

Pisidian Antioch are so striking as to make each the best commentary on the other. It may be said in explanation that the topics common to them are those which are fundamental in Paul's Gospel and must appear in every address. But there is no such close resemblance between the Epistle and any other of Paul's addresses reported in Acts, and the Antiochian address stands in much closer relation to this than to any other of Paul's Epistles, even the kindred letter to the Romans.

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DIFFICULT PASSAGES IN ROMANS.

VIII. THE REIGN OF LAW.

IN chapter vi. St. Paul set before us, as a reply to the objection that God's purpose of mercy is a reason why men should continue in sin, a description of the new life He would have us live, in its relation to God, to the death and the resurrection life of Christ, and as contrasted with our past life of sin. While thus delineating the new life, he made the astonishing assertion, "ye are no longer under law." This passing assertion he explains in chapter vii. 1-6, by saying that his readers "have been put to death to the Law through the (crucified) body of Christ," that they have been put beyond reach of the efficacy of the Law (*κατηργήθημεν*), and have died to that in which they were held fast. A reason for this deliverance from the Law is said to be that the emotions of sins aroused by means of the Law were at work in the members of their body bringing forth fruit for death.

The above explanation lies open to serious objection. Possibly it was designed to raise the objection. If by means of the Law sinful passions were aroused, if in order that we may be united to Christ we must needs die to the

Law, may we not infer that the Law itself is evil? This plausible inference the apostle states in plain words: *Is the Law sin?* Is the written *letter* an embodiment of opposition to God? This suggestion St. Paul rejects as inconceivable; and goes on to expound the actual relation of sin to the Law, thus vindicating his rejection. He says, The Law is not sin, *but I had not known sin except by means of law.* The conjunction *ἀλλά* might be rendered with equal correctness *nevertheless.* It introduces a statement quite different from the suggestion rejected.

That the Law is not sin, St. Paul proves by a case in point, a case typical of all sin, viz. the sin of covetousness or illicit *desire.* The verb *ἐπιθυμήσεις* is neutral; and is in Luke xxii. 16 attributed to Christ: "with desire I have desired to eat this passover." But, as here used, it is a quotation from Exodus xx. 17 (LXX.) "*Thou shalt not desire thy neighbour's wife,*" etc. The writer says that but for the tenth commandment, here quoted, the sin of covetousness would have been impossible. And it is evident that apart from prohibition there would be no sin, for nothing would be sinful. In other words, by giving man a law God created the possibility of sin.

To this argument we cannot object that there was evil desire long before the Law was given on Sinai. For, as the apostle taught in Romans ii. 14, 15, there is a still older law written in the hearts of all men, and speaking with the authority of God. He prefers however to refer here to the law written in the Sacred Books from which the Jews of his day learnt the principles of morality.

Verse 8 describes the working of the Law in St. Paul's own case. The word *ἀφορμή* denotes a starting-point for activity. It is used in the same sense in 2 Corinthians v. 12, xi. 12, Galatians v. 13, 1 Timothy v. 14. He says that by means of the tenth commandment *the abstract principle of sin obtained a starting-point* for activity, and *wrought out*

in him *all evil desire*. This assertion, he supports by a general principle: *for apart from law sin is dead*: and this principle he illustrates from his own experience. He writes: *I was alive apart from law once; but when the commandment came, sin woke up into life, and I died*. On this sad event he lingers: *and the commandment which was for life (i.e. designed to maintain life), this was found in my case to be for death*. Notice here the preposition *eis* used in the same sentence once for design and once for actual result. Each of these uses falls under its radical meaning, viz. to denote tendency. In verse 11 the apostle describes more fully the sad event stated in verses 8 and 9. The abstract principle of sin, here almost personified, took hold of the commandment, made it a starting-point for activity, and by means of it deceived and slew him.

We now ask, when was St. Paul alive apart from law, when and in what sense did the Law come, and in what sense did he die? Certainly he was not spiritually alive when he was persecuting the Church. He was then, as he teaches in Ephesians ii. 1, "dead through trespasses and sins." Nor was he without law: for he was earnestly seeking righteousness by means of law. Still less could it be said that at that time, so far as he was concerned, sin was dead. For he was its obedient servant. To what time then does the apostle refer? The only possible reference, and a reference quite satisfactory, is to the innocence of infancy. When Saul lay in his cradle at Tarsus, before the moral law had entered his consciousness, the sinful nature in which he was born was inoperative and in this sense *dead*; and the infant, as not yet guilty of actual sin, and therefore not yet under the anger of God, was in a very real sense *alive*. He had not yet forfeited the life which he received from his Creator. But, with opening consciousness, the authority of the moral sense made its voice heard, and along with this dawning sense of right and wrong the

child became conscious of sin within him. He committed actual sin, and thus fell under condemnation and the gloom of spiritual death. In this very real sense he died, slain by sin through the instrumentality of the moral law which took historic form and literary embodiment in the Decalogue.

