

READINGS ON THE EPISTLE TO THE PHILIPPIANS

by W.W. Fereday

W.W. Fereday's exposition of Philippians, highlighting the joy and contentment found in knowing Christ as the believer's life and hope.

5 Chapters

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Readings on the Epistle to the Philippians

Chapter 1

In this assembly all the saints at Philippi are addressed, with the bishops and deacons; these, we have seen, are not even alluded to in Corinthians, where the God of order was correcting the disorders which abounded. The gifted persons were powerless to correct it, possessing their gifts apart from communion with the divine Giver. Still it was God's assembly at Corinth, and the saints, simply as such, are in view. All were in the house of God—the "sanctified in Christ Jesus" alone, members of His body. Of such exclusively is composed the assembly which Christ builds (Matt. 16), for the assembly is looked at in more than one aspect in Scripture.

With all that call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place {1 Cor. 1:1} includes the whole professing church. As we have seen, all was disorder at Corinth, and there was none to help. Bishops are not mentioned, and the gifted persons out of communion with the mind of God. The result was that they—the saints—became more immediately the object of the care of God Himself. The assembly was God's assembly, they were God's building, God's husbandry; and Paul, as one of God's workmen, His messenger to them.

If overseers or deacons had failed or were absent, could God become the servant of His own ordinances? And the apostle, not searching out iniquities, but earnestly desiring to recognize any good thing amongst them, tells them that he thanks God always for the grace of God given to them in Christ, in that they had been enriched in Him in all word of doctrine and in all knowledge.

But how cold, and unlike the opening of the address to the Philippians! The uniting power of a common interest in the work, and of joint participation in the sufferings and conflicts of the gospel, which, in a beautiful way, he speaks of as a person, was wanting at Corinth. It was a poor substitute for what he found at Philippi, to talk of gifts and gifted men. The gifts were still there; but the connection between the streams and the fountain hardly manifest.

But to proceed with our chapter. "I thank my God for my whole remembrance of you." Not a break nor a gap from the beginning to the present hour, not a supplication to God in which their names were omitted, and this with accompanying joy. The ground of it, their fellowship, not here with Paul, but with the gospel itself, suffering evil with it, according to the power of God, not ashamed of the testimony of their Lord. But his joy in those saints was not limited to the remembrance of their ways from the first day: his thoughts about them ran on into the future, even unto the day of Jesus Christ—the day of glory, with boundless confidence in Him who had begun the good work in them, that He would complete it unto that day. But this confidence in God respecting them was united in Paul with a conviction as to their spiritual condition, founded upon their attitude both towards the gospel and towards himself, so that it was only a right thing in him to feel this. With what delicacy and grace; both of the Spirit surely, he tells them of his feelings towards them. They had Paul in their hearts, and in his bonds and the defense of the gospel shared the grace given to him.

What uniting bonds were these! He loved them with the affections of Jesus Christ Himself. "Ye have me in your heart"; they were linked up with him in the maintenance of the truth, the object

one, the conflict one. If a man is “feeding” on the “bread” of the “mighty,” he becomes “single-minded” and single-hearted, and deeply happy. Paul was the channel through which God was feeding them with this bread. “That your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again.” There was the true bread of the mighty! It was in Christ these blessed affections were realized.

Surely these few verses unfold a scene of remarkable moral beauty, “the bond of perfectness” binding together in blessed affections (the bowels of Jesus Christ, as he calls it) the apostle and the beloved Philippians.

But this longing after them in the bowels of Jesus Christ tells itself out in more than words. He prays that the love already in them may abound yet more and more; no measure here, for it was really divine love, though he calls it theirs—“the love of God shed abroad in the heart,” but with special characteristics, full knowledge and all intelligence. What a glorious thought! love for ever growing, both in itself and in full knowledge and intelligence. Whence such thoughts as these? Ah! we need not say whence, but how? Jesus Himself was filling his heart, and coming out through this channel to theirs. And Paul was thinking of Him in this passage, not as at the right hand, but as in His own day; the day of glory and of power come; and of the Philippians being pure and without offence for that day. Compare 1 Thess. 3:12, 13, “In order to the confirming your hearts unblamable in holiness . . . at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.”

Paul has evidently left the old things behind; the subject here is toil and suffering, laboring amongst and against adversaries, and suffering. for and with Christ in view of the day of manifested glory. A great part of our deplorable weakness flows from this, that what that day of glory means for Him and for us, is practically lost for the hearts and minds of so many of His people. He comes with all His saints into the scene of His glory and theirs: the creature is expecting the revelation of the sons of God, when He is revealed they are revealed with Him. It is in view of this glorious day that the saints suffer for and with Christ in spirit: these sufferings and glories cannot be separated “If we suffer we shall reign” (not live).

In none of these passages have we the standing of believers in Christ, no sitting in heavenly places, but the responsibility of pilgrims in the wilderness, in view of salvation through and out of it at the end.

In another aspect, in connection with the work finished on the cross, they were already saved. Forgiven, justified, accepted, and united by the Spirit to Christ glorified, they were fit for sharing the portion of the saints in light on taking the first step into the wilderness. But here the apostle is not speaking of what had been done for them, but expressing his confidence that what God had begun in them, “He would complete unto the day of Jesus Christ.”

Now look at the character in which his heart contemplated them as fit for Jesus Christ’s day: love abounding in itself, as also in full knowledge and in all intelligence. Then there was to be spiritual judgment and appreciation of the things that are more excellent, in view of purity and being without offence for Jesus Christ’s day. And finally, their being complete (filled) as regards proofs of righteousness, to God’s praise and glory. What termini are these to the trials of the wilderness! Christ’s day and God’s praise and glory!

Verse 12. The subject changes, and we have Paul's history of himself in relation to surrounding circumstances; but everything, to the least detail, is for the profit of the saints. Contemplated from above, everything was in favor of the man who said, "This one thing I do." Whatever Mien might say of the power of circumstances, it is evident that the prisoner of Jesus Christ was ever "master of the situation," as men say. It was really Christ in him in the power of the Spirit. Compare what he says in 2 Cor. 2: "But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in the Christ."

Through his captivity at Rome, the name of Jesus was first heard in the Praetorium, as it had once reached the ears of the prisoners at Philippi. The circumstances there were the dungeon, the stocks, and the midnight darkness. Was Paul making melody in his heart in the midst of them, praising God with singing, above or beneath those circumstances? God Himself was there in Spirit! The prisoners listened. What name was that which reached them through the dungeon walls? (for Paul was in the inner prison). Was that a mere circumstance? I think not, and that one sees there also the effect of the presence of Him whom the world cannot receive because it seeth Him not.

