

sities of the case, but will be recognised as the truth and as such commend itself to evangelical Christian scholars.

Meanwhile if Wellhausen and his school are animated by an evangelical spirit they will sink their own personality out of sight, and cease to jeer at those who feel called upon to seek a view of the origin of the Old Testament, which does not cast such dishonour upon God's Word.

Let us remember, however, that we should not tremble for the ark of God, since a mightier hand than ours has it in keeping, and a wiser counsel than that which prompts our well meant endeavours can use the higher and the lower criticism not as ends, but as means for the furtherance of His plans.

In subsequent articles we may show how these critical views revolutionize the History of Israel and Old Testament Theology.

SAMUEL IVES CURTISS.

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## THE EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS.

### XIII.

#### THE TRUE CIRCUMCISION.

“In whom ye were also circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, in the putting off of the body of the flesh, in the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, wherein ye were also raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead through your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, you, *I say*, did he quicken together with Him, having forgiven us all our trespasses.”—COL. ii. 11-13 (Rev. Vers.).

THERE are two opposite tendencies ever at work in human nature to corrupt religion. One is of the intellect; the other of the senses. The one is the temptation of the cultured few; the other, that of the vulgar many. The one turns religion into theological speculation; the other, into a theatrical spectacle. But, opposite as these tendencies usually are, they were united in that strange chaos

of erroneous opinion and practice which Paul had to front at Colossæ. From right and from left he was assailed, and his batteries had to face both ways. Here he is mainly engaged with the error which insisted on imposing circumcision on these Gentile converts.

I. To this teaching of the necessity of circumcision, he first opposes the position that all Christian men, by virtue of their union with Christ, have received the true circumcision, of which the outward rite was a shadow and a prophecy, and that therefore the rite is antiquated and obsolete.

His language is emphatic and remarkable. It points to a definite past time—no doubt the time when they became Christians—when, because they were in Christ, a change passed on them which is fitly paralleled with that rite. This Christian circumcision is described in three particulars: as “not made with hands,” as consisting in “putting off the body of the flesh,” and as “of Christ.”

It is “not made with hands,” that is, it is not a rite but a reality, not transacted in flesh but in spirit. It is not the removal of ceremonial impurity, but the cleansing of the heart. This idea of ethical circumcision, of which the bodily rite is the type, is common in the Old Testament, as, for instance, “The Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart . . . to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart” (Deut. xxx. 6). This is the true Christian circumcision.

It consists in the “putting off the body of the flesh”—for “the sins of” is an interpolation. Of course a man does not shuffle off this mortal coil when he becomes a Christian, so that we have to look for some other meaning of the strong words. They are very strong, for the word “putting off” is intensified so as to express a complete stripping off from oneself, as of clothes which are laid aside, and is evidently intended to contrast the partial outward

circumcision as the removal of a small part of the body, with the entire removal effected by union with Christ. If that removal of "the body of the flesh" is "not made with hands," then it can only be in the sphere of the spiritual life, that is to say, it must consist in a change in the relation of the two constituents of a man's being, and that of such a kind that, for the future, the Christian shall not live after the flesh, though he live in the flesh. "Ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit," says Paul, and again he uses an expression as strong as, if not stronger than that of our text, when he speaks of "the body" as "being destroyed," and explains himself by adding "that henceforth we should not serve sin." It is not the body considered simply as material and fleshly that we put off, but the body considered as the seat of corrupt and sinful affections and passions. A new principle of life comes into men's hearts which delivers them from the dominion of these, and makes it possible that they should live in the flesh, not "according to the lusts of the flesh, but according to the will of God." True, the text regards this divesting as complete, whereas, as all Christian men know only too sadly, it is very partial, and realised only by slow degrees. The ideal is represented here,—what we receive "in Him," rather than what we actually possess and incorporate into our experience. On the Divine side the change is complete. Christ gives complete emancipation from the dominion of sense, and if we are not in reality completely emancipated it is because we have not taken the things that are freely given to us, and are not completely "*in Him*." So far as we are, we have put off "the flesh." The change has passed on us if we are Christians. We have to work it out day by day. The foe may keep up a guerilla warfare after he is substantially defeated, but his entire subjugation is certain if we keep hold of the strength of Christ.

Finally, this circumcision is described as "of Christ," by

which is not meant that He submitted to it, but that He instituted it.

