

Notes on Biblical Exposition

By J. Gresham Machen, D.D., Litt.D.

Professor of New Testament in Westminster Theological Seminary

XXII. THE CROSS OF CHRIST

"O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was openly pictured as crucified"—(Gal. 3:1, in a literal translation).

The Divisions of the Epistle

WE have finished our consideration of the first main division of the Epistle, in which, in Gal. 1:11—2:21, Paul defends his independent apostolic authority over against the contention of the Judaizers that he was an apostle only through the mediation of those who had been apostles before him. Now we turn to the second main division, embracing the central portion of the Epistle from Gal. 3:1 to Gal. 5:12, in which Paul defends the *content* of his gospel of free grace as over against the Judaizers' contention that faith, in the attainment of salvation, must be supplemented by works.

But the divisions in the Pauline Epistles are not always easy to make; and so, in the present case, Paul's account of his meeting with Peter, which we have just been studying, belongs as much to the second main division of the Epistle as to the first. No doubt it is a part of the Apostle's defence of his independent apostolic authority: so independent was he, he says, that on one occasion he could even withstand the chief of the original apostles himself. But what he said to Peter on that past occasion at Antioch was the very thing that he wanted to say also now to those converts in the Galatian churches. So the passage Gal. 2:11-21 contains the very heart of that gospel of free grace which Paul is going on to defend in the following section of the Epistle.

How Did Peter Respond?

The fact that Gal. 2:11-21, especially in the latter part of the passage, contains what Paul was desiring to say now to the Galatians may help to explain

why we are not told how Peter took the rebuke which was given him at Antioch and what the result of the scene was. The silence of the Apostle about this matter has seemed to some scholars to leave room for very serious conclusions as to the history of the apostolic age. If Peter had been convinced by Paul's argument, why did not Paul point in triumph to so gratifying a conclusion of the Antioch scene? The real result of the scene—so the contention of these scholars runs—must have been far less edifying, and what really resulted was a permanent breach or at least coolness between Paul on the one hand and the Jerusalem apostles on the other.

With regard to this well-known contention of the "Tübingen school" of New Testament critics, it may be said, in the first place, that the notion of a permanent conflict of principle between Paul and Peter is contradicted by passages, written long after this Antioch scene, in which Paul refers to Peter with the utmost respect (I Cor. 3:22, 9:5, 15:5): it is contradicted, in the second place, by the entire subsequent history of the Christian Church, which is quite incomprehensible if there was a permanent breach between the apostles at the beginning; it is contradicted, in the third place, expressly by I Cor. 15:11, where Paul distinctly says that his gospel was the same as that of the original apostles; finally, it is contradicted by the very passage, Gal. 2:11-21, which is appealed to most confidently in favor of it, since in this passage Paul insists that his *principles* were the same as Peter's and objects only to Peter's inconsistency in the application of those principles.

Why Paul Does Not Tell

But—to return to the immediate point under discussion—why does not Paul complete the story of the Antioch scene if the end of the story was as edifying

as we have just tried to make it out to be; if Peter was really convinced by what Paul said to him at Antioch, why does not Paul say so in triumph in our Epistle?

Of course, it may be said, in general, in answer to such questions, that the Galatian readers probably knew many things that modern readers do not know; very probably they knew perfectly well that there was no permanent breach between Paul and Peter, so that it was not necessary for their attention to be called to that fact in this Epistle.

But something more definite can be said in explanation of Paul's silence regarding the outcome of the Antioch scene. The plain fact is that before the Apostle has finished his account of what he said to Peter at Antioch he is thinking far more of the present effect of his words upon the Galatian readers than of the effect of them long ago at Antioch. In the passage which we studied last month he has been upon the very heights; as the fine old eighteenth-century commentator, Bengel, remarked, the contents of that passage may be called "the sum and marrow of Christianity." Paul has been pouring out his very soul in that passage; he has been celebrating the glories of the Cross of Christ. For him to have returned after that passage to the details of what had happened at Antioch would have been almost pedantic. What he is thinking of as he pens those glorious words, at the end of the second chapter of Galatians is the unspeakable grace of God contrasted with the fact that his beloved converts in Galatia have turned their back upon it and have done despite to the Cross of Christ. No wonder that he refrains from rehearsing pedantically what the Galatians probably already knew about the results of the Antioch scene; no wonder that, instead, he breaks out in the words, "O foolish Galatians,

who hath bewitched you?" "You have had bestowed upon you all the marvels of the free grace of God; you have received new life through the Cross of Christ; yet you are making it all of none effect in order to try to earn by your own miserable works what Christ has purchased for you by His blood. Who hath bewitched you to make you turn your back upon so great salvation?"

