

*THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. PAUL.*

*ITS CHARACTER AND SOURCE.*

THE question, What is the gospel? is the one to which all other questions concerning the New Testament are but preliminary. To find the answer we must throw the question into this other form, What *was* that gospel preached unto men "with the Holy Ghost sent from heaven," which moved them to repentance, which quickened at once conscience and hope, and issued in an exultant sense of pardon and peace with God? What was the form, and what the contents, of the proclamation which was everywhere recognised as news, startling, unexpected, good? It is to the solution of these questions that the solutions, even partial and provisional, of all other New Testament problems contribute. Doubtful or ignorant of these things, the Church is a herald without a message. Her very pomp and circumstance expose her only to the greater ridicule. Her supreme need is to discover or rediscover that which once was, and again might be, the power of God unto salvation.

A decisive answer to these questions is presently suspended through the operation of two different and opposite conceptions as to the character of the gospel, and the extent of the sources from which it is to be derived. On the one hand, we find writers who assert even with vehemence that the conception of the "gospel as the *rationale* of salvation which has been commonly traced to St. Paul, is neither Pauline or Scriptural." We find a certain system of Christian doctrine and the corresponding theory of Church organization basing itself on statements such as these: "The word 'gospel' in the New Testament is applied exclusively to the announcement of certain events occurring at a particular time in the history of the world." "Scripture never brings before us the gospel of

Christ except as the record of certain facts respecting Him." On this showing, all theories about the connection of these facts, about their meaning and their bearing upon individual or corporate need and salvation, are non-Scriptural. That construction of the facts and events in which the Reformed Churches have rejoiced as their message to mankind, is denied all Scriptural sanction. And the function of the Church as preaching the Gospel to every creature, is sufficiently discharged by the presentation to the minds of men of the consecutive events of the Gospel history.

That such a theory is held may well seem hardly credible to those who have not met with it, and seen it stoutly maintained and supported by an imposing array of Scripture passages. But even to those who may have been for the moment impressed by it, a short consideration must display its fallacious character.

The position that the "gospel" in the New Testament refers exclusively to "the announcement of certain events," is neither true nor credible. It is not credible, for the facts must necessarily be put into some relation with one another before they become a narrative at all, and they must be put into some relation with human life and history before they come to have any influence on human thinking or on human conduct, still more before they can lead to such results as St. Paul predicates for his proclamation. To take such a statement as that in Romans i. 2-4, and deduce therefrom that St. Paul's gospel consisted only in the announcement of these facts, is to forget that these facts have no coherence except in connection with the personality of Jesus, no religious or moral value except as illuminated by the purpose of His Incarnation, and no meaning for us except as related at one point to human need and at another to human duty. The announcement of the facts must necessarily be prefaced by some explana-

tion, accompanied by some interpretation, followed by some inference. But the moment such explanation or inference is forthcoming, we are going beyond the bare historic facts, and this theory falls to the ground. If, for example, we say that Jesus Christ "came to save His people from their sins," or that He "died for our sakes," we are adding to the mere announcement that He was born and died. On this theory such additions may or may not be true and important. The point is that they do not form part of the gospel in the Scriptural sense of the word. But the theory is seen to be absurd. The "gospel" consists of the facts, and more. The Church has not fulfilled her function of preaching the gospel by securing the periodical or continuous presentation of the events of Christ's life and death, but must find and present in her gospel at least some theory of the relation of the facts to one another and to human history.

But if further proof be needed, it will be found in St. Paul's use of the word "gospel," and particularly in his Epistle to the Galatians. What moved the Apostle to write that letter was plainly an insidious attack which had been made upon his gospel. His own authority as an Apostle had also been impugned. But even that concerned him chiefly because of the issue to which it tended—the rejection of his "gospel" and the substitution of another. He marvels that the Galatians have been so quickly transferred to "another gospel." He denounces in the most emphatic manner any one whatever who should preach a different gospel from his own, that which he and his companions had preached to them at the first. Now, the different gospel the proclamation and acceptance of which so deeply moved St. Paul, was not a gospel which differed from his in regard to the facts. No one has even suggested, no one could believe, that the older Apostles, say St. James or St. Peter, preached or countenanced a gospel which omitted

any of the fundamental events of our Lord's ministry. Equally with St. Paul, they proclaimed the birth, baptism, death, burial, and resurrection. As far as the facts were concerned, the gospel of St. Paul and the gospel of St. James were practically identical. The difference must therefore have been found outside the facts. The "gospel," both that preached by St. Paul and that proclaimed by his opponents, must have included something beyond the facts in which the difference could arise. It must have included some interpretation or application of the facts; that is to say, the Gospel according to St. Paul contained or consisted of the facts—and more.

