

Notes on Biblical Exposition

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IV. THE FREEDOM OF THE CHRISTIAN MAN

"Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, in order that He might deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of Him who is God and our Father, to whom be the glory for ever and ever, Amen."

"I marvel that you are so soon turning, from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to another gospel, which is not another—only, there are some who are disturbing you and wishing to subvert the gospel of Christ." (Gal. 1:3-7, in a literal translation.)

Grace and Peace

IN the last three numbers of CHRISTIANITY TODAY, we have discussed two of the three parts into which the opening of this Epistle is divided: we have discussed the nominative part, which indicates the person or persons from whom the Epistle comes; and we have discussed the dative part, which indicates the persons to whom the Epistle is addressed.

The remaining part is the greeting. It begins with the words: "Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." So far there is nothing peculiar about it at all. Exactly these same words occur in the greetings in Romans, I and II Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians, II Thessalonians; and very similar words occur in all the other Epistles of Paul.

In this Pauline greeting, "grace" designates the undeserved favor of God, and "peace" the profound well-being of the soul which is the result of it.

"God Our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"

This grace and this peace come not only from "God our Father" but also from "the Lord Jesus Christ;" these two divine Persons are placed in the closest possible conjunction. Thus the greeting involves the most stupendous ascription of deity to our Lord. Yet that ascription of deity appears not at all as something new, but altogether as a matter of course. So deeply rooted in the life of the apostolic Church is the belief in the deity of Christ that it has determined the very form with which practically every one of the Pauline Epistles begins. Neither Paul nor his readers detected anything strange in this amazing separation of Jesus Christ from all created beings and this amazing inclusion of Him with God the

Father as the source of all grace and all peace.*

So much appears in almost every one of the Epistles of Paul. The greeting is the most constant part among the three parts into which the openings of the Epistles are divided. But here in Galatians this constant formula of greeting has joined with it an addition which is entirely unique. "Grace be to you and peace," says Paul to the Galatians, "from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"—so much appears in the other Epistles—but then he adds here alone, "who gave Himself for our sins in order that He might deliver us from the present evil age according to the will of Him who is God and our Father, to whom be the glory for ever and ever, Amen."

What is the reason for this addition just here, this addition which is entirely without parallel in the other Epistles? The answer is perfectly clear. Paul is adding these words in reply to the propaganda of the Judaizing teachers who were making the cross of Christ of none effect. "Christ died to set you free," says Paul in substance; "yet now you are returning into bondage; by your effort to earn a part of your salvation by your own good works you are returning into that very bondage from which you were released at such enormous cost; you are trying to undo the effects of Christ's unspeakable gift." That is the central thought of the Epistle to the Galatians. It is set forth in epitome in this remarkable addition which the Apostle makes to the regular form of greeting that appears in the other Epistles.

"Who Gave Himself for Our Sins"

"The Lord Jesus Christ," says Paul, "who gave Himself for our sins." When Paul says "gave Himself," he is referring very specifically not to the incarnation, but to the cross; not to the life of Christ, but to His death. Certainly the incarnation and the life of Christ on earth were necessary to the saving work of Christ; without them the redemption which He accomplished on Calvary would have been impossible. But here it is unquestionably the death that Paul has in mind. There might conceivably be a doubt about that if this language appeared in some other writer, but in Pauline usage the matter is not open to doubt.

The word "for" in the English translation of the phrase "for our sins" represents either of two Greek prepositions, of which some manuscripts have one and some the other.

One of these two prepositions, *peri*, means simply "concerning" or "in the matter of." If that preposition was what Paul wrote, then the phrase simply indicates that Christ's death was connected in some way with our sins, without any indication of what the connection was. Of course, the connection is made perfectly plain by other passages in Paul; the Apostle clearly believed that when Christ died on the cross He died in our stead, bearing the just punishment of our sins. That wonderful thought was always in the background of his mind when he spoke of the connection between our sins and Christ's death. But it is not designated specifically by the preposition *peri*.

The other preposition, *hyper*, means "in behalf of," "for the benefit of;" it has the idea not merely of a connection between what precedes it and what follows after it, but of an active interest of the former in the latter. But how can Paul possibly have said that Christ died "for the benefit of" *sins*? The thought seems at first sight to be blasphemous.

In reply, it may be said, in the first place, that Paul does say just that in I Cor. 15:3. Whichever reading is correct at Gal. 1:4, the preposition *hyper* is certainly used in the clause, "Christ died for (*hyper*) our sins," in the precious summary that Paul gives in I Cor. 15:3 ff. of the tradition of the early Jerusalem Church. It is important, therefore, to determine what the preposition means in this connection. What does Paul mean when he says that Christ died "in behalf of our sins?"

