

*THE THEOLOGY OF THE EPISTLE TO THE
ROMANS.*

VI.

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD AND THE NEW LIFE.

THROUGH faith in Christ, set forth by God as a propitiation in His blood, man is justified. His relation to God is determined not by sin, or by any of the powers or ideas which in St. Paul's mind form part of the same whole as sin, such as the law, the curse, or death; it is determined completely and exclusively by Christ. The sinner who is ignorant of Christ, or who refuses the obedience of faith, is in the wrong with God; the sinner from whom Christ the propitiation has won the great surrender is in the right with God. He is in that attitude to God which alone answers to the truth of what God is, as God has revealed that truth in giving His Son a propitiation for the sins of the world.

Now to be right with God in this sense is not a part of religion, it is the whole of it. The righteousness of God which Paul preached was not an element in his gospel; his gospel was exhausted in it. The justification of the sinner was not a preliminary to something higher, it was not a condition without which real salvation could not be attained; it was itself salvation. In the very nature of the case it could not be supplemented, and it did not need to be; it has in it the promise and the potency of all that can ever be called Christian. The man who has once apprehended, in Christ or His cross, the true dimensions of the love of God, and in whose heart that unconditioned love, bearing his sins, has called forth the response of unconditional faith, has in principle nothing more to learn about God, and nothing more to receive from Him. His faith in God's love, the faith by which he is made right with God, is his life. The whole of Christianity is in the faith which abandons

itself to the sin-bearing love of God, just as the last truth about God is in the sin-bearing love which offers itself in Christ for the acceptance of faith.

This is the point of view from which St. Paul, in the Epistle to the Romans, first enlarges on the life of the justified. In the third chapter he exhibits Christ as a propitiation—God's revelation of a righteousness in which His own character is vindicated, and in which sinners may become right with Him. In the fourth chapter he shows that the way of being right with God which he preaches—the way not of meritorious works which claim as of right God's approbation, but of unconditional reliance upon God in Christ—is no new thing, subversive of all the true religion that has ever been known in the world, but one in principle with the piety of the Old Testament. He points especially to the identity of Abrahamic and of Christian faith in this, that both are trust in a living God who can quicken the dead (v. 17). This is the Scriptural way of saying that both are faith in omnipotence. But in the case of Christian faith, the omnipotence has been demonstrated in a way which gives it a peculiar character. It has been shown in raising from the dead One "who was delivered for our offences and raised for our justification." In other words, it has been shown in the service of the love of God, dealing with the sin of the world for man's redemption. It is not omnipotence *simpliciter* in which the Christian trusts, it is omnipotent *grace*. And when we say this, we see again how trust in such grace is not a part of the Christian life, but the whole of it. Hence we cannot be surprised when St. Paul at this point actually brings the whole Christian life into view as the life of the justified, a life which has its inspiration and all its characteristic qualities and virtues simply in this, that it is the life of men who through faith in the omnipotent grace revealed in Christ are completely and once for all right with God. It is not something added to their

justification, it is something involved in it. It is not something which has another condition than their faith, it is the assertion of their faith through all things. If we introduce a word from another circle of ideas, and speak of a regenerate life, then we may say that justification regenerates, or that faith regenerates; for the regenerate life of Romans v. 1-11 is nothing but the life of justification and of faith. It does not matter for our present purpose whether we read ἔχωμεν or ἔχομεν in v. 1, or take *καυχώμεθα* in vv. 2 and 3 as indicative or subjunctive, though the indicative in all three seems to me the more probable; peace with God, access to God, a secure standing in grace, power to glory even in tribulations and to make them subservient to spiritual good, and a hope of glory which does not make ashamed because it rests on the assurance of God's love, a love poured out in our hearts through His Spirit—all this is included in the life of the justified. It does not occur to the Apostle to ask, What is the connexion between justification and the new life? How is the new life mediated to the man who through faith in Christ set forth as a propitiation has become right with God? These are not real questions for him. The new life, as Romans v. 1-11 exhibits it, is not communicated or evoked in any special way at all. It is the spontaneous manifestation of what justification is and means. It is justification asserting itself as a reality in all the relations, and under all the changing and trying conditions, of our being. "We have received the reconciliation" (v. 11): everything is in that.

