

Spiritual Poverty and Heavenly Riches

by J.C. Philpot

The sermon explores the apparent contradiction between having nothing and possessing all things, and reveals that true spiritual growth and understanding come from a process of stripping and emptying, leading to a deep sense of spiritual poverty and dependence on God.

Scripture: 1 Samuel 2:6, Psalm 45:14, Isaiah 29:8, Isaiah 55:8, Matthew 22:42, 1 Corinthians 1:30, 2 Corinthians 6:10, 2 Corinthians 12:9, 2 Corinthians 12:11

Topics: "Spiritual Poverty", "Christ's Sufficiency"

Description

J.C. Philpot preaches on the apparent contradictions in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, highlighting the harmony found in the Spirit's light. He delves into the Apostle Paul's experience of having nothing in self but possessing all things in Christ, emphasizing the need for divine teaching to reveal our spiritual poverty and Christ's sufficiency. Philpot explains how the stripping process by God's Spirit leads to a deeper understanding of our weakness and Christ's strength, righteousness, wisdom, and sanctification. Through Paul's example of being buffeted by Satan's messenger, Philpot illustrates the paradoxical yet harmonious nature of having nothing in self and possessing all things in Christ.

Transcript

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Tuesday Evening, July 30, 1844, by J. C. Philpot

"Having nothing--and yet possessing all things." 2 Cor. 6:10

In the Gospel of Jesus Christ there are many 'apparent contradictions'. I use the word apparent, for there are no real contradictions. What at first sight appears paradoxical and inconsistent is found, when we see it in the Spirit's light, to be perfectly consistent and harmonious with the whole scheme of revealed truth. The very glory of the gospel is, that it is a mystery; and if it is a mystery, there will be things in it apparently contradictory, and utterly irreconcilable by human reason.

The Apostle in this chapter has brought together some of these apparent contradictions, as worked out in his own experience. He says, "By honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, yet true; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things." To a natural man, to a reasoning mind, to one not initiated by divine teaching into the mystery of the gospel, what clashing and contradiction are to be found in these expressions! And yet,

when seen in the light of the Spirit and known and felt in a gracious experience, all the apparent contradictions disappear, all the seeming inconsistencies are blessedly harmonized, and we taste a beauty and glory in the very paradoxes and very apparent contradictions. Mr. Deer, who of all men seems to have been led most deeply into experimental truth, speaks in similar language of Christian experience:

'Tis to feel the fight against us,

Yet the victory hope to gain;

To believe that Christ has cleansed us,

Though the leprosy remain."

With God's blessing, I shall attempt this evening to show how the apparent contradiction in the text is reconciled to, and is harmoniously consistent with, not only revealed truth, but also with the experience of every one taught of the Spirit. May the Lord in mercy crown the word with his blessing.

"Having nothing!" The Apostle might have, and doubtless had, some reference here to his needy state naturally. The Lord saw fit to keep him in a state of absolute dependence upon himself for temporals. He did not use, as he tells us, the liberty which he had as an Apostle to "live by the gospel" that he preached; but he consented to voluntary poverty that he might not "hinder the gospel of Christ." So that, in a literal sense, the Apostle speaks here of "having nothing," as being completely dependent upon the Lord for the bread that he daily ate, and the clothing he daily wore. And yet, though such a beggar in temporals, rich in spirituals; though "having nothing," except what the Lord gave him as alms for his daily need, yet in the enjoyment of spiritual mercies, and in the possession of Christ in his heart, the hope of glory, "possessing all things."

But, I think, this would limit the Apostle's meaning; we would not get, so to speak, into the mind of the Holy Spirit in this passage, if we confined our interpretation merely to this point, that the Apostle by "having nothing" only meant that he had nothing in a temporal sense. We will take the expression in a higher sense, and place it upon another and more spiritual footing--we will view the Apostle speaking here, not so much of his temporal state as literally dependent upon God for daily food; but consider him as speaking of his state spiritually. And thus we shall find, that the two clauses of the text, so far from clashing with or contradicting each other, meet, in the soul's experience, in a most sweet and blessed harmony. And we are borne out in this interpretation by the Apostle's own words in this very Epistle, (2 Cor. 12:11) where he says, "Though I be nothing." To "be nothing," and to "have nothing," are expressions that differ but little; so that we may bring the Apostle's own authority and his own interpretation to bear upon the text; and consider, that when he said "having nothing," his views were carried beyond this present temporal scene and the struggles for daily bread; that he had a higher reference, and looked at things in a spiritual point of view, when he spoke of himself "as having nothing, and yet possessing all things."

