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PAUL'S GOSPEL OR CHRIST'S ?¹

PART ONE

THIS question, of course, assumes that the Gospels of Christ and of Paul are two, not one, two Gospels, two ways of salvation, and that we must choose between them. My purpose in these two talks is to show the falsity of that assumption. This evening I propose to begin by studying some positive evidence of important parallels between the teaching of Paul and that of Christ, in matters not directly connected with the way of salvation, and then I shall attempt a survey of the general lines of our Lord's teaching, considered as a gospel. This will occupy our time to-day and next time I hope to consider the Pauline Gospel, and to show the essential harmony of this Gospel with that of our Lord, especially in those vital matters in which Paul is alleged to have departed from his Master's teaching. I begin then with evidence which shows that Paul was familiar with our Lord's teaching.

I. THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Several striking parallels are to be found between the Sermon on the Mount and the writings of Paul. Our Lord said: "Ye are the light of the world . . . let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. v. 14, 16). Paul urges the Philippians to be children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, "among whom ye are seen as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life" (Phil. ii. 15, 16).

Our Lord said: "If any man would go to law with thee, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also" (Matt. v. 40). Paul said to the Corinthians: "It is altogether a defect in you that ye have lawsuits one with another. Why not rather take wrong? why not rather be defrauded? Nay, but ye yourselves do wrong and defraud, and that your brethren" (1 Cor. vi. 7, 8).

¹ The first of two talks to a Theological Study Circle in Cambridge, by the late Ven. Archdeacon H. E. Guillebaud.

Such sentiments do not come so readily to the human heart that we can easily accept the view that Paul arrives at them independently of his Master. Of course he might have done so by Divine inspiration without knowing that his Lord had said much the same thing: that we readily grant. But to accept this explanation would end the discussion, for it would conclusively prove that there could not be any contradiction between the teaching of the inspired Apostle and that of his Lord.

Again, our Lord said: "Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you" (Matt. v. 44). Paul echoes His words thus: "Bless them that persecute you, bless and curse not . . . Render to no man evil for evil . . . Avenge not yourselves . . . Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. xii. 14-21). Our Lord's warning: "Be not anxious for your life, what ye shall eat or what ye shall drink" (Matt. vi. 25) finds its parallel in Phil. iv. 6: "In nothing be anxious, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." Our Lord's words against judging others evidently made a deep impression on Paul, though he reproduces rather the spirit of them than the letter. "Judge not, that ye be not judged . . . Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye" (Matt. vii. 1, 5). Paul says the very same thing in different words: "Wherefore thou art without excuse, O man, whosoever thou art, that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself: for thou that judgest dost practise the same things;" (Rom. ii. 1). And again in Rom. xiv with reference to the problem of eating food offered to idols, Paul says: "Who art thou that judgest the servant of another? . . . thou, why dost thou judge thy brother? . . . let us not therefore judge one another any more" (Rom. xiv. 4, 10, 13).

II. THE SECOND COMING

A detailed study of Paul's teaching about the Second Coming would by itself take up all our available time, but this can be said, that though Paul, as an inspired prophet, added a good deal to what our Lord had foretold, there is no inconsistency between the new matter and the old, and Paul takes for granted in his own teaching all the main lines of our Lord's prophetic revelation. The divisions of this revelation are three in number,

first the signs of the Coming, secondly the suddenness of it, and the implications of that fact for the believer and the unbeliever, and thirdly the manner of the Coming itself.

In the first of these divisions, the signs of the Coming, Paul has underlined one particular point in his Master's teaching. Our Lord had said: "There shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall show signs and wonders, that they may lead astray, if possible, the elect" (Mark xiii. 22). Paul writes to the Thessalonians that "the day of the Lord will not be except the falling away come first, and the man of sin be revealed . . . the lawless one, whose coming is according to the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceit of unrighteousness for them that are perishing" (2 Thess. ii. 3, 8-10). Our Lord speaks of many false Christs and false prophets, Paul of the one supreme man of sin: further, Paul speaks of the success of the man of sin in deceiving those who are perishing, our Lord speaks of unsuccessful attempts to deceive the elect. But Paul's prophecy is evidently based upon that of his Master, and is essentially the same.