It is worth while to notice that this point of view underlies all that Paul has yet to say, and emerges through what might seem at the first glance inconsistent with it. To believe in a love of God which is deeper than sin, and makes propitiation for it, is everything; whoever has this faith has justification and the life of the justified in one. Hence the love of God appears both at the beginning and at the end of

all that St. Paul has to say about the new life (v. 5 ff., viii. 32 ff.), and in both places it appears in that immensity which belongs to it as a love which has made propitiation for sin. The *whole* of the Christian life is *one* indivisible response to *this* love. It is a love with every promise in it, and in both the passages referred to it is made the basis of all Christian inferences. When we are sure of this love, the love which enables the ungodly to become right with God, much more, argues the Apostle in chap. v, may we be sure that all our other necessities will be looked to by God. The same argument is repeated in chap. viii. "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not also with Him freely give us all things?" But to argue in this way from the love which makes atonement to all other demonstrations of God's love which may be necessary for the sinner—in other words, to argue that the whole love of God is given in the love which justifies the ungodly—is precisely the same as to argue that the justification in which this atoning love is received, and in which the sinner becomes right with God, includes in itself the whole of salvation, and that the justified man has only to assert and manifest himself as what he is, in order to be equal to all the demands of life. The new life is in no sense added to justification; justification itself, in St. Paul's words, is *justification of life* (v. 18). It is a mistake to draw distinctions which the Apostle does not draw, and to say that life here means eternal life in the transcendent, not the ethical, sense: its may fairly be questioned whether St. Paul could have made out what this means. Life may be rich, but it is simple and indivisible; and when justification is qualified by life we must take it in its wealth of meaning certainly, but in its simplicity as well. A self-contained justification, an impotent negative justification, without fruit or outlook, is not the Apostle's idea. To him justification is related to life and to be characterized by it. We may say, if we please,

that it has immortality in view, but we must say also that it regenerates. Everything in Christianity is vitally in it, vitally connected with it and dependent on it, its vital manifestation. It follows, of course, that independent of it there is nothing of vital Christianity at all.

This interpretation of St. Paul's teaching on justification may seem to some to leave no room for anything in the Epistle to the Romans after chap. v. 1-11. When the Apostle has reached this point, it may be argued, he has said all he has to say; he has made his gospel known to his readers in all its breadth and length and depth and height. And there is no doubt that the connexion between the part of the Epistle with which we have been engaged, and the part which follows, is difficult to grasp. By some it is simply denied. Ritschl, for instance, argues that Paul keeps the two points of view which they represent—that of justification by faith, and that of the bestowment of the Holy Spirit on believers—quite apart. He traces their course, so to speak, side by side, and makes the attainment of salvation at last equally dependent on the one and on the other, but he never combines them. Holtzmann agrees with Ritschl in this, but makes a certain allowance for the lines of thought crossing each other; and though he holds that Paul never clearly defined their relations, he thinks there are certain ideas common to both (such as faith, the Spirit, and redemption) which assist us in bringing them into connexion. Weiss makes a connexion by the simple process of addition. First, we are justified by faith—not indeed in the sense of justification explained above, but in some more negative and impotent sense; then we receive the Spirit, as the power of the new life, in baptism; and it is the sum of these which is the Christian salvation. None of these views can be willingly accepted by one who reads the first part of the Epistle as it has been read in these papers, and who has on general grounds a prejudice in favour of St. Paul's coherency.

