

The Faithful Sayings.

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I.

It is commonly, indeed all but universally, held that the so-called *πιστοὶ λόγοι* of the Epistles to Timothy and Titus refer to certain Christian truths, which had come to be regarded as of special importance, had been condensed into a short form easily remembered, and had been perhaps gathered together, with others, into a collection for the use and edification of believers, some of them being quotations from Christian hymns. This collection was compiled towards the close of St. Paul's ministry; for there is no reference to it in any other of his Epistles. It is also held that in the five places in which St. Paul uses the formula *πιστὸς ὁ λόγος*, he is quoting one or other of these *λόγοι*. The general agreement of commentators may be gathered from the following extracts.

Bishop Wordsworth:—'*πιστὸς ὁ λόγος* is used to introduce a memorable saying . . . very appropriate to a time when the Apostle would leave certain memorable sentences, as "faithful sayings," to be like "nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given by one Shepherd," even by Christ Himself, the chief Shepherd.' And again: 'It is a formula used by St. Paul . . . in order to introduce some weighty and memorable truth. It is to him what Christ's preamble *ἀμὴν, ἀμὴν, λέγω ὑμῖν* was to the Saviour Himself, but which no one else ever ventured to use.'

Dean Alford:—'The formula, *πιστὸς ὁ λόγος*, is characteristic of the later age of these Epistles, when certain sayings had taken their place as Christian maxims and were thus designated.'

Bishop Ellicott's *Commentary*:—'Formulas expressing weighty and memorable truths, well known and often repeated by the brotherhood of Christians in the first ages of the Faith. They were, no doubt, rehearsed constantly in the assemblies, till they became well-known watchwords in the various churches scattered over the Mediterranean provinces of the Roman Empire, and in these sayings perhaps we see germs of the first creeds of Christians.'

The *Speaker's Commentary* is very cautious, and says that 'a comparison of the five passages hardly

bears out the opinion that these Faithful Sayings are always quotations from hymns or liturgical formularies, although 1, 3, and 4 may be Christian maxims in use in the Christian Church.'

The Rev. J. D. James (in *The Genuineness and Authorship of the Pastoral Epistles*) speaks of this view as 'the unanimous interpretation of patristic as well as modern writers,' and says, 'a careful examination tends to shew that they are fragments of hymns and stereotyped sayings which had become current in the Church.'

Archbishop Bernard:—'In 1 Ti 3¹ it introduces a saying which may well have become proverbial at this stage of the Church's development. In 2 Ti 2¹¹, the words which follow probably formed part of an early Christian hymn. In the three remaining cases, it refers to some important statement of doctrine tersely and generally expressed (as in 1 Ti 1¹⁵ and 4^{8,9}) or with more detail (as in Tit 3⁸). . . . 'A faithful saying' indicates a maxim whether of doctrine or practice on which full reliance may be placed.

Dr. Swete, the latest writer on the subject, in the *Journal of Theological Studies*, October 1916, takes the same view.

We may therefore conclude that scholars are practically unanimous in their interpretation of the formula; and we have succeeded in finding no suggestion of any different interpretation except one, which will be referred to later on, and which is summarily rejected by Mr. James as quite untenable. In the face of such unanimity it is very venturesome of any one to propound a different theory. But if there are serious reasons for not being satisfied with the currently received explanation, and as that is based entirely on internal evidence and not supported by an atom of proof, the writer hopes he may be forgiven any presumption in suggesting an alternative interpretation.

II.

Let us then look at the five passages in the light of the common explanation, and see what the evidence amounts to.

i. 1 Ti 1¹⁵. *Πιστὸς ὁ λόγος, καὶ πάσης ἀποδοχῆς ἀξίος, ὅτι Χριστὸς Ἰησοῦς ἦλθεν εἰς τὸν κόσμον*

ἀμαρτωλοὺς σῶσαι. This, all must agree, is plain and straightforward. The 'saying' is linked on definitely to the introductory formula by the word *οἷ*; and it is a saying worthy of the utmost reverence and thankful acceptance; and there can be no serious question about the fitness and meaning of the statement.

