

A VOICE FROM THE PAST:
THAT I MAY GAIN CHRIST¹
PHILIPPIANS 3

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This is an epistle that gives us the proper experience of the Christian, that is, the power of the Spirit of God working in him in his path; and consequently, we get the spirit and character in which a Christian should walk down here. In chapter 2 we see the graciousness of the spirit in which Christ walked. He always went down and humbled Himself, even down to the cross, and then God exalted Him as man to His right hand: even as Antichrist exalts himself, and is abased. Christ is the bright and perfect example of “He that humbles himself shall be exalted.” In chapter 3 you get the energy of the Spirit.

Now, we cannot have too distinctly and clearly before our souls the great basis of the completeness of redemption. In the first place, the putting away of sins and sin too—the putting away of all that the first Adam produces, and then our introduction into a totally new place—an entirely new standing—we have peace with God. Jesus, “was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification. Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 4:25–5:1). That is not all. Our peace is in Christ, and there is no possibility of condemnation for a person in Christ. We see the efficacy of the work of Christ, we get the

¹This article is excerpted from *Notes of an Address. Helps in Things Concerning Himself*, Vol. 2, 1892, pp. 14-24. Scripture text has been changed from the KJV to the NKJV for ease in reading.

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certainty of sins put away, are sealed by the Holy Ghost; consequently we are only waiting for Christ to come and take us to glory. That is our place, and all our duties flow from the place we are in, even as in natural things. We are brought into Christ-made children of God, sons of God; then our duties flow from that place. “Therefore be followers of God as dear children” (Eph 5:1). Again, “He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked” (1 John 2:6). Therefore, the first great thing is to know our place: not only that we are forgiven (though that is the first thing we need), not only that we are guilty, but the believer finds out a great deal more than that, he finds out that he is lost. Guilty brings in the thought of judgement; but if we are lost we do not think of judgement, because we are ruined already. I speak not only of what I have done, but where I am—outside Paradise, and totally ruined already. We are lost in our own condition. “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells” (Rom 8:18). So that I do not say merely that I am justified, but that I am saved, and in Christ. I do not believe we get into full liberty till we understand we are totally lost and saved—not only what we have done, but what we are.

It is important that the Christian should distinctly get hold of that, for it is what redemption means. As with Israel in Egypt, the blood upon the door-posts saved them from the judgement of God; but besides that, God took them out of Egypt, and put them into Canaan. We “are not in the flesh but in the Spirit” (Rom 8:9). It is a new condition and place altogether, and this is deliverance, not only forgiveness and justification, but deliverance; and, therefore, in Romans 7 it is not “How shall I get forgiveness?” but “who shall deliver me?” The answer is, “I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Rom 7:25). He finds his sins blotted out; defiled, he is washed; having offended, he is forgiven; guilty, he is justified; God has made that perfectly clear forever. But the old man is dead before God, and the new man is in Christ. Christ is my righteousness. I was lost, without hope in myself, but now I am in Christ before God. That is my deliverance. In Romans 5 you are justified; but in Romans 8 “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus” (v 1). To find out, practically, that I am lost, is a very different thing from finding that I am guilty; because, if lost, I have finished my whole history, and I must get my whole condition made new (thank God it is, in Christ). If I am guilty, I may hope to get forgiveness; but if I am lost, I must get a new condition altogether—a totally new creation in Christ Jesus. When I have this redemption, the

effect is to leave me, as a matter of fact, down here, being thus delivered, and then I begin to run the race; for you and I have in this world to go through the wilderness (to find ourselves in heavenly places too). God has minded that we should be thus exercised to discern good and evil, and what we get in this chapter is power in that course. We have to “run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus” (Heb 12:1-2). It is the expression, in Philippians 3, of the experience of one who was running the race faithfully.

Sin is never mentioned in the epistle; what you find in Paul was, that the power of the Holy Ghost was there. It was not that the flesh was not there, for he had a thorn in the flesh, but there was power to keep it down. You get complete deliverance here, entire freedom, for he was running his race free; and another you see is power, Christ’s power. He was perfectly free, or he could not have run on in that power, and also (which is practically a great thing), he had an object, which gave him singleness of eye and purpose. You get the man set perfectly free: “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death” (Rom 8:2). The principle of sin, in which I was lost, is dead and gone for faith, because Christ has died, and, therefore, I say I died: “Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 7:11). The life that I have in Christ, and as to the flesh, I say, “I died upon the cross.” That is the place the apostle was then in, and there was power, because “The law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death” (Rom 8:2). There is Christ’s power. His grace is sufficient for us; therefore we can never excuse ourselves if we commit sin, because Christ’s grace is sufficient for us. His strength is made perfect in weakness. It is not that the flesh is not there; but a dead person does not act. We fail; but the Christian condition is, “You are dead.” If there is carelessness and want of prayer, failure does come; but there is no excuse for it. If Christ is in me, there is life and power, and the flesh is a dead thing. *It is not that Christ has died for your sins, but you have died with Christ; that is where real freedom comes in, and power comes in too because Christ is there.*

You will always find that where Christ’s power is in us, Christ is the object of our life, as in Galatians 2, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me” (v 20). And then he adds, “And the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (v 20).

