

2nd CORINTHIANS XII.

(Continued from page 127.)

The being, as men speak, in the third heaven, is not always our place and portion.. It is a mistake to think it would puff us up. A creature is never puffed up in the presence of God and with Him before the mind. It is when the eye is off Him, when we *have been* in the third heaven, but are no longer there, that the danger begins. We are in danger of being puffed up about having been there when we have lost the present sense of the excellency of what is there, and in which we lose the sense of self. This is what we find in Paul's case. The man in Christ has Christ for his title, and is entitled thus to all that Christ enjoys, to joys and glories which mortal apprehensions cannot receive—the language formed by mortal thoughts and ways cannot express, that are not meet to be communicated in this scene of human capacities. They belong to another sphere of things.

But, wonderful as that is into which we are brought, the question of good and evil, the knowledge of which we have by the fall, and cannot get rid of, nor is it desirable or meant we should, must be thoroughly and experimentally gone through by us. It has been as to acceptance. In respect of that it is finally and for ever settled before God by the death and resurrection of Christ. But we have to learn to judge the evil and to delight in the good. The law, as we have seen, makes us

learn the evil as looking to be judged for it. In grace we are first put into the position of perfect blessing in Christ, and then we judge what is contrary to it. This is the difference of bondage and liberty. Still we have to judge it, and grow in our apprehension of good. In the instruction of our chapter this (as in all God's ways with the apostle, who was to be both quickly and fully taught in order constantly and deeply to teach others) was done in the strongest and fullest contrast of the extremes. The third heaven, if it did not set aside the flesh in fact for ever, must show what a hopeless, unchangeable thing it is. And so it did. Paul had entered into the third heaven with no consciousness of the hindrance of the body, still less with any working of the flesh in any way. But he must return into the practical state of existence in which he had to serve Christ with the consciousness of what he was as Paul. And here the only working of the flesh, the only way it took cognizance of Paul's having been in the third heaven, would have been, if it had been allowed to do so, to have puffed him up at having such wondrous revelations. It was unchanged in evil. Paul must learn this practically, even by a visit to the third heavens, instead of this amazing privilege taking away or changing it. It was not allowed to act, but he must learn truly to judge it for himself.

Note this difference. It is not necessary, when we are in Christ, that flesh should act in order to

judge it in ourselves. Alas ! it is often in that way we do learn it, but it is not necessary that it should act even in thought. By God's ways, and through communion with Him, we can learn to judge evil in the root in us without its bearing fruit. If we do not learn to judge it in communion with God, where there may be very real exercise about it (and a very great conflict of will against God if it has acquired any head), we learn it in its fruits through the giving way to the temptation of Satan. When it is not judged, we learn, no doubt, the evil—not yet indeed the root, but Christ is dishonoured, the spirit grieved, and but for the coming in of grace, sin will in such case have acquired deceiving power in our hearts.

In what has preceded, we have found three important points brought before us in this chapter : First, the man in Christ ; secondly, the gross evil of the flesh if our members be not mortified ; thirdly, that this same flesh is not at all corrected in its tendencies even by a man's being in the third heaven, nor by anything else. Paul needed a messenger of Satan to buffet him, lest he should be puffed up. There is another collateral point, indeed, which I would here briefly notice ; the difference between our abstract position as men in Christ (and we are entitled to consider ourselves as such ; it is our true position as Christians according to grace), and our actual condition with the consciousness of the existence of the flesh and all our bodily circumstances and infirmities down

here. Into this actual condition we have now to follow Paul in our chapter, and to learn where power is to be found to walk rightly in it. The flesh exists unchangeable in its nature, a pure hindrance.

First, we may remark that no extent of knowledge, even where given of God, is in itself spiritual power in our souls. We cannot doubt that such revelations as Paul received in the third heaven strengthened his own faith, made him understand that it was well worth sacrificing a miserable life, such as this world's life is, for it, and gave him a consciousness of what he was contending for, a sense of the divine things he had to do with, which must have exercised an immense influence upon his career in this world. But it was not immediate power in conflict in the mixed state in which he found himself when he had to speak of "myself Paul." He had, and so have we, to walk by faith, and not by sight. The wickedest man would not sin while his mind had the glory of God before his eyes; but that would no way prove the state of his heart and affections when it was removed. Like Balaam he would turn to his vomit again. So in point of fact the Christian (however strengthened and refreshed by times on the road by what is almost like sight to him, and by communications of divine love to his soul) has to walk by faith, and not always in these sensible apprehensions of divine results in glory. Not that he is to walk in the

