Philippians - Commentaries by Charles Stanley

Things New and Old: Volume 33, Fellowship of His Sufferings, The

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Philippians 3:10.

We must notice that these are not the first words in this text. Many sincere souls try to put them first in their experience, in order to attain to a higher state of resurrection power. And this is the case with many devout Romanists, and others who seek, but never find, this higher state. Penances, and all kinds of self-inflicted chastisements are all in vain, except it be to feed our religious pride and Pharasaism. How many have sunk into dark infidelity through thus reversing the order of the word of God. Let us look at the scripture just as it stands.

“That I may know him.” We will begin one verse previous: “And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law [or which would be on the principle of law], but that which is, through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.” We cannot understand verse 10 if we have not utterly renounced all thoughts of attaining to righteousness on the principle of works of law: otherwise we shall be putting our own sufferings, or our own conformity to His death, call it what we will, in the place of the atoning death of Christ. And this will imperceptibly lead us into the heresy of infused righteousness, and thus deny “righteousness of God.” Satan may use this soul-destroying error in a great variety of ways.

Are you, my reader, seeking to have on “mine own righteousness?” Are you struggling for this? Then dream not of fellowship with the sufferings of Christ. Your refusal of the great truth of righteousness of God is direct antagonism against Christ. Oh, how Saul of Tarsus would have sought righteousness on the principle of works of law, had he not been led by the heavenly vision of Christ to utterly and forever renounce all his own supposed righteousness as dung! Think of his own righteousness being, to Paul, as loathsome as dung! Have you learned this lesson in the light of the heavenly vision? When God gives faith, He gives faith’s object—His beloved Son, who has accomplished all His will in our redemption. What would faith be without this object? Hence he goes on to verse 10.

“That I may know him.” Do you know Him? We may read about Him, and preach about Him, and yet not know Him. Next to seeing Him at His coming, above all things, the believer longs to know Him, our Great High Priest in every sorrow and temptation; to know Him our righteousness, our sanctification, our redemption; and to know Him in all the tender intimacies of His infinite love—that same Jesus who was in an agony at the prospect of bearing my sins. And yet He did bear them, nailed to the cross—that Man who passed through the darkness of God’s wrath due to me.

Not only this: “And the power of his resurrection”—that new creation, where all is new, and all is of God. To know the power of this “us ward.” To know Him, raised from the dead, the beginning of the new creation. To see our old selves passed away out of sight. To know Him, and to know the power of being in Him in that new creation of resurrection, where all is of God. All this must be known in our souls before we talk of conformity to His death. Nothing can be more dangerous to souls than to seek a sort of Romish attainment of death first.

Twelve stones must be taken out of Jordan first in resurrection power. We must first know Him, and our place with Him in resurrection, before the twelve stones can be put into Jordan, and there remain. We must be perfectly clear about our place in the heavenlies with Christ, in actual possession on the principle of faith, before we take the place of conformity unto His death. It is quite true we get into this place of life through death; but is it through our death or dying, or through His death for us? The moment we admit the thought of its being through our death, we are going rather fast on the road to Rome. We may not know it, but there is not a more dangerous road, and, perhaps, nothing we need to be more on our guard against.

But if we well know that we have been brought, through the riches of the grace and the exceeding greatness of the power of God, into this resurrection place of blessedness through the death and resurrection of Christ, we may now go on to what is “the fellowship of his sufferings,” and what it is to be made conformable unto his death. With His atoning suffering at the hands of God, we can have no fellowship, no share. He was absolutely alone, bearing the wrath, of God due to our sins. He was alone when made sin for us. But what He suffered at the hands of men, led on by Satan, we may share. The Satanic hatred of man against Him still continues, and God, in His own tender mercy, still endures the hatred of man.

Oh, how little did Saul know that his mad and cruel persecution of the saints was hatred against God! Yes, God the Son, revealed in glory, said, “Why persecutest thou me?” It was the continuation of man’s hatred, and His suffering in every member of His body on earth. And Saul the persecutor had soon, as Paul the Christian, to have fellowship in these sufferings. Does not our head feel what any member of our body suffers? so Christ as Head of the body feels what affects His saints.

