

THIS ARTICLE WAS prepared for presentation at a departmental retreat of college religion professors. This explains the technical nature of the material—material that will reward your earnest study. The three basic questions treated are: 1) Anthropology—the nature of Christ and mankind in

members are asked what is the heart of the New Testament, only a minority acknowledge with the apostles and prophets that it is “the everlasting gospel,” justification by faith alone. Those who endeavor to muffle discussion or allege the issue to be merely one of semantics show

RIGHTEOUSNESS BY FAITH

PART I

by Desmond Ford

terms of sinful nature and Original Sin; 2) Soteriology—the definition of justification and sanctification in terms of the cross and the believer's faith; 3) Eschatology—the status of the believer in preadvent times in terms of perfection and the perseverance of the saints. This first part covers only 1) Anthropology. You can understand it. Take a deep breath, and start reading . . . NOW!—Ed.

“ . . . the question will be put to me: ‘Hast thou uttered the definite message quite definitely?’ And if I have not done so, what then?” (Soren Kierkegaard, *Journals*, p. 493)

At every period in the history of the Church the greatest sin of the Church, and the one which causes the greatest distress, is that she withholds the Gospel from the world and from herself The weakness of the Church lies in the fact that she lacks

this ‘living Word’—that she does not know the reason for her own existence—and consequently has no real message for the present situation. (E. Bruner, *The Divine Imperative*, p. 565)

The great mass of professing Christians has failed to utter the definite message and indeed knows not what it is.

Beholders conclude this church has no real message for the present situation. When

their culpable ignorance. They come under the curse of Galatians 1:8, and separate themselves from the church invisible which has ever been prepared to die rather than compromise here. The free gift of imputed (credited, accounted, reckoned) righteousness, available through faith in the merits of Christ's cross is the one subject that should swallow up every other, the sweetest melody from human lips, the foundation of Christianity, the light that is to lighten the whole earth with its glory, transcending all other issues in importance. Failure to affirm this, once understood, is declared to be treason and cowardice.

Scripture Contains a Definite Gospel

Where is the definitive word on the gospel to be found? Certainly not outside Scripture. And where in Scripture? Not even in the Gospels which were written as supplementary to the Epistles. The cross had to be endured before it could be explained. Christ's own reticence is just what he declared we should find in his words when he announced their incompleteness and promised the enlightening Spirit. It was Pentecost which made Calvary luminous, and the chief product of the Pentecostal early rain was Paul, God's “chosen instrument.” It was Paul, “the greatest of human teachers” who, by inspiration, minted most of the key terms of Christian thought such as “righteousness by faith,” “in Christ,” “justification,” “imputation,” “reconciliation,” “adoption,” etc. Apart from the Crucifixion account, Paul is the only N.T. writer to speak about



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'the cross.' References to the death of Christ (i.e., actual usages of the term "death") are rare outside of Paul. He uses the word "gospel" nearly four times as often as the rest of the N.T. writers combined, and grace about twice as often.

To define the gospel without Paul's insights would be like presenting Christianity apart from Calvary. Every revival in church history has been sparked by the renewed study of Paul's Romans. It is in this, the sole semisystematic theological treatise of Scripture, that Paul affirms the gospel to be a revelation of the righteousness available to those who have faith, a righteousness imputed at the beginning and every subsequent step of the Christian life despite the believer's imperfections and "unavoidable deficiencies." Thus the gospel and righteousness by faith include each other, and to understand either is to understand both, but to err regarding either is to err concerning both.

Paul summed up his message thus—"we preach Christ crucified"; "I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified"; "Jesus Christ was openly set forth crucified" (1 Cor 1:23; 1 Cor 2:2; Gal 3:1). He refused to glory in anything save the cross (Gal 6:14). Preaching the gospel and preaching Christ crucified are the same thing. (Compare 1 Cor 15:1,2 and Php 1:5,7, 12,15,16,27.) Galatians 1 declares that the gospel is the news of God's gift of his son for the sins of the world, and that if any man preach otherwise let him be anathema. Wrote Luther:

... he dare curse all teachers throughout the whole world and in heaven, which pervert his Gospel and teach any other; for all men must either believe that Gospel that Paul preached, or else they must be accursed and condemned. (Martin Luther, *Galatians*, p. 69)

At the beginning and throughout his presentation of RBF, Paul alluded to the Incarnation. What merits there be in Christ's life and death depend upon who and what he was. It is this which distinguishes Christ's sacrifice from a martyrdom. Therefore, we address ourselves in detail first to this area of Christology and anthropology. As we do so, we should keep in mind that the law of God, the foundation,

pillar, and bulwark of the universe is a reflection of what God is, not just what he does, and therefore the sinlessness it demands is first one of nature, then only secondarily character and performance.

ANTHROPOLOGY

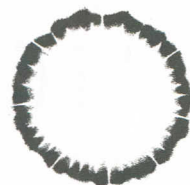
Controversies over Christ's Nature

All the controversies of the centuries over the nature of Christ have revolved around one of the following three cruxes: 1. The reality of his human nature; 2. Its integrity (completeness and perfection); 3. The nature of its union with the divine nature.

