

DIFFICULT PASSAGES IN ROMANS.

IV. THE DEATH OF CHRIST.

IN my last paper we found in Romans i. 16, 17, and again by emphatic repetition in chapter iii. 21, 22, a clear statement of St. Paul's fundamental doctrine of righteousness through faith. In the verses (24-26) following the second of these passages, we shall now find the fullest statement in the New Testament of another characteristic element of the Gospel, viz., Justification through the Death of Christ.

Between these two great doctrines falls, on the pages of this epistle, a momentary shadow, a continuation of the deep shadow extending from chapter i. 18 to iii. 20 and separating the two statements of the first doctrine. St. Paul supports his assertion that a righteousness of God has now been manifested for all that believe by saying that between man and man *there is no difference*. The same words occur again in the same connection in chapter x. 12: "for there is no difference of Jew and Greek." The aorist ἥμαρτον is correctly rendered by A.V. and R.V. "all have sinned." This is one of the many passages which illustrate the difference between the Greek aorist and the English preterite. This latter, we use only for some event or events or condition definitely separated from the present time. The Greek "indefinite" tense describes any past event or state whether belonging only to the past or continuing to the present. The word before us covers the whole sinful action of men from the first transgression to the moment of writing.

The word δόξα denotes in classical Greek an opinion, *i.e.* a subjective view of some one or something. From this neutral meaning easily arose that of a good opinion, appreciation, admiration. In this sense it became the constant equivalent of the Hebrew word כְּבוֹד, denoting weight or

anything which gives importance in the eyes of others. The common phrase "glory of Jehovah" in the Old Testament denotes a supernatural splendour revealing the presence and grandeur of the God of Israel. In a similar sense the words *δόξα Κυρίου* are used in Luke ii. 9 to describe the supernatural brightness surrounding the angels who announced the birth of Christ.

The words *δόξα* and *δοξάζω* are often used in the New Testament to describe the splendour awaiting the righteous. So Romans ii. 7, 10: "For those who by way of perseverance in good work seek for *glory* and honour . . . there will be *glory* and honour and peace." Also chapter v. 2: "we exult in hope of *the glory of God*." Similarly chapter viii. 17, "if we suffer together in order that we may be also *glorified* together." And verses 18, 21: "the *glory* about to be revealed for us . . . the liberty of the *glory* of the children of God." This is the simplest meaning of the phrase *glory of God* in the passage before us, as in chapter v. 2. It is the splendour with which God will cover His faithful servants, and which as reserved for them in heaven is in a real sense already theirs. It is, as we read in chapter ii. 10, a reward of well doing. Consequently they who *have sinned fall short* of it. They are destitute of the future splendour awaiting the righteous.

Grammatically, verses 24-26 are a participial clause subordinate to the finite verbs in verse 23. Yet indisputably these verses contain the chief matter of the sentence. That this is put in a dependent clause, is no difficulty. The Greek language groups in participial clauses of one long sentence ideas which in other languages would be expressed by finite verbs and separate sentences, in order thus to show their mutual relation. This grouping of ideas is very frequent with St. Paul. So especially Ephesians i. 3-14, where again the chief matter is contained in a series of dependent clauses. In the passage before us St. Paul

introduces a new and important doctrine, viz. justification through the death of Christ, for rhetorical reasons, as a proof that all have sinned and thus fall short of the glory of God. The costliness of the salvation proves how far man had fallen.

No other exposition except the foregoing is possible here. In the absence of any main assertion, or any conjunction, it is most difficult to take verse 24 as beginning a new sentence. And it is equally difficult to join verse 24 to verse 22, making verse 23 a parenthesis. Moreover, as we have seen, these expedients are needless.

The proof here given that all have sinned and are destitute of the splendour which God gives to His servants is that men are justified as a free gift by God's undeserved favour, *δωρεάν τῇ αὐτοῦ χάριτι*. For the freeness of the gift reveals the unrighteousness of the persons thus justified. And this is still further revealed in the infinite cost of their justification, which St. Paul goes on to expound.

This free justification comes to men, as the means by which it is brought about, *through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus*. The word translated *redemption*, *ἀπολύτρωσις*, and its simpler cognates, *λυτρόομαι* and *λύτρον*, and the still simpler word *λύω*, denote always a loosing or liberation. The word *λύτρον* is the ordinary term for the means or price of liberation. In classical Greek the verb *λυτρόομαι* is the ordinary word for liberation of captives by payment of a ransom. In the LXX. it is frequently used for the liberation of those whom the Mosaic law claimed, but released for a price or a substitute. For instance, God claimed the firstborn, but waived His claim on payment of five shekels each: Exodus xiii. 13, Numbers xviii. 15. Good examples are also found in Leviticus xxvii. 27-33, Numbers iii. 46-51. But, like most words which convey two ideas, it is sometimes used when only one of them is present, in this case always the idea of liberation. So

Exodus vi. 6, "I will redeem you with a stretched-out arm"; and chapter xv. 13, "the people which Thou hast redeemed." For here there is no thought of price or cost.

