

Incarnate Wisdom itself was sorrowful in profound sympathy with the woes and griefs of mankind. In all the disciples of that Wisdom there must be sorrow as well as joy. It will only be in another world that the curse of knowledge shall cease, and "sorrow and sighing flee away."

J. J. STEWART PEROWNE.

### A BIBLICAL NOTE.

#### COLOSSIANS I. 3-5.

THE consensus of Erasmus and Calvin, De Wette, Meyer, Ellicott, and Lightfoot, with the Greek commentators, ought surely, one would expect, to mark a *certain* interpretation. Yet there seem to be strong reasons for hesitating to accept their judgment—united and confident, and therefore all but decisive as it is—in regard to *the connection of* *διὰ τὴν ἐλπίδα* (in Verse 5) *with the foregoing context.*

*a.* They hold that this phrase is an adjunct of Verse 4, stating that which 'evokes and conditions' *the Colossians' love* (Meyer and Ellicott); or *faith and love* (so De Wette and Lightfoot).

*b.* The alternative view regards it as dependent on *εὐχαριστοῦμεν* (Verse 3), and giving the reason of *the Apostle's thanksgiving*: "Ex spe patet quanta sit causa gratias agendi pro dono fidei et amoris" (Bengel). The names of Athanasius, Calovius, Michaelis, Storr, Hofmann, Conybeare, and Eadie, amongst others who unite with Bengel in adopting this connection of the words, are sufficient to shew that, after all, the weight of critical authority is divided, and that the question may be regarded as still open to discussion.

It may be observed, in passing, that the various reading in Verse 4 does not materially affect the point at issue, although *ἦν ἔχετε*, now generally preferred, makes the connection of *διὰ τ. ἐλπίδα* with *ἀγάπην* somewhat easier and more regular.

The grounds on which *a* is based by Meyer, Ellicott, and Lightfoot are chiefly negative, consisting of objections to *b*. Let us examine them one by one.

**1.** Meyer is determined by two considerations: the first—adopted by Ellicott and Alford, both of whom regard it as fully conclusive by itself—is that "this preliminary *εὐχαριστία* in St. Paul's Epistles is

always grounded on the *subjective state*<sup>1</sup> of his converts" (Ellicott). To this Eadie's reply is perhaps sufficient. "Faith and love," he says, "are not excluded from the grounds of thanksgiving, and hope laid up is not wholly objective, as it signifies a blessing so sure and attainable that it creates hope." But the rule above given surely proves nothing to the point, unless it be understood to mean that the Apostle always grounds his preliminary *εὐχαριστία* on subjective state *alone*. In that form it strikes one as somewhat empirical, and one asks for a reason why St. Paul should so carefully keep the objective out of sight in this particular matter. Finding no answer to this query, one is tempted to ask whether he *does* so exclude it? And, turning to the very next Epistle, we find him giving thanks to God for the Thessalonians, remembering their "work of faith, and toil of love, and patience of hope, knowing, brethren beloved by God, *your election*;" where Ellicott says of *εἰδότες κ. τ. λ.*—"participial clause, parallel to *μνημονεύοντες*, and similarly dependent on *εὐχαριστοῦμεν*." Is election then a 'subjective state'?

It is clear that in the Thessalonian *εὐχαριστία* the gratifying state of that Church leads the Apostle's thoughts back to God's antecedent choice of them and gracious purposes towards them, of which he had been already persuaded by what he saw and felt when amongst them (Verse 5), as well as by their whole subsequent behaviour, with its happy effect on others (Verses 6-10). There is no break anywhere from the *εὐχαριστοῦμεν* of Verse 2 to the end of the Chapter. The thanksgiving has a fulness of scope corresponding both to the facts of the case and to the cumulative richness so characteristic of the Apostle's more solemn passages.

Similarly, in Philippians i. 3-6, his confidence in God's purpose towards the Philippians shares with their 'fellowship in the gospel' in prompting his *Εὐχαριστῶ τ. θεῷ μου*. The subjective suggests the objective, passes into it, and blends with it in the most free and natural way. In Romans i. 8, moreover, is the fact that the faith of the Roman Christians was being 'spoken of throughout the whole world' an element of their subjective state?

