

who mix the poison of their opinions and unbelief with the pure Word of God, and industriously peddle it out to a credulous and unsuspecting public. Bolsheviks who unlawfully attack the foundations of the Faith, and poison the souls of men in the very citadel of religion. Who defy all church authority

"despise dominion and speak evil of dignities" consider sacred symbols and solemn vows as "scraps of paper." A fitting name for these corrupters and rationalists *Kapaelons* might be coined because they weaken and corrupt and debase the pure Word of God, and thereby overthrow the faith of many.

With their tongues they use deceit, and the poison of asps is under their lips.

But the true minister who is like the Apostle led in triumph by God, does not corrupt the Word of God, but as of sincerity, as of God, that is as though God were speaking by him, in the sight of God, speaks in Christ.

# Notes on Biblical Exposition

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## XX. THE PERIL OF INCONSISTENCY

*"But if in seeking to be justified in Christ we were found, ourselves also, sinners, is Christ a minister of sin? God forbid! For if the things which I tore down, these things again I build up, I show myself to be a transgressor. For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God" (Gal. 2:17-19a, in a literal translation).*

### The General Sense

**I**N the last two articles in this series we have been considering the speech which Paul made to Peter at Antioch. "You and I," said Paul to Peter, "were Jews by nature; we had all the advantages which the law could give. Yet we relinquished our confidence in all those advantages, so far as the attainment of salvation was concerned, by seeking our salvation in exactly the same way as that in which it is to be sought by despised Gentile 'sinners'—namely, by the free grace of Christ received by faith alone."

At that point, an objection might arise from the Jewish point of view; and the objection is taken up incidentally and by implication at the beginning of the passage which we study this month.

It is rather a difficult passage. But difficult though it is in certain details, the general thought of it does seem to be fairly clear. That general thought may perhaps be paraphrased as follows: "We Jews, when we became Christians, gave up seeking justification through the

law; we became just as much 'sinners' (in the old Jewish sense of the word, which divided humanity into the two classes of (1) Jews and (2) sinners), as the Gentiles. But it was Christ who led us to take that step. If so, if Christ led us to become 'sinners,' how shall we avoid the conclusion that Christ was one who led us into sin? Only by recognising that that Jewish distinction between 'sinners' and Jews is invalid. We must not set it up again. If we do set it up again, then we do charge Christ with being a helper in sin. Christ led us to become 'sinners' in that Jewish sense of the word. If that sense is right, then, since Christ led us to become 'sinners,' He led us into sin."

### A Difficult Connection

So much for the general thought. We must now consider briefly one or two details.

The first difficulty concerns the connection of the sentence, "For if I build up the things which I tore down I show myself up as a transgressor." That sentence is introduced by "for"; it gives thus a reason for something that precedes. But the words immediately preceding are "God forbid" (literally, "May it not be"). Our first impulse would be, then, to regard the "for" clause as giving a reason for the "God forbid." The sense of the "God forbid," when it is taken together with the question which it answers in the negative, is: "No,

Christ is not a helper in sin." If, then, the "for" clause gives a reason for that negative assertion, we get the following: "Christ is not a helper in sin; for if I build up the things which I tore down I show myself to be a transgressor." But that hardly seems to make sense. It is very difficult to see how the sentence introduced by "for," so understood, gives any reason for, or has any logical connection with, the preceding clause.

The connection could, indeed, be established if we could introduce the word "only" into the clause introduced by "for." Then we should have the thought: "Christ is not a helper in sin; for only if I build up what I tore down do I show myself to be a transgressor and thus show Christ to have led me into transgression by leading me to tear it down, whereas, on the other hand if I stand by the step which I have taken I do not confess that it was wrong for me to take it and so do not confess that Christ led me into sin when He led me to take it."

This interpretation yields a perfectly good thought. But the trouble with it is that in order to adopt it we have to insert the all-important word "only," the word upon which the whole interpretation hangs.

### How Vacillation Dishonors Christ

It seems better therefore, to say that the sentence introduced by "for" does not give a reason for the "God forbid"—

does not give a reason for Paul's negative reply to the question, "Is Christ a helper in sin?"—but rather explains how Paul came to raise that blasphemous question. No doubt it would have been more coldly logical to postpone the negative answer to the question—to postpone, that is, the "God forbid"—until the question itself has been thoroughly explained. But the Apostle Paul, though always logical, is not coldly or pedantically logical; and so here, when he raises the blasphemous question, "Is Christ a minister of sin?", he prefers first to brush that blasphemous question aside with his indignant "God forbid," before he explains how that question ever could arise. We get, then, the following sense for the passage: "If in giving up the law as a means of salvation we became 'sinners,' is Christ a helper in sin? You will agree with me, Peter, in rejecting any conclusion so blasphemous and absurd; you will agree with me in brushing that conclusion aside with an emphatic 'God forbid.' But let us look at that matter a little more closely. That blasphemous conclusion does follow by an inevitable logic, Peter, from your vacillating conduct. If, by your example in refusing table-companionship to Gentile Christians, you build up that view of the law as a means of salvation which when you trusted in Christ you tore down, you confess that you did wrong in tearing it down; and, since Christ led you to tear it down, you confess that *He* did wrong, you confess that *He* was your helper in an act of sin."

