

THE NEW CREATION.

2 CORINTHIANS V. 13-21.

It is blessed to see in this chapter how the thought of *God* comes out in the new creation. In this aspect man is gone as to his sins and responsibility—dead in them. The judgment of the first Adam is complete. The old thing is entirely gone. It is a new creation now, and in this new creation I find God instead of man. Even Christ Himself, as known after the flesh, is known no more. True, He was, when down here, the hope and expectation of faith as coming into the world; but the apostle only knows Him now as having died for all and glorified, all under death whether Jew or Gentile, and Christ no more known after the flesh—that is, as come after the hopes of man in it—but Head of a new creation, where all things are of God, and in which we have been made in Him the righteousness of God. God has manifested Himself in the second Man, and wrought atonement in His death, and now we are the righteousness of God in Him.

In the first creation we see man and his responsibility. In the new creation, all things are of God, and man is reconciled by Jesus Christ unto Himself. We want to have the power of this in our souls, to live as belonging to the new creation, as reconciled by God to Himself, all that belonged to the old creation for ever gone to faith,

“old things are passed away, behold all things are become new.”

We see how the apostle walked in the power of this in verse 13. “Whether,” he says, “we be beside ourselves, it is to God.” That is, if he were beyond the influence that belonged to him as a man, it was not an excitement that belongs to those influences, it was because he was absorbed in God. It is what is called ecstasy. When his spirit was free to rise above present service in what he was in Christ, he was lost in God, carried out beyond himself. If he were sober, if he had to weigh difficulties—come down into the sober estimate of what was before him—it was God in love working in him. His thought was entirely for others in that love. This was his daily life ; as to himself, transported with God ; and, when he did think about things down here, all his thoughts were for others. It was the love of Christ that constrained him, and he looked upon all around in connection with the death of Christ. It was no longer a living Messiah in the flesh with promises for Israel. All this was over. Christ had died, and He judged that Christ would not have gone into death if men had not been there. The whole history of Adam’s race is closed in death. If they had not all been dead, Christ would not have been found in death ; why have gone down there if others were not lying there ? And therefore those who from amongst these lived were now to live not to themselves, but to Christ who

died for them, and rose again. Thus, if he met an unconverted man, he would not think of him as an old acquaintance, and know him as such. He would look upon him as one that was dead and needed to be saved by the death of Christ. Or, if the person was a Christian, it would be just the same. He would not know him after the flesh according to an old acquaintance with him; he would look upon him as one alive with Christ, and his one thought would be that Christ might be glorified in him. Even Christ Himself was not to be known any more, in connection with this creation. He had died to it, and if any man is in Christ, he is of the new creation, where old things are passed away, and all things are become new, and all things are of God. Man is looked upon as dead, and God brings in a new creation.

We have the same aspect of truth, when in verse 19 he speaks of Christ coming in the flesh. It is not looked upon as fulfilling promises to Israel, but God revealing Himself in grace to the world. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." This was the aspect of Christ's first coming, in which the apostle thought of Him. We know He came to His own, and was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God to confirm the promises made to the fathers. All this is blessedly true; but here we have God in man come here, and the apostle sees neither Jew nor Gentile. If God were in Christ, He acts toward the *world*.

To what portion of it can you confine Him, if it be a question of God displaying Himself in grace in the world? For the same reason when he speaks of the love of Christ, he judges all to be dead, and sees neither Jew nor Gentile, but a new creation, in which God counts every man that is in Christ.

We know that that is God as to the glory of His divine Person, but the apostle is speaking here historically; and therefore when he looks upon the Lord Jesus living in the world, He sees God in Him acting in overtures of grace to the world. God *was* in Christ; that is the great fact, that God has been here as the Reconciler, and man would not be reconciled. Does the apostle say that God is reconciling us? No, but that God *has* reconciled us by Jesus Christ unto Himself and has committed unto us the word of reconciliation to the world. Specially, no doubt, the apostles, but in their measure true of all. Man would not have God when He came, and therefore he had to make Christ sin, to work atonement for us, and now He is at God's right hand, in whom we become the righteousness of God. The apostle does not say to the Corinthians, Be ye reconciled, for they *were* reconciled; but Christ being in heaven, having gone there through death in working out atonement for us, and His presence there being necessary to complete all in glory. He must have ambassadors to carry out His work of reconciliation here; so the apostle says, when he preaches—that is, the gospel to sinners—"We pray in

