

STUDIES IN THE PAULINE THEOLOGY.

I. THE EXPERIENCE OF PAUL.

(1) THE cry, Back to Christ, on many lips to-day expresses not only appreciation of Christ Himself, but also depreciation of Paul. It is often supposed that the simple gospel of Jesus has been obscured and perverted by the Apostle to the Gentiles. The historical function of Paul in delivering the Christian Church from its imminent danger of becoming merely a Jewish sect, and in forcing the door open for it to become a world-wide religion is ignored. For if his significance in this respect were fully recognized, it would be impossible to suppose that the man who secured for the gospel its widest extension was guilty of its most thorough perversion. It is at least probable that the mind that perceived most clearly the scope of the revelation of God in Christ conceived most fully its contents. As a study of the experience of Paul will show, he himself was conscious of his absolute dependence on, his intimate communion with, and his loyal submission to, his Living Lord; and, unless we are to judge him as self-deceived or as deceiving others, we must regard his life which was hid with Christ in God as a continuation of the ministry of Jesus. God was still revealing His Son in Paul. If this be so, and in these *Studies* the endeavour will be made to show that this is so, then the antithesis so commonly assumed between the teaching of Jesus and the doctrine of Paul is false;

and we are concerned only with different, but not contradictory modes of the same divine manifestation.

(2) It is with Paul's experience in Christ as the source and the warrant of his doctrine that we are primarily concerned; and in constantly relating his doctrine to his experience we are following the now generally approved method of investigation. The religious-historical method, which in Germany at least is being advocated as the only legitimate method in the inquiry regarding the nature of Christianity, insists that the fruits of religion in doctrine, worship, polity, should always be traced back to their root in the religious life itself. Religious psychology is now coming to be recognized as a necessary organon of theology. There is no reason for distrusting, but every reason for heartily welcoming this demand. Theology as the expression of religious life is invested with a personal interest in which it has too often been altogether lacking. The theology of Paul, conceived as the struggle and the victory of a soul, appeals to the imagination and the affections as it cannot when presented as an abstract system, divorced from an individual experience. This is not a reduction of his theology to subjectivity; for sin, sacrifice, and salvation are objective realities, and are subjectively realized as such in his experience. May we not even say that we do not possess any other record so full as his letters are of an experience so intense as his was; and accordingly nowhere else can we find a subjective realization of the objectivities of the Christian experience which can compare with his?

(3) While in dealing with the doctrines of Paul there will be constant reference to his experience, it seems desirable at the very beginning of the discussion to form as distinct a conception as possible of that experience as a whole. What the stages in his personal development were he has himself revealed to us in his letters. There are autobiographical

references scattered throughout his writings, which, brought together and wrought into a unity, present to us a living likeness. While it is possible that he may have sometimes used the first personal pronoun for rhetorical effect, yet many of the passages would lose their fullest meaning if we could not regard them as confessions of his own inmost life. The passages for which we can claim this distinctive character bring before us every stage of his personal development, and throw light on all the essential elements of his theology. The change which Christ wrought in him, and the growth in the knowledge, love, and service of Christ which he displayed afford one of the most striking evidences of the constant presence and prevailing power of Christ in his life. While it is not maintained that Paul's experience affords the only valid type of Christian life, yet that experience, interesting as it is as a "human document," does distinctly establish the conclusion, that this type, which reappears in Augustine, Luther, Wesley, must be adequately accounted for by any theology which can prove its title to the Christian name.

(4) While we gratefully recognize the service which Sir W. M. Ramsay is rendering in recovering for us the Gentile environment in which Paul's youth was spent, and in showing how much he was influenced in thought and feeling as well as in language by that environment; and while we gladly welcome the contribution of the late Professor Ernst Curtius to the same subject in the *EXPOSITOR* for November, 1907, yet there seems to be little doubt that here we should look in vain for the key that would unlock the inmost secret of Paul. His own testimony points in another direction. While he was proud that he was "a citizen of no mean city" (Acts xxi. 39), and that he was "*a Roman born*" (xxii. 28), yet it was in Jerusalem that he was "brought up, at the feet of Gamaliel, instructed according to the

