

Milk & Honey

Vol. XXVI December, 2012 No. 12

Spiritual Food and Encouragement for Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ

Christianity - What is it?

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[Previously] we have endeavored to hold up the Bible as the Church's supreme and all-sufficient guide, in all ages, in all times, and under all circumstances. We now desire to hold up Christianity in its divine beauty and moral excellence, as illustrated in this well-known passage of Holy Scripture.

And be it observed that, as it was the Bible itself, and not any special system of theology deduced there from, that we sought to present to our readers; so now, it is Christianity, and not any peculiar form of human religiousness, that we desire to place before them. We are deeply thankful for this. We dare not enter upon the defense of men or their systems. Men err in their theology and fail in their ethics; but the Bible and Christianity remain unshaken and unshakable. This is an unspeakable mercy. Who can duly estimate it? To be furnished with a perfect standard of divinity and morals is a privilege for which we can never be sufficiently thankful. Such a standard we possess (blessed be God!) in the Bible and in the Christianity which the Bible unfolds to our view. Men may err in their creed and break down in their conduct, but the Bible is the Bible still, and Christianity is Christianity still.

Now, we believe that this third chapter of Philippians gives us the model of a true Christian – a model on which every Christian should be formed. The man who is here introduced to our notice could say, by the Holy Spirit, “Brethren, by ye followers together of me.” Nor is it as an apostle that he here speaks to us – nor as one endowed with extraordinary gifts, and privileged to see unspeakable visions. It is not to Paul, the apostle, nor Paul, the gifted vessel, that we listen, in verse 17 of our chapter, but to Paul, the Christian. We could not follow him in his brilliant career, as an apostle. We could not follow him, in his rapture to Paradise; but we can follow him in his Christian course, in this world; and it seems to us that we have in our chapter a very full view of that course, not only of the course itself, but also the starting-post and the goal. In other words, we have to consider, first, the Christian's **STANDING**; secondly, the Christian's **OBJECT**; and thirdly, the Christian's **HOPE**. May God the Holy Spirit, be our teacher, while we dwell for a little on these most weighty and most interesting points!

1. **THE CHRISTIAN'S STANDING.** The point is unfolded, in a double way, in our chapter. We are not only told what the Christian's standing is, but also what it is not. If ever there was a man who could boast of having a righteousness of his own in which to stand before God, Paul was the man. “If,” says he, “any other man thinks that he has whereof to trust in the flesh, I more; circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless (vv.4–6).”

This is a most remarkable catalog, presenting everything that one could possibly desire for the formation of a standing in the flesh. No one could excel Saul of Tarsus. He was a Jew, of pure pedigree, in orderly fellowship, of blameless walk, of fervent zeal and unflinching devotedness. He was, on principle, a persecutor of the Church. As a Jew, he could not but see that the very foundations of Judaism were assailed by the new economy of the Church of God. It was utterly impossible that Judaism and Christianity could subsist on the same platform, or hold sway over the same mind. One special feature of the former system was the strict separation of Jew and Gentile; a special feature of the latter was the intimate union of both in one body. Judaism erected and maintained the middle wall of partition; Christianity abolished that wall altogether.

Hence Saul, as an earnest Jew, could not but be a zealous persecutor of the Church of God. It was part of his religion – of that in which he “excelled many of his equals in his own nation” – of that in which he was “exceedingly zealous.” Whatever was to be had, in the shape of religiousness, Saul would have it; whatever height was to be attained, he would attain. He would leave no stone unturned in order to build up the superstructure of his own righteousness – righteousness in the flesh – righteousness in the old creation. He was permitted to possess himself of all the attractions of legal righteousness in order that he might fling them from him amid the brighter glories of a righteousness divine. “But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in Him, not having

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mine own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith (vv.7-9).”

And we should note here that the grand prominent thought, in the above passage, is not that of a guilty sinner betaking himself to the blood of Jesus for pardon, but rather of a legalist casting aside, as dross, his own righteousness, because of having found a better. We need hardly say that Paul was a sinner – “chief of sinners” – and that, as such, he betook himself to the precious blood of Christ, and there found pardon, peace, and acceptance with God. This is plainly taught us in many passages of the New Testament. But it is not the leading thought in the chapter now before us. Paul is not speaking of his SINS, but of his GAINS.

He is not occupied with his necessities, as a sinner, but with his advantages, as a man – a man in the flesh – a man in the old creation – a Jew – a legalist.

