

Notes of a Reading on 2 Corinthians

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Part Fourth. LATER MINISTRY.

I suppose the account of Paul's conversion in Acts would be connected with this, as also his testimony on the stairs at Jerusalem, where he gives the account of God's personal dealing with himself and of his connection with the Gentiles; at least that would be part of it. What would the whole of it be? The whole of it, I suppose, would be the last Adam in all His beauty in the glory looking into a soul down here as the light and the life. Vigour of life seems to have characterized Paul; he had just what the Ephesians had lost — their first love. *They* seemed to forget the rapture of the love, and to get into candlestick duties; not that they had grown cold merely, but they had let slip this amazing thing. Works, and faith, and love are all spoken of; but they had forgotten the power of His own grace and beauty. The light of life was more than light by itself. The first discovery of the light was of the character of God in contrast with Satan, who had Paul in his power. The Nazarene was up there, the Son of God, and needed him, the persecutor. 3rd verse: "If our gospel be *veiled*." It is not only the counsel of God, but the character of the place brought out in action. The whole moral character of the Father was beaming through the Son, and telling itself forth on the cross. The light of the gospel of the glory is different from the "image." He is as much the image of God sitting by the woman of Samaria as in the glory. He stood forth confessed as the Man who was truly forsaken of God, but who did not forsake God. Christ cannot look into a heart and not quicken it. Christ and the soul cannot come together without the communication of life. Paul was a man exactly like myself, and he walked brim-full of Christ to overflowing. In suffering, energy, everything, he lived to Christ. In life I get the character of warmth.

The "image" is a remarkable expression; I suppose one might say the facsimile. The whole character of God came out in a Man; God manifest in flesh. The Father was the One — He was dwelling in, and He in Him. Saints overlook too much the grace of God in having presented it in that way — in a Man. That Man doing a work gives me the infiniteness of Christ as a Man. I have not so large a vessel as Paul, but he had not a bit more eternal life than I have; it is our common portion. Saints get occupied with gifts, not with life. Many are sent to carry life in their souls; few have gifts, and the power of testimony is the power of life. If you are brim-full of this life, and I have a great gift, it will turn out that *you* are the edifier of the Church, not I. I may give a testimony as clear as Balaam's, and it will be a stumbling-block if I do not know how to walk. There may be life without warmth. Peter had self-willed blunder-headedness, with great personal attachment to Christ, trying to keep the Master straight, to turn the Master from the cross; but he was full of love.

In Old Testament times man was told not to make an image of God. God meant to present Himself in Christ, and say, "Now if you have seen Me, you have seen the Father." Oh the grace that comes out, the mercy that comes out there! In John 14, there is great stress laid on that. Christ wanted to get souls occupied with the Father as seen in Him. "My Father spake the words, did the works, etc.: In Person I reveal Him, in words I reveal Him, and in works I have revealed Him. If you are conversant with Me, you are conversant with the Father." He dovetails all that into the place He is in now in that fourteenth of John. "When I am gone, I will take advantage of your weakness; whatever ye shall ask in My name I will do it, and I will take the range of the thought of My Father about the Paraclete, and will

send Him down to you."

I never find souls who have doubts and questions in their minds as to salvation looking into the face of Christ. I do not think it is possible to look in the face of Christ and say, "Thou dost not look as if Thou wouldst have mercy, and be a Saviour to me." That state of mind shows distance of soul from the person of Christ Himself. Directly you look into the face of Christ there, you get the whole doctrine of "changed into the same image from glory to glory." It is the last Adam putting down everything you brought into the world with you.

Verse 6. There is a remarkable contrast between light shining out of darkness in creation, and into darkness in redemption. The light that shone for Stephen had no effect on Saul of Tarsus; but a little after his time came, and the gap in the army of Christ, Paul is brought to fill up in a larger way than Stephen. In the end of the first chapter of John, Christ walks off taking people after Him, picks up two of John's disciples, Philip, etc. A virtue comes out in each case that lays hold of their hearts, and all are found after at the Sea of Galilee. (John 21)

The Ten Commandments would cut me down at once, they irritate every man's flesh except Christ's.

The latter part of verse 6 is most astounding, I could not understand the character of God apart from revelation by the work of Christ. I cannot understand mercy, etc. If I give my thoughts of mercy, they would not go beyond God being able to shut His eyes. But He made His love manifest, sent His Son to be the propitiation. Then I say, "It is all right; I was dead in sins, and the Son came to be the propitiation, and to give me life after." By His Son He expresses love: it is no mere passing by sin. There conscience gets boldness before Him. I cannot have my eyes fixed on Christ, where Christ is, as the accepted sacrifice, without having a perfect conscience, a conscience perfect, because formed on the very thing that His holiness finds rest in. God has told me about Himself in the truth that His Son has borne the penalty. If I am not satisfied, that is only saying that I am more holy than God.

