

2 Corinthians - Commentaries by George Vicesimus Wigram

Food for the Flock: Volume 3, We Are Made Manifest (5:1-10)

CO 5:1-10 {ONE of the remarkable things about the truth of God is- that it lays hold of the conscience, and acts on it far beyond the intelligence of the person. In this way a statement, in itself inaccurate and incomplete, in the mind even of the person who makes it, is directed to the very point needed to touch the conscience.

This is the case with what is often said about this chapter. It is a solemn thing to have everything thus turned out before God and man. There is a time coming when language will no longer be able to disguise what we really feel; all will be brought into the light-will stand in the presence of it; everything will be made manifest, not only to the person's own conscience, but in the presence of other men, too. There is this in the passage, but there is a great deal more.

" We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ; " that word implies our personal presence-the judgment-seat and every one there; but besides this all is "made manifest " there now. It is " knowing the terror of the Lord " that " we persuade men." "We are made manifest to God, and I trust also to your consciences." There was a light which had shined into Paul's heart, and there was no terror to him.

To a sinner it is an awful thought that all must be opened up. before God, but it was not to Paul, because he was made manifest to God. He had been before God-he had been read by Him. And not only this, but there was a something-a certain life of God—which these Corinthians might see whether they did or not. There was not only light in his heart, but there was treasure in an earthen vessel, and Paul showed how God works death in us in order that the life may be free.

This is God's way with us, but it is' not what man likes. If man could have heaven in his own way, he would be 'ready to go there; but when it comes to the living God having His way with us, man's will broken and death working, it becomes a painful thing. " Though our outward man perish " is the way Paul had to go, and the Corinthians, and we, too, whether sensible of it or no; and it is a very blessed thing when, while &luscious of the outer man thus perishing, the child of God can say, " The inward man is renewed day by day." Life is working on through all the death.

Paul could say it was in the midst of all circumstances. " For which cause we faint not; for our light affliction, which is but for a moments worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at-the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." What is the secret from lack of which many finding death working in them have no power to say, ",for which cause we faint not "? Why not now as then?. It is because we are not realizing that " our light affliction, which is but. for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

Do you wonder that if Christ is preparing d place for us there, and sees us meanwhile here carrying about as much of the sand of the desert as we can, that He, by letting death and disappointment roll in on all we seek, should bring home to us the fact that it will not do? There is not one of us really able to say, I see what He is doing, who is not also able to add, I faint not, though all be against me. In contrast to present things, for every touch that death gives you should be able to point to some circumstance in: glory that answers to it.—God has taken us potsherds of the earth up for His glory, and the great thing for us to do is to sit down and see which way God is going, for we shall find His way is to make all give way before that I should be-sorry if any one knowing me could not say, Your walk says that you have everything inside Christ and nothing outside I would look upon my body as an earthen pitcher in which to carry about the dying of Jesus, as it shall carry one day the glory of Christ; and, as to circumstances here, they are smashed.

This is no matter of attainment; -it is the simple path of the Christian. If God has, by the hand of His Son, labeled a place for me in the glory, what do I want here? when I get up to where He is I shall see that, though I was a poor broken thing here, " in deaths oft," yet it was my pathway. And where does that pathway lead up to? To the judgment-seat of Christ. He is only a Savior to some. But He would not apply His work to your soul and leave Himself out of the question. The point is how the saved ones should walk. He cares about your walk though you do not gain life by it. I should not like to be one who so little appreciated the love and grace of Christ as to be dragged up there just because He must have me, and it to be manifested there what an unworthy life mine has been!

Do you know what it is to have your motives detected? to have a friend come and say that which makes your heart ready to burst because he has touched the right point-the one you thought concealed? -What agony you felt at the first sound of it? What is that to what it will be before that judgment-seat?

But everything is " made manifest " now. What is there in me that is not made manifest All is. You may, like Job, be in the furnace, but God comes in and says: He is a dear child of mine; the dross is purged away, and there remains that which I put in. What would a place on the throne be without the heart being brought into subjection to His present work? What is all the eternal glory compared to the thought that Christ is the object for which I have to live now He has made me a vessel to show forth His glory now, and what sort of fruit does He look for from me?

