

"Not long after that event, some persons in the Church of England began to be dissatisfied with the constitution and order of worship established at the Reformation. They tried to procure some modification in the matters they objected to, but their request was peremptorily refused. The consequence was that these persons formed themselves into differently organized bodies separate from the Church of England. In this way the Independents, or Congregationalists, and Baptists came into existence. More recently, the Wesleyans drifted likewise into separation. It is not for us to judge how far these fresh schisms in the body were justified at the time they took place, but we may fairly concede that the leaders in them were conscientious men who believed themselves to be contending for purity of doctrine and of worship. *These bodies cannot be charged with heresy, and no one holds in any of them any doctrine necessary to salvation which he could not hold as a member of the Church of England. We cannot, however, deny that the Church of England in those days by its stiffness and unconciliatory spirit contributed to the formation of breaches which a due regard for the feelings of some of its most pious members might possibly have avoided.*

"But these are things of the past. We have to act in the present, and unhappily see the body of Christ, in its visible manifestation, rent and torn not only by external differences of government and worship, but what is far worse, by party spirit and mutual alienation. *How is this to be healed? Are we to demand uniformity, the submission of all to a rigid rule of worship, and an unalterable constitution of ministry? Such uniformity exists nowhere, and experience shows that nothing has caused more divisions in the Church than the attempt to enforce it.*

There is no reason why those who belong to one particular body, even the oldest and most Apostolic, should regard those who belong to others as cut off from the body of Christ. Rather have we need to see that we ourselves are holding the Head as firmly and resolutely as they. *The best way to cultivate unity is not self-assertion but Christian love and mutual consideration.*

"But these outward rents in the Church of Christ are not the only sad thing in the state of things concerning the Church. There is division and party spirit even within the Church of England itself. This is not new. Even from the time of the Reformation there has been opposite tendencies among Churchmen. Indeed, it belongs properly to the natural variety of human nature, that some should lay stress on things inward, others on things outward; anyhow, some members of the Church of England have always been inclined to attach more importance to personal faith in Christ and spiritual union with Him, while others have thought or spoken more of the sacraments, and of the Church as an outward organization. This difference between the parties called "Evangelical" and "High Church" in the Church of England has within the last forty years risen to a great height. But perhaps the difference is not now quite so great as it was, each has learned something from the other, but the Evangelical party is strong in its hearty and unreserved acceptance of the fundamental principle of the English Church, of referring every matter of importance as concerns the faith to the decision of Scripture. It rests also with confidence on the general bearing of the Prayer-book and Articles, in which, as we hope to show hereafter, the High Church views about the Sacraments, priestly power, and so on, find but scanty support. That the Prayer-book is mainly on the Evangelical side is made pretty clear, not only by several recent authoritative decisions as to the interpretation of its rules, but also by the fact that the High Church party has lately begun to ask for permission to use another Prayer-book, supposed to contain a doctrine as to the sacraments approaching more closely the Church of Rome.

"For ourselves—for those, that is, who are con-

nected with the Church Missionary Society—we desire to be reckoned among those who lay more stress on the personal connection with Christ by faith than on the sacraments and the Church; but we by means disparage these. We are perfectly loyal to the doctrine, discipline, and general system of worship contained in the Prayer-book and Articles, and have no wish to see any great change in the arrangements of the Church of England; but we desire first to be loyal to the Church of Christ, and to regard as brethren all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. While we lament that schisms have taken place, we believe the injury is to be healed, not by exclusiveness, but by love. *We believe that there is a real spiritual unity underlying all the divisions of the outward Church, and we think we see that inward unity making itself felt in an ever-increasing degree as the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.* But we think that the perfect manifestation of the oneness of the Church is not likely to take place till the Church's other attribute, of holiness, becomes a visible reality. Sin disintegrates, holiness unites, the race of men. May both unity and holiness be speedily perfected, in the millennial Reign of Christ!"

The Sunday School.

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON.

1ST SUNDAY AFTER EASTER APRIL 20, 1884.

BIBLE LESSON.

ST. PAUL'S PREACHING.—1 Cor. i: 17-31.

While St. Paul is working among the Ephesians he is thinking much about his Corinthian converts. It was through his anxiety for them that he came to write the letter from which our lesson is taken. How long since Paul was labouring in Corinth? Perhaps three years. Where had he been lately? Very likely he had crossed over to see them from Ephesus (ships were often going), for he speaks of his next visit as the *third* (2 Cor. xii. 14, xiii. 1). This visit had made him very sad (2 Cor. ii. 1), for some of his converts sinning worse than heathen—when came back to Ephesus, he wrote to them to bid them separate entirely from any Christian who was thus disgracing his name. That letter not preserved. (See 1 Cor. v. 9-11). They answered his letter, but their answer not satisfactory; they were boasting of their gifts—made excuses for the sins among them instead of grieving over them. (1 Cor. v. 2). Then Paul heard from others about their disputes—even going to heathen judges to settle their quarrels (vi. 1, 5, 6)—many living ungodly lives—confusion in their religious services—some even drunken when met for the Lord's Supper (xi. 20, 21). So Paul had *much to reprove*. Besides this, they had asked *some questions which he answers* in this letter.

