

The Eternal Life in Paul

Philippians 3.

"Selections from the Writings and Ministry of G. V. Wigram."

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There were two things very present to the mind of the Spirit when by Paul He wrote the epistle to the Philippians. The first was eternal life manifested in a believer — a beautiful sight to dwell upon; heartfelt, soul-enjoyed eternal life filled the apostle Paul in all its power and energy. And the second was the contrast with this, namely, that there were dogs and evil-workers who denied the power of it, who were enemies of the cross of Christ. The word is an important one to ourselves.

Just see the beauty of the eternal life that filled the soul of the apostle Paul, and flowed from him to others. If there be a worldly person here, I would say to any such: What do you think of that? And to the child of God I say: Is this picture that Paul gives of himself practically true of you?

In the beginning of the epistle he speaks of the treacherous, tricky dealing of some who named the name of Christ: "Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife, and some also of goodwill: the one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds." But he goes on: "In nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also, Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die gain." Eternal life had so completely filled the vessel, that the individual was sure that, as it had been, so it should be to the end; whether by life or by death Christ would be magnified. Here a prisoner to the emperor, he says: Whether he cut off my head or let me go, it is all the same; Christ shall be magnified in my body; for to me to live is Christ, and to die, gain.

Then he goes on in the second chapter to show, that if he were on earth the model man, which he was, that that after which he was formed was infinitely superior. The Son of the Father had come down, had taken upon Him the form of a servant, had been made in the likeness of men, and humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross; and for this God had highly exalted Him, had placed Him at His own right hand and given Him a name above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow — bow to the Son of His love. There was the perfection of that eternal life, in comparison with which Paul's little bit of fervour, Paul's little bit of whole-hearted devotedness, was just as nothing at all. Still it was beautiful — the eternal life in the vessel, an earthen vessel, a fragile vessel, and the bright light shining out. It was one single thing, and that was *Christ*. When the knowledge Of that got hold of a Saul, he said: I have but one single thing to do on this earth, and that is to so walk that Christ may be glorified.

But now, on the side of the apostle as on the side of Christ, the life that was led down here — in the blessed Lord of course perfect, in the apostle Paul not to be compared with it — what lay at the root of it? He does not come to this till the third chapter; and here he takes up the religion of a fallen nature, and the religion of a risen and ascended Christ. Paul was walking in the power of the latter.

If there be one thing that strikes my mind as I look at Paul's account of what he had been as a Jew, it is the littleness — the *contemptible littleness* - to which he reduces all human righteousness. Just listen to the words in which he shows it out. Item 1: an eighth-day circumcision. Item 2: of the stock of Israel. Item 3: of the tribe of Benjamin. Item 4: an Hebrew of the Hebrews. Item 5: as touching the law, a separatist — which is what the word Pharisee means. You can hardly count what he says next, "concerning zeal persecuting the church," as part of his righteousness as a Jew. He could say: "As

touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless;" because if he had neglected anything there was the sacrifice, so that the thing, whatever it was, might be covered over.

But take the whole of it; it was all human righteousness — call it Adamic righteousness, if you like. Could Adam, after he was turned out of the garden, say: Everything that is required of me by God I have rendered, as a creature to a Creator?

And if we take the different items of it. As to circumcision, God gave it first to Abram, and then to all those descended from him. If descendants were lineal, such as Ishmael, they had a perfect right to it, as much as those descended through Isaac. Then, next, it was quite an accident of providence that Paul was of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, out of all those who had crossed out of Mesopotamia. He was thus a thorough Jew, and not only so, but he had regard for ordinances, and separated himself from all obvious evil.

I will just observe, if ever it is a question of human righteousness, that it is always a question of *time*. God does not give His sentence in time, except so far as saying, "There is none righteous, no, not one." Now could Paul have had the thought that, when he had died and was risen again, all these privileges of nature and providence would come up in resurrection? No! They would not stand a man in stead before the throne of God. They are nothing but the first Adam. And what is the history of the first Adam? Why, murder comes in at once; all evil comes in; just as if, in a mighty accumulation of water, there come but the least little chink in the bank, in a very short time the whole country below will be deluged. So it was. And is that stream going on now? Yes. That flood has gone on from Adam down, and will, till the Lord comes and takes the kingdom and puts down evil by His own presence. And even then, no sooner is it let loose again than man will go up against the very camp of God Himself. Then comes the great white throne, and the whole rebel family judged according to their works; and what comes of that? Every one of them cast into hell.

There will be righteousness reigning on this earth for a thousand years when He is King; but righteousness will abide for ever and ever in the new heavens and the new earth. When I come to measure that there were seven thousand years granted to man to show out his puny wickedness in, and in which has been shown out, too, the grace of God in Jesus Christ, I say: What will be seven thousand years in connection with that new heavens and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness for ever and ever!

