

Ghost. Let us illustrate it in this way, and you will understand it better: The love of God is one thing, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is another thing, the fellowship of the Holy Ghost is another. The love of God is the fountain-head; the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is the channel of conveyance of that love from the fountain-head; and the communion of the Holy Spirit is that by which each one is made to be himself a partaker of the love of God, and of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the love of God we have the fountain, in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we have the channel, but in the communion of the Holy Ghost we have the blessed waters laid on to every house and to every person.—R. MAGUIRE.

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The Theology of the Epistle to the Romans.

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THE GOSPEL IN HISTORY.

ROM. IX.—XI.

ST. PAUL has now finished his main argument. He has explained the gospel of Christ. He has shown the need of it. He has shown how it comes with its message of comfort and hope to men afflicted with the consciousness and the power of sin, and appalled by the demands of a law inexorable and unattainable. He has guarded it against want of comprehension and perversion. He has shown the richness and power that it gives to a man's whole life. He has traced its working from the moment when a man gives himself up to Christ by his own act of faith and self-surrender, and by the rite of baptism is initiated into the church and made a partaker of the privileges which membership of that body implies until that final attainment of perfect union with Christ, which is the end of the Christian life.

But now comes a question which has often been before his mind as he wrote, which he has already begun to discuss, but has put aside until he has finished his main argument, which no thoughtful person could help raising. How was it that the Jews, the chosen people of God, had not attained this righteousness? Were they not the chosen people? Had they not been the guardians through centuries of strife of the divine revelations contained in the Scriptures? Year by year they had

offered up the solemn service of the temple. They could point to their ancestors the patriarchs, to the long roll of their prophets. They had been the recipients of the divine promises. From them in these last days the Christ had come. They had fulfilled their mission, and they were cast away. What wonder if there was questioning and doubting! What wonder if men began to doubt the wisdom, and the justice and the mercy of God!

With this question St. Paul now deals, and mark how cautiously and considerately and sympathetically he begins. He does not even venture to state the subject he is discussing, he only gradually allows it to become evident. He emphasizes rather his own kinship with the race. He is full of sympathy and sorrow. He Paul—he who had given his life for Christ. He who, but a few lines before, had written that nothing, nor life, nor death, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, could separate him from the love of God in Christ, now deliberately declares that he could give up that life in Christ if he might thus save those who were his own brothers (ix. 1-5).

And then he begins his argument. In the first place, the Jews could not plead their privileges. It is true they were descendants of Abraham, to

whom the promise was given; but it was quite clear that that promise was not to all the descendants of the patriarch, but only to those whom God had chosen to be recipients of it. The children of Isaac were chosen, the children of Ishmael were not chosen. But it might be argued that that was not a fair case, that Ishmael was not equally well born with Isaac. The second instance has no such defect. Jacob and Esau were sons of the same father and the same mother, born at the same time. And the choice between them was dependent on no merits of their own; it was made before they were born. Jacob was chosen to privilege, and Esau to hatred; and this had been reflected in the history of their descendants. It was quite clear, therefore, that on the same principles on which the Israelites were chosen and the Edomites rejected, God might choose some Israelites and reject others; or choose the Gentiles and reject the Jews. God was bound by no promises (ix. 6-13).

Nor could any Jew complain of injustice. The Old Testament Scriptures to which they appealed showed how God had chosen Moses for one purpose, and Pharaoh for another; the one for honour, the other for dishonour. And the Scripture had very plainly declared that the grounds of choice were not in any case merit, but simply God's will (vers. 14-18). Nor, again as men could they speak of injustice, even if God had acted arbitrarily. God had created man, and his relation to those whom He had created was simply that of the potter to the vessels that he made. In relation to his Creator, man has no rights; he cannot speak of justice or injustice. God on every principle of right and justice may do what He will with man, just as absolutely as the potter with his clay or the vessels which he has made. Whatever God will, man cannot complain of injustice (vers. 19-23).

So St. Paul lays down the absolute rights of God over man, and then he changes his whole method of argument. Had God been arbitrary, He would not have been unjust; but He had not been arbitrary. The Jews had fallen through their own fault. Righteousness had been offered them on the simplest and easiest terms, but they had not accepted it; and that because they had obstinately clung to their own method instead of God's method. And this had not arisen through any ignorance or want of opportunity. The gospel

had been fully preached; they had had ample opportunities of hearing it; but they had rejected it, rejected it by their own self-willed, stubborn act. As the prophet had foretold: 'All the day long have I stretched forth my hands to a disobedient and gainsaying people' (ix. 30-x. 21).

