

Philippians - Commentaries by Julius Anton Wilhelm Eugen von Poseck

One Thing I Do, One Thing I Do: 3

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What a power of attraction lies in a beautiful and desirable goal! It sets into motion all the spiritual and bodily capacities. The more glorious the goal, the greater the effort to reach it. Day by day this may be perceived in the pursuits of this world, so vain and yet so eagerly and perseveringly carried on, it may be at a race or regatta, where every muscle, nerve, and sinew is being strained to the utmost to reach the desired goal; or in the arena of political ambition, or military fame, or other vanities of this world, where, in the pursuit of the fervently coveted goal, other attractive objects lose their charm, the competitors being wholly absorbed with the goal of attraction before them, which does not permit of side looks. The nearer to the goal, the greater the efforts, perseverance, and undivided attention of the one who runs in the race. Many otherwise attractive objects by the wayside are scarcely perceived, and soon left behind in the distance.

Judaism with its privileges, ceremonies, and self-efforts, so attractive and desirable to the religious natural man, remained like a distant coast far behind Paul, making for the shore of resurrection, and for Him Who stood on that shore, not only a risen Savior, as He appeared to His fishing disciples on this earthly shore (John 21)—to show them, that He, though risen, with the same love as when He was daily walking with them on earth, continued to care for their earthly necessities—but as the ascended and glorified head of the church, as He appeared to Stephen, His martyr, and to Paul, Stephen's persecutor, on his way to Damascus. All those splendid religious privileges had paled and faded away before Paul's glorious goal of attraction. When the sun rises, not only the darkness disappears but also the stars.

All those things that had appeared desirable to Paul, the Jew, lay now behind him like a distant coast; nay, lie had entirely lost sight of them, though not of his former co-religionists. To him not only did all these things appear to be nothing but dung; but, more so, he had forgotten them altogether. Sometimes we hear a Christian with great animation "recounting" what he has "given up" for Christ and for Christian truth. He thereby only shows how much he values that which he professes to have given up for Christ, and how little he has realized what Christ has given up for him, and not only given up, but also given, for He "gave Himself for us." He further proves how far he is from having understood the meaning of our apostle when he wrote to the same Philippians: "For unto you it is given, on behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake." Such looking back towards the religious "camp," from which one professes to have gone forth "unto Him" (Heb. 13:13), further shows that one has not yet arrived at that happy forgetfulness of those Old Testament witnesses of faith in the eleventh chapter of the same Epistle to the Hebrews, who were not even "mindful of that country from whence they came out" (ver. 15). When all those things, which once appeared a precious "gain" to Saul, had become to Paul naught but "loss" and "dung" for Christ's sake, he did not think that he had "given up" something for Christ's sake. One does not give up dung, one throws it away, if one sees it really to be such. A "gain" I might give up, but a "loss" I do not give up, but avoid it. And as those blessed forefathers of the apostle had forgotten that country from whence they came out, so Paul forgot the "camp," with its contents so dear and precious, and its recollections so sacred to the heart of a Jew. To him all this had become not only "flesh," "loss," and even "dung," but he continues, "One thing I do: forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

If any one might speak of having "given up" something for Christ, Paul was the man. But to him all this was now only "that which is behind." What is behind is soon forgotten, especially if it is nothing but dung. So Paul, the apostle, had forgotten all that which to the zealous Jew, Saul, had been the most precious privileges and glorious attainments. Was it because these privileges and blessings given by God to His earthly people were esteemed lightly by him? Or had his heart, since he had been "apprehended by Christ," been alienated from his former co-religionists through the bitter persecution he had suffered from them? Such a spirit was far from him. Let his own words speak. "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish to be accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh: who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the services, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came, Who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen" (Rom. 9:1-5).

