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THE APOSTLE PAUL'S THEME

By: Dr. C. D. Cole

I Corinthians 2:2, *“For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.”*

Introduction: Paul, in the context, gives us a little autobiographical glimpse, which is confirmed by some references in the Acts of the Apostles. I Corinthians 2:3, *“...And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling.”* There seems to have been a singular period of silence; apparent abandonment of his work and a spirit of dejection; about the time Paul came to Corinth. The reasons for his feeling are obvious. He had but recently arrived in Europe for the first time, and many of his experiences had been very discouraging. He had been imprisoned at Philippi; he had been smuggled away by night from Thessalonica; he had been hounded from Berea; he had almost failed to make any impression at all in Athens. And alone he came to Corinth, where he lay quiet for a while and took stock of his adversaries. In quiet meditation he came to the conclusion recorded in our text. The question of his future course pressed upon him, and in Divine strength and wisdom he determined to know nothing in Corinth but Christ and Him crucified.

This purpose was not formed in ignorance of conditions in Corinth.

PAUL'S THEME

Notice the exclusiveness of Paul's theme. “Nothing but.” His theme was the biography of a man, with special emphasis laid on one act in His history; His death. The development of this expression leads to the very heart of the

Gospel. Let it be fixed in the mind once forever that it takes something more than the bare facts of the life and death of Christ to constitute the Gospel. Now be careful to not divorce this sentence from the next one I am to utter, namely, that it takes Paul's conception or theory of these facts to make the Gospel. Unless you hold to Paul's commentary on these bare facts, you will miss the Gospel. Theory is of much importance here. You may believe the historical facts of the life and death of Christ, and hold a false theory concerning them. And to do so is fatal. Let us observe some of these false theories, before noticing the true theory.

The theory that Christ lived and died as an example. There is no Gospel in this theory of the life and death of Christ. A man who is paralyzed in his lower limbs needs something more to enable him to walk than to see other men walking. A blind man needs something more than the example of others who can see. A sinner dead in trespasses and sins, needs something more than an example. No atonement here.

The moral influence theory of the atonement. According to this view, the death of Christ was only to manifest God's love to the sinner in such a way as to turn the sinner from his sins. This view denies that man's sins have incurred the wrath of God, and that Christ's death was necessary to satisfy God's justice. Nothing in God to be satisfied. The only hindrance was something in man, and God would overcome this hindrance by a manifestation of His love in the death of His Son. But if men were not in danger from the wrath of God; if there is no hell

to which God consigns sinners; then the death of Christ was not a manifestation of love but of folly. If a father should plunge himself into the water and drown himself, or thrust his hand into the fire and burn it off, this would not be a manifestation of love to his child unless it was done to save the child from drowning in the one case, or of burning in the other.

The general atonement theory. According to this theory the death of Christ was not to make the salvation of any sinner certain, but of all men possible. Christ died as much for Judas who went to hell as for Peter who went to heaven. And for millions who were already in hell when He died. Revelation 5:9, *“And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.”*

Paul's view of the death of Christ. It is sometime called the commercial theory of the atonement. Paul's commentary on the life and death of Christ is this: As for the person of Christ, he was declared to be the Son of God by the resurrection from the dead. As to His death, he died for our sins according to the Scriptures. Galatians 3:13, *“Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.”* I Peter 2:24,

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CHRIST AND SINNERS

By: Dr. C. D. Cole

Matthew 21:31, "Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you."

I Timothy 1:15, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief."

Christ's mission to this earth has no parallel in human history. He came here in the interest of sinners. He came to a world that was in rebellion against the government of God. It is the usual thing that when a people rebel against their government that the government sends armed forces to put down the rebellion. Empires like Great Britain have had much trouble with rebellious provinces like India and Ireland and other lands under the British flag.

John 3:17, "For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world: but that the world through him might be saved."

INTEREST IN SINNERS

Christ is interested in nobody on this earth but sinners.

Illustrated during His earthly ministry. Even before His birth it was apparent that His mission to earth had to do with sinners. Matthew 1:21, "And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins."

At his entrance upon His public ministry He went down into the Jordan, the river of death, not because He needed to repent, but because the people He came to save were struggling in the dark waters of the river of judgment, and He would become identified with them as their

You do not have to go and commit some foul deed in order to become a sinner; you are already a sinner, and a bigger sinner than you realize. I Corinthians 6:9-10, "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor

substitute "to fulfill all righteousness." Matthew 3:13-15, "Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness, Then he suffered him."

He was called the friends of publicans and sinners. He could be terribly severe in His denunciation of learned scribes and Pharisees, crying out, ye serpents, ye generation of vipers! How can ye escape the damnation of hell? Matthew 3:7, "But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

Matthew 21:31, "...Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you." But He never spurned the vilest sinners from His feet nor refused even once to grant the petition for mercy and pardon.