But again St. Paul's tone changes. The Jews had been rejected; but the rejection was not complete, and it was not final. The rejection had been temporary, and with a purpose. Through it salvation had come to the Gentiles. St. Paul rests on an historical fact. He remembers that day, now long past, in distant Antioch, when he had uttered those memorable words: 'From henceforth, we go to the Gentiles.' And now remembering past years, remembering the effects unexpected and incalculable of that rejection of Christ by the Jews, seeing before his eyes the daily increasing body of Gentile Christians, he looks forward into the future, and arguing by analogy predicts a time when the Jews will return to the Messianic salvation. Was not their stock holy? If the Gentiles, the branches of the wild tree, have produced such fruit when in quite an unnatural manner they have been grafted into the stock of the cultivated olive, what will not be the result when the original branches are re-engrafted into their own stock? And so seeing how in one case God's ways have been unexpectedly justified, and relying on the divine wisdom thus signally justified, St. Paul looks forward into the future. His imagination expands; he foresees a time when Israel as a nation will come to Christ; and the wealth of spiritual life which this will mean will win the world to Him. God's purpose has been to shut up all as prisoners of sin, that all may need and enjoy His mercy. Where we can follow God's ways, we can see how His wisdom and mercy are vindicated, and so St. Paul breaks forth into the praise of the wisdom and mercy of God, giving what is both the conclusion and the logical basis of his argument: 'O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out. . . . For of Him, and through Him, and unto Him, are all things. To him be the glory for ever. Amen' (xi. 1-36).

Like the earlier chapters, like every argument and passage in the Epistle, this section has proved the basis of a great system of Christian doctrine, a system which like so many others has interpreted

in a one-sided way, has at times exaggerated, at times perverted an isolated portion of the apostle's language. Calvinism has ceased to be popular as a creed; and probably at the present day we are inclined to underrate the value of the vigorous logical thought, of the manliness of mind refusing ever to avoid a difficulty, of the grasp of the sovereignty of God which the system exhibited. Calvinism is no longer popular, but the problem still remains: Is it the true interpretation of St. Paul's language?

The Calvinistic interpretation of chaps. ix.-xi. is certainly defective, as it misunderstands the drift of these chapters. While Eastern exegesis, as represented by St. Chrysostom, rightly interpreted St. Paul's argument, Western exegesis, following St. Augustine, has missed his point of view. It has assumed that St. Paul was primarily engaged in discussing the conditions upon which man receives grace, but, as we have seen, that was not his purpose. The problem before him was: How can we explain these claims of the new gospel, when we remember that the Jews have been rejected? and in answering that question he propounds his philosophy of history. The Calvinistic exegesis was wrong, therefore, in its interpretation of these chapters in mistaking St. Paul's purpose; but the problem that Calvin tried to solve still remains. There is certainly language used which seems to justify his interpretation, but we must state the question somewhat differently. What theory of the relation between the human and divine will, what theory, in other words, of predestination and election is implied in the discussion contained in these chapters, and elsewhere in these Epistles?

The problem is by no means a simple one. We read chap. ix., and we find a strong assertion of the divine sovereignty. Man is represented as clay in the hands of the potter; his whole life is distinctly stated to be the result not of his choice or will, but of the divine election. All interpretations which seek to evade this seem forced and unnatural. But we pass on to chap. x., and the whole argument implies human free-will. Throughout the Jews are condemned because they rejected the message that was offered to them, and rejected of themselves and through their own fault. How are these two chapters reconcilable? Arminian interpreters have explained away chap. ix., and they have been helped by some of the exaggerations of Calvinism; Calvinistic interpreters have explained away chap. x.

But in neither case can we accept their explanations.

Gradually it is beginning to be admitted that the two chapters are irreconcilable, but this admission may be made in two ways. Fritzsche, one of the most learned commentators on the Epistle, asserts that it came from St. Paul's defective reasoning power: 'He would have argued better if he had been a pupil of Aristotle and not of Gamaliel.' Meyer, on the other hand, considers that this antithesis was deliberate, and that as a matter of fact all we can do is to state the two sides of the problem—we cannot solve it.

That this opinion is right, is shown by very strong arguments. In the first place, this antithesis prevails all through St. Paul's writings: 'Work out your own salvation, for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure' (Phil. ii. 12, 13). So again, in Rom. i. 28, we read: 'God gave them up unto a reprobate mind,' followed, in ii. 1, by the words, 'Thou art without excuse.' Then again it was the traditional teaching of the Jewish schools in which St. Paul had been brought up. Josephus tells us that the Pharisees stated that all things were in the hands of God and fate, but that each man could choose whether he would do good or evil. And in the *Sayings of the Jewish Fathers* occurs this passage: 'Everything is foreseen, and free-will is given; and the world is judged by grace; and everything is according to works.' St. Paul, brought up as a Pharisee, must certainly have heard the questions discussed, and considered the difficulties of both sides. It is inconceivable that he should have used the language which he habitually does without being conscious of the difficulty, or apparent difficulty, involved in it.

