

Notes on Biblical Exposition

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XVI. THE RIGHT HAND OF FELLOWSHIP

"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).

One Gospel Given to Both

IN the last number of CHRISTIANITY TODAY, we showed that when Paul says in Gal. 2:6, "For to me those who were of repute added nothing," he is not excluding such an action as the issuance of the so-called "Apostolic Decree" with its four prohibitions as recorded in Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25. That discussion involved the whole difficult question of the relation between Acts and Galatians, and of the identification, with one or another of the visits recorded in Acts, of the visit to Jerusalem which Paul records in Gal. 2:1-10.

This month we turn to somewhat easier matters and can make more rapid progress.

"But on the contrary," Paul continues (after the momentous words discussed last month), "when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel of the uncircumcision just as Peter with that of the circumcision . . ."

It is very important here to observe the tense of the verb "had been entrusted." What the leaders of the Jerusalem Church recognized was not that Paul was then being entrusted with the gospel of the uncircumcision, not that he was worthy to be entrusted with it by their instrumentality, but that he had already been entrusted with it, in complete independence of them, by God.

By speaking of "the gospel of the uncircumcision" and (by implication) of "the gospel of the circumcision," Paul does not mean to say that there were two different gospels, one to be preached to Gentiles and the other to be preached to Jews. Such an interpretation is excluded by the "right hand of fellowship" which, according to verse 9, the Jerusalem pillars gave to Paul and Barnabas; it is also expressly excluded by I Cor. 15:11, where Paul says, "Whether it were I or they, so we preached and so ye believed." What Paul means, and what the Jerusalem leaders recognized, is that it was the same gospel that was everywhere proclaimed, but that to Paul had been entrusted the special duty of preaching that gospel to Gentiles, and to them the special duty of preaching it to Jews.

How did they "see" that Paul had been entrusted with the gospel? It is natural to think in this connection of the glorious results of Paul's preaching of the gospel out in the Gentile world; and the Book of Acts tells us that Paul and Barnabas recounted in Jerusalem "how great things God had done with them" (Acts 15:4) and "how great signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles" (Acts 15:12). No doubt that was one kind of evidence that convinced the Jerusalem leaders that Paul had really been entrusted with the gospel. But there is no reason why we should not also include among the evidence that convinced them the imme-

diately received impression that they received when Paul told them what his gospel was.

One God Working for Both

At any rate, we are told in the next verse that at least one reason why they were convinced that Paul had been entrusted with the gospel was that God had worked for him as He had worked for Peter. "For He who had worked for Peter unto the apostleship of the circumcision had worked also for me unto the Gentiles." It is not very important to ask whether the working of God here referred to was the working in the hearts and lives of the hearers, giving effect to the gospel that Paul preached, or the working of God in Paul himself, making him powerful in the preaching of the gospel. Probably both kinds of working are included. At any rate, the Jerusalem leaders saw that it was the same gospel that had been preached by Peter and by Paul, because the same God had worked for both.

"And when they had recognized the grace that had been given me . . ." The Jerusalem leaders saw that the divine favor rested upon Paul. No doubt they saw it partly through the marvellous effects of his preaching in the Gentile world. But here, at least, even if we should not do so in verse 7, we ought probably to think also, and perhaps primarily, of the immediate impression which the Jerusalem leaders received from Paul. They were convinced, by their immediate contact with him there in Jerusalem, that the divine favor had been bestowed upon him to make him what they so plainly saw him to be.

"James and Cephas and John, those who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship." James the brother of the Lord is here put first, although he was not one of the Twelve Apostles, because

he was the head of the Jerusalem Church and so seems to have presided over its meetings. These men are here called "pillars" by a natural figure of speech which has come, through the influence of this passage, into our common parlance, in which we speak of "pillars of the Church."

The Meaning of "Fellowship"

The pillars of the Jerusalem Church gave to Paul and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship. The word "fellowship" is derived from a word meaning "common"; a man has "fellowship" with another, in accordance with the usage of this word, when he has something in "common" with him. But it is perfectly clear from the context what it was that the Jerusalem leaders had in common with Paul, and what they recognized that they had in common with him when they extended to him and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship. They had the gospel in common with him. By extending to him the right hand of fellowship, they indicated that they and he were both engaged in preaching the same gospel of the same Lord.

The word "fellowship" is a fine, rich word; it is the same word as that which appears in the "Apostolic Benediction" at the end of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, where Paul writes of the "communion" of the Holy Ghost. There is no reason whatever for weakening its meaning in our passage in Galatians.

