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Paul's Salutation to the Ephesians.

IN Ephesians i. 1-2, we are given three ideas which take us to the very core of Paul's theology and religion. They are (1) his designation of himself, (2) the description of his hearers, (3) his salutation.

I.

Paul describes himself as "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God." He generally begins his letters with a personal greeting, in which he describes himself as the writer and gives some sort of personal salutation to the readers. In fact, this was the general method in the ancient world. Both the writer and the readers of a letter were defined in the first few words. But there is a note of authority to be found in some of the letters of Paul that is absent in others. Here, for example, he speaks of himself as "the apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God." That is explained by the letter to the Galatians, where he fights hard and at some length to prove the validity of his apostleship, "Paul, an apostle, not of men, nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father." In the Epistles to the Thessalonians, the earliest of the extant epistles, his authority is not stressed. In the Epistle to the church at Philippi, with which he was on the most friendly terms, and where his authority would never be disputed, and also in the letter to Philemon, the note of authority is absent. But it is carefully mentioned in all the other epistles.

The reason for this difference is obvious. After writing the letters to the Thessalonians and before writing any others, Paul was attacked in a very sore place. He preached a very original Gospel, so original that he was not able to carry the majority of Christians along with him. He had to establish his apostleship. There was much to be said against it. He lacked the qualifications laid down in Acts i. 21-22. He had not kept company with Jesus from the day of the baptism until the day that He had been taken up, and he had not seen Jesus in His resurrection form between the day of resurrection and the day of ascension. Further, he was not reckoned by the Twelve to be on their level as an interpreter of the Christian faith. Further, the Gospel preached by Paul was so different from that preached by the rest of the apostles, that it was natural that he should be asked for pretty strong credentials. He had been a Pharisee of the Pharisees. He had been a relentless persecutor of the church. He had

not seen Jesus apparently during His ministry. And then, when he became a Christian, he went further than them all. He said that Jesus abolished all differences, broke down all barriers, and made the law of the Jews a thing of the past. It was only faith in Christ that mattered. It was no wonder that he was asked for his credentials.

The difficulty was that some went out of their way to annoy him. If they had kept to their own churches, things would not have reached such a pass. But they followed Paul about from place to place, endeavouring to undo what he had done. It was this most particularly which aroused his anger. His self-defence is concerned, in the main, with the following points: (1) First, he knows his apostleship is from God. He always makes this clear. "An apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God" is almost part of his name. He had not been appointed by the church. He had seen the Lord. He had his authority straight from Him. He knew from his own experience that Jesus was alive and he could speak with boldness as one of the redeemed. The journey to Damascus was the turning-point in his career. The whole of the theology of Paul is but an interpretation and an explication of that experience. (2) He had paid the price for his apostleship, just as much as the rest of the apostles. He had proved by his readiness to suffer for the Gospel that he was an accredited servant of Jesus Christ. In fact, he had suffered more than them all. He had been "in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in death oft." (3) He had been officially recognised at Jerusalem by the other apostles and his work among the Gentiles was taken to be of God. (4) He had the same rights in the churches as the apostles. He could demand to be supported by the churches, and the fact that he worked at his own trade and renounced his rights, gave him, in his own judgment, claims to authority such as the best of the apostles could not gainsay. There is no doubt that Paul was attacked in the tenderest spots. He was accused of egotism. He worked more abundantly than the rest of the apostles, but he knew it, and the others did not take it kindly when he told them. He was humble before God, but he had no false modesty, and was always ready to defend his rights when they were attacked by men. He was a chosen messenger of God. He was part of his own work. He had been set apart by God for the evangelisation of the heathen. This was all true, and Paul knew it to be true, and it would be particularly galling for him to have it all misconstrued. He was said to be fighting for his own advantage rather than for the glory of God, to be filling his own pocket with the collection he was making for the church at Jerusalem, to be distorting the Gospel rather than acting as a messenger of God.

The anger of Paul is reasonable, and in his defence he speaks with the scorn and passion of a great man, even if he does not reveal the patience and forbearance of a great saint.