We might rather be disposed to argue that in chaps. iii. 9-v. 11 he is propounding his gospel in its purely religious significance—remembering, of course, that in a religion which puts a man right with God everything is included; that in chap. v. 12-21 he digresses to bring out its significance in the spiritual history of humanity, and particularly to show that the great figures in that history are Adam and Christ, and its great ideas Sin and Grace, Death and Life, as compared with which Moses and his Law have only a subordinate and transient importance; while in chaps. vi.-viii. the ethical significance of the gospel is asserted against plausible objections which would find in it an excuse for sin. But this is to give an exaggerated importance to chap. v. 12-21, which in spite of the enormous place it has filled in the history of dogma is hardly more than an *obiter dictum* in the Epistle to the Romans. What is really before the Apostle's mind from v. 11 onwards is the ethical vindication of his gospel. That gospel was attacked on the ground of reverence for the law, and the main purpose served in his argument by this much disputed passage is to put the law in its place. The law is not what the Jews who slandered him (iii. 8) supposed. It is a vanishing quantity between Sin and Grace, as Moses is a vanishing personality between Adam and Christ. But after his preliminary discounting of its importance (in which the law can only be taken in the historical sense) he comes to face the real objection which was in the minds of his opponents. The law they were concerned about was not to be disparaged as the law of Moses: to them it was the law of God. It represented the interest both of God and man in righteousness, and their assertion was that Paul's gospel of a justification for the ungodly was inconsistent with its claims. It set righteousness at nought. It not only tempted men to say, Let us do evil that good may come, let us continue in sin that grace may abound; it justified them in so saying, and would end in their so

doing. This is the situation to which Paul addresses himself in chap. vi. 1 ff.

Let it be observed that what is assailed is St. Paul's doctrine of justification. Now that which is assailed is that which has to be defended. Nothing will serve the Apostle's purpose except a demonstration that justification as he understands it is vitally related to the holy will of God, as it is expressed in the law, and to the doing of that will in life. To show that there is *more* in Christianity than the *δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ* which he has consistently identified with his gospel, and to argue that morality is guaranteed in another way of which he has as yet said nothing, but which this objection reminds him to set forth, is both irrelevant and absurd. It is as if he tacitly pleaded guilty to the charge made against his gospel, and then by an after-thought got past it; as if he said, Yes, my gospel of a Divine righteousness would be open to these charges if it stood alone; but it does not stand alone. It is supplemented by a reception of the Holy Spirit in which a divine life is communicated to us and maintained in us; and as we walk after the Spirit the righteousness of the law is fulfilled. Such a connexion, or rather such a want of connexion, such an incoherence, in the Apostle's thoughts is incredible. A gospel of justification, which has no relation to morality, and of new spiritual life which has no vital connexion with justification, is a gospel like Mephibosheth, lame on both its feet. It needs a great deal of courage to ascribe it to a mind like St. Paul's, even in the company of such distinguished scholars as those referred to above.

But indeed it is not necessary to do so. The Apostle states the objection of his opponents, apparently in their own words, Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Then he repels it with moral indignation: *μὴ γένοιτο*. The very idea is shocking. Then—and this is the essential point—he demonstrates its inconsistency with

his gospel. This is the purport of the second verse in the sixth chapter : men who like us died to sin, how shall we continue to live in it? It seems to be taken for granted, by many if not by most interpreters, that the idea of dying to sin is a perfectly new one, having no relation to anything which precedes and intelligible only in the light of what follows. I venture to dissent altogether from this view. Dying to sin is not a new nor an incomprehensible idea to any one who has understood chap. iii. 25 f., and who knows what that faith is in which the sinful man abandons himself to the mercy of God in Christ crucified. It is our death which Christ dies as He bears our sins on the Cross, and when we commit ourselves in faith to the mercy of God which is revealed there, to that mercy and to no other, we make that death our own. Sin becomes to us in the very act of believing all that it is to Christ ; we are dead to it as He is dead ; it is a thing foreign to the world into which our faith introduces us, as it was foreign to Him who died for it. St. Paul does not here supplement his gospel of justification ; he only brings out its contents on the basis of experience, and shows how adequate they are to answer the objections made to it in the name of morality. Every man, he argues, who knows what it is to be justified by believing in Christ who died for sins knows *ipso facto*, in his own soul, what it is to die to sin. It is Christ *dying* for sin who evokes faith, and the faith which He evokes answers to what He is and to what He does ; - it is a faith which has a *death* to sin in it. But this is the same faith which justifies, and St. Paul's argument rests entirely on the fact that it is the same. Unless the faith through which the sinner becomes right with God involves in it this death to sin, and what is not a separate thing, but only the other side of the same, a being alive to God, he has no reply to his opponents at all. It is out

