

WHAT IS CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITY?

WE have the principle of all holiness of walk from the fact of our position being in Christ. I must know that this is my place before God, if my walk is to be according to Christ. "For their sakes," said our blessed Lord, "I sanctify myself, that they also may be sanctified through the truth." He is set apart to God as the pattern-man in heavenly places, that the Holy Ghost may take and apply it to us here. I see this perfect Christ set apart for me in heaven, and I say I must walk according to the pattern. I will walk in love, because Christ also has loved us, and given Himself for us. I get there, "Be ye imitators of God." And in another place, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." He sets before us, as walking through this world, the kindness of God even to His enemies. The starting point of all my measure of conduct is the place in which I am already set in Christ.

Since the fall of man, since our judgment has been a fallen one by sin, our thought of obligation and duty is always as a means of gaining something. People often fancy, that if there is not the uncertainty attendant upon this responsibility to get life, there must be carelessness.

But supposing you have got children, they are your children and never can cease to be your children. But does this destroy their responsibility? Their relationship to you is the very thing that forms their responsibility. The principle of a real responsibility till sin came into the world was a blessed one. It was this—I am to act up to the condition that I am in. The Christian's responsibility is not that of a man hoping and trying to be a Christian. It is not at the time of the difficulty and danger that we get the capacity of walking according to Christ. The way to walk in a time of difficulty is not by valuing Christ *for the temptation* but for His own sake. If we live in the constant valuing of Christ for His own sake, we shall assuredly have Him delivering us from the temptation. If my heart is full of Christ, the things that are contrary to Him do not attract me. I may feel my failure and weakness all the more; but the God that, by power, has brought us into this place in Christ, can sustain us in it. The whole of our relationship with God upon the ground of the old man is closed in the cross, and then, in a risen Christ, all is begun afresh in perfect blessing, in the power of the deliverance in which we have been brought in Christ. The place in which we are thus set begins from the cross, where I see my old nature judged and set aside. And therefore it is that the apostle can say such a thing as "when we were in the flesh." There are multitudes even of true believers that say—What are we but in the flesh now? But the apostle says, "When we *were* in the flesh," evidently implying that we are not in the flesh now. It is what we were in the first Adam. The standard of our walk gets its real power and blessedness when once we see that

we are no longer in the flesh, but are set in Christ before God.

We see what the place of a Christian is, looked at in his privileges, and then what he is, looked at in his path down here, and how it is that a person, with the possibility of much infirmity, if he is not walking watchfully—how it is that he can walk according to his privileges. Because here we are in a world of temptation and evil, and we have got the flesh that the devil is always seeking to draw us aside by; and how is a person, walking in the midst of temptation, with the flesh there and the devil too, to walk according to this heavenly condition in which he has been put? The first thing is to know what the privilege is. The apostle was made to enjoy it in an extraordinary manner; but the place which he gives to himself is one which, in principle, belongs to every Christian. The title that took Paul to the third heaven takes all there. We do not realise it now to the extent that he did, but still that title gives us our place there. We are come to God in glory now: such is the place that is given to us. And therefore he says, I do not talk about Paul—"I knew a man in Christ." I do not get a man in the flesh, but a man in Christ. This is where the Spirit of God sets a Christian. It is the place of every believer. They may have great exercises of heart before getting there; but where He sets them is not in the flesh, but in Christ. This is not the flesh; it is the glory at the right hand of God. A man in the flesh cannot be there.

Where the apostle says, "When we were in the flesh," he means that we are so no longer; it is a past thing. If I say, "When I was in ———, I did so and

so," it means that I am not there now. In that way it is he says, "When we were in the flesh." He had had the commandment, and might assent to it that it was good, but he could not get power through it. It was not then with him, rejoicing in the Lord always, and saying, Of such an one will I glory. But there was his very being, his nature, his walk all opposed to God; and the consciousness that he had of himself and his flesh was this: "I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing." This is what he got the consciousness of before God. Supposing the man was desiring to do the right thing but did not do it—rather did what was the contrary—he had the consciousness that this was what he was before God. In Romans vii. he was walking in sin and death in the first Adam, and he had to answer for it. In chapter viii. he says another thing: "Ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit." There we have the man in Christ, and "there is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." There is the walking not after the flesh but after the Spirit that will be seen. But where is now the power for it? "What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh." Mark, that when he is under the law and has got these holy desires, which the new nature always must desire, he sees that the law is right, he consents to the law that it is good; but he also finds another law in his members, bringing him into captivity to the law of sin. He sees that it is of no use. How can I stand before God? I wish the right thing, and do the right thing. Am I not answerable to God? and how can I answer to Him, if I am

