

The Christian's Standing, Object, and Hope

by

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"Brethren, be ye followers together of me" (Philippians 3:17). "Those things which ye have both learned and received and heard and seen in me, do" (Philippians 4:9).

It is interesting to note the character in which Saint Paul, by the Holy Spirit, speaks to us in the passages quoted. In the Epistles to the Romans, I and II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, and I and II Timothy, he calls himself "Apostle". In I and II Thessalonians he uses no term at all in regard to himself. In Philemon, he is "a prisoner of Jesus Christ," and in Philippians, only, "a servant of Jesus Christ."

So that when he writes and speaks here, and says, "be ye followers of me," he speaks not as one endowed with extraordinary gifts, or one privileged to see unspeakable visions, not as a laborious Apostle, nor as a gifted vessel, but as the "Servant of Jesus Christ," the simple Christian. We could not follow him in his labours as an Apostle, in his rapture to the third heaven and Paradise; but we can follow him in his simple Christian character as a servant, and this Epistle where he exhorts us to follow him, is the only Epistle in which he thus describes himself simply as a servant. It is

true that in Romans he styles himself a "servant of Jesus Christ," but he adds, "called to be an Apostle"; and in Titus, "a servant of God, and an Apostle of Jesus Christ."

We can follow him when he sets the pattern as he does in I Timothy 1:16. "Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy that in me first, Jesus Christ might, show forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting." What a pattern! What a hope-inspiring pattern! What an encouraging pattern! What a blessed pattern! What a pattern for poor lost sinners (I Timothy 1:13)! What a pattern for such as have been "blasphemers, persecutors, injurious"! The Apostle couples himself with another servant of God when he says to Titus (3:3), "We ourselves were sometimes foolish disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another." But he touches the lowest depth of all when he says, "Sinners; of whom I am Chief" (I Timothy 1:15).

What a pattern for Pharisees, for all who are seeking to be saved by works! He refers to this in Philippians 2:3, where he declares that he has no confidence in the flesh," although possessing all the advantages enumerated in verses 4-6. So that, however far any may go in working out a righteousness of their own, so that they may have confidence in the flesh, they hear a voice from a higher height saying, "I more" (verse 4). No one could excel Saul of Tarsus. Hear him in verses 5, 6. The point here is not about sins as in I Timothy 1, but about his "gains". Hence in verse 7 he is not speaking of his needs as a sinner, but of his advantages as a religious man; it was not that Saul as a sinner needed righteousness, but that Saul as a Pharisee preferred the righteousness of God because it was infinitely better and more glorious than any other. It would be a positive loss for anyone to have a righteousness of his own, seeing God has provided "that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God through faith."

This brings us to the first of three things which are revealed in this chapter as making the perfect character of a true Christian. They are like the three things of I Thessalonians 1:9,10.

1. The Christian's Standing — Turning from idols (verse 9)

"Found in Him" (Philippians 3:9). This is the Christian's standing. Nothing less, nothing lower, nothing different. Not partly in Christ and partly in a church, but "found in Him." It is in Christ that we must be found, in His righteousness. Like stones in the Temple, hid in Christ. If we are not found in Him, it matters little where else we are. If we are found in Him, it matters little where we are not found. Oh, to be found "in Him," in our own experience! This, then, is the proper Christian standing. See also Galatians 2:15-24.

2. The Christian's Object — To serve the living and true God (verse 9).

"That I may know Him" (Philippians 3:10). Here, again, true Christianity throws us back on Christ, and takes up the thoughts from verse 8. Our object is not this or that church, or this or that work, but Christ Himself in His own glorious Person.

As to the natural man, all is different. The ancient philosophy had a motto continually sounding in its ears, "Know thyself." This saying was introduced by Solon, one of the seven wise men of Greece, and the wisest of them all. A lawgiver, a great reformer, and a great patriot, 638 years before Christ, Solon gave this as his most precious wisdom. It was carved over all the schools and seats of learning, its letters may be seen to-day carved in the marble ruins of Greece. It was good, so far as man's wisdom went; it was the best that man could do! But oh! how impossible to obey it! It is the one thing man never could do. It is the one thing none of us know." The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately

wicked. Who can know it?" And if we could know ourselves thus, what then? When we came to this knowledge, and saw ourselves and our ruin, would it not end in despair? No, we can only know ourselves by the knowledge of Christ.

Christianity came and brought with it a loftier motto, a heavenly wisdom, a Divine truth: "That I may know Him." And why? Because it is only by comparing ourselves with that which is perfect that we can form a true judgment (II Corinthians 10:12). How can we know whether anything measures what it ought to?

