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THE CROSS OF CHRIST

AND

A MAN IN CHRIST.

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THE CROSS OF CHRIST AND A MAN IN CHRIST.

(1 COR. I. 17-31; 2 COR. XII. 1-10.)

I DESIRE to speak a little to-night upon those two great subjects: first, the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ; and secondly, the man in Christ. It is interesting to see how the apostle, in writing to these saints at Corinth, begins with the cross and winds up with the man in Christ. Perhaps we know but little of those two great subjects. Those at Corinth had little idea of either. They were sadly deficient in the truth as to the cross, and the apostle can only say as to the second point, "I know a man in Christ." He does not say "*we*" or "*you* know," but "*I* know." But it was his great desire for them that *they* might know both of these great realities; and I am sure it is the desire of the heart of Christ for us to-day. It is a day of great weakness, and of pretension. It may seem strange to us that these two things should be found together, but I think they always go hand in hand. Weakness

comes from allowing the fleshly mind a place, and the flesh is always pretentious. As spiritual power decreases pretension to great things and religious activity increases. It has been so in the history of the profession of Christianity. In Thyatira the last works were more than the first. I take first works to be those done in the energy of first love; but the assembly had left its first love in the Ephesian state, and the works done in that state were devoid of lustre in the eye of God, hence the church is exhorted to "Repent, and do the first works." (Rev. ii. 5.) Works in themselves can have no value in the eyes of God; it must ever be a question of the state of soul from which they spring. God may be pleased to allow us to serve Him a little, and He is pleased to give each of us something to do for Him, but the labour of our hands can give no gratification to Him if our hearts be not right in His sight. "If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned." (Cant. viii. 7.) And we are told in 1 Corinthians xiii. 3 that "Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity (love), it profiteth me nothing." The spring of all the activities of God toward us has been the

love of His heart, and this is just what fills our souls with unspeakable joy, and it is what will constitute our eternal happiness. The love of God is to be the pulse of the universe, and all service will spring from the glad hearts of His intelligent creatures quickened into life by the manifestation of that great love in the person of Christ.

It was always needful and becoming to the saint of God to walk in humility of mind and lowliness of heart, but it is especially so in these days when there is so much fleshly activity in divine things coupled with the apparent disregard for the desires of the heart of Christ, and with supreme contempt for everything that is of God. The so-called preaching of the gospel and the theatrical performances which often accompany it rival, as entertainment for the natural man, the drama or the pantomime, and few seem to be willing to do anything for Christ without blowing a trumpet to call the attention of the world to their deed. Converts are counted by the hundred that a little glory may be cast upon the creature, and deeds of every description must be blazoned abroad that a little worship may be called forth from the corrupt heart of man. Few care to leave everything they do in

the hand of Christ until that day when, in the presence of Him who loves us perfectly, and who knows us perfectly, and who forgets nothing, He shall reward every man according to his works, and all shall have praise of God. It is Laodiceanism, and in spite of all the pretension to be something and to sing their own praises, He has to say to that assembly, "Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." (Rev. iii. 17.) We need to take care that we fall not under a like delusion. We must keep in mind that it is only in the power of divine love we can do things acceptable to God, and that in the midst of a scene of such confusion as we find ourselves, a path of retirement is the right path, and if God give us anything to minister to others, if He commit any line of service to us, He will open a way in which we will be able to serve, and we will most likely find in the long run, though scorned and despised by the mass, that, "The words of wise men are heard in quiet more than the cry of him that ruleth among fools." (Eccles. ix. 17.)

We have, perhaps, through the infinite mercy and love of Christ gathered up a few

fragments of truth, and they have been very sweet to our taste, and they have become the strength of our hearts; but there is just a possibility that we might forget to have what we have received maintained in our souls in the power of the Spirit, and the fleshly mind might assert itself and readily attribute to its superior wisdom that which has been given to us in the power of God; and the truth that once exercised us, and brought us down upon our faces before God, might lose its blessed influence over our souls, and instead of keeping us in contact with God, it might take the form of a lifeless creed, adopted by the flesh, with all the vitality and health gone out of it. May both speaker and hearer be preserved from this; but it is a very real danger, and one, thank God, which it is possible to avoid.