Thus, then, if God enable us, we will unfold the two branches of the subject, and show, what it is to "have nothing," and what it is to "possess all things" And then we shall see how these two opposites, or rather apparent opposites, so far from contradicting each other, are brought, in the experience of the child of God, sweetly to harmonize.

I. "Having nothing." Is that the experience of a man in a state of nature? It cannot be; we know it is not. Could any man, in a state of nature, honestly take such an expression into his mouth? Some might say,

"Man has nothing by nature." It is true; but though that is his state, it is not his experience. Man by nature is in that spot in which we read (Rev. 3:7) the church of Laodicea was. I do not mean to say, that the Laodicean church was in a state of nature. She was a true church, though fallen; the grace of God was in her, though she had backslidden from that spiritual standing which she once occupied. But her language in her fallen state was that of every man in his unregenerate condition, "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing;" though to the heart-searching eye of Omniscience she was "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

The Apostle, then, in using the expression, "having nothing," is not speaking of man in a state of nature, but of his own experience, and of the things he had spiritually felt and known. He was describing the state into which he had himself been reduced. I say, "reduced;" for we do not set out with this experience, nor do we come here in a day. There is a stripping, emptying process carried on by God the Spirit in the conscience; and it is only after we have passed through this stripping and emptying process, that we come into the experience of the Apostle, "having nothing." Until the Lord brings the soul down from its once lofty eminence, breaks to pieces its self-righteousness, and cuts from under its feet that ground on which it once proudly took its stand, it cannot come into the spiritual meaning of these words.

The wealthy stock-broker that walks daily upon Exchange cannot honestly say he "has nothing," when he knows that he has his thousands; nor can any one say, spiritually, he "has nothing," while he has any stock of strength, wisdom, or righteousness left. But if this wealthy stock-broker, through some unsuccessful speculation, (mark, I am merely using this as a figure; I am not saying that speculation of any kind is justifiable) were reduced to complete beggary, then he could say, he "had nothing;" and his conscience (if he had one, which few speculators have) could bear witness that he spoke the truth. Now I use this figure just to show the way in which the Lord deals with his people.

When we first set out Zionward, we start full of SELF--we have no idea what God means to do with us. Our idea of getting to heaven is, by accumulating a treasure of good deeds, heaping up an amount of piety, and living a life whereby we may propitiate God, and secure to our souls a seat in glory. Nature never can pursue any other path; nature knows no other way to heaven, but to climb up by the ladder of good works, and to crane itself up to glory by working at the winch of human merit.

But we read, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord--for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Isa. 55:8, 9.) Our thoughts are, to make ourselves rich; his thoughts are, to make us poor. Our thoughts are, to increase in piety; his thoughts are, to make us sink down into the ruins of self. Our thoughts are, to advance day by day in sanctification and holiness, and continually increase the amount of good works we mean to produce; his thoughts are, to teach us feelingly our helpless and hopeless state, and to strip us of all boasting in the flesh. But we struggle against this humiliating process. Our proud heart rebels against God's dealings with us in this manner; and being ignorant, for the most part, of what the Lord is doing in us by thus stripping us of the fancied treasure we are getting together, our proud, presumptuous, hypocritical heart rises up in perverseness and anger against it.

We do not often see what the Lord is doing with us until some months, perhaps years, after we have been put into the furnace. I am sure I can say so for myself. We certainly do not know, at the time, what the Lord is doing with us, when he is stripping us of our fancied religion. But when we come out of the furnace, and the Lord makes it clear to us how much tin and dross we have lost, we see the reason why we were put there. When we come out of the waters, we are glad we were sunk there, though we may have been half

drowned in the process, when we see our filthy rags left at the bottom.