If we know our place in Christ, in resurrection standing, shall we desire to be with that world which still hates and persecutes Christ, in His true members, though it be as sincere and religious as was Saul? Or shall we not, like Paul the converted, be desiring the rather to know the fellowship of the sufferings of Christ? Which way lean you, beloved Christian? To the world that still hates Christ, or to the Christ that is hated? Have you not been separated from that world by the death of Christ? Have you not been baptized into this very profession of death with Christ?

Now where is the practical conformity to His death? You may say, Oh, well, all this is now given up in Christendom. Within the last few years all is changed. Yes, even as it is written, there are “Lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God: having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.” (See 2 Tim. 3:1-5.) It is like the story of the spider and the fly. Come into my parlor, says Satan, and enjoy my world’s pleasures, and pastimes to your hearts’ content; and do not really believe a word God says in the scriptures. Reader, will you listen to the old serpent? Remember it is written, “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the

love of the Father is not in him.” Here you join issue. The Father loves the Son: the world hates Him. Can you have fellowship with both? You must then give up the world that hates Christ, and take your place, bearing His reproach and suffering here; or you must give up Christ, and accept Satan’s world, with its pleasures, lusts, and pastimes. But not for long. These are the last days. The widespread giving up of Christ for worldly pleasures proves it. The Judge is at the door. Do not dream that God will allow men to go on forever persecuting and hating Christ. It is blessed to suffer with Him, for they that suffer with Him shall reign with Him forever. May the Lord separate all who are His from a world doomed to speedy judgment. C. S.

Holiness and the Second Coming of Christ, Holiness and the Second Coming of Christ: No. 2

We will now turn to Phil. 3:17-21: " Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an en-sample." Paul had been attracted to Christ in heavenly glory. He longed for the resurrection from among the dead, when he knew he should be perfect; that is, conformed to the glorified Christ All else was as dung to him. He calls on the whole assembly at Philippi to be thus minded, and be followers of him. (" For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ; whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame; who mind earthly things.") He does not say. There are many such amongst you, the assembly, at Philippi, but with weeping he tells of such as had already come in amongst the general professors of Christianity. Neither do these seem to have been guilty of such sins as would have subjected them to discipline. What had they done? By their walk, minding (setting their hearts on) earthly things, they had denied all real identification with the cross of Christ. Now this minding earthly things, proved they were not Christians at all; for their end is destruction—yea, they are enemies of the cross of Christ.

What a searching word for our hearts. One man may say, " May I not set this aside, and mind earthly things, and possess as much of the world as I can get?" No; remember it is written, " whose end is destruction." Others may say, " May we not mind earthly things, and sit in the world's parliament?" And professors may say, " May we not mind earthly things, and take part in the world's politics? Are we not members of its commonwealth?" And thousands more may sky," May we not set our hearts on the acquisition of wealth?" God tells us all such are the enemies of the cross of Christ. u Whose end is destruction." Do we believe God? And if we do not, will that alter the fact, "whose end is destruction "?

If such be the case, (and can any deny it?) then what is the mark of true holiness? And what marks those who really are true Christians? Let us hear the apostle: u For our conversation [commonwealth] is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." It is a remarkable fact, that, not until the sanctifying hope of the Lord's return had been practically lost—yea, for the first three centuries—there is not a single fact on record to show that true Christians ever took part in earthly politics. All true Christians acted on this principle of heavenly citizenship.

Failure there was, but the true heavenly character of the Christian was not denied as now. And it is no less remarkable, that the revival of the great and blessed truth of the coming of the Lord in these days, has been accompanied with the felt need of holy separation from the world. Beloved reader, if that hope is lost to your soul, you are sinking into minding earthly things. Remember, the end of this path is destruction.

No man can serve two masters. Our commonwealth is in heaven, the world's commonwealth is on earth. The world, having killed the Prince of life, is ever expecting in vain that a better day is coming to them. True Christians look for the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior—that very Jesus, Savior, whom the world still rejects and hates. Are you quite sure that when He comes, He will come as your Savior? Are you waiting for Him from heaven? Can you say you arc not of the world, even as He is not of the world? When the soul is first awakened to wait for the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, he is lifted out of politics and minding earthly things, like a man when lie is drawn out of a pit.