The truth rather seems to be that in his preliminary *εὐχαριστία* the Apostle, as a rule, naturally dwells *first* on the matter of thankfulness he has in the condition of those to whom he is writing, and then passes from that to whatever other motive of gratitude their state and his own thoughts at the time suggest to one who ever delights to act upon his own precept, *ἐν παντί εὐχαριστεῖτε*.

<sup>1</sup> The italics are my own.

2. Meyer further objects that *διά* with accusative never occurs elsewhere in the New Testament after εὐχαριστέω.

But is there any reason why it should not on occasion?

Ἐπί is the preposition in regular use in the New Testament to indicate the object after verbs of emotion,<sup>1</sup> and it is found with εὐχαριστέω and equivalent expressions in 1 Corinthians i. 4; 2 Corinthians ix. 15; Philippians i. 3, 5; 1 Thessalonians iii. 9. Ὑπέρ, however, takes its place in 1 Corinthians x. 30; Ephesians v. 20; while περί (with genitive of thing as well as of person) is found in later Greek. In 2 Corinthians i. 11 this verb is even used in the passive with χάρισμα as subject (as though it might take in the active a simple accusative of the thing).<sup>2</sup> Clearly εὐχαριστέω is far from being fixed and uniform in the construction it requires. Kindred verbs shew a similar variety. Thus θαυμάζω is found with accusative of thing in Luke xxiv. 12; with ἐπί in Luke ii. 33, &c.; and with διά in Mark vi. 6 and (probably) John vii. 21.<sup>3</sup> Χαίρω, with its equivalents, takes most frequently ἐπί, as in 1 Corinthians xiii. 6; Philemon 7; but also ἐν and διά in John iii. 29 and 1 Thessalonians iii. 9. Εὐχαριστέω διά seems, therefore, to be fully justified by analogy.

Eadie finds a special reason for this preposition here in the fact that Verse 4 intervenes between the verb and the prepositional phrase, so that the connection of thought undergoes modification. Perhaps the prepositions we have found following εὐχαριστέω might be thus distinguished: Ἐπί denotes the occasion or incentive; ὑπέρ (or περί), the subject-matter or concernment; and διά (as with any other verb), the reason or ultimate motive of the act of thanksgiving.

3. Lightfoot, without referring to the argument of his predecessors, gives three reasons of his own which "seem decisive in favour of connecting *διά τ. ἐλπίδα* with *τ. πίστω κ. τ. λ.*" The first is the great distance of Verse 5 from εὐχαριστέω.

But is the distance so very great for *St. Paul*? Compare the interval which separates *ἐπὶ πάντων διὰ τοῦτους* in Colossians iii. 14 from the verb it qualifies.

Verse 4 does not form any interruption of the current of thought, such as might make it difficult for the reader to keep the principal verb in mind till he arrived at *διά τ. ἐλπίδα*. Read the sentence thus: "We give thanks to God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, always praying for you, at the report of your faith in Christ Jesus and

<sup>1</sup> Moulton's *Winer*, p. 491.

<sup>2</sup> See A. Buttmann's *New Testament Grammar*, p. 148, English Translation.

<sup>3</sup> See Meyer *in loc.*

your love to all the saints,—because of the hope laid up for you in heaven ;” and with a slight pause before the last clause, and a little emphasis upon it, the connection is perfectly clear of itself, and the whole runs smoothly and easily enough. Προσευχόμενοι κ. τ. λ. gives the explanation as regards himself; ἀκούσαντες κ. τ. λ. the occasion and subjective ground as regards the Colossians; and διὰ τ. ἐλπίδα κ. τ. λ. the motive and objective ground of the Apostle’s thanksgiving, as consisting in that of which their faith and love assured him, and in which he most rejoiced on their account. Here everything is in order, and διὰ τ. ἐλπίδα is only separated from εὐχαριστοῦμεν by that which prepares for it, and leads up to it.

4. The last consideration anticipates Lightfoot’s third argument, on which he lays most stress, viz., that by attaching Verse 5 to εὐχαριστοῦμεν, “the triad of Christian graces, which St. Paul delights to associate together, would be broken up.”

