

2ND CORINTHIANS XII.

(Continued from No. 7.)

Faith anticipates the judgment, as regards the old man, the flesh, with all its ways. Upon the grounds of its responsibility we are wholly lost. We may learn it experimentally by passing under the law, becoming hopeless of pleasing God as being *in the flesh*, or we may learn it by finding our opposition and indifference to Christ. But the whole thing is done away with for the believer on the cross. He is crucified with Christ, nevertheless lives, but not he but Christ lives in Him. If the cross has proved that in the flesh there is nothing but sin and hatred against God, it has put away the sin it has proved. All that is gone. The life is gone. If a guilty man die in prison, what can the law do more against him? The life in which he had sinned, and to which his guilt attached itself, is gone. With us too it is gone; for Christ has died, willingly, no doubt, but by the judicial dealing of God with the sin which He bore for us. If we are alive, we are alive now on a new footing before God—alive in Christ. The old things are passed away; there is a new creation; we are created again in Christ Jesus.

Our place and standing before God is no longer in flesh. It is in Christ. Christ as man has taken quite a new place that neither Adam innocent, nor Adam sinner, had *anything to say to*. The best robe formed no part of the prodigal's first inheritance at all; it was in the Father's possession—quite a new

thing. Christ has taken this place consequent on putting away our sins, on having glorified God as to them, and finishing the work. He has taken it in righteousness, and man in Him has got a new place in righteousness with God.

When quickened, he is quickened with the life in which Christ lives, the second Adam; and submitting to God's righteousness, knowing that he is totally lost in the first and old man, and having bowed to this solemn truth, as shown and learned in the cross, he is sealed with the Holy Ghost, livingly united to the Lord, One Spirit: he is a man in Christ, not in the flesh or in the first Adam. All *that* is closed for him in the cross, where Christ made Himself responsible for him in respect of it and died unto sin *once*; and he is alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. He belongs to a new creation, having the life of the head of it as his life. Where he learnt the utter total condemnation of what he was, he learnt its total and eternal putting away. The cross is for him that impassable Red Sea, that Jordan which he has now gone through, and is his deliverance from Egypt for ever, and now he has realized it, his entrance into Canaan, in Christ. If Jordan and the power of death overflowed all its banks, for him the ark of the covenant passed in. It is just his way into Canaan. That which, if he had himself assayed to go through, as the Egyptians, would have been his destruction, has been a wall on the right hand and the left, and only destroyed all that was against

him. He *was* a man in the flesh, he *is* a man in Christ.

Amazing and total change *from the whole condition and standing* of the 1st Adam, responsible for his own sins, into that of Christ, who, having borne the whole consequences of that responsibility in his place, has given him (in the power of that, to us, new life, in which He rose from the dead) a place in and with Himself, as He now is, as man before God! It is to this position the apostle refers; only that he was given in a very extraordinary manner to enjoy the full fruit and glory of it during the period of his existence here below. His language as to this truth is remarkably plain, and therefore powerful. "When we were in the flesh," he says. Thus it is we speak, when we refer to a bye-gone state of things, in which we are no longer. "When we were in the flesh," (that is we are no longer in that position at all.) "But," he says, "ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you." We are now alive in Christ. "If ye be *dead*," says he elsewhere, "to the rudiments of the world, why are ye subject to ordinances?" "For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." "When Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory."

The reader will forgive me, if I have dwelt so long upon the first expression of our chapter. I have done so because of its vast importance. It is the very heart of all Paul's doctrine, the true and holy way of full divine liberty, and the power of

holiness. And because many Christians have not seized the force of this truth, nor of the expression of the Apostle, they use Christ's death as a remedy for the old man, or at least only learn forgiveness of past sins by it, instead of learning that they have passed out of the old man, as to their place before God, and into the new in the power of that life which is in Christ.

Ask many a true-hearted saint what is the meaning of "when we were in the flesh," and he could give no clear answer—he has no definite idea of what it does mean. Ask him what it is to be "in Christ"—all is equally vague.

A regenerate man may be in the flesh, as to the condition and standing of his own soul, though he be not so in God's sight; nay this is the very case supposed in Romans vii., because he looks at himself as standing before God on the ground of his own responsibility, on which ground he never can (in virtue of being regenerate) meet the requirements of God, attain to His righteousness. Perhaps, finding this out, he has recourse to the blood of Christ to quiet his uneasy conscience, and repeated recurrence to it, as a Jew would to a sacrifice, a superstitious man to absolution. But he has no idea that he has been cleansed and perfected once for all, and that he is taken clean out of that standing, to be placed in Christ before God. But in Christ, the title and privilege of Christ, is our title and privilege.

