

The Theology of the Epistle to the Romans.

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THE LIFE OF THE JUSTIFIED.

WHILE the first portion of the Epistle is simple in its structure and deals with one broad argument, this middle section is much more complicated. One thought after another comes forward, often only suggested or alluded to; and completeness of any sort in treating it is impossible. We must content ourselves with touching on a few of the lines of thought suggested.

St. Paul is clearly influenced in this section by the second type of false teaching with which he had come in contact; that which had arisen from the perversion of his own doctrine. Enthusiastic disciples without the mental balance which he possessed, without the reserves which were always in his mind, had developed a practical and theoretical antinomianism. We are freed from law; what need of restraint on our actions? Let us give up a weak-minded compliance with a code of rules. Let us enjoy the Christian liberty which has been won for us. Or again: the greater the sin, the greater the grace. Let us continue in sin; it will only mean the pouring forth of greater stores of the divine favour; it will only mean the exercise of the divine love in forgiveness. The argument is a strange one, but perhaps not unnatural; at anyrate, again and again in the course of history it has been repeated, and even where Christian antinomianism has not prevailed a onesided hold of St. Paul's teaching has often produced a neglect of the training of the Christian character which was to him an essential part of Christianity.

Now the existence of this perverted teaching is important for us, because it makes quite clear what St. Paul meant by justification. If he had intended merely a moral reformation, as some have supposed; if the process of justification had meant merely 'making righteous'; if there had been no teaching of free forgiveness, of acceptance before God not for our own merits; then these perversions which undoubtedly existed could not have arisen. The reality of the atonement, the reality of St. Paul's teaching of justification by faith is proved by its perversions.

But now what is the method by which St. Paul meets the perversion of his teaching? For it has a certain logical speciousness about it. It seems to be the natural conclusion from certain premisses. In iii. 1-8 the question had been touched upon, and there St. Paul contents himself with an indignant disclaimer which really conceals a valid argument. He appeals to man's moral instincts. Everyone with a healthy moral sense will naturally revolt from it, and feel that it is untrue. But yet the argument must be met; and the logical refutation implied in these chapters is this, that any such conduct is inconsistent with the conditions on which a man is accounted righteous. If faith is necessary for our justification; that justification is sealed for us in baptism, and baptism implies an incorporation with the Christian society in and through which we receive our justification; it implies a mystical union with Christ, which means a death to sin and a new birth to righteousness; it implies the gift of God's Holy Spirit and a life hereafter in the 'spirit,' and not in the 'flesh'; it implies a continual process of progressive holiness guaranteed for us by our firm conviction that God will work out to the end the process that He has begun in us.

This section, then, enables us to complete a systematic view of St. Paul's theory as to the 'process of salvation.' We must remember that St. Paul is never scholastic, that he always feels and expresses the limitation of every positive assertion, that his terminology is never fixed, because absolute distinctions between different stages are impossible. 'Life' is to be here and hereafter. 'Salvation' is in the present life and the life to come. We can never, except in thought, divide one stage from another; but yet, just for a few minutes and for the sake of clearness, we may be allowed to be systematic. There are, then, from this point of view three distinct stages in the Christian life: Justification, Sanctification, Salvation. *Justification* is a single act. It is the beginning of the Christian life. It is the acceptance of us by God; the reversal of a condition of

hostility; the forgiveness of past sins. It is universally connected with baptism. *Sanctification* is a continuous and progressive state; it begins at the moment when our justification is sealed in baptism; then we are united with Christ; then we receive the gift of the Spirit; then our sanctified will, co-operating with the divine gift, proceeds to build up our character that we may be worthy of sharing in the divine glory. *Salvation* is the final end to which we look forward, and for which we hope. It is the confusion of these three processes which has at different times produced theological error. If justification and sanctification be confused together, then the old Judaising error has a tendency to reappear. We forget that the one condition of the Christian life is that we must come to God in the humble self-abnegation of faith, trusting only in His mercy, and in the grace given us through Christ. If justification and salvation be confused together, then the evils of a one-sided teaching in faith grow up. The exceptional phrase, 'we are saved by faith' (which St. Paul could use, because with him salvation was a wider term than it generally is with us), is substituted for 'we are justified by faith,' and all that is implied in the progressive sanctification of the Christian life is neglected. We must come to God trusting in Christ and Christ only; we are accepted and justified through faith. Our life must be one which, with God's assistance, will fit us for the glories for which we hope; it is by our lives that we shall be judged, and for them be held worthy of a final salvation.

