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A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php

ARTICLE IX.

THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST IN THE FIRST CENTURY.

BY THE REVEREND JOHN W. BRADSHAW.

IN the consideration of this general theme, four subordinate topics claim attention:—

I. The Constituent Elements of the Gospel; II. Its Essential Truths; III. The Motives to which the Apostles Appealed; IV. The Secret of the Gospel's Rapid Spread.

I. THE CONSTITUENT ELEMENTS OF THE GOSPEL.

In the Gospel, broadly understood as the initial force which gave rise to Christianity, three essential elements are to be distinguished. They are: 1. A Person; 2. A Way of Life; and 3. A Teaching.

1. Primarily the Gospel, as defined, was a wonderful *personality*. First in time, transcendent in importance in the inauguration of Christianity, was Jesus Christ. He himself was the initial force through which Christianity was started upon its career. He was the center of attraction by which the earliest disciples were drawn into the Christian life, the living bond by which they were held in unity, the propulsion by which they were sent out to propagate the new redemption, the message which they proclaimed.

It is impossible for us to exaggerate the importance of Jesus himself as the central, vital factor in the beginning and spread of Christianity; and that, not chiefly because of the words he spoke, which might be understood and remembered; not because of the works he did, which might

awaken amazement and lead to certain inferences as to the source of his power; but because of what he himself was in the rich, overmastering influence of his own personality. As we read "In Memoriam," the masterpiece of the great laureate, and in some measure perceive what Arthur Hallam was to the heart and mind, to the whole personal development, of Alfred Tennyson, we may perhaps be helped to some faint suggestion of the mighty meaning of personality, and of what the supreme personality of human history must have been to the men whose hearts he won, whose minds he illumined, whose lives he transformed, whose spirits he vitalized and inspired. To quote the words of another, "The most important part of the training of the twelve was one which was perhaps at the time little noticed, though it was producing splendid results,—the silent and constant influence of the character of Jesus upon them. It was this which made them the men they became. For this, more than all else, the generations of those who love him look back to them with envy. We admire and adore at a distance the qualities of his character; but what must it have been to see them in the unity of life, and for years to feel their molding pressure."

To those who were his disciples during his earthly life, Jesus himself *was* the Gospel. There is little evidence of any attempt on their part to analyze or to account for him. It was enough to be with him and to love him. And when he had gone from them, and they started forth to continue the work which he had begun, the Gospel which they carried to the world was that indicated in the first words of Mark, "The good tidings concerning Jesus Christ." By no amount of historical research, by no exercise of the historic imagination, will it ever be possible for us to put ourselves precisely at the point of view of the apostles; for the reason that we can never know the person, Jesus of Nazareth, as they knew him. It follows that

we shall inevitably fail rightly to estimate the beginnings of Christianity, except as we recognize in Jesus himself not only the vital force, but also the essential content, of the original Gospel.

2. Viewed in another important aspect, the Gospel in the First Century was *a way of life*. The early disciples came quickly to be known as those who were of "the Way." It was that he might bring bound to Jerusalem any that were of "the Way" that Saul of Tarsus set forth on his journey to Damascus.

For the secret of this way of life we go back to Christ himself. About the person of Jesus, as its germinative center, a new order of society began spontaneously to organize itself,—a society whose regulative principles were (1st) the new thought of God and the filial spirit towards him which Jesus taught and exemplified, and (2d) the new thought of man and the spirit of self-forgetful service of men which Christ was continually illustrating; a life of free, glad loyalty towards God as Father, and of sympathetic, loving interest in one another as brethren. Into this way of life the followers of Jesus were received as they were added to the little company of the disciples.

After the ascension of Christ, under the abiding consciousness of the Holy Spirit's presence, the disciples continued to cherish the life they had lived in the society of Jesus, and through them it propagated itself in the world. The early chapters of Acts are largely occupied with the story of its manifestation. It was by their way of life especially that the followers of Jesus arrested the attention and won the hearts of the people. In the Gospel, understood as the initial force which gave rise to Christianity, the Christian way of life must be recognized as a conspicuous factor.

3. But, as implied in our common use of the word, the Gospel in the First Century was also *a teaching*; the

teaching (1st) of Jesus himself, (2d) that teaching as modified and proclaimed by the disciples.