This personal experience reveals the relation of the Law to sin. It was the weapon with which a foreign foe slew Paul.

We notice now that the foregoing statement of the facts of the case has vindicated the Law from the charge which in verse 7 was brought against it. That a weapon torn by an enemy from a soldier's hand has slain him, is no proof or presumption that it is bad or was made by an enemy. That which was designed to be his protection has become his destruction. This is very sad. But no one blames the weapon. So with the Law. This logical result is stated in verse 12. The same use of the word *ὥστε* is found in verse 4 and in chapter xiii. 2. The particle *μέν*, without *δέ* following, suggests that the sentence is incomplete. And its logic is incomplete: for we have as yet had no valid proof that the Law is good. The real logical result of verses 7-11 is stated in verse 13. The excellence of the Law, now vindicated from the charge brought against it in verse 7, has revealed the awful evil of sin which by means of a law designed to maintain life has wrought death: and this revelation is so wonderful and complete that St. Paul rightly infers that it was designed by God.

In verse 14 we find a conspicuous and important transition. The writer still uses the first person singular, and still narrates his own experience. His tone of sadness continues and deepens. But, instead of past tenses, as throughout verses 7-13, we have to the end of the chapter the present tense. In chapter viii. 2, but in an altogether different tone, we have again the past tense. This change

of tense without change of tone, and the change of tone in chapter viii. demand explanation.

The writer describes himself as *σαρκινός* or fleshen, a man of flesh. He further describes himself as *sold under sin*. In these last words, the perfect participle depicts the abiding state of one *sold* as a slave, thus put *under* the power of another, and that other *sin*. This recalls chapter vi. 17: "ye were slaves of sin." The proof that Paul is a slave is at once given: he does not know what he is doing; *i.e.* like a man under the control of another, he is working out purposes he does not understand. This statement, the writer further supports by saying that he does, not what he wishes, but what he detests. This detestation of his own action is an agreement with the judgment of the Law which condemns him: *I agree with the Law that it is good*. From this agreement with the Law the writer infers in verse 17 that the results of his action are wrought not by himself but by another. And, inasmuch as there is no one external to himself who controls his actions, he is compelled to infer that his master is within him. This *indwelling* lord, he calls *sin*.

The title thus given, the apostle goes on, in verses 18-20, to justify. The indwelling ruling principle cannot be *good*: *ἀγαθόν*, *i.e.* beneficent. That it is not *good*, is proved by his sad experience that he is unable to do that which is noble: *τὸ καλόν*. In other words, that which he desires and cannot do is good: and this proves that the inward power which prevents him from carrying out his desire is not good. This argument is plainly stated in verse 19, which differs from verse 15*b*, by characterizing as respectively *good* and *evil* that which the writer desires and that which he actually does. The inference from the opposition between Paul's desire and action, already stated in verse 17, is emphatically restated, after the introduction in verse 19 of the words *good* and *evil*, in verse 20.

The foregoing argument is summed up, and developed, in verses 21–23. The grammatical construction of verse 21 is very difficult. The chief difficulty is the construction of τὸν νόμον. If we were to leave out these words, we could take τῷ θέλοντι ἐμοὶ ποιεῖν τὸ καλόν in apposition to the second ἐμοί, thrust forward out of its place in order to emphasize the desire to do good even while evil is present. We could then render, “I find therefore, to me who desire to do the excellent, that to me the evil is present.” But what are we to do with τὸν νόμον thrust in between εὐρίσκω and τῷ θέλοντι? In this chapter we have the Law of God, of which the decalogue is a partial expression. This is undoubtedly the meaning of *the Law* in verses 14 and 16. And in verse 22 which explains and supports the verse now before us, and again in verse 25, we read of *the Law of God*: it is also the ordinary meaning of these words throughout the epistles of Paul. This is the meaning at once suggested by the words before us. On the other hand we read in verse 23 of *another law* and of *the law of sin*. But these are carefully distinguished from the ordinary use of the word *law*.

