**THE FUNDAMENTALS: A TESTIMONY TO THE TRUTH**

**VOLUME 4; CHAPTER 15. THE APOLOGETIC VALUE OF PAUL'S EPISTLES**

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"Paul is the greatest literary figure in the New Testament; round him all its burning questions lie." "There is nothing more certain in ancient literature than the authorship of the more important of the Pauline epistles." These utterances of Dr. Fairbairn in his "Philosophy of the Christian Religion" bring us face to face with the apologetic value of the writings of the Apostle to the Gentiles. The oldest Pauline epistle is divided by little more than twenty years from the death of them Christ, and by a still shorter interval from the Epistle to the Hebrews and Apocalypse; so that Paul's interpretation of the Christ has a distinct bearing upon the Gospels and later Christian literature.

In this paper we shall deal only with four epistles which in are acknowledged by Biblical critics of all schools as undoubtedly genuine; viz., Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians and Romans. The four epistles in question have the advantage of being more or less controversial in their nature. who Debate leads to clearness of statement, and we have the advantage of hearing the words of Paul as well as of understanding the views of those against whom he contends. The controversy in these epistles concerns the nature and destination of Christianity, and consequently we may expect to learn what Paul deemed central and essential in the Christian faith. There is enough Christology in these epistles to show us what Paul thought concerning the Great Founder of Christianity. Moreover there are, in these writings, references to the solemn crisis-experience in his spiritual history, and these of necessity have a bearing upon Luke's letters to Theophilus, which are popularly known as the Gospel of Luke and The Acts of the Apostles. With such clues to follow we are able to argue for the credibility of the other New Testament documents, and also for the accuracy of the portrait painted of its central figure, the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Our first argument has to do with The Apologetic Value of the References, in Paul's Epistles, to his Christian Experience.**

His theology is an outgrowth of his experience. His thinking is remarkably autobiographical. He resembles Luther in this respect as a religious teacher. His thinking is colored by the age in which he lives, and in such words as law, righteousness, justification, adoption, flesh, spirit, there is undying interest, if we remember the intense, tragic, moral struggle lying behind Paul's theology.

The passages in these four epistles, which exhibit most conspicuously the autobiographical character, occur in the in first chapter of the Epistle to the Galatians and the seventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. From the former we learn that he belonged to a class which was thoroughly antagonistic to Jesus. His religion was Judaism. He was an enthusiastic in it. He says: "I advanced in the Jew's religion beyond many of mine own age among my countrymen, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers." In other words he was a Pharisee of the most extreme type. His great aim in life was to become legally righteous, and thus all his prejudices were most strongly opposed to the new teaching. In the seventh chapter of Romans we learn that Paul in time made a great discovery. One of the commandments, the tenth, forbids coveting; and so he learned that a mere feeling, a state of the heart, is condemned as sin. In that hour his Pharisaism was doomed. "When the commandment came sin revived and I died." He discovered a world of sin within of which he had not dreamed, and legal righteousness seemed unattainable. That was a great step towards Christianity. He had been trying to satisfy the hunger of his soul with legal ordinances; he found them chaff, not wheat, and so he sought for true nourishment. Eventually he became a convert to Christianity. The Pauline letters give no detailed account of the memorable event like the narratives contained in the Book of the Acts. The main feature of the story is referred to in 1 Cor. 15:8 where the Apostle enumerates the different appearances of the risen Christ: "Last of all He was seen of me also."

Paul's conversion is one of the hard problems for those who undertake to give a purely naturalistic solution of the origins of Christianity. All attempts to explain it without recognizing the hand of God in it must be futile. He himself says devoutly concerning it: "It was the good pleasure of God ... to reveal His Son in me." This argues that Christianity is a supernatural religion.

When a religious crisis comes to a man of Paul's type it possesses deep significance. For him to become a Christian meant everything. It meant to leap into a large cosmopolitan idea of Christianity, its nature and destination. He saw that all was over with Judaism and its legal righteousness, all over with the law itself as a way of salvation; that salvation must come to man through the grace of God, and that it might come through that channel to all men alike on equal terms, and that therefore the Jewish prerogative was at an end. These consequences are all borne out in the biographical notice in the first chapters of Galatians.

