

Notes on Biblical Exposition

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XIV. Paul's Commission and its Importance to Us

"But from those who were reputed to be something—of whatever sort they were, it makes no difference to me; God does not accept the countenance of a man; for to me those who were of repute added nothing, but, on the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel of the uncircumcision just as Peter with that of the circumcision (for He who had worked for Peter unto the apostleship of the circumcision had worked also for me unto the Gentiles), and when they recognized the grace that had been given me, James and Cephas and John, those who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go unto the Gentiles, and they unto the circumcision—only, that we should remember the poor, which very thing also I was zealous to do" (Gal. 2:6-10, in a literal translation).

Another Broken Sentence

IN the immediately preceding verses, which were treated in last month's issue of CHRISTIANITY TODAY, Paul has spoken of the Judaizers and of his refusal to yield to them regarding the test case of Titus. Those verses constitute in some sort a digression; and the apostle now returns with verse 6 to the point at which he has broken off. He has told us in verse 2 that he laid his Gospel before the leaders of the Jerusalem Church. Now he tells us what they said to him in reply. With the words "from those who were reputed to be something," contrasting as these words do the leaders of the Church with the words "from those who were reputed to be something," contrasting as these words do the leaders of the Church with the Judaizers of whom he has just spoken, the Apostle takes up the interrupted thread of his narrative.

We observed last month that verses 4 and 5, in the opinion of many exposi-

tors, constitute an "anacoluthon"—that is, Paul begins a sentence which he breaks off without completing it in any grammatical way. There, however, the anacoluthon is of such an unusual kind, if it really does exist, that many scholars have sought to avoid it by joining the verses to the preceding sentence.

In our passage, on the other hand, there is an anacoluthon which is altogether natural and easy. Paul was intending, when he began the sentence, to say, "From those who were reputed to be something I received nothing": but after the words, "from those who were reputed to be something," several explanatory clauses intervene; the sentence is broken off; and Paul expresses in a different form the thought which he had in his mind. Instead of saying, as he had at first intended to say, "From those who were reputed to be something I received nothing," he expresses exactly the same thought by saying, "Those who were reputed to be something added nothing to me."

The Main Point

The only question is whether the word which we have translated provisionally by the conjunction "for" in the last clause of verse 6 really means "for" or is merely resumptive of the broken thread of the sentence.

If it means "for," it gives a reason for the words, "of whatever sort they were it makes no difference to me," or for the words, "God does not receive the countenance of a man." Paul would thus mean to say: "Whatever advantages the Jerusalem leaders possess, it makes no difference to me; for to me at least (whatever others may have received from them) they added nothing, since my gospel had already been given me by Christ." Or else, he would mean: "God does not accept the countenance of a man; for this general principle is illus-

trated in the present case by the fact that I, who had so little advantages compared with those of the Jerusalem leaders, needed to receive nothing from them."

If either of these two interpretations be right, the whole weighty series of clauses beginning with the word "for" in the last clause of verse 6 and extending to the end of verse 10 is introduced in support of a parenthetical assertion. But what is thus introduced in support of the parenthetical assertion is also the main point of the whole passage, so that in content, though not in form, Paul has completed what he started out to say, and any further grammatical completion of the sentence would have been pedantic and unnecessary.

However, the word which we have provisionally translated "for" is also sometimes used in Greek merely to resume the broken thread of a sentence, as we in English use the words, "I say," or the like. If this be the use of the word here, then the passage is to be translated: "But from those who were reputed to be something—of whatever sort they were, it makes no difference to me; God does not accept the countenance of a man—to me, I say, those who were of repute added nothing . . ."

Fortunately it does not make much difference which meaning is to be attributed to the word; it does not make much difference whether it introduces a reason for what stands in the parenthesis or resumes the thread of the sentence after the parenthesis is completed. In either case, the sentence is grammatically incomplete, but in either case Paul fully completes the expression of the thought that he had in mind when he began.

