

Is the Sermon on the Mount Orthodox?

There is much being said and written of late by a certain school of semi-heterodox teachers about getting back to Christ; and taking his teaching as the sure and safe path to heaven. Hence, say they, the Sermon on the Mount gives us all we need to know, and tells what we need to do, in order to please God and be acceptable to him. They insinuate that the teachings of the Apostles is not in accord with those of Christ, and that orthodox teaching makes more of the apostles' teachings than of Christ's. This kind of preaching and teaching seems to savor somewhat of that teaching which ignores the depravity of the human heart, and the consequent need of regeneration. But if those teachers who prate so much about the Sermon on the Mount being the climax of Christocentric theology will only look carefully into characteristics commonly called the beatitudes they will see that they comprise all there is of grace or of spirituality, that makes the new man in Christ Jesus. Jesus had many ways of presenting the central truth that makes for righteousness in manhood—viz. a radical change of heart and life. To Nicodemus he said, "ye must be born again," and to the woman at the well he said, "he that drinketh of the water I shall give him shall never thirst." Both of these figures of speech signify the newly begun life of God in the human soul, and to the disciples who gathered around him on the mount he first described the characteristics of that divine and newly begun life, and emphasised the blessedness of those who possessed those qualities of mind and heart, and then he proceeded to show them the ethical, or practical side of this new life principle, which in its development, beautifies, and adorns his disciples above all other religionists. For his precepts as given in that Sermon are the highest code of morals ever given to man. And none but the renewed man can ever live them, because it requires so much self contradiction that none but those who have his spirit can possibly comply with his regime. Neither Christ, nor His Apostles, ever taught that men could initiate themselves into the favour of God, nor secure a title to heaven by works of their own. These thoughts have been our views of the Sermon on the Mount for many years; and we give them as an introduction to the following article written by Edward B. Pollard, Ph. D. which we commend to our readers.

Some one has recently raised the question, "Was Christ a Christian?" In the late Pan-Presbyterian Alliance a distinguished member stated that in the "Presbyterian and Reformed churches" the Sermon on the Mount had not had its due place, because "it has not seemed to come up to our standard of orthodoxy." Were the teachings of Jesus orthodox? They certainly were not, in the opinion of the Pharisee of the first century. What of to-day?

If we judge from many writings of recent date, the Sermon on the Mount is the only part of the Bible that is strictly orthodox.

For several centuries the Apostle Paul has largely held the key to Protestant theology, through the medium of Calvin, Luther, Augustine.

There are several reasons for the modern reaction from Paulinism. There is the very natural swinging of the pendulum sway from a too exclusive emphasis in some quarters upon theology and creed. The speculative gives way before the experimental and ethical. Both the Ritschlian theology of Germany and the "New England theology" have tended to accelerate this revulsion. This age is characteristically experimental and practical. Besides all this, the modern Biblical critics have, in the opinion of many, so far succeeded in taking away the earlier feeling of security in "proof-texts," that many have been led to seek certainty in the person and teachings of Jesus. Hence the cry "Back to Christ." The modern doctrine of evolution has also been doing its work. The writings of Paul and of the other Apostles have been set forth, not as final, but as a step in the evolution of Christian thought and doctrine.

Thus men seek for solid ground turning to Jesus Christ. But, remember, it is not "the Christ of the Epistles," not even "the Christ of the Gospels," with many it is only the Christ of the Sermon on the Mount.

For our part, we have never seen any good reason why there should be any putting of Paul over against Christ, or Christ against Paul. This supposed antagonism is not new. From the time when the Apostle started out upon his career of conquest till the present day, there have been those who would claim that the Apostle to the Gentiles had never seen the Lord, and so had misinterpreted the Christian message. More than a century ago, "Gameliel Smith, Esq." supposed to be Jeremy Bentham, published a somewhat savage book by the name of "Not Paul but Jesus," in which Christ is used to break Paul's head; and one feels as he reads that it was written not that the author loves Jesus more, but Paul less.

There seems to lack the semblance of fairness to put over against the Christ one whose whole life was so thoroughly Christo-centric; one who verily travelled in pain till Christ should be formed in those to whom he ministered; one who looked upon his own life as not his own, but Christ's, who lived in him; one whose life indeed was a continuous fulfilment of his primal inquiry on the Damascan road, "What wilt Thou have me to do, Lord?"

Christ, thoroughly understood, does not nullify the teachings of Paul, properly studied. With Christ, doctrine and doing were not antagonistic, but necessary to each other. "Greater things than these shall ye do," implies "greater things than these shall ye teach"—"for He that willeth to do His will, shall know of the doctrines." Nor does Paul warrant the setting up of a Pauline orthodoxy against a Christic orthodoxy. Belief and life with him were one and inseparable.

