

*STUDIES IN THE PAULINE THEOLOGY.*

III. THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST.

(7) THE earthly life of Jesus was in contrast both to the pre-existent state and the Risen Glory a humiliation. It was throughout a proof of the grace of the choice of poverty instead of wealth. The Synoptists see the glory of the Son of God in the words and works of Jesus; the author of the Fourth Gospel as an eye-witness beholds in the Incarnate Word "the glory of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (i. 14). While it would be an unwarranted use of the argument from silence to infer that Paul was ignorant of the facts of the ministry of Jesus, and that the Gospel-story had no place in his preaching, yet we do seem entitled to argue that the earthly life cannot have meant to him as much as to the writers of the Gospels, even as much as to the modern reader of the Gospels, for, if it had, he could hardly have avoided more frequent allusions to the facts than we find in his Epistle. Should we not frankly recognize that so distinctive and intense an experience as Paul's brings with it its own limitations? He was so absorbed in the Crucified and Risen Lord, that much which now appears to us of primary importance in the complete revelation of God in Christ was to him comparatively indifferent. Apart from the appeals to the teaching and example of Jesus for practical purposes, the facts about the earthly life of Jesus which are of importance for him are the following. The human birth of Jesus is referred to in the phrases, "born of a woman, born under the law" (Gal. iv. 4), and "born of the seed of David according to the flesh" (Rom. i. 3). In both of these passages a contrast is presented; in the first it is God's own Son who is thus sent forth; in the second He is instituted Son of God with

power according to the spirit of holiness. Without any desire to find evidence in Paul's letters for the virgin-birth, I cannot altogether escape the impression that in the first passage there is an allusion to it. The participle *γενόμενον* does not require the mention of the mother any more than of the father; it is a neutral word. Why then the phrase *ἐκ γυναικός*? Does not the preceding phrase *ὁ θεὸς τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ* exclude a human paternity, but admit an entrance into the world of the Son on His mission through human motherhood? The allusion to the Davidic descent in the second passage does not contradict the virgin-birth. The Gospels which record the virgin-birth also give the genealogy of Joseph. The legal and putative paternity of Joseph is an adequate explanation of this claim of Davidic descent for Jesus. It is to be noted that this Davidic descent is not mentioned as the reason for claiming the Messiahship of Jesus. What the pious and patriotic Jew regarded as one of the brightest glories of the Messiah, Paul deliberately uses to describe what he regarded as the lower side of the personality of Jesus. As a Jew Paul was proud that "Christ as concerning the flesh" was of Israel (Rom. ix. 5); yet in his doctrine of Christ the Jewish nationality and the Davidic descent both belonged to the temporal and local conditions in contrast with the divine, eternal and universal import of the person of Christ.

(8) It is possible that the phrase "born of a woman" had no more significance for Paul's doctrine regarding Christ than the Davidic descent; it is certain, however, that the phrase, "under the law," was of the greatest importance. Although the R.V. renders, and our English idiom demands the rendering "under the law," yet the Greek is without the article. Paul has undoubtedly the Jewish law mainly in view, as it was to it that the Judaizers were seeking to bring the Gentiles into bondage, but the context shows