The study of New Testament theology has made very evident the truth, not always recognized, that this distinction is to be made between the teaching of Jesus himself, and the Gospel as apprehended and proclaimed by his followers,—not that there is any essential, vital difference between the two; not that there was intentional or conscious divergence from the teaching of Jesus on the part of his disciples. We cannot question their honest attempt with fidelity to proclaim and interpret that Gospel which Jesus was and taught. But their success in this attempt was qualified variously; as, e.g., by their Jewish presuppositions, which clung to them, and molded, limited, their Christian conceptions for long years after the departure of their Master; or, as by that dullness of spiritual apprehension, and the strongly materialistic bias of their conceptions, for which Jesus had frequent occasion to reprove them, and from which they did not wholly and instantly escape through the enduement at Pentecost.

Moreover, the preaching of the apostles and other of the early Christians was not simply the proclamation of what Jesus had done and said. It included the attempted interpretation of the teachings of Jesus, of the events of his life, and of the mysteries of his being. It fell to the early disciples to define the essential relation of Christianity to the Jewish religion, the Mosaic law, and the Levitical observances. The significance of Christ's death, the question of his person, the essential nature of faith and of the salvation to which it leads,—these are problems whose solution the apostles felt themselves constrained to attempt. And these attempted interpretations which appear in the New Testament writings bear the peculiar impress of the persons who present them or of the situation out of which they arise. They are colored by personal experience, like

that of the Apostle Paul; they bear witness to differences of mental and spiritual endowment, as is indicated by the Johannine writings when contrasted with the Epistle of James. They are determined by the conditions which Christianity is called to face in the world. In the Epistle to the Hebrews, we recognize Christianity at the crisis of its transition from a Jewish sect to a world-wide religion. In the Epistle to the Colossians, Christianity confronts the Alexandrian philosophy. In Jude, Second Peter, and the Epistles of John it is in the conflict with Gnosticism. The writer of the Apocalypse represents a Christianity crushed beneath the power of a persecuting Roman empire. It is Christianity confronted by the problems of the universe, which expresses itself in the Gospel of John.

This clearly defined stratification of teaching is apparent in the New Testament. There is unity indeed; but it is the unity of unfolding life,—a unity which is yet consistent with varying emphasis, and with partial apprehension of the many-sided evangel. We can no longer sum up the Gospel of Christ in the First Century under a single category without creating a false impression. The teaching of the Master must be distinguished from that of his disciples. The interpretations of his teaching by the disciples must be distinguished from one another.

With sufficient accuracy for our present purpose we may distinguish in the teaching of the Apostolic age five successive strata or slightly varying representations of Christian truth. They are as follows:—

- (1) The Teaching of Jesus Himself, as reported in the Synoptic Gospels;
- (2) The Teaching of the Primitive Apostles, as given in the early chapters of the book of Acts;
- (3) The Theology of Paul;
- (4) The Theology of the Epistle to the Hebrews;
- (5) The Theology of the Gospel and Epistles of John.

A very brief summary of the distinguishing features of these variant aspects of Christian teaching is all that can be attempted.

(1) *The Teaching of Jesus Himself.*—It is a commonplace, to which reference is scarcely necessary, that Christianity is the child of the Jewish religion. It tacitly accepts certain Jewish presuppositions, and makes these the foundation upon which it builds.

The secret of Israel's indomitable hope, the inspiration and regulative influence in the life of the Jewish people, was the confident expectation of the coming Messianic kingdom. It was this conception of the kingdom of God on earth that Jesus seized upon and made central in his teaching. He began his ministry with the proclamation that this kingdom need no longer be waited for; that it was at hand, to be entered and possessed immediately. The conditions of citizenship in this kingdom, the law of its life, its king, the method of its development and progress, its judgments and awards,—these are the themes about which the teachings of Jesus chiefly group themselves. Under the form of truths concerning the Messianic kingdom it is that those utterances of Christ which are most universal in their application find expression.

But in the teaching of Jesus the Jewish presuppositions are accepted in essential idea to be completely transformed and vastly expanded in significance and scope. The temporal reign of a descendant of David, with Jerusalem as his capital, the Jews as his people, and the nations of the Gentiles as his subjugated dependencies, gives way to a spiritual kingdom, whose citizens are such as are marked by certain qualities of heart and the spirit of loyalty to God. To this citizenship all men are eligible, regardless of nationality or race. The Messianic king is not one who, in the pomp of royalty, conquers and rules by force, for his own aggrandizement and the material enrichment

of his chosen people; but one who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister; who has not where to lay his head; who gives his life a ransom for others, and whose subjects are summoned likewise to deny themselves, and, taking up the cross, to follow him.