Former Privileges and Present Authority

So much for the general grammatical structure of the sentence. When we come

now to the details, we can pass over without further comment the phrases, "those who were reputed to be something" and "those who were reputed to be pillars." Those phrases were sufficiently dealt with in the December issue of CHRISTIANITY TODAY. They do not, as we there observed, indicate indignation against the original apostles, but only indignation against the Judaizers who had falsely appealed to the original apostles against Paul.

At the beginning of the parenthesis in verse 6, there is serious question about the meaning of one word. The word which we have translated by the suffix "-ever" in the phrase "of whatever sort they were"—thus regarding it merely as imparting a somewhat more indefinite tone to the "of what sort"—may also mean "formerly" or "once upon a time." If the meaning "formerly" or "once upon a time" is to be attributed to the word here, then the clause means: "Of what sort they *formerly* were makes no difference to me;" and we have a clear allusion to the advantages which James and the original apostles possessed during the earthly ministry of Jesus, when the apostles were intimate disciples of Jesus, and when James, though not a disciple, was bound to the Lord by close human ties. No doubt the Judaizers had emphasized those former advantages of the Jerusalem leaders. "Paul," they had no doubt said, "is an upstart and a newcomer, whereas Peter and the others have long been bound to Jesus in the closest possible way." In opposition to that argument, Paul would be saying (if the word in question does mean "formerly" here): "Of what sort the Jerusalem pillars were formerly—during the earthly ministry of Jesus—makes no difference to me."

Certainly that interpretation of the word yields an excellent sense, and it may be correct. But it is quite possible also that the other interpretation is right, and that the word merely makes the "of what sort" a little more indefinite.

Even, however, if this latter interpretation be adopted, even if the word be taken to mean "-ever" and not "formerly," there is still probably an allusion, though in this case not so definite an allusion, to the advantages

which the original apostles and James the brother of the Lord enjoyed during the earthly ministry of Jesus. Even if Paul says merely: "Of whatever sort James and Peter and John were, it makes no difference to me," still he is alluding to advantages which those three men enjoyed in the opinion of the Judaizers, and prominent among such advantages was no doubt the former close association of those men with Jesus when He was on earth.

Man's Person and God's Grace

In the next clause, Paul indicates the underlying reason why it made no difference to him how great the Jerusalem apostles were. The reason was that God had already given him all the authority that he could in any case have received from them; God does not, in the disposal of His favor, regard the outward advantages of this man or that; His grace runs counter to all human expectations; and so He had given to Paul, the enemy, a commission which made him independent even of what James or Peter or John could give.

The expression, "to accept the countenance of," which occurs in this clause, is formed in imitation of a phrase of the Hebrew Bible meaning "to lift up the countenance of." In the New Testament, it is used in a distinctly unfavorable way, meaning "to look upon the outward advantages of," "to show partiality because of the high position of the one with whom one is dealing." "No such partiality," says Paul, "is to be attributed to God; high worldly position means nothing to Him; He puts down the mighty from their seats and exalts them of low degree; and so He bestowed His favor upon me, the persecutor, as much as upon those whom all in the Church regarded highly as the original friends of Jesus."

Paul does not mean that the long association of the original apostles with Jesus was a matter of no importance; on the contrary, he regarded it no doubt as a blessed privilege. But what he does mean is that the Judaizers were wrong in thinking that such privileges of the original apostles set limits to the divine grace. "God's ways are not man's ways," Paul means to say. "To human eyes it might have seemed as though the

original apostles alone could be true apostles of Jesus Christ. They had been with Jesus when He was on earth; they were looked up to—and rightly—in the Church. But God's grace broke through all such human calculations. The Lord Jesus appeared to me after apparently the series of the appearances had been closed; I, the persecutor and the enemy, was made to be an apostle equal to the apostles whom all in the Church revered."