There is the object: wherever Christ is the power of life in us, Christ is the object of that life. Christ having become a man, and gone into glory, God has given the object of our delight also, and given us His Spirit to enable us to make it so. It is a wonderful thing to see that God has so set Christ before us, and given us His Spirit, and a new nature, to be able to enjoy Him, linking us thus with himself.

The next thing is, “that I may gain Christ” (3:8). That is what he means by “That I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me,” (3:12), and now he says, “I want to possess Him.” He is not looking at the salvation wrought out by Christ, but at the end; and therefore he says, at the close of the chapter, “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body” (3:20-21). It is the salvation we are expecting that he speaks of now.

We have the man freed, and with power; and we have the man with Christ as his object and nothing else: and there is where we all are, and it is just a question of our faith as to how far it is true of us practically. It all depends on how far Christ is our object. You have the graciousness of deportment in chapter 2. Here we get the active energy of the Spirit of God; and mark, it is where there is one single object that there is practical energy and power. “A double-minded man [is] unstable in all his ways” (Jas 1:7). In some things, he acts like a Christian; in others, he does not. If he has two or three objects, he is unstable, but if he has one object he walks with energy.

Now what characterized the apostle was that he had given up all things; not did “count them as rubbish” (Phil 3:8), but “do” now! Can we say that? At the moment of our conversion we all felt that all we had in the world had been deceiving us, and leading us to hell and its horrors. The pleasure, wealth, riches, ease, everything that was gain to us as men in the world, can we say of them, “I do count them but rubbish that I may gain Christ?” Paul was not satisfied with having counted, but he says, “I do count,” and further than this, “All this will only hinder me.” Like a man running a race, he has on a beautiful cloak, we will suppose; he finds it hinders him, and he throws it off.

It is the object we have that always characterizes us—blest be God, we have it in Christ unto everlasting life. It was not any uncertainty with the apostle, it was not that he doubted that Christ had laid hold of him, but he wanted to get Christ. There was this honest purpose of

heart—the man was free, he had Christ’s strength; and then there was this purpose of heart-spiritual energy and activity. There are two things which go together. The first, “that I may gain Christ,” and then our resurrection from the dead, that is, our own glory, which comes in as the second thing. First, “that I may gain Christ,” it was Christ Himself who possessed his heart; still he says, “if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead” (Phil 3:11).

Well, I can have but one thing as my object. If I am making tents, as Paul did, I shall do it well; it is our duty as Christians to be patient and gracious in meeting with hard men—wrong doers. You will find that everything is judged of entirely by the object a man has. If he wants to get a thing, he will spend his money without stint to get it—he estimates everything by his object. An avaricious man will say of a spendthrift, “Did you ever see such a fool!” And the spendthrift will say of one fond of money, “he might as well have a stone, for his money is no good to him.” The moment I get Christ as my object everything else will be as dross and dung, and there will be no want of lowliness, *because the nearer we get to Christ the less we think of ourselves*. I want to know Him, and the Spirit of God is not grieved. The path of the just grows brighter and brighter until the perfect day. His heart is more capable of knowing Christ, and he knows him better—he is not thinking of self. It is a privilege held out to us that we shall be so perfect that we shall only think of the Lord, and in any measure as we are near Him now, *we think of Him and not of ourselves*. The Christian looks at himself as forgiven, as justified, but as perfect, and going to be like Christ and with Christ. He has a new place; he is in Christ; he has it by the Spirit in faith now, and he wants actually to possess it.

Now how far can our souls say we are actually delivered, not only forgiven, but delivered? I do not mean that if you are careless you will not slip into sin, but there is a positive deliverance; we are not in the flesh at all. The world is there, Satan is there, and I have to watch every moment to have Christ sufficiently before my mind. You will find that nine-tenths of the things that are temptations to us would be no temptations at all if we walked with Christ. See a mother who has heard that her child has met with an accident on the railway, and lies at the station suffering; how she hastens to the spot, and does not even think of the show and vanity in the shop windows she may have to pass. Another time she might linger there, but not now. If our souls are filled with Christ, as I said, nine-tenths of the things that are temptations to

us we shall not think of at all. It is living as Christ—“By the words of Your lips, I have kept myself from the paths of the destroyer” (Ps 17:4). The great mass of the temptations we should escape altogether, because we should be thinking of something entirely different. God has called me up to be with Christ and like Christ, and now I am after that, and am looking for nothing else. We all have some object that we follow with energy and life, and can we say that it is Christ, and that that is the one thing that governs our hearts from day to day?

The Lord give us beloved, to know what that true liberty is; “Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty” (2 Cor 3:17)—liberty with God and from the things around: though we still have to contend, and shall have, too, yet it is with the joy of Christ in our hearts as we go on. God has called us in sovereign grace to be with Himself, like and with Christ forever, and where the soul is full of the Holy Ghost, there is joy and sustained freshness.