that the reference is wider. It is the legal relation to God which is contrasted with the filial. The end of the deliverance from the law is the adoption as sons of God. The principle of redemption Paul here states is presented to us, as we shall see, in various forms ; its *rationale* must be reserved for a subsequent discussion ; meanwhile we are concerned only with Paul's conception of the earthly life of Jesus as determined in its distinctive character by this principle. The principle may be briefly stated thus. Jesus became what men were that men might become what He was. He took to Himself man's lot that He might give to man His life. For mankind the moral relation to God is that of subjection to His law. As long as human wishes and the divine will are not coincident, the righteousness of God presents itself to man as command or restraint. Of this legal relation Judaism presented the classic example, both *objectively* in the extensiveness and minuteness of the code imposed, and *subjectively* in the spirit of *legalism* which was characteristic of Pharisaism, the logical outcome of this conception of the relation of God to man. That Jesus shared the spirit of *legalism* Paul does not affirm ; but he does teach that Jesus submitted Himself to this code, which He did experience as a contradiction to His own spirit of sonship. The Gospel record offers us a commentary on this statement of Paul's in the incident of the temple-tax with Jesus' comment, "The sons are free. But, lest we cause them to stumble . . . give unto them for Me and thee" (Matt. xvii. 26-27). But is Paul's meaning in the phrase adequately explained by this external conformity ? Must we not ask further, Did Jesus ever Himself experience the strain of the divine will in His wishes ? His saying to the rich young ruler, "Why callest thou me good ? There is none good save One, even God" (Mark x. 18) seems to be the confession of one who felt that He had not yet reached

the goal, but was still in the labour of the race. Was not His warning to the disciples in Gethsemane, "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Mark xiv. 38), uttered out of His own troubled soul? It may be doubtful whether Paul knew these sayings or not, or, knowing them, found in them the meaning they suggest to us; but it does seem to the writer that this principle of the Pauline theology—Christ's self-identification with the sinful race—must have led him to the conclusion that in His earthly life Jesus, too, sometimes felt the will of God as command and restraint, and thus, inwardly as well as outwardly, was, in spite of His filial consciousness, "under law."

(9) This conjecture gains confirmation from the next statement regarding the earthly life of Jesus which calls for examination. Paul's use of flesh for the lower side of Christ's nature has already been noted. In neither of these passages is there any moral reference in the term flesh, and so they throw no light on Paul's conception of the experience of Jesus. It is otherwise with Romans viii. 3: "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of flesh of sin and for sin (as an offering for sin) condemned sin in the flesh." The impotence of the law to restrain man from sinning in consequence of the sin which has its seat and vehicle in the flesh has been proved by our appeal to Paul's own experience in the preceding chapter (vers. 7 to 25). The phrase, "flesh of sin," does not mean that the flesh as material substance is necessarily evil, but that "there is as a matter of fact a close and constant connexion between sin and flesh." That connexion it is not necessary here to define more exactly. There being such general connexion, but not necessary identity between flesh and sin, the whole clause "in the likeness of sinful flesh" may be taken as asserting not merely a similarity with some difference, but

even a sameness of human nature in Christ and mankind. To Christ is assigned a material organism, and all which that necessarily involves in man's moral experience—liability to temptation, and conflict with evil—but in Christ's case it does not involve that the flesh is the seat and the vehicle of sin. The following phrase, "for sin," is rendered in the text of the R.V. "as an offering for sin." This is not a translation, but an interpretation, for which, however, a good deal can be said. "This phrase is found constantly in the Greek Old Testament as an equivalent for the 'sin-offering.'" As such Paul regards the death of Christ in chap. iii. 25. But the context seems to point to a wider meaning. The Son of God came to deal effectively with sin as the law had failed to do. Exposed to temptation, He resisted it; beset by evil, He overcame it. His sinlessness is the proof that for mankind, whose nature He made His own, sin is unnecessary and unjustified. The condemnation of sin lies in His conquest of it as man. While this does appear to be the interpretation suggested by the immediate context, yet it must be admitted that Paul's mind was so concentrated on the Cross, that it is not improbable that for him the condemnation of sin lay not so much in Christ's victory over temptation as in His endurance of the consequences of sin in His death. He has not the same interest as the writer of the *Epistle to the Hebrews* in the moral experience of Jesus as making Him perfect as the High Priest who can offer Himself as the efficacious sacrifice. Nevertheless if the last clause, "for sin," does refer to the death of Jesus as a sin-offering, the preceding clause, "the likeness of sinful flesh," cannot but refer to the moral experience of Jesus. It is with Christian experience Paul is in this passage dealing, and there can be no doubt that he does here appeal to Christ's conquest of evil as typical.