#### Tearing Down and Building Up

So much for the question regarding the connection of the sentence introduced by "for" with what precedes. Another question has been asked about this passage. What is meant by the "transgression" which is referred to in verse 18? Two opposite views have been held.

According to one view, the "transgression" is the initial act of Paul and Peter and other Jewish Christians in turning their backs upon any thought of the law as a means of salvation. According to the other view, the "transgression" is not the tearing down, but,

paradoxically enough, the building up.

Let us consider the second of these views first. According to this second view, Paul is expressing the paradoxical thought that in this particular case, unlike what usually prevails, it is a transgression to build a thing up. That paradoxical thought becomes clear, say the advocates of this interpretation, when verse 18 is taken in close connection with the words "through the law" in verse 19. "In this particular case," Paul would be saying, "I would become a transgressor of the law in building up the law as a means of salvation, because it was through the law that I died to the law; since the law commanded me to tear the law down as a means of salvation, I would become a transgressor of the law—paradoxical though it may seem—in going back upon that initial act by building the law up again."

This interpretation has the advantage that it exhibits a good and close connection between verse 18 and verse 19; according to it, the "for" at the beginning of verse 19 is made to introduce a reason for what immediately precedes. What is perhaps even more important, it relieves us of our previous difficulty regarding the "for" sentence in verse 18; it makes it possible for us to take that "for" sentence, after all, as a reason for the immediately preceding "God forbid," and relieves us from the necessity, which we had previously felt ourselves to be under, of making the "for" of verse 18 jump back of the "God forbid" to the question with which the "God forbid" is an answer. Thus, if we can adopt this identification of the "transgression" with the building up, even what we have already said about verses 17 and 18 will have to be abandoned, and the whole passage will be understood as follows: "If we became 'sinners' when we gave up the law as a means of salvation, is Christ, who led us to take that step, a helper in sin? No, He is not a helper in sin; for in this particular case, unlike ordinary cases, it was not a sin to tear the thing down; the law itself commanded us to tear it down, so that Christ, in leading us to tear it down, did not lead us to be transgressors of the law; on the contrary, we became transgressors of the law if, going back upon

what Christ led us to do, we build the law up."

#### The Right View About the "Transgression"

Despite the advantages of this interpretation, despite the close logical connection which, unlike the other interpretation, it shows between every clause and the immediately preceding clause, it must probably be rejected. The trouble is that verse 18—"For if the things which I tore down these things again I build up, I show myself to be a transgressor"—is worded as though it were a general and obvious proposition, and most emphatically not as though it were meant to express a paradoxical exception to that general proposition. If Paul had meant that in this particular case that general proposition does not hold, but on the contrary it is the building up and not the tearing down that is the "transgression," why did he not make clear in some way—in verse 18 itself—that he is talking about the particular case and not about the general proposition? As a matter of fact, verse 18 is put in the most studiedly general form, and no ordinary reader would take it in any other way than simply as expressing the obvious thought that if just after tearing a thing down I proceed to build it up again, I confess thereby that I did wrong in tearing it down; I confess that my tearing it down was a transgression.

We, therefore, despite the temptation offered by the view just discussed, are inclined to stick to our previous interpretation of the connection between verse 17 and verse 18. The "for" in verse 18 does, we still hold, go back of the "God forbid;" it does not give a reason for this negative answer to the question, "Is Christ a minister of sin?", but it explains how that question came to be raised.

What, then, on this view of verse 18, is the meaning of the "for" at the beginning of verse 19? We have rejected the close connection between this verse and the immediately preceding verse. What shall we put in place of that connection? For what does the "for" at the beginning of verse 19 introduce a reason? We answer that it introduces a reason for

the general thought of verses 17 and 18. "Away," says Paul, "with all this inconsistency which confesses that we did wrong in giving up the law as a means of salvation and which thereby confesses that Christ did wrong in leading us to do it. I for my part will have nothing to do with such inconsistency; I broke with the law (as a means of salvation) not temporarily but for ever; I *died* to it, that I might live to God."

If there is any proposition in what precedes which we must single out as being that for which the "for" of verse 19 introduces a reason, it must be, we suppose, the "God forbid" of verse 17. "Christ is not a minister of sin," says Paul; "for, in opposition to all vacillating policy which would make Him a minister of sin, I for my part stand firmly by the decision which He led me to make; I for my part *died* to the law, as He led me to do, in order that I might live to God."

