

# PAUL: A SERVANT OF JESUS CHRIST

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

### “HOW LARGE LETTERS”

(Galatians 6:11)

“All his glowing language issued forth  
With God’s deep stamp upon its current worth.”  
- Cowper

IT has been supposed, with much show of reason, that at the close of the Epistle to the Galatians the Apostle took the pen from the hand of his amanuensis and wrote somewhat more than his usual brief autograph. Generally he contented himself with such words as those with which the Epistle to the Colossians closes, “**The salutation by the hand of me Paul. Remember my bonds. Grace be with you.**” But in the case of the Galatians, among whom his authority had been greatly impugned, it seemed incumbent to give rather more emphasis and importance to his words by a prolonged personal closing paragraph. He practically begs them excuse the clumsy shape and appearance of his handwriting, on account of his defective sight; to which he may also be alluding when he touchingly describes himself as branded with the marks of Jesus (Galatians 6:17).

We may take his words also in a metaphorical sense. How largely his letters bulk in the make-up of the New Testament! If we judge the question only by comparing their length with that of the New Testament, we shall find that they make a fourth part of the whole. And their importance must be measured not by length but by weight.

Before you put them into the scale, consider the precious treasures you are handling.

- The sublime chapter on Love, I Corinthians 13;
- The matchless argument on Justification in Romans 4, 5;
- The glorious exposition of the work of the Holy Spirit in Romans 8;
- The triumphant Resurrection Hope of in I Corinthians 15;
- The tender unveiling of the Love between Jesus and his own in Ephesians 5.

What priceless treasures are these which the Church owes first to the Holy Ghost, and next to the Apostle Paul, acting as his organ and instrument. How many of the most precious and helpful passages in Scripture bear the mark of the tender, eager, fervent, and devout spirit of the Apostle of the Gentiles.

The Epistles marvellously reflect his personality. It has been said of one of the great painters that he was wont to mix his colors with blood drawn from a secret wound; and of Paul it may be said that he dipped his pen in the blood of his heart. Whatever impression had last rested on his sensitive nature colored the flow of his thoughts and expressions, whether it was Philippian love expressed by the coming of Epaphroditus, or the story of the Corinthian division told by the members of the house of Chloe. Probably it is for this very reason, because he wrote with all the freshness of speech, with the sparkle of conversation, as though he were talking naturally in a circle of friends, that he has so moved the heart of the world.

But it is not too much to say that, humanly speaking, the Gospel of Christ would never have taken such fast hold on the strong, practical, vigorous nations of the West, had it not been for these Epistles.

The mind of the Apostle John is given to deep and spiritual insight, which sees, rather than argues, its way into the truths of the Gospel.

The mind of the Apostle Peter, again, is specially Hebraic: he looks at everything from the standpoint of his early education and training, on which the teachings of his Master had been grafted.

But with Paul, though he writes as a Hebrew of the Hebrews, employing methods of Scripture interpretation, which, being in the method of the Rabbis, are recondite and unfamiliar to our thought, yet his Epistles are characterized by a virility, a logical order, a style of argument, a definiteness of statement and phraseology, which are closely akin to our Western civilization.

When he was born the Roman Empire was in the summer of its glory, and Greek culture so infused into the universal thought and speech, that even the exclusivism and bigotry of the Jewish ghettos were not wholly proof against it. The breath of the Western ocean is in these Epistles; the tides of the coming centuries were already rolling into the estuary, and causing the barges of long stationary tradition to move uneasily and rattle their mooring chains.

It is for this reason that Paul has been the contemporary of Western civilization through all the centuries. It was he who taught Augustine and inspired Luther. His thoughts and conceptions have been wrought into the texture, and woven into the woof of the foremost minds of the Christian centuries. The seeds he scattered have fruited in the harvests of modern education, jurisprudence, liberty, and civilization.