Christ's stead, be reconciled to God." That is what he had to say to men as Christ's ambassador. How far are we living thus? Living in the power of God's new creation, judging the whole thing belonging to the first creation as gone to faith, and entering into the blessedness of our place in Christ, in the power of an ungrieved Spirit? Exercised for others, that the life of Christ may have power in their walk and ways; judging evil practically in our own path through the world, but yet having our souls so full of our blessedness in Christ, of what it is to be reconciled to God, that directly opportunity arises, our hearts burst forth in praises to God, and ever go forth after others still dead in their sins. That this may be so practically, we must bring the death of Christ to judge everything in ourselves and in our ways. As the apostle says, "Always bearing about in the body, the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body." (2 Cor. iv. 10). If we do not daily, and hourly, bring everything under the sentence of Christ's death, and judge everything by it, the Spirit will be grieved in us, and, instead of filling us with the joy of our portion in Christ, He will cause the light of Christ to awaken us to the judgment of ourselves, and of our ways.

May the Lord give us to walk in the power of an ungrieved Spirit, bringing everything into subjection to Christ, that we may know what the apostle goes on to say, "Death worketh in us,

but life in 'you." In thus bearing about in his body the dying of the Lord Jesus, Paul found death to self, and the result was life to the Corinthians. Paul held the power of Christ's death on the natural man, so that when he ministered among the Corinthians, there was no Paul at all, but only Christ. It was life to them, because death was working in Paul.

May the Lord give us thus to live ! And may He grant us, especially in a day like this, to judge of men as Paul did, so that whatever the boast of human nature may be, we may see that all are dead, because Christ died for all in grace—for the highest act of grace and love is the proof of it—and that the only living ones are they that live to Him who died for them and rose again, while in our own souls we enter into His new creation. We may have to go down to babes, and feed them with milk, and not with strong meat ; but may we ourselves live in the light of this new creation *where all things are of God*. We must pass through exercise, and be tried and tested to learn what is in our hearts, and to have our senses exercised to discern good and evil. This is all needful and profitable, but then there is our distinct place in Christ as part of the new creation, where, instead of having the first man responsible to God, we have God in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself in grace, and making Christ sin for us, to bring us into the new creation, where all things are of God, and where man is before God in divine

righteousness, and, as to his enjoyment, finding himself lost in God. It is God, and not man. It is what God is to man, and the blessedness of man being with God. God we know, revealed in Christ; but nevertheless God revealed, and man made the righteousness of God, a part of God's new creation.

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“TO ME TO LIVE IS CHRIST.”

It is years now since I gave up letter-writing in the common sense of the word. Apart from Christ it is mere nature—in which, alas! we are too apt to live, and which must be bustling, because it has not Christ. The craving for letters is often like the craving for society, a substitute for the love of Christ. Ah! how few open the Bible with the same eager zest with which they open a letter! How few cannot live without daily correspondence with Jesus! I mean, hearty, living, personal communion with Him, such as the Song of Solomon describes.

The Bible is like a veil on the face of Christ, and when the Spirit draws it aside, we see all His beauty, and that is what makes us strong and joyous and holy. It is gazing on the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Again, I like to think of the word as a vessel which contains a precious wine. Now, there may be much to do with the outside, and the soul abide in death: but if there be but one small hole made

in the side of the vessel, with what joy we drink this new wine of the kingdom; or as it is in Isaiah xii., draw water out of these wells of salvation?

Now, it is to the heart that seeks Jesus that God ministers Jesus; for it is not of him that willeth or of him that runneth, any more than is salvation; though in another aspect it is only the diligent soul that is made fat. Read Proverbs ii., and also viii., for this; also 2 Peter i., where we are told to add to faith, virtue and all these other graces. But why? Not merely for the having THEM to God's praise and our blessing, but that we may be neither idle nor unfruitful in the KNOWLEDGE of JESUS. Ah! that is everything, as Paul says—"That I may know Him"—and again, "the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." Other knowledge even about the word puffs up, but this keeps the soul like a babe on the breast of its mother, and works into us the very grace and gentleness and love of Jesus Himself. Witness Mary, who sat at His feet. And the grace of Christ is an active thing. It is not the idle contemplation of a beautiful picture; it is the power of living for the comfort and good of OTHERS.

This is important, for many delight in the word—honestly indeed—and yet, not connecting it with Jesus, it is like manna which stinks. Why do they delight in the word? Because it gives THEM comfort. You see the heart is not on Christ, but self. No wonder, then, that it is but as a very lovely song, which leaves only a remem-

brance of its having been heard. (See Ezek. xxxiii. 31, 32). But when it is Jesus Himself we are after, He brings us into the banqueting-house, and there we hear the music and dancing, and for our life we cannot help joining in it. God would not have us to be invalids in His house all our life, feeding on our sorrows and our joys ; but like loving children, who come into a hearty breakfast in the morning, in all the gladness of His smile and family joy ; then who go out to work hard and heartily for Him all day, returning to dine, and to tell how we have sped in commending Christ by our temper and our ways and words.

