

THE PROGRESS OF DOCTRINE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

By T. D. Bernard

A Review Article (Part I)

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Thomas Dehany Bernard's *The Progress of Doctrine in the New Testament* has gone through several printings. It has received glowing recommendations by Wilbur M. Smith, Alva Hovey, W.H. Griffith Thomas, and H.C.G. Moule, to name a few. It was first delivered in lecture form in 1864 before the University of Oxford as part of the Bampton Lecture series. Wilbur Smith thought so highly of this book that he said, "There are a few books that are timeless – this is one of them."¹

It is interesting to note that Bernard's book is the only one footnoted by Geerhardus Vos in his "The Idea of Biblical Theology as a Science and as a Theological Discipline," a lecture delivered in 1894 as Vos's inaugural address as Professor of Biblical Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary.² Vos references Bernard in the context of discussing the progressive, organic character of special revelation. As we review Bernard's book, readers acquainted with Vos's writings will see why he referenced this work.

Preface

In the Preface, Bernard focuses on the aim and design of his lectures. He is trying to show that the New Testament "exhibits a scheme of progressive doctrine, fashioned for permanent and universal use,"³ to observe "the actual sequence of thought"⁴ in the NT; to show that this progressive scheme "*involves the unity of a divine plan*, and therefore the continuity of a divine authority."⁵ In a day when many had bought the lie of rationalism and its historical-critical method and were anti-supernaturalists, Bernard obviously held to the divine authority of the Scriptures.

Lecture I: The New Testament

This lecture seeks to prove three points:

- I. That by doctrine shall be here meant *divine* teaching, or truth as communicated by God.
2. That the course of the divine teaching under the Christian dispensation shall be considered to coincide in *extent* with the New Testament Scriptures.

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¹ Wilbur H. Smith, in Thomas Dehany Bernard, *The Progress of Doctrine in the New Testament* (New York: American Tract Society, n.d.), 2. Copies of Bernard's hard-to-find and nearly-forgotten book can be purchased at www.alibris.com. The copy I possess has been in my library since 1999. I picked it up earlier this fall when I noticed that Vos referenced it in the lecture cited above. From the first page, I became keenly aware that Vos had not only read Bernard but had probably drunk deeply from this timeless volume. I cannot commend the book too highly!

² Geerhardus Vos, *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1980), 3-24.

³ Bernard, 7.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 9. All italics throughout are Bernard's unless noted.

3. That the relative character and actual order of the parts of the New Testament shall be taken, as adequately representing the progressive *plan* on which this course of divine teaching was perfected.⁶

Upon completion of the discussion of these points, Bernard points “out that the progressive system of teaching in the New Testament is an obvious *fact*, that it is marked by distinct *stages*, and that it is determined by natural *principles*.”⁷

Lecture II: The Gospels (Part I)

This lecture takes up two major considerations: (1) the Gospels as the commencement of Christian doctrine in the NT and (2) the Gospels as “a course of teaching which bears within its own limits a certain character of systematic advance.”⁸ Under the first heading, Bernard argues that the Gospels are “the beginning of the orderly development of the Christian doctrine in the whole New Testament.”⁹ Elsewhere he says that the Gospels are “the beginning of a course of doctrine extending through the books which follow.”¹⁰ He asserts that “Christian doctrine is a doctrine concerning *facts* which have occurred and a *person* who has been manifested within the sphere of human observation.”¹¹ Since this is so, the Gospels naturally present the facts of Christ’s life in narrative form without much commentary, inferences, or applications. There is a natural logic to the NT. Historical facts are presented first (i.e., the Gospels), then those facts are subsequently interpreted and applied (i.e., the rest of the NT). Christianity is a religion revealed in history, therefore the NT bases its doctrine on the historical events surrounding the life, teaching, ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ. Also, each Gospel has a unique contribution to make in establishing the doctrinal foundation of the rest of the NT.