These words show that Paul, the apostle, did not esteem lightly the privileges which God had given to Israel. And so great was his love to his "brethren and kinsmen according to the flesh," that like Moses (who wished to be blotted out of the book of God, if He would not pardon Israel's sin), Paul also had wished, for his people's sake, to be banished from Christ with a curse. And this after all the bitter persecution and abuse he had to experience at their hands! But as the sun with renewed and fresh splendor breaks through the dark clouds and scatters them, so at the close of that memorable passage, in even heightened splendor shines forth the priceless value and glory of Christ, "Who is over all, God blessed forever." Amen.

All these splendid privileges of Judaism disappeared before Christ, the glorified Head of the church, as the fog before the sun. To the Hebrews the apostle wrote, "Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away;" and to the Corinthians, "Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ, after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more. Therefore if any man be in Christ, there is a new creation: old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."

Apprehended by Christ, he sought to apprehend the glorious prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus, forgetting those things which to him were "behind," and reaching forth unto those things which were before him, his eyes steadily looking towards the goal, and thus "pressing toward the mark." And let us heed what follows: "Let us, therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded; and if in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you." And, "Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule,

let us mind the same thing." "For our conversation [or citizenship] is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, Who shall change our body of humiliation, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working, whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself."

Christian reader, is your "horn filled with oil?" (1 Sam. 16:1.) Are we "filled with the Spirit" Who glorifieth Christ, receiveth from His, and showeth it unto us? if so, we shall be able to discern a false Christ from a true one; and our hearts, like Mary's pure and white alabaster box, will be filled with the precious "ointment of pure nard, very costly," that is with adoring thoughts of Him Who is "altogether lovely, and the chief among ten thousands" —thoughts of adoration and thanksgiving to God, from Whom all blessings flow, and to His dear Son, in Whom all blessings are. And our eye, fixed by the power of the Holy Ghost on the glorified Christ, will make "the whole body light," and thus enable us, steadily looking toward the goal before us, after the example of the apostle of the church and of glory, to "press on toward the mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus," until He, Who is "our hope," and our bright morning star," shall come to take us up to Himself into the Father's house, whither He has gone before to prepare a place for us. Blessed be His glorious name, now and evermore. Amen.

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(Concluded from page 75.)

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One Thing I Do, One Thing I Do: 2

As has been observed already, that which in such an especial way characterized the apostle, was his being "apprehended of Christ." As an historical fact it was done on his way to Damascus, but it served to imprint upon his whole being and character that particular stamp which distinguishes him from other servants of the Lord. Christ, the glorified Head of the church, His body, at the right hand of God is the glorious subject of his testimony as well as of his individual walk. The apostle's heart and mind were directed towards one point only—Jesus, the once persecuted and rejected Nazaraean there above. Not only Paul's outward man, but his whole inner, yea, his inmost man, heart, mind and spirit, had been "apprehended" or laid hold of, by the glorified Christ. As the plant turns towards the sun, so all the powers and inclinations of the new man and of the resurrection life of Christ in the apostle turned towards the glorified Son of man, in the energy of the Spirit of glory that rested upon him and filled him. As the magnet needle, though trembling through the motions of the vessel, invariably turns towards the pole, so the heart of the apostle of the church turned to its glorified Head. That unique goal, surpassingly beautiful and all glorious for which he had been "apprehended," he sought to apprehend although he had not yet apprehended it. What formerly he had been, when Saul—a zealous upright Israelite, pursuing a certain aim with his whole heart and with unabating zeal, serving God from his forefathers with a pure conscience—he was now in a better and infinitely higher sense as the servant of Christ and apostle of the church. In the third chapter of his Epistle to his beloved Philippians, that goal which he pursued, is most distinctly put before us.