For modern exaggeration of systematic theology, therefore, the Apostle is by no means responsible; nor is he responsible for its late disparagement! The orthodox systematic theology of the future is to be not less systematic, but more truly theological.

The truth is, every age has its special points of view from which that age best sees the divine teaching; each age has its special needs. This demands difference of emphasis, but not antagonism between divine teachings and teachers.

The generation that needs Christ as seen by Paul will find Him; the age which needs a more ethical gospel will not be slow to find the Sermon on the Mount.

What is true of epochs is true of individuals. Augustine—his life being what it was—not unaturally turned to Paul as furnishing that which best accorded with his own suffering and yearnings, and that which his own experience could best expound. So, too, Luther, standing in his generation by the will of God and battling for individualism and a justification which is of faith, found in Paul his chief support; regarding James but an "epistle of straw," and Galatians his very wife and companion.

Luther did not err in loving the theological Paul, but in ridiculing the practical James. So to-day, they do not go astray who praise the Sermon on the Mount, but they who praise only that. By some Paul is enthroned and Christ rejected; by others Christ is exalted and Paul becomes a cast-away. Paul preached "Christ and Him crucified," as the gospel for his day, and it is never a worn-out gospel. Jesus Christ and Him moralized cannot be a whole gospel at any time.

Is the Sermon on the Mount orthodox? The true orthodoxy of any particular age will always be the truth which that age most needs. But unfortunately, we are so limited in our appreciation of truth that in our practical emphasis upon one of its poles, the other is obscured and even denied. And more unfortunately still, the past too often leaves the present a legacy of its form of orthodoxy, when it has denied the power thereof.

Get from behind the bush. Show your colors. Don't you know that everyone—friend or foe—despises a foe.

Religious News.

SUSSEX, N. B. We have been holding special services at Penobscus. Three has been received for baptism. I expect to baptize on the last Sunday in this month. Yesterday we had Rev. Mr. Snell with us all day. He preached a very fine sermon in the evening on Prayer. After the sermon I baptized in the presence of a very large congregation, two candidates, James Friars and Leander Palmer. The last named is a boy of fifteen years, son of Mr. Samuel Palmer, and grandson of Deacon Palmer of Dorchester. Mr. Samuel Palmer and family came to our town last summer. He and wife joined our church and went to work for Christ. Their hearts were made happy yesterday when they saw their only son, a boy of beautiful Christian life, follow his Saviour. Our work here is very encouraging. W. CAMP.

BEAVER HARBOR, N. B. We have been favored of late with special gatherings in our church at the Harbor.

The first was the Charlotte County Conference, which met with us on the 21st of last month. The Oak Bay and St. Stephen pastors did the preaching, which was highly appreciated by all. The Secretary of the Conference, Pastor Lavers, of St. George, was also present and added much interest to the sessions by his fatherly appearance and kind addresses. The next gathering was that of the parish Sunday School Association. The field secretary, Rev. Mr. Lucas, was present and gave us a good deal to think about and remember. Pastor Lavers, of St. George, was also present and invited to a seat in the Association and to participate in the work, which he did. We enjoyed a good season in both of these meetings and hope that good was done. As a church we are succeeding fairly well. Our congregations are fine and attentive. The Sunday School is prospering under the able management of its superintendent, Elias Bates. We are practically remembering the benevolent claims of the denomination. The Pennfield church stands about the same in the matters of benevolent work and prayers. A collection will be taken for the Ministers' Annuity Association in both of these churches Christmas evening.

T. M. MUNRO.

TEKKALI, INDIA. Eight were baptized at this station last week. Seven of them were Savaras. Four of the Savaras were baptized at sunset in a little pond amid the Savara hills. It was an impressive scene. Gopolpur is now a Christian village indeed, all in it are Christians but two. A separate church for the Savara Christians located in their midst is now talked of. These are a lovable and most interesting people. May they soon have a missionary, and may the Word of the Lord have free course and be glorified among them. W. V. H.

November 29th.

I have just returned from a **NEW CUMBERLAND**, week's campaign with Pastor Blakeney in this section of this church. The Holy Spirit opened the hearts of the people. A number turned to the Lord and there are many seeking. It was a great joy to preach the word publicly and from house to house. It reminded one of some of the blessed seasons I spent with Evangelist Wallace when God opened the windows of heaven and poured out a blessing. It is easy to work when God works too. The Home Mission did an excellent thing when they secured Bro. Blakeney for that part of the country. He is in reputation as a great preacher, a good man and full of the Holy Ghost. He is beloved by old and young and is accomplishing much for the cause. The pastors of Lunenburg County generally are co-operating in special work throughout the winter. A good way for all pastors, it strikes me, unless the churches can afford to get a general missionary to help.

Chester, Dec. 21st.

W. H. JENKINS.
—M. and V.