The second part of this lecture examines the Gospels in order to display their unique contributions and their character of systematic advance. Here Bernard argues that there is a “plan of progressive development, which is constituted by the relative characters of the Gospels viewed in the order which they have habitually assumed.”¹² Here, of course, he is referring to the differences between the Synoptics and the Gospel of John. He sees a natural and logical relationship between these two types of Gospels. Bernard comments:

The collection is divided into two parts by a line of demarcation perceptible to every eye and recognized in every age; the first three Gospels forming the one part and the fourth Gospel the other. The former naturally precedes, and in its effect prepares us for the latter. We are to learn the great lesson of the manifestation of Christ: and here, as in most other subjects, the order of fact is not the order of knowledge. In the order of fact the glory of the divine nature precedes the phenomena of the earthly manifestation; but in the order of knowledge the reverse is true. Events occurring in time, a place in human history, and the external aspect of a life, must supply the antecedent conditions for the higher disclosures. Thus the triple Gospel, which educates us among scenes of earth, prepares us for that which follows. Our minds are led along that very course of thought over which they would have moved if we had been eye-witnesses of the manifestation of Christ, in that we are familiarized with its ordinary aspect and most frequent characteristics, before our thoughts are riveted on those peculiar passages in which the revelation of glory is most

⁶ Ibid., 22.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 49.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., 57.

¹¹ Ibid., 50.

¹² Ibid., 57.

concentrated [*i.e.*, the Gospel of John], and which serve to interpret all that we had before felt to be implied.¹³

Bernard also briefly details the differences between the Synoptics, each with “its own prevailing character, whereby it makes its proper contribution to the complete portrait of the Lord: each also has its own historical associations.”¹⁴ Matthew is the Jewish Gospel, growing out of the OT, where Christ is seen as the son of David, the son of Abraham, and as the fulfiller of righteousness and the Law and the Prophets. Mark’s Gospel, connected to Peter, is the Gospel of action. Christ is on the move displaying his power over the visible and invisible world. Luke’s Gospel portrays Christ as the son of Adam. His humanity is especially displayed as he has sympathy with and compassion on sinners. Written for Greeks, it is best suited for the non-Jewish mind and is “pre-eminently a Gospel for the Gentiles.”¹⁵

Bernard draws this conclusion about the Synoptics:

As the book of Acts shows us three stages in the outward progress of the Gospel, first within the bounds of Judaism, then in the work of St. Peter, spreading beyond those limits in the Roman direction, and finally in the ministry of St. Paul, delivered freely and fully to the world; so do the Synoptic Gospels, as they stand in the canon, correspond with a singular fitness to those three periods. We are going forward as we pass through them, and are completing the representation of Christ, not by mere repetition or fortuitous variation in our point of view, but in a certain orderly sequence, corresponding to that in which the knowledge of him was historically opened to the world. The evangelical narratives are the proper monuments of a Gospel, which first asserted itself as the true form of Judaism and the legitimate consummation of the old covenant, and then unfolded its relations with the whole race of mankind, and passed into the keeping of a Catholic Church.¹⁶

Bernard sees in John’s Gospel a focus on the person of Christ in response to the first Christological heresies. He sees in it, therefore, the presentation of the glory of Christ.

[John] begins, not like his predecessors from an earthly starting-point, from the firth of the son of Adam or the son of Abraham, or the opening of the human ministry, but in the depths of unmeasured eternity and the recesses of the nature of God; and then, bringing the First-begotten into the world, traces with adoring eyes the course of word and deed by which he manifested forth his glory, and at last delivers his record to others, “that they may believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and that believing they may have life through his name” (John 20:31).¹⁷

Lecture III: The Gospels (Part II)

This lecture is a discussion based on the words of Hebrews 2:3, “so great a salvation, *which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord.*” Bernard gives the following headings for discussion:

First, The teaching of the Lord in the Gospels *includes the substance of all Christian doctrine, but does not bear the character of finality.* Secondly, the teaching of the Lord in the Gospels *is a visibly progressive course, but on reaching it highest point announces its own incompleteness, and opens another stage of instruction.*¹⁸

¹³ Ibid., 58.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 60.

¹⁶ Ibid., 61.

¹⁷ Ibid., 63.

¹⁸ Ibid., 71-72.

Under the first heading he seeks to display two phenomena of our Lord's teaching—the fact that it includes the substance of all Christian doctrine and the fact that it does not bear the character of finality. As to the former, Bernard says that . . .

it would be yet easy to show that every doctrine expanded in the Epistles roots itself in some pregnant saying in the Gospels; and that the first intimation of every truth, revealed to the holy Apostles by the Spirit, came first from the lips of the Son of Man. In each case the later revelation may enlarge the earlier, may show its meaning and define its application, but the earlier revelation stands behind it still, and we owe our first knowledge of every part of the new covenant to those personal communications in which the salvation began to be spoken by the Lord.¹⁹

He goes on to discuss the fact that our Lord's teaching does not bear the character of finality in its form (*i.e.*, “the mode of parable or proverb”²⁰), method (*i.e.*, the deliverance of “*principles of moral righteousness*”²¹ and “the *mysteries of salvation*”²² not only through his ordinary discourses but in his “separate addresses, or replies to particular persons, and by explanations added to particular acts”²³), and substance (*i.e.*, a twofold character of Christ's doctrine is asserted: “the clearing, restoring, and perfecting of truth already known; and . . .the revealing of a mysterious economy which had not yet been divulged”²⁴).

