

2 Corinthians - Commentaries by James Ebenezer Batten

Bible Treasury: Volume 9, All Things Are of God: Part 2 (5:18)

(2 Cor. 5:18.)

(Concluded.)

Into the midst of this ruin and misery, this scene of God's dishonor and of Satan's triumph, Jesus came to glorify the Father, to deliver man, and to destroy the works of the devil. He who alone could work redemption such as the sinner needed endured the righteous judgments of God (which else were powerless to Him) by which to deliver us. He wrought by means of the penalties which God had inflicted upon men, and so wrought by them as to put away forever the offenses and sins, on account of which they had been pronounced. Prophecy had pointed to this wonder-working Redeemer, "O death, I will be thy plague; O grave, I will be thy destruction." Consistently with this prophecy and after all that had been foretold was accomplished, He laid His right hand upon John in the Apocalypse, saying, "Fear not: I am the first and the last, I am he that liveth and was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore, and have the keys of death and hell." The penalties were endured by Him who could work out deliverance by nothing else. They were employed to glorify God, to put our sins away, and to defeat Satan who held them in his power. Penalties are now gone and sin is put away by the sacrifice of Himself, and God will finally cast death and hell into the lake of fire. When nothing further remained for Christ to do, and not till then, He said, "It is finished, and he bowed his head and gave up the ghost."

It is necessary to take this survey of the work of our blessed Lord, in order to pursue our inquiry, whether God is invariably true to Christ and His work on the cross, as the only rule of His action towards us. The last act of Christ in laying down His life, and the first new action of God in raising Him up from the dead, ought never to be separated in our souls any more than the last loud cry and God's answer by the rent veil. Otherwise we separate redemption and resurrection.

But before a believer can get happily into this position as one with Christ, it is of immense moment to see that God does more than rend the veil that hid Him from the earth and shut us out from heaven.

The place and relations of God, consequent upon the finished work of His Son, are as completely changed towards us, through redemption, as they were previous to the fall, when God walked with Adam in the garden of Eden, and after it when He drove out the man. So that our question is really twofold: not merely is God true to the work of Christ on the cross and at His right hand in heaven? but will God be true to Himself and His relations to the crucified Savior in death, and to the exalted Son of man in glory? After the resurrection of the second man what place can Adam have with God? Properly this ceases to be even a matter of inquiry, since God has made it the whole subject of a new revelation to us in the gospel of His grace, "All things are become new." As truly also another history has commenced with man in the heavens, and between God the Father and His redeemed people on earth, concerning all His purposes and counsels, made yea and amen in righteous title by Him who has gone up to God. It is that same work, which has put away our sins and by which we are saved, that has glorified God; and on account of which the Christ who did it now sits on the right hand of the majesty in the heavens. Further, and as regards ourselves and the altered relations of God towards us, having accepted the blood of Christ as the propitiation for our sins, God correspondingly takes His place upon the mercy-seat and proclaims a gospel of salvation.

Having judged our transgressions on Christ, and divine righteousness having found its answer in the death of the substitute, God takes another place at the cross, no longer as a judge, but as "the just God and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus." The One who was delivered for our offenses being raised from the dead, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. The cross has thus been the place of judgment, of blood-shedding, and of death. Christ has suffered, the just one for the unjust, to bring us to God. This is what the cross is to the believer, to Christ as the victim, to God the judge of all. Death is there where Christ bowed His head and gave up the ghost. Life is beyond it where Christ now is with God, crowned with glory and honor.

Is God true to these two centers—the cross below where Christ was, and the throne above where Christ is; and does He make these the unchanging rule of His actings towards us? Let us take our stand at the cross as believers, to see our sins and iniquities on Jesus; yea all that we were as in the flesh brought under the hand of God for judgment on Christ. By means of righteous condemnation on Him, the guiltless One, all that was against us has been brought down by death into the place of ashes, where all has been consumed by the fire of God's holiness and wrath. Can God deny Himself in what He condemned and judged upon Christ and reduced to ashes under divine wrath? Can He deny Christ in His sufferings, death, and atoning blood? Nay, His own glory was wrought out here by these means, and Satan overcome. What does He say to us, and what must He do for Christ but declare, "I am he that blotteth out your transgressions as a cloud, and your iniquities as a thick cloud?" God is true to the work of Christ and to His own judgment of sin and the flesh at the cross. All has been carried down to death, and by means of death left in the silence of the grave. Christ is risen out of it, and we in Him. Nothing else has gone up. The blood is before God, sprinkled in the holiest where He dwells, and a new and living way opened which He hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh. The blood of Christ which shuts out all fear of judgment (since it is the abiding answer to judgment) has opened the heavens to us, and we come boldly to the throne of grace to obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. This is what God is towards us.