By the time that the letter to the Ephesians was written the fight was over. His position was secure, and his apostleship was recognised by all. But the scar is there. Paul will make no more mistakes. To the very end of his life, he is "*an apostle of Christ through the will of God.*"

But he was more than a fighter for his rights: he was a humble servant of God. He had the heart to which the secrets of the Kingdom are revealed. He was not an apostle through any rights of his own. He was too conscious of his black past to make such an assertion. It was no self-sought task, this of preaching the Gospel. It was the will of God. He had been a blasphemer. Last of all to him had the Lord appeared, as unto an abortion, one born out of due time. He was the least of all the saints. It was no insight, no ability, no claims he had upon God that gave him the right to speak: it was all the expression of the sheer grace of God. Paul can never grasp the fact of God's goodness to him. He murders language and drags up words by the roots in his efforts to show how good God has been. It was God's will that set him apart as a preacher. It was God's will that led to his conversion. It was God's will that had mastered him. It was God's will that gave him authority to speak to the churches. It was the certainty of being always open to the influence of the Spirit that gave Paul such power. His whole theology is super-naturalistic. The will of God is supreme in the life of man.

II.

Paul uses two suggestive words to designate his readers. One is "saints," and the other is "faithful." We will take the word "saint" first.

First of all we must guard ourselves against misconception. The associations of the word in the mind of Paul are Jewish and not Greek. Quite a new turn has been given to the study of Paul by the endeavour to see the sources of his thought in the current phraseology of Greek thought and the mystery religions. Our attitude to this question affects vitally our interpretation of some of his teaching. But we can say without any prejudice on this larger question, that his view of saintliness is, in general, based upon his study of the Old Testament rather than upon his acquaintance with Hellenistic religion. For one thing, he uses a different term. He speaks of the saint as *hagios,* which is the regular LXX word for *qadosh.* But the technical word for the initiated in the mystery religions is *hosios.*

In ancient religion generally, the conception of holiness is frankly magical. That is holy upon which rests the taboo of the Gods. Religion cannot exist without the conception of holiness. Holiness is that which is divine or which belongs to the divine. At first, this is purely physical or formal. But later on, men began to think ethically, and holiness came to have a semi-religious and ethical character. That is holy which belongs to the gods and which shares in the nature of the gods.

In the Old Testament it is Yahweh who is holy. In much of the Old Testament, we find traces of a magical element in the idea of holiness, but the final outcome of the religion of the Old Testament is of a far higher order. At first, the people of Israel were considered to be holy because they belonged specifically to Yahweh, and their holiness did not depend upon any moral quality they themselves possessed, but the final outcome of the thought of the Old Testament is that the nation is holy because it has received a special revelation from God, of His gracious love and His purpose for the world, and that it reveals its holiness by being faithful to its high calling and by handing on to others the revelation it has itself been privileged to receive. At first, the Sabbath is holy because it is a taboo day, and for some reason it is dangerous to work on it, but the best thought of the Old Testament regards the Sabbath as holy because on it the people remember with gratitude the way in which God delivered them from Egypt, and the chance is given to all the working classes to rest. But though an ethical content begins to fill the idea of holiness, the thought of consecration to God is still uppermost. The Temple is holy because it has been set apart for God. He watched over all its building, and made orders concerning the most minute details, even down to the door-posts and the nails. The priests are holy because they are set aside for the service of Yahweh. The altar is holy because the sacrifices on it belong to Him. The Sabbath is holy because He has set His seal on it.

In the New Testament the primary meaning of the word is preserved. The saints are not those who live a cloistered existence, but those who engage in the normal occupations of life, going about their business as men and women, husbands and wives, masters and servants, tradesmen and preachers, in all things trying to live as those who belong to God. The term does not imply any extraordinary ethical attainment. All the early Christians were saints or were called to be saints. They were consecrated members of the consecrated body, called by the will of God into the service of His holy Church, and set apart for His service. They did not lay claim to any special merit. They had not made themselves into saints. It was by no endeavours of their

own that they had attained to holiness, although all the New Testament urges upon the Christians to live worthily of their calling. They were saints because God had called them to Himself, set His seal upon them, manifested His love to them. Man can consecrate nothing: it is God who consecrates all things. The priests are holy, not because men appoint them, but because God elects them. And Christians are holy, not because they voluntarily dedicate themselves to the cause of God, but rather because God has chosen them out of the world for Himself.