(10) The relation of Christ to sin is further defined in 2 Corinthians v. 21, "Him who knew no sin He made to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." The first clause affirms unequivocally the absolute sinlessness of Jesus, and not merely as a fact, but as the fact on which depends the efficacy of His sacrifice for sinners. We are not warranted in assuming that Paul inferred the sinlessness from the value he assigned to the death of Christ. Where so much depended on the fact, we may assume that as in regard to the Resurrection of Christ, he made sure of the sufficient evidence; but whether he simply accepted the general testimony of the eye-witnesses, or drew his own conclusion from the traditions he received of the words and works of Jesus we have not the means of deciding. That God made the sinless sin can mean nothing else than that God willed that the sinless on behalf of sinners should be treated as a sinner, that is, should Himself experience the consequences of sin. To avoid misunderstanding it is better not to use such phrases as "He was held guilty" or "He was punished"; but, nevertheless, it must be insisted that Paul regarded Christ's death as an endurance by the sinless of the death which is the penalty of the guilty. The contrasted phrase, "the righteousness of God" clearly indicates that it is not moral character, but relation to God's law that is here in question. Paul here is concerned only with God's appointment; how it was possible for the sinless to be made sin is a question which must meanwhile be reserved.

(11) From this passage it is easy to pass to Galatians iii. 13, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us; for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth upon a tree." In the previous study it was argued that the common Jewish belief that death by crucifixion was accursed had been one of the greatest

hindrances to Paul's belief in the Messiahship of Jesus. That hindrance had been removed only by the conviction that Jesus had risen from the dead. But Paul does not altogether abandon this Jewish belief ; he transforms it to become an element in his Christian faith. All explanations of these words seem to be far-fetched, which discover in them a condemnation of the law which thus condemned Jesus the Christ, and as a consequence an emancipation of believers from the claim of the law so discredited. To Paul the mode of the death of Jesus may have been significant, owing to this saying in Deuteronomy xxi. 23, as it is not to us ; but the curse Jesus endured has the wider reference of the quotation in verse 10 from Deuteronomy xxvii. 26, "Cursed is every one which continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them." The penalty of the transgression of the law—death, and death viewed as a curse—is what Christ endured on our behalf, and what we in Him are saved from. Doubtless Paul conceived the death of Christ as invested on account of this its distinctive character with unique terror, darkness and desolation, as the story of the passion would not be unknown to him.

(12) In all these respects Jesus put Himself in the place of man, He was subject to law, liable to temptation, endured the consequences of sin, although Himself sinless, and suffered even the extreme consequence death as divine condemnation. It was through death, however, that He was Himself delivered from all relation to sin. "The death that He died He died unto sin once ; but the life that he liveth He liveth unto God " (Rom. vi. 10). Until the crucifixion sin with all its consequences was His environment ; at His Resurrection God became wholly His home. This final separation from sin was not an involuntary consequence of His death, but He Himself freely willed His

death as such a condemnation and execution of sin. He so absolutely willed the perfect fulfilment of the holy will of God in His sacrifice that His relation to sin in any form of necessity ceased. The next verse, in which Christ's example is applied to the Christian, "Even so reckon ye also yourselves to be dead unto sin, but alive unto God in Christ Jesus," shows that in the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus we are concerned not with physical events merely, but with physical events as the expression and consequence of moral processes. Christ died because He absolutely condemned and executed sentence on sin; Christ rose again, because He absolutely consecrated Himself to the will of God. It is one moral decision in its negative and in its positive aspect which is manifested in His death and rising again.

