

PAUL “SENT” BY JESUS

Having an unbroken continuity of descent in Paul’s letters from the day of their production down to the present day, we are justified in reading them with the attention which we should give to his voice, telephonically transmitted. What we have read this morning, is, in fact, equivalent to having Paul in our midst to utter the words. Let us consider them in this light, and see how much is involved in the very first sentence of the chapter read (1Tim. 1).

“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the commandment of God;”

Here is the character in which he introduces himself—the fact he alleges concerning himself—an apostle of Jesus Christ. Realise what this means. In our day, the word apostle, like a great many other words, has been shorn of its force by diluted meanings. You hear of the apostle of free trade, the apostle of temperance, the apostle of this, that, and the other; by which is meant the leading advocate of a particular set of ideas. This understanding of the word carries nothing with it of weight as to the truthfulness of the things advocated. It leaves a wide open door for respectful dissent. You touch your hat as it were, to, say, Richard Cobden, as the “great apostle” of his particular political theory, without allowing that his theory is necessarily a true or binding one. So when people hear of Paul an apostle of Christ, they think of a leading advocate of Christian doctrines, without any idea that his recognition in that character commits them to the reception of what he taught as being necessarily true from the fact of his apostleship. This is as far away as possible from the true understanding of the term in this case. An apostle means “one sent.” To be an apostle of Christ, is to be one sent by Christ. And if sent by Christ, then the question of truth is not debatable. It is equivalent to the term “messenger” in its official relations. The Queen’s messenger is a messenger from the Queen. The authority of what he has to communicate is not open to question. It does not rest on his opinions, or views, or good-will or intentions in any way. It rests on the fact that the Queen has authorised the message with which he is charged.

That this is the state of the case with regard to Paul’s apostleship must be apparent to anyone acquainted with the facts of the case. The objects of apostleship and the qualifications for the office are defined in a manner that leaves no room for the treatment of Paul’s teaching as an affair of Paul’s opinion, which is the common way of treating it. When a successor to Judas had to be appointed, the qualifications specified as essential consisted of personal knowledge of the facts to be declared. See what we read in Acts 1:22:

*“Of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us . . . must one be ordained to be a **witness with us** of his resurrection.”*

Now though Paul cannot be brought precisely into this category, in so far as he did not “*company with*” the disciples during the Lord’s ministry on earth, yet as regards the essential feature of personal knowledge, and personal delegation, he was “*not behind the very chieftest apostles,*” as he says,

“Last of all he (Christ) was seen of (or by) me also.”

“Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?” he enquires.

In the same breath he enquires—

“Am I not an apostle?” (1 Cor. 9:1).

He did not become an apostle as the result of a change of conviction. There was evidence enough to produce change of conviction if it had been fully under his notice. The twelve who had been the Lord’s companions before the crucifixion were before the public with their testimony to the fact of his having risen, and their testimony was accompanied by works of power which were inexplicable except on the principle of divine co-operation. There were also 500 witnesses of whom he speaks in 1 Cor. 15, the bulk of whom were alive when Paul wrote. But it was not on grounds of this kind that Paul changed from being a destroyer to being a preacher of the faith of Christ. It was because Paul saw Christ himself under the circumstances described several times in the apostolic writings. These circumstances were not in any sense of a private or secret character. They were as public as the nature of the times permitted. They transpired in the presence of official and unfriendly witnesses in the full light of day, and with the effect of leaving marks on Paul of their having occurred. Paul informs that

the Lord who appeared to him in the midst of the brightness that struck him down and blinded him outside Damascus, said to him,

*“For this purpose I have appeared unto thee, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in which I will appear unto thee, delivering thee from the people and from the Gentiles unto whom now I **send thee**”* (Acts 26:16-17).

It follows that Paul gives expression to a very solid matter of fact when he describes himself in the chapter we have read as *“an apostle of Jesus Christ.”* He is not merely defining his opinions or describing his profession or his status, as a man might now do who might call himself a minister of the Gospel. A man might be a minister of the gospel, and the gospel might be a complete myth so far as his ministership had to do with the truth of it one way or other. But a man cannot be an apostle of Christ without having seen Christ and without having been sent by him, nor therefore without the whole system of teaching that centres in Christ being a matter of truth and fact that cannot in reason be called in question. This is the rock on which we stand. Paul was sent as directly to us by Christ as Lord Dufferin was sent to Paris by Queen Victoria the other day as British Ambassador. This invests the faith of Christ with a terrible reality—a glorious reality. Men may gloze and doze over it in a dreamy way as if it were an insignificant matter of opinion. It is our part as wise men to keep awake to the fact of its reality, that we may in the present time be controlled by it with all the power which its reality will exert in every logical mind; and in the future time be incorporate with the blessed developments which will attend its manifestation at the second coming of the Lord in power and great glory.

Consider the second part of his statement: He not only declares that he is *“an apostle of Jesus Christ,”* but that it is *“by the commandment of God our Saviour.”* What a great rock is here! Standing on the apostleship of Paul, we are standing on God. It is *“by the commandment of God.”* Is it possible that our generation can recognise this, who speak so lightly of the work of Paul? Impossible. *“Much learning”* has dazed their minds and excluded *“the words of truth and sobriety.”* The air is full of views and theories that make completely void the Word of God in this respect. Human opinions and philosophies, served up with vague and elegant dogmatisms, fill the columns of the religious press with smooth things which, *“with excellence of speech and wisdom,”* draw people away from the simple truth that Paul proclaimed, namely, that we are condemned because of sin, but that it hath pleased God by what learned men consider the foolishness of Paul’s preaching to save them that believe and obey the gospel. Well, brethren, we have the honour of standing against the whole world of irrationality in this matter. It is very inconvenient, it is very difficult, the tide is against us on every hand. Everywhere and in every shape, publicly and privately, with deadly animosity or with the sweet beguilements of personal friendliness, the natural mind is acting as a disintegrating force against the stand we maintain on the basis of the apostolic work. There is a universal revolt against the thoughts of God and the ways of wisdom. What are we to do but act on Paul’s most reasonable advice:

“Watch ye: stand fast in the faith: quit you like men, be strong.”