At Rome, he says, his bonds had become manifest as being in Christ, in all the Praetorium, and in all others, or in all other places. (See New Trans.). And most of the brethren were emboldened to speak the word without fear, trusting in the Lord through his bonds. Thus the "Name" was made known everywhere, and the brethren encouraged to proclaim it without fear. Such was the result of Satan's efforts to destroy it, and of God's purpose to glorify it; and the instrument in all this service, the poor prisoner of Jesus Christ. To him might be aptly applied the well-known lines:

Stone walls do not a prison make,

Nor iron bars a cage.

His free and quiet spirit was in perfect liberty, where there is neither "Greek nor Jew," nor Roman neither! but where "Christ is everything, and in all."

We see now that circumstances are only occasions in the hand of power for the accomplishment of God's will. Some preached Christ out of contention, for envy and strife: "What then," he says, "Christ is preached, and I rejoice, and will rejoice, for even this will turn out to my salvation (looked at as realized at the end of the race) through your supplication and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ." In these words we note his lowliness and dependence; farther on he says, "I have learned," and "I know"; but this was the road he took upheld by their prayers, and the "supply of the Spirit of Christ" (increase of spiritual energy). He does not say "Spirit of God," because Christ was immediately before his mind, and he was seeking to follow Him in the path which He had traversed, in all the energy of the Spirit of holiness, not one footmark out of place, not one thought to refuse, not one thing to regret. Paul was not ignorant of the end of the wondrous course finished by the "leader and completer of faith" Himself, in the glorification of God, the revelation of the Father, the accomplishment of the work given Him to do, the conquest of the world. His blessed servant could say at the end of his course, "I have kept the faith." He could not, like His divine Master, be the object of faith; but the creature has not reached a more elevated point in the race set before us than that marked out in these simple words, "I have kept the faith." Never had mortal man had such treasures committed to his keeping: "the faith," "the name of Jesus," and "the ministry," "to testify the glad tidings of the grace of God."

How his heart responded to the great commission, his pen has described in words never equaled by man in feeling and simplicity: "What do ye, weeping and breaking my heart? for I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." When the Holy Spirit in every city witnessed that bonds and tribulations awaited him, his answer was: I make no account of my life as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received. of the Lord Jesus, to testify the glad tidings of the grace of God. "And finally he exclaims, when the conflict was ended, "I have kept the faith."

The last circumstance, if men will call it so, of the way, death, was imminent. Did that give him trouble? Surely he was saying in faith, "Though an host should encamp against me, whom shall I fear?" It is not here, "I am ready to die for the name of the Lord Jesus," but "My earnest expectation and my hope, in all boldness, as always, Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death." Christ was his life, and death gain, and he was "always bearing" about in his body the dying of Jesus.

By the grace of God, through faith, both the life and death of Christ were Paul's. Christ was his life, and "identified with him in the likeness of his death," and united to Him in heaven by the Holy Ghost, he was already spiritually in a place where circumstance, as a thought or expression, has no meaning or application. What are the circumstances of the eternal life of which Paul lived? His own he refuses, saying, "It is no longer I that live, but Christ that liveth in me." Was that life subject or superior to circumstances? It is hid with Christ in God; there he is speaking of its source on high; we do not talk of circumstances there. Dead to all that Christ was dead to, and alive in Him to God, that life is not subject to circumstances, though in one down here it may pass through them, manifesting itself in a power that is really divine, as expressed in the words, "I have strength for all things in him that gives me power."

But in many a one of our day, only the contrast to all this is discernible, judged of according to appearances. It is sometimes said even of a Christian, he is "a creature of circumstances." Was Paul that? What was the world, what the things in it, to one who wanted to be out of it with Christ? But as His saints were here, how could he cease to care for them! It was more necessary for their sakes that he should abide; and so, divinely guided and assured, he knew that he should abide with them for their joy in faith and progress in faith, the only kind of progress he ever thought of; but the end of this progress and joy was that their boasting in Christ Jesus might abound. For Paul's heart, every thought of blessing, whether on earth or in heaven, had Christ for its source, center, and end.

And now, his last thought in this chapter, he presses on them the claims of the glad tidings of the Christ. Their hearts would own them in standing fast in one spirit, with one soul, laboring together in the same conflict with the faith of the gospel, personified here, as in the other passage: "Suffer evil along with the glad tidings."

What a blessed thought! association with the gospel as with a person, participating in its afflictions and conflicts. Who entered into this conflict like the apostle himself, or, being in it, behaved himself as he did? How many have been able to say at the end, and how soon that comes! "I have fought the good fight?"

And note what he says by the way: “Now thanks be to God, who always leads me in triumph in the Christ.” Their not being frightened by adversaries was a demonstration to them of destruction, but to the saints, of God’s salvation. To them to suffer was a gift; were they, in accepting of it, the creatures or the masters of circumstances in the power of the life of Christ, the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus?

The truth as it is in Jesus is a wonderful thing—the life of God in man. Here it is all practical; you get a man realizing what he teaches. Without anything like pretension or affectation, the Lord Jesus Christ in heaven was the Lord of his heart. The Lord said: “For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.” That is the divine way of helping the saints. Paul has apprehended the glorious thought, and has found in Christ an object for himself supremely above the saints whom he loved so well, and was ready to die for. Separation to Christ—His glory, honor, interests, is the measure of all true love and care for His saints. As far as the Holy Ghost works in me unhinderedly, you see a person who can really be a blessing to the saints.

We are to conduct ourselves worthily, it does not say of human principles, but “of the glad tidings of the Christ”; and, as said elsewhere, “of the Lord unto all well-pleasing.”

Finally, it is through the priesthood of Christ, His advocacy on high, the supply of His Spirit, the intercession of saints, and putting on the whole armor of God, that Paul speaks of salvation realized at the end of the course; it is thus that God brings us through the wilderness. In another aspect, according to divine teaching, the first step into the wilderness was taken with the knowledge of eternal salvation, where it is viewed as the fruit of the work finished on the cross. To Him who accomplished it be glory for ever.

Chapter 2

Paul, conscious of the power of the life in which he lived, and strengthened from its source, was far from being insensible to the difficulties and trials by which the saints are, on every side, surrounded. He had himself been pressed beyond his power, but the strain put upon the vessel only brought out the surpassingness of the power which perfected itself in the vessel's weakness; the life of Jesus was manifested in his body. As the sufferings of Christ abounded towards him, so, through Christ, abounded his encouragement also. The encouragement he received from the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ had this beautiful meaning for Paul's spirit, that he should be able to encourage those who are in any tribulation whatever, through the encouragement which he had of God. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ was learned, by him, in yet other characters in the school of experience, as the God of all encouragement and the Father of compassions.

What "precious" knowledge is this for "one's own blessing," and indispensable for service amongst His suffering people! With what exquisite skill and delicacy he ministers such encouragement, we have had proofs in the previous chapter; how he delights to tell them of his thankfulness to God for his whole remembrance of them; of his unwearied supplication for them all with joy, and that the occasion of it was their fellowship with the gospel from the first day. They had shared in its afflictions and triumphs, he desires now that they may share in its conflicts also (in the same conflict with the faith of the gospel).

