

In this sketch we have attempted to describe the leading ideas embodied in the Mystery-Religions and to indicate the range of their diffusion, giving instances, as occasion offered, of the religious terminology which they employed. We must next endeavour to estimate in detail the relation of St. Paul to their terminology and their ideas.<sup>1</sup>

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### THE TEACHING OF PAUL IN TERMS OF THE PRESENT DAY.

#### XX. THE MEASURE AND ESTIMATE OF FAITH.

IN the Pastoral Epistles, as has been commonly held, "faith loses its unique significance and is almost reduced to a place side by side with other virtues," so that "the gift of eternal life appears almost as a reward of good living." At the present moment we are not concerned with defending the authenticity of those Epistles, but simply with the question whether this is a doctrinal position different from that of Paul's earlier letters, and likely to be non-Pauline and characteristic rather of Paulinism as conceived by a pupil of the Apostle.

That in the earlier letters salvation is said to come through faith and the gift of God, not through works, is of course admitted. From that we start. That is emphasised over and over again in the letters; and no quotations are needed to prove that this is the true Pauline teaching. But is that inconsistent with the statement that salvation is the result of the work and intense effort of the individual?

of ancient and widely-propagated religious ideas: "The main thing in the Mithra-Liturgy is that one man from an approximately definable period had these ideas" (*Zeitschr. f. N. T. Wissensch.*, 1912, i. pp. 13, 14).

<sup>1</sup> We have omitted consideration of the Mithra-Mysteries, as these fall outside the scope of our discussion: see Cumont, *op. cit.*, p. xvi.

There is no inconsistency; and he that finds inconsistency between the two statements has never apprehended in a right way the true nature of the relation between man and God. Paul, who says so emphatically that salvation is the free gift of God through faith, can with equal emphasis utter the advice, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." Both are true: they contemplate the same operation, but from different points of view. Such is the true relation of the Divine nature to the human nature. One statement does not exhaust the character of that relation.

Moreover, faith is the driving power that turns man back from his tendency to degradation, and starts him in the course of movement towards God. The way to measure or estimate a force is through the effect that it produces: there is no other way. Now it will be observed that, where Paul is attempting to move the minds and hearts of men, he speaks most about faith and lays all the stress of his teaching on faith, but where he has in his mind the thought of judgment regarding men, he speaks of works, i.e., of the effect that this force produces. In the practical problems of Church management Timothy and Titus have to look to works as the standard of measurement. Only thus can they estimate the driving power in the heart of man. They cannot measure the faith, or judge the character, of their congregations in any other way. Yet throughout those same letters the characteristic Pauline view of faith is suggested here and there, as in 1 Timothy i. 2, 4, iii. 9, v. 8, 12, vi. 12; Timothy iv. 7; Titus iii. 5.<sup>1</sup>

The same thing is equally characteristic of the earlier letters, if we make allowance for the far greater part that is there devoted to stimulating, and the much less attention that is given to estimating. The estimating mentioned in those letters is that which is done by God: although He

<sup>1</sup> See Dr. R. F. Horton's *Introduction to the Pastorals*, p. 7.

knows the thoughts of the heart, He does not estimate the deserts of men by their faith, but by their works and their conduct. The Final Judgment partakes of the nature of a trial issuing in a formal sentence : and even in this trial, at which all "the counsels of the heart are made manifest and the hidden things of darkness are brought to light,"<sup>1</sup> the test which is applied is conduct. "It is indeed surprising," says Professor W. P. Paterson,<sup>2</sup> "that no mention is made of faith."

From our point of view, however, that is quite natural and inevitable. There can be no other scientific measure of a force except in the effect it produces ; and on this the estimate is based. "We must all be made manifest before the judgment-seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done through the body according to what he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad."<sup>3</sup> "Whatsoever good thing each one doeth, the same shall he receive again from the Lord."<sup>4</sup> So again, writing from a slightly different point of view, Paul speaks to the same effect : "Not the hearers of the law are righteous before God, but the doers of the law shall be treated as righteous, . . . in the day when God shall judge the secret things of men according to my gospel by Jesus Christ."<sup>5</sup> If in Romans, Ephesians and Corinthians the judgment of God is consistently based on works, the judgment of men must still more necessarily be based on the same external standard, and not on the

<sup>1</sup> See 1 Corinthians iv. 5.