Luke 18:9-14, "And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

Our Lord began his marvelous *extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.*" But there is hope. Verse 11, "And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." And you do not have to steal and kill in order to feel that you are a mighty sinner. If you will pardon this personal reference: I have never been what the world would call a big sinner, but I feel myself to be a

ministry by saving sinners, and the last thing He did, as He closes His ministry amid the agonies of a horrible and shameful death, was to save a sinner. Luke 23:39-43, "And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise."

If there is a good man, (I use goodness in its absolute and sinless sense) I can assure you that Jesus Christ has nothing to do with him, and that He is not interested in him.

He is the physician of the soul. Matthew 9:10-13, "And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners? But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

Salvation of sinners does not put a premium on sin, but it magnifies the grace and mercy of God. Salvation by grace does not make void the law but rather establishes the law. Romans 3:31, "Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law."

terrible sinner, and at times I literally cry out "O wretched man that I am."

ARE YOU A SINNER?

None except those who feel themselves to be sinners will have any use for Christ in the only office in which they need Him. Some are interested in Him as a good man; but as a good man, he is the condemnation of every other man. Some regard Him as an example to follow, but

he saves no man by setting a pattern to live by. The one office of Christ in which sinners need him is that of priest who gave himself a sacrifice for sin. Hebrews 9:26, *“For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.”* Hebrews 10:10-12, *“By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once. And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, after he had offered once sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God.”*

A dying robber was seen on a cross near the Son of God, who was nailed to another cross. Brought together in suffering but separated in every other respect by a boundless distance. But the dying culprit was awakened to a sense of his appalling condition. He first confessed his fear of God; then he confessed that his condemnation was just; then he confessed in the face of the Jewish Sanhedrim, that Christ had done nothing amiss, then he confessed him as Lord; then he cried, *“remember me, when thou comest into thy kingdom.”*

If a man does not accept the fact that he is a sinner, of course he will be like the malefactor who railed on Christ. Matthew 27:38-44, *“Then were there two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left. And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself, If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God. The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth.”*

“And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not...He that is of God heareth God’s words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God.”

POWER OF GOD

He attributes his success to the power of God. I Corinthians 3:5, *“...even as the Lord gave to every man?”* Paul could preach the Gospel, but he could not give

to men the disposition to believe it. He had to look to God to do this. He preached the Gospel indiscriminately to both Jew and Greek, but to the Jews his Gospel was a stumbling block, and to the Greeks it was foolishness, but there was another class, made up of both Jew and Greek denominated the called, and to them Paul’s Gospel was the power of God and the wisdom of God. Somebody has said that the way to catch fish is to give them the kind of bait they want. But we need to take care in comparing this to the gospel ministry. There are different kinds of bait used in fishing, but there are not different gospels to be used in fishing for men. Paul used the same bait for all kinds of men, and lots of them would not bite, while others took the cork under, and were caught. The gospel bait angered the Jews and made them want to kill Paul; the Greeks laughed at it as a piece of foolishness. That is the Jews and Greeks left to themselves; in their natural state, but the Jews and Greeks who were called, that is those in whose heart the grace of God wrought, believed. Changing the figure from fish to sheep, we are told that it is the sheep that hear Christ’s voice. When we preach the gospel, the sheep will hear and believe. John 10:16, 26, 27, *“And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd...But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.”*

One trouble with our churches is that there has been too many different kinds of bait used.

Christ’s sheep have two marks: One in their ears, *“They hear my voice;”* And one in their feet, *“They follow me.”*

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“Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.” Hebrews 9:26, *“For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.”* II Corinthians 5:21, *“For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”*

CONTRARY TO POPULAR OPINION

The apostle preached contrary to popular opinion. He did not surrender to the demands of the people. Here is the acid test of the preacher’s loyalty to Christ; is he willing to preach the truth in the face of opposition?

The Jews required a sign, or miracle. They wanted something visible; a visible priest; a visible sacrifice. The Jews were the ceremonialist of their day. They thought salvation was in the observance of ceremonies. Ceremonialism is a great enemy of the Gospel today. The Roman Catholic church stands at the head of the Sacramental system, but she has many followers outside her fold. *“The first Sacrament is Baptism, which, as the Church teaches, cleanses us from original sin and makes us the children of God.”* (Tract written by W. M. Collins and distributed by the International Catholic Truth Society.)

The Greeks sought after wisdom. The Greeks were the philosophers of their day. They wanted abstract principles, systemized philosophies. They have their successors today in Christian Science and New Thought, etc. But Paul proclaims a living person and an historic fact with a Divine interpretation.

WHAT WAS NEEDED

The Apostle preached what was needed. And he knew what was needed. He knew the people needed the message they did not want. And how often is this the case. The most dangerous men in the pulpit today are the men who succumb to the demands of the pew. Now, I am not saying that nobody loves the truth, but I am saying that everybody does not love the truth. The man who preaches the truth will be appreciated just in proportion as his hearers are of God. John 8:45, 47, “