

An Epistle of Christ 2 Corinthians 3

by John Nelson Darby

A Christian is an epistle of Christ, written on the heart, and their life is a reflection of Christ's righteousness and power.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 3:2

Topics: "The Role of the Holy Spirit", "Transformation in Christ"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes that a true Christian is an 'epistle of Christ,' with Christ engraved on their hearts rather than on stone tablets. He contrasts the law, which condemns and brings death, with the grace of God through Jesus, who offers righteousness and liberty through the Holy Spirit. Darby urges believers to reflect on whether Christ is truly the object of their lives, highlighting that the Holy Spirit enables them to live out this reality. He explains that the church serves as a living testament to Christ, showcasing His virtues to the world. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a deep, personal relationship with Christ, leading to a transformed life that reflects His glory.

Transcript

The apostle, in the beginning of this chapter, tells us what a true Christian is. He calls him an epistle of Christ. He is a person upon whose heart God has written Christ, as Moses wrote the law on tables of stone. This the apostle opens out; but first he states what Christians are in contrast with the law. A Christian is a person on whom Christ is engraved, not on tables of stone, but on the fleshy tables of the heart. If the heart is serious, one must see that many have not this. We see many persons very amiable, and others with a trying nature. But here it is not difference of mere natural character. This is not the point. Natural amiability of character is not Christ graven on the heart. It has nothing to do with being a Christian, which is a positive real work of God. It is the Holy Ghost engraving Christ on a man's heart, putting Christ into his thoughts, his words, and his ways, just as the law was put upon stones. Now a person may get angry at this; but nevertheless Christ is the object of a Christian's life, and your own conscience must judge if it is so with you. It is not that there is not failure. A man who is seeking to make money does not always succeed; but everybody knows what his object is. Just so Christ is the object of a believer's life.

God gave the law, not to make men righteous, but to prove that there were none righteous. The law condemns every one. It was the ministration of death. But after men had broken God's law, He sent His Son. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son." "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son." God's Son has been in the world. How comes it that He is out of it? The

world would not have Him. Men spit in His face. This is what the world has done. Now I do not ask you about duties; but I ask, is Christ engraven on your heart? We cannot kill Him now; but our hearts can reject Him as much as ever the Jews did. An honest man - I do not speak of a Christian - will own that from morning to night Christ is not in his heart.

Now what was the apostle doing? When a Christian went from one place to another, it was customary to give him a letter of commendation. But, says the apostle, Do I want a letter? If one came to him to ask what he went about doing, he would say, Look at these Corinthians (for they were going on well then): they were his letter. How so? Because they were Christ's. Now I leave it with you as to whether Christ is on your heart. I do not ask if you love Him as you ought; for if you love Him at all, you will not say that; He is too precious for that. But if you are a Christian, you are sure there is not anything that you would not give for Christ. You may not be able to govern yourself, still Christ is the object of your heart.

228 Notice now another thing: "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." It is not liberty to be fearing and trembling before God. "Liberty" is to be happy with Him. When the Holy Ghost begins to shew me my sins, I have anything but liberty. I begin to be afraid of my sins; I do not know whatever to do with them. False liberty is taken away, and true liberty is not given. And this will always be the case until the perfect love of God is seen. Now law will never teach me that. Suppose I command my child to love me, and threaten him if he does not; will that make him love me? Why, it will make him tremble. This is what the law does. It cannot produce the love, it can but command. What is the effect? I cannot stand in its presence. When Moses had been up on the mount, his face shone. He had been with God. And when he came down with the two tables of the law, the children of Israel were afraid to come near him. He had to put a veil on his face for the glory of his countenance. After being in the presence of God's glory, they cannot bear to look on him. The only effect of the revelation of the glory of God is to drive me away as far as ever I can get from Him against whom I have sinned. There is not a pleasure in the world that the presence of God would not blast in a moment. There is not a happiness of man, as man, that is not spoiled by the very mention of the name of God. Now think what a terrible state that is to be in.

The apostle calls this claim of God by the law the "ministration of death and condemnation"; because it claims righteousness, and does not produce the thing it claims. Whenever a person is looking to his conduct for what he ought to be, he is under the ministry of death and condemnation. That is not the way to get Christ written on the heart.