Not like Adam, Christ. With Adam it was straining upwards and onwards to get what God had not given him. With Christ it was becoming obedient unto death; He humbled Himself until that body was taken down from the cross by Joseph of Arimathea, to lay in his new grave. The first body that was laid in that grave was that of the life-giving Spirit! He began His course, indeed, in quite a different way. Adam trying what he could get, whilst Christ went down to the cross, took the course due to the sinner, and then lay in that grave till the time marked in Scripture for Him, and then came to life again. Who ever heard of a man taking his own life again? No one ever did! There is but one case in Scripture, and that is the blessed Lord. He says: "I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again;" and He came out of His grave.

And here was Saul of Tarsus running his course, breathing out threatenings and slaughter, and He stopped him and let a ray of light into his soul. Others who were with him saw the light and heard the voice, but they did not understand it. He just showed Himself to Saul of Tarsus. And what came out in that scene? Why, that the Nazarene Saul thought he could blot the name of Saul out of the earth, discovered to be Jehovah up there. He thought honestly that he, with his mighty energy, could blot that name out; and he, perhaps for the first time in his life, asked, "What wilt thou have me to do?" Before

this he thought he knew what to do himself; before this he could afford to patronise; before this he thought that this Nazarene was only an impostor; but now he discovered that the Nazarene could act upon him when he could not act upon the Nazarene. Now there was not one single thing to be done. The Nazarene could set him apart to be the instrument for the spread of His name through the whole earth.

And what is the history of that Nazarene?

I have just touched upon the history of that which sprang up a little stream in Eden, and broke into a mighty river to find its end at the great white throne. The rejection of Christ is a part of that history. And then came the peculiar time when He in glory was again rejected by the Jews. The murder of Stephen was the first step in that. In the epistle to Timothy, when Paul says, "Sinners, of whom I am chief," there is not a doubt in my mind that he had in his thought the moment when he was urging and cheering on those who were rejecting the Holy Ghost.

But the stream of time rolls on, and the Lord calls one after another; not by a vision, like Saul of Tarsus, but still something passes from the Lord of glory right down into the soul of that particular person, just as it did to Abram or to Saul. Most of us can say there was a time when we did not know Christ, and a time when we did know Him. Nineteen years of my life were spent in vanity and folly; but when He revealed Himself to me I was turned right round, and people thought I was mad, as they did Paul.

But the history of that Nazarene! Oh if you look forward to the tomorrow of Christ! His going down into death; that is His yesterday. His now caring for us at the right hand of the Father; that is His today. And His coming in glory; that is His tomorrow. He will then put forth His power; His people are waiting for Him; He will change their vile bodies, making them like unto His glorious body, and then take them back with Him to the Father's home, and give them the kingdom. I look at Adam like a little handful of snow rolling down the mountain side and gathering size as it rolls along; but after all, when it gets to the bottom, it is only a little thing. But the Son, the free gift of His love! What a poor portion has the family of the first Adam been, compared with that of the Second!

He says: "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness." God has found His heart satisfied. It is 1840, years since Christ took His seat at His right hand. And as to Paul, everything in comparison with that Christ was but as loss and defilement; so much so that he uses, as his estimate of it, words hardly fit, you know, for polite society. But when a person comes into God's presence he sees it is dung, evil, everything that is connected with that which God has condemned.

"That I may win Christ;" a sweet little word for those who can get it! "That I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." What a difference between these two thoughts; what a difference if I can look up and say, Abba, Father, instead of having my own righteousness; if I can say, I know I am trying to meet Abba's mind; I know that Christ has washed me in His blood, and that I am clean every whit. What a thing to appear before the Bema of Christ as a saved person, and hear Him say: Since the day I turned you from Saul into Paul many of my own dear people doubted you — thought you went too far; but now I am going to own you.

"The righteousness that is through the faith of Christ." I am washed in the blood of God's Son as much the moment I get to Christ, as I am after twenty years' service. If I am a pardoned sinner, I can

say: Well, blessed Lord, thou hast laid down thy life for me, and I am ready to lay down my life for thee. According to the mind of the Spirit He laid His life down for me, and as one who has been saved by Him, I am ready to lay down my life any moment He is pleased to call.

There were two things in Paul: this righteousness of God that he had in Christ, and then the glory in which it was to be brought out. "We look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ." Well, what when He comes for us? "He will change this vile body that it may be fashioned like unto his glory body." I shall appear then according to the likeness of the glorious body that my Lord wears. He will change it; and certainly God will find no fault with what Christ does. I wear the glory of Christ; the body of humiliation which I did wear is now changed, and I appear before Him "fashioned like unto his glorious body, according the working whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself."