The same conclusion may clearly be drawn from the Apostle's statement (Gal. ii. 2) that he "communicated" to the older Apostles "the gospel which he preached among the Gentiles." Had his gospel consisted only in the announcement of the facts concerning Jesus, there would obviously have been no necessity to lay it before James and the others. It must have included some theory of the facts, some theory deduced from the facts, which was unknown or unrecognised by them. And, indeed, we shall not be going beyond the clear implication of these passages if we say that it is precisely in this "more," in the inference drawn from the facts or the application made of them, that St. Paul finds the *differentia* of his gospel. The whole Epistle to the Galatians may be regarded as an exposition of the difference between his gospel and that of the Judaizers, and the difference is plainly one that lies outside the facts. It has to do with the way of salvation as conceived by St. Paul and his opponents respectively.

These considerations suffice to disprove what is asserted, that "Scripture never brings before us the Gospel of Christ except as the record of certain facts regarding Him," and also to prove what is denied, that there is some theory of the facts, and their application to human necessities, some

scheme of salvation which we have Scriptural authority for calling "the gospel."

But at this point we are met by the other objection, which comes from an opposite side. We have appealed to St. Paul. We have found in him our criterion for the character of the gospel. We are going to claim him as part of our authority for its contents. But we are met by a demurrer. We are told that we are beginning at the wrong point, seeking a criterion in that which itself falls to be criticised by a higher authority. There are few questions concerning the New Testament of greater practical importance than those thus raised. Are we to confine ourselves strictly, at least in the first instance, to ascertaining what the gospel means within the historic revelation of its Author, Jesus Christ? Does critical accuracy compel us to treat the Jesus of the Evangelists as the primary authority in distinction to the evidence of His Epistles, which is but secondary? Or, more bluntly, is the gospel according to St. Paul part, and a necessary part, of the gospel of Christ?

And certainly, if the two sources can be separated and distinguished, if the one can be set over against the other, the Church can have no hesitation in ascribing the primary position to her Founder and His authority. His teaching, His conception and proclamation of the gospel must be our norm. The fallacy of this reasoning, therefore, if it be fallacious, must lie further back in the assumption that the gospel of the Gospels and the Gospel of St. Paul are upon different planes, or proceed ultimately from different sources. Have we the right, not to speak of the obligation, to say that the one is immediate and primary, the other derived and secondary?

The assertion of such an obligation is a subsumption of the cry, "Back to Christ," which made itself heard so loudly a few years ago. It represented a movement superficially

attractive and promising good results. But already there are signs of reaction. The isolation of the "consciousness of Jesus" for the purposes of study, which was so brilliantly attempted by Baldensperger, and has been followed up by many others, has not yielded the results which once were confidently expected. The opinion is once more gaining ground that the method of investigation which begins by drawing a sharp distinction between the Gospels and Epistles as sources of information, though it may seem genetically correct, is not really satisfactory. The reverse method has at least equal right, that which begins at a particular circumference and proceeds from without to within. Two well-defined circumferences will be found—one in the limits of the New Testament; the other in the writings of St. Paul. Our business for the present is with the latter, and it will be a fair method to assume the continuity of St. Paul's Gospel with the gospel of the Gospels as a working hypothesis, and ascertain whether the facts will fall in with it.

But before examining St. Paul's teaching in the light of this hypothesis it is necessary to inquire, Where did his gospel come from? We have seen that it consisted in the facts regarding Jesus, and something more—some theory or application of the facts. Now some misapprehension has arisen from the failure to distinguish these two elements in his gospel, and to recognise the possibility that he drew them from two different sources or by two different channels. In the first place, as to the facts. It used to be the fashion among extreme critics to minimize the Apostle's knowledge of these in order to magnify the assumed discrepancy between himself and his Master. But however we may account for the paucity of his references to events and teaching, it is now generally admitted that St. Paul had before his mind a conception of our Lord's ministry which was accurate if not detailed, and a picture of His

