**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**PHILIPPIANS-016**. **THE GAIN OF CHRIST by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"That I may gain Christ, and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own, even that which is of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith."*

*Philippians 3:8-9 (R.V.)*

It is not everybody who can say what is his aim in life. Many of us have never thought enough about it to have one beyond keeping alive. We lose life in seeking for the means of living. Many of us have such a multitude of aims, each in its turn drawing us, that no one of them is predominant and rules the crowd. There is no strong hand at the tiller, and so the ship washes about in the trough of the waves.

It is not everybody who dares to say what is his aim in life. We are ashamed to acknowledge even to ourselves what we are not at all ashamed to do. Paul knew his aim, and was not afraid to speak it. It was high and noble, and was passionately and persistently pursued. He tells us it here, and we can see his soul kindling as he speaks. We may note how there is here the same double reference as we found in the previous verses, gaining Christ corresponding to the previous loss for Christ, and the later words of our text being an expansion of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus. No man will ever succeed in any life's purpose, unless like Paul he is enthusiastic about it. If his aim does not rouse his fervour when he speaks of it, he will never accomplish it. We may just remark that Paul does not suppose his aim to be wholly unattained, even although he does not count himself to have apprehended. He knows that he has gained Christ, and is found in Him, but he knows also that there stretch before him the possibilities of infinite increase.

**I. His life's aim was to have the closest possession of, and incorporation in, Christ.**

His two expressions, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, are substantially identical in meaning, though they put the same truth from different sides, and with some variety of metaphor. We may deal with them separately.

The gain is of course the opposite of the loss. His balance-sheet has on one side all things lost, on the other Christ gained, and that is profitable trading. But we have to go deeper than such a metaphor, and to give full scope to the Scriptural truth, that Christ really imparts Himself to the believing soul. There is a real communication of His own life to us, and thereby we live, as He Himself declared, He that hath the Son hath life. The true deep sense in which we possess Christ is not to be weakened down, as it, alas! so often is in our shallow Christianity, which is but the echo of a shallow experience, and a feeble hold of that possession of the Son to which Jesus called us, as the condition of our possession of life. Christ is thus Himself possessed by all our faculties, each after its kind; head and heart, passions and desires, hopes and longings, may each have Him abiding in them, guiding them with His strong and gentle hand, animating them into nobler life, restraining and controlling, gradually transforming and ultimately conforming them to His own likeness. Till that Divine Indweller enters in, the shrine is empty, and unclean things lurk in its hidden corners. To be a man full summed in all his powers, each of us must gain Christ.

The other expression in the text, be found in Him, presents the same truth from the completing point of view. We gain Christ in us when we are found in Him. We are to be incorporated as members are in the body, or imbedded as a stone in the foundation, or to go back to the sweetest words, which are the source of all these representations, included as a branch in the vine. We are to be in Him for safety and shelter, as fugitives take refuge in a strong tower when an enemy swarms over the land.

And lo! from sin and grief and shame, I hide me, Jesus, in Thy name.

We are to be in Him that the life sap may freely flow through us. We are to be in Him that the Divine Love may fall on us, and that in Jesus we may receive our portion of all which is His heritage.

This mutual possession and indwelling is possible if Jesus be the Son of God, but the language is absurd in any other interpretation of His person. It is clearly in its very nature capable of indefinite increase, and as containing in itself the supply of all which we need for life and blessedness, is fitted to be what nothing else can pretend to be, without wrecking the lives that are unwise enough to pursue it--the sovereign aim of a human life. In following it, and only in following it, the highest wisdom says Amen to the aspiration of the lowliest faith. This one thing I do.

**II. Paul's life's aim was righteousness to be received.**

He goes on to present some of the consequences which follow on his gaining Christ and being found in Him, and before all others he names as his aim the possession of righteousness. We must remember that Paul believed that righteousness in the sense of justification had been his from the moment when Ananias came to where he was sitting in darkness, and bid him be baptized and wash away his sins. The word here must be taken in its full sense of moral perfectness; even if we included only this in our thoughts of his life's aim, how high above most men would he tower! But his statement carries him still higher above, and farther away from, the common ideas of moral perfection, and what he means by righteousness is widely separated from the world's conception, not only in regard to its elements, but still more in regard to its source.