(13) This moral act is more fully discussed in Romans v. 12-21. Christ is contrasted with Adam not as in 1 Corinthians xv. 45-49 in respect of nature as the Risen Lord and the Life-Giving Spirit, but in respect of character as obedient to the will of God. Sin, with its consequence death, entered into, took possession of, gained dominion over mankind through the disobedience of Adam. Grace, with its gift of eternal life, has come into the world, and is more exceedingly abounding through the obedience of Christ. Paul's teaching regarding sin, death, the fall of man will be discussed in a subsequent study, and must now be passed over. For the present purpose what alone claims attention is Paul's conception of the sacrifice of Christ as an act of obedience, and one of so immeasurable value that it is more than a compensation morally for the loss involved in Adam's transgression. It is not in the penalty of sin endured by Christ instead of sinners that the virtue of His sacrifice lies, but in His obedience to the will of God in submitting Himself to the consequences of sin on behalf of sinners. If Paul



does not make as prominent as does the writer of the *Epistle to the Hebrews* the moral quality of the sacrifice of Jesus as that which alone gives it efficacy, this passage shows that this conception was not absent from his mind. We may even conjecture that to a man of his moral seriousness it was thoroughly congenial, and only the necessity of meeting the Judaizers on their own ground forced him to give greater prominence to the more legal aspect of the sacrifice.

(14) The Cross is not only an act of obedience, it is also a gift of grace ; and injustice has often been done to the teaching of Paul by not adequately emphasizing what he teaches on this subject. The Apostolic Benediction sums up what Christ is and does in the phrase, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ," and Paul has himself given us a concise description of grace in the words, "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might become rich." Self-sacrifice for the salvation of others is what grace means. The heights from which, and the depths to which love as grace stoops are vividly presented in the passage already discussed in connexion with Paul's doctrine of the pre-existence of Christ (Phil. ii. 5-8). The self-emptying in the Incarnation of the Son of God has its culmination in the obedience unto death, yea, the death of the Cross. Grace toward man has its fulfilment in obedience to God. It is in submitting to the will of God that He should endure the consequences of sin, that Christ perfects His grace for the saving of men ; in Him love and law are one, for "all's love and all's law." Why the will of God required this sacrifice is a question to be answered in dealing with Paul's doctrine of the atonement. What has here to be emphasized is that in Paul's conception of Christ it is grace, self-sacrifice for the salvation of others, which is the supreme moral quality.

(15) It is the grace of Christ which explains the inner life of Paul. For him the Son of God, the Risen Lord, the Life-giving Spirit is the close and constant companion, nay, is more than any human companion could be, for Christ Himself is Paul's own inmost self. "I have been crucified with Christ, yet I live; and yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me; and that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, Who loved me, and gave Himself up for me" (Gal. ii. 20). This intimate communion is, however, no mystical absorption, in which personal distinctness is lost. Paul conceives Christ as a distinct personality, and he does not lose his sense of his own individuality. Christ's experience on separation from sin (in His death), and dedication unto God (in His rising again) has its counterpart and consequence in Paul's own experience and character. It is personal affection inspired by gratitude which is the motive of his consecration. "The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, that they which live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto Him who for their sakes died and rose again" (2 Cor. v. 14). He is confident that Christ is still interested in him; for the sorrows he endures are "the sufferings of Christ" (2 Cor. i. 5: "As the sufferings of Christ abound unto us, even so also our comfort aboundeth through Christ"). Christ's self-identification with him of which he was conscious is surely the clue to the voluntary substitution of Christ for mankind in His death. As Christ so loved Paul as to make his sorrows His own (see the *Expositor's Greek Testament* on Colossians i. 24), so He loved sinful mankind so much as to become one with it in its sin and curse. It is true Paul does not himself make this application; probably because he did not perceive that in vicarious suffering there is a problem to be solved.

However close his communion with Christ, yet Paul felt it was not yet perfect. In two ways did he look for the fulfilment of his desire. On the one hand he took over the eschatological beliefs of the primitive Church, and shared its ardent hope that Christ would appear bodily in power and glory to establish His kingdom. Sometimes he expected to survive to the Resurrection of the dead, and thus to be brought into the Presence of his Lord. There is no evidence that he ever consciously changed his beliefs, or abandoned his hope of the Lord's coming. But on the other hand he does at times appear to expect that it is death which will take him home. "Being therefore always of good courage, and knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord (for we walk by faith, not by sight); we are of good courage, I say, and are willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be at home with the Lord" (2 Cor. v. 6-8). This wavering of judgment, due probably to change of mood, regarding the mode of his introduction into the full glory and blessedness of his Lord does not affect his constant conviction that Christ has not yet manifested to himself, or to the world, all the fulness of Godhead it has pleased God should dwell bodily in Him.

