

of men was according to the flesh. Then came a crisis. And 'from henceforth' he knows no one according to the flesh. That crisis, as all allow, was his conversion. From that time his knowledge of everyone is according to the spirit, just as his walk is according to the spirit, and his war, and his wisdom, and his glory, and his whole life. And if you ask him what he means by knowing men now according to the spirit and no longer according to the flesh, you ask the very question which Agrippa asked. 'Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. And Paul stretched forth the hand and answered for himself—Whereupon, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision, but showed first unto them of Damascus,' and the rest, 'that they should repent and turn to God and do works meet for repentance.' Had he not done that before? Certainly not. He had held before that there were just two classes of men in the earth—those who needed no repentance, and those who needed it but would not get it. Had the change taken place in them, then? No. It had taken place in him.

For every person who, like himself, gets into Christ is a new creature, the old ways of knowing people and treating people, the knowledge according to the flesh, are passed away, behold they have all become new.

Nor is it of men alone that his knowledge has been changed. He once was brought into close contact with Christ before the crisis came. For he persecuted this Way unto the death. And the closer he came to Christ the more it maddened him. He cried with Peter, 'Depart from me,' but did not yet add, 'for I am a sinful man, O Lord.' Nay, he even cried out, as the poor demoniac, 'What have I to do with Thee, Thou Jesus of Nazareth?' He knew Christ intimately enough, and the knowledge was an intolerable anguish. For it was a knowledge according to the flesh. But the crisis came. Jesus said, 'It is hard for thee.' Paul answered, 'What wilt Thou have me to do?' 'Whereupon, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient'; for now his knowledge was according to the spirit.

## The Theology of the Epistle to the Romans.

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### THE NEED OF THE GOSPEL.

IN vers. 16 and 17 of chap. i. St. Paul has stated the theme of his Epistle, 'Righteousness by Faith.' He now begins a systematic treatise on the subject. And the first question that he discusses is, Why is this revelation necessary? The answer put very shortly is, Because of sin: because of the existence of sin in the world. This theory St. Paul proceeds to prove and develop in the passages which follow; the section, namely, beginning at chap. i. ver. 18, and ending at chap. iii. ver. 20. It will be convenient to study at the same time as these two other passages as illustrating St. Paul's theory of sin, chap. v. vers. 12-21; and chap. vii. vers. 7-25.

The argument of this first main section of the

Epistle is continuous and sustained. It may be summarised as follows:—

Why was this revelation of God's righteousness necessary? Because of the continuous revelation of God's wrath exhibited against the sinfulness of the world. First, St. Paul turns to the heathen world, and then in words glowing with indignation he describes their contemptible idolatry and consequent sin. There is a revelation of God in nature to all men. All mankind, if they would only read the lessons of nature and the universe with a pure heart, might learn something of God. 'The invisible things of God since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things which are made.' But although this

knowledge was possible, they had allowed themselves to sink into a state of ignorance and falsehood. God therefore had withdrawn His protection from them, and given them up to their own lusts, and the sinfulness of the world, which men knew only too well, had been the result. Terrible is the picture which St. Paul draws; but yet more terrible was the reality. You shudder when you read his words, but every statement that he makes can be corroborated by the indignant language of heathen satirists and historians. The first century of Christianity, with its luxury and its extravagance and its irreligion and its superstition, was one of the dark ages in the moral history of the world, one of these periods when—owing to the breaking up of old restraints, the failure of national religions, the breaking down of the barriers of custom and tradition, and the increase of wealth—human nature, let loose from its bonds, gave way to every form of vice and crime. But the climax is not yet reached. Not only does man sin, but, worse than all, he glories in his iniquity. Conscious of God's judgment, conscious of what is right, he yet not only does such things as are worthy of death, but his moral principles are so weakened, that even without the impulse of sin and desire, he approves of the practice in others. He insolently glories in his rebellion, and prides himself on his sin and wickedness.

St. Paul is, of course, speaking quite generally, but yet we feel that it is of the heathen world in the main he is thinking.

