

THE MEANING OF JOHN 20²³, MATTHEW 16¹⁹, AND MATTHEW 18¹⁸

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THE editor of the Journal has kindly invited me with the consent of the author of the preceding article to publish with that article a partial reply. In doing so I shall be suspected, I think, neither of prejudice in favor of sacerdotalism, nor of excessive reverence for the older English versions. One may grant at the outset that Professor Mantey is right in contending that the various perfect tenses usually indicate a situation already existent at some time contemplated in the sentence. He assumes that the time contemplated is that of the other verb in these sentences. Accordingly he criticizes the English translation and he draws inferences about the agent of forgiveness or its reverse.

The six perfects or future perfects in his three passages are each in the apodosis of a general condition, introduced by *ἄντινων*, *ὃ ἔάν* or *ὅσα ἔάν*. General conditions are extremely difficult to limit to present, past or future, and it is not necessary to do so. The question here is whether a perfect in the apodosis indicates an action or condition prior to the time of the apodosis. That it does not, may be shown by the following:—

1 John 2⁵: *ὅς δ' ἂν τηρῇ αὐτοῦ τὸν λόγον, ἀληθῶς ἐν τούτῳ ἢ ἀγάπῃ τοῦ θεοῦ τετελείωται*

James 2¹⁰: *ὅστις γὰρ ὄλον τὸν νόμον τηρήσῃ, πταίση δὲ ἐν ἐνί, γέγονεν πάντων ἔνοχος*

Rom 14²³: *ὁ δὲ διακρινόμενος ἔάν φάγῃ κατακέκριται*

Rom 13⁸: *ὁ γὰρ ἀγαπῶν τὸν ἕτερον νόμον πεπλήρωκεν*

Though Dr. Mantey says, "New Testament grammarians cite no instances" of a perfect implying immediate future action,

Blass-Debrunner, 6. Aufl., 1931, §344, citing the first three examples, says:—"Das Perf. in allgemeinen Sätzen oder fingierten Beispielen . . . futurisch." J. H. Moulton, *Prolegomena*, p. 271, indexes a reference to Rom 14 23 as "vivid use for event yet future." (Contrast Dana and Mantey, *Manual Grammar*, 1927, 202.) Robertson, *Grammar of the Greek NT*, 1914, 897, includes all four of the above passages under "the gnomic present perfect" and three of them he regards as "proleptical" also (p. 898). The latter term is used by Burton, *Moods and Tenses*, §50 of James 2 10. A future meaning of the perfect was accepted for some of these instances by Winer (Moulton's translation, 341; Thayer's translation, 273). Without choosing between the terms—futuristic, vivid, gnomic, proleptical, future—one may simply assert that the action or condition implied in the perfect is not necessarily prior to that of the other clause. Similar examples of this perfect exist both within the New Testament (e. g., the kindred Pauline passages, Rom 7 2 and 1 Cor 7 39) and outside it (e. g., Xen. *Anab.* i. 8, 12, and other examples of what Gildersleeve, *Syntax of Classical Greek*, I, 234, calls "perfect for future perfect," to be found in Kühner-Blass §384, 5). Among them I should include John 20 23. Robertson, p. 1019, associates that passage with Rom 14 23 as evidence that the present perfect is used in the apodosis of a maxim. Why some grammarians entirely ignore the Johannine passage I do not know.

In the two passages of Matthew the future perfects seem to imply a permanent condition rather than a condition prior to the time of the relative clause. If they are not periphrastic they may well mean, "Whatever you bind or loose on earth will prove thereafter to have been bound or loosed in heaven." According to Goodwin, *Syntax of the Moods and Tenses*, 1890, the future perfect "denotes that an action will be already finished at some future time" (§77), "often denotes the continuance of an action, or the permanence of its results, in future time" (§78), "sometimes denotes certainty or likelihood that an action will *immediately* take place" (§79). J. M. Stahl, *Kritisch-historische Syntax des griechischen Verbums*, 1907, 143 f., also recognizes that "das Futurum des extensiven Perfektums wird

ganz besonders zur Bezeichnung eines sicheren und sofortigen Eintretens gebraucht." In contrast with the kind of perfect we have assigned to John 20²³, a perfect which Stahl calls "futurales Perfektum mit dem Sinne des sofortigen und sicheren Eintretens" (p. 117, 1, 2), he says: "Dieses Perfektfuturum unterscheidet sich von den futuralen Perfektum nur dadurch, dass bei ihm das Zukünftige auch zum formalen Ausdrücke gelangt."