At first sight, this might seem to be an artificial and unnatural treatment of the passage. The passage falls into four divisions, of which the last two are causal clauses introduced by "for": (1) "Is Christ a minister of sin?"; (2) "God forbid!"; (3) "For if I build up what I tore down I show myself to be a transgressor"; (4) "For I through the law died to the law." According to our interpretation, (3) refers not to (2) but to (1), and (4) refers not to (3) but to (2). At first sight, this business of making causal clauses give the reason, in each case, not for what immediately precedes but for something further back would seem to be unwarranted. The answer to the objection will be found if a man will just read the passage over again and take it as a whole. When he does that, he will see, we think, that the interpretation proposed does bring out the sense of what Paul was intending to say.

#### The Sin of Vacillation

At any rate, the difficulties of the passage do not obscure its profound meaning for the modern Church. Whatever interpretation be adopted as to details, the passage does set forth the danger—the terrible sin—of inconsistency.

If we merely go back upon what *we* have done, well and good. We are but weak and fallible men, and often we make mistakes. But if we go back upon what *Christ* led us to do, if we go back upon some decision of principle which we made for Christ's sake, then we are falling into a very dreadful sin.

How common that sin is in the modern Church; how common it is, in particular, in our Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.! A man decides to take a stand for the gospel of Christ against that "other gospel" of doctrinal indifferentism which now dominates our Church. Then comes flattery from the ecclesiastical authorities; then comes Satan's voice about "peace and work" and about avoidance of contention, and about propagation versus defence and about making our message positive and not negative and about not alienating the support of moderate and peace-loving men in the Church and about teaching the truth and letting Church politics go. At first, the man resists the Tempter's voice. But as these shibboleths of unbelief continue to make their impact upon his soul, his evangelical ardor begins to wane. He begins to fear the ecclesiastical machinery; he begins to consider consequences rather than principle; he begins to withdraw and separate himself from those who bear the reproach of Christ.

Such vacillation is one of the greatest enemies of the evangelical cause today. One wobbly evangelical often does more harm to the cause of the gospel, and leads more of Christ's little ones astray, than do a dozen Modernists. God send us men of a different type, no matter how few they may be! God send us foursquare men, who give the cause their all! God send us men who will say, as over against the "other gospel" now dominant in the Presbyterian Church: "I for my part will never go back upon a decision which Christ led me to take; I will never dishonor Him by confessing that what I did for His sake was sin; I have broken once and for all with that other gospel, which now dominates the Church, and I will never make common cause for one moment, in presbytery, General Assembly or theological seminary, with those who proclaim it."

## Editorial Notes and Comments (Concluded)

that it has been the prevailing view, especially when it is added that it has been held in opposition to "the common view." It is also an overstatement to imply that the Reformers held to the premillennial view. As a matter of fact the Reformers as a class were amillennialists. "The Reformers in general," to quote Dr. HEAGLE, "did not believe in any millennium; considering the church to be the proper kingdom of God on earth, and the whole matter of the thousand years to be one of those 'Jewish opinions' which have often appeared in history." How little the Reformation was a premillennial movement is indicated by the fact that Dr. SHEDD writes: "In the period of the Reformation, millenarianism made its appearance in connection with the fanatical and heterodox tendencies that sprang up along with the great religious awakening. Hence, the symbols when they notice the doctrine at all do so in terms of condemnation" (Vol. II, p. 396). If the amillennial view originated since Dr. HODGE's *Theology* was written, as Dr. HOPKINS apparently thinks, and if "postmillennialism originated only about two centuries ago," as he expressly states, it would seem clear that the premillennial view must have been the prevailing view throughout the history of the Church. But apart from the question whether it is the true Christian view, it is hardly open to doubt that the vast majority of those who have called themselves Christians have not been premillennialists.

It may or may not be true that postmillennialism has "obscured the blessed hope of the appearing of the glory of our great God and SAVIOUR, JESUS CHRIST," but, be that as it may, it seems to us that Dr. HOPKINS is skating on thin ice when he declares that "it is psychologically impossible for people to have much interest in an event that is removed from them by at least a thousand years"—in view of the fact that two thousand years have come and gone since the words were spoken: "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye looking into heaven? this JESUS, who was received up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye beheld Him going into heaven." If it was psychologically possible in the days of the Apostles, why not now?

But while we think that some of Dr. HOPKINS' statements are of doubtful validity, we are in hearty agreement with what we regard as the core of his contention, viz. that "Fundamentalism should be broad enough to include all who believe in the real second coming of CHRIST, whether they be premillennial or postmillennial or amillennial." Our agreements, we believe, have to do with what is fundamental, our differences with what is non-fundamental.