What had appeared to be a gain to Saul, the zealous Israelite, was counted by Paul not only nothing, but positive loss. All those religious privileges, connected with the dispensation of the law of Moses, granted by God to His earthly people, invested as they were with the halo of the grand historical recollections of more than fifteen centuries, were now for Paul nothing but "flesh" —religious respectable flesh in the splendid, gorgeous, apparel of the religious ceremonies of Judaism, but after all nothing but "flesh." What formerly had appeared to him as "gain" the apostle of glory counted but "loss" "for Christ," the glorified "Jesus," Who had appeared to him on his way to Damascus. Neither was that depreciation of all his former religious privileges and attainments with Paul a mere transitory sentiment in the first zeal of conversion. He continued to count all these things "loss" (Phil. 3:8), the more he knew the now glorious, all gracious, all beautiful Person of Him Whose name had once filled him with hatred. Mark the longer period in ver. 8. In ver. 7 he counted it all "loss" "for Christ." But in ver. 8 he continues "Yea, doubtless and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." When a strong wind arises, high and long billows arise in the sea; a gentle breeze only produces low and short wavelets. It is the same with spiritual motions. When our mind is engaged with a beautiful and interesting object, or the heart moved by a mighty and elevating idea, we express ourselves in longer periods than in speaking or writing of ordinary things. We find this for instance in the first chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians, where the apostle, moved by the Spirit of God, pours out to the saints in Ephesus and to the faithful in Christ Jesus his heart, filled with the thoughts of God's wondrous counsels and blessings in Christ Jesus. The whole of the chapter (excepting the usual apostolic benediction in ver. 1 & 2), consists of only two periods. The first of them (ver. 3 -14) contains no less than 12 verses, and the second (ver. 15-23) nine verses.

But the apostle does not content himself with saying that he continues to count as loss all things that were formerly gain to him, but he adds, "For Whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ." The polished and learned man, brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, cannot find words strong enough to express his thorough abandonment of Judaism and of all its boasted privileges. The more he perceived the excellency and perfection of Jesus Christ, beholding with unveiled face the glory of the Lord, the more everything that had been formerly such a gain to him in the eyes of his co-religionists, appeared to him in the light of that glory not only "loss," but "dung," that he might "win Christ, and be found in Him "and "know Him."

This reminds me of a dear saint, who followed the apostle, as he had followed his heavenly pattern, who during her earthly career always set the Lord before her. The Christian lady referred to, possessed a marvelous memory and was so familiar with her bible, that she was able at once to point out any passage in the Scriptures referred to, often not only the chapter, but chapter and verse. And the word of God was not merely stored up in the memory of the head, but she had taken care to treasure it up in the memory of her heart, like the Lord's blessed mother, for she was a true Mary, the Lord's devoted handmaid. But the constant admiration by unwise friends, of her wonderful memory had perhaps impaired in her that all-important quality of real Christian humility: or was it that it pleased God to give to her, like to His apostle of old, a "thorn in the flesh," to prevent spiritual pride? However this may be, she was laid on a bed of sickness for many years, which at last impaired her memory to such a degree that the hitherto well known passages of Scripture—chapters and verses—began to be erased from

the tablets of her memory. But this infirmity could neither reach nor diminish the “good treasure of her heart.” This very Epistle of Paul to the Philippians had been one of her favorite portions in the New Testament. So that now, the memory of the heart lasting longer than that of the head, and supporting the weakness of the latter, this epistle remained longest in her memory. But gradually even this portion began to vanish away, i.e. the words though not the contents; and she retained only these words, “that I may win Christ” — “and be found in Him” — “that I may know Him.” At last, having lost nearly all her memory, there remained on its empty tablet—its “tabula rasa,” only one single word engraved, the word— “HIM.” — “That’s enough,” she said, “I have Him,” and nobody can take Him away from me, nor me from Him.”

“He,” Christ—was the sum of all her scriptural knowledge. All those Bible passages, formerly stored in the upper chamber of her memory, were now in the good treasure of the chamber of her heart, condensed in that one word, “Him” — “Christ.”