strict manner of the law of the fathers, being zealous for God." His position may perhaps be illustrated by a modern analogy. It has been observed that the British living on the Continent are generally more aggressively patriotic than their countrymen at home are, and maintain many of the distinctive customs of the mother land most tenaciously; and yet when they return home they are surprised to discover that there has been some modification in their opinions and manners brought about by their surroundings abroad. While Paul was in his youth influenced by his Gentile environment, yet probably his attitude to it was resistant, and not responsive, and his Jewish piety and patriotism were made still more rigid and exclusive by his education in Jerusalem. After his conversion, when these fetters were broken and cast off, those wider sympathies and influences of his home in Tarsus again asserted themselves, but probably not till then. If in his vocation as the Apostle to the Gentiles he was affected by the thought and life in which he had shared in Tarsus, yet prior to his conversion we must regard him as a Jew of the narrowest type. It is surely his own actual condition as a Pharisee which he describes in his outburst against the Judaizers, who were threatening even a Church so dear and so devoted to him as that of the *Philippians*. "Though I myself might have confidence even in the flesh; if any man thinketh to have confidence in the flesh, I yet more; circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as touching the law a Pharisee; as touching zeal, persecuting the church; as touching the righteousness which is in the law found blameless" (iii. 4-6). This is no merely rhetorical argument; it is a vivid reminiscence and a frank confession. These things had once been gain to him, and to become a Christian he had to count them loss (verse 7). How ardent was his renunciation of this

spiritual condition is surely indicated in his vehement phrase, "I suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung" (verse 8). Such detestation implies a corresponding appreciation. He was a complete, consistent, and for a time at least a contented Pharisee. His treatment of the law both in Galatians and Romans betrays the Pharisaic standpoint. The burden, the bondage, and the curse of the law were not felt by the common people, but by the conscientious Pharisee. The dishonest Pharisee discovered and practised the arts of evasion, and thus succeeded in easing the yoke and lightening the burden of the law. He who honestly and seriously accepted the Pharisaic attitude to the law did labour and was heavy laden, and nevertheless could persuade himself that he was so wearing the yoke and carrying the burden as by his merits to secure God's favour. Paul could not have so vehemently opposed and confidently conquered the Judaizer had the battle not been previously fought to a finish in his own soul. While, as will afterward be shown, there is a permanent and universal element in Paul's conception of the law, yet that conception is distinctly coloured by his Pharisaic experience. We have no reason for believing that Jesus' denunciations of the hypocrisy of the Pharisees would have applied to Paul's character as a Pharisee; yet, on his own confession, the ceremonialism, formalism, legalism, and exclusiveness of Pharisaism were at one period at least characteristic of him. This fact is in no way to his discredit. However mistaken the Pharisaic point of view may now appear to us, it was generally regarded as the fairest flower and the ripest fruit of Judaism. Men of moral earnestness and religious seriousness were attracted and attached to it. The levity or the laxity of youth was never seen in Paul's life; but so far as our evidence carries us, from his earliest years morality and religion asserted their paramount claim on him.

(5) It was not from this condition, however, that Paul at once passed to Christian faith. There seems to have been a transition period, in which his Pharisaic content left him, and his own experiences presented a problem that Pharisaism could not solve. It seems to the writer that we are fully justified in assuming that the passage in Romans vii. 7-25 is an autobiographical reference. This conclusion is refused on two grounds : (i.) It is said that the first personal pronoun is here merely rhetorical, and that Paul is not here giving his personal experience, but is simply individualizing for literary effect the common Christian experience. But surely the form of the appeal to the common Christian experience in the sixth chapter disproves this. There too a question is asked, and answered in the same form of words. But in the former case Paul goes on to say, " We who died to sin, how shall we any longer live therein ? " (vi. 2), and in the latter, " Howbeit I had not known sin, except through the law." If the individualizing of the common Christian experience secures rhetorical effect, it surely sacrifices argumentative force. If Paul could say your experience as well as mine proves this, his argument would gain in cogency. To appeal to himself alone when he might have appealed to his readers as well would have shown greater feebleness in reasoning than we have any right to ascribe to him. (ii.) Further, it is assumed that it is a Christian experience which is appealed to, and the reason given is this, that the unregenerate man cannot in mind approve and in will desire the law of God ; but this is dogmatism ruthlessly trampling on experience, theory distorting fact. Paul before his conversion was a serious and earnest man morally and religiously. He had both a sensitive conscience and an honest purpose. He was seeking to serve God according to the light that he had. He does not in this passage claim for himself more than we should be prepared to assign to

