

THE HARMONY of the GOSPELS and the CHURCHES

Any teacher of the Bible spends a vast amount of time with his classes, trying to get right, and make plain to his students, the harmony of the four Gospels with each other and with the rest of the New Testament. This does not mean, or imply, that there are contradictory statements in our Scriptures, except as the New Testament contradicts, condemns and cancels the whole system of Jewish sacrifices, ceremonies and formal worship in temple and at national and regional altars, and removes it from the life of Christ's people. These very sacrifices and ceremonies pointed to Christ and the Christian era, when all such temple worship and ceremonial life was to give place to the new era and the proclaimed will of the Son of God for his New Testament (Covenant) and the type of obedience and worship fitting to disciples of Christ, living obediently under his Great Commission, Math. 28:19, 20. The Gospels are in harmony with this change, showing it as it was being made, step by step; and the finished product is New Testament Christianity, as seen in the Epistles and the Fourth Gospel and the Revelation of John. Most of the apostasy of Roman Catholicism and Catholicized Protestantism consists exactly in the adoption and re-adoption of such a system of ritual as passed away with the Old Testament era, and its perpetuation in current nominal Christianity. Most denominations now are re-born Judaism!

Real harmony, for example, will note the vastly different treatment of John the Baptist in the Synoptic Gospels and in the Fourth Gospel, written some thirty or forty years later. Of course, as a reverent Christian, who believes that our Bible is true, and a revelation of truth and nothing but the truth, I think the Synoptic picture of John and the Johannine picture of him are of the same man, like two pictures of the same man taken from different angles or at different times. For example, the whole Synoptic representation of John the Baptist shows him as demanding of his contemporaries the inner change of mind, ¹demonstrated in an outer life of holiness, which the ³John, our Savior's favorite ("beloved") disciple,

Read these lines in the order indicated.

⁴ wrote his Gospel, decades later, HE DOESN'T
² New Testament calls REPENTANCE. But when
⁵ CHOOSE TO USE THE WORD REPENTANCE ONE
⁶ SINGLE TIME IN HIS WHOLE GOSPEL. He represents John the Baptist as pointing men directly to Jesus as the Lamb of God, the sin-removing, sin-atoning, substitutionary Sacrifice, who sums up in himself all the values portrayed in all the previous sacrifices of the Mosaic revelation, the Psalms and the Prophets. In this Gospel, the apostle John uses the word BELIEVE 98 times, and never once the word REPENT.

Why this change in fundamental message? But really, is it a change? If John the Baptist is heard preaching **repentance**, in the words of one document, and the reality of **faith**, whose essence the Baptist preached, though not the **word** for that experience which the disciple John uses 98 times in his Gospel, then the natural conclusion is that the Gospel of John the Baptist's symbolism and message was exactly what our Gospel, and the only Gospel is, namely "repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ," Acts 20:21. That is the Harmony of the Gospels as to the gospel itself!

Consider the different circumstances of the era in which the Baptist preached his gospel and the era in which the apostle John reports the same gospel to his readers. John the Baptist spoke to the Jewish nation, politically organized, under a Jewish king, using the Jewish temple and full Mosaic ritual and a lot of priestly additions of Scribes and Pharisees to that ritual and its interpretation. The ministry of Jesus was a great and growing conflict with the officialdom of temple and nation, and the animus of the opposition to our Lord was so intense that it led on to Calvary and to the open rejoicing of the Jewish leaders in the horrible agonizing of our Savior on the cross, and to the official lies against facts of his resurrection which they invented and industriously circulated for all that generation. They aimed to nail down as a Christian lie the fact of his resurrection. The more you think on it, the more vast and inscrut-

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able is this intense and prolonged hatred of Jesus and the gospel which we see, life-sized, in the Synoptic Gospels, but that partially gives way to changed aspects of that issue and added interpretation of it and of the gospel message, in our Fourth Gospel.

We have very little contact today with Jewish life or the Jews with Christian life. The hostility has disappeared. We are good neighbors in our modern cities, or mutually unknown socially. Therefore, the intense hatred, and hostility in every form and fashion possible, which we see surrounding the Savior, his apostles and his gospel, in the Synoptic Gospels, is something we never feel and can hardly imagine, except by an effort of historical imagination, that recreates for ourselves that image of religious life in a narrow little land, nineteen centuries ago.

With that age and all its sentiments of hatred gone, I feel that the sentiments of the age of Paul's Epistles to the Gentile churches, with the relative freedom and courtesy which Paul and his colleagues enjoyed in the Jewish synagogues all over the Gentile world, constitute somewhat of a parallel to our own age of peaceful evangelism. Today we have no preaching IN OUR CHURCHES of fierce, first-hand, denunciation of current sins, such as you read of in the history of John the Baptist, Christ and the apostles. And, for that very reason, we have no outcry from our pulpits against the horrible sins, hatred, persecution and injustices so evident in the Gospels. So the word REPENTANCE has almost faded out of preaching today, in our great churches, just exactly as it disappeared completely from the Fourth Gospel! When you preach today in our great churches in the Bible Belt, with its ten millions of Southern Baptists and millions of other evangelical believers on the Savior, you don't spend your time denouncing sins of a raw and dangerous pioneer era, such as our Far West once knew. You preach to **your children**, drilled in the Gospel story and message, at home, in Sunday School and in church, with countless texts of the essence of the New Testament, memorized and resident in their little hearts; and you preach the gospel of our Fourth Gospel, not of bitter repentance from the controversy-torn environment of hatred of the New Testament and of Bible Christianity. It would be unreal for you to come down upon those children with a war against sin such as they know nothing of except by reading or hearsay. Go out on the city street corners, or in the mountain centers of murder and ignorance of gospel truth and spirit, if you want to preach John the Baptist repentance. But to your children you will continue to present Jesus, the revered and loving Savior, and your children will react in the Johannine fashion, in a faith in Christ crucified and risen again, which brings them to the consciousness and certainty of eternal life in him.