It is possible to lose oneself in a dreamy mysticism which has had much to say of gaining Christ and being found in Him, and has had too little to say about having righteousness, and so has turned out to be an ally of indifference and sometimes of unrighteousness. Buddhism and some forms of mystical Christianity have fallen into a pit of immorality from which Paul's sane combination here would have saved them. There is no danger in the most mystical interpretation of the former statement of his aim, when it is as closely connected as it is here with the second form in which he states it. I have just said that Paul differed from men who were seeking for righteousness, not only because his conceptions of what constituted it were not the same as theirs, though he in this very letter endorses the Greek ideals of virtue and praise, but also and more emphatically because he looked for it as a gift, and not as the result of his own efforts. To him the only righteousness which availed was one which was not my own, but had its source in, and was imparted by, God. The world thought of righteousness as the general designation under which were summed up a man's specific acts of conformity to law, the sum total reached by the addition of many specific instances of conformity to a standard of duty. Paul had learned to think of it as preceding and producing the specific acts. The world therefore said, and says, Do the deeds and win the character; Paul says, Receive the character and do the deeds. The result of the one conception of righteousness is in the average man spasmodic efforts after isolated achievements, with long periods between in which effort subsides into torpor. The result in Paul's case was what we know: a continuous effort to keep his mind and heart open for the influx of the power which, entering into him, would make him able to do the specific acts which constitute righteousness. The one road is a weary path, hard to tread, and, as a matter of fact, not often trodden. To pile up a righteousness by the accumulation of individual righteous acts is an endeavour less hopeful than that of the coral polypes slowly building up their reef out of the depths of the Pacific, till it rises above the waves. He who assumes to be righteous on the strength of a succession of righteous acts, not only needs a profounder idea of what makes his acts righteous, but should also make a catalogue of his unrighteous ones and call himself wicked. The other course is the final deliverance of a man from dependence upon his own struggles, and substitutes for the dreary alternations of effort and torpor, and for the imperfect harvest of imperfectly righteous acts, the attitude of receiving, which supersedes painful strife and weary endeavour. To seek after a righteousness which is my own, is to seek what we shall never find, and what, if found, would crumble beneath us. To seek the righteousness which is from God, is to seek what He is waiting to bestow, and what the blessed receivers blessedly know is more than they dreamed of.

But Paul looked for this great gift as a gift in Christ. It was when he was found in Him that it became his, and he was found blameless. That gift of an imparted life, which has a bias towards all goodness, and the natural operation of which is to incline all our faculties towards conformity with the will of God, is bestowed when we win Christ. Possessing Him, we possess it. It is not only imputed, as our fathers delighted to say, but it is imparted. And because it is the gift of God in Christ, it was in Paul's view received by faith. He expresses that conviction in a double form in our text. It is through faith as the channel by which it passes into our happy hands. It is by faith, or, more accurately, upon faith, as the foundation on which it rests, or the condition on which it depends. Our trust in Christ does bring His life to us to sanctify us, and the plain English of all this blessed teaching is--if we wish to be better let us trust Christ and get Him into the depths of our lives, and righteousness will be ours. That transforming Presence laid up in the hidden man of the heart, will be like some pungent scent in a wardrobe which keeps away moths, and gives out a fragrance that perfumes all that hangs near it.

But all which we have been saying is not to be understood as if there was no effort to be made, in order to receive, and to live manifesting, the righteousness which is of God. There must be the constant abandonment of self, and the constant utilising of the grace given. The righteousness is bestowed whenever faith is exercised. The hand is never stretched out and the gift not lodged in it. But it is a life's aim to possess the righteousness which is of God by faith, because that gift is capable of indefinite increase, and will reward the most strenuous efforts of a believing soul as long as life continues.

**III. Paul's life's aim stretches beyond this life.**

Shall we be chargeable with crowding too much meaning into his words, if we fix on his remarkable expression, be found in Him, as containing a clear reference to that great day of final judgment? We recall other instances of the use of the same expression in connections which unmistakably point to that time. Such as being clothed we shall not be found naked, or the proof of your faith ... might be found unto praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ, or found of Him in peace without spot, blameless. In the light of these and similar passages, it does not seem unreasonable to suppose that this being found does include a reference to the Apostle's place after death, though it is not confined to that. He thinks of the searching eye of the Judge taking keen account, piercing through all disguises, and wistfully as well as penetratingly scrutinising characters, till it finds that for which it seeks. They who are found in Him in that day, are there and thus for ever. There is no further fear of falling out of union with Him, or of being, by either gradual and unconscious stages, or by sudden and overmastering assaults, carried out of the sacred enclosure of the City of Refuge in which they dwell henceforth for ever. A dangerous presumptuousness has sometimes led to the over-confident assertion, Once in Christ always in Christ. But Paul teaches us that that security of permanent dwelling in Him is to be for ever in this life the aim of our efforts, rather than an accomplished fact. So long as we are here, the possibility of falling away cannot be shut out, and there must always rise before us the question, Am I in Christ? Hence there is need for continual watchfulness, self-control, and self-distrust, and the life's aim has to be perpetual, not only because it is capable of indefinite expansion, but because our weakness is capable of deserting it. It is only when at the last we are found by Him, in Him, that we are there for ever, with all dangers of departure from Him at an end. In that City of Refuge, and there only, the gates shall not be shut at all, not solely because no enemies shall attempt to come in, but also because no citizens shall desire to go out.

We should ever have before us that hour, and our life's aim should ever definitely include the final scrutiny in which many a hidden thing will come to light, many a long-lost thing be found, and each man's ultimate place in relation to Jesus Christ will be freed from uncertainties, ambiguities, hypocrisies, and disguises, and made plain to all beholders. In that great day of finding, some of us will have to ask with sinking hearts, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy? and others will break forth into the glad acclaim, I have found Him, or rather been found of Him.

So we have before us the one reasonable aim for a man to have Christ, to be found in Him, to have His righteousness. It is reasonable, it is great enough to absorb all our energies, and to reward them. It will last a lifetime, and run on undisturbed beyond life. Following it, all other aims will fall into their places. Is this my aim?