

## POSSESSED AND POSSESSING

"Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's." I Corinthians 3:21-23.

Preceding these verses is the admonition, "Let no man deceive himself." We usually think of man as having too much sense to deceive himself. But self-deception is a pit into which many fall. It is so easy for a person to deceive himself about the knowledge which he thinks he possesses.

Worldly wisdom is deluding. It deceives a man in that it leads him to overrate the value of his attainments. It also leads him to overrate his importance. God said that, if a man thought he was wise according to the standards of the age, he should confess his ignorance, because the wisdom in the material realm of this world sees nothing beyond it. Such wisdom is foolishness or silliness with God. To God it is stupidity, or the wisdom of a moron. By a moron is meant an adult with the mentality of a child of twelve.

There were two forces which sought to destroy early Christianity -- one was force and the other was intellectuality. One was Roman persecution and the other was Grecian philosophy. Of course, neither succeeded for Christianity has survived to this day. The intellectual assaults of the philosophers failed because they were made upon divine truths rather than human ideas.

The "wisdom of this world" which God calls "foolishness" is those notions which are contrary to that which He has revealed in His Word. Why is such so-called wisdom foolishness with God? It is because of its inability to bring man any knowledge of God or provide him with any remedy for sin. Bear in mind that this statement, "the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God," does not ridicule the search of man for knowledge. When man discovers that two parts of hydrogen and one part of oxygen make water, that wisdom is not folly. But when man discounts or seeks to discredit the revelation of God through the Bible, and seeks to make God out of his own thoughts as a spider spins a web out of its own body, then that wisdom is foolishness. The largest library in the world is in Moscow. It contains over twelve million volumes. However, the largest library does not make Russia the wisest nation. Her wisdom is her folly because it influences her not to recognize God. Therefore, the wisdom of that nation is foolishness with God.

Our Scripture sounds another word of warning, "Let no man glory in men." It is so easy to become hero worshippers and to pay homage to man which belongs to God only. In the church at Corinth the members had their eyes upon men instead of the risen Christ. The result of their misplaced vision brought spiritual disaster to their church. Why glory in man when we are told emphatically that whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, we should do it all to the glory of God? Men are gifts from God. Therefore, let us not glory in the gifts but in the Giver.

### I. Possessed.

"And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's." I am glad that I am not my own. I am Christ's possession. Christ's ownership of us is based on

redemption. We belong to Him because He bought us at the price of His own precious blood. Not only have we been purchased by the blood of Christ, but He has taken possession of us. A person who has been bought does not belong to himself, but to the purchaser. Ownership does not always mean possession. One can own something and yet not possess it. Since we are possessed by Christ, we are to be at His pleasurable disposal. We are not to do as we please, but what Christ wishes and the Holy Spirit urges.

## II. Possessing.

"All things are yours." It is the opinion of many that when a man becomes a Christian he must give up everything that is worth having, and gain nothing in return except the mere hope of something yet to come. They think that he gives up all hope of having a good time here for the mere promise of a good time hereafter. But the fact is that when a man becomes a Christian he does not give up anything that is worth the having. Instead, he gains everything that is worth living for both here and hereafter. Perhaps the reason why Christians are not stronger, happier and more useful is because they do not stop to consider what they have in Christ. Most any good business man can come pretty close to an accurate estimation of how much he possesses or is worth, but a Christian cannot enumerate one-half of the things that God has done for him.

The riches of this verse, "All things are yours," are couched in the present tense. We are rich, if we are the children of God, but our trouble is that we do not realize it. Our ignorance has kept us from enjoying the blessing which God has intended for us. An old lady, who lived in Scotland, had received from her son a monthly check over a period of years, but mistook them for pretty pieces of paper and carefully preserved them in her Bible. The result was that the dear soul went on living in poverty. She was in good circumstances, but she was not aware of it. She lived in poverty because of her ignorance. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ."

God's Word frequently states its deepest truths in the form of a paradox. Indeed, it almost seems as though truth is best stated in such fashion. Our text is an example of this. "Ye are Christ's." "All things are yours." These words express separate sides of a full-orbed truth. The Christian is first possessed by Christ, and then he possesses all the unsearchable riches which are stored in Him. Thus, when a Christian loses as it were his own life by yielding it to the claims of the Saviour, he finds a life that is richer and fuller, and he discovers himself to be the possessor of infinite and uncounted wealth.

Without a doubt all things are yours now. Spurgeon once said, "We have not time enough in the term of seventy years to read over once the fair inventory of the saint's possessions." It is only through becoming Christ's that any sinner can secure a title to all of this boundless wealth.

Let us observe the Christian's possessions which are summarized in our text.

## 1. God's ministers and teachers.

All true ministers and teachers of Christ are yours: "Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas." The Corinthian church members had engaged in a controversy over preachers. There were those who said, "Paul is my preacher. He gives me sound doctrine, good logic and strong argument. I like Paul because he feeds me on the meat and the bread of the Gospel." Others said, "I prefer Apollos. He is an orator. He takes me to the very skies upon the wings of his eloquence. Paul puts me to sleep with his long doctrinal preaching. Give me Apollos, first, last and all the time." Then, there were some of the dear sisters who would say, "I would rather hear Cephas than Paul and Apollos put together. Cephas touches my heart, thrills my soul and makes me cry. He knows what trouble is and he comforts my heart. Bless his dear soul, I want Cephas."