Obviously English and Greek differ so in idiom that the nuance of such Greek terms can rarely be rendered adequately by any plain English tense form. Though we have a future perfect in English its place is colloquially taken by the simple future. General conditions, which all three of the passages under review are, have in the apodosis according to English idiom usually either a present or a future. In the three passages the simple future seems to me as adequate as any simple English translation can be.

If, however, instead of translating we have recourse to paraphrase, I would suggest for Matthew's future perfects an expression "shall be once for all" and for John's perfects "shall be at once." So E. A. Abbott, *Johannine Grammar*, 1906, §2517 f. Alfred Plummer, one of the very few commentators to note the tense in John 20²³, suggests (*Cambridge Greek Testament*, cf. *Cambridge Bible*) that "the force of the perfect is 'are *ipso facto* remitted'—'are *ipso facto* retained.'" The — to us curious — perfect imperative in Greek presents the same problems of translation. It is classical, and also later. For example, *πέπαισο* is found in Demosthenes, Alciphron, Lucian, Philostratus. We have in Mark 4³⁹ *πεφίμωσο* and in Luke 12³⁵ the periphrastic *ἔστωσαν περιέλωμένοι*. Here too the perfects may be durative or in the former case instantaneous. But the time, as Robertson says, p. 908, "is, of course, really future."

The argument which Dr. Mantey wishes to draw from the perfects and future perfects of these verses is that since in his view the forgiveness, etc., is spoken of as prior to the time of the conditional clause, it does not originate with the act or the actor of that clause. This is why he urges that "according to the unanimous testimony of all Greek grammarians, the perfect

tense pictures a past action, the result of which was present to the speaker or writer." Attention may, however, be called to the plain implication of the perfect in passages like Mark 2 5 π. and parallels and Luke 7 47. Jesus here says ἀφέωνται of the sins of the man or woman before him. The reading is certain in Luke 5 20, 23, 7 47, 48, and is to be preferred possibly (so Blass-Debrunner §97.3) at Matt 9 2, 5; Mark 2 5, 9. The form is identical with that accepted by Dr. Mantey in John 20 23 which he understands to mean (see *JBL*, LVIII (1939), 243) God forgives and man concurs in that forgiveness. But in the synoptic instances the context makes it plain that the bystanders understood Jesus to mean "have been hereby forgiven by me," and, in the story of the paralytic, Jesus is represented as wishing to vindicate that impression. Surely Luke, to adduce the evangelist whose readings are undoubted, knew the Greek language well enough, in spite of his total ignorance of the subtleties of its modern grammarians, to avoid using ἀφέωνται if by its very tense the act or state it describes was unmistakably dissociated from the speaker and the time of speaking. Luke like those bystanders thought that Jesus claimed to forgive sins, not that he treated "as forgiven only those that were already forgiven by God." Shall we accept a "sacerdotalism" for Jesus from ἀφέωνται in Luke and deny sacerdotalism for the apostles from the same word in John? Is it not better to treat the cases more alike? Otherwise one seems to stake upon the alleged priority of every perfect verb found in a conditional apodosis the whole argument against the penitential authority claimed by the Council of Trent (Sess. xiv. Canon 3) for "the apostles and their lawful successors" from John 20 23 τ. By the very defense of his view Dr. Mantey concedes too much. The case against sacerdotalism, as indeed the case for it, does not rest upon disputable points of Greek grammar. τὸ γὰρ γράμμα ἀποκτείνει.