Such being the force of this statement, what is its bearing on the Apostle's purpose? He desires to destroy the teaching that the rite of circumcision was binding on Christian converts, and he does so by asserting that the Gospel has brought the reality, of which it was but a picture and a prophecy. The underlying principle is that when we have the thing signified by any Jewish rites, which were all prophetic as well as symbolic, the rite may—must go. It is an anachronism, "as if a flower should shut, and be a bud again." That is a wise and pregnant principle, but as it comes to the surface again immediately hereafter, and is applied to a whole series of subjects, we may defer the consideration of it, and rather dwell briefly on other matters suggested by this verse.

We notice, then, the intense moral earnestness which leads the Apostle here to put the true centre of gravity in Christianity in moral transformation, and to set all outward rites and ceremonies in a very subordinate place. What had Jesus Christ come from heaven for, and for what had He borne His bitter passion? To what end were the Colossians knit to Him by a tie so strong, tender and strange? Had they been carried into that inmost depth of union with Him, and were they still to be laying stress on ceremonies? Had Christ's work, then, no higher issue than to leave religion bound in the cords of outward observances? Surely Jesus Christ, who gives men a new life by union with Himself, which union is brought about through faith alone, has delivered men from that "yoke of bondage," if He has done anything at all. Surely they who are joined to Him should have a profounder apprehension of the means and the end of their relation to their Lord than to suppose that it is either brought about by any outward rite or has any reality unless it makes them pure

and good. From that height all questions of external observances dwindle into insignificance, and all question of sacramental efficacy drops away of itself. The vital centre lies in our being joined to Jesus Christ—the condition of which is faith in Him, and the outcome of it a new life which delivers us from the dominion of the flesh. How far away from such conceptions of Christianity are those which busy themselves on either side with matters of detail, with punctilios of observance, and pedantries of form! The hatred of forms may be as completely a form as the most elaborate ritual—and we all need to have our eyes turned away from these to the far higher thing, the worship and service of a transformed nature.

We notice again, that the conquest of the animal nature and the material body is the certain outcome of true union with Christ, and of that alone.

Paul did not regard, as these teachers at Colossæ did, matter as necessarily evil, nor think of the body as the source of all sin. But he knew that the fiercest and most fiery temptations came from it, and that the foulest and most indelible stains on conscience were splashed from the mud which it threw. We all know that too. It is a matter of life and death for each of us to find some means of taming and holding in the animal that is in us all. We all know of wrecked lives, which have been driven on the rocks by the wild passions rooted in the flesh. Fortune, reputation, health, everything is sacrificed by hundreds of men, especially young men, at the sting of this imperious lust. The budding promise of youth, innocence, hope, and all which makes life desirable and a nature fair, are trodden down by the hoofs of the brute. There is no need to speak of that. And when we come to add the weaknesses of the flesh, and the needs of the flesh, and the limitations of the flesh, and to remember how often high purposes are

frustrated by its shrinking from toil, and how often mists born from its undrained swamps darken the vision that else might gaze on truth and God, we cannot but feel that a man does not need to be an Eastern Gnostic to believe that goodness requires the flesh to be subdued. Every man who has sought for self improvement recognises the necessity. But no asceticisms and no resolves will do what we want. Much repression may be effected by sheer force of will, but it is like a man holding a wolf by the jaws. The arms begin to ache and the grip to grow slack, and he feels his strength going, and knows that, as soon as he lets go, the brute will fly at his throat. Repression is not taming. Nothing tames the wild beast in us but the power of Christ. He binds it in a silken lash, and that gentle constraint is strong, because the fierceness is gone. "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and a little child shall lead them." The power of union with Christ, and that alone, will enable us to put off the body of the flesh. And such union will certainly lead to such crucifying of the animal nature. Christianity would be easy if it were a round of observances; it would be comparatively easy if it were a series of outward asceticisms. Anybody can fast or wear a hair shirt, if he have motive sufficient; but the "putting off the body of the flesh" which is "not made with hands," is a different and harder thing. Nothing else avails. Highflown religious emotion, or clear theological definitions, or elaborate ceremonial worship, may all have their value; but a religion which includes them all, and leaves out the plain moralities of subduing the flesh, and keeping our heel well pressed down on the serpent's head, is worthless. If we are in Christ, we shall not live in the flesh.