Before we turn to look at Christ as He is now, let us look at what He was, God manifest in the flesh. In what state did He find men when He came? He found them "all under sin." And what does Job say of himself, as being in this condition? "If I wash myself with snow-water, and make my hands never so clean, yet thou shalt plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me. Neither is there any daysman betwixt us, that might lay his hand upon us both. Let him take his fear away, then would I speak; but it is not so with me."

229 Now what do I find in Christ when He came? I find "a daysman" - the very thing that Job wanted. Was there fear in Christ? Was any one afraid of Christ? If a sinner was ever so burdened, he could go to Christ and thus to God. Now here I find that though my sins hindered me from going to God, they could not hinder God from coming to me. You will never find a single case in which Christ did not receive the sinner with open arms - never. Now that is what you want. Christ did not say, Get righteousness and come up here, and I will have you. No; but He came down here to meet us here. That is an entirely new thing. Christ came in this way to win our hearts thus. And therefore they reproached Him with receiving sinners,

and eating with them. It is quite true, He replied, but is not a father glad to receive his lost son? Even so is it with My Father in heaven; and therefore am I come to seek and to save that which was lost. Now this is grace.

But there is righteousness too. When the father fell on the neck of the prodigal, he was in his rags. The father could not bring him into the house in his rags; it would dishonour the house. So His blessed love goes on - and Jesus gives Himself for the sins, which unfit me for the Father's house. I see that the very Lord, against whom I have sinned, has taken my sins and put them all away at the cross.

Now where do I see the glory of God? No longer on the face of Moses - I could not look on it there. But now I see it in the face of Jesus Christ. Ah! I say, that is the One who died for my sins. He could not bring my sins into the glory, and therefore He put them away. I have got His word and His work for it, and the glory for it too; and therefore God is now ministering righteousness. Now it is "the ministration of righteousness." The sins are not passed over. He sweat great drops of blood for the sins. He has really gone through everything that holiness required on account of them, and now He is in the glory; so that every ray of the glory I look at is the proof that my sins are put away. When I see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, it is the very thing I like to look at; because the Man whom I see in the glory is the One who bore all my sins. Oh! I delight to look at Him. And this is the way I get Christ graven on my heart by the Holy Ghost. "We all, with open face, beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord." It is the ministration of righteousness, because the Holy Ghost comes and tells us that there is a righteousness accomplished "by one man's obedience." It is the ministration of the Spirit, because the Spirit is given on the foundation of the righteousness. And now the man is at liberty, because his conscience is perfectly purged. Here he will have trial and conflict, it is true; but as between himself and God he will never have anything but perfect peace.

230 This is God's way of graving Christ on the heart. First He gives a man the consciousness of being entirely condemned, shewing him that his nature is enmity against God; that the law he has broken; and that when Christ came in grace, Him he did not love. And when He has brought him to this in his conscience, then He shews him that the God against whom he sinned has come and wrought out a righteousness for him, and that this blessed Man is now in glory.

Now mark how the heart thus learns to trust God. What love! when I was in my sins, God came and put them away. My sins are the very thing that give the greatest proof of His love. He has given Christ for them. Well may I trust Him for everything else.

Let me now ask you, dear reader, if your confidence is in this God? Has your heart been brought to submit to this righteousness, for you have none of your own? Oh, it is the hardest thing for the heart to be broken down so as to be willing to have righteousness by the obedience of another! "By the obedience of one shall many be made righteous," Rom. 5:19. But if you have seen the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ you will desire to "be found in him, not having your own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness, which is of God, by faith."

231 It is good for our souls to dwell on what it is to be an epistle of Christ, though I am sure none of us can express the greatness of the calling. Any gathering of the saints is the epistle of Christ, "to be read of men." They are His letter of recommendation to the world. The world needs to ascertain what Christ is

from the lives of the saints; although they might learn it, it is true, from the word. And the great importance of this place of witness is brought out by the tacit contrast with the law, "written in tables of stone." Just as the ten commandments were the declaration of the mind of God, under the dispensation of the law; so now the church is the engraving of Christ, "written, not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart," to shew forth the virtues of Him "who hath called us out of darkness into his marvellous light."