Of the full and wondrous fruit of this, Paul, for

God's wise and blessed purposes, was made to enjoy in an extraordinary and special manner. In that, flesh and mortal nature had no part, nor ever can, though *we* (as alive in Christ) have, while in that nature, whatever be the degree of our realization of it. Paul was allowed to know it, so that while enjoying it in the highest degree in the new man, in his life in Christ, ("the life hid with Christ in God," the "not I but Christ living in him,") he had no consciousness of that other mortal part which yet burdens by its very nature (as well as by sin if will works) the new and heavenly man in us. He could not tell if he was in or out of the body: he knew, on re-entering his ordinary state of conscious existence that he had this body; but he could not tell whether he was in or out of it when in the third heaven; he was unconscious of it altogether.

The reader will remark too, how carefully the apostle distinguishes between the man in Christ, and himself as he had the practical experience of himself down here, having indeed the life of Christ and the Spirit which united him to the Head, but having also the flesh in him, though he was not in the flesh. Of this Paul, of which he was practically conscious down here, he would not glory; but he had been given to be in the enjoyment of his place as a man in Christ with entire abstraction, as to his consciousness of it, of anything else—of such a one he would glory. And so can we: though we may never have been in the third heaven to realize fully the glory and privileges of the position we are

brought into, yet we are men in Christ, and we have known enough, the feeblest saint who knows his place in Christ, has known enough of that blessing, to rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. He glories in the position of the man in Christ, which is his most surely and fully in Christ; and he may realize it, too, so that at the moment he may not sensibly feel the working of sin in him, though he well knows it is there. We may be filled with the Spirit, so that the Spirit may be the only source of actual thought in us, Indeed this is our proper Christian state, not always with the same activity, it is true, of the Spirit giving the sensible apprehension of the glory, and the things of Christ, so as to elevate the soul to that which is above; but so that there is no consciousness of anything inconsistent with it in the mind. This is the state described in the Epistle to the Philippians—the true Christian state.

There may be even then, when there is no conscious evil, the effect of obscure apprehension, an apprehension obscure perhaps even in a way which implies fault, negligence, want of singleness of eye, spiritual laziness, swerving from the path in which a single eye would lead us, (though then uneasiness naturally follows in the soul, because the Spirit does dwell in us and is grieved;) still there may be no present disturbing element in the conscience. The fact, it is important to remark, of sin being in the flesh, does not make the conscience bad. When it becomes the source of thought or action, then the

conscience is bad, and communion by the Holy Ghost is interrupted. But our chapter leads us further into this.

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(To be continued, D. V.)

THE EXERCISES AND END OF GRACE.

JOHN XX.

It is remarkable the instruments God uses to display His grace towards man, and the different exercises of heart persons go through, which prepare them for the service on which they are to be sent. There is a loneliness which may even be occasioned by a man's own folly, in which he finds himself without a single thing to get comfort in, that he may prove that to be in the Lord which he would not know in any other way.

God cannot associate Himself with evil. There must be death upon nature altogether. The corn of wheat would have remained alone without death. Christ was alone as to Himself; comforters He had none. "I looked for some to take pity, but found none." "They gave me gall for my meat, and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink." (Psa. lxix. 20 and 11.) These are expressions of this loneliness. He was walking in undeviating devotedness with His Father all the way through; but there was none to enter into it, though, speaking of His disciples, He graciously says, "Ye are they that have continued with me in my temptations."

(Luke xxii. 28.) Could He have said more if they had been faithful in sympathy all the time? Our poor hearts have to learn the way the Lord meets the soul that waits on Him.

We see, in the case of Mary Magdalene here, and in the other Mary too who broke the box of ointment on Him, there was something that made them *lonely*. What made Lazarus' sister Mary lonely? She had found something that took her clean out of the world. Martha was careful about the supper; but with Mary it was not the supper but *Himself*. His object was not to come for earthly refreshment, but to pour into His people's hearts the revelation of the Father. Martha was not wrong in preparing the supper, but in trying to get Mary away from the Lord. If she had been right, she would have been glad to do it all herself. There was not the joy and delight in her heart that there ought to have been. Mary had found one thing that isolated her heart in the most blessed way. Her affections were alive to all the evil that was coming (not as a prophetess, but her spirit was in the thing), and at the right moment she went and spent the ointment on Him. He says of her, "She hath done it for my burial."

In this Mary (the Magdalene) we get yet another thing. Seven devils had been cast out of her, that is to say, the expression of complete diabolical possession, indicating the extreme of wickedness. *That* isolates a person, who is separated from nature, as it were, by the extent of wretchedness.

When the spirit is touched, she is separated from the evil. The effect of finding *Christ* in such circumstances is that He becomes everything to her. (There is not the same intelligence in her as in the other Mary; we do not find *her*, as the Magdalene, at the tomb.) She could not leave in the same way. When she lost Christ after the flesh, she had nothing. She was terribly broken to pieces by evil, and Christ was gone. There was something human connected with her affection; there was also culpable ignorance in what she did; but the Lord had compassion on her; and more, He manifested Himself first to her.