II. The Apostle meets the false teaching of the need for circumcision, by a second consideration; namely, a

reference to Christian Baptism, as being the Christian sign of that inward change.

Ye were circumcised, says he—being buried with Him in baptism. The form of expression in the Greek implies that the two things are cotemporaneous. As if he had said—Do you want any further rite to express that mighty change which passed on you when you came to be “in Christ”? You have been baptised, does not that express all the meaning that circumcision ever had, and much more? What can you want with the less significant rite when you have the more significant? This introduction of Baptism is quite consistent with what has been said as to the subordinate importance of ritual. Some forms we must have, if there is to be any outward visible Church, and Christ has yielded to the necessity, and given us two, of which the one symbolises the initial spiritual act of the Christian life, and the other the constantly repeated process of Christian nourishment. They are symbols and outward representations, nothing more. They convey grace, in so far as they help us to realise more clearly and to feel more deeply the facts on which our spiritual life is fed, but they are not channels of grace in any other way than any other outward acts of worship may be.

We see that the form of Baptism is distinctly by immersion, and that the form is regarded as significant. All but entire unanimity prevails among commentators on this point. The burial and the resurrection spoken of point unmistakably to the primitive mode of baptism, as Bishop Lightfoot, the latest and best English expositor of this book, puts it in his paraphrase: “Ye were buried with Christ to your old selves beneath the baptismal waters, and were raised with Him from these same waters, to a new and better life.”

We observe the solemnity and the thoroughness of the change thus symbolised. It is more than a circumcision.

It is burial and a resurrection, an entire dying of the old self by union with Christ, a real and present rising again by participation in His risen life. This and nothing less makes a Christian. We partake of His death, inasmuch as we ally ourselves to it by our faith, as the sacrifice for our sins, and make it the ground of all our hope. But that is not all. We partake of His death, inasmuch as, by the power of His cross, we are drawn to sever ourselves from the selfish life, and to slay our own old nature; dying for His dear sake to habits, tastes, desires, purposes in which we lived. Self-crucifixion for the love of Christ is the law for us all. His cross is the pattern for our conduct, as well as the pledge and means of our acceptance. We must die to sin that we may live to righteousness. We must die to self, that we may live to God and our brethren. We have no right to trust in Christ *for* us, except as we have Christ *in* us. His cross is not saving us from our guilt, unless it is moulding our lives to some faint likeness of Him who died that we might live, and live a real life by dying daily to the world, sin, and self.

If we are thus made conformable to His death, we shall know the power of His resurrection, in all its aspects. It will be to us the guarantee of our own, and we shall know its power as a prophecy for our future. It will be to us the seal of His perfect work on the cross, and we shall know its power as God's token of acceptance of His sacrifice in the past. It will be to us the type of our spiritual resurrection now, and we shall know its power as the pattern and source of our supernatural life in the present. Thus we must die in and with Christ that we may live in and with Him, and that twofold process is the very heart of personal religion. No lofty participation in the immortal hopes which spring from the empty grave of Jesus is warranted, unless we have



His quickening power raising us to-day by the better resurrection; and no participation in the present power of His heavenly life is possible, unless we have such a share in His death, as that by it the world is crucified to us, and we unto the world.

III. The Apostle adds another phase of this great contrast of life and death, which brings home still more closely to his hearers, the deep and radical change which passes upon all Christians. He has been speaking of a death and burial followed by a resurrection. But there is another death from which Christ raises us, by that same risen life imparted to us through faith—a darker and grimmer thing than the self-abnegation before described.

“And you, being dead through your trespasses, and the uncircumcision of your flesh.” The separate acts of transgression of which they had been guilty, and the unchastened, unpurified, carnal nature from which these had flowed were the reasons of a very real and awful death; or, as the parallel passage in Ephesians (ii. 2) puts it with a slight variation, they made the condition or sphere in which that death inhered. That solemn thought, so pregnant in its dread emphasis in Scripture, is not to be put aside as a mere metaphor. All life stands in union with God. The physical universe exists by reason of its perpetual contact with His sustaining hand, in the hollow of which all Being lies, and it is, because He touches it. “In Him we live.” So also the life of mind is sustained by His perpetual in-breathing, and in the deepest sense “we see light” in His light. So, lastly, the highest life of the spirit stands in union in still higher manner with Him, and to be separated from Him is death to it. Sin breaks that union, and therefore sin is death, in the very inmost centre of man’s being. The awful warning, “In the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die,” was fulfilled. That separation by sin, in which the soul is wrenched from God, is the real

death, and the thing that men call by the name is only an outward symbol of a far sadder fact—the shadow of which that is the awful substance, and as much less terrible as painted fires are less than the burning reality.