Is not this the right way of reading our Bibles, Christian reader? On the last page of holy writ, we find as the sum of the whole word of God, these two words, “I Jesus.” The Spirit and the Bride answer, “Come.” And at the close the Lord says, “Yea, I come quickly.” Can we, with His disciple, add in truth, “Amen, come, Lord Jesus”? We know that the Spirit and the Bride, His true church, as such, ever say, “Come” (ver. 17). But in ver. 20, it is John, as an individual believer, who says, “Amen, come Lord Jesus!” Can we add, in truth, our “Amen” to his? Only in the measure as Christ’s ever blessed Person is our object, and we “rejoice in the Lord always,” keeping our consciences sweet in His holy, yet, gracious presence, shall we be able to do so. Only in His presence can the hope of His coming again, have the power and comfort of a truly realized hope. The words, “I Jesus,” and, “Yea, I come quickly,” are in close connection.

Is it not the same in common life? Suppose, some one has gone into a far country, to prepare for his wife and family a better home. Every month brings them letters, each line breathing truest kindness and interest in the welfare of his own he has left behind, and proving that time and distance have not diminished his love and care for his own, and that he is ever the same loving and tenderly careful husband and father. Suddenly a telegram arrives with the news, “I come to-morrow to fetch you!” What an outburst of jubilant rapture will those few words, “I come to-morrow,” call forth from his own! They know what he is for them; therefore they feel what it means, when he says, “I come!”

And how comes it, beloved, that the hope of our Lord’s coming again, which we may expect every day, nay, every moment, has so little effect upon our hearts, our consciences, and our walk? How is it, that this precious portion of Christian truth, which formerly used to occupy the chief place in any meetings for Christian edification, so often recedes into the far background, so that for weeks, nay, even for months, scarcely any reference even is made to it? It used not to be so. What has caused this sad change which has come upon us? Is it not this, that the eyes of our minds, and, in consequence, our hearts and thoughts, have turned away from the glorified One at the right hand of God, and from His all-glorious, all-gracious, all-beauteous, and altogether lovely Person, and so been turned away to earthly things? We have ceased to realize what He is, “Jesus Christ, yesterday, to-day, and forever, the same.” Thus the hope of His coming again has lost its cheering, refreshing, comforting power as to the walk of so many believers, reducing them practically or doctrinally to the level of the world or of the religious “camp.” It was not so with the apostle of the church of glory, nor with his beloved Philippians, whom he called “his joy and his crown.”

(Continued from page 61.)

(To be continued.)

One Thing I Do, One Thing I Do: 1

1“Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing [I do]; forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

Thus, a man could speak, who was subject to like passions as we are. And not only so—he was “the chief of sinners,” which in his case was not a mere expression of false humility, but the simple truth, for he had been a blasphemer and injurious, persecuting the church of God. Like his namesake of old, he also had been “granted by request,”² but in a very different sense! The former had been given by Jehovah “in His wrath” to be king over His people, at their obstinate request, because they preferred a government after the manner of the nations to Jehovah’s government. But the “Saul” of the New Testament was the fruit of the prayer of the first Christian martyr— “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge” —to whose death Saul had consented, and been an active witness of it. The Saul of the Old Testament had been David’s persecutor; the Saul of the New Testament had persecuted David’s Son and Lord. The former was “little in his own eyes,” when he was anointed king of Israel. But he did not continue in that godly condition of soul, but became high-minded, self-willed and disobedient to God, and hence lost his throne and life. The Saul of the N. Testament, regarded as a prince among his people, was great before men at the beginning of his career. But the great “Saul” was changed into “Paul,” i.e. “small” (“Paulus”). He became “little in his own eyes, but like Christ’s humble forerunner, “great before the Lord.”

And what more helpful, beloved, to render us “little in our own eyes,” than keeping them, in the power of the ungrieved Spirit of glory, fixed on Christ, our Head in glory? Paul had been “apprehended” by the Lord of glory, and thus he “followed after,” that he might “apprehend that for which he had been apprehended of Christ.”

One constantly meets with the expression of “Saul’s conversion.” Now the meaning of “conversion” is the being turned right about face, so that the face is where the back had been, as in the case of the Thessalonians. Although this was, of course, true of Saul in a Jewish sense, yet the Lord’s dealing with him on his way to Damascus had the especial character, that he was “apprehended” by Christ.