That is the normal gospel, Christianity and salvation for our children today, and it is what thousands of them are receiving in our Southland, in every Sunday evangelism, in Sunday School and church services.

What then? We have moved forward from the era of the Synoptic Gospels, as to the way of salvation and life, over into the spirit of John's Gospel, and its proclaimed and evident experience of saving faith in the historic Jesus, the Christ of God, the crucified and risen Savior. Let us keep clear our gospel of REPENTANCE AND FAITH, crying out our alarm over national and group and personal sins, at the bar of the public conscience. But, in the gospel-saturated home life and church life of our Bible-belt environment, let us not be intolerant of our children's natural and truly supernatural acceptance of Jesus as Savior, in a Johannine reality and terminology of genuine faith in Jesus as Savior.

I grew up in the Bible and the Bible in me. My mother had had me memorize a thousand verses by the time I could talk plain. I might have easily accepted the Savior, as our children do today. But no! I went to every mourner's bench, at the call of every evangelist who came to town, in Baptist and Methodist churches. There I kneeled and MOURNED MY SINS. Even when, as a college student, I went to chapel, the chapel bell at every stroke of the bell seemed to say to me: "Where will you spend eternity?" And I didn't know, or know how to get relief from the anguish of that uncertainty. One day I threw myself on the straw in the manger of our barn and cried out to God passionately to save me. He did. There came a great peace to my heart. BUT I MOURNED THAT PEACE IN MY SOUL as a hardened heart, for some years. Finally I came, not to a new experience, but to understand my once-for-all and only salvation. In those years of doubt, I was as nearly perfect then, in moral life, as I have been in my half century of active Christian life. How happy are your children in coming simply, easily and clearly to the full assurance of SAVING FAITH, the Johannine faith, that may presuppose repentance, for the Spirit of God has only one gospel, that of REPENTANCE AND FAITH. But in the experience of child salvation, both merge into a great simplicity and certainty, through the Holy Spirit's grace.

But my subject is, HARMONY OF THE GOSPELS AND THE CHURCHES. Yet you never find the word CHURCHES in the Gospels at all. In fact the singular word, **church**, is found only twice, in one Gospel, Math. 16:18 and 18:17. Yet you find the plural word CHURCHES 35 times in the rest of the New Testament. And our Baptist life is a life of churches and of the cooperation of churches, all over our own land and is the Christianity we plant on scores of foreign fields. How do we get CHURCHES as a doc-

trine of our Gospels? Well, we do. And rightly so. The plural of churches and church life is essentially right there in the Gospel of Matthew.

Our King James Version is not a translated Bible. It is a Episcopalian Bible, of the Elizabethan era, with the modified Romanism of the dark ages transplanted from Europe into England and substituted for revealed Christianity, so far as some of its vocabulary is concerned. The Bible of the original New Testament never had in it such words as **church** and **baptism**. That Greek Testament had the Greek words CONGREGATION and IMMERSION, where we have CHURCH and BAPTISM in our KING-JAMESISM, which falsely passes for English in our day. Posing as the original New Testament, such language is a lie. That New Testament said clearly: CONGREGATION where we read CHURCH. And it said IMMERSION where we read BAPTISM. I taught the Greek New Testament in three theological Seminaries on two continents, and wrote and published a Greek Grammar and a Greek Dictionary, in Portuguese, that is used in several countries in theological seminaries. It is a fact that no one but the ignorant can successfully deny that our original New Testaments say in the Greek language: CONGREGATION, where we have the word CHURCH. And they say IMMERSE, and IMMERSION, where we have BAPTIZE and BAPTISM. This is what I mean by the phrase, "A HARMONY OF THE GOSPELS AND THE CHURCHES."

But some will still say: "All right. I admit, for the Greek of the New Testament confessedly says so, that our original New Testaments say **congrega-**

tion and **immerse** in the Gospels. But they say it there in the singular. Where do you get the plural? Well, the plural of immersions comes in the many baptisms told of. The baptism of two people is two baptisms, plural; the baptism of 3,000 people is three thousands baptisms, numerically, though ONE BAPTISM, in act, nature and essence of meaning, as the New Testament affirms. And the two instances of mention of the word church show plural churches originally planned by Jesus. "I will build my CONGREGATION," our Lord said. Then when two chapters later he repeated the word, he said that in matters of personal disagreement and conflict, if two brothers cannot reach a conclusion of their differences between merely themselves, then let the offended brother take the matter to the church. "Tell it to the CONGREGATION," Jesus said. In reach of all his disciples, everywhere and at all times, Jesus planned that there should come to be a Christianity of **churches**. All over the land, there would churches, so that everywhere his Christianity prevailed, in case of a dispute, the offended Christian could take his case to a church and "tell it to the church" nearby, available to hear and settle disputes between discordant members. That is **church** discipline, a discipline known by Baptists in countless churches all around the globe. That doctrine gives us, with our Harmony of the Gospels, a Harmony of the Gospels and the Churches, clearly, in New Testament Christianity.

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