The answer can be made clear by the example of a modern English colloquial usage. We sometimes say to a sick person, "How is your cold this morning?"; and he sometimes replies: "It is very much better; I took some medicine for it last night, and the medicine helped it very much." Now that sick person does not mean, strictly speaking, that he took the medicine *for* ("for the benefit of") the cold, or that the medicine *helped* the cold, or that the cold is now *better*. On the contrary, he means that he took the medicine *against* the cold and that the cold was *hindered* by the medicine and that the cold is *less flourishing* than it was before. Yet the colloquial usage in question is very common and very natural. When we say that a cold is better, we really mean that the person is better because the cold is not so flourishing as it was before; and when we say that we give a sick person some medicine for his cold, we really mean that we

* See the fine article by B. B. Warfield, "God Our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ," now published in the second volume, *Biblical Doctrines*, in his selected works, pp. 213-231.

give the medicine for him and against his cold.

So here, when it is said that Christ died for the benefit of our sins—supposing that to be the correct reading—that really means that Christ died for the benefit of us, laden with our sins as we were; or, in other words, that He died for the benefit of us and for the destruction, or counteraction in some way, of our sins.

The manuscript evidence is rather evenly divided in Gal. 1:4 between *peri*, "concerning" or "in the matter of," and *hyper*, "for the sake of" or "for the benefit of." But fortunately it does not make very much difference which of these two readings is correct: for if *peri* (the more general word) is the correct reading here, we have the more precise word used in exactly the same connection in I Cor. 15:3; and in any case the phrase is of course to be understood in the light of the full, rich teaching of Paul in other passages as to the meaning of Christ's death.

The Two Ages

Christ "gave Himself for our sins," Paul says, "in order that He might deliver us from the present evil age." "The present age" is clearly to be regarded as contrasted with a future age. In Eph. 1:21, in the phrase "not only in this age but also in that which is to come," the contrast becomes explicit; and it is implied in all the passages in Paul's Epistles where "the present age," or "this age," is mentioned. By "the present age" Paul means the whole period from the fall of man to the second coming of Christ; by "the age which is to come" he means the glorious time which is to be ushered in by this latter event.

This doctrine of the two ages was not originated by the Apostle Paul, but had a considerable history before his time. It appears with the utmost clearness, for example, in the teaching of Jesus, as when He speaks of the sin that shall be forgiven "neither in this age nor in that which is to come" (Matt. 12:32). But Jesus does not speak of it as though it were a new thing. On the contrary, He seems to assume that it is already well known to his hearers.

It is not surprising, therefore, to discover that the doctrine of the two ages was a well-known Jewish doctrine at the time of our Lord and of His apostles. Ultimately the doctrine had an Old Testament basis in such passages as the prophecy in Isaiah 65: 17-25 regarding the new heavens and the new earth. The later Jews were quite in accordance with Old Testament teaching when they looked forward to a new and glorious age which was to take the place of the present age of misery and sin.

Thus far we have found nothing peculiar in the teaching of the New Testament and of the Apostle Paul upon this subject. In holding that the age in which we are living is to be followed by a glorious age which is

to be ushered in by an act of God, Paul is teaching what his Jewish contemporaries already taught.

Already Free

But at this point an important difference enters in. The difference is that according to the Jews a man must be either in one age or in the other, whereas according to Paul (and really also according to Jesus) a man, through Christ, can already, here and now, be free from the present age and a citizen of the future kingdom. In one sense we look to the future for our salvation, but in another sense we have it here and now. Outwardly we are still in the present evil age, but inwardly we are already free from its bondage.

This double aspect of salvation—in one sense, future; in another sense, present—runs all through apostolic teaching, and is quite basic in true Christian life of all ages. Here in Galatians it is especially the present aspect of salvation that is in view. "You have already been made free from the present evil age," Paul says to the Galatians; "what folly then it is to return into bondage! Christ died to set you free; will you then do despite to His love by becoming again, slaves?"

Bondage Versus Freedom

Certainly a man is a slave if, as the Judaizers desired, he seeks to earn even a part of his salvation by his obedience to God's law, if he seeks to enter into an account with God. We are already hopelessly in debt; we are under the awful curse which the law pronounces against sin. If we try to pay the debt by our own miserable works, the debt is not really paid but is heaped up yet more and more. There is one way of escape and one way only. It is open because Christ has paid the debt and set us free.