Secondly, our Lord again and again says that His Coming will be sudden. "Ye know not on what day your Lord cometh. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what watch the thief was coming, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken through" (Matt. xxiv. 42, 43). Paul virtually quotes this prophecy. "Concerning the times and season, brethren, ye have no need that aught be written unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night" (1 Thess. v. 1, 2). Our Lord said that to the unsaved His sudden coming would be like the Flood which came upon a world eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, and destroyed them all; or like the sudden destruction which fell on Sodom and Gomorrah in the days of Lot (Luke xvii. 26-29). Paul wrote: "When they are saying, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall in no wise escape" (1 Thess. v. 3). The need for watchfulness and faithfulness on the part of the Christian in view of the Lord's Return is, of course, urged by both our Lord and Paul.

Thirdly, in the prophecies of the Coming itself, Paul echoes our Lord's teaching, though it is here that he adds most. Our

Lord said: "The Son of man shall send forth His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together (*episunaxousin*) His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Matt. xxiv. 31). Paul says: "I beseech you, brethren, touching the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together (*episunagoge*) unto Him," (2 Thess. ii. 1). Of that gathering together he wrote more fully in 1 Thess. iv: "the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first, then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air." The detail of the trumpet is peculiar to Matthew, and a critic might say that Paul's teaching has influenced Matthew's report. But in other respects Matthew's report is practically identical with that of Mark, and it thus appears from Mark's testimony that our Lord predicted that He would gather His elect from all quarters of the earth, and Paul spoke of our gathering together unto Him, and that all His people would be caught up to meet Him in the air. We see then that Paul was familiar with our Lord's teaching about His Return in each of its main divisions, and based his own prophecies upon those of his Master.

III. THE DOOM OF THE LOST

It has often been noticed that Paul's language about the doom of the lost is less terrible, or rather I would say less obviously terrible, than that of his Master. This fact has been used to attack the credit of the Evangelists who reported our Lord, or to support methods of explaining His words away; for clearly it is unthinkable that Paul should be more loving and merciful to men than the Lord who died for him and them. But there is another explanation of the facts which seems far more in accordance with spiritual truth and with the facts which we have been considering. We have already seen, and we shall see still more, reason to believe that Paul was familiar with our Lord's teaching, perhaps as unwritten tradition, perhaps in collections of sayings which afterwards were embodied in our Gospels. But familiar with it he was, in one form or another, and he assumed a knowledge of it in those to whom he wrote—for a particularly clear example of this I would refer you to 1 Thess. v. 1, 2 already quoted.

Well, then, is it not natural that Paul should take for granted what his Master had said, and (as he does) content himself with referring to the doom of the lost in general terms? The words which he generally uses for this purpose are *apollumai* ("perish") and *apoleia* and *olethros* ("destruction" or rather "ruin" or "perdition"). The words "eternal destruction" or rather "eternal ruin" (*olethros aionios*) used by Paul in 2 Thess. i. 9 are very awful and entirely consistent with the more explicit language used by our Lord, such as "where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched". What Paul refers to in the passage quoted as "eternal ruin" he elsewhere describes as "tribulation and anguish" (Rom. ii. 9), showing that by "destruction" Paul does not mean an end of existence. If it be asked why Paul should use less obviously terrible language than our Lord, though referring to the same thing, the answer surely is that the Lord was Himself the Judge, and just because of His love for men He wished to make the warning as explicit as possible, that He might save as many as possible from coming before Him for that awful sentence. This particular reason did not, of course, apply to Paul, who could allude to his Master's teaching without repeating its exact terms.

IV. OTHER IMPORTANT PRINCIPLES OF CHRIST'S TEACHING

Let us now look briefly at six other important principles of our Lord's teaching, and see how Paul embodies them in his own message. (1) Our Lord said that the whole law and the prophets hung on the two great commandments: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength" and "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Matt. xxii. 37-40). Paul, in a context concerned entirely with the Christian's duty to his fellow man, says: "He that loveth his neighbour hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not covet, and if there be any other commandment, it is summed up in this word, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour; love therefore is the fulfilment of the law" (Rom. xiii. 8-10).

(2) Our Lord thanked His Father that He had revealed His truth to babes rather than to the wise and prudent (Matt. xi. 25, 26). Paul fervently enlarges on the same theme in 1 Cor. i. 26-29.

(3) Our Lord was challenged on the question of obedience to State authority, and gave His wonderful answer: "Render to Caesar the things which are Caesar's and to God the things which are God's." Paul discusses the same subject more at length in Rom. xiii, and declares that obedience to the State is a duty to God—of course he is assuming that the demands of the State are not such as to clash with God's commands.