A Possible Misunderstanding

We observe here again, as we have observed before, that Paul's appeal to the pillars of the Jerusalem Church was capable of being misunderstood. When a man appeals to another for endorsement, the natural inference might seem to be that he is appealing to a higher instance, to the source from which he regards his authority as being derived. Was not Paul confessing, then, by his appeal to the original apostles, that his authority was derived from them; was he not saying to the Judaizers, in effect: "You say that I am not an apostle; well, I *am* an apostle because the pillars of the Jerusalem Church sent me out; they constitute surely the highest authority, and if *they* commissioned me, my commission is valid indeed?"

Such an understanding of the appeal to the Jerusalem leaders, plausible though it might seem at first sight, is exactly what Paul is most concerned to deny. His concern to deny it will explain a number of the peculiarities of Gal. 2:1-10, and will refute many of the false inferences that have been drawn from those peculiarities.

It will explain, for example, as we have already observed, the use of the peculiar expressions, "those who were of repute," "those who were reputed to be something," "those who were reputed to be pillars," as referring to James and Peter and John. By these expressions Paul does not mean to say that these men were not really "*something*," were not *really* "pillars," but were only reputed to be such. On the contrary, he shows in the plainest possible way, by his references to them elsewhere (and indeed, for that matter, in this very passage), that he recognized them as true witnesses of the risen Christ and as men

who had a high commission in the Church. What he does mean is that it was not their real importance, but only the importance attributed to them by the Judaizers, that caused him to appeal to them in this particular connection. If he had appealed to their real importance, that would have meant that he had received his authority from them; it would have been equivalent to saying: "Accept me as an apostle because James and Cephas and John were so great as to be able to transmit authority to me."

For exactly the same reason, Paul says, in the passage with which we are now dealing: "Of whatever sort they were, it makes no difference to me." Taken out of the context, these words might seem to betoken an unbrotherly indifference, on the part of Paul, to those who had been apostles before him; but in the context they indicate nothing of the kind.

Paul and the Original Apostles

From many points of view, it did make a very great difference to Paul what the original apostles were; it made a great difference to him, for example, that they were true witnesses of the risen Christ, and in I Cor. 15:3-8 he tells us that he appealed to their witness in his basic teaching in the churches. But from the particular point of view which is determinative in this particular passage in Galatians, it made no difference. Here it was not a question of factual detail about the life of Jesus on earth, nor of additional testimony to the resurrection which would impress those who had not yet been won to Christ. In such matters Paul undoubtedly received much from the original apostles, who had lived so long with Jesus on earth. But here it is a question of Paul's apostolic authority—not whence he received this piece of information or that regarding Jesus, but whence he received his commission as an apostle. With regard to that question, he did not need to appeal to the original apostles or to any man; he did not need to say: "I am an apostle because James and Cephas and John were so great as to be worthy channels through which my apostleship could be transmitted to me." In fact,

that is just what he is anxious *not* to say.

What he is anxious here to say is that the greatness of these men had nothing whatever to do with the matter in hand; his apostleship did not come to him through any man, but directly from Christ; and so no man's greatness—not even the greatness of the original apostles of Jesus—had anything whatever to do with its invalidation. He appeals, therefore, to the original apostles not because of their real greatness—which he did not at all deny—but because of the greatness that was attributed to them by the Judaizers. The Judaizers had appealed to them in a falsely exclusive way, as though they were the only ones who had a right to speak. "Well," says Paul, "let the Judaizers be refuted out of the mouths of the men to whom they themselves have appealed. James and Cephas and John did not give me a commission at the Jerusalem conference. On the contrary, they recognized the fact that I had already been commissioned in completed independence of them; they did not say: 'You are worthy, Paul, and therefore we send you out henceforth to preach;' but they said: 'God has already bestowed His grace upon you; you are already preaching the same gospel as that which we preach, and you have received that gospel in the same way, directly from the Lord Jesus Christ; go forward in your sphere as we go forward in ours, that Christ may be preached unto every creature.'"