There is a word in the song of Hannah (a song I am very partial to, for it is a sweet epitome of the Lord's dealings with his people) that throws a light upon the text. In reviewing God's dealings with her, that gracious woman says, "The Lord kills, and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and brings up. The Lord makes poor, and makes rich; he brings low, and lifts up." (1 Sam. 2:6, 7.) What a wise and well-taught woman Hannah was! She knew both sides of the question. She was not for liberty without bondage, pardon without guilt, mercy without misery, salvation without condemnation, the riches of Christ without the poverty of the creature. She (as we find 1 Sam. 1) had passed through an experience that had taught her better things. She had poured out her soul before the Lord in groans and cries, and he had manifested his mercy to her conscience. And thus she had learned both sides of the question. She had known black, as well as white; darkness, as well as light; sorrow, as well as joy; stripping, as well as clothing; humbling, as well as raising; a furnace to pass through, as well as coming out like tried gold; floods of water to wade in, as well as to stand upon the bank blessing and praising the Lord. That gracious and wise woman, speaking by divine inspiration, has left this sentence upon record; and there it stands as a bulwark against all those who say, "That a man can know Christ and salvation without any stripping and emptying process;" "the Lord makes poor, and makes rich."

Now Hannah must have had an experimental meaning in these words. She had no temporal necessities; her husband Elkanah was not a poor man; his coming up to Shiloh yearly, with his wives and children, shows that he could afford to travel. And we read, that "he gave to Peninnah his wife, and to all her sons and her daughters portions; but to Hannah he gave a worthy (or "double") portion." We hear only of her 'soul trouble'; therefore, when she said, "The Lord makes poor," she must have had reference to the spiritual dealings of God with her soul. Taking, then, these words of Hannah as throwing light upon what Paul says here, "having nothing," we see that the Apostle means spiritual poverty and nothingness.

The Lord makes poor by taking away fancied riches. To use a figure, (and sometimes figures throw light upon truth,) a man may have invested all his property in a bank. He may get up in the morning, and please himself with thinking what a wealthy man he is; but before the hour of noon tidings come that the bank is broken; that, like many banks, it has been nothing but a swindling company; and that he is completely ruined. Before the tidings came, he thought himself rich; and yet all the time his wealth was but fancied, only a bubble. While he was counting and calculating on the wealth which he thought so securely invested, it had all been swindled away months and years ago; and he finds himself in the deepest poverty, when he fancied himself abounding in riches.

So spiritually, how many people think they are sure to go to heaven; their hope is firm and steadfast; they never doubt their faith; they have no exercises of mind, no trials, no desponding seasons, no harassing temptations, no fiery darts from Satan; and they are quite confident that they are safe for eternity. But unless God the Spirit has revealed salvation with power in their conscience, their hope stands upon a slippery foundation. It will not do to take the Scriptures, and get your religion out of them, unless God seals mercy and pardon with power upon your conscience. Like the man whose money was all in the swindling bubble bank, you may fancy yourself rich when you are really a bankrupt, and dream of wealth in the midst of poverty. You may resemble the man of whom we read (Isa. 29:8), "It shall be even as when a hungry man dreams, and, behold, he eats; but he awakens, and his soul is empty; or, as when a thirsty man dreams, and behold he drinks; but he awakens, and, behold, he is faint, and his soul has appetite." He dreams in the night, that he is sitting down to a banquet; but the pangs of hunger convince him to the contrary in the morning.

So a man may dream and delude himself by thinking how much religion he possesses; but when the Lord begins to show him what vital godliness really is, and convinces him that all saving faith stands, not in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God; and that he has not a grain, nor an atom, but what the Spirit works in the heart, he sinks down into the depths of soul poverty. Grace makes a man's heart honest in the fear of the Lord; and therefore when he weighs up his religion in the "balances of the sanctuary," unless he feels that faith, hope, and love have been powerfully wrought in his conscience, he begins to find how much of his confidence stands in the flesh, and how much that he fancied to be a safe foundation for eternity was built upon nothing else but delusion or fleshly excitement.