I am sure we should advance in the knowledge of God. If we keep near to Him we are sure to make progress. You cannot keep in company with any one without getting acquainted with him; and if we keep company with God, we will most assuredly reap the benefit of it in the knowledge of Himself. "Filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding" (Col. i. 9) is the desire of our

God for us; and His Holy Spirit is the power by which we are enabled to take in the light that is so freely given to us. We owe nothing to the mind of man.

In the world you get the mind of man at work, each individual taking up a special line of things, and making himself well acquainted with his own particular branch of knowledge, possibly knowing little or nothing of other things. But in the things of God it is quite different. The mind of God is one whole, and though it has to be learned in detail, and this may be slow work, no one can be an expert in any particular doctrine. It so hangs together, and is so interwoven, that to be faulty in one line is to be faulty in all. We sometimes hear of one man being well instructed in prophecy, another in the church, and another in the gospel. I am certain it is all a mistake. It has often been remarked that there are no specialists in the things of God. Everything is known as we know Christ. The truth of God is not to be learned as an art or science. It is all comprehended in a Person, and it is only as we know that Person that we know anything rightly. And it is really as we grow in stature that we grow in divine wisdom. The mind of God is

known as we know Himself; and what is needed is "the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him." (Eph. i. 17.) The farther we get on in the mind of God, the better we know the very simplest elements; and indeed if we are weak in one thing, we are weak in everything. It might be thought that I am forgetting that there is "*milk*" and "*meat*." I am keeping the fact of this well in mind, but I think that one who can only take "*milk*" is weak. He is in an infantile condition, and that condition is not supposed to continue. I may be told also that there is Peter's line of truth, and that there is Paul's, and one may know a good deal of what Peter has taught, without knowing the "things hard to be understood" put forth by Paul. But my answer to that is, that Paul was sent to the Gentiles, and the Spirit of God directs us who are Gentiles to our own apostle. We must learn from the one commissioned to teach us. I do not mean that we should leave out Peter's teaching, or the teaching of any other who has ministered the word of God to His own, but we must first learn from Paul, and if we do, we will find that Peter has "*added nothing*" to him. (Gal. ii. 6.)

If I do not know the meaning of *the cross*, I

cannot know the meaning of "*a man in Christ.*" These truths meet together in the soul, and I cannot know one without the other. The cross is the condemnation and judgment of the flesh. It also gives me to see the value of fleshly wisdom; for after man had been given 4000 years in which he might put in operation and develop the resources of the natural mind in which he gloried, in the cross of Christ is set forth the full growth and value of that wisdom. Man condemns his Creator to the death of a malefactor, and hangs Him upon a gibbet. The world by wisdom knew not God. Who would be insane enough to trust the fleshly mind after such an exhibition of its folly?

I may be told that men have made great progress within the last 1000 years. Progress in what? Men have been very inventive, and the resources of nature have been revealed and used to embellish the world and to minister to the lust and pride of the flesh; but is God better known, and are men less selfish and more affectionate towards each other? And, further, all the progress the world has made has been made in the light of Christianity; and the benefits that men speak of, as proofs of the capacity of the creature to fathom the secret of

the universe, are not apparent where the light of the gospel is not shining. Outside Christendom things remain pretty well fixed and stationary.

I do not say Christianity has been set up to bring about these results that men glory in, but through its healthful and beneficent influence the minds of men, even where the soul does not savingly profit, are set free from the degrading power of absolute darkness, and Satan, his great enemy, has to alter his tactics, and unable to keep him enslaved in open idolatry, nakedness and superstition, he seizes hold of the pride of his heart, to make him deny the source of all the light that has come to him.

It is not hard to see that, not only does the world by wisdom know not God, but, even where God has in any measure given a revelation of Himself, the tendency of man is to give up that revelation. It was so immediately after the flood, and it is so to-day.

