

Christian Life in the Spirit

Philippians 2, 3.

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The whole of this epistle contains very little doctrine (doctrine being just alluded to in Phil. 3); but it gives us, in a remarkable manner, the experience of a christian life in the power of the Holy Ghost. It is full of blessing in that character — the life above seen down here in a man through the power of the Spirit of God. So much is this the case that the very word "sin" is not found in it. When he speaks of justification and righteousness, it is not in contrast with sin, but rather with human and legal righteousness. The flesh was there. At the very time Paul wrote the epistle he had got the thorn in the flesh to prevent it from acting; but we see in him one rising above the flesh and all hindrances, that Christ might be magnified in him. Whether to live or die, he did not know; he would have liked to be gone, but in love to the church he says, Better for you to remain; and so, counting upon Christ and knowing it is better, he knows he will remain. He knows how to abound and how to suffer need; he is pressing towards the mark for the prize — it is the only thing he has to do.

The graciousness of a Christian is in Philippians 2, the energy in Philippians 3, the absence of care in Philippians 4; but it is all by the power of the Spirit of God. It is well for us to lay it to heart. We are the epistle of Christ known and read of all men — an epistle written not in stone, but in the fleshy tables of the heart. We are set as Christians to be a letter of recommendation of Christ before the world. Yet it gives us the fullest and blessedest confidence towards God if we take that ground; for, if we are in the presence of the world for God, Christ is in the presence of God for us. His work has perfectly settled that question, and He is every moment appearing in the presence of God for us.

We are loved as He is loved. In every shape in which we can look at it, all is a fixed settled thing according to the counsels of God in grace; it is in a poor earthen vessel, but our relationship is settled, all that belonged to the old man cleared away, and all that belongs to Christ, the new Man, our positive portion. Not only are our debts paid, but we are to be conformed to the image of His Son, and He has obtained for us the glory which is His own. "The glory which thou hast given me I have given them." He has given *Himself* on the cross to meet what we were, and He has obtained for us all that He has. This is the way Christ gives — not as the world. If the world gives, they have it not any longer; but Christ never gives in that way — never gives away, but brings us into all He If I light up one candle by another, I lose nothing of the first; and such is the way He gives. I speak of blessed principles. "My peace I give unto thee . . . that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves." "Thy words thou hast given me I have given them . . . that the love wherewith thou hast loved me maybe in them." He became a man on purpose to bring us as men into the same glory as Himself. That relationship we *are brought into already*. "I go to my Father and to your Father, to my God and your God." If I look at righteousness and holiness, I am as He is; if at the Son, I am before the Father as a son; and, is we hibe borne the image of the earthy, we shall bear the image of the heavenly.

The work that entitles us to this is absolutely and totally finished. The Spirit makes us first feel our need in order to our possessing it, but the work is *finished*. In order to get our path clear, we must see where He has brought us. I cannot expect anyone to behave as my child, if be is not my child; you must be in the place before you can have the conduct suited to that place, or be under the obligations which belong to it; and it is this last part I desire to look at a little tonight. "You hath He reconciled," not brought halfway: as to relationship, brought into Christ. That is all. Through the work of the cross

He put away our sins, and when He had done it, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. He finished the work which His Father gave Him to do; and in Hebrew the Spirit contrasts Christ's work with that work of the priests which was never finished so that they never sat down.

We are perfect as pertaining to the conscience. A blunder often made is confounding perfection as to our state with perfection as to our conscience. When once we have understood the work of Christ, we are perfect as regards the conscience. If I look up to God, I can have no thought of His ever imputing sin to me again, or I could not have peace with God; and this is so true that it is said, if this work was not perfectly done, Christ must suffer again. But He cannot drink that dreadful cup again, the very thought of which made Him sweat great drops of blood. If there is any sin still to be put away (I speak now of believers), Christ must suffer again, and this can never be. God has set Him at His right hand as *having finished the work*: "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do; now, O Father, glorify thou me." He will deal with His enemies, no doubt, when He rises up in judgment; but, as to believers, He is sitting down because He has no more to do. I am not speaking now, of course, of the daily grace He ministers to them. It is *settled*, and settled with this double aspect that, the purpose of God being to bring us into the same glory as His Son, the work of Christ not only cleared away our guilt but obtained that glory for us. We have not *got* it yet; but the work which is our title to it is finished, though we have not yet the glory to which it is our title. We are anointed and sealed with the Spirit, and He is the earnest of our inheritance. We are to the praise of the glory of His *grace*, but not yet to the praise of His glory, which will be when He comes the second time to bring us into the glory which His work obtained for *us* when He came the first time. And our life stands between the two — the cross and the glory.