Life and light cannot shine in, and not shine out. A person would be justified in saying to another, "I have watched your conduct, and it is not expressive of eternal life." Life must show itself — the whole habit of soul must show itself. It has been a question with me whether it is the person of the Lord or the light shining in, that is the treasure. (Eph. 3: 17.) I have sometimes thought the treasure is, that Christ may dwell in your hearts by *faith*, not by the Spirit. That my soul may be so before God, that He may see Christ dwelling in me by faith. If I want to carry the vase in that way I shall have difficulties. My eye upon Him brings the light right down here. The grand discovery of the present day is a living Person in living intercourse with each one, and occupied with us. Paul says, "I want to run straight up there to Christ, and Christ alone." Everything was light to Paul, because he had Christ always as his object. It was a divine power that made it available. In talking to souls, you have to take each just where it is before God. You must take the soul up where it is, and go on with it.

If Christ says that He died for all, that they who live might live to Him, and not to themselves, it is not much for the heart to say. "I go in for that." It is but in little things that I can live to Him, but I will live to Him in those little things.

My faith does not make atonement, does not carry in the blood; but if I am to get blessing, I am to walk in all the freshness of one that sees Christ there and knows His heart. If it becomes a real thing to me — there He is before God, and I am all that in Him — one life, etc., it becomes power. The substance is the great thing. The feebleness of the vessel is pretty strongly marked. Nothing could shine out of Saul of Tarsus till Christ had shone in.

Verses 8, 9. Trouble, perplexity, down casting.

Verse 10. "Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus." Our voluntary act through faith. Verse 11. "Always *delivered unto* death." Both might be going on together. My own mind looks on bearing about the dying, as different from the death. I find Christ going through life waiting on God, as One whose ear was digged, and had no ear for things down here, whose eye did not see according to the sight of man. He saw everything as the Servant of God, so there was an inability to take in the things here. He saw Satan behind them. Christ just passed along quietly as the Servant of God; He never took or sought anything for Himself. The things were presented to Him, but He could not take them in their then state. He knew everything would be His from the hand of God, and refused to take it in any other way. I have to carry that out; I am a follower of the carpenter's Son. He could not take the things here without sanctioning Satan. He could take no exemption from suffering from Satan's hand. The world was devil-tossed and devil-tortured in every way. I cannot be what Christ was. He had no sin, but His word to me is to walk as He walked. You see the beauty of the life of Christ being manifested. He comes to a Philadelphian and says, "I charge myself with all your difficulties; just you walk with Me, I will settle all for you. I know how to take you out of it." The very principle He puts forth to the Philadelphians was the very principle He walked by Himself.

"Mortal flesh." Death came into the world by sin, and passed upon all men, for that all have sinned. "I glory in infirmities;" He could sing a song over Satan. As you pass through life there will be a breaking of everything about you, and of yourself too, that the life may shine out. There is often a great deal of self-will mixed up with martyrdom. Many rush into the place, like Peter, without their Master; many a one serving the Lord in a humble, quiet way, has the spirit of a martyr, not counting their lives dear for Christ's sake.

Verse 13: It is beautiful to see the Lord giving the apostle the same sort of place He had Himself as the Servant to God, for the people who were dear to God. All service costs the person something. If you go about washing people's feet you must expect to be knocked about. Paul had to wash the Corinthians' feet. They were getting power, and gifts, and knowledge, and were a little lifted up while Paul is kept ground in the mill, broken to pieces, ready to restore them, when they admit their failure. We may fairly challenge our hearts about the last three verses:

16. The breaking of all that is outward.

17. Afflictions rolling in.

18. There it is God working for blessing for us. Very gracious of the Lord to put one like Paul as a bell-wearer for the flock, to show how far the life of Christ could be carried out consistently in such poor things as we are. We see in Paul's life the exceedingly blessed portion we have. Paul's heart was full of blessing; everything he looked upon he saw Christ behind it. The poor worldly heart is glad of prosperity, and things that suit itself; here was a man smashed and broken to powder, and he says he is more than conqueror. I should think he was one of the happiest men ever on earth, walking consistently with the life, and light he had got. If I have the life and the light, and am not consistent, I could not have that 18th verse. Paul had got it, "To me to live is Christ." Phil. 1 does not show how the power of life was in him, but how it worked and came out. If I am one spirit with the Lord, if He is Head and I a member, the grace that set me in such union is the power that makes me say, "To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

I often think no man could joy like Paul; no man ever came so near Him who was the Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief, in trials and troubles as Paul; and no man was full of such bright light, and never any so full of joy.

