

# The Ways of God with a Heavenly People

2 Corinthians 12.

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## Part Fourth. LATER MINISTRY.

Christ Himself is our life. We are in Him; and the Head cannot say to the feet, "I have no need of you." Christ would not be a true and faithful Son of the Father unless He carried us Himself into the Father's house. There, then, He is for us, and the Holy Ghost dwells in us. This is not the life, but is given on the ground of the life which has come down from Christ. The earthen vessel is inseparably connected with the eternal life, and the result is conscious weakness within and difficulty from without. The scope of this chapter is not taken up as it ought to be, even by intelligent *babes* in Christ. (Paul was but a babe just born when he was caught up into the third heaven.) The Lord Jesus, who was then the beginning of the new creation, had certain thoughts about Paul — thoughts which should not be limited to Paul, but such that each believer who gets to understand that he has a right to be in heaven, and gets into the *habit* of going in there (do not you and I know heaven as the home into which we are constantly driven, whether we like it or no?), finds that Christ means us to learn the very same lesson which He taught Paul. Paul saw bright things there, but these were not so bright as the ways of Christ Himself. In the transfiguration He was there Himself, and His face put on the glory in its brightness, but *that* was not to be compared to Himself.

The Lord anticipated certain evil results in the earthen vessel, in which the treasure dwelt, that would impede the rightful action of the germ of life in the apostle, and He sent a correction. The end of this was, that the apostle became perfectly sentient in understanding something of His Lord in His walk here. The Lord did not want any thorn to keep Him right; it *could* not have been given to Him. But He was as one blind and deaf, never doing anything save His Father's will, and guided by His word. In the perfectness of what He was as Son of man, He could walk straight forward, never taking one step too quick, even though He had all power. His life was one of perfect communion with His Father; He would not let the words He spoke, or the work He did, be His own, but His Father's. But Paul was not this perfect One. How was he then to be carried through his course? Merely by the power of God, like the prophets? No, there was something to be wrought out in him. "I find it difficult to regulate my prayers. I would *desire* in everything to say, 'I come to do Thy will;' and on the other side, 'I would be as clay in the hand of the potter.' I want the God who has given the life to direct it; for that life must be so sentiently developed in me, that I may know how to step on the stepping-stones which Christ formed through the world." Paul needed this thorn in the flesh, this crippling, that he might get conscious fellowship with Christ. He was more of a cripple than Jacob. Oh, I do not conceive that Jacob's cripplement was one half so much of a cripplement as Paul's! He was altogether crippled, and the Lord makes him feel what a very poor thing he is. His was to be a life of perfect realized dependence like Christ's. Christ wanted to have him not only guarded against all boasting, but as a child of resurrection, knowing that his whole life depended upon Christ, so that he might glory even in infirmities. An aptitude to think of self is an infirmity, an infirmity of a *babe* too! He would have liked to have his life, and to be able to *spend* it (as the younger brother — Luke 15 — did), taking it out and spending it away from God; but Christ did not mean that — He meant that the eternal life He had given should be guided by Himself entirely. Paul *could* not have it in his own keeping to spend without the *present* upholding

power of the hand of Christ.

There was something medicinal in the way Christ used Satan here. Very likely in Satan's mind *destruction* was the thought; in Christ's it was salvation. It was sanitive, curative, preventative. It never was in Christ's heart to think what "I like;" it was not His nature. He took the place of a perfect Servant, and would never bring Himself in. Was there ever a will so strong as Christ's? Never. What was so remarkable was, that its only acting was in perfect, voluntary, intelligent subjection. Paul was brought to this in quite a different way. God used His archenemy, who had been Paul's master, to give the man the consciousness that, while he had the eternal life, and a fitness to go into God's presence into heaven without the slightest discomfort, the eternal life was one that only Christ could use and direct. Often we get hold of new truth, and the mind becomes one-sided, and we forget to judge ourselves. It was as natural for Christ, who had put the eternal life into that earthen vessel, to watch over the danger of it as to give it at first. We like to take one side — to be always on the mount. But that is not Christ's way; and there is such a thing as blending the two. That is one of the ways of heaven — God giving Paul this feeling of insufficiency and weakness, that might stop the flow of blessing to the apostle, but could not stop its flow from Him.

There is something uncommonly beautiful in Christ first putting the eternal life into a vessel, and then carrying it Himself. Paul did not know the road; Christ did. The more you are inwardly sentient that you cannot keep or spend that life the better. Christ has springs in Himself; Paul had none. Our only fountains are in Him. The streams of joy I had this morning are not a fountain. They may have come in from Christ at the back of my heart, and rise up again, and flow forth; but we can get our wells choked, and we *do*. "What a poor thing I am!" is the best you can say about yourselves, the only form of expression you are justified in using the "I" in in the presence of God. If a saint knows his weakness, he may express that. Can you expect to be in God's presence, and not know it?

In the first chapter of this epistle, we find that in circumstances down here Paul would have liked to have the pure life in himself. But that was not God's purpose. Satan meets him, and says, "This is my world." And Paul is let down into prison, and gets discouraged; but in thinking of it, he saw above it all the God of resurrection, who could do all He pleased, the fountain of all his comforts. God lets Satan lock him up, that He might show *Himself* there to let him out again. Fourteen years after that God says to Paul, "You have now to apply to yourself the principle I taught you before."

When Paul saw his dear Corinthians going all to the bad, what spring of comfort could he have, save in the God of resurrection? You will find that in your passage down here, you have constantly to challenge yourselves as to the extent to which you are acting on that principle, especially in difficulties. You and I do not like the wilderness; it is such a disagreeable place. God sees it as the path in which He will give you the opportunity of exercising faith in the God of resurrection. You will find it so in all the duties and relationships of life. The sentence of death lies on all. Never take the side of the flint that cuts except to use it as an opportunity to bring God in. This makes the life of an *honest* pilgrim so happy. I do not know what to do with that child; but, blessed be God, He is the God of resurrection. The everlasting One *means* us to go through the world finding plenty of difficulties, in which He will answer the faith of His people. Look back a year, two years. *Which* have been the happiest times — those in which God was waiting on you as your servant, or those in which you did not want Him? the time written over with His interferences on your behalf, or those in which He made no entry?