It is at once evident that justification, which is practically pardon, involves liberation from punishment. I involves therefore redemption from the consequences of sin, from the bondage to sin to which "God gave up," as we read in Romans i. 24, 26, 28, those who hold back the truth in unrighteousness. Touching this liberation, we now seek further information. Especially we ask whether, as in most other cases in which the word *redemption* is used, it is brought about by payment of a price.

This liberation takes place *in Christ Jesus*. This and the shorter phrase *in Christ* occur in the letters of St. Paul some eighty times, and are a conspicuous feature of his thought and expression. They are also peculiar to him, except 1 Peter iii. 16, Jude 1, the frequent phrase "abide in Me" in John vi. 56, xv. 4, etc., and "abide in Him" in 1 John ii. 6, etc. All these forms of speech imply that Christ is, in some real and important sense, the environment of the Christian life. That this thought is, under different modes of expression, common to the writings of St. Paul and St. John, and in the New Testament almost peculiar to them, is an important fact of New-Testament Theology.

The statement that this liberation from the penalty and bondage of sin takes place *in Christ*, i.e. within His personality, needs further elucidation: and this is at once given. St. Paul adds, *whom God set forth as a propitiation*.

The word rendered *propitiation*, whatever its precise meaning, stands related to the verb *ἰλάσκομαι*, found in Hebrews ii. 17 and (in slightly different form) very frequently in the LXX., e.g. Leviticus iv. 20, 26, 31, 35, v. 6, 10, 13, 18, to describe the effect of sacrifice; "the priest

shall propitiate for them, and the sin shall be forgiven them." It is very unfortunate that in R.V., as in A.V., equivalent words are rendered in the Old Testament *atonement* and in the New Testament *propitiation*. The identity of these terms should have been noted, at least in the margin. The form of the word *ἱλαστήριον* suggests the instrument by which propitiation is made. It is frequent in the LXX. as a technical term for the mercy-seat covering the ark of the covenant. It was so used probably because on that mercy-seat was sprinkled, on the day of atonement or propitiation, the blood with which the high priest made propitiation for himself and the people. In the same sense the word is used in Hebrews ix. 5. But in the passage before us nothing suggests the mercy-seat; and it is not easy to see what thought this reference would add to the sentence. On the other hand, the root idea of the word, viz. propitiation, links the blood shed on the cross with the blood of the Jewish sacrifices. This meaning, the word certainly conveys: and it is the only meaning suggested by it. This being so, the question whether *ἱλαστήριον* is a substantive or adjective is of little moment. In the latter case, we must supply in thought the word *sacrifice*: in the former, we must interpret it, although perhaps without example elsewhere, according to the common significance of its termination, as the instrument of propitiation. It differs from the simpler form *ἱλασμός* in 1 John ii. 2, iv. 10, chiefly in making conspicuous the idea of instrumentality.

God set forth Christ as a propitiation. The first syllable of *προέθετο* may denote either time or place: *earlier than* or *in front of*. In the former sense, both verb and substantive are common to denote a purpose, a setting before oneself something which we intend afterwards to do. And this is their only use in the New Testament, except that in Matthew xii. 4 and its parallels the substantive is used

for the loaves set publicly day by day on the table of shew-bread. But nothing here suggests a purpose. On the other hand, the local sense gives a good meaning. Before the eyes of men and angels and before His own eyes, God publicly set Christ as a means of propitiation.

That justification is *through faith*, St. Paul has already taught. And evidently justification covers the head of the sinner from the punishment due to his sin, as did the propitiation wrought by the priest in the Mosaic sacrifices. In other words, this evangelical propitiation becomes effectual to each one when he believes. It is therefore a *propitiation through faith*.

The words *in His blood* may be joined either to *faith* immediately foregoing or to *set forth as a propitiation*. The phrase *πίστεως ἐν* is not frequent with St. Paul or in the New Testament. Moreover nowhere else is the blood of Christ represented as an object of faith, although indisputably the faith which saves has regard to His death. On the other hand, in the sacrificial ritual of the Old Testament, propitiation is closely connected with the shedding and sprinkling of blood. And this connection of thought gives good sense here. God set Christ before the eyes of men and angels covered with His own blood to be a propitiation through faith, *i.e.* in order that all who believe in Him may escape the punishment due to their sins. The word *blood* suggests the violent death of Christ. The word *set forth* suggests the conspicuousness of a victim hanging on a cross.