The second major section of this chapter seeks to display the fact that “the personal teaching of the Lord is a *visibly progressive system, which, on reaching its highest point, declares its own incompleteness, and refers us to another stage of instruction.*”²⁵ Bernard briefly compares the first and last discourses of our Lord (*i.e.*, the Sermon on the Mount and the Upper Room Discourse). He does so to show the progress of doctrinal expression. The Sermon on the Mount, for instance, is related to “the teaching given to the fathers.”²⁶ It links itself antecedently in redemptive history to both clear and confirm, to fulfil and not to destroy, though in language appropriate for the redemptive-historical contingences of the moment.

The first discourse is the voice of the minister of the circumcision, clearing and confirming the divine teaching given to the fathers. Blessings, laws, and promises are alike founded on the Old Testament language, which the speaker at the same time adopts and interprets. He keeps in a line with the past, while he makes a clear step in advance. He gives, not so much a new code, as a *new edition of the old one*. The word of authority, “I say unto you,” is directed not to destroy but to fulfil. It is the authority of the original lawgiver, clearing up his own intentions, and disallowing the perversions of men.²⁷

The Sermon on the Mount is the beginning of the Lord's earthly ministry and reflects this very fact in the manner in which it seeks to clear up what has been distorted and to display continuity with antecedent revelation.

The Upper Room Discourse, however, connects itself with revelation in another direction—the future. Speaking of the two discourses, Bernard says:

¹⁹ Ibid., 73. This reminds us of statements made by Vos in the lecture referenced above. “[Each epoch of redemptive history] was prepared for by what preceded, and being in turn preparatory for what follows.” “So dispensation grows out of dispensation, and the newest is but the fully expanded flower of the oldest.” Both Vos statements come from Vos, *Redemptive History*, 11.

²⁰ Ibid., 74.

²¹ Ibid., 76.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 77.

²⁵ Ibid., 83.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., 83-84. Emphasis added.

As plainly as the first discourse links itself to the past, so plainly does the last discourse reach on to the future. If the one reverts to what was said in old time, the other casts the mind forward on a day of knowledge which is dawning and a new teacher who is coming. In passing from the one point to the other, we have left behind us the language and associations of the Old Testament: we have entered a new world of thought, and hear a new language which is being created for its exigencies.²⁸

Though the Upper Room Discourse is the last recorded discourse of the Gospels, it is not, however, the end of revelation. As Bernard says:

the character of the discourse is distinctly *transitional*; that it announces not an *end*, but a *change*; and that, in closing one course of teaching, it at the same time opens another. As the first discourse linked the personal teaching of Christ to the Law and the Prophets which went before it, so the last discourse links that teaching to the dispensation of the Spirit, which is to come after it.²⁹

Though Christ will be gone from the disciples, he will not leave them alone. Though he will not speak to them in the flesh, he will not cease to reveal the Father's will to them. Though the teacher is the same (*i.e.*, Christ), the mode of communication is changed (*i.e.*, the Spirit) to fit the conditions brought on by his resurrection and ascension.

Lecture IV: The Acts of the Apostles (Part I)

This lecture treats the Book of Acts. Bernard derives his introductory and paradigmatic thoughts from the first words of Luke's second volume.

The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, which, He said, you have heard from Me (Acts 1:1-4).

Bernard comments, "With these words we enter on a new stage of history and of doctrine, and they are words which connect it with the past."³⁰ As with the Gospel of Matthew, so with the Book of Acts—it connects itself to the past, yet is the natural advance of former revelation. As the OT was preparatory of the NT, so the earthly ministry of Christ was preparatory of the subsequent, post-ascension ministry of Christ. Christ "began both to do and teach" during his earthly ministry "until the day in which He was taken up." However, the ascension did not close the book on Christ's ministry of revealing the Father's will. The teacher remains the same, the origin and means of instruction are changed. As Bernard puts it:

the book of Acts at its opening attach[es] itself to the preceding record; throwing back our thoughts on "the former treatise of all that Jesus began both to do and teach," and then passing rapidly in review the last circumstances which connect the Apostles with their Lord, as the instruments which he had chosen and prepared for the work which he had yet to do. Thus the history which follows is *linked* to, or (may I not rather say) *welded* with, the past; and the founding of the Church in the earth is presented as one continuous work, begun by the Lord in

²⁸ Ibid., 84.