Having thus associated them with the portion the gospel has in this world, he next associates them with himself: "Ye have me in your hearts, and that both in my bonds and in the defense and confirmation of the glad tidings ye are all participators in my grace." What could be more encouraging to the saints than praise like this. from the "apostle of Jesus Christ"?

He had confidence respecting them that He who had begun the good work in them would complete it unto Jesus Christ's day: he had confidence, too, that it was better for them that he should remain, that their boasting might abound in Jesus Christ through him, by his presence again with them, so he knew that he should abide with them. They had the same conflict which they saw in him and now heard of in him.

There were many links in the chain that bound together the apostle and the Philippians, but we have not all the links yet. There were comforts in Christ of which they were the channel. We must remember that their interest in him had, somewhat slackened; it was but for a moment; they had revived their thinking of him (Phil. 4:10, New Trans.). Yet surely they did think of him, he would not allow the thought that they had forgotten him; it must be that they had lacked opportunity of communication.

He rejoices greatly, but it was in the Lord, the comforts were in Christ; his heart owns the source; where but in Him could he enjoy them?

God Himself had accepted the things sent to His servant, they were agreeable to Him, an odor of sweet savor, an acceptable sacrifice. See how, in thinking of them, he connects them with God, with Christ and with himself.

But these comforts in Christ were the consolations of love—what God is in His nature—and had yet another character: they were fruits of the fellowship of the Spirit. In speaking of their affections and compassions he is thinking rather of the saints in themselves. What heart but God's could have perceived all this in the revival of their thinking of Paul? in whose heart God's love was flowing by the Holy Ghost, who gave proofs of His indwelling when He thus filled the heart and mind with thoughts which do not belong to man.

By this comfort and consolation and fellowship, his heart, we can see, was enlarged, his mouth opened unto the Philippians, but his joy not yet filled up; that would be realized when they thought the same things, had the same love, were joined in soul, thinking one thing (New Trans.).

Elsewhere he speaks of the unity of the Spirit, and in a more abstract way; here it was rather the realization of practical union. The standard is very high; it would be felt in the conscience to be above the measure of human thinking; that is just what Paul feels, and he meets it by saying, "Let this mind [what Christ thought, or the thinking of Christ] be in you." Subsisting in the form of God [effulgence of His glory and exact expression of His being,] ever "thinking the same thing," with Him, "thinking one thing," one with Him in nature and glory, Christ emptied Himself when in the form of God. Found in figure as a man He humbled Himself, and became obedient even unto the death of the cross.

Emptied, "humbled," "obedient," these were the forms in which the thinkings of Christ present Him to us, bringing before us the grace of Him who came down out of heaven, the Son of man who is in heaven.

Each beautiful word, and oh, how beautiful! as thus applied to Him, wakes up the dormant affection of His own, while sounding in the awakened conscience the judgment of the first man.

But the Philippians had already the mind of Christ according to 1 Cor. 2. The thoughts of that mind connected with the place He had taken—His pathway here—are the theme of the apostle in this place. How often we find that these thoughts are neglected by our light selfish hearts, which are only deceived when we think of enjoying the fruits of His atoning work apart from communion with Him in the further knowledge of Himself as revealed in the word.

We talk of our salvation, our joy, and our happiness; of the freedom wherewith He hath made us free, more than of Him who is the Source of all the blessing; and, in a certain sense, we talk and think rightly, too, for it is our salvation, the joy, too, in it is given us, and that freedom has made us free indeed. But to stop there, in the place where power and love divine have set us free, is not to think rightly; but to lose the strength even of the joy of deliverance, and to come short of that boasting in Christ Jesus which the heart of the apostle was proposing for them. For this is connected with deeper and ever-deepening knowledge of the divine Person.

That He had overcome the world, revealed the Father, and finished the work which He had given Him to do, they knew already; but the mind that was in Christ Jesus upon coming into the world, the thoughts of that mind revealing His relations as man to God, had not been the subject of the

apostle's special unfolding; yet it is impossible to think of any subject more interesting to the hearts of His people, of anything more separative in its nature. The unveiled face in heaven is not more attractive than the marred face on earth.

Have you ever compared the "mind" in which Jesus commenced and ended His wondrous course through this world, with the works with which He closed it? the mind as expressed in "emptied" "humbled," "obedient"; the works in, "overcome the world," revealed the Father, "finished the work."

If you have, will you say which are the most perfect, the thoughts or the works? but this is what none can answer. They have each and alike their beginning and accomplishment in Himself. Besides, how compare that which is of infinite moral beauty with something else which is of exactly the same character? Where all is light and no darkness at all, it would be like comparing sunbeam with sunbeam; yet even there some inequalities might be found; but here, none.

In the passages we have been looking at we cannot help seeing that the deed is but the necessary outflow and accomplishment of the thought according to all its perfection. Had He not been the emptied One, how could He have taken the body prepared for Him, in which, crucified through weakness, He could finish the work, having revealed the Father? If He had not humbled Himself in the world, of which Satan was the god, how could He have over-thrown him? And if not obedient, instead of overcoming the world He would have been overcome by it. In John 8 He tells us that He was altogether that which He said. (See New Trans.).

Thus was He infinitely and equally reflected in what He thought, said, and did.

The apostle is not merely saying, I want you to know about this mind which was in Christ, presenting it as he did objectively; but, let this mind be in you, subjectively, as they say. In this lay the secret of power. All the grace of the Lord Jesus is unfolded in the revelation of "this mind," and there is no teacher like grace, carrying with it salvation as well as instruction, as Titus 2:11 teaches.

But whatever the essential blessedness and attractiveness of this mind, and they were indeed infinite, they were in One found in figure as a man. It was a Man's heart which was the scene of all these holy exercises and affections, in which He was perfectly before God as well as for Him, a most wondrous thing in this world; a Man fully and absolutely for God in every thought of His heart, all closing on earth in one supreme thought and gift. He gave Himself (for us) an offering and sacrifice to God, for a sweet-smelling savor. It will be remarked, too, that His enemies, the instruments of His humiliation and death, have no place in the passage before us (Phil. 2). Neither saint nor sinner occupy our attention here; it is a Man before God in all His thoughts. And then the mind of God about that wondrous Man, obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, in infinite contrast with the first man, disobedient even unto death—the wages of sin.

And now the Philippians are to have God's mind about this obedient Man, His whole being's exclusive object. He had been crucified through weakness, therefore it is said what God (the name of power) did, in highly exalting Him.

In "raised from the dead by the glory of the Father," are further and deeper thoughts; thus we learn that the power of God and the glory of the Father, were necessarily engaged in the exaltation of

Jesus. This was His personal name, the name by which He was known in humiliation. Yet the name was a mystery in itself, for it means Jehovah the Savior. This name had been announced even before His birth by an angel. Who amongst His own had known its glorious meaning?