ii. 1 Ti 3¹. Inasmuch as neither chapters nor stops form part of the original Scriptures, we must here, and in the following passages, quote the whole context. *Σωθήσεται (ἡ γυνὴ) διὰ τῆς τεκνογονίας, ἔὰν μείνωσιν ἐν πίστει καὶ ἀγάπῃ καὶ ἀγιασμῷ μετὰ σωφροσύνης. Πιστὸς ὁ λόγος· εἴ τις ἐπισκοπῆς ὀρέγεται, καλοῦ ἔργου ἐπιθυμεῖ.* On this passage Bishop Wordsworth and the *Speaker's Commentary* are silent. Bengel, Dean Alford, and Dr. Swete agree in referring the formula to the words that follow it. Bishop Ellicott with his usual boldness says: 'The Faithful Saying here refers to the wish for high and arduous work in the Church of Christ; and declares such a wish to be a noble one. It was no doubt one of the well-known sayings among the brethren of the first days and not improbably formed part of the liturgy,' etc. Mr. James regards the application as uncertain, but inclines to refer it to what follows. Archbishop Bernard says: 'This formula has been referred (e.g. by Chrysostom) to the words which precede, but it seems better to take it with the terse sentence which follows. . . . A maxim like this might well have arisen from the unwillingness of Christian converts to be raised to so conspicuous a position.' Here are two points to be noticed: first, there is a considerable measure of doubt as to whether the Faithful Saying is that which precedes or that which follows (though the leaning of scholars is towards the latter), for the formula is linked on to neither; and, secondly, can any one solemnly assert that either the preceding or the following statement is worthy to be ranked as a leading principle of the Christian religion, and put in the same category as the gospel message of 1¹⁵? If you take the usual interpretation, you can hardly pass from the latter to the former without a feeling that you have dropped from the sublime to the commonplace. Can one seriously imagine a congregation solemnly repeating again and again, as a truth of the first importance, the words, 'If a man,' etc.?

iii. 1 Ti 4⁸⁻¹⁰. *Ἡ εὐσέβεια πρὸς πάντα ὠφέλιμος ἐστίν, ἐπαγγελίαν ἔχουσα ζωῆς τῆς νῦν καὶ τῆς*

μελλούσης. Πιστὸς ὁ λόγος καὶ πάσης ἀποδοχῆς ἄξιος· εἰς τοῦτο γὰρ καὶ κοπιῶμεν καὶ ὀνειδιζόμεθα, ὅτι ἠλπικαμεν ἐπὶ Θεῷ ζῶντι, ὃς ἐστὶ σωτὴρ πάντων ἀνθρώπων, μάλιστα πιστῶν. Upon this passage Bishop Wordsworth again says nothing. Dean Alford refers the formula to what follows, and remarks that *εἰς τοῦτο* means the *σωτηρία* implied in *σωτὴρ*; while *γὰρ* is used to explain *μελλούσης* as if *πιστὸς ὁ λόγος* had not been inserted. Bengel says, 'Verbum sequens cohæret per "enim."' The *Speaker's Commentary* refers it to what precedes, Bishop Ellicott to what follows, calling it 'one of the great watchwords of the faith.' Mr. James admits the uncertainty, and prefers to refer it to what precedes, Dr. Swete to what follows. Archbishop Bernard's comment is: 'It is not certain what the reference is. On the whole it seems more natural here to understand it of the saying at the close of v.⁸ about the blessings of εὐσέβεια. V.¹⁰ does not read like a familiar or proverbial saying; and the *γὰρ* after *εἰς τοῦτο* seems to be explanatory.' Here, then, we have the same doubt as to what the *λόγος* is. Commentators seem to be about equally divided in opinion. If we prefer the preceding words, we may agree that they are more worthy of insertion in the collection than the last. But the words that follow can hardly be regarded as an apophthegm at all. How can *πάσης ἀποδοχῆς ἄξιος* be applied to them?

iv. 2 Ti 2^{10, 11}. *Διὰ τοῦτο πάντα ὑπομένω διὰ τοὺς ἐκλεκτοὺς, ἵνα καὶ αὐτοὶ σωτηρίας τύχωσι τῆς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, μετὰ δόξης αἰωνίου. Πιστὸς ὁ λόγος· εἰ γὰρ συναπεθάνομεν, καὶ συζήσομεν κ.τ.λ.* Again, Bishop Wordsworth makes no comment, neither does Bengel. The *Speaker's Commentary* and Dean Alford refer the formula to what follows, the latter saying that *γὰρ* gives the reason for *πιστὸς*. Bishop Ellicott says: 'Faithful is the saying, namely, If we be dead, etc.:—as though he said, "Don't you remember that well-known watchword of our own faith, so often repeated amongst us in our solemn assemblies, when the brotherhood meet together?"' Mr. James inclines to refer it to what follows; Dr. Swete the same, adding that *γὰρ* is a survival (in this fragment of a hymn) which the Apostle did not care to remove. Archbishop Bernard remarks: 'Commentators are not agreed as to the reference of the formula here; some, following Chrysostom, hold that it refers to what precedes, namely, the motive to patient endurance set forth in v.¹⁰. And it is