True it is, most blessedly true, that Paul brought all his sins to the cross, and had them washed away in the atoning blood of the divine Sin-offering. But, in this passage we see another thing. We see a legalist flinging far away from his own righteousness, and esteeming it as a worthless and unsightly thing in contrast with a risen and glorified Christ, who is the righteousness of the Christian – the righteousness which belongs to the new creation. Paul had sins to mourn over, and he had a righteousness to boast in. He had guilt on his conscience, and he had laurels on his brow. He had plenty to be ashamed of, and plenty to glory in. But the special point presented in Phil.3:4-8 is not a sinner getting his sins pardoned, his guilt cleared, his shame covered, but a legalist laying aside his righteousness, a scholar casting away his laurels, and a man abandoning his vain glory, simply because he had found true glory, unfading laurels, and an everlasting righteousness in the Person of a victorious and exalted Christ. It was not merely that Paul, the sinner, NEEDED a righteousness, because, in reality, he had none of his own; but that Paul, the Pharisee, PREFERRED the righteousness which was revealed to him in Christ, because it was infinitely better and more glorious than any other.

No doubt Paul as a sinner needed, like every other sinner, a righteousness in which to stand before God; but that is not what he is bringing before us in our chapter. We are anxious that the reader should clearly apprehend this point. It is not merely that my sins DRIVE me to Christ; but His excellences DRAW me to Him. True, I have sins and therefore I need Christ; but even if I had a righteousness, I should cast it from me, and gladly hide myself “IN HIM (v.9).” It would be a positive “loss” to me to have any righteousness of my own, seeing that God has graciously provided such a glorious righteousness for me in Christ. Like Adam, in the garden

of Eden, he was naked, and therefore he made himself an apron; but it would have been a “loss” to him to retain the apron after that the Lord God had made him a coat. It was surely far better to have a God-made coat than a man-made apron. So thought Adam, so thought Paul, and so thought all the saints of God whose names are recorded upon the sacred page. It is better to stand in the righteousness of God, which is by faith, than to stand in the righteousness of man, which is by works of law. It is not only mercy to get rid of our sins, through the remedy which God has provided, but to get rid of our righteousness, and accept, instead, the righteousness which God has revealed.

Thus then, we see that the standing of a Christian is IN CHRIST. “Found in Him.” This is Christian standing. Nothing less, nothing lower, nothing different. It is not partly in Christ, and partly in law – partly in Christ and partly in ordinances. No; it is “found in Him.” This is the standing which Christianity furnishes. If this be touched, it is not Christianity at all. It may be some ancient ISM, or some medieval ISM, or some modern ISM; but most surely it is not the Christianity of the New Testament if it be aught else than this, “found in Him.”

We do therefore earnestly exhort the reader to look well to this our first point, “In Christ it is we stand.” He is our righteousness. He Himself, the crucified, risen, exalted, glorified Christ. Yes; He is our righteousness. To be found in Him is proper Christian standing. It is not Judaism, Catholicism, nor any other ISM. It is not the being a member of this church, that church, or the other church. It is to be in Christ. This is the great foundation of true practical Christianity. In a word this is the standing of the Christian.

2. **THE CHRISTIAN’S OBJECT.** Here again, Christianity shuts us up to Christ: “That I may KNOW HIM, (Phil. 3:10)” is the breathing of the true Christian. If to be “found in Him” constitutes the Christian’s standing, then “to know Him” is the Christian’s proper object. The ancient philosophy had a motto which it was constantly sounding in the ears of its followers and that motto was, “Know thyself.” Christianity, on the contrary, has a loftier motto, pointing to a nobler object. It tells us to know Christ – to make Him our object – to fix our earnest gaze on Him.

This, and this alone, is the Christian’s object. To have

Milk & Honey Information

There is no charge for Milk & Honey. It, like all ministries of Spread The Word, is supported entirely by the freewill offerings of the Lord’s people. All gifts are tax deductible.

Publisher: **Spread The Word, Inc.**

2400 Admire Springs Dr.
Dover, PA 17315

Editor: Stephen Hulshizer

Fax/Phone (717) 467-5729 phone/fax

Web site www.STW1982.com

other object is not Christianity at all. Alas! Christians have other objects. And that is precisely the reason why we said, at the opening of this paper, that it is Christianity, and not the ways of Christians, that we desire to hold up to the view of our readers. It matters not in the least what the object is; if it is not Christ, it is not Christianity. The true Christian's desire will ever be embodied in these words, "That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death." It is not that I may get on in the world – that I may make money – that I may attain a high position – that I may aggrandize my family – that I may make a name – that I may be regarded as a great man, a rich man, a popular man. No; not one of these is a Christian object. It may be all very well for a man, who has got nothing better, to make such things his object. But the Christian has got Christ. This makes all the difference. It may be all well enough for a man, who does not know Christ as his righteousness, to do the best he can in the way of working out a righteousness for himself; but to one whose standing is in a risen Christ, the very fairest righteousness that could be produced by human efforts would be an actual loss. So is it exactly in the matter of an object. The question is not, What harm is there in this or that? but, is it a Christian object?