Then follows, in this great passage, a statement of the aim in view of which God set forth Christ as a propitiation in His own blood; and this is followed by a further ultimate aim. God gave Christ to die in order to *demonstrate His own righteousness*. This aim is made emphatic by conspicuous repetition. The ultimate aim is that God may be *Himself righteous and a justifier* of him who has faith in

Christ, *i.e.* in order to harmonize with His own justice the justification of the believer. These proximate and ultimate aims of the death of Christ demand now our most careful attention.

The word *ἔνδειξις* denotes a pointing to something within, an indication or proof. *His righteousness* denotes, as in verse 5, the administrative justice of God by which He "will judge the world." In other words, God set Christ conspicuously before the eyes of men, covered with His own blood, in order to afford proof that in His administration of the world He is just.

The words following, to end of verse 25, give a motive for this demonstration of the justice of God, *viz.* His action in days gone by. During long ages He passed by sins, *i.e.* He did not at once execute due punishment. He did not pardon sin; but He seemed to overlook it: *πάρεσις*, not *ἄφεσις*. And this was done *in the forbearance of God*. Now, to allow sin to go unpunished, obscures the justice, and compromises the character, of a ruler, and thus injures the state. The welfare and honour of all concerned demand the speedy and full punishment of crime. St. Paul here asserts that God gave Christ to die in order to demonstrate His justice, in view of a tolerance of sin in the past which seemed to obscure it.

After stating this motive of God's action in the past, St. Paul states again His purpose *in the present season*, *i.e.* in the great era in the Kingdom of God now beginning. The repetition calls marked attention to the necessity of vindicating His justice.

The ultimate aim of the death of Christ is then stated. God gave Christ to die not only in order to manifest His justice but in order that He might be Himself actually just. This implies that, apart from the death of Christ, to justify believers would have been inconsistent with justice. And this we can understand. Justice ever demands to be con-

spicuously manifested. Whatever obscures a ruler's justice defeats the ends of justice. The justice or righteousness of God is the divine attribute underlying the sequence of sin and punishment. It is all-important for the good of the state that this sequence, and therefore the justice of God, be ever conspicuous. The appropriateness of this exposition renders needless any other less simple meaning of the words *that He may be Himself righteous*, such as "that He may be seen to be righteous." This meaning would make this last clause of the sentence mere tautology. The exposition given above makes it the all-important culmination of an important sentence.

The phrase τὸν ἐκ πίστεως describes a man whose character and position are derived from faith. So chapter iv. 16, τῷ ἐκ πίστεως Ἀβραάμ: also Galatians iii. 7, 9. Similarly Romans x. 6: "the righteousness which is from faith." The genitive Ἰησοῦ describes the personal object of justifying faith. In a similar connection, in chapter iv. 16, the genitive describes the believing person: "the faith of Abraham."

The passage before us asserts the important truth, not elsewhere in Holy Scripture so clearly stated, that the death of Christ stands in definite relation to the justice of God, that it was needful as a means of harmonizing with the divine attribute the justification of believers; or, in other words, that justice forbade the pardon even of those who believe in Christ apart from some such manifestation of the justice of God as was given in the death of Christ. This is the fullest exposition in the Bible of the need for the death of Christ in order to the salvation of men.

In close harmony with the above teaching, we find in chapter vii. 4 the death of Christ in conspicuous relation to the Law of God, of which His justice is the animating principle. The readers are there compared to a woman bound by the law to a husband; but afterwards set free

from that bondage by the hand of death, and then united to another. "Also ye have been put to death to the law by means of the body of Christ, in order that ye may become another's." The same is involved in the phrase "died to law" in Galatians ii. 19. A remarkable parallel is found in Hebrews ix. 16, 17, where the New Covenant (*ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη*) is compared to a testament or will (*διαθήκη*) which becomes a valid legal instrument only by the death of the testator. This implies that the death of Christ gave legal validity to the New Covenant, which can mean only that it removed a legal difficulty in the way of our justification. These passages are an important confirmation of Romans iii. 26, as above expounded.

The nearest approach in the Bible to the teaching which connects the death of Christ with the justice and law of God, peculiar there to St. Paul and Hebrews ix. 16, 17, is perhaps 1 John i. 9: "He is faithful and righteous in order that He may forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." For in verse 7 we read, "the blood of Jesus His Son cleanseth us from all sin." It is thus related to the term *justification* used by St. Paul, and by him only, to describe the pardon of sins; and to the term *adoption*, derived from Roman law, and used by St. Paul, and him only, to describe the filial relation to God into which the justified are received. This legal aspect of the Gospel of Pardon is a great contribution, amid many others, made to Christian thought by the pupil of Gamaliel.