It remains to dwell a little more fully on certain points in the 'Life of the Justified.' We will confine ourselves to these three—

1. Baptism and the new life.
2. The life in the Spirit.
3. The life in Christ.

1. There is something extremely significant in the reference we get to baptism in the sixth chapter, and the manner in which it is introduced. The Epistle to the Romans has been often quoted as opposed to any form of 'sacramental' teaching (for the moment we must use modern phraseology); as a matter of fact it presupposes it. St. Paul assumes that there is in the Church just that system which is, for example, implied in the Epistle to the Corinthians, a system which looks upon baptism as the initiatory rite of the Church, which

looks upon the Lord's Supper as the continuing rite—a rite which represents, on the one side the brotherly unity of the whole community, on the other, the unity of the community with Christ. Another point must be touched upon in this connexion. It must be realised quite clearly that St. Paul's whole argument implies that baptism is absolutely universal in the Christian Church, as universal as faith and justification. It has been argued that the expression used 'as many of us as were baptized into Christ were baptized into His death,' implies that some of us were not. The language does not in the least necessarily demand this, the words really mean, 'all we who were,' 'we, as many as were'; while the context demands that the rite should be universal. If baptism were an unnecessary but picturesque ceremonial which some might, and some might not, take part in, the logical force of the whole argument would be lost; for St. Paul is dealing with the normal conditions of the Christian life. The fact is, that to assume in the early Church the existence of a modern anti-sacramental spirit is entirely and absolutely unhistorical. The importance and significance of baptism in the early Church, and the same is probably true of the Lord's Supper or the Eucharist, was very much greater than we were accustomed to imagine or realise.

The belief in the importance of the rite of baptism St. Paul shared with his fellow-countrymen; much of the deeper spiritual significance he ascribed to it was probably all his own. The language he uses is that of symbolism; but it is a symbolism which conceals a great spiritual reality. Baptism was the outward sign of the incorporation of the believer into the Christian community, and by that of union with Christ—a union which had equally a spiritual and moral significance. It is this moral significance that St. Paul felt was implied by the symbolism of baptism. The ceremony in the early Church when it was performed on adults—on new converts full of ardent spiritual zeal, and receiving, as we believe, in an especial degree and manner the gift of God's Spirit—must have been singularly impressive. Dressed probably in white robes, they stepped down into the baptismal tank, they were immersed under the waters, which were a symbol of the washing away of sins, and they came forth in the brightness and hope of a new life. The analogy of the grave and the tank suggested to St. Paul the real significance of the rite. It was, as he elsewhere explains it, the

putting on of Christ; and that implied the making our own the life and death of Him, that we might share in His resurrection. And so baptism implied that we really made our own His life and death. Our old sinful nature was destroyed by our making our own what He had done for us, and our life henceforth must be the life of one born anew, a life free from the stain of sin and passion.

2. But the life of the justified is a life in the Spirit. A scholarly study of chap. viii. of the Romans, paying careful attention to the exact meaning of language, enables us to realise the extent of belief in the Spirit which is presupposed like so much else in the Epistle to the Romans. It is quite clear, in the first place, that there is no confusion in St. Paul's mind between the spiritual nature of man and the Spirit of God. 'The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit' (viii. 16). Man has a spiritual nature, for he is made in the image of God. That spiritual nature is akin to and is responsive to the operations of the Divine Spirit; and because of this higher nature, the Divine Spirit can dwell in him. If it does so, it so strengthens his higher nature as to enable him to live 'according to the Spirit, and not according to the flesh'; to conquer all his low and base desires, and live in a manner worthy of his origin and destination.

But what of the Divine Spirit? We noted how easily the terms 'Spirit of God' and 'Spirit of Christ' were interchanged. 'But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the *Spirit of God* dwell in you. Now if any man have not the *Spirit of Christ*, he is none of His' (viii. 9). But equally the 'Spirit' and 'Christ' are interchanged, for in the next verse we read, 'And if Christ be in you' (ver. 10). But, again in the next verse, there is another change. 'But if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you.' Now putting all these passages together, it is difficult to find any theory which will explain the meaning of them, but one which considers that the Spirit is equally 'of God' and 'of Christ,' and that Christ dwells in us by 'the Spirit.'

But what of the Spirit? Is it a mere abstraction, or an impersonal influence? In ver. 14 we read, 'as many as are led by the Spirit'; in ver. 16, the Spirit beareth witness; in ver. 26, the Spirit helpeth our infirmities, and the Spirit maketh intercession for us; in ver. 27, 'He that searcheth the hearts

knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit,' the Spirit 'maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.' It is difficult in any ordinary or natural interpretation to explain these words without supposing that St. Paul ascribes what we must call 'personality' to the Spirit. We desire to be historical in our interpretation. To say that St. Paul had formulated in his own mind the doctrine of the Trinity, as later ages developed it, would be unhistorical. What would be true is this, that the language of St. Paul throughout the Epistles can only be explained if we assume that he had a belief which is best and most adequately formulated by the doctrine of the Trinity as we hold it.