Each of these great men of God belonged to each of the Christians at Corinth. Christian friends, they are ours also, just as truly as they belonged to the Corinthians. They instruct us and help us. Their faith, courage, examples and teachings minister to our good. Just as the bee gathers sweetness from the blooming rose, the fragrant clover, the modest violet, the nodding daisy and the gorgeous lily and stores it away in the honeycomb to contribute to the luxury of the monarch's royal feast or the peasant's scanty fare, so we gather from all the ministers and teachers of God the things that are helpful. God has given all of them to us. They are for our upbuilding. All of them have taught for our instruction. Let us not exclude ourselves from the riches of His grace which He has bestowed through others. All that truth requires to make its home in a personality is a hungry mind, a pure heart and an obedient will.

## 2. The world.

Perhaps this statement will strike you with surprise, but the world is yours. It is a world of mountains and lakes, of flowers and birds, of summers and winters, of music and art, of culture and love. They belong to God and He makes them yours. In the deepest and truest meaning of the word, no one can possess this world like the Christian. When we go away from it, let us leave it better than we found it, simply because we have lived in it.

## 3. Life.

The question is often raised, Do you find life worth living? The answer is "No." Nobody finds life worth living; he has to make it worth living. And the secret of the "making" is found adequately, joyously and achievingly in Christ our Lord. He did not find life worthwhile; He had to make it so. What Christ found in our world was misunderstanding, jealousy, hatred, betrayal, sorrow and a cross. Did He surrender to these things? Not at all. He seized them and turned them to profit. When life treated Him to its utmost villainy, spitting in His face and nailing Him to a cross, He took hold of that cross and fashioned it into a ladder of love and light up which He climbed to His throne of leadership and lordship in the hearts of millions. Yes, life belonged to Him, and when we belong to Him, then life belongs to us.

Is life worth living? Yes, without a doubt, if it is lived in the service of Christ; otherwise, it is not. Your life will be glad or sober, shadowed or brightened by the quality of shading which you add to it. Nobody can take away your opportunities. There is no competition that will rob you of the chance to smile, to speak a good word or to do a kindly deed. What you get out of this life will depend on what you put into it. You need not expect returns without an investment. Eternal life is the present possession of all who have received Christ as their Saviour.

#### 4. Death.

You may have a peculiar dread of death and shrink from it. You may be accustomed to associate with death all that is dark, gloomy and undesirable. But death is one of God's servants which ministers to our good. Death breaks the chains that bind us to earth and leads us into the city celestial. It comes and unlocks the door for the soul to respond to the voice which says to the child of God, "Your Father has sent for you to come to His home." Since death is the means by which God brings His children home, and unites them with their loved ones who have gone before into their Father's house, it is one of our greatest and most blessed possessions. Commendable indeed was the attitude of that Scottish clergyman who, when asked if he was dying, said: "I do not know and I do not care; for if I die I shall be with the Lord, and if I live the Lord will be with me."

#### 5. Things present.

Christ makes us happy and enables us to enjoy this life as those who are not Christians can never enjoy it. Things present, which include all of God's providences, are ours to enjoy. Have you a sweet home? Enjoy it, and thank God for it. Are you surrounded by loved ones? Enjoy them and praise the Lord for them. Thank God for all your blessings, and ask Him to let you use them for the benefit of others. Our possessions have not been bestowed upon us merely for our personal enjoyment. We have not been blessed with things present merely that we may be made happy or holy.

Things present are yours not merely to spend on selfish enjoyment, or to minister to personal comfort, or to evade personal responsibility. They are yours in order that you may serve your generation by the will of God, and in ministering to those for whom Christ died you may minister to Him. Your love for Him is expressible only in terms of service to others. If you are Christ's, you should be serving Him. As Adoniram Judson walked the streets of the heathen city in which he worked, men would say, "Who is that going along there?" Others would answer, "That is Jesus Christ's man." If we belong to Christ, let us serve Him.

A lady standing in front of the magnificent cathedral at Cologne, Germany, heard someone behind her say, "Didn't we do a fine piece of work here?" Turning she saw a man in the plainest of working clothes, and said to him, "Pray, what did you do about it?" "I mixed the mortar for two years," was his cheerful reply. God's work today needs cheerful, patient, diligent mortar mixers. Mixing mortar is one of the hardest and most disagreeable things to do in erecting a building. But what sort of a building could be erected without it? We are called upon now to do the menial things prior to the use of the

glorious things His precious blood has purchased for us.

6. Things to come.

There are so many wonderful things to come. One of them is that we shall see the time when we shall be entirely free from sin. Another is that we shall never have any more trouble. Another is the enjoyment of the blessed reunion with our loved ones. We shall never say goodbye in heaven. Another is that we shall see Christ. What a joyous privilege it will be to look into His blessed face and hear His loving voice speaking to us! Are you prepared to meet Him? If not, won't you receive Him as your Saviour now?