But we are not occupied here with man's mind; God's mind about Him is the great and only thought here. Jesus is the name in heaven. God has granted Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of heavenly, and earthly, and infernal beings. This is God's present answer to the rejecters of His holy Servant Jesus. So, when His authority and Messiahship were disowned, the apostle tells them that "God has made this same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." The kings of the earth were there, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against His Christ; indeed they did imagine a vain thing when they stood against His Anointed, for what is the present result? God has invested Him in glory with these very titles, Lord and Christ, and granted Him the great name that is above every name, that every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to God the Father's glory. This is God's present answer to rejecters of Jesus.

It will be understood that the glory spoken of here is the glory given by God to the anointed Man Christ Jesus; the glory looked for in John 17 was not one of divine names and titles; nor is it simply Man before God, but the Son before the Father asking for glory with Him, as He says, "Along with thyself, with the glory which I had along with thee before the world was." He had a right to it all in the title of His Person; but claims it on the ground of His having glorified the Father, and in view of for ever glorifying Him.

In Philippians the glory was in relation to the creature, every knee bowing, every tongue confessing; in John 17 it is in relation to the Father alone: "Glorify thou me with thine own self."

The Scriptures present us with yet other forms of His glory, as in Psa. 2: Ask of me, and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.

But to return to our chapter, we may see now the unspeakable importance of the exhortation: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." No such words had ever been spoken to man; they would have been incomprehensible in a religion made for man in the flesh. It needed first that the "Life" should have been manifested, and consciously possessed, by those to whom they were addressed, for they are the expression of that life on earth. To angels they would be wholly inapplicable: glorious beings though they are, but how carry this mind which was in Christ! They had kept their first estate, excel in strength and do His commandments, hearkening to the voice of His word. In all this they are the condemnation of man, who did not keep his first estate, whose condition was marked by weakness and disobedience to His commandments, and refusal to hearken to his word.

But Satan's apparent triumph in his fall has been an occasion for the revelation of ways and counsels of grace, into which these glorious beings desire to look (1 Pet. 1:12), and by which they learn the all-various wisdom of God. Indeed we did not keep our first estate, and angels kept theirs. But see what God has done for the saints according to His own eternal purpose and grace, given us in Christ Jesus before angels were. Angels are wondrous beings, but they have not the place we have. We have to do with God in a way angels have not. He has given us the glorious estate of the second Man risen and set over all creatures, Head of the new creation. Moreover

grace and counsel in Christ are not dependent upon creature responsibility.

Again, angels excel in strength, but it is angel strength in which they do excel. Of man it is said without strength; the weakness of saints, however, is but the inlet to the power of Christ, His strength perfecting itself in their weakness. If angels do His commandment, still it is in the obedience of angels, a blessed thing! But the obedience of saints is the obedience of Christ Himself—sanctified unto the obedience of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 1:2).

They are not ashamed of the holy angels now, for their gain—in the possession of the estate, strength, and obedience of the second Man, a place never occupied by creature before—immeasurably surpasses their loss in nature's fall.

What a mighty sanction for a life of obedience was God's exaltation of the obedient, emptied One—the name which is above every name which He gave Him!

With regard to motives and encouragements Paul has nothing now to add. The obedience of Jesus had been perfected in holiness, and God had marked His delight in it, in exalting the obedient Man to a place far above all creatures. In the spirit of this obedience, which they had seen perfected in Christ, they had to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling, (this working is too serious to admit of lightness; and the more diligently, that Paul was not with them, were they to work out their own salvation; or, as Peter expresses it, "grow up to salvation" (1 Pet. 2:2, New Trans.). This meaning of salvation has been spoken of already. It is God, he says, who works in you, (internal operation of power) both the willing and the working according to His own good pleasure. In the first chapter he had expressed his confidence that He who had begun a good work in them would complete it unto Jesus Christ's day.

They were to be "harmless and simple, irreproachable children of God in the midst of a perverted generation; among whom they appeared [as it is said of the heavenly bodies] as lights in the world." Holding forth the word of life so as to be a boast for me in Christ's day, that "I have not run in vain nor labored in vain." Man's day yielded no measure for Paul's exercises of heart or conscience; for me, he told the Corinthians, it is the very smallest matter that I be examined of you or of man's day. No; it was Jesus Christ's day which alone would reveal the true character of the running and laboring and thinking of Paul. Blessed and solemn thought! It was the judgment of Jesus Christ's day that lifted him above the judgment of man's day.

He had spoken of the Philippians being his boast in the day of Christ. What would they feel when they read the following lines which tell of his devotedness to them, even unto the death; that, if poured out on the sacrifice of their faith (their offering was the fruit of their faith, a sacrifice to God), if my life be taken, he says, I shall consider it as a libation poured out on the sacrifice of your faith. Their service, faith, and work, and that of the apostle were one.

Was I right in saying he had nothing to add, in view of ministering motives for unity, when, in this passage, he ministers to them the fruits of Christ's Spirit working in him?

Never before had the creature, man, spoken as this man speaks here. So pure and holy were the affections with which he regarded them, now in connection with Jesus Christ's day, and now with his own death; fruit of a faith and love which were common to both. They were to rejoice in common. How great will be their rejoicing together in Christ's day!

May we live more in that day! Of Timothy and Epaphroditus one can say nothing higher than that they sympathized perfectly with Paul in these affections and interests. How blessed and precious are the sympathies which are the fruits of the inworking of the Spirit of Christ!

Chapters 3, 4

“For the rest, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord,” and (ch. 4). “Stand fast in the Lord, beloved.” “Rejoice in the Lord always: again, I will say, Rejoice.” The key-notes for a song in the wilderness:

Rejoice in Him, again, again,

The Spirit speaks the word,

Stand fast in Christ, ah, yet again,

He teacheth all the band.

We may compare this with a former word of encouragement given while the people were in the wilderness: “Moses my servant is dead; now, therefore, arise, go over this Jordan.” “Be strong, and of a good courage”: “I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.” Again, ah, yet again, God speaks the word: “only be thou strong and very courageous.” “Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage” (Josh. 1:6, 7, 9).

Thus spake the God of all encouragement, when announcing the death of His servant Moses. Here it is the Spirit of Christ, in His servant Paul, encouraging the saints to rejoice in the Lord.

These words, we well know, were but the fruit of the joy poured by the Spirit of Jesus Christ into the heart of His prisoner, and what so fitting channel on earth as the heart of that prisoner of Jesus Christ for the nations? The circumstance of his position, his prison-house and chain, were far from being hindrances to joy in the Lord. And what were those of Christ when He said: “That my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full”? This kind of joy, blessed be God, is independent of earthly circumstances, though realized in their midst, and our strength therein.