The disciples saw, and believed. They perceived He was gone, but understood not the Scriptures. Mary had no home, and when she found not the body of Christ, what had she? The disciples were not isolated in the same way; they go away to their homes. She, in her ignorance, but withal in her love, says, "I will come and take him away." (John xx. 15.) This last is very precious. It is a great thing, when Christ has such a place with us as to be everything. In one sense this is the door by which all must pass through; at death, if not before, nature must decay and vanish. What is more nothing than death? All here is gone. We may learn this spiritually, or by circumstances, or at the moment of death itself; but learn it we must. We must find everything but Christ *nothing*.

Christ calls her by name. When He comes and calls His sheep by name, it is all right. She had

got Him back after death. Nature had, as it were, passed through death, as Isaac. Nature *had* mixed itself up with her affections, but now she has got beyond that; all is given up to God. The promises made to Abraham were all surrendered up by him when Isaac was to be taken. Mary Magdalene thought she had Christ back when she had not. She thought of Him corporeally, but she must have Him in another way. It will be so with the remnant of Israel by-and-by. They will have Him corporeally then, but now He says, "Touch me not," &c. I am going to another place. I am taking your hopes or your promises in another way, and not in flesh. If He was to take it, it would be when the just shine in the kingdom of the Father. He says, "Go tell my brethren, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father, and my God and your God." (John xx. 17.) I am giving you something entirely new—not My presence yet—not power yet; but where He was going Himself He would take us.

He does isolate us; He does pass through different circumstances; but whether gradually or suddenly, His object is to break down everything of nature, and this in grace to us. Here for the first time He says, "my brethren." He had never called them "brethren" *definitely* until now. He had been heard from the horns of the unicorns. (Psa. xxii. 21.) During His life He had declared the Father's name. Now He declares the love wherewith He is loved is that with which we are loved. He could

not say that during His life. During His ministry He was making known the Father, walking with the Father, speaking to the Father. Now he takes them into the same relationship. Why? Because the redemption was accomplished.

Christ never addressed His Father as *God*—never less than as *Father*. During His life as given in the Gospels, all His life through, it was always, "Father." When on the cross it was, "My God, my God," until all was finished, when He said, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." (Luke xxiii. 46.) In making the atonement, what was not against Him? There was one thing that could not be against any, and that was *love*; but there could be none as to the feeling and manifestation of it then. He was forsaken; and the more the love was known, the more terrible it was. He was dealt with according to the majesty of God, the righteousness of God, the truth of God, the holiness of God. All that God is was made good against Him. God was thus putting away sin, and Christ was glorifying God about sin.

But now, being dead and risen, He comes up to put His disciples into the place of full blessing. The work is done, and there is no sin left. Everything that God is is now brought out in blessing, and all the sin is put out of the way. He is declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead. He goes up to God, and takes us too. I am

going to my God, and He is your God too. He is going into all that is blessed. I am not going to be present with you corporeally, so that you can "touch" me; but I am going to My God, and your God, My Father, and your Father. Such is the word to this poor desolate woman. She was a fit messenger, by her very nothingness, to witness of Christ and His work and His fulness.

"I go," and faith goes too, entering into that within the veil. It enters into all that which God is. Where we live is within the veil. Sense may come in and hide God's presence; but the atonement has brought us into it, and into the very same relationship which Christ has as risen. We sometimes enjoy peace, we enjoy scripture, a hymn, or prayer, without realizing the presence of God; and then there is not the same power, or the same exercise of heart in it. I can own the blessing, and rejoice in the blessing, without having my heart searched out; but if in these I have the sense of Him, my state is very different. It is very important, not only to have a right thought, *but to have it with Him*. If you search your own heart, you will find that you may sing without realizing Jesus Himself. Then the heart is never probed, the evil is not detected, and the power of grace is not the same. By the atonement sin is put out, and God is brought in. God exercises our hearts about good and evil by first giving us the good. There must be the possession of perfect good and then there is holiness, and not merely the exercise of dread and

fear. Our hearts must follow Him where He is gone. We cannot "touch" Him.

May the Lord give us to live a life in which He is everything!

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"I WILL CONSIDER THY TESTIMONIES."

How varied and precious are the "considerations" set before us in the Epistle to the Hebrews, striking chord after chord in our hearts, and producing note after note of praise! In the first chapter the personal and official dignities and glories of the Lord Jesus Christ crowd themselves together and unfold themselves before our souls; while in the second chapter, we have the grace of Him, by whom God spake in these last days, in associating others with Himself, when passing through death to the Headship of all things, crowned with glory and honour; it is as thus set before us, we are told, as holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, to "*consider*" Him, the Apostle and High Priest of our profession; to gaze on Him, and have our souls enlarged in contemplating Him, "who was faithful to Him that appointed him."