But Paul is influenced by some other considerations.

(1) In any case, apart from any origin of his conceptions, he is, in some moods, an unqualified pre-destinarian. I say, "in some moods," because Paul is a man of more than one idea. He is a universalist. The Gospel is for everyone. That is the great force at the back of his missionary preaching. But he is a pre-destinarian, for all that. He knows that God has His elect, and he can give no proper interpretation of the election. It is something He cannot understand, but he knows it to be true. But election is ethically conditioned. Those whom God knew beforehand He also pre-destinated to be conformed to the image of His Son. Those who were pre-destinated were called, and those who were called were justified, and those who were justified were also glorified. God would carry through His work to the end. He might call men and women into His church before they were worthy, but before He had finished with them, He would make them worthy. The Christians were saints first because they belonged to God, but before God had done with them, they would be saints because they were God-like.

(2) In some sense, Paul believed in the essential purity of everyone. He made no mistake in reading life. He did not go through the world with his eyes closed. But he learned how to look for virtue in unexpected places. He believed in the universalism of Christianity, because there was something in all to which it could appeal.

(3) Paul shares with the early Christians the habit of looking upon the Christian life as fully made all at once, even though salvation has to be worked out by the grace of God through the whole personality. He can call himself an apostle of God and yet confess that he has to beat his body black and blue to make it go in the right way. He can speak of the Christians at Ephesus as "saints" and as "in Christ," and yet warn them against some of the grossest sins. He sees the end always. He may have to plough through the Slough Despond and climb Hill Difficulty, but the Shining City is always there.

(4) Paul shows he is giving an ethical meaning to the idea of the saints by saying that they are the "faithful in Christ

Jesus." It is doubtful what "faithful" means. It may mean "trustworthy," or it may mean "trusting." Probably the second is meant. A Christian church is composed of men and women who put their trust in the Lord Jesus. But to Paul, faith meant far more than the acceptance of a creed, or the assent to a historical fact: it meant the outgoing of the whole personality to love and adore and serve the One who is accepted as Saviour and Lord.

The conception of the believer being "in Christ" takes us to the very core of Paul's thought.

Since the publication of Deissmann's monograph on this phrase, it has generally been interpreted in a local sense. The Christian is in Christ in the sense that Christ is the surrounding atmosphere of the Christian. Christ or the Spirit is in the form of an extended supersensuous substance, into which the Christian enters, and which he is privileged to share. But for many reasons, we should pause before accepting this theory. (1) First of all, *en* does not always have the same meaning. Thus, in several cases, it probably means "through." Such is the case in Rom. vi. 11, "Even so reckon ye also yourselves to be dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus," and in Col. i. 13-14, "who delivered us out of the power of darkness and translated us into the Kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have our redemption, the forgiveness of our sins." Sometimes, again, *en* seems to imply "in fellowship with." Such is the case in Rom. xvi. 7, "Salute Andronicus and Junias—who also have been in Christ before me." Then again, it may quite conceivably mean "under the power of," as in Rom. viii. 9, "But ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit." In any case, if the particular meanings suggested here are not sound, the term "in Christ" is capable of such a wide interpretation that Deissmann's theory must fall to the ground for linguistic reasons alone. (2) Paul is capable of expressing the same thought by exactly the opposite words. He can speak of the believer being in Christ, but he can equally well speak of Christ being in the believer. It is surely impossible to regard the Christian as the surrounding atmosphere of Christ!

The term is very elastic and capable of more than one interpretation. The really important fact is that Paul was trying to explain the close intimacy of Christ and the Christian. Christ had renewed the personality of the believer from its very centre.

Several points in this need to be carefully examined.

(1) Paul, together with all the early Christians, believed in a risen and glorified Lord, who was alive in their midst and whose power they could test in their daily experience. Christ had lifted the Christians into the realm of the eternal and invisible.

Historical considerations had, for the time being, been forgotten. The Christian was in living contact with Christ in the unseen world. This was the distinctively Christian feeling. Jesus was Saviour, not only in the sense that by one historic event in the past, He had purchased their freedom, but also because even now, by the imparting of His Spirit, He was leading them on to greater and ever greater spiritual and moral victories. He was their Lord, their King, their Life, their Head, growing up within them, renewing and perfecting the whole life.