But “beware,” he says, “of dogs [shameless ones], evil workmen”; the secret of the Lord is not with such. It is only the “circumcision” who boast in Christ Jesus; the answer in them to God’s boasting in heaven, when, having brought Him from the dead, He gave Him the great name above all creature names, a position, as Man glorified, which claimed universal homage. Yet this is far from being the fullness of the divine mind concerning Him. The blessed and only Ruler, King of kings and Lord of lords, is going to show the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Father has glorified Him with Himself. Boasting in Christ Jesus is the mind of God Himself in the saints.

It has just been remarked that having the mind of Christ—this mind which was in Christ—is the secret of power; but the same may be said of this joy in the Lord; we shall presently see how this comes out.

But what a blessed description of our practical state under the term “circumcision”: (and how blessedly and wondrously he illustrates it in his own spiritual history!) worshiping by the Spirit of God, boasting in Christ Jesus, all confidence in the flesh for ever gone.

It reminds one of another scripture in 1 John 1:7, which presents a different but equally precious aspect of our state and standing. "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin." There we have a blending of both standing and state. We Christians are in the light as He is in the light; clouds and darkness are not found in this revelation of God; darkness is no longer His secret place (Psa. 18), He is in the light, but we are walking in it; where else could we walk? (he goes on to add, "The darkness is past," or "passing".) And see the blessed result, "we have fellowship one with another," and the blood of Jesus Christ is of unchanged and unchangeable efficacy. This is said here in connection with our walking in the light.

What a roll of blessings these two passages bring before us! We walk in the light as He is in the light, having fellowship with one another; we worship by the Spirit of God; we boast in Christ Jesus; and we have lost all confidence in the flesh; henceforth it is the Lord who possesses our confidence.

All this is very blessed, and it is easy to see that the Lord Jesus is the center and immediate object before the soul of the apostle. It is no longer a question of the mind that was in Him being in us now, but of being with Him where He is, having Himself there as the soul's exceeding great and eternal gain. This is the one thought here, supreme and governing, before which all the thoughts of the flesh disappear. What possible connection could there be between a Hebrew of the Hebrews and the glorified Man in heaven?

This Hebrew was of the former things, the old creation and the first man; Christ was the second Man out of heaven, and gone on high, the Head there of the new creation. Could you speak now of circumcision or of uncircumcision in any relation to Him? These were former things, and are nothing now, the apostle states elsewhere; but "in Christ," is new creation (Galatians). Again, in the thought of the "new man," the names "Jew" and "Greek" &c., have disappeared, and only that of Christ is found, as in the words of Col. 3. "Christ is all."

I think the apostle was full of this thought when he says here, "My Lord!" My Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things; the answer of his heart to the purpose of God the Father, that every tongue should confess Him Lord, to God the Father's glory. With like readiness he expresses his sympathy with others in their wants by: "My God shall abundantly supply all your need according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus." The chain of the prisoner had not weakened the confidence of the saint; he knew whom he had believed, and was persuaded He was able to keep for that day what he had entrusted to Him. He had many interests connected with that day. We may not know what the "deposit" was, but we do know there was that which would be a boast and crown and joy for him when that day came.

It is evident that he lived much in spirit with the Lord, much in His coming day, making little account of the judgment of man's day; of this kind of life how much, or how little do we know? The things before are not in view, while the things behind, in a religious and social aspect, are what Christians seem to be for the most part "reaching after." Their labors are chiefly directed to the advancement politically, socially, and morally, of this present evil world; to modify, as far as may be, peradventure to remove altogether, the reproach of the cross. Many thus prove themselves to be its enemies, their professions notwithstanding.

Could Paul, who said, "God forbid that I should boast, save in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, by which I am crucified unto the world and the world unto me," be of that company? He was a fanatic in their eyes in saying it; at least he was the true servant of Him whom he called my Lord; bearing in his body the brands of the Lord Jesus. But when these professors come to this passage, they are silent for the most part, in the silence of spiritual death.

It can hardly fail to be noticed, that, in this most interesting chapter, we have again before us, one emptied, not as in the preceding chapter, in the power of divine grace to man, but here through grace given to man: not the Son of man out of heaven, but one who had been of earth, taken possession of by Jesus Christ for heaven, and glory with Himself there.

The fullness of Saul of Tarsus had been what might be termed the fullness of the flesh; in principle, all that it most glories in; what the man in the flesh had counted gain to him was there. There was nothing to be desired in respect of race, tribe, or nationality, circumcision, law, zeal, or righteousness of his own. There was a seven-fold completeness in this gain to him, which gave him his place and standing before men. He was an important personage there, a Jew of Tarsus, a citizen of no mean city, a Roman also, educated according to the exactness of the law, brought up at the feet of Gamaliel. Such were the varied and splendid advantages which the man in the flesh counted gain to him.

But, as he was drawing near to Damascus, about midday there shone out of heaven a great light round about him, when he fell to the ground, having heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" To the query, "Who art thou, Lord?" came the answer, "I am Jesus the Nazaraean, whom thou persecutest." That voice has reached his inmost soul. It pleased God to reveal His Son in him; in a moment all is changed! He refuses to take counsel with flesh and blood; all that constituted the gain of Saul of Tarsus fell to the ground with him. He understands it now.

But this was the voice of One, not out of the earth, "but out of heaven (New Trans.), the second Man." Such as he (Adam), made of dust, such are they also made of dust (hitherto that had been his state); "and such as the heavenly one, such also the heavenly ones" (henceforth this is to be Paul's state). The Man of heaven announces Himself to him who was of the earth, as "Jesus the Nazaraean, whom thou persecutest."

Was it to this goal, that the advantages, already detailed, had led the man of the earth open hatred and persecution of the Nazariaean, now speaking from that light, the glory of which rendered Saul sightless? What affinity then had these privileges of his earthly position with that place of light and glory of which Jesus the Nazaraean was the center? They were but the strength of that enmity in which he raged against the name of Jesus; even as the law itself is the strength of sin.

But the voice from heaven has reached him. The God who separated him from his mother's womb, and called him by His grace, and was pleased to reveal His Son in him, has begun a good work in him. The starting-point of this chief of sinners, in his new and wondrous career, was Jesus glorified on high. Of what he then saw, and of what this voice conveyed—Jesus glorified, one with His suffering saints—he was to be a witness. Henceforth his heart, unwearied, will never suffer him to rest until he has gained Him in that glory from which His voice had reached him.

It is no question here of soul salvation; but oh, how unlike everything that one sees or hears of! The subject is not one of doctrines or divine reasonings, yet who was more used in these lines

than Paul? It is the history of a whole heart for ever won, and henceforth for ever to be engaged with one supreme object, in the affections and thoughts of a new nature, of which the Holy Spirit was the strength; for in Him, and in Him alone, were concentrated all the counsels, all the promises, all the mercies of God towards man: His beloved Son, in whom was all His delight—God had highly exalted Him, and here was the least of all saints, exclaiming: My Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and whom I have alone before me in His place on high for mine eternal and unspeakable gain!

Was not this, so far, fellowship with God? the expression of His mind in His servant at any rate. God's appreciation of His holy servant Jesus was shown in setting Him over all; the least of all saints showed his appreciation, in suffering for Him the loss of all things.