It seems to me extremely difficult or impossible to give to the phrase *the law* in verse 21, used as it is without any further specification, any meaning other than its common one. Dr. Sanday and Mr. Headlam render “I find therefore this law—if it may be so called—this stern necessity laid upon me from without, that much as I wish to do what is good, the evil lies at my door.” But no example is adduced of the use of the common term *the law* in any such way. An easier exposition is to retain the common use of the term, and to take the accusative τὸν νόμον as governed, not by εὐρίσκω foregoing, but by τῷ θέλοντι following, taking ποιεῖν τὸ καλόν as epexegetic, giving the purpose for which the writer desires the Law. In this case, the accusative would be put before the governing

verb for emphasis, just as for emphasis τῷ θέλοντι ἐμοί is pushed forward. We might then render "I find therefore, to me who desire the Law in order to do the good, that to me the evil is present." This exposition is practically the same as those of Fritzsche and Meyer.

The above interpretation has the advantage of giving to the common term *the law* its ordinary meaning. It explains the conspicuous introduction of the word *law*, which in the other interpretation, as adding nothing to the sense of the verse, is unexplained. It is, as I understand it, introduced in order to reassert the writer's agreement with the Law even while breaking it; and is thus parallel to "I agree with the Law" in verse 16, and with "I am pleased with the Law of God" in verse 22. It thus renders real service to the argument.

Elsewhere in the New Testament the word θέλω is almost always followed by an infinitive. But an accusative follows it in verses 15, 16, 19, and 20: and this conspicuous construction in four foregoing verses prepares a way for the same construction in verse 21. The same construction is found in 2 Corinthians xi. 12: τῶν θελούντων ἀφορμὴν. On the whole, the exposition given above, of one of the most difficult verses in the New Testament, seems to me open to fewest objections.

The practical significance of the statement in verse 21 is expounded in verses 22, 23. The writer says συνήδομαι τῷ νόμῳ: *I am pleased along with the Law*, i.e. I share its pleasure. This is a stronger restatement of verse 16, "I agree with the Law." The writer not only approves what the Law approves, but does so with pleasure. But this pleasure pertains only to one side of his nature, to *the inner man*. This suggests that to him evil is still alien and in some sense external. But verse 23 tells us, in graphic and terrible words, that even this inner man and indeed the whole man is in bondage. He sees *another law*, another

prescription of conduct speaking with an authority he cannot resist, *carrying on war against the law of his mind*, i.e. against the prescription of conduct which his intelligence approves, and taking him captive, as a conquered foe, to the law of sin, to the prescription of conduct which is characterized by sin.

Notice the emphatic repetition of the words ἐν τοῖς μέλεσίν μου, *in the members of my body*. These words describe the locality of this hostile law. They thus recall chapter vi. 12: "Let not sin reign as king in your mortal body." The importance given in these passages to the complex human body as the locality in which sin dominates the man is a conspicuous feature of the teaching of St. Paul in contrast to modern theology. Equally conspicuous and important is his teaching, in chapter vi. 13, 19, xii. 1, and elsewhere, that our bodies are to be laid on the altar of God and are thus to become the dwelling-place of the Spirit of God.

The above description of the writer's terrible position evokes, in verse 24, a wail of anguish, which is at once relieved by a shout of joy in verse 25*a*. The result of the whole discussion is given in verse 25*b*. In the writer there is an unreconciled dualism. With his intelligence he recognises the binding authority of the *Law of God*. With his body, the organ through which thought passes into action, in virtue of its constitution as a thing of *flesh*, he acknowledges the compelling authority of a *law of sin*. From this painful inward antagonism, the next chapter will announce full deliverance.

The charge brought against the Law in verse 7 is now completely removed, by a statement of the whole case. The Law has been an instrument of spiritual death. But this was contrary to its purpose. And, even in his deepest bondage, the captive recognises, by the reluctance with which he breaks its commands, the excellence of the Law

and the total dissimilarity of the evil prescription of conduct which he finds himself compelled to obey. The case is profoundly sad: but even before the sadness is removed the excellence of the Law is completely vindicated.

We now ask, to whom and to what time does the writer refer in his conspicuous use of the first person singular throughout verses 7-25 and in his use of the present tense throughout verses 14-25? The utter contrast between the captivity and bondage and sin described in these last verses, and the liberation from sin described in chapter vi. 18, 22, and again in chapter viii. 2, forbids the suggestion that these passages refer to the same man at the same time. No one man can be dead to sin and made free from it and at the same time a captive and slave to it. Evidently the writer is either personating some one else or is reproducing an experience of the past.