flesh or lose communion, but he is not always under the power of especial communications of the glory conferred on him, and divine love to his soul. Paul knew a man *fourteen years ago*—not every day in that state. He could rejoice *in the Lord always*. Some Christians are apt to confound these two things—special joy and abiding communion, and to suppose, because the first is not always the case, the discontinuance of the latter is to be taken for granted and acquiesced in. This is a great mistake. Special visitations of joy may be afforded. Constant fellowship with God and with the Lord Jesus is the only right state, the only one recognized in scripture. We are to rejoice in the Lord always. This the flesh would seek to hinder, and Satan by the flesh.

Here we find first the privilege of having the title to hold ourselves dead. We are *not debtors to the flesh*. It has no kind of title over us. We are not in the flesh. We may reckon ourselves dead and alive unto God, and sin shall not have dominion over us. It is all-important to hold this fact. The flesh is unchanged, but there is no necessity of walking in it—not more as to our thoughts than as to our outward conduct. The law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death; sin in the flesh is condemned by the death of Christ; the power it had over us, when under law (if not lawless), it has no longer. *When we were in the flesh the motions of sin which were by the law*

wrought in us all manner of concupiscence. But we are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of Christ dwells in us. We are delivered from the law, having died in that in which we were held. Our whole condition is changed. What the law could not do just because it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, has condemned sin in the flesh.

But if the flesh be not changed, how is this realized in practice? . It is this which is taught us here. It is first the giving conscious nothingness and weakness in the flesh. This is not power, but it is the practical way to it. We are entitled, as to our standing before God, to reckon ourselves dead unto sin and alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord, and in practice to hold ourselves, as in this condition, not debtors to the flesh to live after the flesh; and sin shall not have dominion over us, for we are not under law, but under grace. But our chapter goes farther than this: it shows us power so to walk. The flesh is then practically put down. The measure, as stated by the apostle, is this—"Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our body." His object was not to gain this life. Alive in Christ we have it. But he held every movement, thought, and will of the flesh under the judgment of the cross, and so the life of Christ was left free.

Such is our path. Admitted into the very presence of God, into the holiest, by the blood of Christ, we judge in its roots, in communion with Him according to His infinite grace, everything that is not of Christ in us, and the grace we meet and are made partakers of in this communion carries us along our road in lowliness and grace. Our fleshly tendencies are thus only the occasion of receiving the grace which keeps us safe from their power. I may be humbler than ordinary men if I have dealt with God about my pride, and so of every danger. The present power of Christ keeps the evil out of our thoughts. We have brought God into our life in this respect. It is not merely the absence, comparatively speaking, of a particular character of evil. The flesh—evil—is judged according to God, and I am lowly in spirit, and walk softly and safely. But where there are real dangers, God helps us in this. Not only do I bear about the dying, but we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake. God works; some messenger of Satan is sent (not sin—far from it: God cannot send that; but some humbling process which *prevents* sin and pride working), unpleasant to the human heart, but needed for it. All self-activity of the flesh is sin. The body is dead because of sin if Christ be in me; that is, if alive, it is only sin; and if Christ is my life, the Spirit is life. My body is not counted as alive, or to be so in its will. What is of me in will and nature—me as a conscious living man, a child of

Adam in this world—is annulled, or is a hindrance; it has no connection with God: a man in it cannot please God. “I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.”

(To be continued, D.V.)

CHRISTIAN LIFE: AND JESUS THE PATTERN OF IT.

CHRISTIAN life, is a common life of service in contact with human passions, faults, weaknesses,—in a word, in contact with flesh, but in order to act in the midst of it, to INTRODUCE GOD there.

And this is what Christ was. We must be really in communion with Him, by partaking thus of that nature which nothing can injure, and which shines with its own perfection in the midst of all, above everything we meet with.

