

**SERMONS PREACHED IN ELGIN
PLACE CONGREGATIONAL
CHURCH, GLASGOW, ON
SABBATH, 6H SEPTEMBER, 1891**

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Sermons Preached in Elgin Place Congregational Church, Glasgow, on Sabbath, 6h September, 1891 by Henry Allon

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HENRY ALLON

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SERMONS

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PREACHED IN

Elgin Place Congregational Church, Glasgow,

On SABBATH, 6th SEPTEMBER, 1891.

ON THE OCCASION OF THE

REV. T. EYNON DAVIES

ENTERING UPON HIS MINISTRY AS PASTOR OF THE CHURCH.

PAUL'S PASSION FOR CHRIST.

BY THE

REV. HENRY ALLON, D.D., LONDON.

31p

THE CROSS OF CHRIST.

BY THE

REV. T. EYNON DAVIES.

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1891.

PAUL'S PASSION FOR CHRIST.

BY THE REV. HENRY ALLON, D.D., LONDON.

"For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God; or whether we be sober, it is for your cause. For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them, and rose again."—2 Corinthians v. 13-15.

To the men of his generation the Christian apostleship of Paul was a great paradox. Amongst his fellow-apostles he stood pre-eminent in intellectual greatness, in varied learning, in Pharisaic reputation, in intensity of religious passion, and in the practical energy and daring with which he propagated Christianity. The antagonism that he provoked is a measure of his power. Few men in human history have excited more surprise, or provoked so much denunciation, sarcasm, and hatred. No animosities are so bitter as religious animosities; just because no interests are so sacred, no issues so momentous. All followers of the Nazarene fanaticism provoked scorn or hatred from both Jew and Greek. But concerning no one of the Apostles—Peter, James, or John—do we find records of such contempt and resentment as concerning Paul. His letters abound in references to the inimical estimates of him that men formed. Either he was more sensitive than his brethren, and more acutely felt his social ostracism, or there was in his character, or in his apostolate, something that made his Christian advocacy more anomalous and provocative than that of the other Apostles. The historian of the Acts of the Apostles, in his records of Paul, confirms the expressions of Paul's own letters. Festus, for instance, is represented as unable to restrain himself even upon the judgment-seat; and in the presence of King Agrippa he breaks in upon what to us reads as a well-reasoned defence, and which, indeed, greatly moved Agrippa himself, with something like passionate impatience,—“Paul, thou art beside thyself: much learning doth make thee mad.” To which, with characteristic calmness and cogency, Paul simply replies, that this account of his personal conversion, and of the great facts and

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ideas which justified it, were strictly "words of truth and soberness." Again and again he speaks of the animosities excited towards him. "We are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men." "We are made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things." And—with a more general reference to the Christianity which he preached—"The wisdom of the world is foolishness with God." "The preaching of the Cross is to them that perish foolishness;" "to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness." Most of these expressions occur in his letters to Gentile churches—especially to the Church at Corinth—as if to Gentile philosophy Christianity was specially obnoxious.

One can understand the feeling excited in the Jews by this Nazarene heresy, and by the conversion to it of a prominent Pharisee, and an orthodox champion of great gifts and great zeal, such as Saul of Tarsus. It has its analogies in the feeling sometimes shewn by Romanists towards Protestants, and by Anglicans towards Nonconformists. But here is the estimate of Christianity, and of its ablest apostle of Grecian philosophers, looking at it from a purely intellectual standpoint. To the Jew, Christianity, theologically estimated, was a stumbling block; to the Greek, Christianity, philosophically estimated, was foolishness. So that when they saw a strong thinker, and a great scholar, like Saul of Tarsus, become an enthusiastic convert to it, and a fervid preacher of it, sacrificing for it all the secular and social and religious interests of life, they could only sarcastically say of him—"He is mad!" I need not point out the modern parallels to this attitude—the contempt that so-called philosophy often expresses towards what it deems the ignorance and superstition of Christian belief: as a lofty ethical teaching Christianity is all very well, but as a supernatural revelation, as an expiatory sacrifice for human sin, it is fanatical foolishness.