Now it is from feeling this, and experiencing a measure of the stripping hand of God in the conscience (and I have known what it is to roll upon my bed in trouble while being stripped of my false religion, though I believe that the root of the matter was in my soul at the time), that the Lord drives his people out of the refuges of lies in which many a professor hides his deluded head. For instance, there is-

1. Our own RIGHTEOUSNESS, that Babel by which we would gladly climb up into heaven, and escape the rising waters of the flood; that proud tower must be leveled, and fall into complete ruin. The Lord, by bringing the law in its purity and spirituality into the conscience, discovers to us what sin is, and thus opens up the depravity of the heart and the vileness of our nature. There are many people who are strongly opposed to hearing anything about sin; they cannot bear to have "corruption," as they call it, even touched upon. But depend upon this, if you never know the malady, you can never prize the remedy. It is not very pleasant to go into a hospital, and look at the sores of the patients there; but what takes the patient there but the very sores which are so disgusting to the eyes of the healthy?

So stout, unwounded professors may say, "This gloating over corruption and the sores of human nature, how disgusting it is!" It is disgusting to a healthy man to look at these sores. But if the man had a wound made in his conscience, and was covered with bruises and putrefying sores, how glad he would be to be admitted into the spiritual hospital; to have Jehovah-rophi, "the Lord my healer," come to his bed-side, and heal him by a touch of his gracious hand, and the application of the balm of his blood to his conscience.

2. So with our own WISDOM. I do not know how it is with you; perhaps the Lord has led you otherwise. But when I set out, what a wonderful stock of wisdom I thought I would get from reading the Scriptures, and good men's books; and I thought, by such helps I could easily understand the truth. But the Lord has to teach us different lessons from this. I have been to the University, have learned languages, studied commentators, and thought to make myself wise by cultivating my natural understanding. I have passed through all those things which are by many considered such wondrous helps; I bought book upon book, and commentator upon commentator. And what did all these helps do for me? They never gave me one grain of true wisdom. I value all these things in their proper place. But there is no greater delusion than to think we can learn the truths of God by the exercise of creature intellect.

When the Lord begins to open up his truth in our conscience, he shows us (and that is the main point I am aiming at) our own folly, and that though we may "know his mysteries" and "have all knowledge," yet, short of his teaching, we know nothing as we ought to know. This is what the Apostle says, (1 Cor. 3:18) "If any man among you seems to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise." We thus become fools for Christ's sake; and learning what ignorant besotted wretches we are strips us of our fancied wisdom, and brings us down to our true level. You would not think it, but I assure you it is true; I have, as I told you before, learned languages, studied commentaries, and exercised my mind upon the Scriptures; but I have often felt, that a poor ploughman who only knew how to handle the plough- if the

Lord teaches him more deeply by his grace than myself, is a wiser man than I. And the greatest dolt that cannot read a word in a book, and does not know great A from great B, if the Lord but teach him, knows better and deeper the meaning of the word of God and the nature of the kingdom of heaven, than I, or any man, ever could by all our study of God's word distinct from that teaching. When, then, we come to know and feel in our conscience that 'divine teaching' is the only source of all true knowledge, the pride of human wisdom is brought down. And what a mercy it is to be brought there!

3. So again, with respect to our own STRENGTH. How strong we think we are when we set out in the divine life! We do not need God to strengthen us against temptation; we may not dare actually to say so; but we never think of the Lord's keeping us, or of his strength being made perfect in our weakness. We have little idea of being guided and kept continually by him that "our footsteps slip not," and of his power being thus made known. But we go on leaning, as we think, upon the Lord and depending upon him, but in a great measure, in reality, depending upon ourselves. After a time, however, we begin to find 'our' strength fail us; we have no power to stand against the temptations that attack us; our inward slips and falls, and the idolatrous workings of our depraved nature, startle and alarm us. From these things we painfully learn our weakness, and come to that spot where the Apostle was, when Christ said to him, "My strength is made perfect in weakness." (2 Cor. 12:9.)

4. So with respect to holiness and inward SANCTIFICATION. There is much talk about holiness. That "without holiness no man shall see the Lord," is most certain; and that there is a holy principle which the Lord communicates to every man to whom he gives a new nature, is most certain also. But how often is mere fleshly holiness mistaken for the inward sanctification of the Spirit! And until we learn painfully that we have no real holiness of nature's growth, and until we are made to know our own vileness and defilement, we never can learn what gospel holiness is. As long as the Lord lets us, we whiten the sepulcher, and make the outside of the cup and platter clean. But when we painfully feel what defiled wretches we are by nature and practice, what vile thoughts fill our mind, what perverseness is working and bubbling up from the bottom of our heart, we cry out with the leper, "Unclean, unclean;" and with Paul, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

And thus, as the Lord leads us into the secret, we come into the experience of the Apostle--"Having nothing."

