

Notes On Biblical Exposition

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XXI. THE NEW LIFE

"For I through the law died unto the law that I might live unto God. I have been crucified together with Christ; and it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me. And the life which I now live in the flesh I live in the faith which is in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me. I do not make void the grace of God; for if righteousness is through the law, then Christ died in vain" (Gal. 2:19-21, in a literal translation).

What Is Meant by "the Law"?

IN the last number of CHRISTIANITY TODAY, we discussed the connection of the first sentence in this passage with what precedes. The "for" of that sentence, we observed, introduces a reason for the main thought of the whole preceding passage, which main thought is: "Away with a miserable vacillation which would repudiate what Christ led us to do and would therefore imply that Christ is a minister of sin." "I," says Paul, "will have nothing to do with such vacillation; for I for my part, when I broke with the law, did so once and for all; I did not separate myself from the law merely in some temporary fashion, but I *died* to the law; my break with the law was as irrevocable as death."

In interpreting the words, "I died to the law," two errors should be avoided.

In the first place, when Paul speaks of "the law," he does not mean merely the ceremonial law, but he means the whole law of God as it is set forth in the Old Testament, including what modern men would call its ethical as distinguished from its ceremonial requirements. When the meaning of the term "the law" is limited to the ceremonial law, the real point of the Epistle to the Galatians is missed. That is the root error of Ernest DeWitt Burton, in his learned commentary on the Epistle. According to Burton—if we may summarize the thought in our language, not

in his—Paul is contending in the Epistle to the Galatians for a view of the will of God which finds the true essence of God's will in great general principles, as over against an external or piecemeal notion of morality. There could scarcely be a more serious error. As a matter of fact, Paul is contending in this great Epistle not for a "spiritual" view of the law as over against externalism or ceremonialism; he is contending for the grace of God as over against human merit in any form. The particular form in which human merit was sought by the Judaizers in Galatia was an observance of the ceremonial law; but Paul's objection would have been essentially the same if the error had been of the form which appears in the religious "Liberalism" of our day. Salvation by character, salvation by our love for God, or (after the crass manner of "Abou ben Adhem") by our love for our fellow-men, salvation by "making Christ Master in the life," salvation by "complete surrender"—these are all just differing forms of the one central error which seeks salvation in human merit, and they all alike come under the condemnation of Paul's tremendous polemic in the Epistle to the Galatians.

But another error needs also to be avoided. If the interpretation which we have just mentioned attributes too little meaning to the words, "I died to the law," if it makes those tremendous words mean merely that a higher form of law is to be put in place of a lower one in order that human obedience to the law may attain merit with God, another interpretation is equally erroneous in attributing too *much* meaning to the words. We refer to the error of "antinomianism," which supposes that according to Paul the law of God, as it is set forth in the Bible, is no longer binding upon the Christian man.

That error is plainly contradicted by the Word of God, and in particular it is

quite out of accord with the teaching of Paul in this Epistle. "They that do such things," says Paul in Gal. 5:31 after a very specific catalogue of sins; "shall not inherit the Kingdom of God"; and the same stern teaching appears everywhere in the New Testament. No, Christianity, according to the Apostle, is not a way for a man to free himself from the requirements of God's law.

The Ceremonial Law

There was, indeed, a part of the law as set forth in the Old Testament which was no longer binding in the new dispensation—the part, namely, that consisted in the law's ceremonial requirements. The reason why the ceremonial law was no longer binding is set forth fully in the Epistle to the Hebrews. It was not because the ceremonial requirements were not true commands of God; it was not because disobedience to those requirements, in Old Testament times, was anything other than a deadly sin; it was not because increasing religious insight showed that those ceremonial requirements had been unnecessary after all. But it was because those requirements, though of divine authority, were temporary; they were expressly intended by God for the time before the coming of Christ. They were shadows of good things to come; and when that which they foreshadowed had appeared, the shadows were done away.

In Galatians, there is just a hint of this explanation of the ceremonial law; it is found in Gal. 4:1-11, where Paul does seem to treat the old dispensation as being a preliminary, though divinely ordered, period, when man's worship of God was still bound to external things. But in most of the Epistle the ceremonial law is not separated from the rest of the law of God as the Old Testament sets it forth. Paul is not here dealing with the question of ceremonialism versus "spiritual" worship (to make

use of the word "spiritual" in a very modern and very un-Pauline way); he is dealing with a far profounder question—the question of human merit versus divine grace. The particular form in which merit was being sought in Galatia was an observance of the ceremonial law; and Paul takes that particular form as the object of attack, without specifically pointing out its relation to other forms. But his words apply, and apply with crushing force, against those other forms; in particular, they apply against the entire non-doctrinal, "practical" trend of the religion of the modern Church. That non-doctrinal, "practical" religion is just one form of the very ancient error that human goodness is sufficient to make a man right with God.