We are here in this world, beloved friends, in the midst of temptations, snares, and difficulties, everything around us tending to draw us away; but the power of God is in us. We know that we are sons of God, though the world knows us not. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is; and every one that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." The practical effect of beholding the glory of God is to change us into the same image.

When Moses came down from the mountain, they were afraid to look in his face, because the law required what they had not to give; but now I see the glory which excels, the glory in Christ, which is infinitely brighter. But the glory in the face of Jesus Christ is the witness that all my sins are put away. That which shone in the face of Moses required what man ought to have been as a child of Adam, but it came to man who was a *sinner*. It required righteousness, and pronounced a curse if it was not there. Now I see it in the face of Him who bore my sins in His own body on the tree. The Christian sees the Man who died for his sins now in the glory as Man, a witness that the work is done, and a testimony to the place unto which He is bringing us; and, meanwhile, we have the testimony of the Holy Ghost that our souls may be perfectly clear as to this.

That is where the believer is set, resting in entire confidence upon the efficacy of the work of Christ, and, upon the other hand, waiting for God's Son from heaven, *converted for this*: "Ye yourselves as men who wait for their Lord." Standing here is perfect liberty, for where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty.

And here we have the proper experience of a Christian as led by the Spirit of God. We have in Philippians 3 a Christian as to his walk, Christ having laid hold of him for that; as in 2 Corinthians 5: "He that hath *wrought* us for the self-same thing," etc. He has *wrought* us for that, not only cleared our sins. He sees Christ in glory before him (Paul had really seen Him there), and that was what he was

going to get. "This one thing I do . . . I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." What he was doing was to win Christ. He had not yet obtained Him, or got into the glory; but it was the only thing he was doing in the world: his whole life was that.

In Philippians 2, on the other hand, Christ is looked at, not as going up to glory, but as coming down to the cross; and here we see the graciousness of His character. By this our hearts and affections are won, and we are formed into the likeness of this graciousness. And thus we have the two great things that govern the Christian: the glory that is before him, and the grace that has been shown him.

One word as to verses 12, 13: "Not as in my presence only," etc. Often this "fear and trembling" is used to cast a doubt upon our relations with God. Yet it is not this we have to fear about. But we are in the midst of temptations, everything around us, the power of Satan distracting and turning the heart from Christ; and he presses upon them that, now he is absent, they must take care. He had worked for them when he was with them, he had met the craft of the enemy in wisdom and apostolic power; but he was in prison when he wrote this. He says, "Therefore, now, you must fight for yourselves;" but this is in contrast with his fighting for them; and they were to do it, for it was GOD that worked in them. The contrast is between (not God and man working, but) Paul and the Philippians. God it was who did work in them, were Paul there; and, if they had lost Paul, God who wrought in them was still there.

But, then, what a solemn thing for us, beloved friends, if we have the sense of this, that we are left down here to make good our path to glory against Satan and all the difficulties of the way! It is enough to make us grave. A false step will throw me into the snares of Satan. I have to be serious; I have the promise of being kept, but I need to be serious.

I have spoken of the finished work, but there is another thing that exercises us: how far can we look at the flesh and say we have *done* with it? And this is where the practical difficulty comes, if you are in earnest and desiring to walk in fellowship with the Father and the Son. I ought never to walk after the flesh. The existence of the flesh does not give me a bad conscience, but if I allow it to act it does. Whenever I let even an evil thought in, communion is interrupted. It is not that the flesh is gone as a matter of fact; not that there is nothing in us which Satan can tempt, but there is power in us not to let it act. The flesh is not changed. The word is as plain as over it can be as to what the flesh is. If left to itself, it becomes so bad that God had to destroy the world. Noah, saved out of the old world, gets drunk. The law is given, and the flesh is not subject to it. Christ comes in grace, and the flesh crucifies Him. The Holy Ghost is given, and the flesh lusts against it; and we get the ease of one in the third heaven, and the flesh ready to puff him up. The flesh could not be mended, but he gets a thorn in it. But that is no reason why I should ever let it act; it *never* ought.