“Ah!” it has been eloquently said, “what does the world owe to this Apostle; what has it owed to him; what will it owe: of pious pastors, zealous missionaries, eminent Christians, useful books, benevolent endowments, examples of faith, charity, purity, holiness? Who can calculate it? The whole human race will arise and confess that amongst all the names of its benefactors whom it is

pleased to enroll from age to age, there is no one whom it proclaims with so much harmony, gratitude and love, as the name of the Apostle Paul.”

We have thirteen Letters bearing the inscription and signature of Paul. The evidence of their genuineness and authenticity is generally admitted; even the extreme school of destructive criticism has been compelled to admit that the Epistles to the Corinthians, Galatians, and Romans are undoubtedly his. They were written at different periods between the years 52 and 68 A. D.; and under very different circumstances. These when hope was young and fresh in the first glad dawn; these amid the stress of strong antagonism; these with the shackles of the prison on the wrist; these when the sun was dyeing the horizon with its last intense glow. Each largely tintured with the complexion of the worlds without and within, but all full of that devotion to the risen Lord which led him to subscribe himself so often as his devoted bond servant. **“Paul, the servant of Jesus Christ.”**

Let us place these Epistles in the order of their composition, and see how they mark the successive stages of progress in the Apostle’s conceptions of Christ. He was always full of Love and Loyalty and the Divine Spirit; but according to his own words he was perpetually leaving the things that were behind and pressing on to those before, that he might know Christ, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings.

It is not surprising, therefore, that each of the Epistles contains some profounder apprehension of the fulness and glory of the risen Lord. As Jesus is said to have increased in wisdom and age, so his Apostle was transformed into his image from glory to glory. All his life was a going from strength to strength. And as he climbed the craggy steeps of obedience and faith, of growing likeness to Jesus, of self-sacrifice and experience of the Cross, his horizon of knowledge widened to tread the lengths and heights and depths of the knowledge of the love of Christ, which still passed his knowledge. We have only to compare the first Epistle to the Thessalonians with that of the Ephesians, to perceive at once how greatly this noble nature had filled out and ripened under the culture of the Divine husbandman.

The best and most natural division of the Epistles, that I have met with, is the following:

- The *Eschatological* Group: I and II Thessalonians.
- The *Anti-Judaic* Group: I and II Corinthians, Galatians, Romans.
- The *Christological or Anti- Gnostic* Group: Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians.
- The *Pastoral Group*: I Timothy, Titus, and II Timothy.

Let us consider them in this order.

## **I AND II THESSALONIANS**

The first of these was probably written towards the close of the year 52, and certainly from Corinth. Timothy had been left in Macedonia to complete the work from which the Apostle had been so summarily torn.

After doing all he could to comfort and help the infant churches, he came with Silas to Paul, and the three held solemn and prayerful conferences on the best way of directing and assisting the disciples amid the great storm of opposition through which they were passing. It was impossible for any of them to go to their relief, and so this first Epistle was dispatched. And the second from the same city, a few months afterwards, when the Apostle heard that the first had been interpreted to mean that the Lord's coming was near enough to justify the expectation of the speedy dissolution of existing society.

In each of these Epistles, the Apostle dwells more largely than in any of the others on the Second Advent. Its light was illuminating his whole being with its glow. The motive for every duty, the incitement to every Christian disposition, the ground for purity, hopefulness, comfort, and practical virtue, are found in the coming of the Son of God.

**“The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up.”**

The motive for Christian living is less in the sense of the indwelling Christ and more in the expectation of the coming Christ: there is less of the Cross, and more of the glory; less of the invisible headship over all things in Heaven and earth, which comes out so prominently in later Epistles, and more of the parousia, the personal presence of Jesus. To the end the Apostle bade the Church stand at her oriel window, looking for the coming of the glory of her great God and Saviour; but the ground covered by his later Epistles is much wider than that of his earliest.