Are they not in reality closely and strikingly combined, when the *faith* and *love* of the Colossians are represented as together assuring the Apostle of the *hope* that awaits them—a hope ensuing so certainly on such faith and love, that he gives thanks for it, as if already realized? The same combination appears to recur, more subtly expressed and with greater elaboration, in Ephesians i. 15–18; where, on hearing of the Ephesians’ *faith* and *love*, he ceases not to give thanks for them, with prayer that they may have enlightenment to ‘know what is *the hope*’ of their calling.’ The inference of 2 Thessalonians i. 3–5, and of Philippians i. 27, 28, is essentially similar: here, moreover, the argument is *two-edged*—made to cut both ways.

5. Lightfoot’s second objection is drawn from the following ἦν προηκούσατε κ. τ. λ., which, he thinks, “suggests that the words διὰ τ. ἐλπίδα describe the motives of the Colossians for well-doing,<sup>2</sup> rather than the reasons of the Apostle for thanksgiving.”

It strongly suggests to me, through some obtuseness perhaps, the very opposite. Why does St. Paul say that they had heard the gospel *already* (προηκούσατε)? that it had come to them *as to all the world*, and *in all the world* was bearing fruit and growing? that they had learnt it *from Epaphras, his beloved fellow-servant*, who had brought such good tidings from them? What is there specially

<sup>1</sup> See Meyer *in loc.*

<sup>2</sup> By the way, is it quite fair to make faith and love here equivalent to *well-doing*? True, they are *motives and principles* of well-doing, and so is hope; but the question here is respecting hope as *the motive of faith and love*. See, however, § 6, below.

appropriate or forcible in all this, regarded as explaining the Colossians' 'motives for well-doing'? or germane to the thought that their faith and love were animated by the hope of glory? What had the *time* or *means* of their hearing the gospel to do with this motive? Does not the Apostle even seem to be *giving his readers information* in what he says of its wide and rapid diffusion? The longer one looks at Verses 5-8, the more one is convinced (in spite of extreme deference to the dictum quoted) that the whole passage presents considerations *acting on the mind of the Apostle himself*. That the work he had set on foot was so blessedly extending and propagating itself; that beyond the bounds of his own personal ministry the gospel—*his* gospel—had been so successfully preached; that the great 'hope' was thus actually becoming the possession of the Gentiles, for whose claim to it he had gladly sacrificed liberty and life; and that he had heard all this from Epaphras, probably his own son in the faith,<sup>1</sup>—can we imagine anything that would stir the Apostle's gratitude to God more profoundly? Not otherwise does he give thanks for the Roman brethren, that their "faith is published abroad in all the world." And the sustained outburst of thanksgiving with which his first Epistle opens cannot reach its pause till he has recounted how that "from you hath sounded out the word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad, so that we need not to speak anything." If he could rejoice in the preaching of Christ by others, even 'in presence' and 'of contentionsness,'<sup>2</sup> how much more in what Epaphras had done in Colossæ!

In reviewing the objections brought against *εὐχαριστοῦμεν . . . διὰ τ. λαπίδα*, the positive argument in favour of that connection has been in great part already stated. It only remains further to confront the two interpretations together, and to inquire whether St. Paul's line of thought in this and neighbouring Epistles helps to a decision between them.

6. That *a* appears to put love—or faith and love—'on a selfish basis' (Eadie), is an objection that recurs again and again in spite of every attempt to remove it; and that, to some minds at least, approaches the insuperable. The sentiment it expresses one might call Paley-an rather than Pauline. No New Testament parallel of any kind is forthcoming to support the notion that "love towards the ἄγιοι is evoked and conditioned by hope for the μίσθος in heaven."

<sup>1</sup> Lightfoot, p. 31.

<sup>2</sup> Phil. i. 15-18.