always doing the thing that is wrong? All through this part of Romans vii., mark, he does not speak of Christ, but of man in the flesh. It was not that there were not new desires, but he did not do them; and there he was, a responsible man, having to answer for his own condition before God; and he says, My condition is all wrong, "O wretched man that I am!" &c. That was true, but what was he speaking of all this time? The law. "We know that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin." It was not merely that the law judged any gross misconduct, but it required from him what he ought to be, quickening his desire and wish to be it, and yet he was not it. "I consent to the law that it is good." He has got to do with law. Again, what does he delight in? "I delight in the law of God, after the inward man." I have got a desire after what is right, but I have not got a Saviour. I have got a law, and what does this law say? You must love God with all your heart. But I do not that. Then you are lost. It requires from me what I ought to be, but what I am not. It requires from a man that he should not covet; that he should love God with all his heart, and soul, and might, and his neighbour as himself. But who is the man from whom that is required? Why, it is a man in the flesh, with all the lusts of the flesh constantly dragging him into evil.

The law requires from a man who is a sinner that he should not be a sinner. It is just that. If I then, as a responsible being, am under law, what can it do? Why, condemn me—righteously condemn me. It could not do anything else but condemn me. It comes and requires from me, when I am a sinner, to be what, as a sinner, I cannot be; and therefore as a man in the fle

if the law of God comes, it condemns him. It must condemn him, because the heart is so thoroughly corrupt and bad, that the very fact of a command being given only brings out the evil that is there. We know it by experience in our own hearts. If there were anything upon this table, and I were to say, "Nobody is to know what is there," at once everybody would be longing to know what it was. This is just human nature; it is not the fault of the law at all. Supposing you have children; they may have no particular desire to go out of the house; but if you tell them not to go and put a barrier to hinder them, then comes a child that wants to go out, and if it finds the barrier there, it will push all the harder against it to get out. The law says it must have obedience; but I have a disobedient will. The law says it cannot have a lust; but the lust is there, and therefore the law says, "Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them;" and the law of God is righteous of course in saying that. But in all that I do not get a word about Christ. I get the claims of God over man, looked at as responsible, as a child of Adam, when he is in his sins, and calling upon him for no sins. The effect of that is altogether condemning, and I cannot get rid of it. It is not merely that I give way to certain evil things again and again; but the tree is bad, the *will* is wrong.

Now this is just the contrast of what we find in Christ. When Christ comes, He says, "Lo, I come to do *thy will*, O God." And so it is with the saint in his measure. But the law being there, and the lust being there, the effect of a claim upon him is morally to bring the consciousness that, looked at in the flesh, he is a

sinner in the sight of God. It shows him his real condition, but does not take him out of it; and therefore he cries out, "O wretched man that I am!" &c. He had been striving to be better, and the only result was, that he gets this experience of himself by God giving him the law, which is the standard of what he ought to be. Then he says another thing, "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" He is looking now not at how he, as in the flesh, should be better, but that *Another* should come and take the matter up for him and go through it all. That is where the soul is brought when it is converted—when it discovers itself to be not merely a sinner, but without strength. I now get the consciousness of the weakness that sin has produced in my flesh, and I say somebody must take up the work for me; I cannot do it myself. I have the consciousness of what sin has made me in the presence of God, and I cannot get out of that condition. "Who shall deliver me?" Mark the answer. He says, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." It is all settled. He is thanking God already. Why so? Because "what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh" (the law was all right; but "what the law could not do"), "God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh." There I get God doing the whole thing. What the law could not do, because of this principle of sin that is in me, God, sending His Son, has done. Supposing I were to say to my child, "You love me; and if you do not, I will whip you," do you think it would make my child love me? Certainly not: I should not get a bit of love from him. So with the law. The law says, Love God; but this

never produces love. Commandment never produces love, nor changes the nature that does not love. What then can do it? "We love him because he first loved us."

The law tells me that God is a righteous Judge. It tells me what I ought to be; but what does it tell me that God is, except that He will not have unrighteousness? It tells me that I am to love God; but does it tell me what the God is that I am to love? It says nothing about it. It says you are to love Him; and if you do not, you will be punished. But it tells me nothing of what He is, that I may love Him.

