

Romans - Commentaries by Algernon James Pollock

The Journey and Its End, Every Knee Shall Bow (14:11)

(Rom. 14. 11)

CHARLES LAMB, the skeptical poet, was telling what he should do if the world's greatest men suddenly came into the room. Among others Shakespeare was named.

" Ah! we should all rise, and uncover, if Shakespeare came in."

" And Christ? "

With a hushed voice, he stuttered out, " You see, we should all kneel."

He spoke the truth for once.

Things Which Must Shortly Come to Pass, Fullness of the Gentiles, The (11:25)

(Romans 11:25)

This is a most significant expression, demanding a word of explanation. It stands in contrast to the blindness in part that has happened to Israel.

Israel, because of her rejection of her Messiah, is set aside and judicially blinded. The words of Isaiah, written centuries before, are fulfilled—"Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed. Then said I, Lord, how long? And He answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate" (Isa. 6:10-11).

Just as "the times of the Gentiles" is a political term, referring to God's governmental dealings in the world, so "the fullness of the Gentiles" is a spiritual term, referring to God's ways in grace in this world. It is significant that the word Gentiles dominates both expressions.

In studying the Acts of the Apostles we see how the divine commission for the Apostles to be witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea, in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth (see Acts 1:8) was carried out. Judaism is left to its unbelief and rejection of Christ. Acts 2 to 7 inclusive give us the fulfillment of this to Jerusalem and Judea. "To the Jew first" is the divine order.

Satan, having secured the martyrdom of Stephen, proceeded to stir up great persecution of the Church at Jerusalem. But he outwitted himself. Like a child using a pair of bellows to blow out a spark, but who, instead, blows it into a flame, so Satan, instead of quenching the light of the infant Church, did the very reverse by causing the disciples to be scattered abroad, for everywhere they went they preached the Word. Thus Philip found himself preaching in Samaria. This Acts 8 records. But even Samaria was not far enough afield for the energies of the grace of God, so we find Philip sent to the desert near Gaza in order to speak to an Ethiopian, who in his turn carried the Gospel to his native land.

But in connection with Stephen's death we find a striking character introduced—the young man, Saul. The arch-persecutor of the Church was destined to be the arch-propagator of the Gospel and the zealous founder of new churches. If he persecuted even unto strange cities, we shall see him evangelizing even unto strange countries. So Acts 9 gives us the conversion of this remarkable man, and his early labors at Damascus and Jerusalem, and his escape to Tarsus.

Then the curtain falls for the moment upon Saul, and Peter comes into prominence again. But let it be grasped how this Apostle of the circumcision is presented to us. Acts 10 and 11 narrate very fully how the prejudiced Peter was made willing to go to Caesarea in order to preach to the Gentile Cornelius and his Gentile friends. That God should use the Apostle of the circumcision on this service was divinely wise, inasmuch as he convinced Peter, the chief of the Jewish Apostles, of the rightness of the work among the Gentiles, and through him carried the rest with him in this conviction. What a victory for the grace of God when the narrowness of the exclusive Jewish heart was widened out to go to the Gentile.

The next important point to notice is in Acts 13. There the Antiochan prophets and teachers, as directed by the Holy Ghost, separated Barnabas and Saul for the work of the ministry. Here a new and striking departure took place. Jerusalem is set aside, and from a Gentile city these servants of God are sent forth. And where do they go? Their divine Master was sent to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 10:6). But was the scope of His death limited to the Jews? No; we read: "The Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world" (1 John 4:14).

The divine scope of His death is thus indicated here. We find Barnabas and Saul immediately going to such places as Seleucia, Cyprus, Pamphylia. True, in the main they ministered in the synagogues, but the way was being prepared for the Gentiles.

Acts 13 and 14 form one long record of Gentile places visited by the energy of these servants of Christ. In Acts 15 Peter again comes to view in connection with the attempt to bring in Judaizing principles in connection with the Gospel. Jerusalem is the scene of the remarkable conference to discuss this matter, and its result is to release the infant Church from looking to Jerusalem for guidance or control, and setting her free to seek it from her glorious Head in heaven. Nor is Peter's name once mentioned after this chapter. The word "Gentiles" is the predominant word of the narrative. Let us quote the passages referred to: "And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe" (vs. 7). Here the Apostle refers to the great epoch when he preached the Gospel to Cornelius and his friends. "Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them" (vs. 12). "Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name" (vs. 14). "That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles" (vs. 17). "Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God" (vs. 19). "The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia" (vs. 23).

So the circle of blessing starts from, the center, Jerusalem, moves on to Judea, passes thence to Samaria, and then through the tireless energy of the great Apostle and his companions widens out to the very ends of the earth.

The Apostle Paul was called as the Apostle of the Gentiles, and fulfilled that ministry far and wide. Judaism bitterly opposed him in this. As he made his defense on the castle stairs at Jerusalem he was listened to in "great silence" till he came to the point where he told how the Lord had given him his commission. "And He said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles. And they gave him audience unto this word, and then lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live" (Acts 22:21-22). Such is man's heart. To hear that a man was commissioned by God to carry the Gospel to the Gentiles sufficed to provoke an outburst of bitter bigotry and hatred.

And thus we run through the Acts of the Apostles till we come to the last chapter, where the Jews refuse the testimony of Paul, and he says to them: "Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, AND THAT THEY WILL HEAR IT" (vs. 28).

"The fullness of the Gentiles" (Rom. 11:25) refers then to the spiritual blessing of the Gentile, consequent on the setting aside of the Jews because of their rejection of Christ. Its operation is described by Simeon: "How God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name" (Acts 15:14). God is not blessing nationally either Jew or Gentile, but saving men and women out of the world. The very word for Church —ecclesia— means called out, and this calling out is what God is doing at the present time.

"The fullness of the Gentiles" will be complete when Christ comes to catch up His church, His called-out ones, and then God will begin to deal with His ancient people again for earthly blessing.

But in the meantime one glance will tell us that the light and energy and blessing of the Gospel lie in Gentile hands, and not in Jewish. That Gentiles should form missionary societies to the Jews is proof enough of the state of things. But when the Church is caught up "the fullness of the Gentiles" will be complete. We shall then see the Jew evangelizing the Gentile again.

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