death and resurrection which was both accurate and detailed. There is no reason to suppose that this knowledge came to him in any other than the ordinary way. Too much stress has commonly been laid on the Apostolic upbringing in Tarsus, too little on his long course of education in Jerusalem. On any theory of chronology it is probable that St. Paul was in Jerusalem during the ministry of Jesus, and if Harnack is correct in ascribing his conversion to a date within twelve months of the Crucifixion, the probability becomes almost a certainty. It is therefore quite possible that he had seen and heard Jesus in the Temple, and though his silence on such a point seems at first sight hard to understand, nevertheless it is explained by his own words in 2 Corinthians v. 15-17, when their sense is properly understood. We would go further, and inquire whether a consideration of all the passages in which he refers to it, and of the central position it occupied in his experience and theology, does not suggest that he had been actually a witness of the Crucifixion, a witness afterwards so filled with horror at his share in the death to which he then consented, that he kept that memory to himself, only to realize the more vividly its meaning for himself and for others. But, in any case, St. Paul's presence in Jerusalem as a contemporary of Jesus accounts for all the knowledge of the historic facts which he shows, and it is in accordance with the Divine method that the acquisition of such knowledge should take place in the ordinary way.

It remains to inquire as to that other element in his "gospel" to which he himself attaches so great importance—the interpretation of the facts as a scheme of salvation. As to the genesis or source of this element, St. Paul himself is our only evidence. But he does not leave us uninformed. As regards the validity of his testimony, it will be sufficient to refer to the impressive argument recently advanced by Prof. Ramsay (*Galatians*, p. 335). What, then, does

St. Paul say on this point? Probably the most striking form in which his testimony is cast is found in Galatians i. 12, 15, 16. He solemnly asseverates that the gospel he had from the beginning preached to the Galatians was received by him "by the revelation of Jesus Christ." That was the source of this element in his gospel, not of his knowledge of the facts, but of his perception of the nexus, the meaning, the application of the facts. The source of this knowledge was not what Jesus revealed to him, but Jesus revealed in him, the indwelling Son of God. That this is the force of the genitive, may be gathered from a comparison with the fifteenth verse: "when it pleased God . . . to reveal His Son in me." It is true that Bishop Lightfoot maintains that what is here described is the revelation of Christ through Paul to men, and it is always with profoundest diffidence that one questions any of Dr. Lightfoot's decisions. But here surely his verdict is not in accordance with the evidence. The question is, Does the Apostle mean that it pleased God to reveal His Son *within* Paul, or *through* Paul to men without? In the immediate context there is nothing to decide. But in ii. 20 St. Paul describes the effect of his conversion in the words "Christ liveth in me": in iv. 19 he describes the object of his preaching as this, that Christ might be formed in men. Writing to the Colossians he reminds them of "Christ in you the hope of glory," and writing to the Romans appeals to this Divine indwelling as a natural element of Christian experience, "if Christ be in you," etc. The experience he thus appealed to, postulated, or laboured to create in others, had first been his own. And how could he better describe that experience than by the words "when it pleased God to reveal His Son in me"?

But the language of this verse shows, further, that this experience was closely connected with that of which we are in search, the communication to St. Paul of his specific



gospel. The purpose of his conversion, and of this revelation of Christ within the man who at once became His Apostle is expressed in the phrase *ἵνα εὐαγγελίζωμαι αὐτὸν* [*Χριστὸν*] *ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν*. The phrase is untranslatable, but plainly indicates that the Apostle is explaining how he came to preach the gospel, how he came to have a gospel to preach.

The knowledge of the gospel came to him at and in consequence of his conversion. And the process of that conversion was the unveiling of the living Christ within his soul. That seemingly single experience of Jesus as the risen Messiah proved to be complex. It involved a recognition also of the way in which God dealt and would deal with men in Jesus Christ. It carried with it the abandonment of old views, and the acceptance of new ones as to the way of salvation. It threw into solution all the forms of thought into which St. Paul's theology had crystallized under the influence of Judaism. But it crystallized his thinking afresh round a new centre. Paul entered on that experience intellectually equipped as a Jewish Rabbi; he emerged from it intellectually as well as spiritually equipped as a Christian Apostle. He had found at once a Saviour and a scheme of salvation. Details of the scheme remained to be wrought out through later experience, but his gospel was given to him in the revelation which it pleased God to make to him of His Son.

St. Paul claimed, therefore, for his gospel an authority superior to that of men, superior to that even of an angel from heaven; for it came to him and through him direct from Christ. This conviction of his must be allowed the full weight it derives from his character and his after life. But its validity can be tested, and, as we believe, established by an examination of his teaching and its relation to the recorded teaching of our Lord. But this must be reserved for another paper.

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