## I CORINTHIANS

Towards the end of Paul's three years residence in Ephesus, tidings came, partly through Apollos and partly through members of the house of Chloe, of the very unfavorable condition of affairs at Corinth. Amid the strongly sensuous influences of that voluptuous city the little band of converts seemed on the point of yielding to the strong current setting against them, and relapsing into the vices of their contemporaries. Shortly after this a letter arrived from the Church itself, brought to Ephesus by Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, asking advice on a number of practical difficulties. It was a terrible revelation of quarrels, disputings, inconsistencies, and grosser evils, and was enough to daunt any man. How could he hope to remedy such a state of things without going in person? And if he went, how would he be received?

At that time he was pressed with the terrible conflict which was being waged at Ephesus, and he must stay at his post. There was nothing for it but to write as the Holy Spirit might direct; and the result is the marvellous Epistle, which more than any other has supplied practical direction to the Church in the following centuries, showing her how to apply the principles of the Gospel to the most complicated moral and social problems. It was carried to Corinth by Titus.

In this Epistle there is still the pulse throb of the Second Advent; but there is, in addition, the sublime conception of the Second Adam, and the revelation by the Holy Spirit now and here, to spiritual minds, of things which eye had not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived.

## II CORINTHIANS

When the riot broke out in Ephesus, the Apostle was eagerly looking for the coming of Titus with tidings of the reception of his Epistle. On his expulsion from the city he went to Troas, making sure that he would meet him there; but failing to do so, he became feverishly anxious, and hastened on to Macedonia to seek him. **“We were troubled on every side: without were fightings, within were fears,”** till he was finally comforted by the coming of Titus, who brought good news as he told of their longing, their mourning, their zeal for him. Thereupon he wrote his second Epistle, and sent it to the Church by the hands of Titus and another.

This is the most personal of all his Epistles. He lays bare his heart; he permits us to see its yearning tenderness, its sensitiveness to love or hate, its eager devotion to the best interests of his converts.

**“All things are for your sakes . . . for which cause we faint not.”**

The deep spiritual aspects of the Christian life, which are so characteristic of the later Epistles, are specially unfolded. He writes as though, under the teaching of the Holy Spirit, he were enjoying increasing measures of the life hid with Christ in God. Though he was always delivered unto death for Jesus sake, the life of Jesus, which was in him, was manifesting itself in his mortal flesh (4:11). He now knew Christ, not after the flesh, but in the spirit; the constraint of his love was perpetually leading to the denial of self, and the putting on of that new creation which was the gift of the risen Lord (v. 14-17).

Whatever the difficulties and privations of his lot, he was amply compensated from the eternal and spiritual sphere in which he lived (6:4-10). What though the stake in the flesh cost him continual anguish, the grace of Jesus made him glory in it, as positively a source of strength (12:10).

## GALATIANS

Paul followed Titus to Corinth, and remained there a happy three months. But the joy of fellowship with the large and happy band of friends that gathered around him there must have been greatly blurred by tidings of the fickleness of the Galatians, who were removing **“from him that had called them into the grace of Christ unto another gospel.”**

Proselytizers had gone amongst his converts professing to represent the Church at Jerusalem, and in the name of primitive Christianity had disparaged Paul's apostleship, questioned his authority, and insisted on the necessity of Gentiles being circumcised and submitting to the Levitical law.

It was a critical hour. If these views had prevailed, Christianity must have dwindled into a Jewish sect, and the river of Christian life and work which had gushed from the ground at Pentecost must have lost itself among the sands of Rabbinical speculation. Gentile Christianity was in the balance; the hope of the world at stake.

Profoundly stirred in spirit, the Apostle's righteous indignation flames in almost every sentence, and with glowing passion he meets the arguments of those who were seducing the Galatians from the simplicity and freedom of Christ: "**As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.**"

Under the glow of his indignation there is not only clear and strong thinking, but there is indication of yet further regions of Christian knowledge which were being unfolded to Paul.