In the next section, chap. ii. vers. 1-16, St. Paul lays down the conditions which made this sin so evil. Man cannot claim exemption on the ground of ignorance. Is it not a fact that they pass judgment on others? and does not this prove that they have a moral standard? And is it not a fact that a belief in divine judgment is recognised? All those at anyrate to whom this Epistle is addressed will realise that there is a divine judgment in store for men, a judgment which has these characteristics:—(1) It is a judgment according to works; 'God will render to every man according to his works: to them that by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honour and incorruption, eternal life: but unto them that are factious, and obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that worketh evil.' (2) It is a judgment without respect of

persons, Jews and Greek, privileged and unprivileged, shall alike be subject to it. (3) It is a judgment that will be in accordance with the opportunities that men have enjoyed; 'as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned under law shall be judged by law.' No one, in fact, is quite without knowledge. It is true that the Jews have had the fuller revelation of 'the Law,' more particularly so called; but the Gentiles have been equally under the rule of the great principle of law,—a law revealed in conscience and proved to exist by the moral judgments and disputations of mankind. These are the characteristics of judgment, and in this way, according to the fuller revelation of Christianity, the world shall be judged in Christ.

Now, it has been asked, to whom is St. Paul referring in this section? There are really two points of view. In the first place, St. Paul is quite clearly emphasising the fact that all alike have had knowledge, and are conscious of a moral law, and are conscious that there is a judgment awaiting them. But at the same time he is writing to men with the fuller knowledge which the Christian revelation gives. It is not only because of the fact of sin, but on account of the heinousness of sin in God's sight, the wrath of God as revealed in judgment, that the gospel message was necessary.

And all through St. Paul has been, as we see from vers. 9 and 10, thinking of the one particular case of that nation who, as privileged people, might think themselves exempt from this law. At last in ver. 17 he imagines some Jewish hearer, unable to restrain his indignation any longer, and bursting out into a storm of indignation: 'But we are Jews, we are not sinners of the Gentiles, we know divine things, we have learnt law, we are a guide to the blind, we are a light for them which are in darkness, we have truth and knowledge embodied for us in the law.' Listen to the strong moral indignation with which St. Paul turns to them, and to all who like them are filled with pharasaic pride: 'Thou that teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? Thou that preachest a man should not steal; dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery?' The Jews might pride themselves on their privileges, that would avail them nothing in the face of the well-known

fact that they did not as a nation keep that law on which they professed to pride themselves. They might speak of their circumcision, but the only circumcision of value is that of the heart. 'He is a Jew which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.'

The first eight verses of the next chapter we may pass over; they are a digression, and an unfinished digression, on that question which must always have been a difficulty to the pious Jew, What then was the meaning and value of their privileged position, if it had not been able to save them? St. Paul answers their question more fully in chap. ix., and we may therefore dismiss it at present.

In vers. 9-20 he returns to the main argument, all alike, Jews as well as Greeks, are under sin. This he proves from the Old Testament, the recognised Scripture of that day. And then he ends his sad argument by an assertion that this was as a matter of fact due to the failure of law. All mankind had sinned. The old principle of law under which men had hitherto lived had failed to conquer sin; it had only revealed its nature. 'Through law cometh only knowledge of sin.'

These then are those facts which had made the revelation of the gospel necessary, 'sin,' 'law,' 'judgment'; and these we must now consider.

What then is sin, and what is its origin? St. Paul never tells us what sin means, just as we see he assumes a knowledge of the fundamental idea of righteousness. He assumes it, he assumes that his hearers accept the fact and the theory of sin; we have therefore to reconstruct his ideas from hints which he lets drop.

In the first place, 'sin' is clearly a state or a principle. It sometimes seems almost personified, 'sin came into the world,' 'man is under sin.' It does not mean definite acts, but a state or principle which causes those acts.

And, secondly, sin is a meaningless expression without a belief in God. Just as we see the Jewish moral ideal of 'righteousness' or 'upright men' always implied the belief in God, and that this was the fundamental characteristic of Jewish morality as opposed to Greek conceptions of virtue, so while the Greek would talk of that which was 'dishonourable,' or towards men 'unjust,' the Jew would designate moral defect as sinful, *i.e.* wrong-doing in violation to God. God has created

the human race in His own image; He has created him with all the possibilities of rising to higher and nobler things; He has created him 'free,' 'sufficient to have stood, yet free to fall.' And mankind by a deliberate act of rebellion has alienated himself from God. This is St. Paul's idea of the origin of sin. It is a state of enmity against God, a state in which man submits to the rule of an alien power, instead of to the rule of his true master. He has rebelled, and compelled God to show that wrath which is the necessary outcome of His perfect righteousness towards evil. Mankind is at enmity with God.