What a test these few verses are to every one of us. Though the apostle was perfect in Christ as to his acceptance in Him, yet, in this epistle, the eye of faith is fixed on that perfection we shall have in complete conformity to Christ at His coming. Who shall change (or transform) this vile body, or our body of humiliation, into conformity to His body of glory, &c. For the present our commonwealth is in heaven. We wait for the Lord Jesus as Savior. Then we shall be like Him, transformed into conformity to His body in glory. Oh, the separating, sanctifying, holy influence of this blessed hope!

If we turn now to another scripture, we shall see the same effect of this blessed hope, not only as to earthly politics, and minding earthly things, but as to lust and sins in general. But first mark, in the scripture we have been considering, it is not looking for the Judge, or the Lord, to judge us for our sins, that has this sanctifying effect, but looking for the Lord as Savior.

It may be solemnly taken for granted, that of those who deceive themselves by mere profession, whilst, by their worldly walk, they deny the cross of Christ, and mind earthly things, their end is not to wait for the Savior, but destruction. The minding of earthly things is not a fall, or the failure of a true Christian in the hour of temptation—the thing which he abhors, and deeply repents of; but minding of earthly things characterizes a man—it is willful—he delights in it—he defends it. It thus proves he has not been born of God. He is not a new creature, and delights only in the ways of the old nature. And, as to being dead with Christ, he is an enemy to such a thought. May the Lord awaken thousands of such, who are hastening on to eternal woe.

Now, will you turn to Col. 3:1-5. Here is the same truth more widely applied. With real Christians all is absolute certainty. As to themselves, they are " buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him, through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead." (Chap. 2:12.) They are quickened with Him—all trespasses forgiven. (Chap. ii. 13.) They are dead with Christ. They need no ritualism to improve what is dead. (Chap. 2:20.) Yes, as to all thought of improvement of the flesh, they are dead with Christ. But not only so, " If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection [or, mind] on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God."

What a contrast this is to the enmity against the cross of Christ, by minding earthly things. But surely true Christians, being dead with Christ, and risen with Christ, and their commonwealth being in heaven, they will delight to mind, to set their mind and heart on, things above. And then, mark the still further divine certainty: " When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory." Have you, beloved reader, this blessed certainty? When Christ shall appear in glory, will you be one of the glorified saints that shall appear, or be

manifested, with Him? Is this divinely certain? We know some would say, Such a certainty would lead you to be careless as to holiness of walk—yea, would be license to sin. How differently the Holy Spirit uses this very certainty at the appearing of the Lord. Yes, note, He is not speaking to a backslider in a low condition of soul, but to you and the writer, if dead with Christ, and risen with Him; and because we have this blessed divine certainty of appearing with Christ in glory, He says, " Mortify, therefore, your members which are upon the earth, fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetous-ness, which is idolatry." Yes, the most advanced Christian, complete in Christ, holy and beloved (ver. 12), has these members, or tendencies, in himself, and needs to mortify them; for, if not walking in holy dependence on the Spirit of God, there is not one of these sins, or those named afterward in this chapter, into which he may not fall. But if the believer, though, as to his standing in Christ, dead and risen with Christ, has not still this evil nature to contend with, or, as scripture expresses it, these members on earth, then there would be no meaning in the exhortation to mortify them. If that sinful nature be either made good and holy, or eradicated, then there would be no such members of evil to mortify. Instead, then, of false views of perfection, the coming of the Lord, and the absolute certainty that when He appears, every true Christian will appear with Him in glory, is made the very basis of exhortations to holiness, every one of which exhortations would have no meaning, if the believer had not in himself the tendency to do these very things.

Before looking at other scriptures on this subject, we would press the reader to well examine these facts. If you know that you are identified with Christ in death, dead with Him; and more, if you be risen with Christ; and further, if you have the certainty that when He shall appear, you will certainly appear with Him in glory; then remember that this is the very reason why you should mortify every evil desire that may arise. And surely there cannot be a greater motive for holiness.

Things New and Old: Volume 27, Has the Believer to Work Out His Salvation From Beneath the Wrath of God? A Letter

Deep conviction of sin, and an earnest desire to flee from the wrath to come, is, undoubtedly, a sure sign of the work of the Spirit of God. May it be, if it has not been, the condition of every reader of this paper! “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.” (Rom. 1:18.)