Pressed by the exigencies of his position and how often the arising of new heresies has driven God's servants deeper into the fulness treasured in Christ for all needs and times he is led to realize that not Moses but Abraham, not Sinai but the tents of the patriarch, were the true origin of the Jewish people.

Abraham was called when yet in uncircumcision; he believed, and was justified by faith thirty years before he received the distinctive Jewish rite. It was as great a revelation as the shores of the New World to Columbus; and from that moment Paul sprang up to an altogether new position, from which he was able successfully to meet the assaults of the Judaizer, and vindicate all believing Gentiles as children of believing Abraham, and heirs of the covenant of promise.

## **ROMANS**

As his stay at Corinth drew to a close, the Apostle's mind was attracted to the church in the world's metropolis, which he hoped very soon to visit; and by way of preparation for his coming he prepared a succinct and connected view of the truths which had been revealed to his profoundest thought by the Divine Spirit. Thus originated the greatest of his Epistles, that to the Romans.

In this, as in the former, there is not only a clear appreciation and presentation of the great doctrine of justification by faith, but an ever-enlarging view of our identification with Christ, and of his indwelling.

He says we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, but we are saved by his life. He speaks of reigning in life through the abundance of grace treasured up in the one Man, Jesus Christ. His words glow with rapture as he speaks of being joined to Him that was raised from the dead, and of our freedom from the old bondage in which we were held. So entirely had Christ become one with him, and he one with Christ, that he felt the unutterable groans of His intercessions, and something of His travail for the souls of men. He had yielded his members as weapons in his mighty warfare against sin; had been crucified with Christ, and now no longer lived, but Christ lived in him. His life was one of faith in the Son of God, who loved him and gave Himself for him.

The cross was the means, not of justification only, but of sanctification, and stood between him and his past; while by the Holy Spirit the Son of God had become resident and regnant within him.

## **PHILIPPIANS**

There is nothing polemical in this Epistle. The former Epistles have met and silenced his detractors and enemies. The strife and divisions of the churches, if such there were, do not reach him through

the prison doors, or traverse the distance to his Roman abode. The peace of God that passeth all understanding keeps his mind and heart, and out of that tranquil heart pours forth a tide of deep and tender love to his beloved friends at Philippi.

The hope of being alive at the coming of the Lord is still his heart's guiding star. His citizenship was in Heaven, whence he looked for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ; but the possibility that perhaps the Lord might have to be magnified by his death had already presented itself to his mind. He saw, however, that the will of God was best, and learned from his Master the secret of self-sacrificing humility. Epaphroditus had brought gifts of love from Philippi, and by his hands this letter of love and gratitude was returned.

## COLOSSIANS

Among those who visited Paul in his hired house, towards the end of his detention in Rome, was Epaphras of Colossae, who also represented Laodicea and Hierapolis cities of Asia Minor in the valley of the Lycus. He told the Apostle of a strange new heresy, which was developing with alarming rapidity in the churches that had been planted in those distant cities.

The falsely-called Christian philosophy of the time was endeavoring to fill the gulf between sinful man and the holy God by a ladder of mythical existences, through which man's prayers might ascend to God and his blessing descend on man. The whole conception was entirely imaginary, and in its furthest reach must fail of its object; for between the loftiest archangel or spirit and the eternal God there is still the infinite chasm which sunders the creature from the Creator, and is impassable unless the Creator come across it.

The necessity of dealing with this absurd tissue of the imagination was used by the Spirit of God to unveil a wider, deeper view of the fulness that there is in Jesus; and a disclosure was made to the Apostle of the full meaning of the Lord's ascension to the right hand of power. He saw that all principalities and powers, all creature existences, all beings in Heaven and earth, and under the earth, were beneath his feet. He was Lord and King, ruling all, filling all, maintaining all. **“By him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist . . . And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power”** (Colossians 1:16; 2:10).