I would refer to one great thing in the life of Christ, namely, that He never, in one simple act, word, or movement of His heart, did a single thing to please Himself. "Christ pleased not himself"; and so "we ought not to please ourselves"; for "none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself." Jesus said, "that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do." This was obedience flowing out of love, and manifesting love. Nothing ever moved Him from that. The temptation to move from obedience to a commandment might come in a very subtle form, with all the ardour of affection; as when Peter said, in answer to the Lord's word about His sufferings and death, "This be far from thee, Lord." It was affectionate in Peter; but the Lord would not own it, for this would have been to turn from the Father's commandment. And what does He answer? "Get thee behind me, Satan; thou art an offence unto me, for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men."

Another thing I would remark. Not only was Jesus heavenly in His nature, but, as Son of man, He lived in heaven - as He said, "the Son of man which is in heaven." The whole spirit of His mind, the tone of all His feelings and thoughts, was heavenly. So if there is any motive in my heart which I could not have if I were in heaven, I am not like Christ.

Again, all the grace that was in Him was brought out to meet man's sorrow and misery, and to bear on every earthly circumstance. In this we often find our failure. Even when the motive is right, the manner is wanting in graciousness. But it was never so with Christ. He was always seeking to promote the glory of God; but never did He in manner, on any occasion, depart from the spirit of grace. We often are not close enough in our communion with God to have confidence in Him. We become impatient, and resort to means that are not of God, as Jacob did, who had not confidence enough in God to say, "He will secure the blessing." Would not God have made Isaac give the right answer? Surely He would. So we often fail by not waiting upon God, who will bring the thing to pass most surely, though we know not how. So it was in the sorrowful case of Saul. He would not wait; yet Samuel came at the end of seven days, and Saul lost the kingdom. And those who really are the children of God always sustain loss when they depart from confidence in Him. Christ was always trusting in God, and always waiting upon Him; and so He was ever ready for every sorrow and misery; ever ready to bring out the resources of God to meet every necessity. It is touching to read Matthew 5. Every beatitude is a lively portrait of Christ. Who so poor in spirit as Christ? Who mourned as Christ? Who so meek? so hungering and thirsting after righteousness? His whole life was hungering and thirsting after righteousness. "The life was the light of men."

232 But, further, Jesus was the victorious man over all opposition, even though it were death itself. There is a great difference between good desires and power. The quickened soul may say, "O wretched man that I am"; but we cannot be the full epistle of Christ, unless we exhibit power over all obstacles - even over death. Death is given us. The believer, living in the power of Christ's life, has entire power over death.

Again the Lord Jesus, amidst all His zeal, never failed in love. Strictly speaking, there is no motive in love, though there may be joy in its exercise; and this is our triumph. If I look for a motive, it is not love. Therefore love enables a man to meet all trials. Should one spit in his face, this makes no difference, for love abides; because it never draws its strength from circumstances, but rides above all circumstances.

Nothing can be presented to a saint which can separate him from the love of God. The love which he enjoys triumphs over all circumstances. If we do not shew this heavenly-mindedness of the love which is of God, doing nothing from any motive but obedience, we are not a true epistle of Christ. I might be walking lowly, but if I did not shew out Christ, I should be nothing. So Christ. He gave no answer when God gave no word. And we, in passing through the world, should stand still and wait if we cannot see how we may so walk as to please God.

233 In the latter part of the chapter, the apostle tells us how we may be acting as the epistles of Christ - ministers, not of the letter, but of the spirit. The letter refers to the requirements of God from man, which necessarily was a ministration of death. But the gospel is the manifestation of God, not from Sinai, requiring righteousness; but from His own throne revealing the accomplishment of His own righteousness, and sending a message concerning it to draw our hearts to Himself. To those who submit themselves to this righteousness, the Holy Ghost is given on the foundation of the righteousness, and He is in them a Spirit of power. So now we can use great plainness of speech, because we are speaking of grace. We can tell men that they are wicked, wretched, and helpless. We can speak all things plainly, because we are not expecting anything from them, but telling them of God's grace to just such as they are. We can speak plainly of God, for it is of the God of all grace. Israel could not look at the reflection of the glory in the face of Moses, poor though it was; but now man can look plainly - wonderful to say - at the full glory of God, because it is now in the face of Jesus. It is this very glory that tells me of the putting away of my sin. I see the glory of God, not dimly, but as of one who put Himself in my place as a sinner, and who could not be in that glory if He had not put away all my sins; for my sins are enough to dim any glory. What a glorious thing, not only to see God visiting my soul in grace, but that, so to speak, the glory has taken the place of my sins! The transition from the cross has left nothing between them! Thus we get righteousness in our Head, and the Spirit goes with the message, so that there is power, for "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."

