

CHAPTER 10

Postscripts are proverbially important, and apostolic postscripts are no exception to the rule. But the final postscript to St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans has been treated with strange neglect by theologians. Witness the extraordinary carelessness with which it has been translated even by the Revisers of 1881! With his own hand it was, no doubt, that, after his secretary, Tertius, had laid down the pen, the apostle added the pregnant words which end the Epistle: "Now to Him who is able to stablish you according to my gospel even the preaching of Jesus Christ according to [the] revelation of a mystery which has been kept in silence through times eternal, but now is manifested and by prophetic scriptures according to the commandment of the Eternal God is made known unto all the nations unto obedience of faith--to the only wise God through Jesus Christ be the glory forever."¹

"MY Gospel." The words, three times repeated by St. Paul,² are no mere conventional expression. They are explained in several of his Epistles,³ and with peculiar definiteness in his letter to the Galatians. He there declares in explicit and emphatic terms that the gospel which he preached among the Gentiles was the subject of a special revelation peculiar to himself. Not only was he not taught it by those who were apostles before him, but he it was who, by Divine command, communicated it to "the twelve"; and this was not until his second visit to Jerusalem, seventeen years after his conversion (Gal. 1:11-2:12). It is certain, therefore, that his testimony was essentially distinct in character and scope from anything we shall find in the ministry of the other apostles, as recorded in the Acts. And this, he declares, they themselves acknowledge. "They saw," he says, "that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter" (Gal. 2:7). The latter was a promise according to the Scriptures of *the* prophets; the former, a proclamation according to the revealing of a mystery kept secret from eternity, but now manifested in this Christian dispensation, and by prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations. What, then, were those writings? What the mystery which was thus revealed?

The rendering of the passage in our English versions is a compromise between translation and exegesis; and that the exposition thus suggested is erroneous is clear from the fact that it makes the apostle's statement inconsistent to the verge of absurdity. If it be by the writings of the Hebrew prophets that the gospel is made known to all the nations, it certainly was not a mystery kept secret through all the ages! The words "by prophetic writings" refer, of course, to the Scriptures of the *New* Testament; and as the gospel thus made known was entrusted, not even to the other apostles, but only to "the apostle of the Gentiles," it is, again of course, to the Epistles of Paul that we must turn to seek for it. Do these Epistles, then, contain any great characteristic truth or truths which cannot be

1 Our English versions have distorted the passage, first by a punctuation (I have followed Dean Alford's), which makes the mystery a characteristic of the power to stablish us, whereas it characterizes the preaching by which we are established; and secondly, by their rendering of the words *δια τε γραφων προφητικων* (*cf.* Matt. 26:56, "*the* scriptures of *the* prophets"). It claims notice also that both "revelation" and "mystery" are anarthrous; but while the English idiom seems to require the article before the former word, its insertion before "mystery" is not only unnecessary, but misleading.

2 Rom. 2:15, 16:25; 2 Tim. 2:8..

3 See, *e.g.*, Eph. 3; Col. 1:25,26

found in the earlier Scriptures?

Our English word "mystery" means something which is either incomprehensible or unknown, but this is not the significance of the Greek *musterion*.⁴ In its primary meaning in classical and Biblical Greek, it is simply a secret; and a secret when once disclosed may be understood by anyone. A patent lock is a "mystery." It is as easily opened as any other provided we have the proper key, but without the key it cannot be opened at all. The mysteries of the New Testament are Divine truths which till then had been "kept in silence"; truths which had not been revealed in the earlier Scriptures, and which, until revealed, could not be known. Once and once only the word was used by the Lord Himself, as recorded in the three first Gospels, and it occurs four times in the Apocalypse. But with these exceptions, it is found only in St. Paul's Epistles, where it occurs no fewer than twenty times.

In some of these passages the word is used in a secondary sense. In others, definite secrets are revealed. And notably we find the following:--

The mystery of Lawlessness, culminating in the revelation of the Lawless One.⁵

The mystery that at the coming of the Lord some of His people will pass to heaven, as Elijah did, "with death untasted and the grave unknown" (1 Cor. 15:51).

The mystery that in the present dispensation believers are united to Christ in a special relationship as members of a body of which He Himself is the head.⁶

Here, then, we have specific "mysteries" respecting which the earlier Scriptures are silent. And it may be added that, though now revealed, they are still unknown to the majority of Christians. But these are truths essentially for the *believer*, whereas the "mystery" of the apostle's postscript is emphatically a truth for ALL--a truth to be "made known to all the nations for the obedience of faith."

The apostle's statement, moreover, assumes that his words would be understood by those to whom they were addressed. Therefore, as he had never personally visited Rome, we may confidently turn to the Epistle itself to find within it the truth referred to.

First, then, it is a *mystery* truth--a truth which till then had been "kept in silence." Secondly, it is a truth of universal scope and application. And thirdly, it is a truth to be found in the Epistle to the Romans. With these clues to guide us, there can be no difficulty in fixing upon the truth which is here in question, for one and only one will satisfy these requirements.

In common with some other great truths of the Christian faith, Reconciliation has received but scant notice from theologians. Many a page might be filled with quotations from

4 See Appendix, Note V.

5 2 Thess. 2:7,8. Within the Church, of course. Lawlessness in the world is as old as sin.