Much mischief has been wrought in the interpretation of the Bible by making the interpretation of what is clear fit a doubtful interpretation of what is obscure. So in the Epistle to the Galatians some men have read a great deal between the lines. They have interpreted the puzzling phrases, "those who were reputed to be something," "those who were reputed to be pillars," to mean that Paul was in permanently strained relations with the original apostles; and then, on the basis of that very doubtful view, they have proceeded to explain "the right hand of fellowship" to mean merely that the Jerusalem leaders on the one hand and Paul on the other made a cold agreement to disagree, a cold agreement to keep apart from each other in order that quarreling might be avoided.

As a matter of fact, what is abundantly clear about this passage—a passage in some respects obscure—is that the Jerusalem leaders and Paul did *not* make a cold agreement to disagree, but that they gave each other the right hand of fellowship and said thereby that they were all engaged in preaching the same gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and that neither group of them could do without the other.

The So-Called "Division of Labor"

The pillars of the Jerusalem Church, Paul says, "gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcision." In the Greek, there is no verb at all in this purpose clause; it reads merely, "that we to the Gentiles, they to the circumcision." Some verb no doubt has to be inserted in English; but the Greek is more general, and yet more forcible. "We to the Jews, you to the Gentiles"—such was the way in which the Jerusalem leaders summed up the guidance of God in sending out laborers into His harvest in those days.

Grievous errors have often arisen in the modern understanding of this "division of labor." It has been represented as though its purpose were largely negative—to prevent Paul from trespassing upon the field of the original apostles, and to prevent the original apostles from trespassing upon the field of Paul. So the question has been asked by some modern scholars whether the meaning of the division was geographical or ethnological—that is, whether Paul was to preach in Gentile *countries* and the original apostles in the Jewish *country*, Palestine; or whether Paul was to preach to Gentiles, wherever they might be found, even in Palestine, and the original apostles were to preach to Jews wherever they might be found, even in Gentile countries. The suggestion has even been made that Paul understood the division in one way and the original apostles in the other, Paul understanding it geographically and the original apostles ethnologically, so that when Peter came to Antioch he was doing right according to *his* understanding of the arrangement (since there were some Jews at Antioch) but wrong according

to Paul's understanding (since Antioch is not in Palestine).

But the very raising of such questions shows a complete misunderstanding of the right hand of fellowship which the Jerusalem leaders gave to Paul. As a matter of fact, the so-called "division of labor" between Paul and the original apostles was not, strictly speaking, a division of labor at all; its purpose was not negative; it was not meant at all as a limitation of the field of one party or of the other; it did not mean that Paul was not to preach to Jews or that Peter was not to preach to Gentiles; it did not mean that Paul was not to preach in Palestine or that Peter was not to preach outside of Palestine. But it meant that so far, according to the plain meaning of God, Paul had been sent predominantly to the Gentiles and the original apostles to the Jews; and that, therefore, unless both Paul and the original apostles continued their work, the cause would suffer. "Neither of us," said the Jerusalem leaders, "can do without the other, you and we are both preaching the same gospel; but we are needed to preach it to the Jews and you and Barnabas are needed to preach it to the Gentiles. It is all Christ's work; and in the future prosecution of the work, among both Jews and Gentiles, both by your instrumentality and by ours, we all have fellowship."

"Remember the Poor"

There was one express exception to the division of labor (if we may call it such) between the Jerusalem leaders and Paul. "We to the Gentiles," says Paul, "they to the circumcision—only, that we should remember the poor." By "the poor" is meant, of course, the poor of the Jerusalem Church. "God has sent you to the Gentiles," said the Jerusalem leaders; "but do not be so exclusively an apostle to the Gentiles as to forget our poor people here in Jerusalem."

It is very important to observe that this exception, introduced by the word "only," is not an exception to the assertion in verse 6, "To me those who were of repute added nothing." If it were an exception to that assertion, then the omission of all mention of the Apostolic

Decree would, despite what we said last month, become very strange. If the inculcation of care for the Jerusalem Church was an exception to the general assertion, "They added nothing to me," then surely the inculcation of the four prohibitions of the Apostolic Decree would also seem to be an exception, and Paul would probably have been obliged to mention that exception as much as the other. In other words, if Paul meant to say, "They added nothing to me except that I should remember the Jerusalem poor," then the words, "they added nothing," would probably not be interpreted (as we interpreted them last month) merely as denying an addition to Paul's gospel, but would have to be taken in a much broader sense, as denying any communications addressed by the Jerusalem leaders to Paul; and in that case it would seem strange that Paul does not mention the Apostolic Decree as an exception along with the inculcation of relief for the Jerusalem poor.