There is a verse in Micah, I think—"Do not my words do good to them that walk uprightly"—which contains much truth ; and again in the Psalm, "To him that ordereth his conversation aright will I show the salvation of God." After all, the one thing needful is, to be near Jesus and to hear His words—everything else will follow.

I always find Christ with me in visiting IN HIS NAME. Of course it is but death if He is not one's object in visiting. I find that when Jesus Himself came into the world, people were taken up with ten thousand things in one way or another. But He came down not to be a party in their thoughts and to their views, but to get their ears open to the glorious news He had to tell of His Father in heaven. So I find that the current is so strong in most places, that if you do not go in with Christ you get weakened instead of being a help or

helped. But it is unspeakably sweet when you can go to a house in the assurance that the current of the affections and thoughts is strong heavenwards.



“THE LIGHT OF THE BODY IS THE EYE.”

LUKE XI. 34-36.

Light manifests the heart of man ; but man in his natural darkness avoids and flies from it. On the other hand, in Christ is life, and the life is the light of men. This is grace ; and where God acts according to the efficacy of grace, one becomes light in the Lord, receiving the true light in Him.

In Luke Jesus develops, in a moral point of view, the state of souls, the phases of the combat between light and darkness. He has sown the good seed, God's word ; it is perfectly adapted to the wants of man's heart. If the heart is hard, the seed does not enter, and Satan takes it away. If the natural affections receive the word with joy, without anything and because of nothing produced in the conscience, the seed springs up immediately ; but then the first difficulties cause it to wither away. Even where appearances are better, the thorny cares of this life choke its growth and hinder fruit.

It is not the quality nor perfection of the light which is in question here, as in John ; but the manner in which the heart receives it. None could deny that Jesus cast out demons, but some

imputed the power to Beelzebub ; others sought a sign from heaven. Thus the effect was that the heart manifested what was within, and betrayed its real state. All come out because the light of God is there ; and wherever it shines, it brings out all sorts of difficulties, because it forces everyone to show before God what he is. When the heart is stirred, it is like a sink. The more perfect the light, the more the effect is produced. It compels each one to take his side for or against the light. Things find their level in the presence of God. We should desire God to act with all the power of His Spirit, that those who love the light may come to the full perfection of it. If it makes our sins evident, it is that they may be put away ; for He who is light, makes also expiation for sins.

The power of Satan (vs. 21-23) seeks to keep souls in darkness. Are you then for Christ or against Him? A middle course is impossible where He presents Himself ; the heart must decide one way or the other ; and this settles the question of Satan's power, for "greater is He that is in us, than he that is in the world." (1 John iv. 4.) It is not the light which fails, but faith.

In our gospel, however, the light of the body is not that of the sun, but the eye : because the subject matter is the state of him who receives light from God, and not its manifestation in Christ. It is the eye, the organ of our moral vision ; it is the aim and object of the heart. All depends on what is really before the soul when it is a question of

seeing clearly. It is certain that all is right in Christ, and that there is enough grace in Him to cause the light to jet out. But morally the light is the eye; and it is important that the light which is in us be not darkness. It is not a question either of ourselves or of a sign from heaven. Faith is not founded on miracles: if its only basis is signs, evidences, etc., it is worth nothing; if it is not a conviction in the conscience, it is not the life of God. Christ had confidence in nothing of the kind (John ii. 23-25). "My sheep hear My voice," instead of seeing miracles, and so believing.

So with Elijah: the Lord was not in the whirlwind, nor in the thunder, but in the still small voice. As to this, one can hardly distinguish between the written word and the living Word; nothing is hidden from it. It discerns even the "thoughts and intents of the heart." It manifests God to the heart, and the heart to God. It is the soft voice that we need. There is in the heart such want as causes that the light, while condemning us, does not affright so much as it attracts.

Why was that an "evil generation"? Because they sought a sign. In presence of the light, they asked for a demonstration of the truth. The only sign given is that of Jonah the prophet—too late for that generation to be spared. It was the sign of death and resurrection; and these were realities, not signs, in the case of Jesus, because He was rejected. His rejection brings on the judgment. Jonah was a preacher without miracles to

Nineveh, that repented and was saved. Solomon, too, did no signs; yet the queen of the south came from far to hear his wisdom. Does not all condemn that generation? A greater than Solomon or Jonah was there. What was the preaching of the one or the wisdom of the other compared with the light of God in Christ? In truth, it was an evil generation.