(4) Our Lord declares that the marriage tie is for the Christian unbreakable, and quotes God's original command about marriage in Gen. ii. 24. Paul asserts exactly the same principle as regards marriage between Christians, and quotes the same Old Testament text: see 1 Cor. vii. 10, 11; Eph. v. 28-31.

(5) Our Lord, when He sent His disciples on a mission, told them that they were to accept hospitality from people in the villages which they visited, for, said He, "the labourer is worthy of his hire" (Luke x. 5-7). Paul evidently had this command of Christ in mind when he said to the Corinthians: "Even so did the Lord ordain that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel." (1 Cor. ix. 14). The interpretation of 1 Tim. v. 18, where I personally believe that Paul quotes our Lord's words from Luke's Gospel as Scripture, is doubtful, and I do not press it.

(6) In the story of the widow's mite, our Lord declared the principle that God respects gifts not according to their earthly value, but according to what they cost the giver and the spirit in which they were given. Paul, in 2 Corinthians viii. 12, asserts the same principle. "If the readiness is there, it is acceptable according as a man hath, not according as he hath not."

The cumulative effect of the parallels between our Lord's teaching and that of Paul so far considered is sufficient to show that Paul was familiar with his Master's teaching, and based his own teaching upon it again and again. But how does this fact bear on our main subject, "Paul's gospel or Christ's"? Although the evidence so far considered is certainly not enough to enable us to conclude straight away that Paul's whole message was in harmony with that of Christ, it does help us very much in our enquiry. For if Paul both knew and followed his Master's teaching in many important matters, it is very unlikely that he should have conflicted with it elsewhere through not knowing what it was. But it is certain from the whole of Paul's references to the Lord that he had far too deep a reverence for Him to

contradict Him intentionally. Is it then possible that though he knew the old gospel, he preached a new gospel, essentially different from the old, without realising that he was doing so? This is hardly likely either.

I admit that the question whether Paul's gospel is in conflict with that of Christ can only be finally decided by a careful comparison of the two (apart, of course, from the supreme fact of Inspiration): but the foregoing discussion has, I believe, established at least an initial improbability that there should be any such conflict.

Let us then turn to the study of the main currents of our Lord's teaching considered as a gospel. It has been truly said that the chief purpose of His coming into the world was not so much to preach a gospel as to ensure that there should be a gospel to preach. He Himself in a real sense *was* the gospel: so at any rate Paul believed, and the Lord Himself used language in harmony with that view, as we shall see.

Yet He *did* preach a gospel, and He certainly regarded it as part of His mission to do so. But what do we mean by the word "gospel"? Our Lord Himself defined His mission in the words of Isaiah, which perfectly describe a gospel. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; because He anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor: He hath sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind . . . to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke iv. 18, 19). A gospel, then, is a message from God which brings sight to the spiritually blind, deliverance to those who are in spiritual bondage, and makes clear to man how he can obtain acceptance with God. To these great ends our Lord's teaching was directed.

He called His message the gospel of the kingdom. In the Lord's Prayer and in the saying "the kingdom of God is within you" He showed that the kingdom of God meant the supremacy of God and His holy will in the hearts of men, here on earth and in its highest form in the redeemed community in heaven. When, therefore, He said that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, He meant that God was going to call out for Himself men and women in whose hearts His will would be supreme, who would own Him as King and be His subjects: but the message of the Kingdom was for those who would repent; that is, be willing to forsake sin.

As His teaching developed, a great part of it consisted in a revelation of the kind of life subjects of the kingdom must

live; this is in the main the topic of the Sermon on the Mount, for instance. It was a gospel, in the sense that it showed how utterly different was the kind of holiness which God really desires from the mere obedience to external laws and regulations which was taught by the scribes and Pharisees. But it was not a gospel in the sense that it was offered to "those without" as the way of salvation, for it was not so offered. It was the Lord's teaching for His own disciples, a way for the saved rather than a way of salvation.

His teaching about sin and the forgiveness of sin was also a gospel. He taught that sin was not the breach of a multitude of petty external rules, but that God who reads the heart looks there for sin, and finds it in the thoughts and motives: for instance, the springs of adultery and murder lie in the thoughts of evil desire and hatred which lie open to the eyes of God.

