

THE SIN OF SELF-SUFFICIENCY

"But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."
I Corinthians 1:30-31.

There were a number of pressing problems at Corinth which occupied Paul's attention and demanded solution. Largely, if not entirely, the root of the trouble was a spirit of self-sufficiency which dominated the members of the church. Self-sufficiency hinders the progress of the Lord's work as do few, if any, things. It expresses and reveals itself in carnality. The carnal man is self-satisfied and self-sufficient. We have cause for alarm when we feel unduly pleased with ourselves. Carlyle once said that "the greatest of faults is to be conscious of none." We can so easily become pharisaical, like the little girl who prayed that God would bless her brother and make him as good as herself.

Much has been said about the Laodicean spirit within the churches, the spirit of self-sufficiency which says "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing" (Revelation 3:17). Where there is self-sufficiency there cannot be any spiritual thirst or hunger. In such cases the sufficiency of Christ will never be realized. What is the answer to this problem? Paul leaves us in no doubt. In our text he stresses certain aspects of the Christian life.

I. The Origin of the Christian Life.

Paul declared that the origin of the Christian life is "of him." That is the very opposite to the language of self-sufficiency. Our salvation is all of God. We must never lose sight of that. We were elected in eternity, and we have been redeemed in time. We have been born from above, of the Spirit, and by means of the "seed of the Word."

The philosophy of the unbeliever is that of self-sufficiency, as voiced by the foolish farmer who boastfully declared "I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry" (Luke 12:18-19). That is a sad soliloquy of self-sufficiency. That kind of a man is self-possessed, boasts that he is self-made, and is unbearably self-righteous. Self is the means and the end of his life. He does not recognize or acknowledge any need of Christ.

The Christian should present a striking contrast to the man of the world, because he has learned to regard self as the most subtle enemy of the spiritual life. Like Paul he cries "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" At Corinth they had removed their eyes from the Saviour and focused their attention upon themselves, and particularly upon their leaders. They prided themselves upon their philosophies. Consequently Paul wrote to them saying, "For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of

the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence" (I Corinthians 1:26-29).

We are amazed by the fact that out of the mouths of babes and sucklings God ordained strength. His Son came into the world as a tiny babe. He chose unlettered and for the most part unlearned men to spread the glorious news of His evangel in Christ. Surely there could not be any more convincing proof of man's inability to save himself than that God should achieve the mightiest and most glorious ends by the humblest means.

Well may the Christian sing:

"Naught have I gotten, but what I received
Grace hath bestowed it, since I have believed."

We cannot be reminded too often that apart from Christ we would be in a desperate plight. Yet we pride ourselves on our respectability, and look askance at the man who has never come to a saving knowledge of Christ. We try to convince ourselves that God should be honored because we consent to do His will. For this reason we need to read and re-read these words -- "But of him."

II. The Office of the Christian.

Paul informed the Corinthian believers of their exalted position "in Christ." Andrew Murray emphasized the fact that "the whole Christian life depends upon the clear consciousness of our position in Christ." "In Christ" was a favorite phrase with Paul. It was the theme of his epistle to the Ephesians. He delighted to instruct and remind his readers of their mystical union "in Christ." The union of the believer with Christ is not the result of human wisdom or religious exercises, but it is the work of the Holy Spirit. We can only live the abounding and sufficient life by abiding in Christ.

Are you united with Christ? If so, you did not get there of yourself. You were ordained unto this grace by the purpose of the infinite God, who chose you before the world was. Your union with Christ is to be attributed to God's power. You were an enemy, but He reconciled you. "But of him are ye in Christ Jesus." The connection which exists between you and Him is real and vital.

III. The Opportunities of the Christian Life.

Verse 30 declares that certain things are made available to us in Christ. Any standing that we have we owe to Him and not to anything that we, of ourselves, are or have or know. The only standing of real importance to the Christian is that which he has in Christ.

Paul made clear the sufficiency of Christ. Naturally the question arises, how is Christ sufficient? In what does His sufficiency consist? Christ is made unto us wisdom. At Corinth they were seeking human wisdom, while what they needed most of all was an experimental knowledge of divine wisdom.

From Christ, Who is our wisdom, proceeds three great things which are expressed here in our text in three tremendous words:

1. Righteousness.

What is righteousness? Sometimes a word becomes more powerful when it is shortened. Rightness is the same thing. Shorten it again and the word is a little more dynamic--right. What is right? Right is perfect conformity to a standard. What is the standard? There is only one, and that is what the world has yet to learn. What is it? God Himself. Righteousness, or rightness, or right, in human life is conformity to the standard which is found in God and revealed in Christ Jesus. Paul says here Christ is made that to us. In Christ we attain to a state of life impossible otherwise or elsewhere.

We had no righteousness of our own. All that we thought to be such, we have learned, is but as filthy or polluted rags in the sight of an infinitely holy God. We are made the righteousness of God in Christ. When we receive Christ, His righteousness is imputed to us.

2. Sanctification.

Righteousness leads to sanctification. What is sanctification? To be sanctified is to be set apart. It is to be set apart to God in Christ in the perfection of His finished work. It is the effect of the death of Christ on the relation of a believer to God by which, the defilement of sin being put away, he is set apart to Him. That Christ is made sanctification to believers implies that they are thus set apart to God in contrast to their former condition of alienation from Him.

3. Redemption.

What is meant here by redemption? It signifies a releasing or a deliverance. We who sold ourselves for nought have been redeemed without money. "Redeemed, not with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ." He gave Himself for us, in order that we might be delivered from the fear of death and enter into life eternal. Deliverance from the penalty, the power and the presence of sin is ours in and through Christ.

IV. The Objective of the Christian Life.

"He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." Since all that we are in Him we owe to God, there is no room for personal boasting. All the glory of our salvation should be ascribed to Him and not to ourselves. The fact that we are indebted to the Lord for every good thing should keep us from glorying in self. Even though there is a natural tendency to think highly of self, and to depreciate our fellow men and their gifts, and to forget God, the Christian must not glory in his powers or possessions. He must not glory in the gifts of God's providence. To boast of nationality, family or possessions is to overlook the great question, "What hast thou that thou didst not receive?" Let the people of the Lord be on guard lest they claim credit for what they owe to the free grace of God.

Whereas unsaved men boast of their prowess, their privileges and their possessions, the children of God are admonished to cultivate the reasonable and profitable habit of glorying in the Lord. Inasmuch as God has brought

us into this blessed and fruitful union with Christ in order that we might "glory in the Lord," let us emulate the spirit of Paul as it was expressed by him in the words, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Galatians 6:14).