Now I would just direct your thoughts for a few moments in the WAY in which the Lord brought his Apostle here. What an unheard-of way it was! It is enough to strike our minds with wonder and astonishment. He took him up into the "third heaven," (as we read 2 Cor. 12:2) to that blissful abode of eternal happiness and purity, where he saw and heard things "not lawful," nor "possible," for a man to utter; and his soul was bathed in such unutterable bliss and overwhelming joy, that he knew not whether he was in the body, or out of the body. But did this teach him his weakness? Not so; he learned no weakness there--for we read, "Lest I should be exalted above measure, through the abundance of the revelations." The pride and presumption of his carnal mind would puff him up; as Deer says, "The heart uplifts with God's own gifts."

There was "given to him, therefore, a THORN in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him, lest he should be exalted above measure." Now here we have the experience of the Apostle in learning the secret of his own weakness. A "messenger of Satan" was sent "to buffet him." There is something very expressive in that word; it means literally, "beating a man with a fist." Here, then, we have the Apostle coming down from the "third heaven," and the Lord sending "a messenger of Satan to buffet him." Whatever this thorn in the flesh was, this vile temptation, as an emissary of the Devil, beat his face to a

pulp, smote him with the fist of wickedness, and by these infernal assaults brought him into the greatest distress and horror of mind. Under the pressure of this "thorn in the flesh," "this messenger of Satan," (some vile temptation, no doubt, perpetually haunting and harassing his soul) "he asked the Lord thrice that it might depart from him." Now what was the Lord's answer? "My grace is sufficient for you; for my strength," (not your strength) "is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore," says the Apostle, "will I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." He could bear the very buffetings of "the messenger of Satan," he could endure the rankling "thorn in the flesh," he could submit to the vile temptation that perpetually haunted him, in order that he might find the strength of Christ made perfect in his weakness.

But what a mysterious dealing was this! That this highly favored man of God should come down from the "third heaven" to the very gates of hell, (that is not too strong an expression, for "the messenger of Satan" came from hell)--that he should sink, I say, in soul feeling to the very gates of hell, there to be buffeted by "the messenger of Satan;" and all to teach him a lesson that heaven did not teach him, the strength of God made perfect in weakness!

Do you not think, my friends, that if we are to learn our weakness, we must learn it in the same way? How did Paul get his religion? And must we not get ours, in our feebleness, through the same channels, by the same means, and by the same inward teachings? If we are to learn the secret of Christ's strength, it is not by making daily advances in fleshly holiness, and getting stronger in SELF day by day. It is not by old nature being so mended and improved, as by and by to be transformed into grace, just as the colors in the rainbow are so harmoniously blended that you can scarcely tell where the one ends and the other begins. For this is what is really meant by "progressive sanctification," that the old nature is so gradually softened and blended into grace, that we can scarcely tell where the old man ceases and the new nature commences. I say, did the Apostle learn Christ's strength in that way? No--but by being buffeted by Satan's messenger, and thus being beaten out of his own strength, he found Christ's strength made perfect (what a word that is, perfect!) in his weakness.

If, then, you know not experimentally the meaning of the expression in the text, "having nothing" in self, you may depend upon it, your religion, however highly you may think of it, is but a delusion; or if you have not learned it in some measure as Paul did his, in the experience of a feeling heart. I am not setting up a rigorous standard for conformity; but we must all learn our weakness and Christ's strength in the same way that the Apostle learned his. If you know anything of Christ it must be by learning what you are by nature, and by finding in him a remedy for every malady, and a mercy for every misery.