6 Eph. 3:4,6; 5:30,32; 1 Cor. 12:12,13, &c.

standard books which either misrepresent or deny it. But all attempts to oust it from our creeds rest, as Archbishop Trench declares, "on a foregone determination to get rid of the reality of God's anger against sin."⁷ Sin not merely alienated man from God, it alienated God from man. A just and holy God could not but regard him as an enemy. But "while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son." And "through our Lord Jesus Christ" they who believe "have now received the reconciliation" (Rom. 5:10,11). "All things are of God who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave unto us the ministry of the reconciliation, to wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not reckoning unto them their trespasses, and having committed unto us the word of the reconciliation. We are ambassadors, therefore, on behalf of Christ," the apostle adds, "as though God were entreating by us, we beseech men on behalf of Christ, 'be ye reconciled to God'"⁸--an appeal to the sinner, not, as too commonly represented, to forgive his God, but to come within the unsought benefit which God in His infinite grace has accomplished. For (the apostle further adds) "Him who knew no sin He made to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21).

Words could not be simpler, and yet, as already noticed, the truth so plainly taught is in many quarters perverted or denied. Just as in our day there are doctrinaire philanthropists who talk of crime as though it were nothing but a natural eccentricity of weak natures, so there are theologians who delight in such representations of sin that if provision had not been made for it in the Divine economy, the omission would be entirely to the discredit of the Deity. Others, again, so fritter away the great truths of Divine love to the world and the reconciliation of the world to God through Christ, that the sovereignty of God degenerates into mere favoritism, and the death of Christ is no more than a means by which the favored few can attain to blessing.

This great truth of Reconciliation will be sought in vain in the Old Testament Scriptures. The revelation of it, indeed, was impossible so long as the Jew held the position which he forfeited by rejecting the Messiah. Reading the Gospel of John in the light of the Epistles, we can discern it in the teaching of our Lord, but without that light no one would dare to formulate it. To the Jew, indeed, the doctrine must have been astounding, and even among Christians it is received with hesitation and reserve. But the difficulties which beset the exposition of the fifth chapter of Romans relate only to the *argument*. The doctrine it teaches is unequivocally clear. "As through one trespass [the result was] unto all men to condemnation; even so through one act of righteousness [the result was] unto all men to justification of life." If words have any meaning, this declares that the death of Christ has efficacy as complete and universal as the sin of Adam. If that sin "brought

7 "Synonyms," Part II, p. 123.

8 2 Cor. 5:18-20. This passage is inseparably associated in my mind with an incident once narrated to me by the late Sir Robert Lush. When Serjeant Wilkins returned to the Law Courts after an illness which practically ended his career, Mr. Lush (as he then was) saw him sitting with his face in his hands, and he noticed that tears were falling from between his fingers. The Serjeant was not of his acquaintance, but when he saw him hurriedly leave the court, he followed him, and delicately referring to what he had seen, he asked if he was in any trouble in which he could be of service to him. The Serjeant gratefully acknowledged his kindness, but explained his seeming distress by the fact that the words above quoted, which he had been reading that morning, had come back to his mind as he sat in court, and he could not restrain his emotion. The incident will be appreciated by those who know the sort of man he was. Suffice it to say it had not been his habit to read the Bible. But how many such there are who turn to it in times of sickness or trouble!

death into the world, and all our woe," so the great *dikaioma* brought justification of life to all men insofar as the Eden trespass brought condemnation to them.

But the work of Christ goes infinitely further than this. The Eden trespass ushered in the reign of sin. "Sin reigned unto death." "The wages of sin is death," and sin claimed the very throne of God as an agency for enforcing its just demands. But Calvary has dethroned sin, and grace now reigns supreme. And this, not at the expense of righteousness, but through righteousness. And as sin reigned unto death, so grace now reigns unto eternal life. Or, getting behind the magnificent imagery of the Epistle, we grasp the amazing truth that the Divine attitude toward men is one of universal beneficence. It is not that the Gentile has attained to the special position of privilege from which the Jew has fallen, for apart from "the household of faith" there is no favored people now. "There is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord is Lord of all, and is rich unto all that call upon Him; for *whosoever* shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Rom. 10:12, R.V.). Eternal life is thus brought within reach of every human being to whom this testimony comes.⁹ How, then, is it possible that so few receive the benefit? The answer to this question claims a chapter to itself.

9 Such a statement will be resented by that school of religious thought which boasts as its founder one of the greatest of the Church's teachers. But let us appeal from the disciples to their master. Here is Calvin's commentary upon the verse above quoted (Rom. 5:18). "He makes this favor common to all because it is propounded to all, and not because it is in reality extended to all; for though Christ suffered for the sins of the whole world, and is offered through God's benignity indiscriminately to all, yet all do not receive Him." And the following extract from his commentary on the third chapter of the Gospel of St. John is no less apposite. Referring to the sixteenth verse he says: "Christ employed the universal term *whosoever* both to invite indiscriminately all to partake of life, and to cut off every excuse from unbelievers. Such is the import of the term *world*. Though there is nothing in the world that is worthy of God's favor, yet He shows Himself to be reconciled to the whole world when He invites all men without exception to the faith of Christ, which is nothing else than an entrance into life." And if anyone ask, How, then, is Judgment possible? the answer is that Judgment is based upon this very truth. See ch. 12.