<sup>2</sup> *The Apostles' Teaching*, i. p. 116. Such is the usual remark made by theologians on this topic.

<sup>3</sup> 2 Corinthians v. 10.

<sup>4</sup> Ephesians vi. 8.

<sup>5</sup> Romans ii. 13-16. That the American Revision is right in so connecting the structure of the sentence seems clear, and has been already stated: the intermediate words are parenthetical. I refer to meditation in secret, not to the final judgment (as Westcott and Hort punctuate).

attempt to estimate a hidden force in the heart and nature of man.

Those who would bind Paul, regarded as a philosophic thinker and as a teacher for all time, to the bare statements in their narrowest form which are made most frequently and most emphatically in the earlier letters, miss much of his thought and character. He did not try to win men by setting before them a complete system of philosophy. He hammered on the potent and penetrating nail of faith. This was the all-important means of getting into their hearts. Hence this is the most characteristic idea of Paulinism as a power to convert. No emphasis can be too strong on that. This, however, does not exhaust the mind, or the philosophic position, or even the teaching, of Paul.

Now, when we attempt to go further and comprehend Paulinism as a complete system of thought and of teaching, and to show how it can make itself intelligible to men of the twentieth century, we must remember that he did not always preach to the unconverted or the newly converted and immature; and we should not exclude the possibility that he could organise and govern as well as persuade and convert. It is the denial, sometimes overt and conscious, sometimes half-unconscious, of this possibility, that causes much of the difficulty experienced as to the truly Pauline character of the teaching in the Pastoral Epistles. The importance of faith in the teaching of Paul was immense; but there was much more than faith in his teaching.

The emphasis which Paul lays upon faith is wholly justified and necessary. Faith is the motive power of good life: through its force man can begin to move towards God, and its continued impulse is needed right through to the end. We can make no step except through it. Without faith man is helpless: it is the power of the divine within him, believing, hoping, loving, and seeking after

the Divine around him. Too much emphasis cannot be laid on the indispensableness of faith.

It is not always easy for the practical expounder of Paulinism to find words that will rightly and exactly express the situation. In such perplexity, if you lay the superior stress on faith, you will not go far wrong.

Yet in attempting to comprehend the nature of Pauline teaching, we must remember that even Paul himself does not say that it is the only thing, nor even that it is the greatest thing. "Now abideth faith, hope, love, these three ; and the greater of these is love" (1 Cor. xiii. 13). The singular "abideth," instead of the plural, is not merely a grammatical feature : it bears closely on the sense.<sup>1</sup> Paul does not mean simply that each one of the three separately and by itself remains permanent. He never would say so emphatically that you can trust in the permanence of faith by itself without the others. He means that the divine unity of faith, hope, love is the permanent thing amid the flux and change of the world. Faith, as he says in xiii. 2, is by itself insufficient : however great faith I have, however my faith fulfils the supreme test, it would be nothing without love. The one is incomplete without the other two. And, if you are determined to weigh them against one another, love is greater than faith as a constituent element in the divine whole ; and love is in itself the most lasting and most Divine thing in the universe, for it, more completely than anything else, is the Divine nature.

## XXI. FAITH UNTO SALVATION.

When the true nature and meaning of the Pauline term "faith" is understood we see that the greatest difficulties

<sup>1</sup> This I would venture to add to Dr. Harnack's exquisite statement of the quality of this passage, as set forth in an earlier page of the *EXPOSITOR* for June, 1912.

which Paulinism presents to the modern mind rest on a misconception of the word.

“Why should I be condemned because another man sinned, or made righteous because another has paid the penalty for me?” That is the question which constantly rises in one form or another to the mind of the ordinary man in modern time, and to a somewhat less degree probably in ancient time: every age has its own special difficulties to meet and its questions to put.

As has been pointed out in Section XVI., we are according to Paul not condemned because another man sinned, but because we have ourselves sinned; and I do not hesitate to say that according to Paul we are made righteous, not simply because another man, even Jesus, has paid the penalty for us, but because we, through faith in Jesus and in His payment of the penalty on behalf of all men, attain to righteousness.