The soul that submits to the righteousness of God becomes the epistle of Christ, because he is looking at Christ in the glory. This cannot be while only looking at Him down here; but when the eye is fixed on the Lord Jesus in glory, we are changed into the same image. The heart living in the glory counts all things else but dross and dung in comparison. This is the real victory - when all of this world surrounds me, to say, I do count them but dross and dung. This is being like Christ. We soon learn the weakness of the flesh in this, but the faith that thus looks to Christ is the true victory. The apostle said, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." We sometimes say this too lightly, for we have not proved it. We may say a believer can do all things, but he could say, I can do all things through Christ, for he had proved it by deep experience and arduous conflict.

234 The Lord give us so to recognise the power there is in Christ, as that we may heartily walk in the strength of it; though it humble us in the dust.

That which alone can make us an "epistle of Christ" is looking unto Jesus, or, as in verse 18, "with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord." The ministry of the Spirit is "taking of the things of Christ and shewing them unto us." There is power as the consequence of the Holy Ghost being here. Until Jesus was glorified, there could not be power nor anything to reveal. It is called the ministration of the Spirit. "Ye shall be endued with power," etc.

It has struck me latterly in the last verse, we never attain the glory while down here, yet are always looking at it as an object, and "changed into the same image," but we are not actually in any sense the same. Still we are daily growing up into Him who is the Head - who is in the glory. Paul says, "I press towards the mark . . . if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection," at the end rather than at the beginning of his course; yet he had attained a great deal, if you look at him as to the realisation of power. Now, that is what the individual Christian is called to, founded on the ministration of righteousness: glory and righteousness go together. It is not now merely that God forbears - this He did before; but He declares His righteousness; it is a righteousness now obtained, not a future thing. The law required righteousness from man, but that is a different thing from the administration of righteousness to man. Now He, Christ, is giving it unto us. The law was called the ministration of condemnation. The ministration of righteousness is also called the ministration of the Spirit, because the Spirit is here in virtue of accomplished righteousness in the Person of Christ, who is up there in the glory. "He that ministereth to you the Spirit." Since redemption God ministers to each saint the Holy Spirit.

235 Righteousness is shewn by God in two ways: first, in setting Christ at His own right hand; secondly, in not letting the world see Him any more, whom it rejected and cast out. The Spirit now convicts the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment: "of sin," in rejecting Christ; "of righteousness," because Christ is gone to the Father; "of judgment," because the prince of this world is judged. If I receive the demonstration, I partake of it, and the demonstration of righteousness placed Christ on the throne at the right hand of God. "I go to my Father." In verse 7: "So that they could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance," etc. There was no veil, but the state of Israel was such that they could not bear a sight of the glory, "which glory was to be done away." So in verse 13, Moses put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel might not look to the end of that which was abolished; shewing, I believe, the moral condition of the people, for Moses had no veil when he went to God, but they could not get beyond the outward thing. The veil was over Moses' face, and all was veiled to them, so that they could not see to the end. He is here giving the meaning of the act: they could not see to the end, but stopped short in the things given. The veil is now not on the things but on their heart, which is done away in Christ; "nevertheless, when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away." In Christ everything is fully revealed in the reality and truth of it, not in mere types and shadows. They could not see to the end; it is always because of the hardness of their hearts, though the veil is at one time on the glory, and at another on their hearts. Moses put a veil over his face, but it was God's purpose being fulfilled. Now we are not as Moses, but use great plainness of speech. It is not now about the people, but about the ministration.

The Holy Ghost is come down here, because Christ is in the glory; therefore we do not leave people in dimness and darkness. We speak boldly; we tell you plainly you are "accepted in the beloved," righteous as He is righteous, and the glory is your portion. We speak thus very boldly about it; "For we are not as many who corrupt the word of God, but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God, speak we in Christ." The difference in the subject of ministration gives this greater boldness. It is not a certain working of the soul to get up to Christ; but when Christ is thus really and truly revealed to the heart, it is inwrought by the Spirit of God in the soul, and graved and written on the "fleshy tables of the heart." The soul will be exercised upon receiving this glory, not to be satisfied in knowing merely as a fact there is this righteousness, but to have it wrought in the heart. We should be not only thinking about Christ sometimes, but wholly occupied with Christ Himself. What a little compass it reduces a man into when Christ is received in the heart! Paul says to the Corinthians, "Ye are our epistle written in our hearts." He carried them about with him, though they were leaving him and preferring other teachers; but he appeals to them