But what does the gospel tell me? It tells me, You have not loved God, but God has been loving you all the time. Now that is the starting point for the soul. God has loved me when I did not love Him. It is true that we get new thoughts and desires; but when I am simple, the effect is that my conscience, getting into the light, sees and judges all my sins in the light; but I find that, this love of God having sent Christ, and Christ coming in the same love, God does not say, I will help you to love Me, but He says, I will love *you*; you cannot get rid of that sin in the flesh, but I will love you. "What the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son . . . for sin, condemned sin in the flesh." Where did He condemn it? In the cross. Now then I am pardoned; now I am free. I see the love of God, that when I had got into this terrible condition of death in sin in the flesh, Christ has been there and has condemned it. The sentence of God has been put upon it, and it is done. And that is why, looking at Christ, he can say, "I thank God, through Jesus Christ."

When he has seen what a man is, looked at as responsible to God under the law, he says, "O wretched man that I am!" But then he sees that Christ has been here, and done it all for him, and he can say, "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

The man now is not standing as himself, a sinner responsible to God, because he has owned himself entirely lost in that state; and now what he has learnt is this, that God has sent His Son, and has condemned sin in the flesh. Therefore there is no condemnation. God has condemned it already, and thus he comes not to be a man in the flesh, but a man in Christ. This is what we get in chapter viii. He is looked at as in Christ; he has got Christ as his life in the Spirit. Now he can say, I am in Christ. The second Adam, after having put away my sin on the cross, and having risen again, communicates His life to me. It is the eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us. I have seen this life; I have looked at Christ walking through this world, and there I see what love, what blessing, was in all His ways; what tenderness, what patience with His disciples. There, I say, that is eternal life, the life of God, and it has been manifested to me. In the 2nd chapter John says, "Which thing is true in him and in you." And now my standing in the presence of God is not in the old wretched flesh, but I am a man in Christ, because Christ is my life. That is the place in which we are set. Christ is my new life, and I am in Christ, in the presence of God.

In the case of St. Paul, where this truth was carried to the highest possible realisation, he was in the third heaven. The body could have no part in such a place

as that. There he was, not knowing whether he was in the body or out of it; and that is what he calls "a man in Christ." He is a man that is living, and really having his life from Christ, and united to Him in the power of the Holy Ghost, joined to Him in one Spirit, and that not in his condition as a child of Adam, but as born of God. So that when I look at Christ, as walking in this world, I can say that this is my life. I see this life in Him in all its perfectness, and I say, That is very precious. I see that very eternal life, which was with the Father, and I say, That is my life. I had a life in the first Adam, which brought in the bitter fruits of sin and corruption; but now I have got the life of Christ. But Paul could not stay in the third heaven; he had to walk in this world. But even as walking through the world, it must still be taking this blessed One as our life. When I see Christ walking in this world, was there anything inconsistent with this heavenly place? Never. He was the manifestation of the divine nature down here. Now that is what you ought to be. "He that saith he abideth in him, ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked." I get, that is, not merely what man under the law, but what the divine nature is, expressed in a man upon earth, and that is what a Christian ought to be. He is a man who has become a heavenly man; who has got his place in the presence of God, sin for ever put away, and the Holy Ghost uniting him to Christ, and in spirit and faith in the presence of God. And now he has to act so in the world, not as in the flesh, but the flesh being there; and, in trials and duties of all kinds that he has to go through, he is to abide with God. If he cannot abide with God in what he has got to do, he must give it up.

But Paul gets back to the world, and now comes trial. The flesh comes in. He had been in the third heaven; he had got this wonderful abundance of revelations, and the flesh says to him, There has not been a person in the third heaven but you. Now he is puffed up, and certainly that is not heavenly; it is the very contrary of it. And that is the way the flesh will use even being in the third heaven. He is not puffed up when he is there, because it is the presence of God, and nobody can be proud in the presence of God. Persons fancy that it makes people proud to be in the third heaven. Never! The danger is, when you get out of the third heaven, of the flesh being proud of having been there. We feel our nothingness in the presence of God. But now Paul finds that the flesh was just as bad and mischievous as ever. Wherever the flesh works, if it gets into the thought of the third heaven, it makes mischief; and if you could give a man the thought of a fourth heaven, it would only be worse. There is no mending it. And what does God send? A thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him. There is grace that Satan himself must be God's servant in the world, just as it was in Job's case. Who begins the business with Job? Was it Satan? No, it was God. God says to Satan, "Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth?" &c. And then God allows Satan to bring Job to the very point where He wanted him, the discovery of what he was. Job said, "When the ear heard me, then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me. Because I delivered the poor that cried," &c. And he had done it: that was his third heaven; and therefore the Lord allows Satan to break him down