Under the touch of Jesus the law of Moses undergoes a similar transfiguration. Accepted in form, it is so spiritualized in interpretation, and universalized in application, as to become essentially a new rule of life. "Not to destroy, but to fulfill," aptly summarizes the method of the teaching of Christ. The Jewish presupposition spiritualized and universalized becomes the Gospel for the world.

The attempt to classify the teachings of Christ according to the different subjects of which he spoke leads to some such summary as the following:—

(a) The Kingdom: its nature, growth, citizenship, etc., in many of the parables.

(b) The Law of the Kingdom, interpreted in the Sermon on the Mount, and summed up in the two great commandments.

(c) The Divine King, as portrayed in the glorious revelation of the universal Fatherhood of God.

(d) The Messiah, God's earthly representative, in the teachings concerning the Son of Man and the Son of God.

(e) The Messianic Salvation; including the freeness and unlimited scope of the divine grace and the representation of man as essentially child of God; a sinner, yet with the capacity for righteousness,—for receiving the divine life,—as his preëminent characteristic.

(f) The Christian Brotherhood—universal in its spirit—founded upon the law of love.

(g) The Last Things—death, judgment, the hereafter.

In these teachings of Jesus as given us in the synoptic narrative we have undoubtedly the nearest approach to the Gospel in its original simplicity.

(2) *The Teaching of the Primitive Apostles* is essentially the proclamation of Jesus as the long-expected Messiah. It occupies itself with the story of his life, teachings, mighty works, his crucifixion, resurrection, and exaltation to the right hand of God. In these are attested his Messiahship, and his authority to grant to believers the remission of their sins.

This teaching is marked by a perceptible receding from the spiritual conceptions of Jesus himself, toward those materialistic notions of the Messiah and his kingdom for which Christ so often found occasion to reprove his disciples while with them. The withdrawal of Christ into the heavens is regarded as but temporary. When, through the proclamation of the Gospel, the people shall be spiritually prepared to receive him, he will return for the final establishing of an earthly Messianic kingdom.

These teachings of the primitive church can scarcely be spoken of as a theology. There is no attempt to interpret nor to systematize the truths that are proclaimed. The two great themes which constitute the foci of later theological systems—the person of Christ, and the significance of his death—receive no particular attention. Jesus is the Messiah, the servant and prophet of God, the messenger of divine mercy, the innocent sufferer, whose sufferings were divinely appointed, now the exalted bearer of salvation, to whom is entrusted the lordship over all things. But there is no allusion to his preëxistence, no intimation as to his essential being or his metaphysical relationship to God. Of similar character are the frequent references to Christ's death. They are historical, not interpretative. From the standpoint of the Jew, the death of Jesus was the conclusive refutation of all his Messianic claims. To parry the force of this reasoning was the first necessity felt by the early Christians. The great instrument for accomplishing this was the fact of the resurrection. In spite of his death

upon the cross, God had set his seal to the Messiahship of Jesus by raising him from the dead. The death of the Messiah, moreover, had been predicted by the prophets, and appointed in the purpose of God. But there is no indication that the primitive disciples regarded the death of Jesus as possessing any independent value of its own, or as sustaining any essential relation to the exercise of divine grace or the deliverance of men from sin.

It is to be noted, also, that the original disciples of Jesus continued in their observance of the Jewish ritual; not, like the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, attempting to use the Mosaic ceremonial as interpreting the work of Christ; and apparently with no suspicion that Christianity was the enunciation of a new method of salvation, or that the Jewish ritual was to be done away. In their thought, Christianity was simply Judaism with the added feature of belief in Jesus as the Messiah.