Have the men of our time really known that freedom? Will they ever really be able to atone for sin by "making Christ Master" in their lives, by trying, unredeemed and unregenerate, to live as Christ once lived? The whole Word of God answers, "No." Freedom is found only when a man, like Christian in Bunyan's allegory, comes to a place somewhat ascending where he sees a cross and the figure of Him that did hang thereon, and where, at that sight, the burden of sin, which none in the village of Morality could remove, falls of itself from the back. That is a freedom that is freedom indeed. Right with God, fear removed, the slate wiped clean, all lightness and joy!

It is a freedom, first of all, from sin—freedom from its guilt and freedom from its power. But the freedom from sin brings also a freedom from this whole evil world. What cares the true Christian what the world may do; what cares he what ill fortune, as the world looks upon it, may bring? These things hold the unredeemed in bondage, but over the redeemed man they have no power.

The Meaning of Freedom

The Christian does indeed live still in this world. It is a travesty on this Pauline doctrine when it is held to mean that when he escapes, inwardly, from the present evil world by the redeeming work of Christ the Christian can calmly leave the world to its fate. On the contrary, Christian men, even after they have been redeemed, are left in this world, and in this world they have an important duty to perform.

In the first place, they do not stand alone, but are united in the great brotherhood of the Christian Church. Into that brotherhood it is their duty to invite other men by the preaching of the gospel; and they should pray that that preaching, through the supernatural operation of the Holy Spirit in the new birth, may be efficacious, and that the great brotherhood may expand yet more and more.

In the second place, Christians should by no means adopt a negative attitude toward art, government, science, literature, and the other achievements of mankind, but should consecrate these things to the service of God. The separateness of the Christian from the world is not to be manifested, as so many seem to think that it should be manifested, by the presentation to God of only an impoverished man; but it is to be manifested by the presentation to God of all man's God-given powers developed to the full. That is the higher Christian humanism, a humanism based not upon human pride but upon the solid foundation of the grace of God.

But these considerations do not make any less radical the step of which Paul speaks. It remains true that the Christian has escaped from this present age—from this present world with all its sin and all its pride. The Christian continues to live in the world, but he lives in it as its master and not as its slave. He can move the world because at last he has a place to stand.

The Author of Freedom

This freedom which Paul attributes to the Christian is not a freedom that the Christian has arrogated to himself; it is not a freedom that has been attained by rebellion against God's holy law. So the Judaizers represented it, but in representing it so they were wrong. "No," says Paul; "we are not free by rebellion against God, but by His own gracious will. Christ gave Himself for our sins that He might deliver us from the present evil age according to the will of Him who is God and our Father; and to Him, our supreme Liberator, we can ascribe all the glory and all the praise." So the address of this Epistle ends with a triumphant doxology: "To whom be the glory for ever and ever, Amen."

* It is a wonderful passage—this "address" or opening of the Epistle to the Galatians. In it is contained a summary of the whole rich content of the glorious Epistle that

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the leaven of evolution and Modernism. Unless immediate action is taken in New Zealand to stem the tide I fear that Modernism will capture the entire field.

There is scarcely a University Professor in our midst that does not hold and teach evolution. For the first time in the history of the Otago University a series of public lectures on this was arranged a year ago. To my knowledge the only Presbyterian Minister who protested and used his pen to some purpose was the editor of *The Biblical Recorder*, the Rev. P. B. Fraser, M.A. It is impossible for our High School young people as well as our University undergraduates to escape the teaching of evolution. The sad part is that these young people do not get both sides placed before them. Their teachers take an unfair advantage of them. Either these teachers do not know there is another side to evolution or they know it, yet deliberately suppress it in their teaching. There was a time when the Theological Seminary with its sound teaching was an antidote to the infidelity of the University, but alas the Seminary is now a bed-fellow with the University. There was a time when the Pulpit was an antidote to the false teaching of the Colleges but that time has gone.

The Denominational Church Papers keep their readers in ignorance concerning the battle that is being waged in your country for the truth. I am persuaded that if *CHRISTIANITY TODAY* could be placed in the homes of the people it would prepare an army to wage a victorious conflict for Bible Christianity.

The latest move to capture the churches for Modernism is Church Union. Tentative negotiations are now on foot to bring about Union between the Presbyterians, Methodists and Congregationalists. The leaders of this "unionarian stunt" are modernistic to a man. They see the churches losing ground. They are finding it increasingly hard to pay their way. Support to Foreign Missions is waning, yet these short sighted politicians think that the only way out of defeat is Union. They refuse to be told that if they would see the hand of God upon them in power they must return to Apostolic doctrine and preaching.