But how can such as we sit down and feast ourselves with such considerations, with consciences unpurged and not at rest? In view of this need, and before the next "consideration" is presented to us, we are led, in chapters ix. and x., to see the altar of sin-offering receiving a victim, once and for

ever, that has satisfied all its cravings, and which has fully answered all the demands of the glory of God as to sin and uncleanness; satisfies the need of the convicted conscience, and silenced every accusing foe. And with consciences thus at rest, we are set down to another consideration for our souls. We are told in chapter x. 24, to "*consider* one another to provoke unto love and to good works." With the holy peace and calm of purged consciences we are thus, as it were, told that we have leisure to turn round and look one upon another with such an end in view, and so much the more as we see the "day" approaching.

But, you will say, there are the trials and difficulties of the way to contend with, and there are the weights and hinderances that would hamper and clog us in our journeying onwards to the glory. And, in view of these things, we are told to turn our eyes toward Him again, and we are exhorted in chapter xii., to "*consider*" Him who endured as One who has been in the way Himself, and understands the grace needed for every step, and who has learned "how to speak a word in season to him that is weary," (Isaiah l.) at every stage of the journey to the place where He has Himself sat down, "lest we should be weary and faint in our minds."

And, lastly, as those who are in the midst of the things that are about to be shaken, and who are dwelling in spirit, and by faith amongst those things which, when all things are shaken, will remain, we are exhorted to "*consider*" the end of the

conversation of those who have ministered among us, . . . "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever."

Varied and precious are the "considerations" thus laid before us, and to which we are set down to contemplate, in their order and suitability, as every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of our God.

ONE RIGHT PATH.

There is only one right way with everything of God; while the shades of right (which in reality are paths of error) are countless. Now the errant soul, or *bad* guide, is sure always to engage my soul with an inquiry about some one of the shades of right; asking me, "Where is the wrong there?" "Are there not exemplary men there?" he does not say to me, "Are you seeking the only one narrow path in this evil day (more and more narrow, as the day becomes more evil); are you seeking Christ pre-eminently? Another Mary Magdalene, only with more intelligence, and *not less love*. It was a dark hour of true regard for Him on the earth, when He Himself, and He alone could satisfy her. It was not companions, or good men, or anything but that true, deep, *personal* interest, which love alone understands, and confers; and this is what we want in this day. If we have true personal interest for the Lord, we shall assuredly care for all that are His on the earth; but we must *begin* with Him.

It is about Himself He speaks to the angels of the seven churches. The moment I love Him, He says to me, "Feed my sheep." (John xxi. 16.) All interest for others must spring from this, as well as all instruction for myself. If I am seeking the Lord with a pure heart, I am sure to find myself

(because it is the one Spirit which is leading us) in company "with them who call on the Lord out of a pure heart." (2 Tim. ii. 23.) If it be the meeting, or the ministry, or the brethren, I am on a poor foundation.

The more evil the time, the more pointed, though less open, is the attempt to set aside the plan and rule of Christ. It has been done openly in Christendom, and now the malice of Satan would have it done among them who profess to stand apart from the growing apostasy in the world. If I am seeking a place to worship in, I am sure to go wrong; for I am looking for what suits my taste, and I am not guided by principle; but if I am seeking to worship my Lord (then it is a Person, not a place, that is before my soul), I am sure to be led rightly, for the Spirit of light which is in the blind man (John ix.) always leads the soul that is morally outside the place of worship (as this man was, on account of his new light,) to worship the Lord of light. One faithful one, like this self-same man, confounds the most learned theologian.

Let us be like Mary Magdalene in true devotion of heart to our Lord; and like the once blind man, maintaining our light, its reality, and its source, against all comers, and *in the way*. We shall surely be rewarded as they were, with the assured presence of our Lord.

Gracious God, thy children keep;
Jesus guide thy silly sheep;
Fix, O fix, our fickle souls;
Lord, direct us; we are fools.

Bid us in thy care confide;
Keep us near thy wounded side;
From thee never let us stir,
For thou know'st how soon we err.

Lay us low before thy feet,
Safe from pride and self-conceit;
Be the language of our souls,
Lord, direct us; we are fools.

Dang'rous doctrines from without,
Lies and errors round about;

From within a treach'rous heart,
Prone to take the tempter's part.

By thy word we fain would steer,
Fain thy Spirit's dictates hear;
Save us from the rocks and shelves;
Save us chiefly from ourselves.

Never, never may we dare,
What we are not, say we are;
Make us well our vileness know;
Keep us very, very low.

May we all our wills resign,
Quite absorb'd and lost in thine;
Let us walk by thy right rules;
Lord, direct us; we are fools.