Our loose friends will advise differently. Their motives may be good, but their judgment is at fault. We shall do unwisely to listen. The unwisdom will be apparent to all when too late to be reversed. Our lives are flitting away like shadows across the plain. Once off the field of vision, our day is done. Life must be shaped by wisdom now to be used by wisdom afterwards. The only voice of wisdom sounding among men is in the Bible; and however odd and odious it may make us, or however much inconvenience subject us to, there is no other course of true wisdom than to stand with invincible purpose in the midst of the universal folly of mankind, giving to God that position in our lives which is His due, and to His purpose that place in our aims which its unspeakable value and uncontradictable truth entitle it to at the hands of true reason.

Paul laments that he was not always in this line of things, but *“was before, a blasphemmer and a persecutor and injurious.”* As to which, he says:

“I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.”

We may all have circumstances in the past that afford no satisfaction as we look back upon them. The use we should make of them is the use Paul made of his mistakes; he felt them as a constant spur to make up for lost time. We have been sinners, as Paul says here, but—

“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.”

And Jesus recognises the amount of sin forgiven as a reasonable measure of subsequent service in the case of the woman who “*loved much*” and was “*forgiven much*” (Luke 7:41). This is the best way to use a bad past; not to allow it to depress and hinder and obstruct, but making it a reason for specially redeeming the time that remains, by diligent and devoted service, “*and so much the more as ye see the day approaching.*” This was Paul’s policy:

“Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto the things that are before, I press towards the mark.”

This is a perfectly reasonable and enlightened policy which we are not only allowed, but commanded to imitate; for Paul informs us here that Christ had others in view in dealing with him in the way he did.

“For this cause I obtained mercy that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.”

The people, therefore, who deprecate the endeavour to imitate Paul do not speak according to wisdom, and must be left alone to what they themselves will discover to be their folly when the time comes to measure up and classify things according to Bible principles.

In these utterances, Paul was unbosoming himself to a young man. He not only declared himself a pattern for others to follow, but he advises this young man, Timothy, to make himself the same.

“Be thou an example of the believers.”

He specifies the points in which the example was to be shown: “*in word, in conversation (i.e. behaviour), in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.*” Hence, we are safe in keeping close to Timothy, however antiquated he may be considered by a polished generation that considers itself oh, so wise, but is, oh, so foolish, even according to the discernments of their own wiser prophets (e.g. Carlyle). Now this Timothy was much given up to the faith of Christ and all that was related to it, according to Paul’s description of him in Phil. 2:19-22:

“I have no man likeminded who will naturally care for your state: for all seek their own, not the things that are Jesus Christ’s, but ye know the proof of him that as a son with the father, he hath served with me in the gospel.”

This is a pretty graphic though briefly drawn portrait. It is according to Paul’s advice to him in the epistle we have been considering:

“Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them, continue in them; for in doing this, thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee.”

Again he says,

“Put the brethren in remembrance of these things.”

It may have been outside the bent of an ordinary young man to follow this cue. What then? Are we bound to take the ordinary young man, or the ordinary man at all, as a model in such things? What do men do in art and literature? Do they copy the mediocrities? Do they not aim at the masters? Why should they be less wise in much more important things? Christ has given us Paul and Timothy as illustrations of the kind of men in whom he finds satisfaction, and, however uncommon it may be to work by these illustrations, it is the thing that will be done by all who have their eyes open to the actualities exhibited in the Scriptures of truth. These men “*exercised themselves unto godliness;*” which, considering what godliness is, is a form of activity highly befitting rational beings to cultivate. They “*gave themselves wholly to the things which were Jesus Christ’s,*” which considering that Christ is alive and immortal, and appointed head of the human race and the only access to God for man, either for favour now or hope in the day when he will be the visible proprietor of the entire planet, was not more than a very reasonable thing to do, and which men in our day are guilty of the highest form of unreason in not doing. This being the example shown, it is not for us to be content at aiming to do less. It is a matter of what people call common sense. To this common sense the Creator Himself appeals when He says:

“Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear and come unto me, hear and your soul shall live and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.”

If, in disregard of this irresistible appeal of common sense, we throw in our lot with the frivolous and scornful generation around us that despise wisdom and seek delight in folly, we may have in much bitterness yet to know the truth of those other words of divine warning that say:

“Behold My servants shall eat, but ye shall be hungry; Behold My servants shall drink; but ye shall be thirsty; Behold My servants shall rejoice, but ye shall be ashamed. Behold My servants shall sing for joy of heart but ye shall cry in sorrow of heart and shall howl for vexation of spirit. And ye shall leave your name for a curse to my chosen . . . I will number you to the sword and ye shall bow down to the slaughter because when I called, ye did not answer; When I spake, ye did not hear, but did evil before mine eyes, and did choose that wherein I delighted not.”

“Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, to whom be glory both now and forever, Amen.”

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