urged that γάρ, which seems to introduce a reason for what has been said, necessitates this explanation and excludes the reference of πιστὸς ὁ λόγος to vv.^{12, 13}. But on the other hand there is nothing in the preceding verses of the nature of a formula or aphorism or quotation, and it is to such stereotyped phrases that πιστὸς ὁ λόγος has reference in the other instances of its occurrence. And there can be little doubt that vv.^{12, 13} are a quotation from a Christian hymn. . . . This fragment of a hymn is exactly the kind of "saying" to which the formula would apply. The presence of γάρ may be variously accounted for. It may actually be part of the quotation, or its force may be explanatory; "For, as you remember. . . ." Here we find ourselves in the same doubt as in the two preceding passages; there is the same want of a clear connecting particle, and, as in the last, the presence of an awkward one requiring explanation; and the same question as to the suitability of one of the two claimants for admission to the honourable roll.

v. Tit 3⁸. To get the whole context, we must go back at least to v.⁴. ὅτε δὲ ἡ χρηστότης καὶ ἡ φιλοφροσύνη ἐπεφάνη τοῦ σωτήρος ἡμῶν Θεοῦ, οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων τῶν ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ ὧν ἐποιήσαμεν ἡμεῖς, ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὸ αὐτοῦ ἔλεος ἔσωσεν ἡμᾶς διὰ λουτροῦ παλιγγενεσίας καὶ ἀνακαινώσεως Πνεύματος ἁγίου, οὗ ἐξέχεεν ἐφ' ἡμᾶς πλουσίως διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ σωτήρος ἡμῶν, ἵνα δικαιωθῆτε τῇ ἐκείνου χάριτι κληρονόμοι γενηθῶμεν κατ' ἐλπίδα ζωῆς αἰωνίου. Πιστὸς ὁ λόγος, καὶ περὶ τούτων βούλομαι σε διαβεβαιώσθαι, ἵνα φροντίζωσιν καλῶν ἔργων προϊστασθαι οἱ πεπιστευκότες Θεῷ. Here Bishop Wordsworth says: 'The saying thus prefaced is that which declares the practical character of the doctrine of Regeneration by Baptism. They who have been grafted into Christ by baptism must be careful to promote good works.' Bengel, Mr. James, and the *Speaker's Commentary* refer the formula on the other hand to what precedes, the latter calling it 'this abstract of the Gospel.' Dr. Swete refers it to what follows, and Dean Alford to the words ὅτε ὁ χρηστότης, etc., 'which alone has the solemn and rhythmical character belonging for the most part to the Faithful Sayings.' Bishop Ellicott remarks: 'Having in very few but sublime words painted our present happy state—happy even on earth, where the glorious promised inheritance was still only a hope—and having shown how that this blessedness was the result of no efforts of our own,

but that we owe it solely to the tender love and to the divine pity of God for men, he cries out, 'Yes, faithful is this saying.' . . . Hearing this faithful saying, thought the old man St. Paul, my children in Christ will surely be disposed to be more loyal subjects, more faithful citizens, more loving neighbours. . . . And yet there was another reason for the constant repetition of this faithful saying. Men would see that they owed all their glorious Christian privileges . . . to God's free grace. Therefore affirm this faithful saying.' Archbishop Bernard remarks: 'The faithful saying is certainly to be found in the preceding vv.^{4, 7}; it has even been supposed by some that we have here the fragment of a hymn on the way of salvation, but there is not sufficient evidence to confirm the hypothesis.' Again, opinions are divided as to the reference, though they preponderate in favour of what precedes; but then the question arises as to how much of these three verses forms the πιστὸς λόγος; all, or part; and if part, which part? So one passes on again confused and in doubt.

III.

Now let us look at the material before us.

(a) We have five passages in which the formula appears: and we are almost unanimously invited to find the several faithful sayings in the words immediately preceding or following it.