many a man who has not yet tasted how gracious the Lord is. It was his religious belief and not his moral aim that needed to be changed. Even of his persecuting frenzy he says, "Though I was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: howbeit I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief" (1 Timothy i. 13). It is evident that the rough-and-ready distinctions of regenerate and unregenerate do not apply to so complex a case. (iii.) The position of the passage in the argument of the Epistle is against this reference to Christian experience. Paul is expounding the Christian salvation, and his own distinctive gospel of salvation by God's free grace apart from the works of the law. He is meeting objections to his view. That the law cannot save from moral impotence, but Christ can, is surely a truth that refers to the unsaved and not the saved. It is not a description of Christian experience; but an argument for abandoning the fruitless way of the law, and entering on the fruitful path of faith. Is not Paul's distinctive view of Christian experience just this, that as he lives in the spirit, he is dead to the law? Yet here the law still holds dominion, and makes demands that cannot be fulfilled. For these reasons the writer holds that Paul is here describing his own experience before conversion.

(6) As such a description the passage deserves closer study. To the writer it seems that the more abstractly we explain any saying of Paul's, the more likely we are to miss its meaning, and the more concretely we interpret it, the nearer we shall get to his mind and heart. Accordingly, he believes that Paul is here describing not his experience generally, but a distinct inner event that had burned itself into his memory. Just as we may suppose that in Isaiah vi. the record of the prophet's call is coloured by subsequent experience, so it is possible that here Paul describes a crisis

in his own inner life as it appeared more clearly to him in the light of what he afterwards passed through. With this qualification we may, however, affirm that verse seven describes a moral discovery which he made either in one flash of moral insight, or in the brightening light of growing moral knowledge. So long as he thought of righteousness as external conformity to the law of God he remained a contented Pharisee, for he could confidently maintain that "as touching the righteousness which is in the law" he was "found blameless." But when it was brought home to him that the law was not confined to outward acts, but included inward dispositions, that one of the commandments forbade evil desire as well as action, then the battlefield of his moral life was changed. In the realm of action he had hitherto believed himself victorious; in the dominion of the inner life he found himself defeated. This extension of the scope of the law he could not but approve, even although it brought him self-condemnation instead of self-satisfaction.

(7) Two questions in this connexion press for an answer : (i.) Did Paul make this moral discovery independently without any external influence, or did the suggestion come to him from one of his teachers, or even indirectly from Jesus Himself ? Within Judaism itself the inwardness of religion and morality were in theory recognized, although in practice largely ignored. We need not then look beyond its borders for an outward source of this moral discovery. One cannot but ask, however, whether discussion in the Jewish schools, or at least among the serious and earnest young men who were disciples in these schools, was not stimulated by such teaching as Jesus gave in the Sermon on the Mount. It is an attractive idea that ultimately from Jesus Himself came the wound to the soul of Paul, which He and He alone was afterwards able to heal. (ii.) Does Paul refer to the prohibition of evil desire generally, or has he any definite

desire in his view? The word *ἐπιθυμῆσεις* "has a wider sense than our 'covet'; it includes every kind of illicit desire" (Sanday and Headlam's *Romans*, p. 179). It is used by Jesus in regard to the lustful look (Matthew v. 28). In the tenth commandment there is the clause "thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife" (Exodus xx. 17). The repeated reference in this passage to the *flesh* would at first sight appear to lend some countenance to the supposition that it is some form of sensual desire to which Paul is here alluding. Dr. Bruce maintains that "*body* and *flesh*, so far as obstructing holiness is concerned, are for the Apostle synonymous terms." "He speaks in so serious a tone because he knows the formidable nature of the foe from *present, chronic* and *personal experience*. This we know from that extremely significant autobiographical hint in 1 Corinthians: 'I buffet my body, and bring it into bondage; lest by any means, after having preached to others, I myself should become a rejected one' (ix. 27). He found it necessary for spiritual safety to be in effect an ascetic, not in any superstitious sense, or on a rigid system, but in the plain practical sense of taking special pains to prevent the body with its clamorous passions from getting the upper hand." In defending this suggestion Dr. Bruce makes a statement, the truth of which we cannot challenge. "There is a mysterious, subtle, psychological connexion between spiritual and sensual excitements, which some of the noblest men have detected and confessed" (THE EXPOSITOR, Fourth Series, volume ix. pp. 190, 191). The characteristics of Paul's genius do lend probability to this view of the evil desire, which he found himself unable to quench. If, even after his conversion, such severe self-discipline was necessary, how hopeless must have appeared the struggle when no help seemed near. It is a condition of acute misery and even comfortless despair which is described in the cry, "O

wretched man that I am ! who shall deliver me out of the body of this death ? ” (Romans vii. 24).