So men may live in the body, and toil and think and feel, and be dead. The world is full of “sheeted dead,” that “squeak and gibber” in “our streets,” for every soul that lives to self and has rent itself away from God, so far as a creature can, is “dead while he liveth.” The other death, of which the previous verse spoke, is therefore but the putting off of a death. We lose nothing of real life in putting off self, but only that which keeps us in a separation from God, and slays our true and highest being. To die to self is but “the death of death.”

The same life which the previous verse spoke of as coming from the risen Lord is here set forth as able to raise us from that death of sin. “He hath quickened you together with Him.” Union with Christ floods our dead souls with His own vitality, as water will pour from a reservoir through a tube inserted in it. There is the actual communication of a new life when we touch Christ by faith. The prophet of old laid himself upon the dead child, the warm lip on the pallid mouth, the throbbing heart on the still one, and the contact rekindled the extinguished spark. So Christ lays His full life on our deadness, and does more than recall a departed glow of vitality. He communicates a new life kindred with His own. That life makes us free here and now from the law of sin and death, and it shall be perfected hereafter when the working of His mighty power shall change the body of our humiliation into the likeness of the body of His glory, and the leaven of His new life shall leaven the three measures in which it is hidden, body, soul, and spirit, with its own transforming energy. Then, in yet higher sense, death shall die, and life shall be victor by His victory.

But to all this there is one preliminary needful—"having forgiven us all trespasses." Paul's eagerness to associate himself with his brethren, and to claim his share in the forgiveness, as well as to unite in the acknowledgment of sin, makes him change his word from "you" to "us." So the best manuscripts give the text, and the reading is obviously full of interest and suggestiveness. There must be a removal of the cause of deadness before there can be a quickening to new life. That cause was sin, which cannot be cancelled as guilt by any self-denial however great, nor even by the impartation of a new life from God for the future. A gospel which only enjoined dying to self would be as inadequate as a gospel which only provided for a higher life in the future. The stained and faultful past must be cared for. Christ must bring pardon for the past, as well as a new spirit for the future. So the condition prior to our own being quickened together with Him is God's forgiveness, free and universal, covering all our sins, and given to us without anything on our part. That condition is satisfied. Christ's death brings to us God's pardon, and when the great barrier of unforgiven sin is cleared away, Christ's life pours into our hearts, and "everything lives whithersoever the river cometh."

Here then we have the deepest ground of Paul's intense hatred of every attempt to make anything but faith in Christ and moral purity essential to the perfect Christian life. Circumcision and baptism and all other rites or sacraments of Judaism or Christianity are equally powerless to quicken dead souls. For that the first thing needed is the forgiveness of our sins, and that is ours through simple faith in Christ's death. We are quickened by Christ's own life in us, and He "dwells in our hearts by faith." All ordinances may be administered to us a hundred times, and without faith they leave us as they found us—dead. If we have hold of Christ by faith we live, whether we have received

the ordinances or not. So all full blown or budding sacramentarianism is to be fought against to the uttermost, because it tends to block the road to the City of Refuge for a poor sinful soul, and the most pressing of all necessities is that that way of life should be kept clear and unimpeded.

We need the profound truth which lies in the threefold form which Paul gives to one of his great watchwords: "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God." And how, says my despairing conscience, shall I keep the commandments? The answer lies in the second form of the saying—"In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature." And how, replies my saddened heart, can I become a new creature? The answer lies in the final form of the saying—"In Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh." Faith brings the life which makes us new men, and then we can keep the commandments. If we have faith, and are new men and do God's will, we need no rites but as helps. Without these all rites are nothing.

ALEXANDER MACLAREN.

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*THE REVISED VERSION OF THE OLD  
TESTAMENT.*

*THE BOOKS OF JUDGES AND RUTH.*

THE aim of these papers is to call attention to some of the more important changes in the Revised Version, to offer some explanation of the reasons for them, and to point out the difference of meaning involved. The limits of space must necessarily make these notes brief and incomplete, but