

right action go together. The regeneration is made up of truth and righteousness.

A man cannot turn until he sees where to turn; but as soon as he sees what is right and what is wrong, he must turn from the one to the other;—from darkness and the power of Satan: 2 Cor. iv. 4; Col. i. 13; 1 John iii. 8.

To light and unto God.—God is light: 1 John i. —The gift is next described. Like the work, it is two-fold. Forgiveness of sins: Luke i. 77; Eph. i. 7, 11. Inheritance: 1 Pet. i. 4. The pardon and the inheritance go together. By faith that is in me.—These words extend to the whole clause, and imply both the pardon and the inheritance are the results of faith.

Learn.—The absolute necessity of conversion.—We see here how a man who is not vicious and immoral may yet need and undergo a conversion. We must make the same discoveries which St. Paul did, of the insufficiency of our own righteousness, and renouncing it, seek the righteousness which is of God by faith in Jesus.

III. ST. PAUL AS HE IS; Verses 19, 20. He is now a new man in Christ Jesus.

I was not disobedient.—What a complete change had passed over him. The whole bent and purpose of his life is changed. That which before he hated, he loves; that which before he esteemed and gloried in he counts but as dross: Phil.

Herein lies the proof of the reality of conversion, not in profession, but in obedience.

First. Damascus.—Where he had given greatest offence, there he begins to remove it; where he had sought glory as a persecutor he comes as an ambassador for Jesus. At Jerusalem—the holy, the beloved city. The sphere of his work enlarges—Judea—the Gentiles.

Compare verse 20 with verse 18. Observe the three elements of Christian life: Repent—turn from sin: Acts iii. 19; xvii. 30. Turn to God—by faith. Do works worthy of repentance—good works, as the effects and proofs of genuine conversion. They are fruits of the new life: Matt. iii. 8; Jas. ii. 20, 26; Eph. v. 22.

A changed heart is manifested by a changed life. The purpose of that changed life is fulfilled in obedience to God and loving service to men in the work God has given us to do.

SUGGESTIVE TOPICS.

The policy of Felix—his successor—the Jews' ardor—Festus' course—Paul's firmness—Agrippa's visit—his wish—his fitness to judge—the argument—its three parts—first—second—third—his change—how effected—his obedience to the command—the lessons.

EXPLANATORY NOTES.

1. The Agrippa of this passage was Herod Agrippa II., son of Herod Agrippa I. (the Herod of chap. xii.). He only reigned over the northern parts of his father's kingdom, Iturea, Abilene, etc. The original kingdom of Herod the Great (the Herod of Matt. ii.) was divided on his death among his sons, one portion, Judaea, coming soon after under the direct Roman rule of Pilate and other governors (see Luke iii. 1). All these petty provinces were reunited under Herod Agrippa I., but again divided at his death: Judaea, Samaria, and part of Galilee, being retained by the Romans and governed by Felix, Festus, etc., and the rest being given to the young Agrippa. Though zealously devoted to Judaism, Agrippa was distrusted by the Jews on account of his Roman tastes and sympathies; and when the last war broke out, which he vainly attempted to prevent, he sided with the Romans, and took part in the siege of Jerusalem.

2. Because Felix was the brother of Agrippa, as was also Drusilla. She was very beautiful, and the history of her life is a succession of scandals. Titus, the conqueror of Jerusalem, wished to make her his empress, but even a Roman populace was roused to indignation by the proposal, and it was abandoned.

3. Black and white stones were used for voting. If the person was to be condemned a black stone was given. Some suppose that Paul was a member of the Sanhedrim and voted with the other judges. But the phrase is frequently used metaphorically. Paul took an active part in the persecution of the Christians.—Gloag.

4. The imperfect tense here used and rendered "compelled," expresses only the "attempt," without respect to the success or otherwise. Pliny, the proconsul of Bithynia, in his letter to the Emperor Trajan, about A.D. 102, writes that it was required of the Christians to blaspheme Christ, but that none who were truly such could be compelled to do it. Unto outside (foreign) cities, cities outside of Judea. It is not unlikely that he pursued the Christians from place to place on the way to Damascus, and that city is mentioned because there it was that he was arrested.