Why Paul Contended

Was Paul engaging in an unworthy contention when he insisted so strenuously upon his complete independence; was he animated by unworthy jealousy when he guarded so carefully, in our passage, against any thought that it was the real greatness of the original apostles to which he was obliged to appeal as though his commission came in slightest measure from them?

The answer is, most emphatically, "No." Paul was not contending for himself when he contended for his apostolic independence; he was contending for Christ's little ones of all ages, and for the countless multitudes who have received the gospel through his

written and spoken words. He was contending—in ultimate import—for the right of the eighth chapter of Romans, and all the other glorious chapters of the Pauline Epistles, to stand in Holy Scripture; he was contending for the wonderful symmetry and completeness of God's Word. Unless the Epistles of Paul be truly apostolic, they should be excluded from the Bible; and if they were excluded, what a sadly mutilated Bible we should have!

No, Paul was not contending for himself when he contended for his apostolic independence, but he was contending for the One who gave him his apostleship, and for the Church whom that One purchased by His precious blood.

The claim of Paul to apostolic independence, so zealously guarded in the Epistle to the Galatians, does, it is true, place before us a sharp alternative. If the claim was justified, then Paul is to be received today, as always, with the love and gratitude of the Church; but if the claim was not justified, then he deserves much of the opprobrium which has been heaped upon him by an unbelieving world.

Attempts are sometimes made to evade the issue. Attempts are sometimes made to find good in Paul and yet reject his apostolic claims.

We need not wonder that those attempts are made. Similar attempts are made in the case of a greater One, in the case of the Lord Jesus Himself. Jesus came forward with stupendous claims. Men reject those claims today, and yet seek to retain Jesus as the moral ideal of the race. They will not take Him as their Lord and their God; yet they are pleased to admire Him as the leader of mankind into a higher life.

But all such attempts to avoid the issue are vain. In reality, Jesus is everything or nothing. He is either God come in the flesh, as He claimed to be, or else He is unworthy of the admiration of men. Is it really sufficient to give Him the polite admiration that the Church is graciously bestowing upon Him today? "Let the dead bury their dead," He said to a half-hearted disciple when He was on earth. His claims are equally stupendous today. Reject His claims, and you make Him unworthy

even of that measure of devotion which He is receiving from modern men.

A somewhat similar alternative faces us when we consider Paul. He too advanced stupendous claims. His claims were, indeed, infinitely less than the claims of Jesus; he certainly never presented himself as God; he never presented himself as a supernatural person. But though he did not present himself as a supernatural person, he did present himself as one who had a supernatural commission.

Men have tried to evade the issue presented by such a claim. They have tried to push the claim into the background in the account which they give of the life of Paul. They have made excuses for the apostolic consciousness of Paul as they have made excuses for the Messianic consciousness of Jesus; they have tried to show that it was psychologically necessary in that age, that it was the temporary form in which Paul expressed an abiding experience. They have tried to admire Paul the man, after they have ceased to believe that he was, in the sense in which he meant the word, an apostle of Jesus Christ.

But all such efforts are vain. These "Liberal" historians, with their polite excuses for Paul, are farther perhaps from the truth about him than are the radicals who, attending to his stupendous claims, abhor him and all his works. Paul refuses to be placed in the mould in which men try to place him today. Unless his commission was supernatural in the high sense in which he represented it as being, unless it was totally different in kind from the commission of ordinary Christians or the greatest of the saints of the historic Church or the greatest of religious geniuses, then he was a mere visionary and enthusiast, and all his defence against his detractors in Galatia and elsewhere was but the work of an overwrought and irascible man. But if the Lord Jesus really appeared to him on the road to Damascus and made him, not by any human agency but in very presence, an apostle instead of an enemy, then his defence of his apostleship was defence not of himself but of his Lord, and then, too, his Epistles are part of God's holy Word, not one whit inferior in authority to the words which Jesus spoke when He was on earth.

policy of doctrinal inclusiveness that has been followed by the Northern Church. On page 59 we read: "The New School Union of 1869-70; the Revision Question of 1889; the Cumberland Union of 1904; the Auburn Affirmation of 1923; the latitude taken by New York Presbytery in ordaining ministers; the failure of the 1927 Assembly to judicially rebuke this attitude; the ideal of 'an inclusive church' avowed by Northern leaders, are to Columbia Seminary like so many stones in a vast pyramid of difficulty in the way of organic union."