II. Now this leads me to the second part of the text, "Possessing all things." I hinted that these two clauses of the text, so far from being really contradictory, had a most blessed and harmonious consistency. They dovetail into each other; and so far from being inconsistent, heighten and illustrate each other. When we look at a beautiful picture, we do not say, that the shade disturbs or destroys the light, or that the light disturbs and destroys the shade--but we see that the light and the shade mutually relieve each other. So in a beautiful prospect, sunlight and shadow do not destroy each other; but the light sets off the shade, and the shade sets off the light. The light and the shade are really contrasting; but the contrast enhances the beauty of the landscape. It is true, a reasoning man may say, "Having nothing and yet possessing all things!--It is a flat contradiction!" We may fancy an infidel, or a person that had never seen the Bible, picking up a leaf in the street, and reading, without knowing it to be the word of God, this list of apparent contradictions. Would not the pride of his heart rise up, and would he not throw it away with scorn and say, "The man that wrote it is a fool." But seen in the Spirit's light, we find that so far from contradicting each

other, they beautifully harmonize.

For instance. "Having nothing," that is the needful preparation, the indispensable preliminary to "possessing all things;" and only so far as we "have nothing," do we "possess all things." But how do we possess all things? Not in self; that is very clear. We possess all things in Christ. We find the Lord himself, if I may use the expression, puzzling his opponents by the apparent contradiction between those Scriptures that speak of him as God, and those that speak of him as man. For example; he asked the Pharisees, "What do you think of Christ? Whose son is he? They said unto him, The Son of David. He said unto them, How then does David in spirit call him Lord, saying, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit on my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool? If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?" (Matt. 22:42-45.) The difficulty was, to reconcile how David could call him Lord, if he were David's son? How could the son be Lord, and the child reign over the father? Now that difficulty could not be explained except by acknowledging Christ's divine nature, in which he was David's Lord; and his human nature, in which he was David's son. By seeing the union of the two natures in one glorious Immanuel this apparent contradiction disappears, and we see a blessed harmony in the very seeming inconsistency.

So in this passage, "having nothing, and yet possessing all things"--how can that apparent contradiction be reconciled? It is thus--"having nothing" in self, "possessing all things" in Christ. And just in proportion as I have nothing in self experimentally, so I possess all things in Christ. For my own beggary leads me out of self to his riches; my own unrighteousness leads me, under the Spirit's teachings, into Christ's righteousness; my own defilement, into Christ's sanctification; my own weakness, into Christ's strength; my own misery, into Christ's mercy.

But how do we "possess all things" in Christ? Let us take for our guide what the Lord the Spirit says in that striking passage, "Who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." (1 Cor. 1:30.) Let us see, then, how of God Jesus is made these things unto us.

1. Look we first, then, how he is made RIGHTEOUSNESS. Assuming that the Lord has, by his inward teaching, brought us down to poverty and beggary, our own righteousness has disappeared; we have "seen an end of all perfection, and found God's law exceeding broad." Now this has prepared our soul for the reception of Christ's righteousness. I do not wonder that men who hold freewill views should call Christ's imputed righteousness "imputed nonsense;" such blasphemies (for they are blasphemies) do not strike me as amazing. As long as we hold the principle of freewill in the creature, all that Christ is and has for his people is nonsense, because it is giving us what we do not want, bestowing on us a treasure we do not stand in need of; so that the expression, however blasphemous (and it is most blasphemous), is fully consistent with the whole scheme of human freewill and creature righteousness.

But when the Lord makes known by his teaching in the conscience, that we have no righteousness; that, as the Prophet speaks, "all our righteousness are as filthy rags," (and what a figure is that!) and convinces us that we must have a perfect righteousness in which to stand, or sink into hell under the overwhelming wrath of God; as the Spirit opens our eyes to see the glorious righteousness of the Son of God, and that all the obedience, both acting and suffering, of Jesus is imputed to those who believe on his name--having none of our own, we are led, taught, and guided to embrace this imputed righteousness as all our justification before the throne of God.

And thus the deeper we sink into a conviction that we have no righteousness of our own, and the more we trample under foot our own filthy rags, the higher do we rise in an experimental reception of Christ's

glorious righteousness as suited to all our necessities. Thus, not having any righteousness of our own, not an atom whereby God can be pleased, we indeed "have nothing;" yet, in having Christ's righteousness, we "possess all things." We possess a full satisfaction made to God's righteous law; all the demands of God are honored, justice is completely fulfilled; not a single atom is missing, not a single iota deficient, not a thread in the garment lacking.