But in the teaching you refer to there is not the thought of what God is to us, or what Christ has done for us, but the principle of good works for salvation, or deliverance from the wrath to come. The atoning death of our Lord Jesus Christ, and His resurrection, for our justification, as God’s means of our deliverance from the wrath to come, is omitted. This seems almost incredible in these days, when the gospel of the grace of God is preached so fully. One would expect that those who believe this would oppose the gospel wherever fully preached. A system of salvation, deliverance from the wrath of God, by good works, must be opposed to the salvation accomplished by the finished work of Christ. The one is light, the other is darkness. We feel assured many are far beyond these principles. If you saw a house on fire, and several persons in it, asleep, it would be most proper to wake them, and also to place the fire escape to the window. But would you deliver them by the fire escape, or tell them to form a society to work out their own deliverance? Would you tell them to remain in one of the lower rooms, showing their desire to flee from the fire?

Or, if you saw fifty sailors on a wreck, just about to break up on the rocks; and if you had a life-boat ready to take off every man; would you keep that life-boat out of sight, and shout to the poor helpless men, and tell them to remain on the wreck, showing their earnest desire to escape? If they all perished, would you be blameless?

Or, if you heard the thud of an explosion in a pit, containing three hundred men and boys, and you knew that to remain in that pit was certain death; and as there was yet time during which many might be saved, would you hinder the volunteers going down that shaft in the cage to the rescue? Would you say, No, let them remain there, teaching each other how to escape the deadly firedamp? I ask, my dear friend, would you send them a book of instructions, and keep back the cage? No, you would descend with the cage. You would certainly seek to arouse them to their danger, and would you not place them in the cage?

But you point out to us a small part of one text of scripture, on which this doctrine is supposed to rest, for salvation by works: “Work out your own salvation.” (Phil. 2:12.) Bead the whole epistle. Were these persons under wrath, or delivered from it? Were they on the wreck, or in the lifeboat?—in the pit, or in the cage?—in the house on fire, or in the fire escape?

Now, if you will read the very first verse in this epistle, you will see it was sent “to all the saints in Christ Jesus.” They were not, therefore, under wrath, neither had they to form a society “to flee from the wrath to come, which they saw continually hanging over their heads.” There is no wrath, no condemnation, to them who are in Christ Jesus. (Rom. 8:1.) Moreover, the apostle says, “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.” (Phil. 1:6.) Thus they were not still under wrath, or in the dark pit of death, and told to work their way out; or in the wreck, and told to work out their deliverance. They were in the cage—nay, drawn out of the pit of darkness and death. They were in the lifeboat; that is, in Christ; and therefore, to say they were still under wrath, would be to say Christ was still under wrath. Do you not shudder at such a thought?

If, then, they were in Christ, they were where He is, in the unclouded presence of God His Father, and their Father. Then they could not be told to work out their salvation in the sense this teaching gives—that is, seeking to flee from the wrath to come. A man cannot be seeking to flee from the fire in a pit, if he is safely placed in the chair sent down to bring him out. His deliverance depends on another power, not on his own good efforts. If the engine breaks down, he is lost.

Nov/ read the context: “Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling: for it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”1 They are then told what they are to do; but is there a thought of working for the salvation of their souls; or to escape the wrath of God, or even to be born again? No; it is, “that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke.” Thus have all the sons of God to work out their salvation, blameless, harmless, without rebuke.

Only mark well, this is not that they may be the sons of God, but because they are the sons of God; not that they may get saved from wrath, but because they are in Christ, saved from wrath and all condemnation. Thus the working out of our salvation here means the manifestation

of the true christian character by those who have salvation—who are in Christ, who are the sons of God, “without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine [or, shine ye] as lights in the world.” Surely you will see that we must be saved first, and have the Holy Ghost dwelling in us, before we can shine as lights in the world. What light have we, except as the Holy Spirit dwells in us?

We can scarcely tell you how very serious we feel the foundation-error of this teaching to be. Has not Jesus been lifted up on the cross, “that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.” And did not God so love the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life? (John 3:14-16.) Did not our precious Jesus give “himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father?” (Gal. 1:4.) The gospel, or principle, of this teaching is quite another thing: it is, how we may deliver ourselves, or work out our salvation, in the sense of deliverance from the wrath to come. And thus the grace of Christ, in atoning for our sins, is almost ignored. If salvation by our own works is not the doctrine of scripture, and if the eternal salvation of all believers by the accomplished work of Christ is; then, the sooner this erroneous teaching is given up, the better.