This great verse, in other words, must be interpreted in the light of its context; and when it is so interpreted its meaning becomes perfectly clear. "When I became a Christian," says Paul in effect, "I ceased to seek my salvation from my own obedience to the law of God; in that sense, at least, I died to the law; my connection with it, as a means of obtaining merit with God, was forever done away."

The Substitutionary Death of Christ

What does Paul mean by the words "through the law," when he says: "I through the law died to the law"? How did the law itself cause Paul to die to the law?

At first sight, that question might seem to be answerable by an appeal to Gal. 3:24, where the law is said to have been a schoolmaster to bring men to Christ. Without a clear revelation of God's will, men might have comforted themselves by an appeal to their own goodness; but the law of God as set forth in the Old Testament revealed, or ought to have revealed, to men their utter hopelessness as sinners in the sight of God, and so led, or ought to have led, them to accept the free salvation offered by Christ. The law, in other words, led men, by its clear revelation of what God requires, to relinquish all claim to salvation by their own obedience. In that sense, surely, Paul could say that it was "through the law" that

he died to the law. The law made the commands of God so terribly clear that Paul could see plainly that there was no hope for him if he appealed for his salvation to his own obedience to those commands.

This interpretation yields a truly Pauline thought. But the immediate context suggests another, and an even profounder, meaning for the words. The key to the interpretation is probably to be found in the sentence, "I have been crucified together with Christ," which almost immediately follows. "The law," Paul probably means, "caused me to die to the law, because the law, with its penalty of death upon sin (which penalty Christ bore in our stead) brought Christ to the cross; and when Christ died I died, since He died as my representative." In other words, the death to the law of which Paul here speaks is the death which the law itself brought about when it said, "The soul that sinneth it shall die." Christ died that death, which the law fixes as the penalty of sin, when He died upon the cross; and since He died that death as our representative, we too have died that death; the penalty of the law is for us done away because that penalty has been paid in our stead by the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus our death to the law, suffered for us by Christ, far from being contrary to the law, was in fulfilment of the law's own demands. We are free from the penalty of death pronounced by the law upon sin not because we are rebels against the law, but because the penalty has been paid by Christ.

The Christian Life

The death of which Paul speaks in this verse is followed, he says, by a new life. "I through the law died to the law, that I might live unto God." The connection which existed between me and the law when I was still liable to the law's penalty of death is done away now that Christ has died in my stead; the law has nothing more to say against a man after its penalty has been paid. But this death to the law is, according to Paul, followed by a new life; and that new life is lived in communion with God and for the glory of God.

It is interesting to observe how inti-

mately the two aspects of salvation are connected in this great passage. In the Epistle to the Galatians, Paul is dealing primarily with what the theologians call the "forensic" aspect of salvation—he is dealing, in other words, with the question how, despite the guilt of sin, the sinner is freed from that guilt and becomes right with God. But this forensic aspect of salvation is intimately connected with the "vital" aspect; the new and right relation to God as Judge always goes together with the new life which the sinner possesses after he has been made a new creature by the Spirit of God. The familiar hymn is quite true to Holy Scripture when it says:

"Be of sin the *double* cure,
Cleanse me from its guilt and power."

That new life unto God which the sinner comes to possess because of the death of Christ is further characterized as being the very life of the Saviour Himself. "It is no longer I that live," says Paul, "but Christ liveth in me."

These words, if they stood alone, might conceivably be taken in a mystical or pantheizing sense, as though Paul regarded the Christian life as consisting in a merging of the personality of the believer in the being of Christ. But Paul need not fear such an interpretation; for everywhere in his Epistles the relation between the believer and Christ is presented in a thoroughly personal way, as a relation between one person and another. Paul was no mystic—in the strict sense of that word.

But although Paul's words in this passage are certainly not to be taken in an impersonal, mystical sense, they should, on the other hand, certainly not be explained away. Christianity, according to Paul, is not the easy-going thing that is being mistaken for it today; it is not merely a new influence brought to bear upon a man; it is no mere introduction of a new motive into human conduct: but it involves a new life, and that new life, in its quality as well as in its source, is the life of Christ. Look at Christians, says Paul, and you see so many manifestations of Christ.

The Ground of Confidence

An obvious objection may be raised against that view of Christianity—the

objection, namely, that it is not a fact. Are Christians really leading such entirely new lives; is it perfectly clear that Christ is living in them? Are they not living in the same old world; and do they not exhibit themselves still some, at least, of the characteristics of that old world?

This objection is anticipated by Paul in the very next words. "The life which I now live in the flesh"—there is an admission which the Apostle makes. "I admit," says Paul in effect, "that I am still living under the same old conditions of life in this world, and that I am still struggling against the old temptations that are found also in a humanity untouched by the grace of God; yes, I am still living a life 'in the flesh.' But that life in the flesh is lived by faith: completion has not yet come; I am still struggling on in this world: but I have faith to believe that completion will surely come. And the ground of my faith regarding the future is found in what Christ has already done for me; I am confident that the One who loved me and gave Himself for me on the cross will bring to completion the work that He there began; I am confident that faith will one day give place to sight, that the utter newness of the life of believers, now partly hidden, will one day be plain for all to see."