²⁹ Ibid., 86-87.

³⁰ Ibid., 94.

person, and perfected by the same Lord through the ministry of men. This is the point on which I have now to insist. "The former treatise" delivered to us, not all that Jesus did and taught, but "all that Jesus *began* both to do and teach, *until* the day when he was taken up." The following writings appear intended to give us, and do in fact profess to give us, that which Jesus *continued* to do and teach *after* the day in which he was taken up.³¹

When closing his lecture on the Gospels, Bernard had said:

Our thoughts have now arrived at the point where the day of "speaking in proverbs," changes into the day of "showing plainly." It is a critical moment; for, whatever progress of doctrine the change may involve, all our satisfaction in its increased distinctness of outline and accumulated fullness of detail must depend on our assurance that *the teacher is the same*.³²

Christ *began* to teach while on earth; he *continues* his teaching via the Book of Acts and the rest of the NT from heaven. As mentioned above, the teacher remains the same, the origin and means of instruction are changed. Christ is the cornerstone of the Church, the Apostles and Prophets of the NT are its foundation.

Bernard shows that the authority of the previous portions of the NT (*i.e.*, the Gospels) is the same in its subsequent portions and hence, as the Gospels are revelation from God to man, so is the rest of the NT. He does this by considering two phenomena: (1) The Book of Acts "*is a record of the personal action of the Lord Jesus Christ in the first evolution of his Gospel and formation of his Church*"³³ and (2) "The normal guidance of the Apostles by their Lord was not occasional, but *habitual...through the Holy Spirit dwelling in them*."³⁴ What was done by him in the flesh is now done through his designated recipients and organs of revelation through the Spirit of Christ. As Bernard aptly says, "So the promise ran that it should be; and so in fact it was."³⁵

Christ had promised that when he was gone, he would send the Spirit who would lead them into all truth. With Christ in heaven and without the Spirit's illuminating/revelatory ministry, there was no sure way to make infallible judgments concerning the meaning of the great redemptive-historical facts of Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension. These great, redemptive acts of God needed divine interpretation lest they be left to the fallible interpretations of men. Bernard says:

From the moment when they saw their Lord ascend, they were in full possession of all the external facts of which they were appointed to bear witness. But they were not in possession of all the spiritual meaning, relations, and consequences of those facts, and therefore the hour of their testimony was not come, and the interval was passed not in preaching, but in prayer.³⁶

Once the Spirit came, they preached both the *facts* of Christ's death and resurrection and the *meaning* of those great events. Christ not only acted in history to accomplish redemption, he also acted subsequent to redemption's accomplishment by sending his Spirit to lead them "into all truth." What Christ began on earth, he now completed from heaven.

Bernard's closes this lecture by discussing the fact that, though Christ is still the revealer of truth, "he has changed his method"³⁷ of revealing. He focuses on the reasons for this change: his ascension into glory and the sending and ministry of the Spirit of God.

³¹ Ibid., 95.

³² Ibid., 92.

³³ Ibid., 96.

³⁴ Ibid., 107.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., 109.

³⁷ Ibid., 112.

Lecture V: The Acts of the Apostles (Part II)

In this lecture, in order further to display the progress of doctrine, Bernard covers two more characteristics of the Book of Acts. He first asks the question, “What is the office which the book of Acts fulfils in the evolution of doctrine in the New Testament?”³⁸ His answer is three-fold:

1. It places in the clearest light *the divine authority* of the doctrine given during the period which it covers, as a doctrine delivered by those who, for that particular purpose, were filled with the Holy Ghost, and were agents of the personal administration of the Lord Jesus Christ. This, the first and most important part of the office of the book, has been considered in the last Lecture.
2. It represents *the general character* of the doctrine delivered by the Apostles to the world.
3. It traces *the steps of external history* through which the doctrine was matured.³⁹