of his faith that this argument is constructed. The very same experience in which he becomes right with God through Christ—that is, the experience of faith—is an experience in which he becomes a dead man, so far as sin is concerned, a living man, so far as God is concerned. Not that this is the ground on which he finds acceptance with God, or in view of which God justifies him; nothing could be so direct a contradiction of Pauline theology as the idea that God justifies us because the germ of sanctification or of new life is present in the soul and can be counted on to develop. It is the one unconditional mercy of God in Christ crucified which evokes the one response of faith—a faith in which, as one indivisible experience, the believing sinner becomes right with God and dead to sin. And it is the abiding assurance of this justifying mercy, a mercy in the acceptance of which sin dies, or the believer dies to sin (for the two are one), on which the new life depends. The joy of justification is not the initial impulse by which the boat is pushed from the shore; if St. Paul can be trusted, it is the very element on which it floats; it is the inspiration of the new life from beginning to end, and that life itself can be exhaustively described as the life of justification.

The whole answer of St. Paul to the charge that his gospel led to immorality is contained in that exclamation—*men like us who died to sin!* As has been remarked already, it is no answer, unless the dying to sin is necessarily involved in that very act of believing in which a man is made right with God. Paul knows from experience that it is so involved, but he can imagine his assertion being doubted; and if it is doubted, where is the proof? In the nature of the case there can be no conclusive proof but the experimental one—the actual holiness of the justified, the fulfilment of the law by sinners who have received the reconciliation freely, and with no moral

guarantees either asked or offered by way of preliminary. But in the nature of the case also such an experimental proof can hardly be given, and all St. Paul can do to satisfy those who are sceptical about the death to sin involved in faith is to point to the rite in which faith is declared, and to show that it also has the death in question written on its face. The rite is that of baptism. It is plain from the Apostle's language that all Christians were baptized, and it ought not to be necessary to say that in the New Testament baptism and faith are correlative ideas; the meaning of baptism is the meaning of faith, and that is why Paul can appeal to it here as a way of bringing out what is involved in faith. What, then, is the light which baptism—which is only an illustration of faith, a picture in which the contents of faith are presented to the eye—throws upon the subject in hand? In what way does it support the assertion that faith involves a death to sin, and is therefore inconsistent with a continued life in it?

Baptism supports this assertion inasmuch as, in the form in which it was familiar to the Church, it is a picture of death, burial, and resurrection. These things are in baptism as in a picture, but they are in faith in their reality. What is in the picture for the eye to see is in faith as the experience of the soul. We were baptized into Christ's death, means that when we were baptized our faith was evoked by and concentrated on that death; in its atoning power, a power which belongs to it because it is really our death borne by Him, it takes hold of us and conforms us to itself; we make it our own in the very act of believing, and in Christ through faith we die to sin. This is the faith which baptism presents to the senses; if it is not this, what, St. Paul asks, is it? What other interpretation can you put on the sacrament than that it enshrines and exhibits this spiritual experi-

ence? Paul does not refer to baptism because there is something in it which is not to be found in faith, but for precisely the opposite reason. He refers to it because it brings out the fact that in faith—the faith which justifies—the only faith he knew or could think of, the faith which is identical with the Christian religion and which is confessed in baptism—there is involved (at least in idea) a death to sin which is the only absolute guarantee for a life fulfilling the law.