It can easily be seen that if the accounts of Paul's conversion in the epistles be accepted, they lend support and give value to the accounts in the Acts of the Apostles; that the consequences of that conversion as previously indicated are in entire harmony with the teaching of the latter part of the Acts, and so we must come to the conclusion that the contents of that book are trustworthy whether Luke be the author or not. And since the Acts of the Apostles purports to be a continuation of the Gospel of Luke, we are led to conclude that the Gospel must be trustworthy also, and that all the Synoptists set forth real facts. Such a conclusion involves the historicity of Jesus Christ.

**Our second argument is concerned with The Apologetic Value of the References in Paul's Epistles to the Person of Christ.**

The conversion of Paul admitted as a fact, we have seen that it leads back by degrees to the fact of Christ. But what sort of a Christ? The reader will be struck with the fact that, in these Epistles,

**The Earthly Life of the Christ is Represented as Singularly Free from the Miraculous.**

He is born of a woman, born under the law (Gal. 4:4); He springs from Israel, and is, according to the flesh, from the tribe of Judah and the seed of David (Rom. 9:5; 1:3); He is unknown to the princes of this world (1 Cor. 2:8); He is poor, hated, persecuted, crucified (2 Cor. 8:9; Gal. 6:14; 1 Cor. 1:23-25; 2:2); He is betrayed at night just after He has instituted the supper (1 Cor. 15:23); He dies on the cross, to which He had been fastened with nails, and is buried (1 Cor. 15:3, 4). This account it will be seen is at one with that of the Synoptists, with the exception that we do not hear of a supernatural birth, nor is there any emphasis placed upon supernatural works. In its main outlines the portrait of the man Jesus agrees perfectly with that of the Synoptic Gospels, and lends credence to the history of the Galilean Prophet. On the other hand,

**Christ is Represented as a Being of Ideal Majesty.**

The doctrine of Christ's person as found in these four great epistles is no mere theological speculation; it is the outgrowth of religious experience. Jesus was, for Paul, the Lord because He was the Saviour. Four leading truths with reference to Christ are brought into prominence in his writings:

**A. In Relation to Time.**

He is God's Son who was "born of the seed of David according to the flesh". On the side of His humanity our Lord "was born." (Rom. 1:2.) That nature begins only then. He is possessed of another nature that dates back long before the incarnation. He is in a peculiar sense God's "own Son" (Rom. 8:32), belonging to Him above all others, or as Alford well says, "the only one of God's Sons who is one with Him in nature and essence, begotten of Him before all worlds." This Son was delivered up for us all. This idea is hinted at in 2 Cor. 8:9: "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor," and finds full expression in the Epistle to the Philippians (2:5-9), concerning which there is very little controversy. The straggling hints we have in the four great epistles confirm the teaching of the Letter to the Philippians, and above all the classic statement of the Fourth Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word."

**B. In Relation to Man.**

Paul says Christ was "made of a woman" (Gal. 4:4), and that He was sent into the world "in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Rom. 8:3); that is, He came into the world by birth and bore to the eye the aspect of any ordinary man. But though Christ came in the likeness of sinful flesh, He was not a sinner. He "knew no sin" (2 Cor. 5:21). The mind that was in Him before He came ruled His life after He came. However, Paul regards the resurrection as constituting an important crisis in the experience of Christ. Thereby He was declared to be the Son of God with power (Rom. 1:4), "the man from heaven" (1 Cor. 15:47); and yet to Paul, Jesus is a real man, a Jew with Hebrew blood in His veins, a descendant of David. The portrait thus painted agrees perfectly with that of the Evangelists who depict Him as a real man, but, in some strange fashion, different from other men. "His soul was like a star and dwelt apart."

The Son of David was, for Paul, moreover, "The second man" (1 Cor. 15:47). This title points out Christ as one who has, for His vocation, to undo the mischief wrought by the transgression of the first man. Hence He is called, in sharp contrast to the first man Adam, "a quickening spirit" (1 Cor. 15:45). As the one brought death into the world, so the other brings life (1 Cor. 15:22); and this teaching agrees with the declaration of the Synoptists: "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost;" "Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins."