Again, will God be equally true to Himself, to Christ, and to believers, as regards life and righteousness and glory in the risen Christ on the throne? Surely, for it is He who says, "Of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption," that in the enjoyment of this oneness with Christ we might glory in the Lord. It is God who has wrought this for us. It is He who made Christ to be sin for us, that has made us to be the righteousness of God in Him, and we are complete in Him, who is the head of all

principality and power. No, there is no other rule which God accepts as the ground of His actings towards us but what He has declared Christ to be at His right hand in glory. "God who hath commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ." Moreover, "we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us."

The unvarying testimony of the apostles in their epistles is to establish the saints before God in Christ. Peter writes to them as "scattered strangers," and "obedient children," but "begotten again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away." Further, he says, "God hath raised up Christ from the dead and given him glory, that your faith and hope may be in God." Indeed we may ask, "What could the Holy Ghost do by the apostles but glorify Christ, and in this way? Such is His present ministry, as Jesus declared of Him, "When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth, for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak, and he shall show you things to come." The passages already quoted show as to redemption, righteousness, and resurrection, that Christ is made of God all these to us, and that we have the full effects of them in Christ, proving that God has no other ground of acting towards us. Further, as regards life, Paul writing to the Colossians addresses them as associated with Christ. "Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God," and "when Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory." Once more as respects "life," the apostle writes to the Ephesians, "But God who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." Nothing can be plainer than this, "that as He is, so are we in this world" Throughout John's epistles also the same blessed truth is insisted on.

Again, as to glory and the coming of the Lord, we shall find the same great fact holds good, which we have been examining as to our justification and redemption, both in life and righteousness. Indeed the coming of the Lord is the very point at which all is consummated. Then we drop forever the image of the earthly man and put on the image of the heavenly. Then we shall be presented faultless, before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy. Our Lord's own words are decisive: "If I go away, I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am there ye may be also." So John affirms: "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." The consideration of facts like these, between ourselves and the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, cannot fail to bring our souls under the power of that blessed hope of the Lord's coming, and our rapture into the air to meet Him, which will in truth close up all between us and the earth that is earthly. "The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we which are alive and remain [unto the coming of the Lord] shall be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord."

Lastly, another kind of proof and an equally important one may be found in the fact of the Spirit dwelling in us and the Spirit being with us as the Spirit of truth and the glorifier of Jesus. This "promise of the Father," fulfilled at Pentecost by the descent of the Holy Ghost, is what our Lord referred to on the last day, the great day of the feast of tabernacles: "Jesus stood and cried, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink;" and it is added, "This spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive, for the Holy Ghost was not yet [given], because that Jesus was not yet glorified." So also in the Galatians: "That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." In either of these instances, how could such an unspeakable gift reach us as the indwelling Spirit, were it not that God has no other ground of action towards us than the worthiness of Christ? Observe, further, how truly God acts in us upon this truth: "Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?" These scriptures are quoted to show that the Spirit not only testifies of Christ but dwells in us, because we are Christ's, owning us as bought with a price and working in us accordingly, that we may "glorify God in our body [and spirit which are God's]."

The title and claim over us, by sovereign grace and the Father's love, are thus complete upon all points, and founded upon the perfection of the finished work of Christ. "Sealed and indwelt by the Holy Ghost as we are, there is no room left for uncertainty, much less for misgivings and fears. On the contrary, the soul passes on into its own proper blessedness in Christ, as well as out of its own conscious wretchedness, as once connected with a body of sin and death, rejoicing in the liberty wherewith Christ has made it free. Once outside ourselves, we reach the power that has carried us out, and are free to take part with it against the flesh in ourselves that it has been against, and to use it in favor of what it has created and formed in us that is new. As was said at first, it is a wonderful thing to realize that "all things are of God," that "old things are passed away, and all things are become new." We are therefore among those in whom these great facts are to be manifested, by that mighty power of God, both now and hereafter.