The general character of the doctrine delivered by the Apostles is then considered under two headings: its identity and its definition. We will look at these simultaneously. The Apostles preached Christ. But, according to Bernard, their preaching was different from all previous preaching. He takes his text for this lecture from Acts 5:42, “And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.” Bernard comments on this and other similar texts in Acts, “No such announcements as these are heard in the Gospels.” The disciples were

sent out “to preach the kingdom of God,” and are even charged to “tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ” (Matt. 16:20), and are forbidden to publish the manifestation of the fact “until the Son of Man be risen again from the dead” (Matt. 17:9).⁴⁰

No such qualifications and restrictions are found in the Book of Acts. Bernard explains this by observing first that this shift in preaching is anticipated by the focus on the kingdom of God in the Gospel of Matthew and the focus on the person of Christ in the Gospel of John. As he says, “the eye, looking for the kingdom, had come to be fixed upon the person.”⁴¹ What Bernard sees in the Book of Acts is the conflation of these two redemptive-historical facts. He says:

In the teaching of the first Gospel the idea of the kingdom, in that of the last the idea of the person, is predominant. In the Acts two expressions are sometimes united, as when the Samaritans “believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 8:12): and yet again, with more evident purpose, in the end of the book, where Paul’s exposition to the Jews at Rome stands as the last appeal to that people—“To whom he expounded, testifying the kingdom of God and persuading them concerning Jesus” [Acts 28:23]; and yet again in the closing verse, which describes the two years’ continuous ministry by the words “preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ [Acts 28:31].”⁴² Evidently on purpose are the two expressions combined in this final summary, in order to show that the preaching of the kingdom and the preaching of Christ are one: that the original proclamation has not ceased, but that in Christ Jesus the thing proclaimed is no longer a vague and future hope, but a distinct and present fact. In the conjunction of these words the progress of doctrine appears. All is founded upon the old Jewish expectation of a kingdom of God; but it is now explained how that expectation is fulfilled in the person of Jesus; and the account of its realization consists in the unfolding of the truth concerning him, “the things concerning Jesus” (τὰ περὶ τοῦ

³⁸ Ibid., 122.

³⁹ Ibid., 122-123.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 123.

⁴¹ Ibid., 124.

⁴² In a footnote, Bernard references Acts 28:23 and 31 from the Greek text and says, “Compare this summary of the apostolic teaching at the end of the book with the summary of the last teaching of Jesus at its beginning: ... ‘during forty days appearing to them and speaking the things concerning the kingdom of God.’” Ibid.

Ἰησοῦ). The manifestation of Christ being finished, the kingdom is already begun. Those who receive *him* enter into *it*. Having overcome the sharpness of death, he has opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers. Those, therefore, who were once to “tell no man that he was Christ,” are now to make “all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus, whom they had crucified, both Lord and Christ”; yea, they are to proclaim that fact to every nation under heaven.⁴³

In other words, the kingdom of God has come in Jesus and since he has accomplished his work, the kingdom is no longer a mystery. It has been revealed and inaugurated. Its power is manifested by the Holy Spirit through preaching. It is present, though only in its beginning stages.

But what does it mean to preach Jesus? Is it the proclamation of his doctrine, lessons from his life, his holy character, his love? Bernard says no, and he does so emphatically. To preach Jesus (according to the Book of Acts) involved the proclamation of the Messiahship of Jesus *and* the explanation of its nature. Bernard says, “The Christ who was now proclaimed was one who had died and risen again, and whom the heavens had received till the time of the restitution of all things.”⁴⁴ In other words, to preach Christ now meant to preach his death for the forgiveness of sins, his resurrection to secure life eternal, and his coming to restore all things.

Bernard goes on to show just how central the preaching of the resurrection was in Acts.

I need not remind you of the “great power” with which, from one end of the book to the other, “the Apostles gave witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.” Everywhere they preach a “Christ that died, *yea, rather*, that is risen again.” This event is presented by them not simply as the seal of his teaching, or more generally (to use the poor shrunken phrase of later times) as the proof of his divine mission, but as itself the cause and the commencement of that new world and eternal life which was consciously “the hope of Israel,” and unconsciously the hope of man. Turn especially to the latter part of the book, and study the position taken by St. Paul in the last crisis of his controversy with the Jews. See how he falls back upon the *resurrection* of Christ as involving the realization of the hopes of his people and the fulfilment of all the promises of God. Some have treated as a mere expedient for his own deliverance at the moment that one voice which he cried in the Council, “Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; *of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question.*” But he needed no expedient, for he was then in Roman hands and under Roman protection. It was no pretence to serve a turn; it was the genuine language of his heart. In all his other speeches at this crisis the same idea reigns predominant. “I stand and am judged for the *hope of the promise* made of God unto our fathers: unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come: for *which hope’s sake*, King Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews. Why is it judged by you a thing incredible *if God raises the dead?*” It is the self-same sound which we heard in the first discourse given us from his lips, when he cried to the Jews of the Pisidian Antioch, “Now we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the *promise* which was made unto the fathers, God hath *fulfilled* the same unto us their children, *in that he hath raised up Jesus again.*”⁴⁵