as a proof of his ministry, and his commendation is seen and read in them as his converts. Therefore he is proved to be an apostle. There was the public testimony to Christ, and what evil had there been permitted amongst them was corrected. So he could say, Titus brings me an account of how you received my first letter, and he writes a second, now that he is happy about them, in which he speaks of the glory of God who "comforteth them that are cast down," and of faith and obedience, etc. Still he was jealous over them with a godly jealousy, because of judaizing teachers.

236 The end of that which was to be abolished was Christ. In Hebrews Christ is the starting-point of His house; if they departed from that, they were not His house at all. The law was only a shadow; the substance or body is Christ. The Lord was the body, so to speak, of the spirit; and that is what is meant, I take it, here, "Now the Lord is that spirit." The spiritual meaning of all is the Lord. They had neither the image nor the reality; but the Holy Ghost gives the meaning of those things in the power of a glorified Christ. In verse 7, if they had seen to the end, they would have seen Christ. "If the ministration of death was glorious," etc. There was glory in the establishment of the law, not in the law itself, but going with it. "For even that which was made glorious" - which was introduced with glory - "was not to remain"; but the glory in Christ is not merely introduced; it is a reality which will remain for ever. The law was the shadow, Christ was the fulness. That shews what the things He manifested were, "those which remained." It looks at first as if characteristically the things Paul ministered were to remain, but it is the glory of Christ's Person remains. It is the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, that gives a distinct character to Paul's gospel - not merely the glorious gospel, but really the gospel of the glory of Christ: the glory of God shines in His face.

237 Short of this, you cannot minister righteousness; you may set forth all the attractiveness of Christ and draw sinners, like the woman who loved the Lord, as a sinner attracted by His grace, but had not found righteousness yet, till sent away in peace. "Thy sins, which are many, are forgiven thee." The Holy Ghost tells us now of righteousness because Christ is set down on the Father's throne; He declares God's righteousness by and in "Jesus Christ the righteous." As soon as you have unqualified righteousness, you have a present heavenly character; you are not merely attracted to Christ, but suffering with Him who is in the glory.

People are told sometimes, practically, they must find out what work the Spirit has done in them, instead of having set forth the work of Christ as accomplished for them. None went beyond the preaching of the cross for many ages past, fearing to preach God's righteousness, lest it should lead to Antinomianism. But now we see it is the ground of perfect righteousness we start upon; and that is the very reason we desire to walk so as to please Christ.

In John 15 we are spoken of as being loved according as we have loved Him, not as in grace, but by the Father. The place righteousness is put in shews that the church's place is with God. The heavenly position is shewn. God receives us into His presence in Christ when Christ is received. Having the Spirit, we "wait for the hope of righteousness." What is that? Oh, it has set Christ at the right hand of God, and in Him sets you there too. "Set in heavenly places" is the church's place properly. In Romans 3:22 it is not the righteousness of a certain class of men for God, but God's righteousness for man who had none of his own - "none righteous." It is "unto all," as much for the Gentiles as Jews, "and upon all that believe"; though presented to all, it is by imputation (made real by grace, and not by accomplishment) on them only that believe. God ministers righteousness, which we have none of our own (that is the gospel), because Christ is set down at the right hand of God. But we should have been ignorant of the fact if the Holy Ghost had not come down to tell us of it. The church's proper association is with Christ in the heavens. And when

in the glory, I shall only have my body put right, for everything else I have now by the Spirit. The coming of the Lord is to take us into the place, where we are in spirit by faith already, to which we belong.

238 "I have finished the work thou gavest me to do Now come I to thee." We shall be to the praise of His glory then, as we are to the praise of His grace now. In Ephesians Christ's coming is not even spoken of, because they were seated in heavenly places; and therefore all that was spoken to them was about the inheritance; the thing set before us is the inheritance in heaven, the possession, not the glory or translation. In Colossians it is "the hope which is laid up for you in heaven." Why? Because they were not holding the Head, but holding angel-worship and all sorts of things. They had slipped down from the full possession of their place, and he is getting them back. "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above." In Ephesians they were going on properly, and he could unfold to them all. In Peter it is "to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled . . . reserved in heaven for you" - "ready to be revealed." Here they are seen as begotten again, walking towards heaven, and therefore the word is "as pilgrims and strangers in the earth," in virtue of the resurrection. If the flesh be not judged, one will not stand. The coming of the Lord is the proper hope of the soul to be converted to; as in Thessalonians, "to wait for his Son from heaven."