It is worth while, in the light of Paul's experience, to look at this. What is it in Christianity which, while it excites a transcendent enthusiasm in men like Paul, excites a corresponding contempt in men like the philosophers of Greece? Here is a gifted Jew, a prominent Pharisee, an eminently religious man, who, in the fidelity and fervour of his religious zeal, had signalized himself as an eager and relentless persecutor of these fanatical Nazarenes. "I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things

contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which things I also did in Jerusalem; and many of the saints did I shut up in prison; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities." But in the very culmination of his persecuting passion, in the prosecution of a special and surpassing enterprise, where every indication is of the most determined and intensified hostility, in a single hour, this man is converted. Journeying with his persecuting band, he is convinced of the divine truth of the extraordinary preaching and mission of this Nazarene peasant; the sword drops from his hand, and, surrounded by his followers, he falls prostrate to the earth, and prays --as to God--to the crucified Jesus, whose followers he was seeking to exterminate. Forthwith he seeks Ananias in Damascus, and sacrifices for Christ his great position as a Pharisee, his reputation for intelligence and consistency, his home enjoyments, and his brilliant prospects. "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in Him."

Try to imagine this brilliant disciple of Gamaliel a mendicant preacher of this pestilent heresy, the disciple of a crucified blasphemer, the apostle of a sect that was "everywhere spoken against." He travels from country to country, only to exchange the resentful hatred of the Jew for the sarcastic contempt of the Gentile; nowhere finding predisposition whercon to engraft his teaching; encountering every form of popular hostility, "knowing that everywhere bonds and imprisonments await me;" "in deaths oft." He was denounced as a traitor, scorned as a fanatical fool. His apostleship was an inexplicable paradox, outside the pale of rational debate. Men could not understand either the philosophy or the enthusiasm of his religious faith.

How does he vindicate himself? He affirms the intrinsic reasonableness, the spiritual truth, and the constraining force of his Christian teaching. He was so consecrated and enthusiastic in his apostleship, because in the Christ he recognised such transcendent truth and inspiration. No doubt the

ardour of a convert was enkindled in him. Never did man undergo a more wonderful revolution of conviction and feeling. The notions that he had ridiculed as fanatical, and persecuted as blasphemous, he now saw to be "the wisdom and the power of God;" the teachings which he had heard from the lips of Stephen, and for which he had "consented to his death," were demonstrably true; the Christians whom he had persecuted as enemies of religion were "servants of the Most High God." Amazed, and confounded by the demonstration, he fell prostrate before the Jesus whom he had persecuted, calling Him "Lord," and humbly asking, "What wilt thou have me to do?" It must have been a process and paroxysm of intense feeling; and, under the inspiration of its conviction and remorse, he preached the faith that he had once destroyed. He is only a supreme instance of all true Christian discipleship. Every converted man comes under this special constraint, and, more or less, lives under its inspirations.

What is it? What is it in Christianity that, on the one hand, makes it so inscrutable to those who do not experience it, and, on the other, so intense and resistless to those who do? Is it merely a change of theological notions—a belief in the spiritual, as opposed to the materialism of sceptical philosophy? Saul, the Jewish Pharisee, receiving Christ and Christianity? This it is: true theological ideas do determine the strength and inspiration of all religious discipleship. "How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?" But a great deal more than right notion is essential to such inspiration. Many a man avows a Christian creed who is utterly irresponsive to Christian inspirations. Paul distinguishes qualities in men themselves. "The natural man," he tells us, "receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Hence, the first essential to Christian discipleship is spiritual life—the quickening of dormant and inimical spiritual affections—so that the man who was "dead in trespasses and sins" is, as it were, born to a new life of holy sympathy and desire. Christ not only teaches, He quickens. Then there are in religious ideas themselves different degrees of inspiring power. Every true man is influenced in feeling and in conduct by his notions. The Buddhist is, the Jew is, the Mohammedan is, the moral philosopher is, the politician is, the social reformer is. Think, then, of the distinctive character of Christian