Those who compose the church of God—yes, it is the undoubted privilege of all believers to—give thanks to the Father; and they can say of Jesus, the Son of His love, “In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins.” “For by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.” When God had redeemed Israel, and brought them into the land of Canaan, they did not need to form societies, and make rules, by observing which they might seek to escape the bondage of Egypt. If you have redemption through the blood of Jesus, you do not need to form a society to groan or pray for it. The standing of believers is the exact opposite of those who have the wrath to come hanging over their heads. The gospel of the free, unmerited grace of God has come to them in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance. They are “turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God; and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.” (See 1 Thess. 1) Thus the one tells you to serve God, so as to flee from the wrath to come; the others serve Him, and wait for Jesus, who has delivered them from the wrath to come.

Awakened sinners truly desire to flee from the wrath to come, to be saved from their sins, But the church of God is described in the written word as “Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.” (Col. 1:12, 13.) The holy scriptures thus speak of Christians: “Ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power.” (Col. 2:10.) Unbelief would keep us in the pit; the believer is out of it. The cage, or chair, had to be sent down to the very bottom, but when once placed in that chair, you are as safe as it is. We speak, dear friend as to the salvation of your soul: practical salvation from the evil of this world, is, as we have seen, another matter. And so, as to the redemption of the poor body, for in that we still groan. (Rom. 8:23.) But as to the salvation from wrath, we are just where Christ is.

Did He not once take our place on the cross, beneath the wrath due to our sins? Delivered for our iniquities, did He not meet all the claims of God in righteousness? Oh, what infinite grace—undeserved, free, wondrous favor to us, poor hell-deserving sinners! He was forsaken of God. Oh, that bitter cry! And He must thus suffer. Without shedding of blood there is no remission of sins. Did He not say, “It is finished”? Did He not bow His head in death for you, even you, fellow-believer? Yes, He died for our sins, according to the scriptures. (1 Cor. 15:3.) Do not ignore His dying love, and seek to work out your own deliverance from wrath. As the Substitute, He bore the full wrath due to us. Precious Savior! He thus went to the bottom of the pit. “If one died for all, then all were dead.” Oh, what it cost Him to go down as our Substitute beneath the wrath of God against sin; How terrible is sin!

Here comes in that all-important question—Is Jesus, our Substitute, still dead? Is He still under wrath? Then we cannot be saved, for if He, our Substitute, is, we must be as He is. “If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins.” (1 Cor. 15:17.) Yes, if Christ be not risen, we are still under wrath, for He would still be under the condemnation, for us, of death. If He, our Substitute, is under wrath, we must be. It is also true, if we, as believers in Him, are still under wrath and condemnation, then He must be. Thus, whatever lowers the believer’s standing lowers His. If this were so, well, then, we might vainly try to deliver ourselves from the wrath to come.

But God has raised Him, our Substitute, from the dead. God has taken Him out of death, and that for our justification; for the very purpose, in view of, being able in righteousness to justify us; believing Him, to account us righteous. Thus faith and hope are not only in what Christ has done for us, in meeting the claims of divine righteousness by His death, but in God. Just as the cage is taken out of the pit of death, so God has taken, raised, Christ out of death, and all believers in Him. And where has God taken Christ, our Representative? He is seated at His own right hand, in the radiance of His glory; and the place that God has given to our Head and Representative—once our Substitute, bearing the wrath due to us—into that same place and standing has God raised us in Him. Is that risen Christ groaning beneath the coming wrath in the highest glory? Then how can we do so? “As he is, so are we in this world.” (1 John 4:17.)

Why should we doubt the word of God? Oh, the riches of His boundless grace! Did the Father leave the penitent prodigal in a state never getting beyond the wrath to come? There was no wrath to him. The Shepherd had died for the sheep, the Spirit of God had sought and found him. And he was not placed beneath the fear of the wrath to come, but brought into the full joy of the Father’s heart and house. No wrath remains for us, all was borne by Jesus. May we rest in the righteousness and infinite love of God. We say righteousness, for God is righteous in thus completely justifying us through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

May all who are the children of God be delivered from this sad human bondage and unbelief. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. C. S.

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