An interesting and what may prove to be a very significant fact in connection with efforts to reunite the churches is recorded on page 66: "The perpetuation of the Southern Church is guarded by a legal seal. The Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church in the United States provides that full organic union and consolidation with any other ecclesiastical body can only be effected by the approval of two General Assemblies and the consent of three fourths of the Presbyteries; and that this paragraph can only be amended by the same vote."

Dr. Robinson is not unknown to the readers of CHRISTIANITY TODAY having contributed the articles, "The Gospel of Jesus" (July, 1930) and "Is the Church Forgetting God?" (May and June, 1931).

S. G. C.

THE BASIS OF EVOLUTIONARY FAITH: A CRITIQUE OF THE THEORY OF EVOLUTION, by Floyd E. Hamilton, Th.M. James Clarke & Company, London. pp. 222. Six shillings. (May be obtained through CHRISTIANITY TODAY for \$1.50.)

IN 1927 Professor Hamilton gave us his book, *The Basis of Christian Faith: A Modern Defense of the Christian Religion* (George H. Doran Co. N. Y. \$2.25)—the book which still contains the best comprehensive apology for the faith "once delivered to the saints," fitted to meet the needs of college students and other non-professional men and women who have doubts as to the validity of the Christian religion, of which we have knowledge.

In this book Professor Hamilton has given us a critique of a faith which as it is ordinarily presented is a rival of the Christian faith. Professor Hamilton is aware, of course, that there are advocates of "Christian Evolution" but, as he points out, these include practically no evolutionists of standing. "The kind of evolution that is being taught in most schools and colleges, with perhaps a few notable exceptions," he rightly says, "is not only anti-Biblical and anti-Christian, but antitheistic." Moreover, as he also points out, most of those who maintain that there is no conflict between evolution and Christianity really mean that there is no conflict between evolution and that kind of Christianity that "eliminates the first chapters of Genesis, does away with the

Books of Religious Significance

COLUMBIA THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY AND THE SOUTHERN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, by Wm. Childs Robinson, A.M., Th.D., D.D. Dennis Lindsey Printing Co., Decatur, Georgia. pp. 233 \$1.75.

THIS volume by the Professor of Church History and Polity of Columbia Theological Seminary should command a wider interest than its title might indicate. While it is primarily a history of Columbia Theological Seminary, having been presented at the celebration of its Centennial and bearing the endorsement of the Board of Directors of that institution, it deals with questions of thought and life that have agitated the whole Southern Presbyterian Church during the last one hundred years. What is more, it deals with matters that have an important bearing on present-day problems, particularly with the question of organic union between the Northern and Southern Presbyterian churches. Special interest attaches to what is said about the question of slavery, the reasons for the division of the Presbyterian Church between the North and the South, the differences in the field of Church polity between Thornwell and

Hodge, the evolution controversy in connection with Prof. Woodrow, and the theology of Thornwell in as far as it is distinguished from the old Princeton theology. No student of Church history or of Church polity or of theology can afford to ignore this volume.

Dr. Robinson points out that there are two great obstacles in the way of a reunion of the Northern and Southern Presbyterian churches. The first of these is difference of attitude of the two churches relative to the spirituality of the Church. While the Northern Church since the days of the Civil War has permitted political questions to influence its actions and on occasion has even made political pronouncements, the Southern Church insists that political matters are outside the province of the Church. On page 61 Dr. Robinson points out that in the Baltimore Assembly in 1926 spokesmen for all three groups within the Northern Church (the Conservative, Liberal and Mediating) condemned the doctrine of the non-participation by the church in political or secular matters as that doctrine is embraced in the Southern Church.

The second of these great obstacles is the