Now what place in the unsearchable riches of Christ had the privileges of race, and nation, and circumcision, advantages social, moral, or carnally religious? These were the riches of the man out of the earth, but such was Paul no longer: grace and divine power had changed all that. Such as the heavenly one, such also the heavenly ones, and of these was Paul.

It was remarked before, that this is not the place to look for doctrines and reasonings, and yet the chapter is full of both; but they are the doctrines and reasonings of a heart full of Christ, and led by His Spirit in giving them forth. Is there no doctrine in: "What things were gain to me, these I counted, on account of Christ, but loss"? Is not this the calculation of right reason in the highest sense; a reasonable thought, as elsewhere he speaks of a "reasonable service"? Yet the words express the emotion of a heart drawn in the deepest way towards its divine and heavenly object.

But these reasonings of the affections, when in spirit before God, were, so far as he was really there, the reasonings of the Spirit of Christ, and it is a solemn thing to be allowed to hear them. "What things were to me gain, these I counted, on account of Christ, loss." "But surely I count also all things to be loss on account of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." "I have suffered the loss of all, and count them to be filth, that I may gain Christ." That which could not be found in the second Man out of heaven, or connected with Him, was rejected by Paul, or regarded by him with utter contempt.

Here then we have another man; not the Man out of heaven, but one of those who are such as the heavenly One, and find again in measure the same characteristics: emptied, humbled, and obedient. All of self seems to have disappeared; lost in the all-subduing energy of spirit in which he cast aside all that reminded him of the things behind, pressing ever onward towards his one and only object.

Yet was he ever full of interest in the things and persons in the midst of which his pathway lay; but they were solely Christ's interests on earth, the kingdom and house and testimonies of God, the souls He had quickened, laboring amongst them and preaching the gospel to every creature which is under heaven. But this was work by the way; his object was Christ in the glory of God; his path led straight as an arrow to that divine goal. From that he never swerved. Who else of the children of men ever addressed his brethren in terms like these? "Be imitators all together of me, brethren, and fix your eyes on those walking thus, as you have us for a model." What a wonderful path for man on earth! a path whose moral heights the creature had not before contemplated. With what interest we fix our eyes, not only on the new position, but on the new man; who, understanding its

meaning, walked at its height, sustained by the power which took man in the person of Christ, and set Him in glory on high, Head of the new creation.

Now let us look at the position in relation to the wilderness path; for we are not sitting in heavenly places here as in Ephesians. Thus then the position in the wilderness is developed, old things passed away, former things forgotten, the things before not yet reached, while all around is enmity and moral death, the blessings as yet unseen, and known only by faith; for now was the judgment of this world, Christ not yet gained, that is, Christ where He is, glorified on high; eternal life a hope, as in Titus 1: In a word, all the blessings, which replaced the old things passed away, are regarded here (characterizing the salvation) as gained or possessed at the end; the result of blest ways and energies in the wilderness.

These blessings, beginning with Christ Himself, are also seven in number, as were the old privileges in the flesh. To gain Christ; to be found in Him; to have the righteousness of God; to know Him; to know the power of His resurrection; to know the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable to His death; to attain by any means unto the resurrection from among the dead. All this would be the glorious result of working out his own salvation with fear and trembling, and belongs to Christian responsibility.

In another aspect, we receive eternal life when we believe, as it is written: "In whom ye also have trusted, having heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, in whom also, having believed, ye have been sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the earnest of our inheritance, to the redemption of the acquired possession, to the praise of his glory." The acquired possession is what the saints inherit with Christ. Thus Christ Himself, with salvation and the Holy Spirit as its seal, and as earnest of our inheritance, characterize our present position. As to his position in the wilderness, through which his pathway led, Paul could not say that he was already perfected. He had not attained to the resurrection from among the dead (the power that wrought in that resurrection he realized much of), he had not gained Christ, was not with Him in His glory; how then could he say he was perfected?

Yet, in speaking thus, he places himself, according to his own teaching, amongst the perfect or full-grown. It was not a babe, needing milk, that desired to be with Christ in glory, to gain Him there. "Let us be thus minded (think this)," he adds, addressing the full-grown (perfect); yet not forgetting those otherwise minded, God would reveal it unto them.

It will be well to compare his state here with that of the rich man in Mark 10. He runs to Jesus, kneels to Him, and asks Him, as "good teacher," what he should do to inherit eternal life. What zeal, and freshness, and beauty, and righteousness, too! but it was all his own! not found in Christ, indeed all was his own as much as his riches. The only real advantage he received from them was in this, that they helped him in the discovery that all was vanity: eternal life alone was not that. Yet, after all, the present possession of wealth was practically more important to him than life eternal; it formed the chain that bound him to earth, and was the only treasure his heart knew of. "Treasure in heaven," was a dark saying; to sell what he had, take up his cross, and follow the Good Teacher in His lonely path, was a hard one, too hard for him to listen to. His soul's present immediate want was salvation, but his own death in sins, and powerless estate as a lost sinner he was ignorant of. Riches and the good things of this life harden the heart and sear the conscience, hence the needed testing words: "Sell what thou hast, take up thy cross, and follow me." His alacrity in

coming to Jesus is turned into sadness: “at the word” he went away grieving; his assumed competency to do “was a vanity,” like everything else of man.

Compare this with Paul’s, My Lord, on account of whom I have suffered the loss of all, and count them to be filth, that I may gain Christ. Paul, from the beginning, had his treasure in heaven, and where that was, there was his heart also; the rich man wants to know what he must do to inherit eternal life; he has no thought of finding it in the Good Teacher, no thought that he is already a lost sinner, “without strength.”

Now what thought had Paul of life or righteousness, strength, salvation, or glory, or aught that is of God, and not vanity, apart from Christ? The grace, mercy, promises, and counsels of God, he found in Him. His Person rose gloriously above all that which He could bestow upon man, and to be with Himself (for ever with the Lord) was, for Paul’s heart, the chiefest of all that for which he was apprehended. When he said at, his conversion, “What shall I do, Lord?” it was not in the view of inheriting anything by his doings; what he had seen and heard had put an end for ever to all such thoughts. “For this purpose have I appeared unto thee,” said the Lord, “to appoint thee to be a servant and a witness, both of what thou hast seen, and of what I shall appear to thee in.” It was the right word for the servant, “What shall I do, Lord?” He “was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.” It is true, there was a doing on his part, and that of a most peculiar kind: “But one thing,” he says, and then it comes out that for Paul the present consisted in forgetting the past (the things behind), and stretching out to the things before, pursuing for the prize of the calling on high of God in Christ. Such was the course he was running.

It may well be questioned whether such a present had ever been realized by man before, such a race run! The absence will be remarked of all effort to improve or change, or act in any way upon the scene he was passing through; it formed no part of his divine commission (Acts 22). Christ had given Himself for our sins, that He should deliver us out of this present evil world. He overcame the world, and all that has been begotten of God gets the victory over it also.