But now we come to some very difficult questions connected with the origin of sin. 'Through one man sin entered into the world' (chap. vi. ver. 12). It is definitely implied that sin is connected in its origin with the fall of Adam, and that, as a matter of fact, that causes us very considerable difficulties. It causes us difficulties because we have doubts as to the Fall being an historical fact, and because it may seem to us reasonable to object that to condemn all the human race because of the fall of one man is unjust and inconsistent with the nature of God.

We may, I think, at once dismiss a difficulty with which the question has been implicated. It has been said 'the Atonement was necessary because of the Fall; the Fall was not a fact; how therefore can we account for the Atonement?' Now this is clearly not a representation of the facts of the case. The Atonement, the coming of the Christ, the gospel message, were necessary because of sin. St. Paul incidentally, whether correctly or not, speaks of the Fall as the cause of sin; but whether the Fall be a fact or not, sin as a principle or a state was a fact, and that it was that made the gospel necessary.

One difficulty, then, we may set aside, and for the rest I think we must quite honestly look at the facts. St. Paul clearly believed in the Fall as an historical fact; we are many of us unable to accept it as such. It is for us rather the concrete form in which certain very definite and very important spiritual truths are conveyed. These truths are—that man is not by nature sinful, but only weak, and that sin is an external, unnatural condition into which he has fallen. Whether his state of innocence was an actual state, or whether it does not rather represent an ideal, we need not discuss. What is important for us to realise is this, that man, by an act which

is typified for the whole race in the fall of Adam, but has been in a sense repeated in every individual, has allowed an alien and evil principle to rule in his nature.

But then, next, how do we deal with this grand objection? You are condemning men for a state which was, as you admit, inherited. The state was, it is true, partly inherited, but it was real also. Let us continue the illustration. Men, we suggested, are represented as in rebellion. Men of a later generation are not responsible for the rebellion, they were born into it; but they have not put an end to the rebellion. Some men were ignorant of their state. They were in rebellion, in sin, but 'sin was not imputed when there was no law,' they were not held guilty; others have tried to bring the state of rebellion to an end, but have failed. We shall discuss in a minute the principles of divine judgment, and attempt to remove certain misconceptions. Whatever may be the case, it remains an undoubted fact that mankind as a whole, and equally every individual, has not fulfilled his higher destiny, is in rebellion against God, is under sin.

This, then, is man's state, and the wickedness of the world is both the cause and result of the state of sin in which man is. Just as the spiritual life is one from faith to faith, just as each good deed, each act of devotion, leads to higher possibilities, so in wickedness, idolatry has led to sensuality, covetousness to the loss of all natural affections, pride and envy to evil temper. Step by step man sinks downwards.

But how has God dealt with man? His first act has been to convict man of sin by the imposition of law. If you look again at chap. vi., you

will see that St. Paul divides the history of man into three stages. The first is that from Adam to Moses—a period when sin existed in the world, but sin was not imputed because there was no law; the second, from Moses to Christ—the period of law; and the third, after Christ. The first stage is one not of innocence, but of ignorance. It is one of sin too, for it represents what is alien to the ideal of man's nature and the purpose of God. We might consider it to be the state of the most ignorant and the most savage races, those in which the idea of right and wrong, of God and religion, of the State, of society, of the family, is least developed. If we look at them from one point of view, we should say most decisively, most certainly, they fall short of the ideal. They are almost as degraded as the beasts, they seem hardly capable of higher things. If sin is what is alien to God, then they are sinful; if sin is rebellion, then they are in a state of rebellion. But look at them from the other side. They have no knowledge, they have no consciousness of guilt. If sin be conscious guilt, they are not sinful, no more sinful than your dog, or your horse; if sin is that for which we deserve punishment, there is little or nothing in them for which they do deserve it. They represent the lowest stage in man's development, but not the most guilty. 'Until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law.'

How then did God deal with man? By the imposition of law. To convict men of their sinfulness, of the inadequacy of their lives, of a necessity of an ideal to aim at, He has given them law.

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