This appears too markedly contrary to some widely received conceptions of Pauline teaching: is it justifiable as an expression of his thought?

The usual conception of Pauline teaching may be very roughly stated thus. Salvation is procured and earned, not by ceremonial observance and ritual acts of outward homage and external respect towards, nor even by obedience to the higher moral law which requires that man should “do justly and love mercy and walk humbly with God,” but by faith alone: “By grace have ye been saved through faith.”<sup>1</sup> Salvation is not obtained through merit of our own, nor is it the reward of excellent character or good conduct, but is the free gift of God, independent of ourselves. In this we find no fault, except in so far as it is stated to the exclusion of any further statement or teaching.

That salvation cannot be obtained by ritual is quite in

<sup>1</sup> Micah vi. 8; Ephesians ii. 8.

accordance with the judgment of the ordinary reasonable man, who wants to understand plainly and to think simply about his rule and conduct of life. He finds, however, that the words of Micah as quoted above express his own judgment and his own intention : he would like to do well, to be just and merciful, and to be finally judged by God accordingly.

Paul does not object to this desire and opinion of the ordinary reasonable man. Such was apparently his own original aim in life. He came to Jerusalem to live the higher life ; he eagerly desired to do rightly ; and in attempting with his whole heart and soul to carry into effect this eager desire, he found himself trampling on what was best in his nation, an accomplice in the murder or attempted murder of the noblest among his own people, and a hater and enemy of the Lord Himself.

The discovery that his enthusiasm to serve God aright had led him headlong into such perverse and shameful conduct produced the most profound effect on his judgment. He saw that the result of the eager desire to live one's own life well through one's own effort must be utter failure. You cannot do what you desire to do : you are inevitably led into sin and wrong-doing, partly by your own nature, partly by the perverting influence of the errors and sins of preceding generations, as the iniquity of the fathers is visited on the children and produces in them an ever-increasing liability to error, partly by the very law itself which stands above you and which you strive to obey. Paul felt keenly that the law had in itself been an influence to lead him astray : it had drawn his attention away from the truth : he had set it in the place of God, and it had concealed from him the true nature of God and the purpose of Christ.

Paul himself, therefore, had natural sympathy with that

judgment and intention of the common man. He began so, and he knew what was good in that intention, and what was mistaken.

In the natural condition of human character, when it is not yet too much perverted by wrong choice and wrong aspirations and has not yet begun to aim deliberately at wrongdoing for its own sake or as a means to something that lies beyond the wrongdoing, the ordinary reasonable man desires to do rightly, to act according to a good standard of conduct, and to gain thereby the rewards in character and in external blessings which ought (as he thinks) to accompany and result from good action. This his natural sense of right takes as a fair and just principle and measure of treatment.

It is commonly said that righteous action of this kind is of a lower class than the righteousness that is gained by faith, and therefore would not be sufficient to merit salvation. Theologians labour to prove this by a variety of considerations and arguments, on which we need not enter. The natural sense of fairness in the ordinary man of our time is not convinced by them; and the Gospel of Paul, when recommended by such methods, fails to touch him. These arguments are, however, beside the point: they never touch the real problem: they do not interpret rightly the mind of Paul. To the Apostle the *crux* of the whole situation lay, not in the fact that righteousness if so gained is in itself of a lower order, but in the fact that righteousness cannot be attained in this way. If the way were possible, if it led to success and to true righteousness, all would be well. But it cannot lead to success: it does not produce true righteousness. Sometimes it leads to appalling error and crime: sometimes it produces less terrible, but still quite unsatisfactory results. There is no possible way except through faith.



Examine the question in every way you please. Take it historically. The history of the past was, as Paul saw and as every pagan thinker and poet (except Virgil, sometimes) acknowledged, a process of deterioration and degeneration. Man was not growing better. Racial sin had vitiated the whole fabric of society, and lowered the national standard of judgment and conduct. Take it in the individual case: no man could feel that, as he grew older, he grew better. Take it in the typical case of the first man, Adam. He had sinned where every circumstance was in his favour.

Another way was needed. Except by another way righteousness could not be attained. God had shown that way through Jesus. It is the way of dying that one may live, of suffering that one may triumph.

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