Christ by His Spirit, which is the Spirit of God, dwelleth in us. Henceforth we live not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

3. The Christian life is one of union with Christ. It is the life in Christ.

In reading the Epistles of St. Paul, we constantly recognise that we are brought face to face with deep religious experience. We are reading the record of a life; of the life of a man whom we know to have been genuine, and we know to have been great. And we find that the most profound conviction of his life is that it is one in union with Christ. One of the most significant expressions of which he makes use, one which constantly occurs, is that of 'in Christ.' The apostle's joys and sorrows, his thoughts and feelings, his hopes and fears, are all alike 'in Christ.' We feel that we are dealing with a religious experience, not merely with a dogmatic formula. And we feel that the experience is real. Our own experience is no doubt inadequate to enable us to use with sincerity all the words that come with such force straight from the apostle's heart, but that only convicts us of our own religious imperfection; it does not make us feel that his language is unreal. We know that it is not so, for we know the reality of St. Paul's work, and we recognise the motives which prompted it. And we know how the experience of St. Paul is not isolated, it has been part of the religious experience of many a man from the beginnings of Christianity.

The doctrine of the 'life in Christ' is based on religious experience. It is also a theological doctrine. St. Paul has described the beginning of the new life. That moment of baptism in which we put on Christ was the beginning of life in Him

—a life which we see has two sides. On the one side, it is the moral conformity of our will to His will, the indwelling of our life in His life. On the other side, it is the incorporation of our life in His life. This last is a deduction from several different elements in St. Paul's teaching. It is a deduction from his doctrine of the Church, a doctrine which is touched on in this Epistle, which is elaborated more fully in the Epistle to the Corinthians, and in those of the Captivity. We are all members of one body, and Christ is the head of that body. It is a deduction again from that teaching of communion with Christ, which is put before us in the Epistle to the Corinthians (1 Cor. x. 16). In this Epistle it is rather a deduction from the central teaching of the person and work of Christ. Christ is the representative man, the second Adam. We all therefore live in Him, as we die in Adam. Christ by His death has destroyed death for us, so that our sin-stained body is destroyed, and our true self is united with Him in a new marriage. The love of God is shed forth in us by the death of Christ, and we are united to God in love, which is in Christ Jesus.

If we analyse all these expressions, we shall find that what is implied in them is teaching concerning the Incarnation, but looked at rather from the side

of Christ's work than a theory of Christ's nature. If we compare the teaching of St. Paul and St. John, we find that St. Paul's teaching about the work of Christ presupposes a theory about His person such as St. John formulates; St. John's teaching about His person explains the possibility of St. Paul's theory about His work. And then this teaching of our life in Christ takes away all the moral functions which men have found in the doctrine of the Atonement, and of Justification. In neither case are we dealing with formal or legal fictions. Christ's death influences our life, because we are really made spiritual sharers in His death, partakers of His life. We are held just before God because we are incorporated in Christ, and elevated and justified by that spiritual union.

This, then, is the life of the justified. We are at peace with God. Our sins are done away. By our baptism we are united with His Church, and are made partakers of the spiritual blessings which flow from that union. We have received the gift of the Spirit, and our life will bring forth the fruits of the Spirit. We are united with Christ, and that union will grow closer and more real as we make our religion a more real element in our lives. Our religious life is one from faith to faith; faith perfected in love.

At the Literary Table.

THE BOOKS OF THE MONTH.

(The Prices of the Books mentioned below will generally be found in the Advertisement pages.)

THE INFLUENCE OF JESUS. BY THE REV. PHILLIPS BROOKS. (*Allenson*. Crown 8vo, pp. 274.) *The Influence of Jesus* is, theologically, the most characteristic of all Bishop Brooks' works. That is to say, one gets his theology in these 'Bohlen Lectures' most immediately and most unmistakably. 'The inspiring idea is the fatherhood of God, and the childhood of every man to Him'—that is the theology of Phillips Brooks, and that is found with all its plainness at the top of the second page. So, if one would understand this man, one must read this book. Mr. Allenson has therefore been wise in this generation, and has given us a new and attractive edition of it.

THE DOMINION OF CHRIST. BY WILLIAM PIERCE. (*Allenson*. Crown 8vo, pp. xiv, 226.) 'The following discourses have been published as a contribution to the centenary celebrations of the London Missionary Society;' and they advocate 'the claims of Foreign Missions in the light of modern religious thought and a century of experience.' The experience is the experience of the whole Church. Mr. Pierce is well aware of the work that has been done, and the greater work that has been left undone. He reckons the work done an earnest only; he would yet see greater things than these. The sermons are more for impulse than for instruction. It is instruction