5. No doubt this light was the *Shekinah*,—a glorious presence of Jehovah,—that was seen by Moses in the burning bush, shone in the pillar of fire, dwelt in the tabernacle and temple, and reappeared at Bethlehem to the shepherds.—Bonar.

LESSON XLVII.

Nov. 18, } ALMOST PERSUADED. { Acts xxvi. 1877. } 21-29

GOLDEN TEXT:—"Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian."—Acts xxvi. 28.

HOME STUDIES.

M. Isa. liii. 1-12. The suffering Saviour.
T. Dan. ix. 20-27. Suffering for others.
W. Acts ii. 22-36. Raised to life.
Th. Zech. xiii. 1-9. Cleansing from sin.
F. Isa. xlii. 1-16. Opening blind eyes.
S. Isa. xlix. 1-13. A light to the Gentiles.
S. Acts xxvi. 20-29. A light to all people.

HELPS TO STUDY.

Our lesson brings before us three personages. The first towers above the others in moral greatness.

I. THE FAITHFUL WITNESS, Verses 21-23.

For these causes—which are stated at length in the preceding verses. We learn from them why the Jews went about to kill Paul. It was because he was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. He had received Jesus as the Messiah, and his faith improved their unbelief. He had even openly and boldly exposed their guilt in slaying Jesus, and had exhorted them to repent. This they could not bear. Their pride was touched; and what was even worse, he had gone to the Gentiles, and proclaimed to them the blessings of salvation, opening up to them all the blessings of the kingdom which the Jews had claimed for themselves. So it is that when sin is rebuked and real good is being done, the world finds fault, John vii. 7. From the cause of his trials, Paul passes quickly to the source of his strength.

Having obtained help of God: Ps. lxxv. 12; cxviii. 13; cxxiv. 8.

In how many ways had the Lord interposed for his deliverance! even the powers of this world he had made use of for his servant's safety: 1 Tim. iii. 11.

I continue unto this day,—in spite of all the craft and violence of his adversaries. He stood because the Lord stood with him: 2 Tim. iv. 17. Man is immortal till his work is done. We can do nothing without Christ: John xv. 5; but by Him Paul declares he can do all things: 2 Cor. xii. 9; Phil. iv. 13. Paul was preserved to do his work. His work was witnessing for Christ, and he was a faithful witness. He bore his testimony to all, both small and great; he neither despised the one nor feared the other: Acts xx. 21; Col. i. 28. Alike to the chief of Asia and of Athens, and to the poor women of Philippi he carried his message. He was a faithful witness, too, because his testimony was in accordance with the Scriptures of the Old Testament: out of these he reasoned: Acts xvii. 2, 3.

The Old Testament is in harmony with the New. A knowledge of both is essential. There is a wonderful correspondence between them, and both testify of Christ, who Himself appealed to Moses and the prophets: Luke xxiv. 27; John v. 40.

The subject of the apostle's testimony is set before us under three heads:

(1) That Christ should suffer.

The lowly condition, sufferings and death of Jesus were the great stumbling-block to the Jews—the chief obstacle to them receiving Him as the Messiah. Paul seeks to remove this obstacle by proving from the prophets that the Messiah was to suffer: Isa. liii. 7, 8; Dan. ix. 26; Zech. xii. 10.

(2) That Christ should be the first that should rise from the dead.

Literally it is: "The first from the resurrection of the dead." He was so called not because He was the first who rose, although He was the first to rise never to be overcome again by death, but especially because He was the cause of the resurrection—the Prince of Life: 1 Cor. xv. 20; Col. i. 18; Rev. i. 5. Compare Ps. xvi. 10 with Acts ii. 25-31.