As a matter of fact, however, it is quite impossible to take the words, "only, that I should remember the poor" (verse 10), with the words, "they added nothing." Those words lie four verses back (in verse 6); and it is of course as plain as day that what verse 10 is actually to be taken as presenting an exception to is the division of labor which has been mentioned in the immediately preceding verse. "You to the Gentiles, we to the Jews," said the Jerusalem leaders to Paul. "That is the general division of labor which so far seems to have been established by the guidance of God. But there is one matter at least where we hope you will not take the division too strictly even now—to say nothing of any guidance of God which may be given to both of us in the future. There is one matter concerning the Jews in which we need the help of you, the Apostle to the Gentiles, even now. We hope you will not forget our poor of the Jerusalem Church."

Paul took very seriously indeed that call for help. He says here in Galatians, "which very thing also I was zealous to do"; and in I and II Corinthians and Romans it becomes evident that the collection for the Jerusalem poor was very much on his heart.

Letters to the Editor

[The letters printed here express the convictions of the writers, and publication in these columns does not necessarily imply either approval or disapproval on the part of the Editors. If correspondents do not wish their names printed, they will please so request, but all are asked kindly to sign their names as an evidence of good faith. We do not print letters that come to us anonymously.]

Why Mar Beautiful Hymns?

To the Editor of CHRISTIANITY TODAY:

SIR: Newspapers recently reported that in a Church Conference, proposals have been made to excise from Christian hymns certain references to the atoning blood of our Lord, on the ground that these references were not pleasing to young people.

Now it is reported that Bishop Heber's grand old missionary hymn "From Greenland's Icy Mountains," is to be altered to please certain missionaries who consider it "snobbish."

But is this charge of "snobbishness" true? Is the desire for change well-founded?

Does not this hymn say substantially what Christ and His Apostles declared, that men who worship false gods and are without Christ are "in darkness," in "error's chain," "blind"; and that the crucified and risen Son of God alone can save them; that the Gospel is the "wisdom of God," and can make men "wise unto salvation"?

If there is a fault, it is not in the hymn; it is in the Gospel and the Scriptures.

But who are the "missionaries" who object, and desire a change? If the truth were known, they are comparatively few in number, and do not come into close contact with the people in mission fields. They hold that heathen religions, having some truth, are a sufficient rule of life. That mission work should be a "sharing," a syncretism—taking some ideas from heathenism, and giving some things of Christianity. That the heathen are not "lost," as Paul thought they were, "dead in trespasses and sin," &c., &c. Here is the real ground of objection to these noble hymns: it is the objection of Modernist's unbelief to the Gospel of Christ.

We rejoice to believe that the great majority of missionaries in foreign lands are true to the Gospel, and would strongly oppose the changes proposed in the Church's hymnology. And true converts would take the same position, and oppose softening down the humbling statements of the Gospel to please human pride and self-sufficiency.

In the name of the many faithful missionaries and native converts who stand for the Truth, we protest against the unfounded charge of "snobbishness," which does great injustice to an honored servant of God, and this attempt to alter the hymns of the Church to suit a minority who are out of sympathy with the Gospel.

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The Kearns Case

To the Editor of CHRISTIANITY TODAY:

SIR: Have you room somewhere in your fine Christian paper for a humble, loyal servant of the Church to be heard?

In your mid-January, 1932, number, I read of, seems to me, a terrible thing,—the acts of Presbytery of Washington, D. C. and of our Board of Foreign Missions.

Is it possible that our Board of Foreign Missions will, knowingly, appoint a man to go to any foreign field to preach and teach the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, who can not affirm his belief in the integrity of the same, on any point, much less when it relates to the very center and heart of the whole Bible message?

Then because four ex-moderators are said to be on the Board the Presbytery thinks it "unthinkable" not to license him!

Have the four ex-moderators more weight with that Presbytery than the Bible and the Westminster Standards to which millions of Calvinists have pledged their allegiance and along with them the members of the Board of Missions and the Board as a unit and the Presbytery of Washington, D. C. also?

Does the Church believe as this Presbytery and our Foreign Board have acted? No! Has the world a right to think and to say we do? Yes! most emphatically. When atheists gleefully commend such steps, have they a just reason? They have!

Our Scriptures say "He that believeth not—disbelieveth—refuses to believe, shall be damned—condemned—rejected."

The entire gospel message says the unbeliever is rejected from God's service. Yet our Foreign Board thinks it can use them that "refuse to believe." No wonder the Church is losing and failing and no wonder that the respect due to sacred things of God is almost unknown among the large denominations. No wonder the spiritual power of these churches is so nearly gone. God and His Word are left out of their plans. No wonder so many of our candidates elected to represent us in high places of our nation are defaulters. No wonder our international pacts and pledges are only scraps of paper. The organized forces—at the head—of the Presbyterian Church of Jesus Christ, U. S. A., seem to have no more respect or regard for the Word of God and its Confession of Faith than a pagan nation or a degenerate Christian nation has for its international agreements.

In fact, it is taking the lead and these evil forces are saying, surely we can follow