(G. V. W.)

The Samaritans would not receive Him, and He turns aside into another village. Oh what a lesson that is! Because He had " steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem." The half-hearted would not receive Him because He was doing the very thing that marked His blessedness. And so it will be with you; if you set your face to go to Jerusalem you will not be received by those who are half-hearted. (J. N. D.)

I have read these chapters together because they present the gospel in the way in which Paul learned all the leading points of it. There was a certain man very remarkable for his self-righteousness—Saul of Tarsus. He thought he could put forth his power mightily to vindicate God's cause against One whom he thought an impostor—Jesus of Nazareth; and when he saw the light of the glory shine down on Stephen, it had no effect on him whatever; it only stirred his heart up to go to the high priest to get letters to Damascus. All the hard thoughts he had about Christ had a response in the heart of Christ. He looked down and saw that man with those clothes laid at his feet; and He said, "That is the man I will take up; and I will put him into Stephen's place, whether he likes it or not." The Lord called him as he went down to Damascus "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" Saul's answer was, "Who art thou, Lord?" "I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest." What gentleness of the Lord Jesus! The next word is, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" The Lord put that man for the first time into the place of an enquirer about the person of the Lord Jesus. He says, "The first time I ever asked the question, who art thou? was when I saw the divine glory shining down, and heard the voice of Him who I thought was an impostor calling me by name; what could I do but give up all to Him?" He gives up all his thoughts, and says, "I know Him, and I am at His disposal." Peter, James, and John did not know the Lord Jesus in this way till He was risen from the dead. Both Peter and Paul had to learn what was the main object for which Christ came into the world; and they got the light of it after He rose from the dead. The revelation of Christ as being gone into heaven had to be made known to Peter. Now, how many of you can say, I know Him? Do you know Him? After what sort of fashion? With any sort of intimacy? When I was nineteen, if friends talked to me about Christ, I knew nothing; but when the Lord came and introduced Himself to me I thought that a person was close to me, and that everything I had done was out in the light; but instead of coming to condemn me, there was nothing but love in Him. I could have told you who Jesus Christ was, and who Caesar was; but as to knowing Himself, I was utterly ignorant. But as He made His passages of love into my heart, out came the confession of what I was. I have had forty-seven years' apprenticeship under Christ; and of all the things on which my heart dwells as to eternity, I say, "I have got One who is gone there before me."

God says, "Let there be light." (v. 6) The One who spoke light out of darkness could speak light into darkness, as He does into the heart of the poor sinner. I want to call attention to what Paul had to learn. Peter learned it too, that it was not what men did to Christ in crucifying Him that contained the full meaning of His death, but there was a "determinate counsel of God." He let men run their whole course, because He could not be a just God, and the Justifier of him that believeth, without the blood of Christ. They had God in the world, and they would not have Him there, and now the blood is in heaven. They say, we will not have that either. It is the world, not the earth, spoken of here the world, the system man has set up to make himself happy without God. God comes into the scene, and man says, "I will not have you." "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." He did not come raking up their transgressions. God saw that reconciliation was what was wanted. He saw that unless He could take that enmity out of my heart, we could never come together. And now Paul says, "He has committed unto us the word of this reconciliation." The unconverted say, "I cannot admit that I need reconciling to God, or else I should be lost." "Oh," says the Christian, "that is just where I get my rest!" Even a child very soon displays will. What does God say? "Very unlike my Son; I cannot get on with it." Does He turn away? No; He says you want reconciling. "You are in a path of I will 'and' I won't: it leads to hell. My Son went through the world, and only said I will' twice, and that when it was My will." Does God deal with will in man? Yes; He sent out the apostles and others with this word, "Be ye reconciled to God."