(3) That Christ should show light unto the people and to the Gentiles: Isa. ix. 2; xlii. 16; xlv. 6; Jer. 2; Luke ii. 32; Matt. iv. 16; 2 Tim. i. 10.

Paul proved that in preaching the gospel to the Gentiles he was only acting in accordance with the predictions of the prophets.

II. THE MISTAKEN GOVERNOR: Verses 24, 25.

Festus listened patiently, as did the Athenians, Acts — until the apostle spoke of the resurrection. Then he suddenly and fiercely interrupted him, calling out, "Thou art mad, Paul! Much learning is turning thee to madness." Very probably the apostle read many books during his imprisonment, 2 Tim. iv. 13, and the governor thinks they have turned his brain. How many, like Festus, think a man is mad whenever he becomes in real earnest about religion. But which one of the two is mad? One or the other must be. The Gospel seems foolishness unto Festus, because his eyes are blinded, 1 Cor. i. 23; ii. 14; 2 Cor. iv. 4. St. Paul's answer is not that of a madman; it is calm, courteous, and reasonable. Oh that Christians would learn to imitate the apostle, and even when they meet with rudeness and insolence, behave with moderation. Most noble Festus! There is no flattery or weakness here; but a thrill of tenderness and sympathy runs through the words. St. Paul feels for the governor, and makes allowance for his temptations. The words of truth—not mere fancies—and soberness—not the extravagances of madness. Sin is madness; then only a man comes to himself when he arises and goes in penitence and trust to his Father: Luke xv. 17.

III. AN UNDECIDED KING, Verses 26-29.

St. Paul turns for confirmation of his words to Agrippa. Festus, a Roman, might be ignorant; but the King, a Jew, knoweth of these things, for they were not done in a corner, but in Jerusalem itself and during the paschal week the death and resurrection of Christ took place. And so St. Paul's former life and sudden conversion were well known.

By a sudden and skilful question Paul brings the truth home to the conscience of the pleasure-loving king. King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? He professed to be a Jew, and must therefore have at the same time professed to believe in the prophets. I know that thou believest. From this it would appear that Agrippa had really given some proof of thoughtfulness, if not of faith. Under the cover of assumed indifference there were perhaps workings of conscience and anxious questionings.

Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.—Various explanations have been given of these words. See Note. They are no doubt to a certain extent ironical; but the irony seems to have been assumed to conceal his real feelings. Paul's speech seems to have made some impression upon him, but he was unwilling to show this before those by whom he was surrounded. St. Paul's response is a right noble one—almost and altogether. These words correspond to those of Agrippa; whatever meaning we give the one we must give the other. Such as I am, except these bonds.—What emphasis would his fettered hands give to these words. They were a masterpiece of true eloquence. They make manifest

The magnanimity of Paul; he wished those who un-

justly kept him imprisoned nothing but good in return for evil.

The yearning of his heart for the salvation of men, even of his persecutors.

The blessedness of true religion.—Years before, Paul had resolved to count all things but loss for Christ. His resolution cost him everything which the world accounts desirable, but not for an instant does he regret his decision. The blessedness of Christ's love so outweighs all the evils he endures that he can have no better or higher wish for others than that they were Christians. Christians ever desire others to be Christians, only better and happier Christians than themselves.

Who is the freeman—Paul, or the governor and king before whom he stands? He is the freeman whom the truth makes free. Paul has fettered hands; these men have fettered hearts. They are slaves, slaves of sin; as once was the apostle. For "whosoever committeth sin is the slave of sin": John viii. 34; "taken captive by the devil": 2 Tim. ii. 26; "in the bondage of corruption": Rom. vii. 21; 2 Pet. ii. 19. How many slaves are there to bad habits, slaves who shout "Britons never shall be slaves!"

Paul was made free by the truth: John viii. 32, 36. He is still a freeman, though bound; he is free from sin, yet the slave of righteousness: Rom. vi. 14, 18, 22; viii. 2, 15. He is the slave of Christ: Rom. i. 1; but he has found His "yoke easy," (Matt. xi. 30).

