Philippians 2:21 (Alfred Henry Burton) 173279

Christian's Library: Volume 10, Doing the Will of God (2:21)

“All seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ’s.” —PHIL. 2:21.

BECAUSE of this sad condition of soul among the professed followers of the Lord Jesus, the apostle had no one else but Timothy to send on Christian service to the saints at Philippi.

The presence of an apostle, even of the devoted Paul, did not prevent the self-seeking of those in professed fellowship with him. How sad, too, to think that this departure from living fellowship extended to so many. It was not that a few were pleasing themselves to the dishonor of Christ, to their own loss of joy and blessing, and who shall say how much to the neglect of the salvation of men, but all were seeking their own.

Such was the condition of things even in apostolic times, but are there not many, and, moreover, true believers in Christ, to whom the same words may equally be applied today?

Some who did run well, run well no longer.

Some have allowed their work, or their brethren, or the lack of apparent success to discourage them. Love in their hearts for God, for His service, for His children, and for all men has lost its fervent power. The “things of Jesus Christ” have depreciated in their eyes, and “their own” things have, to their unspeakable loss, gone up in value.

But this departure as to living communion in “the things of Jesus Christ” is a most serious symptom of soul to discover, whether in ourselves or in others. It is a flat contradiction of what Scripture teaches of Christian life, Christian experience, and Christian service. It is a denial by our ways of the Lord who bought us. Unless one is recovered from this state of soul where will he be ultimately landed? What Scripture is there to hold out a course finished with joy to one who continues to seek his own and not the things which are Jesus Christ’s? There are always those who whisper complacently to themselves that they shall have “peace though they walk in the stubbornness of their hearts,” but such persons misuse or misunderstand Scripture. God will render to every man according to his deeds.

“To them who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory and honor and immortality (incorruptibility), eternal life. But unto them that are contentious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile.

“But glory, honor, and peace to every than that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile.”

While we maintain that salvation is by grace and through faith, and not in any sense through works of righteousness which we have done, but solely through the “blood of Christ,” we understand salvation to be from the love and practice as well as from the dreadful guilt and divine judgment of sin, for

“We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10).

Less than this would not be salvation in the full scriptural sense of the word (Phil. 2:12).

“By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts, and by it he being dead yet speaketh.”

These words give us but one side of Abel’s salvation. The reason Cain was not accepted was because he did not do well (Gen. 4:7), and on the other hand we know that Abel was one who “did righteousness.”

“Whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.”

Abel is called in Scripture “righteous Abel.”

The reason why Cain slew him is plain:

“Wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother’s righteous” (1 John 3:12).

It is of the last importance to have eyes to see and ears to hear these things. But if in Old Testament times those true saints who came to God by faith were in their manner of life righteous men, what shall be said of those in Christian times, who, while they profess to know God, in works deny Him, who have a form of godliness but deny its power? We are commanded to turn away from such.

Those in living communion with God have to beware lest they fall from their own steadfastness.

It is not all and everything to own Jesus as a Saviour. We must own Him as Lord too, and be ready as well as willing to keep His commandments. But we are not in this state of heart when we “seek our own and not the things which are Jesus Christ’s.” Peter warns us in

his first epistle that we are sanctified, not only to the sprinkling of the blood but also, to the obedience of Jesus Christ, and in his second epistle would have us give diligence to make our calling and election sure. There is no uncertainty about that calling and election on God's part. Romans 8:29, 30, makes this plain. But ought there not to be questioning, and unhappiness too, in the case of one who has so allowed the world or anything else to overpower him as to be spoken of as seeking his own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's?

The government of God comes in here, no doubt, in the case of true saints, and by painful, though sometimes secret discipline, restores God's children to living and lasting communion with Himself. God chastens for our profit that We may be partakers of His holiness. Even the fruit-bearing branch is purged that it may bring forth more fruit. And the object before Him in John 15 is "fruit," "more fruit," and "much fruit." Thus are we made manifest as disciples of the blessed Saviour who redeemed us by His blood.

Is He not infinitely worthy that we should rise by the power of His Spirit into the reality of these things? Thus, as another has written on 2 Peter 1, "Walking in the ways of God we have part in that kingdom, entering into it with assurance, without difficulty, without that hesitation of soul which is experienced by those who grieve the Holy Ghost and get a bad conscience, and allow themselves in things that do not accord with the character of the kingdom, or who show by their negligence that their heart is not in it. If, on the contrary, the heart cleaves to the kingdom, and our ways are suitable to it, our conscience is in unison with its glory. The way is open before us. We see into the distance, and we go forward, having no impediments in our way. Nothing turns us aside as we walk in the path that leads to the kingdom, occupied with things suitable to it. God has no controversy with one who walks thus."

May we be increasingly stirred up to do the will of God and not to please ourselves!

T. H.

clickbible.org