Scripture does not speak of our being conformed to Christ *here*; it says we are to walk as He walked. But the place of conformity to Christ is the glory, and "he that hath this hope in him purifieth himself;" that is to say, he is not pure, he has not attained. The place where I shall be like Christ is in glory. He has obtained it for me; and then, my eye looking upon Him by faith, I am changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Lord the Spirit.

I find this the great truth which Scripture does give me: not only that Christ died for my sins, but that I died with Christ. In the epistle to the Romans, in the first part, you get all the sins dealt with, the great truth of Christ being substituted for us on the cross — bearing our sins in His own body on the tree, He is delivered for our offences; and, in the subsequent part taken up, is the question, not of *sins*, but of *sin* — not the fruit, but the tree, and we are shown not to be in the flesh if the Spirit of Christ is in us.

I do not live by the life of Adam, but by the life of Christ; and this is where the total difference is

for the Christian. But it is not only that I have a new life as quickened by Christ, the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, nor that He has been crucified for me so that my guilt is removed, but I am crucified with Christ.

In Colossians we read, "Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God" — therefore dead in this world. This is God's declaration of our state as Christians. In Romans, "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Christ, that the body of sin might be destroyed." "In that he died, he died unto sin . . . wherefore reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God (not in Adam, but) through (or in) Jesus Christ our Lord." This is faith's estimate of it, and this is where you find real deliverance and freedom from the bondage of sin. It is "no condemnation" not to them whose sins Christ bore, but "to them that are *in Christ Jesus*." God condemned sin in the flesh: He did not forgive it, He condemned it. If I get the law, it condemns me; but Christ — does He condemn me? No; for He has taken the condemnation for me, and in Him God has condemned sin in the flesh, and I reckon myself dead because it was in death He did so. Christ's death is, as all that He has wrought, available to me; and therefore I reckon myself dead. In 2 Corinthians we get the carrying this out in practice; "Always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in your mortal bodies." And then he speaks of the exercises which God sends for our good, to test this realisation in us and make it effectual: "Always *delivered* unto death," etc. We all fail for want of watchfulness, but that is what our life ought to be.

Suppose I have got a man in my house who is always at mischief. I cannot turn him out, but if I lock him up he can do no harm; he is not changed, but I am free in the house. If I leave the door open, he is at mischief again; but we are to keep him locked up, this is what we are called to do — what God calls us to do. The world will not have this; it will mend and improve man, cultivate the old man, as if it could produce good fruit, because it does not see how bad it is. The world would dig about it and dung it. That has been tried. God cuts it down and grafts us with Christ. This condemning and cutting down was in the cross of Christ; not, of course, that He had any sin, but as made sin for us; and I know, not only my sins cleared away, but I am crucified with Christ, and my life hid with Him in God.

And this is available for power, if I carry it about in my heart. Supposing we honestly held ourselves dead; can Satan tempt a dead man? But in order for this, it must not be putting one's armour on when the danger is there; but, living with Christ, my heart is full of Him.

Would a woman who had heard that her child was killed or hurt at the other end of the town be thinking of what she saw in the shop windows as she ran toward him? No; she would have just enough sense to find her way. If your hearts were fixed like that on Christ, nine-tenths of the temptations that come upon you would be gone: you would be thinking of something else, and outward things would only bring out sweetness, as they did with Christ; for we are never tempted above that which we are able.

Saints, if in earnest, have got to realise not only the putting away of their sins, but also the having died with Christ; and this delivers from the power of sin.

We see in Philippians 3, a Christian with one object: knowing Christ has laid hold of him for glory, and his heart is running after Christ. I am to have no other *object*, though I may have many things to do. He is "in all" as the power of life, and He is "all" as the object of that life. He is all and in all. (See Colossians 3: 12.) This is again summed up in the latter part of Galatians 2: "Not I, but Christ liveth in me;" and then the object: "I live by the faith of the Son of God." Then there is the sense of His perfect love: "Who loved me and gave himself for me." The heart is fixed on Him, and follows hard after Him.