(3) When we pass to the *teaching of Paul*, we find ourselves in a different region. Here is a theology, indeed, based upon presuppositions universal in their extent; with its constituent elements critically interpreted and bound together in a closely articulated system. The Pauline teaching is notable (*a*) by reason of its divergences from that of the primitive apostles, and (*b*) because of its own characteristic features. As contrasted with the earlier preachers of Christianity, Paul scarcely refers to the earthly life of Jesus, and emphasizes his death and resurrection only as connected with the Pauline philosophy of deliverance from sin. The Messianic kingdom, moreover, has little, if any, place in Paul's thought. The office of Christ which is emphasized is that of *deliverance* rather than that of *sovereignty*; and, in the theology of Paul, Jesus, the Messianic king, practically disappears, to give place to Christ, the divine Saviour of the world from sin.

In his conception of the Jewish system, also, Paul com-

pletely breaks with the early disciples. For him Mosaism and Christianity are absolutely incompatible. They represent two mutually exclusive bases of justification in the sight of God. The Law was divinely appointed, indeed, and had its temporary purpose to serve; but that purpose was to demonstrate the utter inability of men to attain to righteousness by the deeds of the Law, and so to make them ready to accept the righteousness which is through faith in Christ. In theory the Law and the Gospel have a common end, to bring men to righteousness; but in practice the Law has failed completely, and is to be wholly abandoned for that method of attaining righteousness which is through Christ. Hence, for Paul, Jesus is the abrogator of the Jewish system. It is not *fulfilled* in Christ, as being, in principle and method of operation, like, but inferior to, the Gospel. It is *abrogated*, as totally unlike and incompatible with the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.

The key to the Pauline theology, considered in itself, is to be sought in the apostle's own experience of sin and of deliverance therefrom through the power of that ascended Lord who had met him on the Damascus journey. An influential motive in the elaboration and proclamation of that theology is the right of the Gentile in the household of God. The starting-point is sin, which Paul recognizes as universal, and from which men are powerless to extricate themselves. The stronghold of sin is the flesh, understood as the seat of the appetites and passions. Christ saves men from sin by delivering them from the power of the flesh. By his death and resurrection he has provided a way whereby those who are identified with him by faith may themselves die to the flesh and rise to new life in the spirit. This faith—that is trust in Christ to the point of absolute surrender to and mystical union with him—becomes the ground of our justification with God.

In the theology of Paul the person and death of Christ emerge as factors of foremost importance. The risen and glorified Messiah, through whose death and resurrection has come salvation from the bondage and condemnation of sin, cannot be less than a superhuman being. The writings of Paul contain no systematic view of the person of Christ; but they clearly indicate that, in his thought, the historical Jesus was the incarnation of a preëxistent being, the Lord from heaven, the agent of God in creation, the image of the invisible God, who, though occupying a position of subordination to God, the eternal Father, yet sustains a relation to God and the universe which is incomparable. The death of this exalted being for the sin of the world is, for Paul, the foremost factor of the Christian faith, the culmination of Christ's saving work and the crowning glory of the Redeemer. Its significance is twofold. It is that by participating in which, through faith, we die unto sin; and it is also expiatory, as fitly expressing the displeasure of God in view of sin.

In the theology of Paul, it is to be observed, Christianity wholly breaks with Jewish particularism, and appears in that aspect of universality which makes it the religion for the world.

(4) In the *Epistle to the Hebrews* yet a different idea of the nature and philosophy of the work of Christ emerges. The key to this theology is its conception of the Jewish ceremonial Law, and of the relation of Jesus and his Gospel thereto. By this conception it is sharply differentiated from the Pauline teaching. In the thought of Paul, as we have already seen, Christianity as a redemptive system has entirely superseded the Jewish Law, as something, in essential principle and method of operation, wholly foreign to itself. In the conception of the writer of the *Epistle to the Hebrews*, the Mosaic Law is not something incompatible with Christianity, which is to be annulled, but some-

thing imperfect, which is to be fulfilled in Christ. The seeming contrast is due in part to the fact, that, with Paul, the emphasis is upon the Law as a *rule of life*, and upon the deliverance of men from the *power* of sin; while in the mind of the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, the *ceremonial* Law, the Jewish sacrificial system, and the deliverance of men from the *condemnation* of sin, are predominant. In the view of this writer, the Jewish ritual was the prophetic embodiment of Christian truth in symbolic form, involving a sacrificial basis of justification, not unlike that of Christianity; but essentially the same, though inferior in form and efficacy. The Levitical sacrificial system, which is assumed to be the essential element in Judaism, is regarded as the imperfect type, which finds its realization in Christ.