The Missionary Preaching of Paul

"Who hath bewitched you," says Paul, "before whose eyes Jesus Christ was openly pictured as crucified." Here we have one of the precious references in the Pauline Epistles to the missionary preaching of the Apostle as distinguished from the instruction which he gave to Christian people. There are many things that we do not know about the missionary preaching of Paul, since the Epistles are addressed not to the unconverted but to Christians and since the Book of Acts gives us only brief examples of the Apostle's preaching to the unconverted world; but one thing we do know about it—we do know that at the very heart of it was the Cross of Christ. "The story of the crucifixion," Paul says in our passage, if we may paraphrase his words, "was made so vivid and so plain in my first preaching among you that it was as though a great picture of Christ on the cross were being held up before your eyes, or [if we adopt a different interpretation of the word that is figuratively used] as though a great placard were being held up before you with the words on it, 'Jesus Christ crucified.'"

Of course, this story of the Cross was not presented by the Apostle merely as an inspiring story of a holy martyrdom; but it was presented as something that had profound meaning for those to whom it was proclaimed. "Christ died for your sins," said Paul to those unconverted people in the Galatian cities.

Should Doctrine Be Preached to the Unconverted?

According to the tendency of religious work which is prevalent at the present day, Christian doctrine, including the central doctrine of the atonement, is to be presented to people, if at all, after

rather than before they have been saved. The advocates of this method sometimes have kind things to say about doctrine; it is necessary, they admit, in its proper place. A man who has already entered upon holy living, some of them no doubt say, will go on to study his Bible and will attain an ever more correct view of Christ and of the meaning of Christ's death. But at the beginning all that, it is held, is unnecessary; at the beginning all that is needed is surrender of the human will. What a man needs to do first, it is thought, is to put away his sin by his own act of surrender; there is time enough later for doctrinal instruction.

Whether that non-doctrinal, anti-intellectualistic method of religious work is right or wrong, it may be observed at any rate that it is quite contrary to the New Testament from beginning to end. The New Testament does not, in the manner of these modern religious workers, offer a man salvation first and then preach the gospel to him afterwards; but it preaches the gospel to him first—with the blessed doctrine of the atonement at the centre of it—and then, through his acceptance of that gospel, it brings salvation to his soul. It was to unconverted people that Paul preached in Galatia the message of the Cross of Christ; and when they accepted that message—that "doctrine"—they were saved.

Presbyterian Pelagianism (Continued)

wicked, depraved little sinners, who needed the cleansing grace of the Holy Spirit. Both Pelagianism and Augustinianism were taught that day in the Hollow. But the Presbyterian "Seminole" preached the Pelagianism; the Methodist brother supplied the Augustinianism.

Consider the average appeal made to the college man to accept Christ. Utterly oblivious to the Reformation doctrine that "faith is a certainty," the speaker begins with the assurance that Christian faith cannot be scientifically validated or historically vindicated as other truths are verified. Then he appeals to the student to exercise his good

will, and by the plenary ability of his autonomous will to throw himself on the side of Christ. Faith is presented as a glorious venture made by the will-to-believe, betting one's life that there is a God. This form of appeal has developed a considerable tradition. With such names as Donald Hankey, William James, Fichte, Kant, Erasmus, William of Occam and Pelagius, it might be said to constitute a "liberal" orthodoxy. Perhaps it is about time for Karl Barth and Reinhold Niebuhr to remind those who are cutting these ruts deeper than the free, autonomous will with plenary ability has fared worse at the hands of modern psychology than even at the hands of Calvinists. Indeed, Barth declares that if we are to have any will at all we get it by positing our freedom on the royal freedom of the Sovereign God. With biting irony Barth describes an ecclesiastical machinery with young people's programs well prepared to keep good people good or even to make them better. The magnificent response which German youth has thus far given Barth's own proclamation of the brokenness of man's will and the sinfulness of his self-affirmation would serve to indicate that he has approached a bit closer to the hard facts of human psychology by leaving the ruts of "liberalism." From personal observation and information the writer can testify to the wonderful response which the youth of the Southeast and the youth of the Southwest have given Dr. "Bill" (W. M.) Anderson's presentation of the Biblical portrait of man and his need. Youth needs something more than the unsuspected resources of spiritual power in his own soul; the latent energies of his own will. He needs the supernatural, inward, purging, regenerating and renewing grace of the living God. He needs to have the heart of stone taken away, to be created anew in Christ Jesus, to have the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost. The actual young man one faces across the pulpit of a college chapel needs the Gospel of a God Almighty enough to make a bad man good, preached by a man who repents of his own sins while he calls others to repentance.

Once more, Pelagianism shows itself