True it is *attended* with this hope, and stimulates, and is stimulated and enriched by it in turn. Had the Apostle said 'in view of the hope,' or (as in 'Titus i. 2) 'in hope of eternal life,' though the adjunct would have been unusual in this connection, it would not have presented the difficulty which arises when he is supposed to say '*because of the hope,*' making future reward, simply and without any qualification, the reason of love. This is surely to reverse the true and Pauline order as set forth in Romans v. 1-5; viii. 28-39; xv. 13; Ephesians i. 13, 14; and Lightfoot secures a closer grammatical and verbal connection of 'the triad' only at the expense of their real and logical order. We are "children, *then heirs*;" it is "love" that "hopeth all things,"—"perfect love" which "casteth out fear" and gives "boldness in the day of judgment."<sup>1</sup> And as Eadie well says: "Of all the graces, love has the least of self in its nature, and its instinctive gratification is its own disinterested reward."

7. Reading onwards in the Epistle, to see how its general analogy bears on the question in hand, we find the Apostle closing his prayer for the Colossians, following immediately upon the *εὐχαριστία*, by asking that they may be filled with knowledge and walk worthily, "with joy giving thanks to the Father, who made you meet for your share in *the inheritance* of the saints in the light" (a possession belonging in full realization only to the future). We behold him "rejoicing in his sufferings" (Verse 24) with a joy full of the thought of "Christ in you (Colossian Gentiles), *the hope of glory*" (Verse 27). If he warns, it is "that no man defraud you of your *βραβεῖον*—the *prize* of your high calling."<sup>2</sup> If he promises, it is that "when Christ your Life shall be manifested, *then shall ye also be manifested with him in glory.*" If he comforts the oppressed slave, it is with the knowledge that "from the Lord ye shall receive the just recompense *of the inheritance.*"<sup>3</sup> Nor is it without significance that at the same time he suggests to Philemon that he has "perhaps lost his bondsman for a short season, that he might recover him *for ever* as a brother beloved."<sup>4</sup>

We pass to the twin Ephesian Letter, whose opening ascription of praise reaches its sublime climax in the thought of *the inheritance* which, according to God's preordaining purpose, we obtained, "we who have first *hoped* in Christ;" and of the seal of the Spirit which "ye also" received as an "*earnest of our inheritance.*"<sup>5</sup> The prayer,

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. xiii. 7; 1 John iv. 17, 18.

<sup>2</sup> Col. ii. 18, and Phil. iii. 14.

<sup>3</sup> Col. iii. 24.

<sup>4</sup> Phil. 15.

<sup>5</sup> Eph. i. 11-14.

already referred to in § 4, which follows and grows out of this act of praise, as *antistrophé* out of *strophé*, looks quite in the same direction; as also does the fact that the Apostle characterizes the Gentiles as "*having no hope, and without God in the world,*"<sup>1</sup> but as now to be "*fellow-heirs and of the same body*" with the Jewish Church.<sup>2</sup>

We come, finally, to that Epistle (nearly contemporaneous, as all agree, with these two) in which, as in no other, the Apostle opens wide his heart—to his loving and beloved Philippian. "*Summa epistolæ,*" says Bengel, "*gaudeo, gaudete;*" and the 'crown of his rejoicing' is 'that blessed hope.' Philippians i. 10, 21-23, ii. 16, and especially iii. 11-21, give abundant evidence to this effect; while Philippians i. 6 is strictly parallel to Colossians i. 5, and completes the agreement of the *εὐχαριστιαί* of the three great Epistles of this period in their prevailing reference to the *future consummation* of the work of grace.<sup>3</sup> On the whole it appears that the heavenly *βραβεῖον* greatly occupied St. Paul's mind, and especially his *feeling* at this particular time—a time for him, it must be remembered, of contemplation rather than of action, of extreme trial and suspense, and when, under the constant imminence of death, he had learned better than ever how to estimate its 'gain.' 'The hope in store for us in heaven'—this was the source of his deep comfort and joy as 'the prisoner of the Lord,' and 'in deaths oft,' and the object of his most fervent anticipations and earnest solicitude both for himself and for his children in Christ. Are we wrong therefore in supposing that *εὐχαριστοῦμεν διὰ τὴν ἐλπίδα* strikes the true keynote of the thanksgivings of the Epistles of the First Roman Captivity?

GEORGE G. FINDLAY.

<sup>1</sup> Eph. ii. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. iii. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Comp. also I Cor. i. 4-8.