It is well to see this. We may depend upon it that one great reason of the low tone which prevails amongst Christians will be found in the fact that the eye is taken off Christ, and fixed upon some lower object. It may be a very laudable object for a mere man of the world – for one who merely sees his place in nature, or in the old creation. But the Christian is not this. He does not belong to this world at all. He is in it, but not of it. "They," says our blessed Lord, "are not of the world, even as I am not of the world (John 17:16)." "Our citizenship is in heaven;" and we should never be satisfied to propose to ourselves any lower object than Christ. It matters not in the least what a man's position may be. He may be only a scavenger, or he may be a prince, or he may stand at any one of the many gradations between these two extremes. It is all the same, provided Christ is his real, his only object. It is a man's object, not his position, that gives him his character.

Now Paul's one object was Christ. Whether he was stationary, or whether he traveled; whether he preached the gospel, or whether he gathered sticks; whether he planted churches, or made tents, Christ was his object. By night and by day, at home or abroad, by sea or by land, alone or in company, in public or private, he could say, "One thing I do." And this, be it remembered, was not merely Paul the laborious apostle, or Paul the raptured saint, but Paul the

living, acting, walking Christian – the one who addresses us in these words, "Brethren, be followers together of me (3:17)." Nor should we ever be satisfied with anything less than this. True, we fail sadly; but let us always keep the true object before us. Like the schoolboy at his copy, he can only expect to succeed by keeping his eye fixed upon his headline. His tendency is to look at his own last written line, and thus each succeeding line is worse than the preceding one. Thus it is in our own case. We take our eye off the blessed and perfect headline, and begin to look at ourselves, or own productions, our own character, our interests, our reputation. We begin to think of what would be consistent with our own principles, our profession, or our standing, instead of fixing the eye steadily upon that one object which Christianity presents, even Christ Himself.

But some will say, "Where will you find this?" Well, if it be meant, where are we to find it amongst the ranks of Christians, nowadays, it might be difficult indeed. But we have it in the third chapter of the Epistle to the Philipians. This is enough for us. We have here a model of true Christianity, and let us ever and only aim thereat. If we find our hearts going after other things let us judge them. Let us compare our lines with the headline, and earnestly seek to produce a faithful copy thereof. In this way, although we may have to weep over constant failure, we shall always be kept occupied with our proper object, and thus have our character formed; for, let it never be forgotten, it is the object which forms the character. If money be my object, my character is covetous; if power, I am ambitious; if books, I am literary; if Christ, I am a Christian. It is not here a question of life and salvation, but only of practical Christianity. If we were asked for a simple definition of a Christian, we should at once say, a Christian is a man who has Christ for his object. This is most simple. May we enter into its power, and thus exhibit a more healthy and vigorous discipleship in this day, when so many, alas! are minding earthly things.

3. **THE CHRISTIAN'S HOPE.** This, our third and last point, is presented in our chapter in a manner quite as characteristic as the other two. The **STANDING** of the Christian is to be found in Christ; the **OBJECT** of the Christian is to know Christ, and the **HOPE** of the Christian is to be like Christ. How beautifully perfect is the connection between these three things. No sooner do I find myself in Christ as my righteousness, than I long to know Him as my object, and the more I know Him, the more ardently shall I long to be like Him, which hope can only be realized when I see Him as He is. Having a perfect righteousness, and a perfect object, I just want one thing more, and that is to be done with everything that hinders my enjoyment of that object.

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A non-profit ministry of
Spread The Word, Inc., 2400 Admire Springs Dr.
Dover, PA 17315



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And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. Matt. 1:21

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look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself (Phil. 3:20,21)."

Now putting all these things together, we get a very complete view of true Christianity. We cannot attempt to elaborate any one of the three points above referred to; for, it may be truly said, each point would demand a volume to treat it fully. But we would ask the reader to pursue the marvelous theme for himself. Let him rise above all the imperfections and inconsistencies of Christians, and gaze upon the moral grandeur of Christianity as exemplified in the life and character of the model man presented to our view in this chapter. And may the language of his heart be, "Let others do as they will, as for me, nothing short of the lovely model shall ever satisfy my heart. Let me turn away my eye from men altogether, and fix it intently upon Christ Himself, and find all my delight in Him as my righteousness, my object, my hope." Thus may it be with the writer and the reader, for Christ's sake. *

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January 12	Romans 12-16	Tom Irwin
February 9	Lessons from Saul & David	Bob Spender
March 9	Feasts of Jehovah	Mike Attwood
April 13	Conference - John Gordon, Mark Kolchin Held at North York Bible Chapel (PA)	
May 11	Assembly Fellowship & Assembly Discipline	Keith Keyser