I know that this kind of testimony torment those that “dwell upon the earth”— to be told that they who refuse to be its overcomers will be found and judged as among its corrupters. But any such refusal on the part of Paul would have falsified his relative position towards it. By the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ he was crucified unto the world, and the world unto him. Those who do not know what this means, much less feel its power, are hardly to be blamed if they refuse to recognize in Paul a model for their Christian walk (and ways); only why call it Christian in this case? The enemies of the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, and those who mind earthly things he classes together.

But Paul had been delivered, spiritually, from this evil world: “Taking thee out from among the people (the Jews), and the nations, to whom now I send thee,” forms part of the Lord’s address to him. He that had said to him, “Arise, and stand on thy feet,” had also appeared unto him that he might see, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. These three things mark his new position: set on his feet by Christ, seeing by the gift of Christ, and filled with the Holy Ghost. Thus, even his body is full of light.

The spirit of intelligence, by which he was thus distinguished, was not the intelligence of Saul of Tarsus, neither was it of, by, or from, man. The scales now fallen from his eyes, he contemplates,

the world through the medium of the cross, and can find nothing in it but that which put Jesus there; it was thus he measured this world. The Lord must be everything to him who can use such a measure as this.

John has another measure for it; but one equally perfect: "All that is in the world . . . is not of the Father," therefore we are not to love it nor the things that are in it: we cannot love the Father, and at the same time, the things that are in the world, any more than we can talk of citizenship in heaven, while we mind earthly things. "Boast in the cross," and "love of the Father," unite in condemning the world, quite as much as Noah's faith did.

The Lord had already pronounced its judgment (John 12), and left it out in His prayer (John 17).

The wise preacher had no such measure: neither the Father nor the Son (in these relationships) were known to him; yet he, too, had taken note of all that was in it; he could not say that it was not of the Father, but simply declares that all that was in it was only vanity and vexation of spirit. Such was the rule by which he measured the world he was surveying: "Vanity and vexation of spirit."

No such words as these ever broke forth from the lips of the prisoner of Jesus Christ. In their stead we have: "Rejoice in the Lord always: and again, I will say, Rejoice." Moses never encouraged the people with words like these. They had seen the glory and the greatness, but where was the grace? But now these could not be contemplated by the believer apart from the grace; they were now seen united in divinest harmony: the greatness, the glory, and the grace of God. This, when fully understood, was told out in the voice from the glory. God had been glorified in man, even in relation to sin, and where sin was; and now man was glorified with God, where sin could not come.

Well might the heart of Paul burn within him, as filled with the Holy Spirit, he comprehended the meaning and bearing of what he had seen and heard, his wondrous mission, and the things in which Christ appeared unto him. Poor, blessed, wondering Paul, what could he say or think! His whole heart was won; Christ had gained him for Himself, an elect vessel indeed, to bear His name before both nations and kings, and the sons of Israel. How often, as he went on in his service, his full heart must have found relief in utterances like these: "My Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things"; and "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ!" how often bent the knee, whilst he prayed that the Christ he loved might dwell in his heart by faith!

It is very clear that the world has lost its power over the soul of one who can say, "It is crucified unto me." Object or interest in it, save those which were Christ's, Paul had no longer. His pathway out of it was a path of service, it is true, and there was no lingering by the way. When it pleased God, who called him by His grace, to reveal His Son in him, that he might announce Him as glad tidings among the nations, immediately he did not take counsel with flesh and blood; no, he only took counsel with God. It seems to have been a solitary journey into Arabia. Glorious solitude, where God is known as our everlasting portion! But he has in spirit left the world, not on the ground of its being corrupted, or only on the authority of such a word as "Depart ye, this is not your rest, for it is polluted." Far other and deeper motives wrought in the spirit of Paul. In the light of the glory he had found Jesus of Nazareth; in His cross his own death to sin, law, and the world itself (Rom. 6, 7; Gal. 6). What was the world now to him? He forsakes it in all the liberty of a soul divinely and for ever freed.

In Rom. 8 we have him celebrating God's victory over a greater than Pharaoh. What the law could not do, God had done: He had condemned sin in the flesh. In the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, he realized deliverance from the law of sin and death. No such deliverance was celebrated on the shores of the Red Sea! no such occasion for praise ever known amongst men! He forsook the world for the highest of all prizes, in the liberty and power of a soul thus divinely freed.

But this is Christianity. Phil. 3 gives us the new man (Κοιτινός), walking according to its spirit and privileges, and showing us the way out of this world to Christ in the glory on high. In the next chapter we see how he bore himself in relation to surrounding circumstances. He was the "creature" of none of them; master, through Christ, everywhere; he had learned to be satisfied in himself (for Christ was there); had strength for all things in Him that gave him power. What he had learned, what he loved, followed after, hoped or feared, his sorrows and his consolations, were all for the service and encouragement of the saints he so truly loved; by grace he shared in Christ's interests in them.

He reminds one of the eagle stirring up her nest, fluttering over her young, spreading abroad her wings, taking them, bearing them on her wings. From the lofty heights in which his spirit dwelt (the prison house was no hindrance here) he could swoop down to the weak or falling; then, spreading abroad his wings, take them, and, bearing them on his wings, mount up to those wondrous heights, not strange to him, though little known to them, and show them how to behold with steadfast gaze the light of glory as it shone in the "unveiled face."

See the figures he employs himself in 1 Thess. 2. "We . . . have been gentle in the midst of you, as a nurse would cherish her own children. Thus, yearning over you, we had found our delight in having imparted to you not only the glad tidings of God, but our own lives also, because ye had become beloved of us . . . As ye know how, as a father his own children, we used to exhort each one of you, and comfort and testify, that ye should walk worthy of God, who calls us to his own kingdom and glory."

This world is a wilderness wide

Paul, as no one else, could have sung that song of the wilderness. Would he not also have led in the songs of the Lord, in the spirit of 2 Chron. 29:27? When the burnt-offering began, the song of the Lord began also. No inspired writer in the New Testament has spoken of Christ offering Himself in that character, and of His acceptance on high, as Paul has. “The Christ loved us, and delivered himself up for us, an offering and sacrifice to God, for a sweet-smelling savor.” His spirit appreciated that aspect of the offering of Christ. Thoughts, too, of Canaan’s long-loved dwelling must have often made his heart tuneful; more than once or twice, in our day, they issued in song in one like-minded, whose heart was much there, who minded the things above.

When to Canaan’s long-loved dwelling

Love divine thy foot shall bring;

There, with shouts of triumph swelling,

Zion’s songs in rest to sing.

We should like to have received, through the hands of our first Christian brethren, of Paul’s day, some of their early songs, the heart’s first, fresh overflowings; but what caused them remains, and that is far better. The strings have been loosened sadly, from the length of the way; but the same wind from heaven still breathes through them, wakening up melody to Him who, entered into heaven, is in the presence of God for us. We are to “sing with our hearts to the Lord,” he tells us; “with grace in our hearts,” to God (Eph. 5.; Col. 3).