From this point we will review our exposition of verses 24-26. If Christ died, as we have just seen that St. Paul teaches, in order to harmonize with the justice of God the justification of believers, then was His death absolutely needful for their salvation. For God cannot possibly be unjust: and He would not have given His Son to die in order to save men if a less costly means of salvation had been sufficient. We therefore infer that had not Christ

died for us we must have died. If so, His death may be correctly described as the price paid for the salvation of those who put faith in Him. For every costly means used to obtain an end not otherwise attainable may be appropriately so described. And this is a correct and forceful mode of expressing the absolute necessity, for the end in view, of this costly means. We have seen that in all cases the word *redemption* implies liberation, and usually liberation by purchase. It is now evident that in the death of Christ there takes place a redemption in this latter sense. He is, as expounded above, the ransom-price of our salvation.

The result thus gained by exposition of the passage before us explains abundant teaching of various writers of the New Testament. So 1 Corinthians vii. 23, "ye were bought with a price"; Galatians iii. 13, "Christ bought us off from the curse of the law, having become on our behalf a curse, as it is written, Cursed is everyone that hangeth on timber." Similarly 1 Peter i. 18 f., "not with corruptible things, silver or gold, were ye redeemed from your useless manner of life handed down from your fathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, even of Christ." Also Revelation v. 9: "Thou wast slain and didst buy (us) for God with Thy blood." Similar teaching is attributed to Christ in Matthew xx. 28, Mark x. 45: "to give His soul (or life) a ransom for many."

This language is now explained. We need not ask to whom the ransom was paid. It was paid to no one. The phraseology before us is simply an appropriate and forceful mode of expressing the infinite costliness of our salvation, and the absolute necessity of the death of Christ as the only means by which it could be brought about. This necessity is implied in abundant teaching of various writers of the New Testament. Wherein it lies is explained only by St. Paul, chiefly in the passage before us, in which it is traced

to an essential element of the nature of God, viz. His justice. This is confirmed by other passages in which the death of Christ is placed in relation to the Law, in which the justice of God finds expression.

We now understand also in what sense "God set forth Christ as a propitiation through faith, in His blood. Just as the blood shed on the brazen altar secured for guilty men forgiveness for certain specified faults, so through the death of Christ on the cross do they who put faith in Christ obtain forgiveness for all their sins. Thus Romans iii. 26 explains verse 25. It also explains Hebrews ii. 17, where Christ is said to have become like us "in order to propitiate the sins of the people"; and 1 John ii. 2, iv. 10, where He is said to be "a propitiation for our sins." This phraseology connects the death of Christ with the Mosaic sacrifices.

The teaching just expounded also explains the prominence given to the death of Christ throughout the New Testament as the means of man's salvation, and the occasional assertion of its necessity for this end. So Matthew xvi. 21: "He must needs go away to Jerusalem and suffer many things and be killed. For, if the justice of God made needful the death of Christ for the justification of believers, this necessity must have been absolute. Thus Romans iii. 26 is a key to the whole teaching of the New Testament about the death of Christ.

It is right to say that this explanation needs to be itself explained. And this further explanation is not given in the Bible. It is however legitimate matter for reverent research. The analogy of human government helps us to understand that the justice of God forbade the pardon of the guilty by mere prerogative. When the guilty goes unpunished, the innocent suffers. We despise a ruler who does not carry out the penalty of the law. For such clemency is ruin to the state. But this analogy leaves

untouched the more serious question how the death of an innocent victim removes the difficulty which forbids a righteous ruler to pardon the guilty. To attempt an answer to this question, is beyond the scope of the present paper. But we notice that frequently the consequences of sin fall upon innocent ones closely related to the sinner, that this must be by the ordinance of God, and that it reveals the inevitable and awful connection of sin and suffering; that he who died for men is their Creator and Judge; and that before He died He entered into closest possible relation to them as a sharer of the flesh and blood on which rests conspicuously the curse of sin. We need not wonder that the punishment due to them fell upon Him. Indisputably the death of Christ for man's sin reveals, as nothing else could, the infinite evil of sin and the inevitable sequence of sin and suffering. It thus serves a moral purpose. And it vindicates the character of God against an apparent tolerance of sin inconsistent with justice. No one can now say that God's long forbearance and His pardon of sin in Christ are in any way prompted by indifference to the essential and tremendous evil of the sin which He forgives.

However incomplete this explanation may seem to be, the fact is now before us that the greatest of the immediate followers of Christ taught that the death of Christ as the means of man's salvation was rendered needful by the justice of God, and that it removed a barrier to the pardon of sin having its root in this divine attribute. To have this issue put plainly before us, as it is in this passage, which in this paper I have endeavoured to expound, is an immense gain. We shall do well to make it a starting point for all further research touching the relation between the death of Christ and the salvation of men.

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