The idea of sacrifice, therefore, becomes central in this theology. "The sufficiency and perfection of Christ's sacrifice," may be said to be the theme of the Epistle. It is written with the manifest purpose of preventing Christian disciples of Jewish antecedents from entirely relapsing into Judaism; and of assisting such to make the complete transition from Jewish to Christian faith. In the attempt to accomplish this, the defects of the Mosaic ritual, from its own point of view, are exhibited in contrast with the perfection of Christ's mediatorial work, in these very particulars.

In the fulfilling of the aim of the Epistle, a view of the person of Christ is presented closely akin to that of Paul. He is the preëxistent Son of God, higher than all angels, by whom God made the worlds, the effulgence of the Father's glory and the very image of his substance. This divine dignity gives to the teachings of Jesus an authority far superior to that of the Mosaic legislation, and enables him, as the perfect high-priest, to accomplish a work of sacrificial mediation, to which the defective Jewish ritual

was wholly inadequate. In his death, also, was made the one perfect, sufficient offering for sin, of which all other sacrifices were but ineffectual shadows.

This Epistle is also notable as proposing a rationale for the Incarnation; the thought being that the preëxistent Christ became incarnate in order that he might share the nature of those whose spiritual deliverance he was to effect.

(5) Coming to the *theology of the Johannine writings*, we find ourselves in a wholly different atmosphere and environment. Christianity is out in the open. Conflicts with Judaism, such as are reflected in the writings of Paul and the Epistle to the Hebrews, are in the far past. For more than a generation since the death of Paul, the Gospel has been pushing its conquests in the Gentile world, redeeming individuals from sin to holiness, leavening society with its spirit. Christianity as expressed in these writings has come to the consciousness of itself, in relation to the world-problems, and is beginning to interpret itself under the influence of non-Jewish philosophies of God and the world. The writings themselves are manifestly the production of one who has thought long and profoundly upon the fundamental questions involved in Christ and his redeeming work, and who is familiar with the actual effects of the Gospel in the lives and characters of men. In the light of all this, and in the face of the claims of other religions and philosophies, he gives to the world this latest interpretation of Christianity in the Apostolic age.

The essential conceptions which mark the Gospel and the Epistles of John are the same, and differentiate them in some degree from all other New Testament writings. The Gospel differs from the Synoptics in being more definitely biography with a purpose. Its avowed aim is "that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye may have life through his name." It is not so much a mere chronicle of the life and teach-

ings of Jesus, as an interpretation of the meaning of Christ's words, deeds and person, as viewed through the vista of a long life of Christian thought and experience. Its emphasis is not, as in the other Gospels, upon Jesus the fulfillment of the Messianic expectation, but upon Christ, the Son of God and Saviour of the world. In the pursuit of the purpose indicated in the words already quoted, the historical Christ is presented as the incarnation of the eternal Logos, the principle of divine self-manifestation, through whom all revelations of God in nature and in humanity have been made. He is so one with God, in character and community of life, as to be able to say, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father," and to impart the life of God to the souls of men. He is himself, therefore, the final revelation, the vital center of the true religion, in which all other religions are transcended and superseded.

In these writings the spirituality of Christian conception reaches its culmination. In the thought of God as Spirit, as Light, as Life, as Love; in the apprehension of salvation as deliverance from sin, and the impartation of a new life to the soul; in the conception of eternal life itself, as the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ; in the recognition of that life as a present possession, to attain its perfection when those already sons of God shall be like him,—we have notable illustration of the depth and clearness of spiritual vision which characterized the author of these writings.

In the Gospel, also, we find a fullness of teaching concerning the Holy Spirit which distinguishes it from the Synoptics; while in the Johannine writings as a whole there is a notable absence of any so clearly defined philosophy of the death of Christ as is found, e.g., in the Epistle to the Hebrews. The death of Jesus is conceived as the culmination of service and self-giving, and a saving sig-

nificance is attributed to it; but no *theory* of its saving import comes to light.

This hasty and altogether inadequate review will have served its purpose if it shall have indicated with some clearness the demarcations by which different aspects of early Christian teaching are differentiated; and with this our consideration of the constituent elements of the Gospel in the First Century will reach its conclusion. That Gospel was, first and preëminently, a personality; second, a way of life; and, third, a teaching, which, finding its germ in the life and words of Jesus, developed with developing Christian life and increasing spiritual vision; became differentiated under the influence of individual apprehension and experience, of changing environment and special emergency, until it eventuated in the rich and many-sided Christian truth of the New Testament writings.