In verses 7-13, where we have the first person singular and past tenses, there is no reason to doubt that the writer refers to his own past experience. Moreover, throughout chapter viii., he is undoubtedly describing an experience shared by himself and his readers. Unless we have strong reason to the contrary, we must accept the intervening verses, chapter vii. 14-25, as describing himself. And, if so, the contrast between these verses and the rest of the epistle and of all his epistles compel us to believe that the experience here described was not his experience while writing.

Other reasons support this inference. In chapter vi. 17 we read of a state of bondage to sin, followed in verses 18 and 22 by liberation from sin: and in chapter vii. 4 we read that this liberation has been brought about by death to the Law. But in verse 9 the writer took us back to a still earlier time, when he was "alive apart from law," followed in verses 9-11 by the coming of the law and his own melancholy death. Then follows, in verses 14-25, a

description of a state of bondage to sin, followed in chapter viii. 2 by liberation from sin by the spirit of life. In other words, between the sad transition from life to death in chapter vii. 9-11 and the experience described throughout chapter viii., another and a happy transition has taken place. Where in the intervening verses are we to place it?

Not at the beginning of verse 14, where for the first time we have the present tense: for one who is "sold under sin" cannot be already "made free" from it. Nor can we put the deliverance in the following verses, where we have no indication of a great and happy change till we come to the joyful shout in verse 25*a*. This is followed by the present indicative, which reproduces in verse 25*b* the dark picture given in verses 14-24. In the verses following, the deep shadow passes finally away and we have a plain statement of the great deliverance. Evidently, the transition for which we are seeking must be placed in chapter vii. 25*a* and viii. 1, after the dark picture we are now endeavouring to interpret. And, if so, this picture must delineate the writer's spiritual condition before he experienced the deliverance described in chapter v. 1-11, vi. 17-22.

Some may object, If St. Paul is here describing a past experience, why does he use the present tense? This question may be answered by attempting to rewrite this paragraph in the past tense. "I was a man of flesh, sold under sin. I did not know what I was doing. I hated my own actions. I saw another law in the members of my body carrying on war against the law of my mind. I cried, Who shall deliver me?" The life and strength of the paragraph are gone. In order that his readers may realize what Christ has done for him and for them, St. Paul delineates as present a condition which has passed away. Similarly in chapter iii. 7 he places himself among liars, and in chapter iv. 24 he looks forward to their faith reckoned for righteousness as then future.

This mode of speech, common in all languages, is a conspicuous feature of the language in which this epistle was written. So Kuehner, *Greek Grammar*, § 382. 2: "In the narration of past events the present is frequently used, especially in principal sentences, but not unfrequently in subordinate sentences, while in the vividness of the representation the past is looked upon as present. This use of the present is also common to all languages. But in the Greek language it is specially frequent; and in the language of poetry appears not merely in narration, but also in vivid questions and otherwise, frequently in a startling manner.

The only serious objection to the above exposition is that the paragraph before us contains statements at first sight inapplicable to persons not yet justified. The writer hates the evil which he does, agrees with the Law that it is good, and is pleased with that which is pleasing to the Law. This last statement, however, is limited to the inmost element of his nature. There is nothing here inconsistent with the inner life of a conscientious Pharisee striving to do right yet borne down by inward forces he cannot resist. Certainly this difficulty is much less than that involved in attributing to a man set free from sin the bondage to sin here described.

It has been suggested that we have here a description of one who has only partially appropriated by faith the salvation offered by Christ. Every defective experience (and whose experience is not defective?) has elements in common with that of those without Christ. Consequently the language of this paragraph is appropriate to many who have a measure of saving faith. But in this paragraph we have no hint whatever of any salvation received by faith in Christ. It is therefore better to understand it as referring to a man not yet justified.

If the above exposition be correct, we have here the full-

est description in the Bible of the natural state of man. Even in the immoral there is an inner man which in some measure approves the good and hates the bad. But this inner man is powerless against the enemy who is master of his body, and who thus dictates his conduct. In spite of his better self, the man is carried along the path of sin. This is not contradicted, nor is its force lessened, by St. Paul's admission, in chapter ii. 26, 27, that even pagans do sometimes what the law commands. For their obedience is only occasional and imperfect; whereas the Law requires constant and complete obedience. A man who breaks the laws of his country is not saved from punishment by occasional performance of noble actions. Although men unfor- given sometimes do that which deserves approbation, they are utterly powerless to rescue themselves from the power of sin and to obtain by good works the favour of God.

Man's relation to the Law is now sufficiently expounded and the Law sufficiently vindicated. It remains only to describe the new life with which in Christ Jesus the Spirit of life makes free the adopted children of God.

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