The ideal or theoretical vindication of St. Paul's gospel is therefore quite complete. He knew in his experience that justifying faith meant death to sin, and the symbolism of the sacrament exhibited this meaning to all. But the ideal is one thing; the reality, even where it has touched the ideal at the central and vital point, is another. The new life is indeed, we may say, guaranteed by the death to sin involved in faith and represented in baptism; it is guaranteed by it, yet it lies beyond it, and as the end contemplated in it, it has an independence of its own. "We were buried with Him by our baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." Religion is not a substitute for morality, it has it in view; and though it is a guarantee for it, morality must be freely and morally produced. Hence the exhortations to right conduct with which the remainder of the sixth chapter of the Epistle is filled. It is as if the Apostle said to his readers, "It is of no use to argue the case; all that can be done is by well doing to put to silence the ignorance of foolish men. Baptism *is* a picture of death and resurrection, and in faith there *is* a corresponding reality; there is a death to sin, and a being alive to God. This it is impossible for us to doubt, but there can be no theoretical demonstration of it; let us demonstrate it, therefore, in act. *Reckon* yourselves to be

dead to sin, and alive to God in Jesus Christ. Remember what you *are*; be yourselves, and every mouth which reproaches the gospel will be stopped."

It is a highly remarkable fact that all through this chapter, in which the Apostle is dealing with the morality of the new life, there is no mention of the Holy Spirit. Christianity is explained in its entirety out of Christ and faith. It consists, first and last, of experiences generated in the believer by the Cross. The fundamental one is death to sin; in the assurance that he has shared with Christ at this point, the Apostle is confident that he will share with Him all through. "If we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him." It is probably a mistake to speak in this connexion of a mystical union with Christ as a transcendent reality on which all such experiences are dependent. It is the experiences alone with which the Apostle is dealing, and it does not make them in any degree more intelligible to provide them with an unrealizable background. To believe in Christ who died for our sins, and who died our death in doing so, is to die ourselves to sin; it is to receive "justification of life"; it is to have the love of God shed abroad in our hearts; it is to know that we are under grace, and that neither sin nor death can have dominion over us any more; it is to have as the ever present, all determining power in our moral life the sense that for these unspeakable blessings we are debtors to Christ who died. We owe them absolutely, and without any qualification, to Him, and our new life is inspired and sustained by the sense of this obligation. As the Apostle puts it in another epistle, it is a life not to ourselves, but to Him who for our sakes died and rose again, and to the God whose love He revealed in doing so. This is the connexion in which the one reference to the Holy Spirit stands which we have yet found in St. Paul's treatment of justification. "The

love of God is shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit given unto us" (chap. v. 5). It is this love of God to us, which, through the response of love evoked by it in our hearts, is the guarantee for a good life. Love begets love—to be more specific, grace begets gratitude; and gratitude is the inspiration of all Christian goodness. This, much more than anything suggested by the idea of a mystical union with Christ, or an indwelling of the Spirit, seems to me the point of view from which the Apostle contemplates the problem raised in the sixth chapter of Romans. We cannot continue in sin, his argument runs; to do so would be inconsistent with our whole relation to Christ. It would be inconsistent with the death to sin which is involved in faith, and represented, as in a picture, in baptism; it would be inconsistent with our sense of debt to Him who died for our sins that we might be in bondage to them no more; it would be inconsistent with our hope of the glory of God. All this, I repeat, is intelligible, and it is on the level at which the Apostle writes throughout this section. Whatever it may be proper to say of the Holy Spirit, or of union to Christ, or incorporation in Him, must be said on the basis of such experiences and within their limits.

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JUDGMENT BY WORDS AND BY WORKS.

IN St. Matthew xii. 37 our Lord declares that "by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." That the judgment referred to is not that of men in the common intercourse of life, but the judgment of God in the last great day, appears unmistakably from the immediate context. He had just been saying that for "every idle word that men shall speak" they shall be called to account "in the day of judgment."