

Philippians - Commentaries by Charles Henry Mackintosh

Answers to Correspondents: From Things New and Old 1858-1863, 29. Perfection (3:12,15)

"F. F." desires to know the meaning of Philippians 3:12. It is probable that our correspondent finds difficulty in understanding the force of the word "perfect." We believe it refers to the time when Paul, in common with all true Christians, shall be conformed in body, soul, and spirit, to the glorious image of Christ. The word "perfect" is used in various ways in the New Testament. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). Here it refers to the principle of our dealing with others. We should act towards men on the same principle as our Father adopts in His dealings with them. He is kind to all; so should we be. This is to be "perfect" in the sense of Matthew 5:48.

Again: "Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect" (1 Cor. 11:9). Here the word refers to the "spiritual" in contrast with the "carnal." Then, again, we read of being "perfect as pertaining to the conscience" (Heb. 9:2). The blood of Christ gives a perfect conscience. It could not do less. According to the dignity of the sacrifice is the condition of the conscience. This is a point of immense value. So also in Philippians 3:15, we read, "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded." Here, we apprehend, the word refers to those who have Christ as their exclusive object, just as Paul could say, "One thing I do." A single eye is perfection, according to this passage. Oh, for the grace of a single eye! To have the conscience purged, and the eye single, are two distinct perfections of the Christian life. May we all enjoy them.

Our correspondent will, we trust, find help from a careful comparison of all the above passages. He will see that the sense of the word "perfect" in Philippians 3:12, is quite distinct, and that it refers to perfection in glory. The believer should enjoy the perfection of a purged conscience; the perfection of a kindly spirit toward all men; the perfection of a spiritual mind; the perfection of a single eye; and, while enjoying all these perfections, we should cultivate the hope of perfection in glory.

We are deeply thankful for the blessing and profit which our correspondent has received from those volumes to which he refers. We can say, with a full heart, to the Lord alone be all the praise! We would earnestly entreat our dear friend to join us in prayer to God, that He would be graciously pleased to vouchsafe a still more abundant blessing upon the circulation and perusal of those little books.

Short Papers, Resurrection (3:11)

A Correspondent requests a special notice of Phil. 3:11. "If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection from among the dead." The point toward which the desires of the true Christian ever tend is resurrection-glory. It matters not to him by what way he is to reach that point. He longs to reach the glory, "by any means."

It may be that our friend finds difficulty in the word "if," as though it implied a doubt in the mind of the apostle as to his reaching the end in safety. We do not believe he had any such thought in his mind. The idea is simply this—he had the goal before him, and he was eagerly pressing toward it. His vision was filled with it, his heart was set on it, and as to the "means" by which he was to reach it he was quite indifferent.

It may be interesting to observe that the word which is rendered "resurrection," only occurs, so far as we are aware, in this one passage, and properly signifies "resurrection from among." The word ἀναστασις (anastasis, resurrection) occurs about forty-two times in the New Testament, and is applied to the broad fact of resurrection. But the word used in the eleventh verse is morally linked with the expression in Mark 9:10, "Questioning one with another what rising from among the dead (ἐκ νεκρῶν) should mean." The disciples would have found no difficulty in the thought of resurrection as such, seeing that every orthodox Jew believed in it. But a "rising from among the dead" was something strange to them. Hence their "questioning."

Now, the proper hope of the Christian is not merely "resurrection of the dead," but "resurrection from among the dead." This makes a very material difference. It completely sets aside the idea of a general simultaneous resurrection. To speak of a resurrection from among the dead, obviously implies that all shall not rise together. Rev. 20:5. teaches us that there will be a thousand years between the two resurrections; but it is of importance to see that the very word used by the apostle to express that resurrection for which 110 was looking, is quite different from that usually employed to set forth the general thought of resurrection. Why is this? Simply because he meant a special thing and he therefore used a special word—a word which, as we have said, occurs only in this one place.

It is deeply solemn to remember that the Lord's people will rise from their graves and leave behind them the ashes of the wicked dead to molder for a thousand years longer. This thought may seem to be foolishness to the natural man, but scripture teaches it, and that is quite enough for the Christian. The resurrection of the Church will be upon the same principle, and partake of the same character, as the resurrection of Christ; it will be "a resurrection from among the dead." May our hearts be set upon that glorious goal!

Short Papers, Gain to Me (3:7)

“But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.” (Philip, iii. 7.) What a marvelous change! Saul had had many sources of gain. He had gathered many honors round his name. He had made progress in Judaism beyond many of his equals. He had achieved a legal righteousness in which no man could find a flaw. His zeal, his knowledge, and his morality, were of the very highest order. But, from the moment that Christ was revealed to him, there was a thorough revolution. Everything was changed. His righteousness, his learning, his morality, all that could in any wise be gain to Paul, became as dung. He does not speak of open sins, but of those things that could justly be esteemed as gain to him. The revelation of the glory of Christ had so completely changed the entire current of Paul’s thoughts, that the very things, which he had once esteemed as positive gain, he now regarded as positive loss.

And why? Simply because he had found his all in Christ. That blessed One had supplanted everything in Paul’s heart. All that belonged to Paul was displaced by Christ; and hence it would have involved actual loss to possess any righteousness or wisdom, holiness or morality, of his own, seeing that he had found all these, in divine perfectness, in Christ. If Christ is made of God unto me righteousness, is it not a loss to me to have any righteousness of my own? Surely. If I have gotten that which is divine, have I any need of that which is human? Clearly not. The more completely I am stripped and emptied of everything in which “I” could glory, or which would be gain to “me,” the better, inasmuch as it only renders me all the more entitled to a full and all-sufficient Christ. Whatever it be that tends to exalt self, whether it be religiousness, morality, respectability, wealth, glory, personal beauty, intellectuality, or philanthropy so called, it is a positive hindrance to our enjoyment of Christ; first, as the foundation of the conscience, and, secondly, as the object of the heart.

May the Spirit of God make Christ more precious to us!

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