And again, this solution (if it can be called a solution) has been that of all deep religious feeling, and is the necessary condition of religious life. If God be omniscient and omnipotent, all things must be in His hands. If man is to be in any real sense of the word 'moral,' he must be a free agent. These two are irreconcilable. We can only state them both, and believe that the fact that they are so arises from the limitations of our mind, not of God's power.

Before we conclude, there is one more point we must turn to. We have said that chaps. ix.-xi. represent St. Paul's philosophy of history. At the end of the Epistle he has summed up the leading thoughts of it in his great concluding doxology.

This is not either the time or the place to discuss the genuineness of that doxology. It is sufficient to say that we agree with Dr. Hort in believing that it is an integral portion of the Epistle. He there states that the gospel, *i.e.* the preaching of Jesus Christ, was the revelation of the mystery which had been kept silent through times eternal, but now was manifested. That was St. Paul's view of the history of the world. Before the foundations of the world, God's purpose was formed. With that purpose in view He had created the world. That was the end to which all things tended. He had

chosen one special race to be the depositories of the divine truth. In all past history there was a divine purpose working. That was still being fulfilled. The end was to make known to all nations the faith in Christ, that all alike, Jew and Gentile, might experience the divine mercy, might enter the kingdom of heaven, and be united with God in Christ. That is the divine purpose. It is not yet fulfilled, but enough is accomplished to make it possible to offer up praise to Him who is the one wise God. 'Of Him, and through Him, and unto Him, are all things. To Him be the glory for ever.'

Sermonettes on the Golden Texts.

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Entrenched Sins.

'By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they had been compassed about for seven days.'—HEB. xi. 30.

THE story of the overthrow of Jericho is a living picture-parable, acted on a gigantic scale that all after ages may learn its lesson. God's dealings with nations and individuals are alike. Life is a desert wandering until one passes into the inheritance of the sons of God. Yet even when translated into the kingdom of light one finds that its fairest spots are occupied by sinful habits, and that the work of the Christian life is the overthrow of fortresses in which favourite sins are entrenched.

I. THE FORCES OF EVIL CONCENTRATE THEMSELVES FOR SELF-DEFENCE.—All the countryside had taken refuge within the walls of Jericho, which was 'straitly shut up.' Jericho was the key to the whole land. At the beginning of a Christian life, or of any holy enterprise, the bitterest opposition of the enemy is encountered. Israel went from the Jordan to Jericho; Christ from the Jordan to the scene of temptation. Every Christian has first of all his Jericho to overthrow, his tempter to vanquish.

II. THE ENTRENCHMENTS OF SIN ARE THE TENDENCIES OF OUR NATURE.—The stones of which the fortress was built were quarried from the land of Canaan, and would just as well have built a temple for the abode of God. Some are of a sensitive nature. Such sensitiveness may become the abode of God, and reveal itself as sympathy;

or the abode of sin, and reveal itself in jealousy and heart-burnings. So impulsiveness may become self-sacrifice or passion. It is because sin falls in line with our natural disposition that it is so formidable. I have heard a man say that God could not save one of his family because they were all so passionate. He knows now that it is not true. Here we are shown how to overthrow such sin.

III. FAITH IN GOD'S WORD IS THE ORDAINED MEANS FOR THEIR OVERTHROW.—It was by faith that the walls of Jericho fell, but means were used, and faith was placed in those means, because they were God-appointed. The trumpets were the ones which were only used in the Year of Jubilee, on the day of Atonement. They announced liberty to the captive. Surely the Christian counterpart is the proclamation of God's promises. How often trust in those promises has brought the victory! Augustine could not conquer his sinful inclinations. He was in tears because of his failure, when he heard the words of a child singing, 'Tolle, lege; tolle, lege.' Taking up his Bible, his eyes fell on the words of Rom. xiii. 13, 14. Immediately the strife was ended, and the victory won, by his faith in God's Word.

IV. SUCH MEANS APPEAR RIDICULOUSLY INADEQUATE.—What contempt and ridicule the Israelites exposed themselves to! How they would be jeered at and scorned! 'The weapons of our warfare are not carnal,' and yet they are 'mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds.'