(2) By the "Christ in you" conception, Paul meant something ethical. The Christian gave obedience to Christ, loved His law, did His will, and accepted Him as moral authority. But he meant more than that. The union was more than one of mind and will: it was *unio mystica.* Christ was the real substance of the soul of the Christian. The language of Paul needs that interpretation. He pleaded for the absorption of one personality in the other, and the finding of one in the other. But though he was teaching frank mysticism, he preserved his ethical sanity. He demanded earnest prayer to God, and prayer can be directed only to one who is outside of us and above us. Then also the Christian must not take too close an interest in his own mystical experiences. Paul might have visions and ecstasies, but he did not think that his religious life depended upon them. Confident hope in Jesus Christ was required. The Christian must do his work, study to be quiet, gain strength by prayer, and carry out his social obligations. The emphasis of Paul on social ethics was a counter-blast to his mysticism.

(3) The source of Paul's mysticism is to be found in Hellenism. It is foreign to Judaism. The union of the godly man and God in the Old Testament and in the teaching of Jesus is one of purpose and will. There is no such thing as a *unio mystica.* The only Jewish writers who teach it are those like Philo, who have already been influenced by Hellenism. The conception is not Paul's creation. He does not apologise for it or explain it. He goes upon the assumption that his readers will accept it. We have to look to the Greek cults as the source of this idea. Already, men had been told that they could enter into the supersensible world by ecstatic experiences. Already they had heard that the divine indwelling could be the permanent possession of the believer. When Paul spoke about the indwelling Christ, he could rely upon a certain amount of sympathy, because his readers had already heard about the indwelling Attis and Osiris. The fact that Paul's mysticism was charged with Hebrew ethic, while it safeguarded him from the excesses of the devotees of the cults, did not prevent him learning from any teacher who had anything good to teach.

III.

The salutation of Paul is expressed very beautifully in the words, "*grace and peace in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*" Here he binds together the customary Greek and Hebrew salutations. But these words are more than an expression of courtesy: they are at once a prayer and a benediction.

Grace and peace are great Pauline words. Grace refers to the free and absolutely unmerited kindness of God which flows out to men through the medium of Jesus Christ, and peace is the consequent sense of fellowship and sonship of man to God and fellowship and brotherhood of man to man.

What is important in this salutation is that Jesus is coupled with God as the bestower of grace and peace. Except in one or two disputed texts, Paul never speaks of Jesus as God. Moreover, he is extremely careful to show that in all things, Christ is subordinate to the Father. He is Saviour, but His saving grace is the expression of the love of God. He is not the Creator: He is the creative agent of God. When He has completed His work of redemption, He will hand over everything to God, in order that God may be all in all. The disciple, in his praying, trusts to the mercy of Christ, but he never prays to Christ. But, in spite of all that, Jesus, most assuredly, in the thought of Paul, stands on the divine side of reality. He is associated with God in essentially divine acts. He is far above men and angels. No other name can stand beside His name.

Paul speaks of Jesus as Lord. That title has displaced both "Messiah" and "Son of Man." The reasons for this are not hard to seek. These titles are essentially Jewish, and have little meaning to Greeks. Further, they are not wide enough. They are bound up with Apocalyptic, and are not capable of that broad interpretation which the gradually widening message of Christ demands.

What is the meaning of "Lord"? There is no doubt that it has a moral reference. It defines Jesus as the Lord of the moral life, the One who has the right to make commands and to receive obedience. That much is certain. The Christian was the slave of Christ. But there was more than that in it. The term implies worship and divinity. We need to ask two questions. How did the Christ-cult come into the church? What is the origin of the title "Lord"?

In asking these questions, we are entering upon one of the most debatable points in early Christian history. But the task cannot be shirked. It is a sheer necessity for the exegete and the student of historical theology. To many, it may not seem to matter what the origin of the terms is: they are either right or

wrong, and our attitude to them depends upon their truth and not upon their origin. But that cannot satisfy the serious student for a single second. Others think that to enquire into the origin of Paul's ideas is to undermine the authority of the Christian religion, and to cast doubt upon the supreme excellence of Christ. But that again is wrong. What we ought to be out for is truth. Jesus is bigger than our theology and more important than any name that we can ever give to Him. When we are dead and our theologies are dead, He will stand. But theology moves on. The Gospel is the same for all, but the presentation of it varies with different peoples and at different times. When we are enquiring into the origins of Paul's theology, it is only that we may the more completely grasp the wealth of the religion of Jesus.