The resurrection became an essential element in the preaching of Christ. As stated by Bernard, it was not merely a stamp of divine approval upon his mission or an expedient for Paul’s deliverance. It was “the realization of the hopes of his people and the fulfilment of all the promises of God.”⁴⁶

Bernard next traces “*the course of external events through which the doctrine was matured.*”⁴⁷ He prefaces his discussion with these words:

⁴³ Ibid., 124-125.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 127-128.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 129-130.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 129.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 131.

It is, however, the book, not of the words, but of the acts of the Apostles, and we accordingly find in it the intimations rather than the expositions of doctrine. It assists our present inquiry in a manner more appropriate to its historical character.⁴⁸

The Book of Acts, says Bernard, “carries us straight from the Gospels to the Epistles.”⁴⁹ It tells us how the original Apostles became powerful witnesses for Christ, who Paul is, how he became an Apostle, that the gospel is the same for Jew and Gentile alike, and how it went from Jerusalem to the various Gentile regions addressed by the Epistles. Bernard says:

[The Book of Acts] begins at Jerusalem, it ends at Rome. Between these two points questions have been settled, principles carried out, and divinely implanted tendencies disclosed. Especially have the relations of the Gospel to Jew and Gentile been fixed forever. We see how all the story progressively ministers to this result.⁵⁰

The narrative of events begins with Jerusalem, with Peter presenting “the Gospel as the fulfillment of prophecy and completion of the covenant made with the fathers.”⁵¹ Stephen’s speech and martyrdom are then chronicled. Bernard comments:

the Hellenist element seems to eclipse the Hebrew, and Stephen rises to reason and to die. A large space is therefore given to the speech, which sets forth the progressive nature of the dealings of God with Israel, and shows the drift of that current of thought on which we are launched. The death of Stephen is not only an individual martyrdom, like that of James, so briefly mentioned afterwards; it is a great crisis, and stands as such in the narrative, with a clear intimation of the position which was assumed on the one side and rejected on the other.⁵²

Philip takes the gospel to the Samaritans. Peter takes it to the uncircumcised. “Then we pass from the side of Peter to that of the new Apostle, to whom the carrying out of this principle [*i.e.*, the gospel to the uncircumcised] is committed.”⁵³ The scene shifts to Antioch and Paul’s missionary journeys. The Council meets at Jerusalem and deals with a sort of Christian Judaism. “Then, and not till then, Europe is entered, and the great centres of Greek life are occupied; but still in every place does the Apostle address himself first to the Jews, and everywhere they reject and persecute him.”⁵⁴ Paul then heads to Jerusalem, “claiming his place in the covenant and as a preacher of *the hope of Israel*.”⁵⁵ It ends with Paul in Rome before Jews, arguing from the Scriptures for the gospel and in support of his ministry (Acts 28:25-28). Luke ends his account with these words, that Paul was “preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered” (Acts 28:31).

Bernard has this to say about the historical account of the Book of Acts:

Now let no man think that the rejection of Jews and admission of Gentiles were the only result of this long history. Another result has been involved in it: Christianity itself has been finally drawn out of Judaism, the delicate and intricate relations of the two systems being dealt with in such a way, that (so to speak) the texture of living fibre has been lifted unimpaired out of its former covering, leaving behind only a residuum of what was temporary, preparatory, and carnal. In fact, the doctrine of the Gospel has been cleared and formed; cleared of the false element which the

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 132.

⁵¹ Ibid., 132-133.

⁵² Ibid., 133.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 134.

existing Judaism would have infused into it, and formed of the true elements which the old covenant had been intended to prepare for its use.⁵⁶

The gospel was preached. Contradictory principles vying for approval were warded-off. The relationship between the OT and the gospel was articulated. The bridge between the Gospels and the Epistles was laid. The continuity and organic relationship between the Testaments was revealed. Many things can be learned from the historical account of the Book of Acts and its progress of doctrine.