At the same time, his conviction of his union with the risen Lord was ever more definite, and his appreciation of his indwelling more full of hope and glory. What did it matter if he was called upon to fill up what was behind of the sufferings? Had it not been given him to make known the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in the heart, the hope of glory? Tychicus bore this letter and that to the Ephesians.

## PHILEMON

Onesimus, the runaway slave, fugitive from his master Philemon, driven by want to the Apostle's house or discovered in some low haunt of crime by his companions in their errands of mercy, had been begotten to a new life, and was now not a slave only, but a brother beloved. Paul sent him

back to his master, who was a friend of his, and with whom he seems to have had a business account (vv. 18, 19). This Epistle, which is a perfect model of Christian courtesy, was given him as an introduction to his owner.

The chief point to notice here is the perfect patience and certainty with which the Apostle awaits the ultimate triumph of divine love. He must have felt that in the sight of God, Onesimus had a perfect right to freedom; but it would have been highly impolitic for him to interfere between master and man. Let Philemon be taught to look at Onesimus as joined to him in the Gospel, it would not be long before he would himself propose his emancipation. But till he did, Paul would not precipitate matters, and Onesimus must return to serve. The principle of action in this single instance doubtless became the ultimate law for the solution of many other difficult problems, which were left to the gradual conquest of the spirit of love.

## **EPHESIANS**

This Epistle reiterates the great conceptions of the empire of the Lord Jesus, and of his ability to fill the whole gulf between God and man, which the former Epistle had foreshadowed. The doctrine of identification with Christ, in his death, resurrection, and ascension, is set forth with remarkable vividness and power. The conception of the Church as the Body and Bride of Christ is elaborated with peculiar beauty of detail. But the commanding peculiarity of this Epistle is its allusion to the home life of husband and wife, parent and child, master and slave.

In earlier days, on account of the present distress, and without the distinct assurance of Inspiration, the Apostle had spoken as though the difficulties of married life preponderated over its sweets (I Corinthians 7); but in these later Epistles he holds it up as the model of the love which subsists between the Heavenly Bridegroom and His own: and, contrary to the opinion of his time, he goes so far as to assert that the true bond of marriage is the self-sacrifice of the stronger for the weaker of the husband for the wife.

Woman was no longer to be the slave or toy of man; but men were to be prepared to give themselves for their wives in loving acts of unselfishness, as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it.

## **I TIMOTHY AND TITUS**

After his release, Paul visited the scenes of his former ministry around the shores of the AEgean; and it was during his journeys at this time that he indited these Epistles to direct the young evangelists in the right ordering of the churches under their care. They are of extreme interest because dealing with so many domestic and practical details.

He is never weary of showing that the great principles of the Gospel are meant to elevate the commoner incidents and duties of life. **“godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.”** **“The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared unto all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world”** (I Timothy 4:8; Titus 2:11, 12).

## II TIMOTHY

It was a mellow and softened old age. Lonely so far as dear companions were concerned; full of privations, without cloak, or books, or tendance; shivering in the prison; waiting to be offered, weigh anchor, and drop down the stream. He wanted once more to see his beloved son in the faith, and wrote to speed his steps.

It is very pathetic, very beautiful, very human. But the ray of an indomitable courage and faith is flung across the heaving waters: he has kept his Lord's deposit, and knows that the deposit which he had made years before had been no less safely kept. And so the pen is taken in hand for the last time. A few tender messages are added as a post script. And with large letters he appends the closing sentences, "**The Lord Jesus Christ be with thy spirit. Grace be with you.**"

The Epistles of Paul resemble stereotyped plates, from which innumerable copies are produced. Who but God can number the myriads of souls that have come in contact with his words, and have themselves become Epistles, ministered by him, "**written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God.**"

And, till the Lord come, edition after edition of character, soul life, and blessed victorious experience, shall be struck off from these blocks of holy thinking which we owe to the Apostle Paul.

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