While Modernism is growing something is being done to resist it. The United Evangelical Church takes its stand on the Bible and is uncompromising in its attitude to all that calls in question the absolute authority of the Bible. But this church is in its infancy. In this young country where the population is small independent churches are difficult to maintain. The people cling to their churches as cats to soft cushions. Few are prepared to put their hands in their pockets and generously help on a sound movement. There is also a Bible League. It too is in its infancy. What is needed in New Zealand is leader-

ship: Men bold enough for the truth to take the field as did Luther, Calvin and Knox and fight until a new day dawns.

Your break with Princeton is heartening. When all is said and done it is impossible to salvage an institution when its Board of Control is modernistic or "Tolerant" of Modernism. The only hope is separation and a new beginning. The truth cannot be saved by compromise or union but by separation. This has been the history of the church.

Westminster Seminary has before it a great future if it remains loyal to the faith. I would urge all who love the faith of our fathers—the faith that made heroes, saints and martyrs—to withdraw their financial support from any institution that has in it the seeds of Modernism and get back of sound institutions such as Westminster Seminary. Only as the source of the stream is pure can the stream be pure.

If the Seminary is sound the ministry will be sound. Let us keep the flag of truth nailed to the mast and with one heart and mind go forward to preach and teach "the faith once for all delivered to the saints."

Notes on Biblical Exposition— Concluded

follows. In the unique addition to the nominative part ("not from men nor through a man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead"), we have a summary of the first main division of the Epistle (Gal. 1:10-2:21) in which Paul defends his independent apostolic authority against the Judaizers' contention that he was an apostle only in a secondary sense; in the unique curttness and brevity of the dative part ("to the churches of Galatia"), we have an indication of the deadly seriousness of the crisis in which the Epistle was written; in the unique addition to the greeting part ("who gave Himself for our sins, in order that He might deliver us from the present evil age according to the will of Him who is God and our Father, to whom be the glory for ever and ever, Amen"), we have a summary of Paul's defence of his gospel in the great central part of the Epistle. Paul was not like some modern preachers, who are inclined to mention the blessed doctrine of the cross only when they are taken to task for neglecting it. Paul regarded it as the very foundation of Christian life; and when it was belittled, as in Galatia, he put his whole heart into its defence.

Thanksgiving True and False

Immediately after the address we find in nearly all of the other Epistles of Paul an expression of thanksgiving for the Christian state of the readers. That appears in Romans, I Corinthians, Philippians, Colos-

sians, I and II Thessalonians, II Timothy, Philemon; and II Corinthians and Ephesians are only apparent, rather than real, exceptions. But in Galatians there is nothing whatever of the kind. The first word of the Epistle, after the address is over, is not "I give thanks" but "I am surprised;" Paul plunges at once into the matter that caused the Epistle to be written. "You are turning away from the gospel," he says in effect, "and I am writing this Epistle to stop you."

What is the reason for this absence, in the Epistle to the Galatians, of the usual thanksgiving? The answer is really very simple. Paul omitted giving thanks, for the simple reason that there was nothing to be thankful for.

No doubt he did give thanks to God on the very same day when he wrote this Epistle. He gave thanks for the gospel of Christ; he gave thanks for news that he had received from other churches. But the news that he had received from Galatia was bad and only bad, and Paul had not the slightest intention of telling God that it was good.

Many persons seem to think that it is eminently pious to give thanks to God whether or not there is anything to be thankful for. They seem to think that loyalty to the Church means blind loyalty to a human organization or to agencies and boards; they seem to think that sin in individual or ecclesiastical life can be removed by saying that it is not there; they cover up the serious issues of the day, in the councils of the Church, by a sad misuse of the sacred exercise of prayer.

Paul's way was very different. A sterling honesty ran all through his devotional life. He thanked God for what was good; he prayed to God, sometimes with tears, for the removal of what was bad. But always he was honest with God. When he got down upon his knees he did not try to conceal the real facts either from God or from himself. He made God a sharer in his joys, but also he made Him a sharer in his sorrows. Like Hezekiah, he spread the threatening letters of the adversaries unreservedly before the throne of grace. So here, with regard to the Galatian churches, he faced the facts. The Galatians were turning away from the faith. There was no honorable possibility of concealment or palliation. The facts were too plain. Paul had not the slightest intention of concealing them. Thanksgiving at such a moment would have been blasphemy; praise of the Galatians would have been cruelty. Paul engaged neither in thanksgiving nor in praise. Instead, he wrote this mighty Epistle, with its solemn warning, with its flaming appeal.

There is one advantage about a man like that. He may not always give you praise when you desire praise; but when he does give you praise you know that it comes from the heart.