**C. In Relation to the Universe.**

He is represented in the Epistle to the Colossians as the Firstborn of all creation, as the Originator of creation as well as its final cause, all things in heaven and on earth visible and invisible, angels included, being made by Him and for Him (Col. 1:15-16). This goes beyond anything found in the four great epistles, yet we may find rudiments of a cosmic doctrine even in these letters. For Paul it was an axiom that the universe has its final aim in Christ its King. (See 1 Cor. 8:6.)

**D. In Relation to God.**

Paul applies two titles to Christ, "the Son of God" and "the Lord." Both of these titles are combined in the introduction of the Epistle to the Romans, "His Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord." He is "declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by a resurrection of the dead" (Rom. 1:4). The most convincing proof of the divinity of Christ Paul found in the resurrection. Writing to the Corinthians he says: "If Christ hath not been raised then is our preaching vain - your faith is vain, ye are yet in your sins" (1 Cor. 15:14-17). He submits to them the proof of his Apostleship in the fact that he has seen "Jesus our Lord" (1 Cor. 9:1). He tells the Galatians that his gospel came "through revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal. 1:12), and that Gospel, according to 1 Cor. 15:3-8, contains five elementary facts:

1. Christ died for our sins;
2. He was buried;
3. He rose on the third day;
4. He appeared to many disciples, and
5. Last of all, He appeared to Paul himself.

These are the things that are vital in Paul's preaching. When we remember that, as a Pharisee, his prejudices were all against the Gospel, we must come to the conclusion that Paul's testimony argues most strongly for the historicity of the resurrection and the truths involved therein.

It may not be out of place to re-iterate what has already been stated regarding Paul's use of the expression, "His own Son," in Rom. 8:3. This passage deals with the brotherhood of sons. Jesus, amid the multitudes having the right to call themselves sons of God, is an unique figure, towering above them all. In 2 Cor. 4:4 it is stated that Christ is the image of God, and in Rom. 8:29 it is said that the destiny of believers is to be conformed to the image of God's Son. The ideal for Christians is to bear the image of Christ. For Christ Himself is reserved the distinction of being the image of God. This throws a side light upon Paul's idea of Christ's sonship.

He is represented as the one Lord by whom or on account of whom are all things (1 Cor. 8:6). According as accepted as the reading, Jesus is the Creator of all things or furnishes the Divine reason for creation. The groaning of the creation in labor for the bringing forth of a new redeemed world is a graphic picture of the relation of Christ's redemptive work to the physical universe. (Rom. 8:22.) It is true that this teaching goes beyond that of the Gospels in some particulars, but it agrees with John's Gospel when it teaches the creatorship of the Logos. (John 1:3.)

In 1 Cor. 8:5, 6, the term "Lord" gains equal significance to that of "Son". In view of pagan polytheism, the Apostle sets one over against the many of paganism, and one real Lord over against all. It would seem by this inscription that the Apostle desired to introduce Christ into the sphere of the truly Divine.

The famous benediction at the close of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians implies a very high conception of Christ's person and position. One could scarcely believe that Paul would use such a collocation of phrases as the grace of the Lord Jesus, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, unless Christ had been for him a Divine Being, even God. Now all this simply adds force to John's prologue: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

The four great Pauline epistles agree, in the most important details, with the portraiture given us of Jesus in the Gospels. The conception of the person of Christ, as we have already shown, was not natural to Paul. He was a bitter opponent of Christianity. It was not the result of gradually changing convictions regarding the claims of Jesus Christ - all the testimony which bears upon the subject implies the contrary. It was not due to extreme mysticism, for Paul's writings impress us as being remarkably sane and logical. No endeavor to account for it upon merely natural grounds is satisfactory, and so we must accept his own statement of the case. The truth of the Messiahship of Jesus was a matter of revelation in the experience of his conversion, and if we accept that, we must necessarily accept all that it involves. The Gospels and Epistles do not contradict, but only supplement this protraiture. They add lines of beauty to the rugged outline painted by Paul, and are inextricably connected with the four great epistles. Accepting these letters as genuine and Paul's explanation of his doctrine as true, we must accept the whole of the New Testament documents as credible, and the portraiture of the Christ as that of a real person - Son of man and Son of God, the God-Man.