In conclusion, it may be well to call attention to the contrast between this love of God, which is the spring and source of all the blessedness connected with our present and eternal relations, and the impotency of every existing institution and human organization, which only contemplate the improvement of man as he is and where he is: in other words, the difference between divine and human philanthropy is in question. And the difference is nothing less than this, that the kindness and love of God towards man has appeared, in that He has not spared His only begotten Son, but has given Him up for us all. By the ways and means which have occupied us in this paper, God has brought back man to Himself by nothing less than a self-sacrificing love, which gave the Son who is in His bosom.

Man can do nothing like this, even in his own circle—he has no such resources. Man has nothing better than himself and his schemes for his fellow, and is reduced therefore to confederacies, organizations, &c. These are all powerless as to conforming men even to the benevolence which has instituted them. The philanthropist cannot by these means create benevolence between man and his fellow, so that he should love his neighbor as himself, much less love God with all his heart and soul and strength. Mere institutions and their endowments do not even secure the attendance of those for whose benefit they were established, nor is it by church extension that the inhabitants of a country can be made true Christians. The best of these may perhaps embrace the idea of drawing man nearer to God, but the necessity of his being brought by substitution and sacrifice is yielded up: otherwise the scriptures and testimony to Christ would be prominent, and Christ Himself be everything.

But the love of God in sending forth His Son (the Man whom He had in reserve) has formed the way, by redemption through the blood of the slain Lamb, to make us new creatures in Christ and thus unite us by the Spirit to Himself as born of God—one in the Father and the Son. In the world's alienation from the love of God and its growing departure from truth and from light, under the delusion and sleight of Satan and of

men, all things are of men. But where the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ has shined into the heart, all things are of God; who has reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ. Old things have passed away, and all things are become new. J. E. B.

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The coming in of Christ by incarnation laid the foundation for a new course of action between God and mankind, according to what Christ was in the glory of His person and the perfection of His ways and work. The objects too for which He came opened out in their accomplishment on earth two new centers of operation for God in grace and government; and these were at the mount of transfiguration by personal glory and righteousness, finally at the cross by His substitution for the guilty. On the mount of His transfiguration He shone resplendent in a light above the glory of the sun; and was invested with honor and majesty, when there came to Him such a voice from the excellent glory, "This is my beloved Son, hear him." He clad Himself with righteousness, as a cloak; and stood the accredited possessor of far more than man had ever received and forfeited. How different afterward was the garden of Gethsemane, where this same man of sorrows sweat as it were great drops of blood falling to the ground! Still more different was mount Calvary, when Jesus was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and His visage was more marred than any man's, and His form more than the sons of men. His majesty and kingly power were also denied Him, and the soldiers stripped Him and put on Him a scarlet robe, and platted a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand: and they bowed the knee before Him and mocked Him saying, "Hail king of the Jews."

But between Himself and mankind there yet lay outside all this the fierce wrath of God against sin; and into this deep suffering and woe He passed, when, as the sacrifice offered up to God without a spot, He was the substituted One, and cried, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?"

This is what these two centers were to the Lord—on the mount of His transfiguration, the voice from the cloud claimed Him as worthy to receive honor and majesty—on the mount of His crucifixion, when under the judgment of God for our sins, and the sword awoke against the man who was Jehovah's fellow, He cried with a loud voice as the forsaken One and gave up the ghost. If these two mountains, in their varied characters, were all this to Christ; what must they have been as the new centers of operation between God in His holiness and sinners in their sins, and between the throne of God's righteous government and the world? They became indeed the great turning-points of another history, and got their answer from God in the rent veil which till then had concealed Him; and in the resurrection of the second man into the heavens which received Him. The glory of the Father took Him from the cross (the place of His own victory in divine counsels and foreknowledge) and from the sepulcher, where He overcame him that had the power of death, that is the devil; and He was carried up in the cloud crowned with glory and honor. The second Man has gone from the cross to the right hand of the throne of God and become the head of a new creation; nor is there any other but this representative man in the heavens where God is. A believer in Christ must therefore look out of himself to Christ, and if he would know the present truth about himself, "this truth is in Jesus."