(16). In closing, two questions which the previous discussion raises may be briefly answered. (1) Was Paul's Christology original or derived? (2) Was there development in his own conception of Christ? As regards the first question it has been pointed out that we need not assume that Paul's teaching about the man from heaven or the personal pre-existence of Christ is borrowed; both conceptions follow naturally from the course of his argument. In the *Epistles of the Captivity* the angelology is that of the Gnostic heretics. Paul's assertion of the absolute supremacy of Jesus in the world as well as over mankind is the inevitable

reaction of his Christian faith against error which challenged the Christian estimate of Christ. The angelology is no essential element in his doctrine. His argument shows that he was prepared to maintain the absolute worth of Christ as Saviour and Lord against all rivals. Even if current beliefs affected his mode of statement to a greater degree than it seems necessary to the writer to assume, yet such beliefs were not added to his Christian faith. At the most they only made explicit what was implicit in it. The answer to the second question has in those sentences been already partially anticipated. Although the teaching of the later Epistles differs from that of the earlier, yet that difference is due to the variety of the errors against which it was directed more than to any development in Paul's own thinking. That Paul's mind, as living, was also growing need not be denied; nor that in controversy he defined his own beliefs more distinctly, nor even that, when necessary, he adapted the language of his opponents to his own uses. But it does seem that the revelation of the Son of God in Him came not in the gleams of dawning day, but in the blaze of glorious noon. In his conversion was implicit his experience and his theology. His contact with the common faith of the Christian Church, his conflict with Judaizers on the one hand and with incipient Gnosticism on the other, the passing of the first Christian generation without the Return of the Lord, the evolution of the Christian Church, of which he was spared to see the beginnings, into a world-wide community, in which Jew and Gentile were reconciled, by all these factors was his inner development affected; and so his conception of Christ enriched and enlarged. What has to be insisted on is that the process was a living growth, an assimilation, and not an accretion. No change of thought in his later life can be compared in decisive significance with the change of the persecutor into the

apostle. With a nature like Paul's, intense, passionate, one may say explosive, one may easily attach too much importance to development, and may unduly depreciate what may be described as the revolutionary in his experience. Although the writer is aware that in the representation he has given he has detached himself from a great mass of current opinion, which minimizes originality, and magnifies development, yet this is the impression Paul makes upon him, and he has endeavoured to report it faithfully.

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### *THE UNIO MYSTICA AS A THEOLOGICAL CONCEPTION.*

IN recent years a tendency has been shown on the part of some prominent theologians to question, if not the Christian character of the "mystic union," at all events its value as a doctrinal concept. Professor Denney, who has been one of the most unrelenting critics of Ritschlianism in this country, joins with Ritschl in protesting that the idea is one of which we should do well to clear our minds, and has expressed something like gratitude that the phrase is not to be found in the New Testament.<sup>1</sup> What Ritschl complains of is the sentimental associations of the phrase, and the ease with which those who employ it rise superior to the idea of justification through trust in the historic Christ ;<sup>2</sup> what Dr. Denney finds unsatisfactory is the way in which the term "mystical," suggestive rather of that which has not yet reached the moral level, such as the union of nature with God, is brought in to describe something which professedly transcends moral relations.<sup>3</sup> Both writers, on

<sup>1</sup> EXPOSITOR, Oct. 1903, p. 256.

<sup>2</sup> *Justification and Reconciliation* (Eng. Trans.), p. 112.

<sup>3</sup> EXPOSITOR, Feb. 1904, pp. 155 ff.