Jesus was the most isolated of men, and at the same time the most accessible. The most isolated, because He was living in absolute communion with His Father, and there was neither echo nor sympathy with the perfect love which was found there; the most accessible, because He was that love for others. And in speaking of that ineffable work which opened a way to that love, through all men's sin, He says, “I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!” That baptism of bitterness and

death, which, by making an end of sin—even in its last stronghold, and its last claims of ruin, by the righteousness of God against us—left that love free to act in its infinite purposes of grace. For love is infinitely inventive for the blessedness of that which is loved, and the love of God purposes that which goes infinitely beyond all our thoughts. It is the spring of the thoughts of God, who is infinite. And again, towards the end of His career, when the unbelief of *His own* led Him to say, “How long shall I be with you, and suffer you?” (for not even in His own was there faith,—the capacity necessary for using the resources of grace and power which were in Him,—for that is what He expects from us in this poor world) then, without a moment’s interval, He adds, “Bring thy son hither.” The consciousness of standing alone in His love, so that others did not even understand how they could and ought to avail themselves of it, *does not for a moment hinder His energy and activity*; the same phrase which contains the words, “How long?” adds this also, “Bring thy son hither.”

And what was the life of that Jesus? “A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief!” A life of activity in obscurity, but which caused the love of God to penetrate into the most remote corners of society, even where there was the most need; in the midst of persons who were repelled by the pride of man, that it might maintain its ground, but which the love of God sought after. Because

He had no need to make himself a character and to keep it, He was always the same; and the more apparently He committed Himself, the more He displayed Himself in a perfection that never belied itself. The love of God had no need of protecting itself, as human society must, from that which might lay it too bare. He was always the same. The toiling life of Jesus was passed in seeking souls in all circumstances, and went through that which could put it to the test. But we see therein, on one hand, a divine reality which never failed, and from time to time—in face of self-righteousness, pride, and tyrannical boldness, and the contradiction of sinners, or in favour of some poor broken-down souls, or to justify the ways of God in their favour—a divine ground-work, the most exquisite and touching thoughts, a depth of truth which betrayed its perfection by its simplicity! All this manifesting a soul whose food was in the most intimate communion with infinite love and perfect holiness,—a soul which could say, “We speak that which we do know, and testify that we have seen;” which weighed evil by the perfection of good which was in Him; *and found*, in the awful discoveries of evil—if we can speak of discoveries, where everything was laid bare—which the holiness of his soul made, *the opportunities of the manifestation of infinite love.*

It was the love of a holy Being, rather, which made this discovery; a love which took the form of that grace which, by its own humiliation, placed

itself within the reach of all the wants of the heart, and at the same time, in presence of the pride of man, showed itself at the height of the dignity and majesty of God. How beautiful to see this divine Person, these divine qualities piercing through the humiliation, place Himself within the reach of those whom the world despised, and find—"being wearied with His journey," and becoming a debtor for a cup of cold water to a woman who hardly dared show herself with others—meat to eat, of which neither His disciples nor the world knew anything; and that in the deliverance of a poor heart, for which he had set free the spirit of life and joy, and had restored it,—or rather had given to a heart crushed under the weight of a bad conscience, and by the contempt of her fellow-creatures.

What a perspective of blessing for poor sinners this opened to His heart! For he did not despise such consolation in the midst of a world which rejected Him from its bosom. Love comforts itself thus. The heart that loves sinners needs such consolation in such a world. And where is it to be found? *In obscurity*; in the labours of a life which had to do with the ordinary need of souls, but which thus ripens in the truth; a life, which did not shelter itself from the misery of the world to walk "in a vain show," but introduced there the love of God! Precious grace! He was what others could write about. (Matt. xxiv. 24; Luke xxiv. 44; John i. 45; etc.)

How many hidden wants, even in the most de-

graded souls, would be confessed, and would manifest themselves, if such love and such goodness, which could win their confidence, were presented to them! But that it may be so, we must be content to find ourselves in the midst of the degradation, *sheltered from it ONLY by that which is inward.* Now, such was the life of the Lord.

How many souls drown their thoughts in pleasure to stifle the moral sorrows which torment them! Divine love not only meets the wants, but brings them to express themselves. How delicious to see a soul open itself, and at the same time to see spiritual life entering it! One does not exactly seek for such degradation; but one finds the world, knowing that is the truth as to what is found there; and its outward forms do not redeem the soul. But this is a life of pain, patience, and blessedness, which has no equal. Christ could say, "That they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves." No doubt there is a difference of gifts; but even if God, in His grace, opens this way to us, *how slow we are to walk in the steps of Him who shows us!*

But take courage, His grace is there, on the road He has opened for us. We find it day by day as we go onward. And what grace it is, when all the principles which have been formed in the heart through faith, come to blow fully in heaven and shew themselves in all the fulness of their results according to the heart of God. *We must wait,—walking* BY FAITH.