It is a wonderful thing (when understood) to see how by the cross of Christ we pass out of our old relationship and standing in Adam with the penalties and consequences of sin which rested upon us as connected with the man who fell. Death has done this. By the death of the last Adam we are forever separated from the condemnation and judgment inflicted on the first. It is as wonderful to see how through the risen and exalted Son of man we pass into our new standing of acceptance and completeness before God, and enter upon our relationships as sons of the Father, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ. The ascension of Christ has done this. By His exaltation we know ourselves made the righteousness of God in Him. Again, how blessed it is to be made conscious that the Holy Ghost has come down from the Father and the Son to dwell in us as the temples of the living God, and to make true in us that which is true of us in Christ. Only thus can such verities become our most familiar thoughts, our daily bread, and source of supply to us as new creatures in Christ. We are kept in this nearness to God by a power equal to that which quickened us and set us in these relationships with our glorified Head and Lord. How else can communion and enjoyment with the Father and the Son be maintained in us against all the contradictions of the flesh, the world, and the devil, unless the fact of our new creation can be displayed to faith in Christ at the right hand of God, as well as what we are by grace as in Him? An important scripture for the establishment of the Lord's people in the truth about themselves is shown in Eph. 4: "But ye have not so learned Christ, if so be that ye have heard him and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus; that ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new man, which according to God is created in righteousness and holiness of truth."

The Holy Ghost, true in His operations in us, cannot therefore accept the experiences we naturally have of ourselves, as ruined and in the flesh (before we heard or learned Christ) as the ground of that work which He is come down to carry on in us, as redeemed out of the Adam state in which we were by nature. The Holy Ghost testifies of Christ to us, and witnesses that "as Christ is, so are we in this world." He therefore judges and keeps the sentence of death upon every motion in the flesh, which if followed out would make us unlike Christ. Working mightily in the inner man, He produces in us as new creatures the affections which are suited to the Father and the Son for the fellowship into which we are called. Moreover, the Spirit of God is true in divine operation to the work of Christ at the cross, keeping the old man in us under death, which was there judicially put to death in Christ, "knowing this that our old man has been crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin."

The motives also which are supplied to us for practical conduct, necessarily spring from the truth between God and ourselves, as to what we are by the death and resurrection of Christ, namely, How shall we that have died to sin, live any longer therein? And again, "Know ye not that so many as have been baptized unto Christ Jesus, have been baptized unto his death?" It is important to see that Christ is the rule of the Spirit's testimony to us and work in us, both as to life and death; and that Christ must therefore be the object and rule of our faith and intercourse with God. Equally important is it to get—our hearts and consciences assured that God Himself owns none other than Christ as the ground of His present and future actings towards us. It is evident that all steadfastness and growth in a believer in Christ, as regards himself and his intercourse with God, about sin and holiness, the flesh and the Spirit, grace and righteousness, heaven and hell, depend upon the person and work of Christ, as the established and unchangeable basis of all communion between us, as redeemed unto God, by the blood of His Son.

With a view of bringing these precious realities nearer to our souls, and ourselves more under their power, we may consider a little in detail, and perhaps in application, the blessed facts already stated. These are, that God is unalterably true to Christ and His work, that the truth about ourselves is now in Jesus and nowhere else, that the Holy Ghost both by testimony and operation in us is true to the person and work of Christ on earth and in heaven, and that we are called out in faith and in fact to be true to the truth, by learning Christ who is the way, the truth, and the life. Such are the gracious lessons which the Father's love has given us to know, as eternal realities between Himself and the children of His adopting grace. The soul that is not learning them in communion with God, under the anointing of the Spirit in the peace which passeth all understanding, must be thrown back from Christ upon self, and the bitter experiences of what the flesh is; and thus be tossed to and fro by its deficiencies one day, or the hope of attainment the next. Consequently there will be conflicts with evil and disappointment every day. Multitudes find busy occupation on this ground of self-seeking, making their being something the object instead of Christ. But building ourselves up in our most holy faith is building up one another in Christ; and to this we will now turn.

A great question upon the matter before us is, What do we understand by "as the truth is in Jesus?" One way of reply, and helpful as introductory, may be to ask what the truth was about us in Adam, by his fall. The first half of the epistle to the Romans is largely occupied with an answer to this question. Measured by the righteousness of God there was none righteous, no not one; measured by the glory of God all have sinned and come short of the glory of it. Further, "by one man sin entered into the world and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men for that all have sinned." Thus judgment came upon all men to condemnation. Besides this, as children of Adam, chapter 7 speaks of the indwelling sin and imparted corruption; and as a consequence of these actual transgressions and guilt, so that our state as under condemnation and our alienation from God by nature are summed up in these words, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death?"

(To be continued)

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