"I do not make void the grace of God," says Paul in concluding the report of his speech to Peter; "for if righteousness is through the law, then Christ died in vain." The "for" here gives a reason for the use of the harsh word "make void"—"make void," I say; for that is just the right word, since if, as the Judaizers say, justification comes even in part through our own obedience to the law, then Christ died in vain."

This verse is the key verse of the Epistle to the Galatians; it expresses the central thought of the Epistle. The Judaizers attempted to supplement the saving work of Christ by the merit of their own obedience to the law. "That," says Paul, "is impossible; Christ will do everything or nothing: earn your salvation if your obedience to the law is perfect, or else trust wholly to Christ's completed work; you cannot do both;

you cannot combine merit and grace; if justification even in slightest measure is through human merit, then Christ died in vain."

The Loss of Certainty (Continued)

to meet in the hypothesis"—"I do not think this is a secure conclusion"—"I hesitate to advocate it as probable"—"It is not a conclusion"; "I wish I could feel confident that it is even a beginning." Where is any ringing note of authority in science? We might paraphrase Shakespeare and exclaim, "O certainty, thou art fled to brutish beasts!"

Moreover science is constantly changing its conclusions. Recently the famous Einstein crossed himself. Sir James Jeans stated that the world was running down. Millikin reversed him and declared that the world was winding up. There was a time not long ago when Darwinism was almost universally accepted by science. Now Professor Edward Poulton is the only noted scientist to cling to the hypothesis. "One can by twisting language reconcile Genesis with evolution," says Lippman, "but what no one can do is to guarantee that science will not destroy the doctrine of evolution the day after." What words of wisdom! We go to bed one night confidently reposing our trust in the god science has given us. We awake the next morning to discover that that god has been dethroned and another one set up. Thus you see that if you hitch your wagon of faith to a star of science, all the probabilities are that it will turn out to be a shooting star.

Nor will you find any more sure foundation if you retreat into the cave of modern psychology. Five years ago the fires of behaviorism were consuming all before them. Today behaviorism is taken seriously nowhere. Pragmatism has rocked the body of advanced scholarship and, like leprosy when it has run its course, has left the body numb and powerless. Feverish efforts are made to rescue what little faith is left. James argues for the "Will to Believe," Eleanor Rowland for "The Right to Believe" and an enthusiastic religionist attempts to answer in a half-hearted way "What Can a Man Believe?" It is very apparent that what none of these has is the certainty to believe!

Science says:

"I cannot find Thee! Still on restless pinion
My spirit beats the void where Thou dost dwell;
I wander lost through all Thy vast dominion,
And shrink beneath Thy light ineffable."

Psychology says:

"I cannot find Thee! Even when most adoring
Before Thy shrine I bend in lowliest prayer,
Beyond these bounds of thought, my thoughts upsoaring,
From furthest guest comes back: Thou are not there."

Professor Robert Millikin, winner of the Nobel prize in physics declares the teaching of modern science to be extraordinarily like the preaching of Jesus. Is it? Jesus taught as one having authority. Never man spake as He spake. With authority He commanded the unclean spirits and they obeyed Him. As a matter of fact there is definitely lacking in all Scripture veiled and equivocal language. The Old Testament prophets spoke in no faltering tones. They pronounced stentorian "Thus saith the Lord." As for the New Testament prophets, listen to their words: "It seemed good to me also having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first to write unto thee . . . that thou mightest know the *certainty* of those redeemed not with corruptible things, as silver and gold . . . but with the precious blood of Christ"; "we *know* that we have passed from death unto life"; "I *know* whom I have believed." When you turn from the writing of science and psychology to the Word of God, it is like coming from the quicksands of speculation to the firm soil of authority.

Archimedes, whom Michael Pupin calls the father of the scientific method of inquiry, once said, "Give me a point to stand on and I'll move the world." Archimedes had no point and the world remained unmoved. Two centuries later a little handful of men went forth into a universe of hostility. They took their starting-point with their Saviour's triumph over the grave. They preached "Jesus and the resurrection." They told a story that centered about a majestic Person, a cross and an empty tomb. And they not only moved the world, they turned it upside down! Such spiritual power was released from the Niagara of heaven that sinful men cried out to God for mercy. It was all the work of the Spirit of God and to Him be all the glory. But from a human angle it was the result of one thing namely, conviction. These apostles were used mightily because they were in the vise-like grip of a conviction that Jesus Christ was the only Saviour of mankind. Why is there a loss of certainty in our day? Simply because people have lost their convictions. And if you and I are going to do anything to aid in the recovery of certainty we are going to need convictions that are strong and rugged and positive. We are going to need convictions that the Bible is the Word of God; that the structure of our faith is a thoroughly supernatural structure; that Christ died on the cross in our place; that