Bernard closes this lecture by discussing what he calls two great principles that “were fought for and secured, which may be expressed (though not with strict accuracy) by saying that *the Gospel is the substitute for the Law*, and that *the Gospel is the heir of the Law*.”⁵⁷ Bernard is careful to explain himself at this point. What he means by saying “*the Gospel is the substitute for the Law*” is that the gospel did what many supposed the Law to have done. Bernard says:

The Gospel provides for individual souls the means of justification and the title to eternal life. This the Law had not done, had not been meant to do, and by Prophets and Psalmists had been asserted not to do. Yet it had sunk deep into the mind of those who were under it, that this was the very thing which it did. Scribes taught distinctly, and the people were possessed with the idea, that there had been a law given which could give life, and that righteousness was by that Law.⁵⁸

In this quote, Bernard clearly, though briefly, assumes the historic Protestant view of justification *sola fide*. He also clearly held that the problem in first-century Judaism was, in part, a wrong view of the function of the law as it related to *personal justification*. This faulty view of the law, he argues, was one of the main reasons why Stephen was martyred and Paul arrested in Jerusalem. In Stephen’s case, Bernard references Acts 6:13. Acts 6:11-14 says:

Then they secretly induced men to say, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God.” And they stirred up the people, the elders and the scribes, and they came up to him and dragged him away and brought him before the Council. They put forward false witnesses who said, “This man incessantly speaks against this holy place and the Law; for we have heard him say that this Nazarene, Jesus, will destroy this place and alter the customs which Moses handed down to us.”

In Paul’s case, he references Acts 21:28, which says, “Men of Israel, come to our aid! This is the man who preaches to all men everywhere against our people and the Law and this place.” He includes these words in his conclusion to this point:

Still the anxious pastor in his parish, still the self-observant Christian in his own heart, learns how deep-seated and how stubborn is that principle in human nature, which seeks the starting-point of salvation in self rather than in God, in doing rather than in receiving, in work rather than in grace. ...The keen eye of the selected champion [*i.e.*, Paul] saw in a moment the fatal consequences of customs turned into doctrines...

In his writings we see how his penetrating eye discerned the danger, and how his unsparing hand averted it; we see also that the intuitive discernment and the impulsive vigor were the result of a deep personal experience, both of the error which he resisted, and of the truth which he defended. In the Acts we are carried through the period of this contest in the outward course of events, and when the history ceases in the hired house at Rome, the Gospel has fought itself free,

⁵⁶ Ibid., 134-135.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 135.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

and severed itself from Judaism, not merely in its form, but in its essence, proclaiming salvation by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and *not* by the works of the Law.⁵⁹

Bernard then discusses how the gospel can be considered as the heir of the law. He argues that the Book of Acts contends for and secures the fact that the gospel “inherits what the Law had prepared.”⁶⁰ He says:

The Law, on its national and ceremonial side, had created a vast and closely-woven system of ideas. These were wrought out and exhibited by it in forms according to the flesh—an elect nation, a miraculous history, a special covenant, a worldly sanctuary, a perpetual service, an anointed priesthood, a ceremonial sanctity, a scheme of sacrifice and atonement, a purchased possession, a holy city, a throne—of David, a destiny of dominion. Were these ideas to be lost, and the language which expressed them to be dropped, when the Gospel came? No! It was the heir of the Law. The Law had prepared these riches, and now bequeathed them to a successor able to unlock and to diffuse them. The Gospel claimed them all, and developed in them a value unknown before. It asserted itself as the proper and predestined continuation of the covenant made of God with the fathers, the real and only fulfilment of all which was typified and prophesied; presenting the same ideas, which had been before embodied in the narrow but distinct limits of carnal forms, in their spiritual, universal, and eternal character. The body of types according to the flesh died with Christ, and with Christ it rose again in a body of antitypes according to the Spirit. Those who were after the flesh could not recognize its identity: those who were after the Spirit felt and proclaimed it. The change was as great, the identity was as real, as in that mystery of the resurrection of the body which the same preachers showed: in which the earthly frame must lay aside the flesh and blood which cannot inherit the kingdom of God, and must reappear, dead and raised again, another and yet the same, “sown in weakness and raised in power, sown in dishonor and raised in glory, sown a natural body and raised a spiritual body.”⁶¹

In these words, Bernard articulates a promise/fulfillment, type/anti-type motif of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments. He sees the gospel as taking-up and transforming various elements of the OT to fit the redemptive-historical contingencies of the New Covenant.