(8) Although there is no distinct autobiographical reference to the next stage of his inner life, yet we do not appear to be indulging in baseless conjecture when we connect his persecuting frenzy with his moral despair. One may be excused the exercise of “ psychological divination.” There may be two links between the inward mood and the outward deed. (i.) Paul may have imagined that he could compensate for his failure in keeping the whole law by this display of devotion to it in the persecution of those who appeared to him violators of it in recognizing as Messiah one whose manner of death the law pronounced as accursed. An uneasy conscience has often been the motive of persecution. His madness against the Christians (Acts xxvi. 11) may have been the measure of the misery he experienced in himself ; nay even the frenzy of his wrath and hate against them may have eased a little the strain of the self-despair. Had he been a contented Pharisee, there is nothing in his disposition as revealed to us in his letters to explain the madness he himself confesses. He had begun to feel the goad, and in his ignorance and unbelief he was kicking against it (Acts xxvi. 14). Because his own heart was so ill at ease the joy and peace and hope their faith gave to those whom he was persecuting would still more exasperate him. How could they, the blasphemers, be so happy when he, the defender of the law, was so miserable ? (ii.) But another motive of his action may be conceived. Doubtless he as a pious and patriotic Jew was looking forward eagerly to the Messiah’s coming ; probably even he may have cherished the hope that the Messianic age might bring him individually some relief from his pain. How angry then he must have felt at the Christians who declared that the Messiah had come, and had been rejected by the people to save whom He had come,

and had even been put to the accursed death of the cross! The words quoted in Galatians iii. 13 from Deuteronomy xxi. 23, "Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree," were full of significance for Paul even before his conversion. For him the Christians appeared guilty of blasphemy of the deepest dye in maintaining that the Messiah had died under the curse of God. They must be forced themselves to pronounce accursed Him whom now they were proclaiming as the Messiah. "Punishing them oftentimes in all the synagogues, I strove to make them blaspheme" (Acts xxvi. 11). This is his own confession of his purpose in persecuting. At any cost the judgment of the law must be maintained. Is it possible that the doubt sometimes visited him, What if they were right after all? What if the chosen people in their blindness had themselves by inflicting such a death on their Messiah quenched their only hope? Could it be possible that God had fulfilled His promise, and that this was the result? If such doubt ever came to him, as he witnessed the joy of martyrdom in Stephen (Acts viii. 1), and others, he doubtless flung it from him with his vehement "God forbid." He was still kicking against the goad. If it were indeed true that Jesus had risen from the dead, then he may have admitted to himself that Jesus might be the Messiah, however difficult it would be to explain the manner of His death.

(9) There was some preparation for his conversion. He must at least have been in such a spiritual condition as would make it possible for him to accept the appearance of Christ to him on the way to Damascus as a convincing evidence that He was indeed the Messiah. Had there been no such preparation, there could not have been the immediate submission, "What shall I do, Lord?" (Acts xxii. 10). The issue between Paul and the Christians seems to have narrowed itself down to this—Had Jesus risen from the

dead? If he could be convinced of that, then he recognized that the Messiahship necessarily followed, as they so confidently affirmed. The recognition of this fact does not, however, make less surprising and wonderful the conversion itself; it does not cast any doubt on the objective reality of the appearance of Jesus as the necessary cause of the evident change in Paul. So incredible did the fact of the rising again of one who had died the accursed death appear to him, that only the overwhelming manifestation of the Living Lord Himself could overcome his unbelief. His own description of his conversion proves this, *ἔσχατον δὲ πάντων ὡσπερ εἰ τῷ ἑκτρώματι ὤφθη κάμοι* (1 Corinthians xv. 8). The same word *ὤφθη* is used of this as of the previous appearances of Jesus, putting it on the same level of objectivity. The word *ἑκτρώμα* is chosen to express the suddenness, the violence, in short the abnormality of the change thus brought about in him. At this point his experience was not evolutionary but revolutionary. The mode of his conversion colours his conception of the Christian life as the absolute antithesis of the previous life. It is his own experience he generalizes in the statements, "Wherefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things are passed away; behold they are become new" (2 Corinthians v. 17). "For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature (marg. creation)" (Galatians vi. 15). It is probable that the whole range and the full content of the change was not at once realized. The Messiahship of Jesus became a certainty to him, and this was the burden of his testimony in the synagogue at Damascus (Acts ix. 20, 22). In the first account of his conversion in Acts the divine intention that he should be the Apostle to the Gentiles is conveyed to Ananias. "He is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles and kings, and the children of Israel; for I will show him how many things