entirely. And what does he say then? "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." That is exactly what he wanted. Satan had been used as an instrument of God to bring Job into the condition of being made nothing of in his own eyes, and then God can bless him. It is very disagreeable work to get to know ourselves, but very useful work. Peter is sifted, and has to learn that this confidence that he has in himself is the very occasion of his failure. In the end, the Lord not only restores his soul, but makes him the channel of blessings to others. When you know your utter nothingness, then you can go and help others. "Go and feed my sheep," the Lord says to Peter. It is very humbling and trying to be made nothing of, but very useful, because we are all disposed to think too good of ourselves.

Lest then Paul should be exalted above measure, a thorn in the flesh is given to him. We learn from the epistle to the Galatians that it was something which made him contemptible in his preaching. It was something to keep him from being puffed up, but that is not strength. We have got the blessedness of Paul in the third heaven. We have got the man in Christ, who can thank and bless God for what we are made in Christ, who can say of all of us, "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." But after this we have another thing, the flesh and its inclination to be puffed up. And then we find a third thing, the flesh made exceeding disagreeable. But that is not strength—on the contrary, it is the emptying of strength. You cannot get God to help the flesh and to help self-

will. He will break it down, He will humble you by it, but He will never help it. He breaks the vessel that we may know that the power is not of man but of God. So that Paul says here, "When I am weak, then am I strong." When I am weak, I feel that I am weak, I know the truth about myself. Here the apostle was preaching, and his manner of preaching was contemptible, and yet hundreds of people were converted through it. Well, that does not come from what is contemptible; it does not come from Paul, but from God. The Lord then, when He had made him feel his weakness, says, "My grace is sufficient for thee; my strength is made perfect in weakness." If Paul had got strength, Christ need not have had so much for him; but if Paul had none, the strength that came from Christ was in him. The man had been brought into conscious weakness, that the power of Christ might rest upon him.

Now there I have got, not the man in Christ, but Christ in the man, and that is what I want down here. If I think of the man in Christ, it is perfection. But when it is a question of walking down here, we want strength as well as sincerity; we want power. If the power be in myself, there is the old man set up, and that will not do. The old man must be put down, and then another power comes in: I have got Christ with me, I am a dependent man. Christ said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word which proceedeth out of the mouth of God." We see Him constantly dependent and always right. There is what is so difficult for us. We get into mischief just when we get into independence of God. And therefore it is that we so often see a Christian have a fall after a season of

great joy. Why? Because his joy has taken him away from dependence upon God. When I am emptied of self, and am in distresses, and infirmities, and necessities for Christ's sake, then I can say, I will glory in them. Why? "That the power of Christ may rest upon me." Now, there is where blessing is found—to be made nothing of in one's own conscience, but then to have the consciousness of the power of Christ resting on me. That is not the man in Christ, but the power of Christ resting on him as he walks down here; it is Christ in the man. Supposing I am emptied of self, and Christ is living in me, what shall I get? I shall not be always in the third heaven, but Christ is always there. I have got my security there, my life there, my righteousness there, everything there that I need. Christ is my title: I am in Christ, and not in the first Adam.

The robe that was put upon the prodigal son when he came home he had never had before. It was not a patching up of his old rags, but a new robe. The best robe was brought out and given. So what we had in Adam is lost, and never can be recovered; but we get a new and far higher thing. An innocent man is one who does not know good and evil. A holy man knows good and loves it. It is not now mere innocence, but what Christ is worth in the presence of God that I have got. The robe that the father put upon the prodigal was a new robe out of the treasures of his own house, that he had never had before. God has given us Christ in heaven. I am not always in the third heaven, but Christ is there, and my place and title is to be there by faith, according to the working of the Spirit of God. If Christ is my life, there is nothing in that life incon-