When on his way to Damascus, persecuting the church of God, Saul had reached the highest round of the ladder of Jewish perfection. He was in the zenith of his religious fame and influence, carrying with him the letters of the high priest for persecuting the Christians at Damascus. Then and there it was, that a light brighter than the sun at noon, came down from the rejected and glorified Christ, and shone all around, and laid the persecutor flat on his face in the dust. It was a personal question between the glorified Christ and Saul. Thus the person of Jesus is

prominent throughout this chapter (Acts 9), as in the preceding chapter it is the person of the Holy Ghost. The greater the halo of Saul's religious renown and attainments had been, the deeper was his fall and the more complete the crash and smash of everything in which he had trusted and gloried.

But whilst the overpowering light from the glorified Christ laid Saul low in the dust, it required a still greater power to turn a Saul into a Paul. It was the Divine power of those words addressed by the glorified Head of the church to its persecutor, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" Those few words shook his soul to its inmost depths; and not his soul only, but also the religious scaffolding on which he had been building and in which he had trusted. What a terrible discovery those few words from the glorified One there above did effect on the smitten down one here below! Why, to be a zealous devoted Israelite was to be at open war with Jehovah, Whom he thought he was serving. A fearful discovery indeed! Not one single moral element of his soul could stand against its all-powerful and overwhelming effect. His soul alike with his body lay prostrate in the dust.

But this was not all. Those whom Saul persecuted were so entirely identified with that glorified One, Whom he had now to own as "Lord," that to persecute them was the same as to persecute Him—the Head of that wondrous body called out from glory, when its members were assailed on earth. Marvelous mystery, all powerful in its revelation! But to the zealous Jew a still more crushing discovery was impending, which "pricked and cut his heart," if possible, more deeply still than were the hearts of his co-religionists at Pentecost, in whose persecution he was engaged. At the trembling inquiry of the prostrate persecutor, "Who art Thou, Lord?" the reply comes from glory, "I am Jesus, the Nazaraean, Whom thou persecutest." The "Nazaraean," Whose very name was sufficient to elicit from a Jew words and gestures of deepest hatred, was the Lord of glory, David's Son and Lord at the right hand of God!—that name, which Saul had thought it his duty to oppose with all his energy, and which, if possible, he fain would have blotted out from the earth. Jesus, the Nazaraean, "rejected by the builders," was the Prophet and Messiah Whom Moses and the prophets had announced—the same Jehovah, Whom Saul had thought to serve by his persecution. More powerful than the light from glory, which had blinded his natural eyes, was the light from the glorified One, disclosing the truth to his inward eye. That truth, terrible as it was for the moment to Saul, proved to be of immeasurably blessed consequences to himself and to the church of God, which he had persecuted. That discovery was the "coup de grace" for the Judaism in Saul. God, Who now commanded the light to shine out of darkness, had shined in Saul's heart to give the light of the knowledge of His glory in the face of Jesus Christ.

But a continuous three days' blindness with fasting was required for Saul, for the deepening and maturing of God's work in him and to enlighten the eyes of his mind. Then, after the scales, as it were, had fallen from his eyes inwardly and outwardly, and he had been baptized by Ananias and been filled with the Holy Ghost, there proceeded from the house of Judas in the "straight" street a new man— "Paul" instead of "Saul;" instead of the merciless persecutor of Christ and His Christians, the fearless preacher of His name and grace and glory, "preaching straightway Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God," and also "the very Christ." He was a witness of faith, who, as he once had assisted in shedding the blood of Christians, from henceforth devoted his whole life to their service, ready to be "poured out as a libation on the sacrifice and ministration of their faith," till at last he also, like Stephen, the martyr and witness of Christ's glory, sealed with his own blood the testimony of his Christian career, so blessed and fruitful for his time and the ages to come.

(To be continued.)

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