

"A man in Christ"

2 Corinthians 12: 2.

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"I *know* (not, 'I knew') a man in Christ" (New Translation), a *continuing* fact. But that man in Christ had a unique experience. He had been (above fourteen years ago) "caught up to the third heaven." That was a *special*, and perhaps a non-recurrent, experience. Being a man in Christ was a continuing reality. The spring of Paul's happiness was not in the special or occasional experience, but in the enjoyment of his abiding place "in Christ."

Whilst he would not glory in himself as a man, or as a servant of the Lord, he would glory of such a man — a "man in Christ." this made nothing of himself, for his position "in Christ" was entirely the sovereign operation of God, ("of Him are ye in Christ Jesus") on the ground of accomplished redemption, and through the agency of the Holy Spirit.

The experience of being "caught up," however blessed, was special and passing. In that experience he was not conscious of being "in the body or out of the body." He had to return to conditions of bodily consciousness. In this, the *responsible* condition, temptation abounds. There is no trial in being caught up — there is unalloyed enjoyment. There is no danger of self-inflation in the company of Christ. The temptation is down here. What more awful than the pride of a man puffed up by the abundance of divine revelations?

Whilst all believers may not have the special experience of being caught up as Paul was, all share the same abiding place "in Christ." All may taste the uplifting joy of this blessed position, and all may be tested on the line of spiritual pride!

Paul was given a thorn in the flesh — a messenger of Satan to buffet him — something which tended to make him contemptible in bodily presence and speech; yet, with this blessed end in view, that he might be humbled and dependent.

What better asset to an active servant of the Lord than a strong, healthy body! Paul thought that without such a body he must be positively hindered and restricted in the service of the Lord. He thought physical efficiency was essential. But he bowed under the humbling hand of the Lord, "I will not glory, but in mine infirmities." As glorying in "a man in Christ," he gloried in that which made *everything of Christ*. Glorying in his infirmities he gloried in that which made *nothing of himself*. But, blessing of blessings, along with that which emphasized his nothingness and demonstrated his utter weakness, he heard that same voice which had spoken blessing to him on the Damascus road, now saying, "My grace is sufficient for thee." "My . . . thee," and in between (not to separate but to sustain), "My grace."

As the "small" Paul looked on the largeness of that grace, which alone could support, empower, and employ him, he cast his weakness, indeed himself with all his deficiencies, at the feet of His all-sufficient Lord, crying, "most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. therefore I take pleasure in infirmities . . . for *Christ's sake*; for when I am weak," consciously so, and looking for nothing in himself the vessel, "then am I strong." Strong in the strength which Christ supplies!