Thank God! "the light of the body is the eye," because we thereby judge and desire to be freed from the evil that the light discovers in us. This is the aim of God; even as a man lights a candle and sets it on a candlestick, that people may see the light. There has never been a time nor circumstances so painful as those of Jesus. The priests were the most distant from God; the righteousness of the Pharisees was but hypocrisy. But those who waited for redemption in Israel, owned it in the Babe of Bethlehem, and Anna spake of it to all such: God had given even them enough light for a witness to the godly.

Now it is a question of conscience. "The light of the body is the eye." It is a matter of eyesight when seeing is the point. "Therefore when thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light; but when thine eye is evil, thy body also is full of darkness." If a light do not manifest what you are, it is worthless. The great matter is not whether you can discern between the true and the false outside you; but the light must enter you, and there reveal everything, unveiling your own state

to yourselves. Then there is blessing. "Take heed, therefore, that the light which is in thee be not darkness." If there is anything for your aim but God's glory, the light is darkness. If the eye is not single it is evil. There is encouragement here : withdraw not from the light, however painful its action on the conscience. We have not to judge the word of God ; the word judges the saved soul, penetrates and holds it fast. When a man holds me so that I cannot escape, I know he is strong. "Come, see a man who told me all things that ever I did." The word seizes us ; the result is that we are judged and purified. God lays bare all our sin for us to get free from it ; for grace and truth are come by Jesus Christ. The truth judges, but it is grace withal. The same Jesus who sounds to the bottom of the heart all the sin that is there, has washed me from my sins in His own blood. If He stirs up all the evil that is in us, it is to take it away. The light in Him is for us always grace. The man who dreams of his reputation, in avoiding the light, avoids grace along with it. God does not leave but love us. He has imposed on Himself the task of blessing us, and of doing us all the good He can. We know that there is in us a quantity of things that the light manifests. Man, in presence of God's purity, is so unclean, that his very clothes are ashamed of him (Job ix., xlii). Why did God so press Job ? He let Satan act to manifest the evil Himself saw already. How many things there are

in us which are not of Christ, but of ourselves! God introduces the light to bring out the hindrances to our enjoyment of communion with Himself. How much becomes a source of sorrow because it connects itself with ourselves! If self-seeking enters the heart of a Christian, there is misery. These things must be got rid of, in order that there may be nothing between God and us: God acts to this end; and this is the history of the Christian life. God cannot bless us in evil, whatever His blessing spite of it. But He does act in grace; and if His action is purity, holiness, light, it is also grace. Confide in Him with entire reliance. He purifies you that you may walk so as to enjoy the brightness of His face.



NOTHING BUT CHRIST.

The Epistle to the Hebrews calls us to leave all for Christ. Whatever be the objects in which thus far we may have gloried, it is necessary to abandon them now, and to receive in their stead Jesus the Son of God. Angels give place to the Son; Moses, the servant of the house, gives place to Christ, who is the Builder; Joshua, the ancient captain, that led Israel into Canaan, gives place to Christ, the Captain of Salvation, who is now conducting the children to glory; Aaron, the carnal and dying priest, gives place to the true Melchisedec, who lives and serves in the heavenly temple for ever; the old covenant gives place to

the new, which Jesus administers; and at the same time the old carnal or earthly ordinances give place to the spiritual and efficacious ministrations of the heavenly Priest; finally, the blood of the victims gives place to the blood of Christ, offered by the Eternal Spirit.

Such is one of the principal characteristics of his divine and glorious Epistle, which thus annihilates all that in which man puts his confidence, in order to establish the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, as the object of glory and only refuge of poor souls.

But this was a doctrine hard to bear, particularly for a people such as the Jews, who had in so many ways put their confidence in the law and legal righteousness. Amongst us also at the present day, when, amidst so many religious forms, men propose with authority other foundations of confidence than JESUS, and other men blindly receive them, we have to consider carefully what are the bases of this doctrine. In these days, when all creation groans, the soul thirsts after this simple gospel, which preaches to us the perfect satisfaction of JESUS, and it is the design of the Holy Spirit in the Epistle to the Hebrews to unfold to the eager soul the reasons for which it can thus embrace Jesus as all that forms the object of its confidence and glory. This Epistle declares what authorizes it thus to appreciate JESUS—to estimate Him as having no equal—to judge that He is in a word the *one* and *only* stay of the poor sinner.

But how does the Holy Spirit assure us of this truth by this Epistle? How does He shew us that it is our own salvation to leave every other prop in order to have none but Christ alone for our stay? He shews it to us in the only way in which it could be done—by presenting to our soul the appreciation which God makes of Christ.