Bernard continues to argue that the gospel also inherited the Scriptures of the preceding dispensation “unchanged and unchangeable.”⁶² He says:

The Law and the Prophets, as scriptures, as a book, were still under the new dispensation what they had been under the old—the voice of the Spirit and the word of God. Nay! This written word belonged to the new dispensation more truly than to the old, for these scriptures also were now raised to newness of life, and were recognized as prepared for the uses to which they were now applied, and written less for the immediate than for the ulterior purposes, as St. Peter has expressed it, “Not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the Gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven” (I Peter 1:12). This is ever the position of St. Paul, for, as one has truly said, “None of the Apostles has laid such stress upon the Holy Scripture as the Apostle of the Spirit and liberty.” And as this appears in his writings, so does it also in the history. From his first reported speech at the Pisidian Antioch (Acts 15:13, 41), which bases all upon the Scriptures, still he goes on with the Scriptures in his hand, till he stands and is judged, “believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets” (Acts 24:14); and finally parts from the Roman Jews after “persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the Law of Moses and out of the Prophets, from morning till evening” (Acts 28:23). This then is the position taken at the beginning and fought for to the end; and it is a striking sight to see how resolutely St. Paul insists that he and his doctrine

⁵⁹ Ibid., 136-137.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 137.

⁶¹ Ibid., 137-138.

⁶² Ibid., 138.

are the true representatives of the Law and the Prophets, while he is being persecuted and cast out, as having betrayed and blasphemed them.⁶³

The OT remains the word of God for the gospel dispensation in both its ideas and form (*i.e.*, from Genesis through Malachi). Though it is now interpreted according to NT/fulfillment hermeneutical motifs, what it foreshadowed has come in the gospel.

Bernard closes his discussion of “these two principles—what the Gospel does without the Law, and what the Gospel derives from the Law”⁶⁴ by stating that they “do in fact contain the main substance of apostolic teaching.”⁶⁵ He continues:

On the one side, the principle that men are “justified freely by God’s grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:24) is laid as the deep foundation of all the various forms and applications of evangelical truth. On the other, the principle that the same things which were done under the old covenant in the region of the flesh are done under the new covenant in the region of the spirit, opens out into the doctrine of the mediatorial work of Christ in the true tabernacle, the sacrificial character of his death, the atoning virtue of his blood, the sanctification of believers as a kingdom of priests and an holy nation, and their destined inheritance in a promised land and a holy city of their God. The expansion of these doctrines fills and forms all the Epistles, and each is distinctly wrought out by itself, the one in the Epistle to the Romans at the beginning, the other in the Epistle to the Hebrews at the end, of the course of the Pauline writings.⁶⁶

He acknowledges that “it is in the Epistles themselves that we behold this expansion and formation of doctrine” but asserts that it is in the Book of Acts that we see “the providential circumstances through which the result is obtained.”⁶⁷

Finally, Bernard closes his discussion of the Book of Acts in a doxological, didactic, and exhortative way:

Blessing and praise be unto his holy name, because he has done this! For he has thus added to the manifestation of himself his own direction as to the way in which it is to be used. On what a sea of uncertainties we should else have been launched! Observe the vague and wavering doctrine which ensues whenever the divine attestation of the apostolical teaching meets with discredit or mistrust. Now the Gospel is nothing but a republication, pure and perfect, of the Law of God; now it is a proclamation of his universal fatherhood; now an exhibition of the beauty of holiness and the attraction of love; now the revelation of a righteous King and Head of the human race; now it seems little else than a negation, a sweeping away of all the ideas which a teaching supposed to be divine had fashioned through preceding ages. So it is when men proceed, as if the summing up of the manifestation of Christ had not been done for them, but was left for them to do. From all partial or perverted representations our refuge is with those who were actually commissioned to do it, and who, under a divine guidance adequate to the exigencies of that commission, ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ. Through the blessed ordinance of a written word they have not ceased to do so now. To us, even to us who are here alive this day, they preach him still; a Christ “who died for our sins and rose again for our justification”; a Christ who saves without the Law, yet one who is witnessed by the Law and the Prophets. So they preach, and so we believe. This was the beginning of the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope to the Church at its birth, and this beginning it will hold firm unto the end. It is for us to see that we bear our part in the long history of the faith, finding its reality in the joy of our own salvation, and transmitting its testimony to the generation to come.⁶⁸

⁶³ Ibid., 138-139.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 139.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 139-140.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 140.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 140-141.