

[R5125 : page 341]

## ST. PAUL'S GREAT MISSION

"For Christ sent me...to preach the Gospel." – 1 Cor. 1:17.

LEARNING HAS always been very properly held in high esteem, and those who have it usually appreciate this fact as well as do those who have it not. There is, therefore, on the part of the learned, or those who appear to be so, a tendency to do or say things or to discuss subjects that would make them shine before others.

St. Paul had a good education. He had much advantage every way; consequently he had the greater temptation to display his knowledge. In his Epistle to the Corinthians, he was addressing a people who were familiar with Greek philosophy and who knew that the world valued this philosophy so highly that a person who did not manifest acquaintance with Greek learning was considered an ignoramus.

The Apostle realized that his great mission was not that of making himself shine, but of preaching the Gospel – the "good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people." (Luke 2:10.) As an ambassador of Christ, he had been given the privilege of becoming a sharer in His sufferings in the present Age and in the glories to follow in Christ's Kingdom. He saw clearly that his commission transcended anything and everything else in the world, and that from the Divine point of view all other philosophies are foolishness. He had wisely concluded that he would neither detract from his own mission to discuss these theories of man, nor would he quarrel with those who accepted them.

Since those who would be blessed by hearing the Gospel would be those whom the Lord wished to gather, St. Paul determined to preach *nothing but Christ*. He would not mix the doctrines of Christ with those of Plato, although he knew that if he were to mention Plato and then [R5126 : page 342] to present Christ as a great philosopher, he would win the attention of the Greeks, who would say, "Here is

another teacher of immortality and kindred themes," and then listen to St. Paul's discourse.

St. Paul was well aware that the teaching of Christ is the very reverse of Plato's theory – that man has inherent immortality, that when he seems to *die*, he then really begins to *live*. Man has nothing that will commend him to God or give him everlasting life. But if he can come to a condition of harmony with God, he will have the blessing of everlasting life and happiness. The Apostle knew that while no fallen man can obtain this for himself, God has made provision for all, both through the redemption price laid down at Calvary and also through the restoration of all things by the Redeemer. – Acts 3:19-21.

How wise St. Paul was! How sad that the early Church did not profit by his course! Long years after the Apostles fell asleep, the mixture of the Platonic philosophy and the Gospel of Christ wrought havoc in Christian faith, and built up the great anti-Christian system Scripturally called "Babylon." St. Paul was wise in that he would not discuss the topics usually taught by the Greek philosophers, but gave his whole time to the presentation of the philosophy of the Plan of the Ages. He preached Christ, able now to save "to the uttermost" all who come to the Father by Him (Heb. 7:25), all who have the appreciative ear, and able in His Kingdom to bring all mankind to a knowledge of God's goodness by opening their deaf ears to receive the Truth. He showed that the whole work of sin and of devastation through death, as it has been accomplished in the human family, will ultimately be undone.

## **THE WEAK POINT IN MODERN PREACHING**

Many of St. Paul's hearers would have been glad to learn about Christ as the great Jewish Teacher and to admit that His philosophy was good. They would have been willing to hear that Christ will some day reign and uplift humanity. A great obstacle, however, stood in the way. This One who was being preached had not borne a good

reputation. According to the testimony of His own nation, He had been *crucified as a malefactor*.

A weaker man than St. Paul might have followed the policy of covering up the fact of the *crucifixion* of Christ. He might have said that the Jews did not appreciate what Christ was doing, that Christ was the Son of God, the mighty Logos; and then he might have glossed over the death of Christ on the cross. Thus the Gentiles might have regarded our Lord as a great Teacher and never have learned of the manner of His death until some Jew should tell them that their great Teacher had been a malefactor so wicked that He was not fit to live. Should they then have asked St. Paul whether this was true, he could have explained that it was a fact, but that the great mass of the Jewish people had not consented to this act of their rulers and therefore were not a party to it.

This glossing over of truth is what is done today in all of the great pulpits of Christendom. If our Lord's death is mentioned at all, it is done in an apologetic manner. But St. Paul preached that Christ's death was *necessary* to redeem the human race, and that under the terms of the Law Covenant, He must die on the *cross* in order to redeem *Israel* from the curse of the Law. – Gal. 3:13.

Thus the Apostle did not shun to declare the whole counsel of God in the strongest form. (Acts 20:27.) Crucifixion was the only way in which our Lord's death would be of full value and accomplish the purpose intended. Had He not died, the "Just for the unjust," He could not have been the Redeemer of the whole world. This Message was so great, so different from anything else in the world, that the Apostle concluded that he had no time for the discussion of any other topic.

There might have been occasions when St. Paul could have discussed something else. Although he might have had the opportunity to say that he did not believe in the Platonic philosophy at all, yet he did not intend to display what he knew about worldly philosophies. So it is with us. We are to discuss the *Truth* rather than the *error*. If we

should have occasion to mention the error, it should be only as a side-light to illuminate the Truth by contrast.

There are many subjects in which there is a measure of truth – geology, astronomy, etc. – but to preach these would be to neglect, not only to set forth the great central Message that man is a sinner and can have no reconciliation with God except through the death of Christ, but to show what constitutes discipleship, what is to be its reward and what the result of the glorification of the Church with Christ. This Message of the Gospel is not preached today. On the contrary, much foolishness is set forth in the name of Christ and in churches dedicated to the service of the Lord. We are not to imitate this course and to strive for popularity in preaching. We are to follow in the footsteps of Jesus and His disciples.

Observation has taught us that those consecrated ones who have permitted other themes than "this Gospel" to engross time and attention are in great danger of being led astray. We advise such to be very jealous in husbanding time and talent for the ministry of the Gospel. Let us leave all other subjects, no matter how interesting, to others. In the future, when all knowledge shall be ours, we can discuss them. Those who from any avoidable cause turn aside from the ministry of the true and only Gospel are quickly turned out of the way, or else are greatly hindered in their course toward "the prize of the high calling." – Phil. 3:14.

=====