Let me say a word about the need of this reconciliation, because I knew so much about it for nineteen years. When I learned I was going down a sloping path to hell, I set myself to work out righteousness, and worked myself nearly to death, having no idea of doing things by halves. And what did I see all this come to? God says, "I must do the work." What! that no one but God was to have the credit of salvation? That I was to come as a poor sinner? Why that will let me down so very low! It just proved that I wanted reconciling. I was saying, up to that time, "I don't like Thy way." Perhaps some of you are saying to God, "I don't like Thy way; I must do something." God says, "I did it eighteen hundred years ago. My Son died. I shall not do the work again. If you come into My presence, saying, I am going to do everything for myself, I say, I do not know you." Are you going to displace everything in heaven? Are you going to undo the work of Christ, and bring in a new way? That work has stood before God for more than eighteen hundred years, and are you, an upstart creature, going to say, no that work must be set aside, and a way must be made for me, to let me figure out and show what I am?

In the last verse we get the basis of it all. If we pause on verse 21, we shall find how different God's thoughts are from man's thoughts. "For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." Very well put by the apostle in a few words, because we cannot say, Who can this be? for we know there was only One who "knew no sin." It might be placed over the Lord Jesus in heaven, "This Man hath done nothing amiss;" but more than that, "He knew no sin." "Holy, harmless, undefiled," &c. God made Him to be sin; now what does man think about that? I heard it said, "I don't think there is any justice about that;" but man, when he undertakes to judge God, is in the dark. It would never have been just or righteousness if He had been made sin contrary to His will. I just remark, that in all these infidel reasonings men take things for granted that are not true. Had not God a right to do as He liked? Had not He a right to sit in heaven from all eternity? Yes. Had not He a right to leave that place, and take His place on the cross? Man must keep his own place, or else he comes into judgment. Who can say to God, Thou must not be here? All that it brings out is, that when the gospel is presented to man, he says, "I do not like God, or His ways." It shows another thing, that the wisdom of God was such that He knew how to take the absolute ruin of man, and make that the means of the greatest glory to Himself. Look at man in the garden; he turned his back upon God, and followed Satan. How did He remedy it? Could man? No; God says, "I will step in there, and turn that very ruin to My own praise." How did He do it? His Son comes down to drink that cup of wrath for sinners; the Son of God was made sin. He is the only Person yet who has ever tasted the wrath of God against sin, and I am bold to say He was the only One who could taste it fully. Take a man who goes to "his own place:" he knows what it is to be separated from God; but how can a finite being learn what is infinite? But when the Son of God came into the world He took the cup of wrath. Who will measure what He went through? the thought of God hiding His face from Him? Many a believer has tried to measure sin, and he says, "No, I cannot; I find the measure in the cross which I cannot measure." He was forsaken of God; that is the sort of God who sent Peter and Paul with this message to poor sinners. "I have made Him, who knew no sin, to be sin for you."

Then you get the other thought brought out in the latter part of the verse, "That we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." God hid His face from His Son, just as the Jews and Gentiles were mocking Him; but He did not mean it to end there. He says, "Now come to My right

hand, and let Me show the world what I think of You; and everyone who comes to Me in Thy name shall receive a hearty welcome." It is as simple as possible. Suppose I had been into a foreign land, and saved the life of some man out of a river. I return, and I want a favor of some of you who are akin to him; I come to you; you say, "I do not know you." I reply, "Have you heard from your son lately?" You tell me all that has passed, and I say, "I am the man who saved him." "Oh," you say, "what will I not give you! Come and sit down, and make my home your home." Just so with God and Christ; if you come in your own name He does not know you, if you come in His name you get a hearty welcome. The thing is as clear as possible, and you have firm ground to go upon if you come in His name.