he must suffer for my name's sake" (ix. 15, 16). But to Paul Ananias defines his mission in the words, "that thou mayest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost" (verse 17). His being filled with the Holy Ghost, "a holy enthusiasm," as Dr. Bartlet describes it (Century Bible, *Acts*, p. 386), was consequent on the certainty of Jesus' Resurrection and His Messiahship. In the account Paul gives of his conversion to the multitude in Jerusalem he ascribes to Ananias this speech: "The God of our fathers hath appointed thee to know His will, and to see the Righteous One, and to hear a voice from His mouth. For thou shalt be a witness for Him unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard" (xxii. 14, 15). In his speech before Agrippa he ascribes to the Living Lord Himself the command, "Arise, and stand upon thy feet; for to this end have I appeared unto thee, to appoint thee a minister and a witness both of the things wherein thou hast seen Me, and of the things wherein I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom I send thee, to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive remission of sins and an inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith in Me" (xxvi. 16-18). This summary of his message and mission, even if it comes to us from the lips of Paul himself (the possibility of this being a free report by Luke cannot be excluded), is antedated. All psychological probability points in the direction of a gradual realization by the Apostle both of the work he had to do, and the faith he was to teach. He himself, in the previous account of his experience, places the command to go to the Gentiles as part of the speech of Christ to him when he was in a trance in the temple at Jerusalem (xxii. 21). The probability would appear to be that he began as a witness to the Jews of the Resurrection and the Messiahship

of Jesus, and that he was gradually led by outward events and inward experiences to the full disclosure both of his message and mission. In the narrative of the outward events after his conversion there is, however, a discrepancy between the record in Acts (ix. 19–25) and his own report in Galatians (i. 11–20), which makes it difficult for us to trace his inward development.

(10) The record in Acts would suggest this view. After his conversion Paul associated himself with the Christian community in Damascus, and for a time taught in the synagogue no other doctrine than was usually delivered by the Christian witnesses; but he pressed his argument against Jewish unbelief with such fervour and force as to provoke an antagonism which less fiery preachers escaped. As his life was threatened in Damascus, he fled from it to Jerusalem; there, after the suspicions against him had been allayed, he associated himself with the primitive Church, over which the apostles presided; he continued his preaching among the Greek-speaking Jews with the same result as at Damascus. Evidently there was something provocative either in the matter or the manner of his preaching which was not at least in equal degree characteristic of the other apostles. As has already been noted, according to his own account, it was a direct command of Christ to cease from his vain efforts among the Jews, and to depart to the Gentiles, which led to his leaving Jerusalem (Acts xxii. 18–21), a step which the author of Acts ascribes rather to the anxiety of the Christian community in Jerusalem for his safety. If we had only the record in Acts, we might conjecture that Paul used the opportunity of this visit to Jerusalem to acquaint himself with the words and works of Jesus and with the beliefs current in the primitive Church; that for a time at least he himself did not advance beyond this standpoint; that at last his own distinctive experience forced on

him a consciousness of difference and even alienation; and that this stage of experience is alluded to in the words otherwise difficult to interpret, "Wherefore we henceforth know no man after the flesh; even though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now we know Him so no more" (2 Corinthians v. 16). It does not seem improbable that for a time Paul did not realize fully the communion of the Living Lord, and relied on such knowledge of Jesus as the Christian community preserved; that in agreement with that community he at first thought of Jesus as the Jewish Messiah, and was content to bear witness to His resurrection as a proof of His Messiahship to Jews only. The abandonment of the knowledge of Christ after the flesh and the summons to the mission to the Gentiles would in that case stand in close connexion. The unbelief with which the Jews met his testimony would recall his own unbelief. The way in which that unbelief had been overcome in his own case would suggest that it was only the consciousness of the Living Lord that could save. The fact that the law by the curse which it pronounced on the death on the Cross had so long hindered his belief in Christ would shatter his attachment to the law. The importance that the Church in Jerusalem attached to the earthly life of Jesus and its devotion to the law would estrange Paul. As the Living Lord had by His manifestation of Himself sufficed for his conversion, and the law had been only a hindrance,—Paul's view both of the content and the scope of the gospel would thus gradually be changed. Such a view of his experience, psychologically probable, would be consistent with the report in Acts.

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(To be continued.)