After long greetings, he speaks words of praise for their past progress (St. Paul always found some good, even where he had much to blame); and expresses his hopefulness for their future. Then only he touches upon their faults. The first he rebukes is their dissensions, in which some of them had even arrayed themselves under the Apostle's own name, as his special disciples, and as thus superior to others; while other parties had been formed claiming the patronage and leadership of other of their teachers. St. Paul rebukes this spirit by setting forth the grand object and substance of his preaching, that by which its results had been achieved.

I. THE SUBJECT OF PAUL'S PREACHING. vs. 17-25.

1. He describes his work, first, *negatively*; he says *what it is not*.

It is not principally or chiefly the administration of outward ordinances. Christ sent him not to baptize, but to preach. He does not undervalue baptism, which has its place and its value as an ordinance of Christ. But its place is subordinate to that of the preaching of the gospel, which is the great work for which Christ's ministers are sent. There is a strong tendency in every age to exalt the outward and external to the chief place. To baptism very unscriptural and erroneous virtues have been ascribed. St. Paul certainly regarded it as altogether secondary in comparison with the gospel.

Neither does his work consist in appeals of rhetoric and display of mere wisdom of words. The power of the Gospel did not lie in the eloquence of the preacher, the logic of his reasonings or the eloquence of his doctrine. Not themes about religion, not speculations or dogmas, not systems of theology can save men, but only Christ.

2. He describes his work *positively*; it is *the preaching* of the crucified Christ.

It is *Christ* whom he preaches; the personal Christ; not the Church, not human philosophy, not a system of theology, but a person, one who lives and loves, one who reveals God and saves men, one who wants man to come to Him and follow Him.

It is *the crucified Christ*. It is called the preaching of the cross, the cross stands for the death of the cross, the fact, the meaning, the power of Christ's death. Not the incarnation, but the atonement is the central truth of Christianity. The first is never mentioned except as preparatory to the second. "The Son of Man comes (here is the incarnation) to give His life a ransom for many, (here is the atonement). "He loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20) is Paul's Gospel. cf. 1 Tim. 1:15.

3. *The crucified Christ is the power and wisdom of God.*

a. He is the Power of God. Verses 18, 24; Rom. 1:16. It did not seem so. What was to all appearance more weak and contemptible than a man of sorrows, a crucified malefactor, a simple message borne by unlettered fishermen. The world which loves power and thinks it has power, scoffed at such weakness. But the world's power was proved to be weakness. It could not atone for one sin, deliver one struggling with evil, lift one burden of the many that oppressed humanity; and God's weakness proved power. God's weakness, the humiliation and sorrow and death to which the Incarnate one voluntarily stooped, proved to be God's power. In what does the power of Christ consist? (1) In His possession of all the resources, capabilities and energy of God. (2) In the power of love to win and control men. (3) In the suffering of His atonement and completeness of His victory over all evil. (4) In the abundance and efficiency of His grace.

b. He is the Wisdom of God, ver. 24; Col. 2:3. It did not appear so. The Jew wanted a sign, like the wind, the fire, or the earthquake, 1 Kgs. 18:11, 12. But there came a still, small voice, a meek and lonely one, Mt. 12:17-20—no king or philosopher, but a "carpenter's son," and a sufferer. A crucified Christ is to this day the great stumbling block to the Jew. The Greeks sought after wisdom, a philosophical explanation of the universe; they must know the reason of things; and they were offended at what seemed unreasonable or which could not be measured by reason. The distinctive truths of Christianity have been in every age a stumbling block to the worldly wise and self-sufficient. But the world's wisdom proves to be folly; it cannot explain the mysteries it confronts; or answer the questions which arise in every man's heart—whence am I? Whither go I? God allowed man's wisdom to do its utmost, until it felt and confessed its own utter helplessness. Then by "the foolishness of that which is preached" (not by foolish preaching, as these words are sometimes misunderstood), God showed His wisdom which maketh wise unto salvation. To this let us cling in our preaching and teaching.

II. THE EFFICACY OF THE PREACHING OF CHRIST CRUCIFIED:—vs. 26-31.

There are two ways in which power can be measured; two lines in which its efficiency can be tested—by the difficulties it overcomes, and by the results it achieves.

1. *By the difficulties it overcomes.* It uplifts the lowest, purifies the basest, gives power to the weakest. It can take hold of, transform and utilize all that is esteemed base and worthless by the world. The world itself it can conquer, overcome its pride, prejudice and opposition, and bring all to the feet of its rightful Lord. And in doing all this it uses the feeblest and humblest instrumentalities. (vs. 27, 28; Matt. ii. 25; Jas. ii. 5.) It thus sets itself against all human pride, and teaches humility (ver. 29; Rom. iii. 27; Eph. ii. 9.)

2. *By the results it achieves.* Here they are enumerated in a threefold classification:—(1) *wisdom* (1 Cor. i. 24), making men truly wise; enlightening, guiding them, opening to them God's truth and love; (2) *righteousness*, (Jer. xxv. 5, 6; Rom. iv. 25; 2 Cor. v. 21), forgiveness of sins, justification, not our own righteousness, but the righteousness of God. (Phil. iii. 9; Rom. x. 3, 5; (3) *sanctification*, (John xvii. 19; making us holy, transforming us into Christ's likeness, delivering us from all love and power of sin, imparting to us all purity and goodness, and making us to grow up unto the stature of the perfect manhood of Christ. Then all three are summed up in one word—*redemption*, complete salvation from all sin, complete restoration