But though He showed that sin is a very much deeper thing than men had supposed, He declared that God earnestly desires to forgive the sinner, and nothing gives Him more joy than to do so. No sin could be so black as to put anyone outside the reach of God's forgiveness if they honestly sought it: indeed the Lord showed by example as well as word that He regarded those who were sunk in sin and knew it as being far nearer to the way of salvation than those who believed themselves to be righteous and in no need of forgiveness. He publicly forgave the sins of a prostitute, while hinting very plainly that those of a highly respectable Pharisee were not forgiven (Luke vii. 36-50). His habit of seeking out and consorting with notorious sinners gave great offence, and caused Him to be named in scorn the Friend of publicans and sinners.

Side by side with this message of a glad and free forgiveness for the humble and penitent sinner, there were warnings in language which makes us shudder of the judgments which He Himself would one day pronounce on those who either rejected the offer of salvation or professed to accept it but did not live accordingly. This double representation of God as the glad Forgiver of sin on earth and the stern Judge at the day of Judgment is indeed a great mystery, which our Lord did not set Himself directly to solve. The solution of it is indeed to be found in acts and words of His, as we shall see, but He left it to His followers and especially to Paul, to deal with it directly.

But we return to the message of forgiveness. A gospel must show how forgiveness is to be obtained, and our Lord's gospel certainly did this. The conditions on which He insisted were repentance and faith. God longs to forgive, but man must be honest in seeking forgiveness; in other words man must repent, must be willing to forsake sin. Our Lord began His Galilean preaching by repeating the cry of John the Baptist: "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. iv. 17). His mission was not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance (Mark ii. 17). He upbraided the cities in which most of His mighty works were done, because they repented not (Matt. xi. 20). He said: "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth" (Luke xv. 7). If people professed to be His, calling Him "Lord, Lord", but did not live as His disciples, He rejected such discipleship, and said He would reject it at the judgment (Matt. vii. 21-23). He spoke of other conditions which are really included in true repentance: recognition of one's sinfulness, and humility before God, and willingness to forgive others. See the Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican (Luke xviii. 9-14), and such sayings as: "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. xviii. 3), and: "If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matt. vi. 14, 15), and of course the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant in Matt. xviii.

But it is quite untrue that He recognised no necessary condition of forgiveness beyond repentance. His teaching about discipleship assumes faith in Himself as indispensable. "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden" (Matt. xi. 28). "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (John vi. 37). This coming is obviously a coming to Him as Saviour, which is just what is meant by faith. "Who-soever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Mark viii. 34). "If any man come to Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple" (Luke xiv. 26). A demand that the disciple should put the Lord far above all human relationships is really a demand for a most implicit trust in Him. It

is also, of course, an implied claim to be more than man, and is fully in line with Paul's doctrine that Christianity *is* Christ ("We preach . . . Christ Jesus the Lord"—2 Cor. iv. 5). Further, He Himself twice forgave sins, and in each case on the ground of faith. "When Jesus saw their faith, He said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee" (Mark ii. 5). And to the sinful woman, after He had forgiven her sins, He said: "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace" (Luke vii. 50). He referred to young or weak Christians as "these little ones that believe in Me" (Mark ix. 42). He taught that all benefits that we ask from God must be asked in faith (Matt. xxi. 22; Mark xi. 24), and surely forgiveness of sins is included among them! In his teaching recorded by John there are definite statements that salvation is by faith (John iii. 14, 15; v. 24), but these only confirm the ample evidence to the same effect in the Synoptic Gospels.

To sum up, our Lord taught that those who want to become His disciples must "come to Him" in true repentance, and accept Him as absolute Lord, believing in Him and putting Him before all else. When men did accept Him, He taught them what they must *do*, *because* they were His disciples.

This teaching was adapted to the conditions of His earthly life among men. While He was visibly present with His disciples, it was sufficient that they should put their trust in Him as having the words of eternal life, and as having the power which he claimed to forgive sins. Essentially, faith in Him is the same to-day, allowing for the fact that a fuller explanation has been given of how it is that our Lord forgives sin. But very naturally He did not Himself develop the meaning which such terms as "Come unto Me", "follow Me", "believe in Me" ought to have for those who should believe in Him after His death. It is also natural that His death itself was not the centre of His own teaching, but that it was vitally connected with the salvation of men is expressly declared in many sayings recorded by John, and in at least two sayings recorded by Matthew and Mark. This, however, is a subject which must be considered next time, when I hope to compare the Gospel of Christ with that of Paul, and to show that the two are in no sense alternatives or opposed to one another, but complementary, and in complete harmony with one another.

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