(b) We try accordingly to make a list of these five faithful sayings, and we find to our discomfort that there is only one of which we can be reasonably certain.

(c) When we have made the best list we can, we remain greatly dissatisfied as to the suitability of some of them to have such an honourable title bestowed on them, either because of the form of the sentence, or because of the comparative unimportance of the subject-matter. A 'faithful saying,' to our mind, should be terse and easily recognizable as such, and should contain a Christian truth of the very highest importance and gravity. In every case but the first we find a difficulty in the fulfilment of these two conditions.

(d) We are thus asked to believe that St. Paul was so careless about his language as to leave his readers for all time in the dark as to what he referred to in four out of the five places in which he used the formula, although he intended to call particular attention to the truths concerned, as being of special importance.

(e) We are further asked to believe that we have in these five places maxims of supreme moment, held in the highest esteem by the Christians of those days; and yet we can identify only one of them.

Now can any one say that this is satisfactory? We turn away from the subject confused and bewildered and doubting. At the very least we seem to have a case for further inquiry, and for questioning whether the solution of the matter may not be found in a different direction. The writer ventures therefore to suggest a solution, which, if not capable of proof, at all events avoids all the difficulties, and, if it is correct, is wholly satisfactory to the Christian consciousness. The idea occurred to him many years ago, but it was only recently, when he was endeavouring to put it into shape, that he lighted upon an article in the *Expositor*, 3rd series, vol. v., by the Rev. F. Rendall, which forms the exception mentioned above, and to a considerable extent tallies with his own view. Mr. Rendall entirely rejects the idea of a collection of faithful sayings, and translates *λόγος*, 'the word,' i.e. 'the preached word, Paul's deposit, the Gospel as a whole, the entire revelation of the Father's love manifested in the Incarnation.' He says, "Faithful is the saying," is an ejaculation coming straight from St. Paul. . . . The very nature of such a sentence forbids any direct connexion with the immediate context. The key to the meaning must be sought below the surface in the mind of the writer rather than in any particular words or phrases. "The word" is the only safe guide in the days of danger; hence the exhortation to keep the deposit. As he contemplates the various dangers and God's love, he breaks out into the ejaculation.' Mr. James, in his book, quotes this view only to reject it somewhat summarily. He says: 'Such an ejaculation is quite unparalleled in the other Epistles, and is not applicable to 1 Ti 1¹⁵, where the faithful saying is introduced by *ὅτι*.' Mr. Rendall's view also seems to fail to meet the case because it does not attempt to account for the appearance of the ejaculation in the particular places where it occurs.

While the present writer therefore holds with Mr. Rendall that the idea of a collection of Faithful Sayings must be abandoned, he suggests that there is one Faithful Saying, and one only, which had come to be known as *ὁ λόγος*, and this one is that contained in 1 Ti 1¹⁵, and linked on to the

formula by *ὅτι*. This expression *πιστὸς ὁ λόγος* had become a familiar one in the Church, or at all events among St. Paul's intimate friends, and, whenever it was used, was recognized as referring to this particular truth. On each occasion on which St. Paul introduces it, it is as if he said, 'Remember that the blessed truth that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners is the ground of all our hopes, and worthy of absolute confidence.' As the Cross had become the sacred symbol of the Christian's hopes, may not this short sentence have become the sacred motto of the Christian community, embodying in the briefest compass the ground of their peaceful confidence? Reasons in support of this theory are as follows:

1. *Πιστὸς ὁ λόγος* means 'trustworthy is the saying.' The 'this' of the A.V. is not in the original in any of the five passages. This renders it unnecessary to assume that where the phrase occurs it must imply some specific quotation preceding or following.

2. There are other short sentences in these Epistles, which read like maxims or quotations from hymns or liturgies, and which are much more worthy to be called *πιστοὶ λόγοι* than some of those supposed to be so called; and yet the term is not applied to them; e.g. 1 Ti 3¹⁶, 2 Ti 2¹⁹.