Now Paul would wish for you the very same thing that he wished for Agrippa. Not that you might have fetters on your hands; but that "except the bonds," you might be what he was.

Which of you are not what he was? Those who have fettered hearts, like Festus and Agrippa. Some of you are like Festus—don't understand religion—dislike it—despise those who love and serve Christ. Some like Agrippa—feel all we tell you is true—know the right and good thing would be to "be a Christian," i.e., a real one—but somehow can't. Why is this? Do think—let each one try and find out for himself. You will find your hearts are fettered—Satan has chained them with ignorance and sin. Does rescue seem impossible? Christ can do it.

SUGGESTIVE TOPICS.

Paul's judges—their respective positions—his plea—the line of life he followed—the grounds of Jewish anger—how it showed itself—the substance of his ministry—to whom he witnessed—the interruption of Festus—its probable intent—the reply of Paul—the appeal to Agrippa—how it was warranted—how it was felt—how much we may learn from it—the danger of remaining "almost persuaded," and the lessons to be learned.

EXPLANATORY NOTES.

1. The famous words, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian," are agreed by almost all expositors not to represent the original accurately. Literally it is, "In a little (*en oligo*) thou persuadest," etc. One expositor renders it, "In a trice thou art persuading me to be a Christian!"—as if spoken scornfully. Another has, "With small persuasion thou thinkest," etc. A third thus paraphrases it: "To become a Christian!—to forfeit perhaps fortune, and rank, and royal title, and become the disciple of a despised Nazarene—the brother and the fellow of an outcast like thee—that's somewhat sudden—thy words must needs be persuasive if they counsel that! Such sudden changes may do for thee, a common Jew, an enthusiastic, impulsive, hasty man, converted by a sunbeam, by a voice, by a vision: they are not for me!"

2. *En oligo kai en megalō*—literally "in little and in great." The meaning of these words depends on the interpretation given to *en oligo* in the preceding verse. If these words mean "almost," then Paul says, "I would to God that not thou, but also all that hear me this day were both almost and altogether such as I am." If Agrippa said, "With little trouble persuadest thou me," then Paul's answer is, "I would that you were persuaded, whether with little trouble, or with great difficulty. If Agrippa's words imply, 'Truly in a short time thou wilt make me a Christian,' Paul replies, 'I pray God that in a longer or shorter time, sooner or later, He would make you such as I am.'"

3. When an heir is impleaded for an idiot the judge commands an apple or a counter, with a piece of gold, to be set before him to try which he will take. If he take the apple or counter and leave the gold then he is cast for a fool. This is the case of all wicked men, and much more. When heaven and hell, life and death, are set before them they choose hell rather than heaven, death rather than life, the trifling things of earth rather than an inheritance among the saints in light.—Swinburn.

MEETINGS OF PRESBYTERY.

HAMILTON.—In Central Church, Hamilton, on Tuesday, Dec. 18th, at 11 o'clock a.m.

OTTAWA.—In Knox Church, Ottawa, on Tuesday, 6th November, at 3 o'clock.

TORONTO.—In the lecture room, Knox Church, on Tuesday, 6th November, at 11 a.m.

QUEBEC.—At Melbourne, on Wednesday, 19th December, at 10 a.m.

WHITBY.—In St. Andrew's Church, Whitby, on 3rd Tuesday of December, at 11 a.m.

SAUGEN.—At Mount Forest, on the third Tuesday of December, at 2 o'clock p.m.

BARRIE.—At Barrie, on Tuesday, 4th December, at 11 o'clock.

LINDSAY.—At Cannington, on Wednesday, 6th November, at 12.30 o'clock.

HAMILTON.—Adjourned meeting in Central Church, Hamilton, on Thursday, 15th inst., at 11 a.m.

OWEN SOUND.—In Division Street Church, Owen Sound, on Tuesday, 18th Dec., at 10 a.m.

MANITOBA.—In Knox Church, Winnipeg, on Wednesday, 12th Dec., at 10 a.m.