What a beautiful picture has the holy Spirit made use of in Psalm 45:14, to show us Christ's imputed righteousness, where, speaking of the Queen, he says, "She shall be brought unto the King in clothing of needlework." What a sweet expression that is, if I can explain it without vulgarizing it! Every stitch in the clothing of needlework must have had the needle to pass through it. And O, what a succession of laborious stitches must the clothing of needlework have gone through in which the church is attired! Now, when we look at every holy thought that passed through Christ's mind, every holy word that dropped from Christ's lips, every holy action performed by Christ's hands; at every holy emotion, every holy prayer, every act of obedience, from the moment that he came into the world until the moment he died on the cross, we see how stitch by stitch the justification of the church was wrought out. We thus see how all the demands of the law were completely satisfied, and how the Queen stands before her Bridegroom in the clothing of needlework. And when Jesus looks upon the clothing of needlework, he sees that every part of that clothing has been accomplished by his own hands. Thus, however needy and naked we are as to our own righteousness, when standing in his righteousness we possess "all things," and we need no more.

2. So with respect to WISDOM; for he "of God is made unto us wisdom." We have none; not an atom, not a grain of true wisdom. But Christ is "made unto us wisdom," in all the circumstances of life, in all the difficulties of the way. So that we cannot come into any condition or circumstance of difficulty, for which there is not a provision in his wisdom. Having none of our own, in him we possess all wisdom.

3. So with respect to STRENGTH. Strength of our own we have none. We are all weakness, and cannot stand a day. People talk of their firm standing; but if God were to deal with them, as with Job, take away the hedge, and let Satan come upon them with one of his temptations; if he did not support them, they would be at once swept away.

Christ being strength to the soul, he supports it in every state into which it may come. Not having any of our own strength, we have the strength of God; not the strength of a man, like ourselves, but the strength of God in every state. So that, as the Lord said to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you." Our sufficiency is in his strength, not in our own. Our strength fails when we need it most. His strength is suited for every place, for every case, every condition, every circumstance; so that a man may say, "Christ is my strength; I therefore have strength; for I have just as much as is suited to my day;" as the promise is, "As your day is, so your strength shall be."

4. And so with respect to SANCTIFICATION. We have none in ourselves; but Christ of God being made unto us "sanctification," we have all holiness in him. Holiness is to have Christ dwelling in our hearts; to have him making our bodies his temple, and working in us that which is well pleasing in his sight. He is the fountain of holiness. There is an external sanctification, whereby the church was sanctified in him before the foundation of the world; and an internal sanctification by his indwelling presence. Shall I go then to the filthy streams, or to the fountain of living waters? I might as well dip a cup into the common sewer, or fill a goblet from the puddle that rolls down the dirtiest street in London, while a fountain of pure water was at hand, as look to my own holiness, when "the holy child Jesus," the Son of God, is sanctification to all that believe in his name; internal sanctification by his indwelling Spirit, and external sanctification by his

covenant headship.

So I might similarly carry out every other circumstance. Happiness, in this world, we have none; life is a blank; afflictions, troubles, and trials are our lot here below, for "through much tribulation we must enter the kingdom." Can we find comfort here? It is blighted. When the Lord drove Adam out of paradise, he planted the cherubim there with the flaming sword pointing every way; and man will never enter this paradise again below. But in Christ we possess all things.

Thus the Lord leads us into these two branches of divine truth, by showing us first that we have nothing, and then, that in him we possess all things. There are two rooms in the chambers where God brings his people, as he says, "Come my people, enter you into your chambers." These are the two rooms in the spiritual chambers--the room of self-aborrence, and the room of admiration of Jesus; the room of humility, and the room of exaltation; the room of poverty, and the room of riches; the room of beggary on our part, and the room of wealth in him; the room where all that the creature has is felt to be a blank, and the room where all that Jesus gives him, and all that Jesus has, is seen to be the source of eternal bliss and happiness.

So that these two branches of divine truth, so far from clashing with each other, sweetly, gloriously, and blessedly harmonize. And just in proportion as we are let down into the one, we are led up into the other; and just as much as we know spiritually, experimentally, and vitally of the one as "having nothing" in self; just so much shall we know spiritually, experimentally, and vitally of the other to "possess all things" in Christ.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/jc-philpot/spiritual-poverty-and-heavenly-riches/>

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