That which warrants the value I am to attach to Christ is that God has already before this made known to us the worth which He possesses. If my soul confides exclusively in Him, I cannot be grounded in so doing, but by seeing the foundation of Israel's confidence at the time of the blood-sprinkling in Egypt. God had prescribed this blood, such is my divine and sure warrant, and the Epistle to the Hebrews assures it to me. It speaks to me of the high value God sees in Christ; it tells me how clearly, simply and exclusively He has laid upon Christ all that can relieve the soul. Such is the reason why this admirable Epistle lingers with so much complacency upon Christ in all His present relations with us, in all the ministrations He accomplishes for us. There is what explains the numerous quotations (chap. i.) which establish Jesus far above angels; there is what explains the glorious commentary which chap. ii. gives on the dignity of the Son of Man, the declarations of His great superiority over Moses (chap. iii.); the abundant and varied testimonies (chap. iv., v.) borne to His priesthood, supplying in quite another way that wherewith Aaron had been

honoured or what the law conferred (chap. vii.). There is the reason why He is represented as anointed and consecrated by an oath, and seated in the heavens in the midst of the sanctuary, as well as at the right hand of Majesty (chap. viii.).

In all this we have the hand of God Himself exalting the merit of Jesus, weighing Him in His dignities known in heaven and on earth. The soul is invited in the most pressing manner to come and be present at this grand work, at this divine proof of the merit of Jesus. Just so the congregation of Israel was commanded to wait at the door of the tabernacle, in order that each for himself should contemplate and know how pleased with the priest God was ; so that each, however large the congregation was, should have personally, individually, all liberty to resign himself to the care and intercession of Aaron (Lev. viii. ix.). It was a matter which concerned each individually, and the same liberty should also appertain to everyone of us individually.

The soul is a thing which concerns ourselves ; for it is written that " none can by any means redeem his brother " (Ps. xlix.) ; and it is ourselves who should know the divine remedy, ourselves who should possess it. It is not a faithful brother who can hear and believe for us ; it is not a church which can represent us ; we must be at the door of the tabernacle ourselves ; we have ourselves to know the worth of Jesus in the eyes of God, and the Epistle to the Hebrews is com-

missioned to reveal this secret in the holy of holies. It is addressed, not to a certain order of privileged persons, but to us all, in order that there we may gather the blessed fruits of this ensured supply which has been stored in Him. It is not the question in this Epistle of a particular church, nor of a class of privileged persons, as is very often thought and said; but it is the voice of the Spirit addressing itself directly to the soul, in order that it may learn to know for itself Him in whom God has placed the help which is necessary to it. In this Epistle, our soul breathes, in some sort, the perfume of the plain which the Lord has blessed, and faith breathes the perfume of Christ; it enjoys Christ as God Himself enjoys Him, and we have the divine light in our hearts, we are converted from darkness to the light of God. In a word, God becomes our own.

There is yet another thing in this Epistle: it makes us understand in what characters God has set this exclusive value on Christ; and these characters are such as fully answer to our necessities. The victim or the sacrifice, ix. 14; the priest, vii.; the prophet or teacher, ii. 1-4; the captain who brings His own to glory, ii. 10; and in all these qualities, as in each of them separately, we see Him estimated in the most exact manner by the hand of God, and we find Him perfectly what it is needful He should be, for persons so wretched as we are. According to God, Jesus is a victim perfectly suited to purify, a priest perfectly suited to

intercede, a prophet perfectly suited to instruct, and a guide perfectly suited to transport us safe and sound unto glory. There is that precisely which we need. This Epistle traces our book of travels, in leaving our place of exile as sinners, up to our dwelling in glory, where we shall be in the companionship of Jesus. Yes, we clearly read there our rights, and we rest on Jesus as our Victim, our Priest, our Prophet, and our Guide, because God has given Him all that is possible of worth in these qualities with which He is endowed for us, and God has appreciated Him because of His work, because of His person, because of His obedience, because He has shed His blood and fully accomplished the will of God for us. There, in this Epistle, the soul may read its titles, not according to the estimate which itself makes of them, but according to that which God makes of Christ.



FRAGMENT.—To grow in the knowledge of Christ is our life and our privilege. The search after novelties, which are foreign to Him, is a proof of not being satisfied with Him. But he who is not satisfied with Jesus does not know Him; or, at least, has forgotten Him. It is impossible to enjoy Him and not feel that He is everything! that is to say, that He satisfies us, and that, by the nature of what He is, He shuts out everything else.