One little word here I would like to say to any person who is not holding the ground in his own conscience of being accepted in the Beloved. If I appear before God as a descendant of the first Adam merely, it is a question whether I can meet all the just claims of God. But, if I appear before God as washed in the blood of Christ, I appear before Him on the ground of my ruin, and before God not on the throne of judgment but on the throne of mercy. I say: Certainly I am a sinner, but the blood of thy Son is on the throne, and I come into thy presence not on the ground of reward to me according to my doings — if I did it would be human righteousness — but I come on the ground of Christ at thy right hand, so I come on the ground of mercy.

Do you know how I found peace? I said once to a troubled soul. Depend upon it when God looks upon Christ He sees far more ground of merit in Him than He sees of demerit in you. He sees nothing but exceeding beauty. The whole position — everything — is changed. All is changed between a person drawing near — to see what God will think about him, and a person drawing near — to see what God will think about Christ. All men are rebels, and God says to them: If you come into my presence to see what I think about that Christ that is there, in the language of a man it would be this: That blood that justifies *me* in dealing with rebels, is certainly sufficient to satisfy *you*. What satisfies me may satisfy you. And that is mercy — an entirely different ground to your human righteousness. It is all the savour of His own perfectness. It is all through that Man that is sitting here on my right hand — the Son of my love, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And He has given Him that name of *Saviour* just to establish our hearts. Supposing you were in glory, and were to see that the Lord Jesus Christ had saved you, but there was no one else saved but you in all heaven — why the name of Saviour would be a dishonour to Him! for He would have saved no one. But He is the One who is competent to save.

Just see the course of this man Paul. He says, My eyes are forward upon Christ. — There are two positions for my soul: in the one I look up, and see God's provision for me; in the other I look forward, and I see He will come forth, and I wait to see Him come forth upon that cloud of glory. And, as to the life down here, can I say it is a life of fellowship with the blessed One up there? "Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." It is Christ behind, Christ above, Christ before. That Christ being in heaven, he says, Now one thing my heart wants, and that is Himself. I have not got it yet, but I know I shall come forth in glory, and that when I see Himself I shall be like Him, for I shall see Him as He is.

"Let us, therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded; and if in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you." What is this perfection here? It is the perfection of discipleship. He has grasped and apprehended all the beauty of Christ, and, if he be a true genuine

learner in the school of Christ, he forgets what is behind, looks at what is before, and then runs. Take a babe in Christ; he is told in the epistle of John to go on and study that part of the book which is necessary to him as a young man. And then the young man is to go on and study that which will make him a father or a mother in Christ. It is "reaching forth unto those things which are before." As to experience — what is it? Nothing but Christ. As to help by the way? Nothing but Christ. As to the goal before me? Nothing but Christ. "Pressing towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

You who truly believe in the Lord, are you really occupied with the Christ of God? Here is a heart and there is a mind occupied with one thing and another. I might pass current down here among you with very little care perhaps, but is it *Christ*? When Christ died He died for me; when Christ rose He rose for me; when Christ went to heaven He went to heaven for me; and now in me down here, there is a new man formed in my heart. Is it that Christ? And is the future characterised not only to God's mind but to mine by that Christ? And if He were to call you home tonight, could you say, The sooner the better? A lady said to me a little time ago, speaking of her ill-health, "I find I can get no air in which I can breathe." I answered her, "Well, I find *any* air will do for me to *die* in."

I will not say the Lord is leaving me down here too long; I am willing to stay as long as He wills, but it would be better, far better, to depart and be with Christ. If I were told I should go before morning, it ought to be my hearty response, "Even so, Lord, for so it seemed good in thy sight." If any of you were to die tonight, your body would be laid in the grave to wait to be changed, and your spirit would be present with the Lord — that One who has shown His love to you in such a costly way. He is now bearing our names there on high before God; then He will come out, putting forth the glorious power that is in Himself to change the bodies of those that are alive and to raise the bodies of those that sleep, to make them like His own.

How many things had you to do last week? Ten thousand duties! and the sun that rose in the heavens was the light by which they all had to be done. And if you are Christians all has to be done in the light of "Come, Lord Jesus." Thus we may show forth the super-excellency of the work of God as the Saviour-God. All ought to bear that mark.

And I do beseech you by all that meets me, both here in England and as I pass all over the world, let Christ be *within* you; Christ *abiding* there; Christ *directing everything* there. I maintain that is not the character of the great mass of Christianity of the present time. I fear that if I knew you individually I should say, These dear people want help to teach them to say, "To me to live is Christ, and to die gain."