sistent with the third heaven. The Christ that is in heaven, even when He was walking upon earth, could say, "The Son of man which is in heaven;" and all His life down here was the expression of that. Our union with Him is a real living union. I am in Christ above, and this Christ is in me below; and there I get the principle of all my walk, and the power of it too. I may be about my work and business; but in that work and business I have to live Christ—to walk in the Spirit of Christ, whatever circumstances I am in. Supposing I am doing that, the Spirit is not grieved, and I enjoy the third heaven: I have not been inconsistent with it. I have not been there, but I have walked consistently with it, because I have walked in the Christ that is there. He is both my life and the power of my life. If I have been in the third heaven, and come out of it to be engaged in service, I may go on with my affections the same spiritually and morally; and when I go back to it, I enjoy it all the more. Take a man working for his family all day long. He may have to labour hard, and away from them, but when the work is done, he comes back and enjoys them all the more. So the Christian, besides being in the third heaven, has to walk through the world. But Christ is His righteousness, His title for being there, and therefore His place is in heaven, and walking in the power of that life, He is back into the third heaven as happy and fresh as ever. We may fail in it, but that is what the power of Christ resting on us down here works in us. Mark how Paul speaks as regards our title to take such a place. "I knew a *man in Christ* . . . of such an one will I glory." In that we ought to glory. If I say I am in Christ, I glory in

it. I say, What an astonishing place God has put me in! He has taken me out of the ditch and placed me with His Son. He takes a thief upon the cross and puts him in the same glory as the Son of God. He takes a Mary Magdalene, from whom He casts out seven devils, and puts her in the same glory as the Son of God. I am to glory in that. And what is the effect down here? That I shall be made a fool of. If you talk of a man in Christ—of such an one—He says, I will glory; but if you talk of me, Paul, why I was going to be puffed up about having been in the third heaven! There can be no good at all for me, unless I am emptied of self. When there, so little thought was there of self, that he did not know whether he was in the body or out of it.

People may say all this is presumption. Allow me to say a word about that. Are you in Christ? If you are not in Christ, you are lost. It is no good saying it is presumption. If you are not in Christ, you are lost; if you are in Christ, you are safe. What is the effect? Is not Christ your righteousness? Are you not going to glory in that—not in yourselves? We do not think badly enough of ourselves as sinners in the flesh. If I know what it is to be lost—without Christ, I shall not think it presumption to glory in being in Him. I have no need to think of myself, because I am perfectly happy in the presence of God. He has made me happy by the grace that has brought me there, and by the present communion that I have with Himself in the place in which He has put me. We have to be taught practically; and therefore Paul had this thorn in the flesh. After he knew his own wretchedness and Christ his

righteousness, there was the perfect learning of his own nothingness. This is the grand work which remains for us. We are in Christ as our righteousness; but if we have only a light thought, that is not communion with God, though grace comes in, and there is intercession. The man in Christ has got his standing with God, and when he has that, his business is to manifest Christ before the world. There he wants power, and the power comes—not merely from having been in the third heaven—not merely from being made the righteousness of God in Christ. He wants *present* power. To be sincere is not enough. You will meet with temptation; you will have your business, your trials of one kind and another; and you want the power that gives Christ a preciousness to you, that makes everything you meet with to be as nothing to you. It is Christ Himself that becomes your power—the power of Christ resting upon you. Now I ask you, whether you can say, “When we were in the flesh?” It is an important thing; and the apostle, speaking of it, says, “When we *were* in the flesh.” Have you learnt that the ground upon which you stand before God is not the ground upon which the first Adam stood, but that God has put you upon a new ground, in the second Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ? If so, I say, you are a man in Christ, and therefore you must walk as Christ walked. But if not, you have got a lesson to learn, to have your souls realising that you are lost without Christ, and, therefore, if you are to have hope of anything, it must be in Christ. But God puts me in Christ; and then I say, Oh! I am in Christ before God. He bore my sins and put them away; He blotted them out for ever. But though

there is the power of the new life, and the presence of the Holy Ghost, of myself I will not glory, save in what pulls this wretched flesh to pieces; but in Christ I will glory.

Do you desire to manifest Christ to the world? You will say you want power; but if so, you must be emptied of self, and find Him your righteousness before God; and His power you get in your weakness as your power to walk through this world. Then our hearts can say, Come, Lord Jesus.

The Lord give you to know what it is to value Him now: first, as poor sinners, knowing Him as meeting all our need; and then, in the communion of His love, as One that is dear to our hearts, and as One that we long to know face to face in all His fulness.

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