The cross is not only the exhibition of man's foolishness, though it is that in the fullest way, for it was the leaders of the world condemned the Son of God to that death, but it is also the demonstration of man's enmity against God. Not only did the world not know Him, but it

hated Him. The enmity that is seen coming out of the heart of man against Christ is the hostility of the flesh toward God.

But if the cross throws such strong light upon the heart and mind of man, laying bare the unreasonable and hideous hatred of the flesh, it also throws its clear and searching light upon the heart of God, and by it I see God come out as a Saviour God to deliver His creature from that flesh, that was so incorrigibly bad and wicked that nothing could be made of it. I see it all judged and set aside in that cross, and God revealed in the unfathomable love of His heart as the One who gave His Son to bear that judgment.

Now with that cross all the activities of God will be consistent. The first thing you get after the cross and resurrection is the gift of the Spirit, that the preaching might go forth. The report must go out in the power of the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven. In this work God will not take up the flesh. The cross, as we have seen, is the end of that. The preaching was not with the wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. It is the flesh that is affected by excellency of speech, wisdom of words and human eloquence; there

things are all destructive of Christianity, because they appeal to the flesh which God has set aside in His judgment. An orator addresses the feelings and emotions of men. He is not always anxious to enlighten, but works upon the nerves of his audience. The servant of God seeks to enlighten and to do no more. He seeks to get at people's consciences, because it is the conscience that takes account of God. Paul did not desire to make proselytes to Christianity. He wished the faith of those who believed to stand in the power of God. The gospel is *the power of God* to salvation, not the power of man, though it be men that preach it; and therefore the apostle only wished their faith to stand in the power of God.

The next thing we come to is the *calling*, and in this also God was true to the cross. Not many wise men after the flesh were called. God chose the foolish things, and the things that were not. He will not have flesh glory in His presence. So also the things that God has prepared before the world to our glory, these are beyond the reach of the mind of the natural man.

But now (verse 30), "Of him are ye in Christ Jesus." The cross is the end of you as in Adam. By the Spirit you are of God, and in Christ. Of

God! How very wonderful! *Of Him* as begotten by the revelation of His love in the death of Christ. *Of Him* as to life and nature; and if *of Him we are in Christ Jesus*. In a new order of man. The natural and earthly gone in the cross, and the heavenly and spiritual brought to light in Christ. Then He is become wisdom to us, and everything else that is needed.

In 2 Corinthians xii. the apostle says, "I know a man in Christ." He could only get to know that man by the teaching of the Spirit; and if you and I are to know a man in Christ, we must be taught of God. We all know a little of what it is to be in Adam. This is what we are by nature, but a man in Christ is not so easily known. It is a very abstract thought. Everything in Christ is of God; it is of His nature. Of course Adam innocent was of God in the sense that he was God's creature, and formed by God out of the dust of the ground, and made a living soul by God's breathing. But a man in Christ is of God in quite another way. He is begotten of God. The light of the revelation of God in Christ has in the power of the Spirit produced a new being who is of the nature of God.

And such an one was caught up to heaven. He was fit for that place. It is the place to

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which he belongs. All such will be caught up one day, not to come back to their life of responsibility like Paul, but to abide there. You tell me our bodies will be changed. Quite so, but that will be accomplished by the power of Christ. But the man in Christ is fit for that place.

Paul had to come back again to go on with his service to Christ. And now the flesh is ready to adorn itself with this honour that was conferred upon the apostle. But the Lord took care of His servant. But we learn from this that the flesh is unmendably bad, and we become thankful to God that He has dealt with it in the cross of Christ and removed it from before Him in judgment.

How blessed it is to know that we belong to an order of things that are of God, and to know that we are of God! To be able to take account of ourselves in this way is most wonderful. And if we are to understand anything of Christianity we must get hold of the truth of "*A man in Christ.*" We need to get grounded in the truth of those two great things that I have sought to bring before you, "*The cross of Christ*" and "*A man in Christ.*"