What is the connection between this and human righteousness? Human righteousness is, I do this and that, and when I have done, God forms the judgment of it. God's righteousness is God saying, "I have done something, and I want someone to recognize it, and to come in His name." That is heart-work when we come to know a loving Saviour; faith-work when we come to think of what God has done. Then there is conscience-work; you cannot look into my conscience, or I into yours. We see a beautiful conscience-work in the apostle. He says we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ; not the great white throne—that is at the end of the thousand years. Those who appear there will never appear at the other judgment-seat. Here it is like a man who has been away from home; he comes back and settles up his accounts in a loving way: good servants like their masters to keep short reckonings. When Christ gathers all His people together there, it is a question of how He shall place them in the kingdom. If I speak of appearing in a place, I mean I shall be manifest. Paul says, my doctrine is manifest, and we must all be manifested. People do not like that: what, all come out there? I will tell you why they do not like it, they have not been manifested to themselves yet; but you cannot escape it if you mean to be in the glory. But stop; what are you afraid of? Who are you going to meet there? The Lord Jesus Christ. No mistake about His having known you as a sinner, and as a failing saint He does not expect you to be just like Himself. He expects a poor sinner saved by grace. Will it be a very painful thing to be there? He will say, as He did to Peter, "I had not a bit of faith in you, but you had a bit of faith in Me, and that is what brought you here." Will it be painful if He says, You owe it all to Me; do not go and say, that you did it yourself. Are you afraid to appear before Him there? What does God think about me? what do saints of God think about me? what do I think about myself? If I have not weighed myself up in God's presence, no wonder I am not at ease at the thought of being at the judgment-seat. Is your thought about yourself anything but the blood of Christ as to acceptance? I would rather come cleansed by that blood than in my own righteousness even if it were possible.

What do I think of all that blessed favor into which I am brought? Christ is gone into heaven, and I am to go in there. It is what I think of Christ, not what I think of myself; it clears out every thought of myself. Where are poor sinners who do not know they want cleansing by blood? Lost! lost! lost! No matter who you are—either a poor sinner with a Saviour, or a poor sinful man cleaving to his sinfulness. Paul says, I do not come to teach you human righteousness, but Jesus Christ who is revealed to you and me. The eye of that Lord looks down on us now. When He was on earth He looked down on a little company like this; He knew Nicodemus at the first glance, and He knew the woman of Samaria at the first glance. As He looks down on us, does He see one who knows His blood, His finished work, or one who cares nothing about Him? I am connected with One who is the center of all God's purposes; I know that all that is true of a believer, and a great deal more. It is wonderful, God's way of setting aside all that is of the flesh, and making a way that lets naughty sinners down in self-abhorrence, and makes them say, "My trust is in the Lord." Who else should ruined sinners trust in? Everything in connection with sin about me makes me loathe myself, and cling to Him and say, Christ for me.

G. V. W.

Christian Truth: Volume 32, 2 Corinthians 3:18 (3:18)

What soul in nature ever thought it worth while to sit down and muse over the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ? But a quickened soul knows that face to be covered with glory. Oh, when one turns and sees the radiancy of the light of the glory of God in the face of the Lord Jesus, one must have something of the divine mind, or one could not enter into it. It is God who has given the power to the believer to see the glory of God in that face.,

The Apostle Paul felt it was a great thing to keep saints in occupation with that glory, beholding it with open face. Are you occupied with it? Surely Christians have their world as well as the men of the earth—a world in which that face of Jesus Christ is seen unveiled; and there is no disappointment connected with it as the heart's object. That face entirely satisfied the heart of Paul. He was one of all others who had the greatest sight of that unveiled face. The light of the glory of that face never passes away. Having had it unveiled, it leaves something in the soul as a deposit. It shines into the heart that we may be changed into the same glory from glory to glory. A certain assimilating power is put forth, so that the soul—as He unfolds and develops it—passes from glory to glory. A seed will germinate after two thousand years, and we may see the plant unfolding; and the glory of the plant is quite a different thing from the seed. What is given to the believer is the incorruptible seed, which, after it is received; gives perfect rest for eternity to the soul; but it has to work and it goes on gradually unfolding in the believer what was received from Christ, changing him into the same image from glory to glory. Not by his own faithfulness, but the faithfulness of that Christ, watching the seed of His own planting, and gradually unfolding that which He had communicated, to make the expression of what He had given, the rule of the life.

He was the One to fill the woman of Samaria's heart, but it is He who must supply the water springing up into eternal life. That is His present work among His people, and the certainty that they have Him working with them is one of their greatest securities as they go through the world. To be able to say, I have received of Him the incorruptible seed which nothing can destroy or pluck out, and He Himself is watching over it night and day. What a thought, that there is One at God's right hand dealing with poor things down here, because He has pledged His word that all who believe in Him have eternal life, and that none shall pluck them out of His hand. They shall not come into judgment. Can the head judge,—the members? My feet may get soiled by my careless walk down here, and they ought not to be so; Christ will wash them again and again, but He does not judge me. I have been quickened and raised up together with Him, and that identifies me with heaven and the center of heaven itself, for it makes me a part of His body.