WAITING FOR CHRIST.

That which should characterize the saints is, not merely holding the doctrine of the Lord's coming as that which they believe, but their souls should be in the daily attitude of waiting, expecting, and desiring His coming. But why? That they may see Himself, and be with Him and like Him for ever! Not because the world which has been so hostile to them is going to be judged, though God will smite the wicked. It is true there will be mercy to those who are spared. But we have obtained mercy now, and are therefore waiting for Himself—for what He is in Himself to us, and not because of judgment. That would not be joy to me, though it will be to some on the earth; for "in every place where the grounded staff shall pass, which Jehovah shall lay upon him, it shall be with tabrets and harps," etc. (Isa. xxx. 32). This is not our hope, but simply waiting for Himself. The whole walk and character of a saint depends upon this—on his waiting for the Lord. Every one should be able to read us by this, as having nothing to do in this world but to get through it, and not as having any portion in it—"Turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for His Son from heaven." 1 Thes. i. 9, 10.

What I desire to press upon you all, and myself too, is the individual waiting for the Lord; not as a doctrine merely, but as a daily waiting for Him-

self. Whatever the Lord's will may be, I should like Him to find me doing it when He comes. But that is not the question; but, Am I waiting for Himself day by day? In 1 Thes. ii. the hope is connected with ministry: "What is our hope or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?" Then Paul would get the reward of his service to the saints. Then in the third chapter the hope is connected with our walk, as a motive for holiness: "Unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints." Then in the fourth chapter the doctrine of the hope is unfolded, the manner of it comes out: "The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord." Thus we see what a present expectation the coming of the Lord was; therefore Paul says, "WE which are alive and remain." But why does he say "WE"? Because he expected it then. This was Paul's character then, that of waiting for the Lord. And does he lose that character because he died before He came? No, not at all. Though Peter had a revelation that he should put off the tabernacle of his body, yet did he daily wait for the Lord's coming then. And this will be

Peter's character when the Lord does come ; he will lose nothing by his death. " Be ye like unto men that wait for their Lord."

The character of their waiting was to be like servants at the hall-door, that, when the Master knocked, they were ready to open to Him immediately. It is a figure, of course, here ; but it is the present power of the expectation that is alluded to. And the ruin of the church has come in by practically saying : " My Lord delayeth His coming." " Blessed are those servants whom the Lord when He cometh shall find watching."

" Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning"—" your loins girt about with truth" for service. You must not let your garments flow loose ; that is, you must not let your thoughts and affections spread abroad, but be ready with your garments well girt up, and your lights burning. This is not rest, for it is an exceedingly tiring thing to have to sit up and watch through a long dark night. But in the spirit of service the heart, affections, thoughts, feelings and desires must all be girt up. And this requires real painstaking not to let the flesh go its own way ; for it is a great comfort sometimes to do this, if but for a moment ; but if we do we shall surely fall asleep like the virgins. For as the virgins went to sleep with their oil in their lamps, so we may go to sleep with the Holy Ghost in our hearts. But blessed are those servants who are found watching. The Lord says this is the time

for you to be girded, to take your turn in love to serve and watch; but when I come again, and have things my own way, then I will take my turn in love; ungird you and gird myself, and come forth and serve you. You must be well girt up and watchful in the midst of evil; but when the evil is done with, then you may take your rest. When in the Father's house you may lie down and be at ease; and then your robes may flow down without any fear of their being soiled. In that blessed place of holiness and purity, you may let your affections, thoughts and desires flow out without the fear of their being defiled.

Jesus, we wait for Thee,
 With Thee to have our part;
 What can full joy and blessing be
 But being where Thou art?

FRAGMENT.

If we have Christ, we have all—without Christ we have nothing. You can be happy without money, without liberty, without parents, without friends, if Christ is yours. If you have not Christ, neither money, nor liberty, nor parents, nor friends, can make you lastingly happy. Christ, with a chain, is liberty; liberty, without Christ, is a chain. Christ, without anything, is riches; all things without Christ, is poverty indeed.