II. THE ESSENTIAL TRUTHS OF THE GOSPEL.

So much of space has been accorded to what the primitive Gospel was, that but little, comparatively, is left for the consideration of the remaining subdivisions of our general theme. Fortunately these call for no so elaborate treatment, and the previous discussion has so far anticipated the questions that are to follow, that we may hope to dispose of them somewhat expeditiously.

The second of the main topics we are to consider is the Essential Truths of the Gospel in the First Century. Our conclusions upon this topic will be determined by the significance given to the word "essential." Three different interpretations suggest themselves:—

1. Essential truths may be understood as those whose intellectual acceptance was, in the Apostolic age, regarded as indispensable to Christian discipleship.

2. Those which were indispensable to the completed

system of Christian truth; by the omission of any one of which Christian teaching would be left incomplete.

3. The truths which we find to be constituent elements in each of those phases of primitive Christian teaching which we have already considered.

If we accept the first definition of the word "essential," we can reach no other conclusion than that there were no essential truths of the Gospel in the First Century. In other words, we find no indication that intellectual assent to any system of doctrine whatever was a condition of membership in the primitive church. The faith which constituted the ground and evidence of Christian discipleship was the personal acceptance of Jesus as Lord. In the words of another, "The earliest creed of Christendom consisted of two words, Κύριος Ἰησοῦς, 'Jesus is Lord.' To make that confession was the mark of a Christian."

If we are to understand "essential" as synonymous with "indispensable to the completed system of Christian truth," we are confronted with the fact that no complete and authoritative system of doctrine was recognized or existed in the Apostolic age. Attempts at the interpretation and systematizing of the great facts of Christianity find expression in the various New Testament writings, as we have already seen; but no one of them is comprehensive and final; nor are these theologies identical, either in point of view or in the principles of interpretation which underlie them. Holding to this definition of the word "essential," it is difficult to make any satisfactory enumeration of the essential truths of the Gospel in the First Century, or accurately to distinguish between the essential and the non-essential.

We shall find, however, that anything of vital significance which may be supposed to attach to this definition of the word "essential," is fully conserved and more than safeguarded if we employ the term in the third signifi-

cance specified above; viz., as indicating the truths which we find to be constituent elements in all the different strata of New Testament teaching. Certain great verities are assumed or proclaimed in the teaching of Jesus and of *all* his disciples. These are the living core of Christian teaching, and may fairly be denominated its essentials. They do not constitute a theology or philosophy. They are simply a set of correlated facts, great living realities, the essentials of Christianity in the first and every other century. They are few, simple, easily apprehended.

Assuming that great presupposition, of human sinfulness and need of salvation which Christianity takes for granted, I know no better summary of the essential truths of the Gospel than that given by Professor William Newton Clarke, as follows: (1) The Fatherhood of God; (2) The Saviourhood of Jesus; (3) The Friendship of the Spirit; (4) The Supremacy of Love; (5) The Transforming Power. These five great verities were in the first century, are to-day, and forever will be the living substance of the Gospel.

III. THE MOTIVES TO WHICH THE APOSTLES APPEALED.

The review of Christianity in its beginnings naturally includes, also, some examination of the motives to which the Apostles appealed. It would perhaps be sufficient, in treatment of this topic, to quote the words of the Apostle Paul to the Corinthian Christians: "I am become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some." Two characteristics in which the original preachers of the Gospel are to the present day unrivaled are their marvelous adaptability to the men whom they addressed and the inexhaustible variety of their appeal. There is not a conceivable tone in the whole gamut of motive which is not struck in the New Testament writings. Hope, fear, the sense of obligation, the Jew's pride of ancestry and relig-

ious privilege, the Greek's consciousness of kinship with the divine, the Roman's reverence for law, gratitude for temporal blessings, the appeal of self-sacrificing love, the holy character of God, the powers of the world to come, the divine possibilities of the human spirit, the joy of fellowship with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ,—all these and the manifold other chords which vibrate in the spirit of man are struck with master hand in the recorded utterances of the early heralds of the Gospel. It is needless to particularize further. The one principle which regulated in the employment of motive was that of the Apostle Paul, "Whatever will reach this man, that without scruple I will use, that I may bring him to the life which is in Jesus Christ."