The source of this Christ-cult is not to be found in the teaching of Jesus. Jesus claimed, at the end of His life, at any rate, to be the Messiah. He spoke of Himself as the Son of Man. He called disciples to Himself. He sent them out to preach the message of the Kingdom of God. But He laid down no creed and founded no church. There is no such thing as a revealed theology. He demanded nothing approximating to a worship of Himself. Whether or not divinity is the right word to apply to Him, when we take into account all that He did and said and the whole of His influence in the world, is another matter, but the fact seems to be certain that there is no warrant for it in the teaching of Jesus as it is given to us in the Synoptic Gospels.

We cannot say that the worship of Christ came in gradually and naturally through the growing appreciation and understanding of the historical Jesus. It took a long time before the real nature of the life of Jesus was understood. At first, theology was Adoptionist. Jesus was constituted Christ by the Resurrection from the dead. Then later on, the Messiahship was carried back to the Transfiguration, and further back than that, to the Baptism. But of all theories of the Person of Christ, the Adoptionist is the most repellent to modern thought. God may become man, but men can never become God. In the early church, the cult of Jesus was always attached to the Risen and Exalted Christ, and there was a clear enough historical sense to prevent worship being carried back into the life of Jesus. If it was the growing appreciation of the greatness of the historical Jesus that led to the worship of Christ, it is hard to understand why the worship should not be made to shine occasionally through the historical framework. The doctrine of the Living Christ depended upon certain irrefutable facts of experience, but the interpretation of that doctrine depended upon the intellectual atmosphere at the time.

The worship of Christ is not the natural outcome of Messianism. The origins of Messianism in Israel are obscure, but one point is certain. The Messiah was generally conceived of as man. Sometimes he was put on the level of the angels. Never was he put on a higher level than the angels. Now angel-worship was an abhorrence to the Jews and to the early Christians. In Judaism, there was no way through from the honouring of an angel to the worship of the Messiah. And the way Paul puts the name of Jesus above all names that are named in heaven and earth and opposes the angel-worship that is beginning to creep into the church, shows that he looks upon the two as being on entirely different levels.

No one factor is big enough to explain the Christ-cult. Each of the preceding reasons may have a certain element of truth in it, but all of them together are not enough. One other fact must be taken into account. On ground purely Jewish, the worship of Christ could not possibly have arisen. In going to the Gentiles, Christians saved their religion for the world. Had they kept to Palestine, Jesus would have remained as a Jewish hero and saint. We can see the conception growing in front of us. The worship of Christ was not the mere rationalising of the experience of salvation the believer had received in Christ. It was a gradual enlargement of view which saw in Jesus a Saviour and a Lord greater than all other Saviours and Lords. But this origin of the conception does not affect in the very least the validity of it.

H. J. FLOWERS.

WISBECH CHURCHES. Josiah Thompson has preserved a few notes as to the Particular Baptists who, in 1692, bought land in Deadman's Lane. Robert Rix was their preacher, living till 1728. One Bennet was there, about 1738-1741; this may be Thomas, who was at Birmingham directly afterwards; or William, who was at St. Albans by 1752. The Baptist Board in 1742 had their application for help to build, through Captain Norris; the site was now called Church Lane, apparently. Samuel James, son of Philip James, came from Abraham Taylor's academy at Deptford, but in 1743 succeeded his father-in law, John Needham, at Hitchin. John Brown (of Ipswich?) followed, but went to Kettering in 1750. Supplies for some time. Meanwhile a new cause had been organised by Simson at Soham, where the hyper-Calvinist John Eve was pastor, of whom Andrew Fuller had something to say. He came here in 1771, but left, "unworthily," as Johnson of Liverpool said. The church now fell under the spell of that strange theologian, through Samuel Fisher; and the next phase has been detailed in our *Transactions*, III., 56.