It is of the utmost importance that we should thoroughly get hold of what the church is and its identification with the Lord Jesus. Its importance may be gathered from the very many and various ways the enemy seeks to attack that truth, and it is always liable to be let slip, for it is easily lost. To have the one truth, that I am in and associated with Christ, uppermost in my thoughts, is a most difficult thing, and the easiest lost of any, because it is a thought, of course, of the Spirit, and nature will always sink the soul down into something in which it is to satisfy God. I am to understand that the power working in my soul is "according to the working of his mighty power which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places." And it will not do if the soul has not taken up its position with Christ. One need not speak of hypocrisy, but sincerity will not do. I ought to crucify the world, and the heart should settle down easy and happy. This puts Satan out. I do not mean that there would be no conflict with him, but we must keep him outside. Satan always acts on the flesh; he has no power over the new man. If we are in the light, all things are made manifest. What a wondrous thing to say we are "one spirit with the Lord!" "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit"; and what persons we should be if abiding under the power of that one spirit with the Lord in heaven! What great peace we should enjoy, now that nature is duly judged! The knowledge of righteousness, without the present power of the Holy Ghost, has led many into Antinomianism. They have turned to the flesh to keep down the flesh; and it is impossible, if a man is so occupied with himself, to keep him from self-importance. A danger exists that, when some have seen the truth of the church being in heavenly places, and there has been the labour and working of the soul itself, they may get a great many ideas of the blessedness of the glory, without having got peace, because they have not got their souls on the ground of righteousness, by which alone we are enabled to crucify the flesh. If, all of a sudden, the question were seriously put, Are you safe and ready to be taken? they would be all aback; the ground of the heart is not so thoroughly ploughed up as that they know they are made the righteousness of God in Him. Job said, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee; wherefore I abhor myself," etc. Was that the first time Job had seen God? Yes, in that way. God will have nothing but good in His presence, and the soul finds itself nothing but evil, and says, "then I cannot have it." But it is His grace that is working. The soul, brought into the presence of God in that way, rests in His perfect grace, and has done with itself; then all the bright place into which it is brought is enjoyed; and we eat the corn of the land.

239 Moses saw the promised land from Pisgah, but did not go into it; to see it from outside is a different thing from entering it. It is easier than as Joshua who went in by conflict; Moses on the contrary did not strike a blow. You know now what it is to sit in heavenly places, and what it is to enjoy "the things that remain."* It is true, there is conflict; but you do get into possession. It is wonderfully connected with the whole armour of God, always the defensive first. The person is first thoroughly preserved spiritually, before a sword is put into his hand. Temptation would pull us down from the place God has set us in: but when it is conflict, it is fighting as in danger of being turned out. A person not spiritual cannot tell what it is to be fighting with wicked spirits in heavenly places. He would say, all his battles were on the earth, neither does he know the joy of sitting above. The difference between the Red Sea and Jordan is that the Red Sea is Christ's dying and rising again for us effectually; in Jordan, it is our death and resurrection with Him. Therefore the moment they had passed the Jordan, they were all circumcised. The first thing in the knowledge of the church's place in heaven is the destruction of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ (where it is real). We want to have things real with God and not ideas. We cannot go on without faith.

{*2 Corinthians 3:11.}

240 The coming of Christ is such a different thing to the soul when our true position is understood. Instead of my desiring it that I may get rid of myself and what I may be doing on the earth, it will be that I may enjoy Him and be with Him in heaven. The affections may be attached to Christ; but unless righteousness is known, there cannot be the quiet waiting for Christ. I dare not look for Him until I know the righteousness of God in Christ. If I have not liberty, I may be wishing for Christ to give me liberty: but when the soul has liberty, it is the peaceful enjoyment of the soul with Him and happy affections! Nothing more easily slips from our souls, even when there is a true desire for it, than the coming of Christ. "Be not conformed to this world."

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