IV. THE SECRET OF THE GOSPEL'S RAPID SPREAD.

It remains to consider briefly the secret of the Gospel's rapid spread. Upon this subject one can hope to throw no light which is not already familiar. The two factors which account for Christianity's rapid extension are a waiting world and an adapted Gospel. In the external, formal preparation of the world for Christianity were involved the three elements often noted: unity of government under the dominion of Rome; unity of speech in the world-wide extension of the Greek language; and, preëminently, the wide-spread dispersion of the Jewish people, providing, through the dissemination of Jewish ideas and hopes and through the synagogue and its services, a *πῶς στῶ*, a peculiarly favorable starting-point for Christianity.

In the spiritual preparation for Christ and his Gospel we may note, on the one hand, the decay of belief in the pagan Græco-Roman religions, the awful corruption of morals, and the admitted failure of philosophy to solve the puzzles of the heart; and, on the other hand, in the case of a large part of the population, the deepening sense of

moral evil and the more earnest desire to escape from the corruptions of the age. Under the influence of these there occurred the attempted rejuvenation of paganism, the wildest superstitions were eagerly adopted, and the gloomy, mysterious cults of Egypt and the Orient secured multitudes of adherents. In the words of another, "The times were ripe for a more specific revelation of the Divine Nature; for, as never before, enfeebled, disenchanting, but still eager for the one thing needful, the world halted as if in expectancy. Alike in its negative and its positive elements, the whole age was big with needs, with problems, with longings; and satisfaction lagged or failed, even in the most likely places. Upon such a universe Christianity burst, taking up the good elements to itself, transforming them to higher purposes, and, above all, revivifying life, by pointing to a practicable ideal; to a way of salvation that had already been trodden by a Man of Sorrows."

The Gospel of Christ came as a sunburst to the hopeless, heartsick multitudes of mankind. The best which pagan philosophy could dream to be attainable was a good for the wise and cultured. The great mass of humanity was beyond hope, disinherited. To these it was that Christianity made its special appeal. To the most wretched, degraded, oppressed, and scorned it brought the assurance of recognition by the Almighty God as his children in this world, and the promise of a glorious and blessed hereafter; a hope guaranteed by the resurrection of the Crucified, and his exaltation to the place of power at God's right hand. To the sensual, corrupt, demoralized world, Christianity came as a power of conviction, by the purity of its teaching and its life. To the seekers after better things, it brought a living power unto salvation; the reality after which they had been hopelessly groping in a rehabilitated paganism and the teachings of the Stoics.

Moreover,—a fact which its earliest preachers did not

suspect, which perhaps they would but imperfectly have understood had it been declared to them,—Christianity carried within itself the solution of those problems of human existence which had been the staple of Greek speculation; upon which the heart and brain of the great thinkers of Greece and Rome from the days of Socrates onward had spent themselves, only to leave the riddle of the sphinx, the question of the true life for man and of the way to attain it, as inscrutable an enigma as at the outset. In Jesus Christ there had come to the world a new thought of God, a fresh interpretation of human nature, and insight into its intrinsically infinite worth, and, above all, power to accomplish *in Christ* everything that a man ought to become, to attain the dignity of true manhood. In a word, the Gospel carried within itself to a needy world the satisfaction of every need which the fathomless, many-sided spirit of man can know. In this, and in the character of the men who confessed and proclaimed it, their burning zeal, their tireless effort, their sympathetic Christly spirit, their blameless life under the indwelling and leadership of the Spirit of God,—in these is to be sought the secret of the rapid extension of Christianity in the Apostolic age.

And here,—in its disclosure of the eternal living verities of the spiritual universe; in its ability to meet, through these, the deepest needs of the ever-deepening human personality; in its possession, in these, of the key to every problem which the ever-complicating life of human society can present,—in its living Christ, its present redeeming energy, its transformed Christly representatives in the world;—in these elements is the guarantee of the Gospel's perpetuity and of its illimitable extension; until, in the last wanderer reclaimed and in a society permeated and energized by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, shall be attained the "one, far-off, divine event to which the whole creation moves."