Only by bringing it to the standard. How can we tell whether a weight is correct? Only by putting it in the balances. How can we tell whether anything is perfectly upright or perpendicular? Only by applying a plumbline to it. How can we tell whether anything is perfectly straight or horizontal? Only by applying a straight edge, or a spirit level to it. We could never tell, though we tried for years, unless we applied the true test. We might think a thing was right measure; we might believe a thing was right weight; but we could not possibly know it. So it is with ourselves. We might study ourselves all our lives, we might compare ourselves with others — I might fancy I was this, or hope I was that, or believe I was the other, but apart from Christ's perfect standard, I could never know it.

Hence we see the highest earthly wisdom is at fault. This was the best it could do, but it was a failure! Not until Christianity came, could a man know himself. Why? Because Christianity is Christ. Tried by other standards we might compare more or less favourably, but tried by Christ, God's standard, tried by Christ, God's glory, there is only one result for all. "All have | sinned, and come short of the Glory of God." That is why we must be "found in Him," not having our own righteousness, but covered over with His righteousness. But the desire of the Apostle here is the object of the Christian, and this is Christ, always CHRIST, only CHRIST.

Alas! How many have other objects, how many are occupied with lower objects!

Paul's spiritual gain

We have considered St. Paul's natural advantages, which he once considered his gains, but which he had learnt to count as loss. We now come to his real spiritual gain. In Philippians 3 we learn what this was, viz., "The power of Christ's resurrection." Paul knew he had died with Christ, and had risen with Christ, but he wanted to know (to get to know) what the power of Christ's resurrection was, what it meant to his own life and service. Too many are occupied with the church and its service; Paul wanted to be occupied with Christ's service, with the things of Christ. Even the Word of God is useless without Christ, for "the letter killeth." The one great reason of the lowness of Christian walk is that the eye is taken off from Christ, and rests on some lower object, either on one's self, or on others, or on one's service. Now Saint Paul's object was one (verse 13). "This one thing I do," whether he was resting or travelling, making tents or planting churches, Christ was his object (verse 10). At home or abroad, by sea or by land, by night or by day, alone or with others, "This one thing I do;" and this, remember, not as the Apostle, not as the enraptured Saint, but as the Servant, the one who addresses us in the words of the passages quoted.

Nor should we ever be satisfied with anything lower than this. True, we all fail sadly. Why? Why do we fail in other things? What were we told when we learned to write? "Look at the copy." The copybook had a line of perfectly-shaped letters printed at the top, we looked at it, and perhaps our first line was fairly well done, but what was our tendency? Each line we looked at the last we had written, instead of looking at the copy, so the writing grew worse and worse. This is our tendency in the spiritual life. We copy one another: we are copies of copies, instead of copies of Christ. No! Christ must be our object, and this includes all else. In this way alone can

we walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called (Ephesians 4:10).

Christ is our strength as well as our righteousness, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength." This being so, it is our adversary's one aim to keep us from Christ. To accomplish this, he will occupy the sinner with his sins; he will occupy the penitent with his repentance; he will occupy the believer with his faith, as though it and not the Object of it were the ground of his salvation. He will occupy the servant with his service; and the saint with his holiness. It matters not what it is, anything can be used for the same end, and if the end is not gained by one thing it is by another: Christ is shut out of view.

How many Christians are taken up with something short of Christ! They are occupied with their holiness instead of with the Holy One; they are occupied with the promises instead of with the Promiser; they are occupied with the blessing instead of with the Blessor. And yet having Him we have everything. The promises of God "in Him are yea and in Him Amen." His holiness is mine. His blessing is mine. The full occupation with a Heavenly Object will alone make us Heavenly without an effort. We have not to try to be this or that: we "beholding ... ARE changed" (II Corinthians 3:18). Nothing else will form our character. It is the object that forms the character; therefore let us run with patience the race that is set before us looking unto Jesus" (Hebrews 12:1,2).

And now, to help us and make us look to Christ we have a blessed Hope given to us, a hope in Christ. This will ensure our looking to Him. This brings us to the special object of Philippians 3. (See I Thessalonians 1:10, "to wait for His Son from heaven.")

3. The Christian's Hope — To be like Christ (verses 20,21)

"Our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our

body of humiliation that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body " (verses 20, 21).

Here our hope is presented in a manner quite as characteristic as our standing and our object. If our standing is to be found in Christ, then our object is to know Christ, and our hope is to be like Christ. Our hope is not the glory of the Kingdom, but "the Saviour"; not the "Restoration of Israel," but Israel's King; and when we see Him, we shall be like Him (I John 3:1,2). That is the hope presented here.

Here we have a "body of humiliation," but we shall be changed. There we shall have a body like His own glorious Body — for we shall be like Him.

Here we have a body in which we groan, but we shall be changed. There we shall be free from all sin and sorrow, for we shall be like Him.

Here we have a body of suffering and death, but we shall be changed, There we shall have a body of immortality and life, for we shall be like Him.

This is our hope. No sooner do we find ourselves in Christ as our righteousness, than we desire to know Him as our Object, and look for Him as our Hope.