3. On every occasion on which the formula appears, it is in close connexion with the word *σωτήρ*, *σῶζω*, or *σωτηρία*, either immediately before or after; the mention of which word suggests to St. Paul the sacred motto, and leads him to remind his reader of it, by inserting the formula. This accounts for its appearance on each occasion. Thus in 1 Ti 3¹, it follows the *σωθήσεται* of the previous verse, as if he would say, 'She shall be saved . . . and here lies her hope, because the saying as to the salvation of sinners through Christ is entirely reliable.' In 1 Ti 4⁹ it is followed by 'God, who is the *σωτήρ* of all men': 'Trustworthy is our sacred motto, and we therefore are ready to labour and endure, because our confidence is in the Living God, who is our Saviour.' In 2 Ti 2¹¹ it follows the *σωτηρίας* of the previous verse: 'That they may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus; and our hopes for them are well grounded because *πιστὸς ὁ λόγος* that Christ came to put salvation within their reach.' Finally, in Tit 3¹¹, it follows the *σωτήρος* of v. 6: 'We have the gift of the Holy Spirit through Christ our Saviour, so that we may become heirs of eternal life: our hope of this is

grounded upon a rock, for πιστός ὁ λόγος that Christ came to be the Saviour of sinners.'

4. The term ὁ λόγος was applied in early Christian days to Him who is the Living Word of God. There would be nothing strange if it were also used to signify the message of messages which He came to leave behind Him as His legacy of love for those for whom He died. This could not be better or more simply expressed than in the 'Comfortable Word,' 'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.' Might not this truth, the very kernel of the Gospel, have come to be known as ὁ λόγος? Might not this have been chiefly in the mind of St. Paul, when he wrote κήρυξον τὸν λόγον (2 Ti 4²)? It is the central truth, to or from which all the rest radiate. The earthly name of the Son of God

meant 'Saviour,' and was given Him because 'He should save His people from their sins.' He was heralded as a Saviour by the angels to the shepherds. 'To seek and to save that which was lost,' was the description of His mission, as given by Himself. He was proclaimed by His forerunner as 'the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.' And in the vision of St. John, He appears in the midst of the throne of God, the central spot in heaven, as a 'Lamb as it had been slain.' While the 'multitudes which no man could number' are represented as attributing their salvation to 'God which sitteth upon the throne and to the Lamb.' The gospel truth, enshrined in these words, is worthy, if any truth is worthy, of being called, *par excellence*, ὁ λόγος.

Literature.

THE UNIVERSE.

IN the moral welter of the present war we need a doctrine of the Universe. It must include creation and evolution, the fact of good and of evil, the power and the love of God, providence and prayer, the life that now is and the life that is to come. We need such a doctrine. We must see life steadily and see it whole. It is our short views that produce our anguish and paralyze our consolation.

The Rev. Charles J. Shebbeare, M.A., Rector of Swerford, has recognized the need, and has offered at least an introduction to such a doctrine in a book entitled *The Challenge of the Universe* (S.P.C.K.; 7s. 6d. net). He has been impressed by the beauty and the falsity of that form of unbelief called Naturalism found in the writings of Mr. Bertrand Russell. Naturalism is supposed to be equivalent to Agnosticism—physical science holding its hand because it cannot stretch it beyond that which is seen and handled. But it is more positive than Agnosticism has ever been, even in the hands of its most positive advocate Professor Huxley. It is a theory of the Universe, gnostic enough in all conscience and very aggressive. It means that there is no hand on the helm of the ship of the Universe, and that we know there is none. Let us eat and drink for we are all adrift—and assuredly driving on the rocks.

How does Mr. Shebbeare answer? He restates the old argument from design. Does that seem futile? Read the book. The argument from design is supposed to have been killed by Kant and Darwin. The supposition has never been verified. It needs restatement. Mr. Shebbeare restates it in three propositions. First, it is held by everybody that the Universe is a rational whole, governed by a rational system of laws. Next, one of these laws is the recognition of a moral ideal—that such words as traitor, drunkard, swindler, coxcomb are uniformly regarded as terms of reproach. Thirdly, since *we* know these ideals it stands to reason that they are honoured in the ordering of the Universe. In other words, 'if a Conscious Creator ordered such a world—deliberately planning that rational beings should have a tendency to know what was good, and yet that their aspirations should be doomed to ultimate disappointment—we should conceive such a Creator not as a God, but as a mischievous and malicious fiend.'

When he comes to the future life Mr. Shebbeare is at his clearest and best. He ends by saying, 'If we wish the belief in a future life to be taken seriously, the whole question must be handled with boldness. There is no attractiveness in a hope of heaven which ignores our real aspirations. It is wise, however, neither to give too free a rein to our imagination, nor to be discouraged at the failure of