We want something to link our hearts up there with the Lord—the constraining power which Paul felt. The love of Christ should be the constraint upon us as to our walk, and this is the simple doctrine of being co-planted with Christ.

When God makes strength perfect in weakness, the question comes, Who is the doer of everything? This took place in Paul when he was first converted; this was the principle he was first put on—You are not to trust, Paul, to your own strength, or wisdom, or anything; but you are to trust Me. Paul got locked up in prison, and despaired of life; but it was not God's thought that His Apostle should be stopped. When he was quietly conning over it all, he said, I had "sentence of death" in myself, etc. Paul had before him the God that raised up the Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Cor. 1:9.)

Was it a great thing for the God who had raised the Lord Jesus, who had shone down into Paul's heart, to open his prison bars? Christ was crucified in weakness; He lives by the power of God—strength made perfect in weakness. The expression at the close of verse 9 should be "tabernacle upon me"; the thought conveyed to my soul is a reference to God dwelling in a pillar of fire, and the cloud keeping company with people all through their journey in the wilderness. Paul was to go forth as one who had no strength, but as one whose weakness is used of God for the display of His glory; and there we find Paul singing a song over Satan. I glory in my infirmities; he finds he can bear nothing of himself, perfect weakness; but now he has got the secret of victory from the Lord, and he can sing a song over his weakness and over Satan; and he finds Satan's work has been turned into his good. The Lord has allowed it, all for his blessing.

Now the question is, Will Christ's arm be always underneath me? Will He ever tabernacle over me? Will He never fail me? Shall I be always able to sing this song? This is the principle of resurrection which quiets and gives peace. Paul was to wear it inside him all day long, through his whole course. Resurrection must be applied to our every circumstance. "Crucified with Christ," "quickened us together," "raised us up together, and made us to sit together in," etc. Through all your life, Paul, you are to take this principle into your bosom; resurrection, strength made perfect in weakness.

One word, and it is not a strained word: I have often thought of the wilderness through which God brought Israel. His eye was on the wilderness. He prepared it. In substance He says, I have made the place for a particular purpose in connection with My people; I have arranged it long ago. The wilderness was no accident; it was the very place He had prepared. No 'resources to nature; absolute dependence on God there. And God has made and marked out your circumstances, and has so made them that you cannot go through them without Himself. Some may say in reference to their path, This thing came upon me through the sin of someone else. Never mind that; it came from God. Neither divine wisdom nor power could have added anything to the wilderness to have made it more impassable to nature or more easy to God. He allows a quantity of things in our circumstances to make us feel we cannot go through them without Him. What an immense difference in saying, This thing comes from God;

He has put it there, and, All this is against me. If it is I and God, there is no difficulty; if we leave Him out, the way is impassable. Which would you rather have, a life without difficulty, or a life so full of difficulty that the blessed Lord Jesus is obliged to show His face every day, yes, every minute, obliged to keep close to me all day long?

God so ordered the course of the Apostle that it was impossible to get on without the Lord Jesus who raises the dead; and this does not merely apply to moral difficulties, but to everything. There is someone sick in the house; who do you turn to first, God or the doctor? When the doctor thinks it a serious case, you take it as a decision; but the question is not what the doctor says, but what is God's purpose? Means may be used, but the Christian is not to use anything apart from God - the Lord first in everything. I do not think praise ever comes forth from us so purely as in connection with what is disagreeable. When we give thanks for mercies, it is not so pure as when able to praise for what we do not like; we should be dropping the sweet into the disagreeable. When we think of the Lord's love in it, it sweetens what is bitter.

The life of Paul was a wonderful life. "To me to live is Christ." The way he did run his course brought out the fellowship of the life of Christ; he had in Caesar's court the very life the Lord Jesus had on the Father's throne. It is wonderful, and all on the principle, "My grace is sufficient for thee."

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