Did Christ have a perfectly sinless nature, one that had no desire for evil and every desire for good? We answer that he began as regards sinlessness where the first Adam began. This is obvious not only when we read such Scriptures as Mark 1:24; Luke 1:35; John 3:34; 7:18; 14:30; Acts 3:14; Romans 8:3; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15; 7:26; 9:14; 10:5; 1 Peter 1:19; 3:18; 1 John 3:5,7, but from the fact that any "lack of conformity with the will of God whether in act, disposition or state" is sin.

Sinless Behavior Requires a Sinless Nature

Perfectly sinless behavior is possible only to a perfectly sinless nature. The divine law is infinite and requires that people be ever permeated by the Spirit as completely as Adam before the Fall, "having no part dark" but "full of light," loving the Lord without reserve with all their faculties, and their neighbor to the extent that Christ has loved. Perfect inherent righteousness means that every thought is brought into captivity to God, being the best possible thought for that moment, God's glory being uppermost, and the well-being of our neighbors given preeminence over our own as we esteem them better than ourselves—and all this without any other feelings than perfect love, joy, and humility. Perfect lawkeeping means never to waste a thought, a cent, or a moment, never to worry or to forget what we



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should remember, never to experience the slightest sickness induced by personal error, to praise God as wholeheartedly and continuously as the sinless angels and never to miss one opportunity of doing not merely good but the best.

Scripture sets forth both sin and righteousness as states. The words translated "sin," or used as synonyms for it, apply to dispositions and states as certainly as to acts. Thus *chattah* and *hamartia*, for example, both mean "a falling short." *Anomia* in 1 John 3:4 means not so much "transgression of the law" as "lawlessness." Thus Scripture can speak of the "evil heart" (Heb 3:12), and the condition of the heart which gives rise to wrong desires and acts is expressly called "sin" (Rom 7:8, 11, 13, 14, 17, 20). There is sin in the desire of sin, and the law requires that we not only hate evil enough to refrain from overtly doing it, but that we should hate it with all our being and repudiate immediately its slightest approach in temptation.

Sin is declared to exist in the being prior to our own consciousness of it, and as that which is discovered and awakened by the law (Rom 7:9, 10). It is set forth as a permanent power and reigning principle (see Rom 5:21 and 6:12). Thus the Beatitudes are pronounced not upon acts but upon states of mind, heart, and character, while the curses of the law are pronounced not so much against single acts of evil, as against the evil dispositions from which they spring.

In both "the works of the flesh" (Gal 5:19) and "the fruit of the Spirit" (Gal 5:22), dispositions rather than actions predominate. For the same reason we distinguish between murder and manslaughter. Not the outward result but the motive differs, and motive has to do with our condition of heart. Scripture clearly teaches in Romans 7 that there is guilt in evil desires, even when resisted by the will. Temptation is not sin, but the failure to repudiate temptation immediately and wholeheartedly is sin, and the very presence of depraved desires reveals the existence of a nature which is sinful. Man's state, and not merely his behavior, is naturally sinful.

Christ and Sinful Nature

Some believers have wished to have a Christ who experienced evil propensities in his flesh but not in his mind. The biblical teaching of the unity of man forbids any such dualism. *Propensities are realized only in the mind, and it is not possible for one part of man's nature to be depraved and another not.* Any such dichotomy of nature as proposed by these theorists is completely unbiblical. Thus the necessity for the perfect health that Christ possessed, and the perfect harmony of faculties.

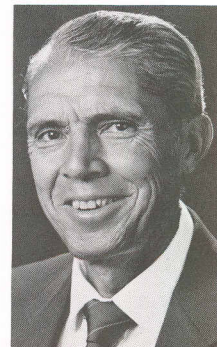
Others confuse infirmities with propensities, but there is a world of difference between weakness and badness. Christ accepted the results of being shut away from the Tree of Life insofar as he had a lessened capacity in every way than Adam, but that does not imply a single evil proclivity. When some theologians refer to Christ's "sinful nature," they mean only that he was affected by sin but not infected.

For Christ to be the second or last Adam, he, the Divine One, must possess a sinless human nature, otherwise he could never have met the law's demands for such, and neither could he have been an acceptable Representative, or Substitute, to provide infinite merits for imputation to the guilty.

To teach that Christ was possessed of sinful propensities is to teach that he himself was a sinner in need of a Savior. It makes his ministry not one of substitution but of example only. His victory is not that of the last Adam representing the race afresh but a victory over indwelling sinfulness. Such teaching veers towards pantheism as it finds God even in sinfulness, and tends to produce the heresies of legalism and perfectionism as men strive to find acceptance by their own complete fulfilling of the law's demands. We affirm that Christ, unlike us, did not have Original Sin. To suggest that his human nature was like our converted nature denies the New Testament evidence that the converted still have evil propensities which require continual crucifixion by the will.

[Part Two will discuss: 2) Justification and Sanctification, and 3) Eschatology.]

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