

THE UNION SEMINARY REVIEW

VOL. XXVII.

JANUARY, 1916.

No. 2.

THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST.

(A Postmillennarian View.)

BY THE REV. PROFESSOR R. A. WEBB, D. D., LL. D.,

Presbyterian Theological Seminary of Kentucky, Louisville, Ky.

The last things in theology are really the first things in life. The woes of the European war are sending the world's mind back to eschatology. We were settling down into a naturalistic optimism. We were dreaming about some Utopia to be brought in by social programmes. The world to come was being relegated in favor of the world that now is.

Providence is driving us back to the old question, "After death, what?" What is to be the final *denouement* of this interesting world?

The Second Coming of Christ is, for Christian eschatology, the most momentous event which struggles in the bosom of the future. From the fall of man till the star stood still over Bethlehem, the First Coming of Christ was the sublimest object which loomed upon the horizon of human hope. Now all Christendom strains its eye for the return of him who once came, and has promised to come again.

About the fact and importance of the Second Coming, the Christian world is agreed. We all believe that Jesus will return

THE IDEAL BROTHER.

(A Book Study of Philemon.)

BY REV. EUGENE CALDWELL, D. D.,

*Professor of New Testament Interpretation, Union Theological
Seminary, Virginia.*

I. GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO PHILEMON.

1. *Unique.*

The epistle to Philemon is unique in that it is the only strictly private letter in the Bible. Paul must have written hundreds of such private letters. Why was this the only one that was preserved and placed in the New Testament canon? We answer because *it gives the most remarkable example of the social power of the gospel known in apostolic times.* "It is infinitely precious. Nowhere is the social influence of the gospel more strikingly exerted; nowhere does the nobility of the apostle's character receive a more vivid illustration than in his pleading on behalf of a runaway slave. The career of Onesimus is the most touching episode in apostolic history and the noblest monument of the moral power of the gospel" (Lightfoot).

2. *Author, Place, Date and Destination.*

It was written by Paul (vs. 1, 19) while a prisoner (vs. 1, 9, 10, 13, 23) at Rome some time during his first Roman imprisonment, 61-63 A. D. Nero, Burrhus, Seneca and Epictetus were some of the world-leaders of the day. But Paul is interested rather in the poor, friendless runaway slave, Onesimus. On behalf of this thief and runaway he writes to the slave's master back in Asia Minor this beautiful letter. Renan, the French literary critic, called it "a true little masterpiece of the art of letter writing." Sabatier spoke of it as "gleaming like a pearl of the most exquisite purity in the rich treasury of the New Testament." Bengel said: "The single epistle to Philemon very far surpasses all the wisdom of the world."

3. *Occasion and Purpose.*

Onesimus, a slave in the home of Philemon of Colossæ in Asia Minor, had in some way defrauded his master. He had fled to Rome, where he thought he would be safe in the thronging crowds of the great and wicked city. Rome was the natural cesspool for criminals. But God willed otherwise (Philemon vs. 15). Onesimus was converted by Paul, and "the slave of Philemon became the freedman of Christ" (Lightfoot). How he met with the great apostle we do not know. Perhaps it was through the influence of Epaphras, pastor of the Colossian church, who was in Rome at this time seeking help from Paul in his efforts to combat the Colossian heresy that was threatening his church (Philemon vs. 23). When Paul sent his epistle to the Colossians by the hand of Tychicus, he sent with this messenger the converted slave, Onesimus. Tychicus also carried another precious document, namely, the epistle to Philemon, in which Paul pleads with every argument he can think of for the forgiveness and restoration of Onesimus. The purpose of the epistle was to secure Philemon's forgiveness of Onesimus.

II. THEME: THE IDEAL BROTHER.

This is found in verse 6, where Paul prays that Philemon may attain unto the loftiest ideal of brotherhood in Christ Jesus. In the exposition below we endeavor to show that the great teaching of this verse is that the ideal brother is one who shares his all with his brother in need.

III. ANALYSIS AND EXPOSITION.

Salutation (vss. 1-3.)