There is another thing — the spirit and character in which we walk down here; and this we see in Christ coming down. When I have got this blessed place, Christ my life, holy boldness, yea, to know we are sitting in Him in heavenly places, the place a Christian is called to (a wonderful thing, I grant) is to go out from God and be an epistle of Christ. I joy in God, have got the blessedness of what He is, and go on in communion with Him to show out His character in the world. This is in Philippians 2.

Ought I to walk as Christ walked? Every Christian will own that: "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." Suppose my soul has tasted this perfect love, and it is well we should recollect it, God's love shed abroad in our hearts, and know, be conscious down here, that we are loved as Jesus was loved; for if I really know God as thus revealed in Christ, what do I believe about Him? What put it into God's heart to send Christ down here? He knew how He would be treated. Did the world? It would not have Him when He came. It was all in His own heart! Perfect love in His heart; the unsuggested origin of every blessing. What character did it take in Christ? Was it staying up in heaven and saying, "You behave well and come up here?" No! we all know that. But He who, in the form of God, in the very same glory, thought it no robbery to be equal with God (mark the contrast with the first Adam), made Himself of no reputation; and what brought this about? Purest love, love coming to *serve*.

For Christ took the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of man. He emptied Himself of all the glory — the very opposite of the first Adam. Divine love came to serve; a *new* thing for God — the only new thing. And this is what I learn. I know this love, I know that I am made the righteousness of God in Him; so that I stand before Him, and then I come out from Him towards the world to bring out this blessed character. I have learned the love, and now I must come out and show it. "Be ye followers of God as dear children." You *are* children: that is all settled. Now you go and give yourself as Christ did, in whom this love is known — a sacrifice to God, and for us. The spirit of love is always lowliness, because it makes itself a servant. I get the grace that brought Christ down. It is very difficult for us to bow; I know that, beloved friends. He "went to another village." There was perfect meekness; but it tries men — some more than others; but the moment *perfect* love is seen, it comes and takes the lowest place to serve others. Paul endured *all* things for the elect's sake, that they might obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

And here I find what is entirely beyond law. Law tells me to love others as myself; grace tells me to give myself up entirely for my neighbour or for anybody. Did not God forgive you? You go and forgive your enemies. Is He kind to the unthankful and the evil? You go and be the same. It tests all the fibres of our hearts, all the pride and vanity and selfishness that are in us. You like doing your own will.

"He humbled himself and became obedient to death;" He goes so low down that He could go no lower; "even to the death of the cross." But, then, "God hath highly exalted him." He was the first grand example of "he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

Blessed be His name! He will never give up His service: it is the very thing He shows us, and in which He would that our hearts should see the perfection of His grace. It is what He is doing in John 13. He had been their servant down here, but now they might think that there was an end of His service. No. He says, I cannot stop with you, but I must have you with me. "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me." He does a slave's work; and this is what He does now. We pick up dirt as we go — there is no excuse for it; but then is Christ up there, the Advocate with the Father. And, even in the time of glory, "He will gird himself and come forth and serve them;" He will be there to minister the blessing Himself. Our hearts want to learn the perfections of that love in which He came always down, down,

till He could come no lower.

Are we willing to walk in that path? No one would deny we ought; but are we *disposed* to do it? Would our hearts be glad of the power of that grace which, holding the flesh as dead, can say, Here I am in the power of that love to walk as everybody's servant? We are to esteem others better than ourselves. If my heart is full of Christ, I judge myself for everything not like Christ: I judge the evil in myself because I see the blessedness in Christ. But what do I see in my brother? I see Christ in him. The effect of being full of Christ is to make me think little of self and much of my brother: there is no real difficulty about it if one is.

"Do all things without murmuring," etc. If you take every single part of this passage, you will find it a statement of what Christ was here. He was blameless and harmless, the Son of God, without rebuke in the midst of this evil world; He was the light of the world, and He was the word of life.

If I reckon the flesh dead, only the life of Christ comes out; if only this came out, we should be a very wonderfully blessed kind of people! To him that hath shall more be given. If I yield myself to God as one alive from the dead, I have got fruit here unto holiness, as well as fulness of blessing hereafter.

I would ask you, beloved friends, do you purpose to be Christians? Are you willing to yield yourselves to God as not having one bit of will of your own? There is power in Christ, not to say, "I am pure," but, always having my eye on Him, to purify myself.