Would he not have led in spirit in these divine songs?

No man ever passed through this world, according to the force of the expression, “in it, but not of it,” as Paul did, in the strength of that power that lifts us above it. We are but poor imitators of him here; but the Old Testament saints could not walk in such a path; the goal for them was not the same, nor the starting-point either, and the power of the Spirit of Christ was wanting; not that they had not life (the new nature), but the Holy Ghost was not yet, because that Jesus was not yet glorified, nor, indeed, come in flesh.

Abraham’s beginning was a little like Paul’s; the God of glory appeared unto him in Mesopotamia, as the “Lord of glory” (the Word that had become flesh) appeared unto Paul. Which was farthest from God? the idolater of Ur, or the devout Jew according to the flesh, the persecutor of Jesus the Nazaraean—Saul of Tarsus?

The beginning in each case, was wholly and absolutely from above, from God, rich in mercy, wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working. The mighty word came to each (Gen. 15; Acts 9); the effect was similar—the effect on the flesh, or nature of man, when God was bringing him into relationship with Himself. It is judged. The sun was going down when God made a covenant with him by sacrifice; then a horror of great darkness fell upon Abraham. It was during the brightness of

the midday sun, outshone by the “glory of that light,” that darkness came upon Saul, already fallen to the ground. Man, as he is, cannot stand there. When the Lord said, “Stand upon thy feet,” it was a new creature who did so. Henceforth, whom had he in heaven but Christ? and there was none upon earth that he desired beside Him.

When a soul is in earnest, Christ having been revealed to it, it wants (its first, its latest, and greatest of all wants) to know the Lord. Who is it who has just been saying, That I may know Him? Was it a babe, or one simple in knowledge? (2 Cor. 11:6). I fear we have not made much progress in this knowledge, and so the nations hear but little of the “unsearchable riches of Christ” in our day.

But, times of trial and judgment are at hand, when, if the Lord tarry—to use the words of Dan. 12—which, however, properly refer to Jewish circumstances; but compare Matt. 25), many, now sleeping, morally, in the dust of the earth, will arise; there will be wise ones, too, who will know what to do. For when did He ever fail to answer the feeblest cry of the remnant of His people? “I will never, never forsake thee; never, no, never, leave thee behind.” But, in one sense, the last days were already come, and here was one of the wise, or teachers, of those days, in immediate connection with the divine source of all knowledge. What he had learned, and received, and heard, and seen in Jesus, shone out through Paul, as through a transparent medium. He must have been conscious of this through the Holy Ghost, when addressing them, in v. 9; and when, in another place, he says, “Be ye imitators of me, as I am of Christ.” It was a word of more than apostolic authority; he was himself in the truth and power of what he enjoined on others.

I do not know of any word that so reminds us of John 8:28: “[I am] altogether that which I also say to you” (New Trans.). See the effect of this in Luke 4, where, in spite of themselves, they wondered at His word, characterized, even in their minds, by grace, power, and authority. His lowly outside position took nothing from the authority of His word, which was thereby only intensified.

The result of their doing what they saw in Paul, would be, that the “God of peace” would be with them. This is but the complement of that other blessed truth: that, in ceasing from mere human anxiety, and trusting Him with the secret of the heart’s trouble, the “peace of God” Himself would guard their hearts and thoughts by Christ Jesus. He is fully conscious of the greatness of the thought, for he adds: “It surpasses every understanding.”

I have put this question to myself: If Paul were here, and knew my spiritual state, could he say, “Abide in those things which you have learned, and of which you have been fully persuaded, knowing of whom you have learned them”? One might have to pass through some exercise of heart and conscience as to what things one had really learned, and had full assurance of, knowing of whom we had learned them. It is only when we have learned and received the things which we have seen and heard that we possess them spiritually. We are then in the state to which the Lord refers, when He says, “Whosoever hath, to him shall be given.”

Again, as in the first chapter, he speaks of the circumstances through which he was passing, but never of himself as a creature of any circumstance; that is the state of those who refuse to walk with God. He who walks according to the course of this world, is carried down the stream from whence never did soul deliver itself. He who gave Himself for our sins is the alone Deliverer here”;

and Paul, who had praised God with singing in the dungeon at Philippi, is now telling the Philippians, from his prison-house at Rome, that the “peace of God which surpasses every understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts by Christ Jesus.”

The circumstances were only a means of his learning to be satisfied in himself. Yes! for Christ was there, and it was He who gave him power, so that he had strength for all things.

Mark the vastness of the range, and the spirit in which he contemplates them: “In everything, and in all things, I am initiated, both to be full and to be hungry; both to abound, and to suffer privation. I have strength for all things in him that gives me power.” In that heart there was no place for the murmurs of the wilderness, and none are ever heard. May we, too, be initiated into this mystery of knowing how to meet all and every circumstance, satisfied in oneself (v. 11, New Trans.). Dependence upon Christ is the measure of this new kind of satisfaction:

It will be remarked, that in this part he is speaking simply of himself in relation to the circumstances of ordinary human life. It was necessary to do so, as he had proposed himself as a model to all the saints at Philippi. But in the first chapter he looks at circumstances in exclusive connection with the glad tidings. They had turned out to the furtherance of the gospel; his bonds were known in the Prætorium to be in Christ; and whether, as looked at outwardly, and as means in the enemy's hand, they portended death, or that, he was still to continue, his only care was that the Lord should be magnified, whether by life or by death.

Let us look once more at the remarkable order and fullness of these exhortations; and then let, us ask ourselves, what room or occasion is left, in one who accepts them, for that wretched unrest and vanity of mind to which even Christians are so often a prey. First, they were to rejoice always in the Lord, their mildness to be known unto all. He was near. To be careful {anxious} for nothing, as in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, letting their requests be made known to God. Then he gives an outline of the character of the things which were to occupy their thoughts. All things true, and noble, and just; all things pure, amiable, and of good report; if there be any virtue, any praise; and, finally, the things they had learned, and received, and heard, and seen in him, they were to do.

In all this we see nothing like the imposition of a law for sanctification. What we do find, is the apostle, through the Spirit, ministering to those born of God the things suitable to the nature they had from Him. Joy in Christ, confidence in God, occupation of heart with all that was noble, and excellent, and pure before God.

How their hearts must have burned when he interpreted for them God's mind about their gift to him! It was an odor of a sweet savor, an acceptable sacrifice, agreeable to God. In their kindness towards himself there was nothing wanting: he was full. “If at any time they were in need, it was Paul's God (my God) who would supply that need, according to His riches in glory.”

The God who had accepted, as a sacrifice agreeable to Him, the things sent by Epaphroditus to His servant, Paul, would not forget them in the day of their need.

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