1. *The writer* is Paul, who describes himself simply as a prisoner because of his labors in behalf of Christ. The thought of Paul in prison and his writing to him with the chains on his wrists would touch Philemon's heart. Paul strengthens his appeal by associating Timothy with him in the salutation. The "evangelist" Timothy, now with Paul in Rome, doubtless had often preached in Colossæ. Philemon knew him and loved

him. Paul wants Philemon to know that Timothy backs him up in his appeal for Onesimus.

2. *The readers* are (a) certain individuals at Colossæ—Philemon, doubtless an elder in the Colossian church; Apphia, his wife, and Archippus, their son, who is perhaps pastor of the near-by church at Laodicea (Col. 4:17); (b) the whole Colossian church, which met in Philemon's house.

3. *The Greeting*—Grace, the fountain of all mercies, and Peace, the crown of all blessings.

THE IDEAL BROTHER IS ONE WHO SHARES HIS ALL WITH HIS BROTHER IN NEED (vss. 4-22).

A. *The Ideal Brother as Seen in Paul's Prayer for Philemon* (vss. 4-7).

1. *Thanksgiving* (vss. 4-5). Paul thanks God for such a brother. He has heard of Philemon's faith in the Lord Jesus and love towards all the saints.

2. *Petition* (vss. 6-7). But Paul is not satisfied with Philemon's present attainments. Hence he prays that Philemon may attain unto the loftiest ideal of what a true brother should be. We find Paul's noblest ideals for his converts and churches in his prayers for them. (See Col. 1:9-14; Philippians 1:9-11; Eph. 3:14-19). So in his prayer for Philemon (vs. 6) Paul gives us his own conception of the ideal brother. Vs. 6 is somewhat obscure in our English versions. The original Greek is not obscure. The meaning is brought out in the following paraphrase adapted from Lightfoot: "It is my prayer that your active sympathy and charity, thus springing from your faith, may abound more and more, in proportion as you enjoy every good thing from God, and that you may ever look unto and strive after Christ."

(1) The ideal brother is described as one who shares all his blessings of every sort with his brother in need.

(2) Faith is the *motive* that prompts him thus to share. The ideal brother is the *Christian* brother. The Christian man should set the standard of brotherhood for the Masonic and all other fraternal orders.

(3) The *measure* of our sharing is as God has blessed us. The true brother has no numerical limit beyond which he will not share with his needy brother.

(4) The supreme *model* of the ideal brother is Christ—"looking unto and striving after Christ." Christ gave all.

B. *The Ideal Brother as Seen in Paul Pleading for Onesimus* (vss. 8-22).

Paul pleads with all his logic, learning, love and money for Onesimus; and, all unconsciously to himself, he gives us the finest picture in the Bible of the ideal brother.

1. First Plea—"For love's sake" (vs. 8-9a). "Such ever was love's way: to rise, it stoops."

2. Second Plea—"Paul the aged and now a prisoner" (vs. 9b). This plea must have touched Philemon's heart.

3. Third Plea—Onesimus is a changed man (vs. 10-16). He is converted.

(1) The genuineness of his conversion is seen in his service to Paul in Rome (vs. 10-14).

(2) The result of his conversion—he becomes not merely a better slave, but a "brother beloved" (vs. 15-16).

4. Fourth Plea—"If thou countest me a partner" (vs. 17). Paul and Philemon are partners in that they have common interests, common feelings, common work.

5. Fifth Plea—Paul offers to pay any debt that Onesimus may owe Philemon.

6. Sixth Plea—Paul intimates that he will soon visit Colossæ to see if Philemon has forgiven Onesimus (vs. 21-22).

CONCLUSION (vs. 23-25).

1. *Parting salutations* (vs. 23-24).

2. *Benediction* (vs. 25).

We close with this word from Luther: "This epistle showeth a right noble lovely example of Christian love. Here we see how Paul layeth himself out for poor Onesimus, and with all

his means pleadeth his cause with his master: and so setteth himself as if he were Onesimus, and he himself had done wrong to Philemon. Even as Christ did for us with God the Father, thus also doth Paul for Onesimus with Philemon. We are all his Onesimi to my thinking."