

PAUL: A SERVANT OF JESUS CHRIST

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CHAPTER NINETEEN

“MORE ABUNDANTLY THAN THEY ALL”

(I Corinthians 15:10)

“Would I describe a preacher, such as Paul,
Were he on earth, would hear, approve, and own
Paul should himself direct me.”

- Cowper

“God,” says the eloquent Adolphe Monod, “left to the Jews the first twelve Apostles, and gave to the Gentiles one only, whom He prepared expressly for them. Like a spiritual Atlas, Paul carries the whole heathen world upon his shoulders. That Roman empire, the most powerful on the face of the earth, which required seven ages to be established, he took only a quarter of an age to regenerate. The greatest among men was Jesus Christ; the greatest among apostles was Paul.”

Even in these days of easy and universal communication the Apostle’s record as a traveller would have been a remarkable one; but how much more remarkable it appears when we recall the banditti that infested the mountain passes of Asia Minor; the impetuous torrents that crossed the track; the vast distances that had to be traversed on foot; the hardships of the wayside inns and caravanserais; the suspicion and dislike of which Jews must have always been the objects.

But what a record he has left!

In his first missionary journey he establishes churches as Christian garrisons along the central highway of Asia Minor, and attracts the enthusiastic Gauls with the tenderest affection preaching both to Jews and Gentiles, converting a proconsul and silencing a false prophet; at one time adored as a god, at another stoned by the same people in their fury.

In his second, he proclaims the Gospel to Europe, and founds churches in some of the most famous and influential cities Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth, flame out as successive beacon fires in the darkness.

In the third, like a Colossus, he strides the AEgean, planting one foot in Asia Minor and the other

in Greece, where he preaches even to Illyricum.

In the fourth, after pleading his cause before at least three different tribunals, he traverses the Mediterranean, saves the crew and passengers of the storm-driven corn ship by his prayers and heroism, compels the respect and affection of an island of barbarians, and reaches Rome in the guise of a prisoner, but really as a conqueror, to unfurl the banner of his Master in the palace of the Caesars. After his release he again sets forth on journeys that carried him, perhaps to Spain, but certainly to familiar scenes in Asia Minor and Greece. So he fulfils his course till Rome and martyrdom again come in sight.

When he began his work, the world was being borne to her grave, in spite of what philosophy, literature, and legislation could do to arrest its moral decay; but when he closed it, some thirty years afterwards, germs of life and salvation had been sown, and even nurtured into sturdy growth, which were destined, after three centuries, to displace the foetid remnants of heathenism with the fresh young undergrowth of Christian civilization.

We may well inquire into the secret of this marvellous work, to which, after that of our Lord, the position of Christianity in the world at this moment is to be ascribed. And if we do, we shall discover it not in his intellectual talent and eloquent speech, for these were more than neutralized by his physical weaknesses, his “**thorn**,” and his “**contemptible**” utterance (II Corinthians 11:6); but in sources of power which are within the reach of us all, however greatly we may come short of that commanding equipment, which, in the words of the great Neander, would have made him, had he sought it, shine in the highest rank amongst the wise and the orators of all ages, so that he would not have been second to any of those masters of thought or of language of whom ancient Greece boasted.

In the forefront, we must place the Apostle’s vivid remembrance of the mercy that had been shown him.

“**We obtained mercy**,” he says on one occasion, when attempting to explain the sources of his indomitable perseverance through obloquy, smiting down, and daily dying. It was as though he never could forget how deeply he had sinned, and how strenuously he had resisted that very grace which he now proclaimed.

He was constantly returning to this precious thought. How could he ever despair of men, since such a one as he had found mercy? How should he faint, when the same grace that had laid hold of him waited to enable him? How could he ever repay the long-suffering which had brooded over his storm-driven nature, and had abounded over his rebellion, until it made him a trophy of its power? Like a silver refrain, it came back on him in all times of anguish, distress, and virulent opposition, “I obtained mercy, therefore I dare not, must not faint.”

From the commencement to the close of his career Paul was impelled by the one master-thought that he had been redeemed to serve; saved that he might save others.

The memory of what he had been saved from and saved to was the constant incentive of his arduous and exhausting toils. And so it is well for us, if we can get away for a time from the

bustle and rush of life, to stand beneath the Cross, where Jesus died, realizing that every drop from his every wound appeals to our every pulse throb to spend or be spent for the cause that cost Him so dear.

Closely connected with this, we must mention the great and simple purpose for which the Apostle lived.

He bent his strength to save men, and for this he was prepared to make any sacrifice. He was equally careful to the very last to institute and organize little Christian communities, which were absolutely necessary to conserve and develop the life that had been implanted.

But all such purposes were subordinated to that which he announced in his earliest Epistle, “**not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts**” (I Thessalonians 2:4).

It mattered comparatively little what were the outward results of his endeavors, or what men might say or do, so long as he had the testimony shed through his heart that it pleased God.

This motive is viewed under another light, when, in the next Epistle, he yearns “**that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified**” (II Thessalonians 1:12).

We cannot forget that the passion of Christ’s heart, during his earthly ministry, was to glorify his Father; and there was a similar passion in the heart of Paul to glorify the Son. To the end of his ministry that purpose grew even stronger. It was always his earnest expectation and hope that in nothing he should be ashamed; but that as always, so then, Christ should be magnified in his body, whether by life or death.

Would that this also were our single aim!

It would greatly simplify our lives. We are apt to set ourselves on the accomplishment of purposes which, though good in themselves, fail of the best; and when we do not succeed in them, when the revival does not ensue, or hosts of souls are not converted, or the Church does not heed, we are apt to write hard things against ourselves and God; whereas, if we simply sought the good pleasure and glory of our Master, we should discover that we succeed amid apparent failure, and are more than conquerors when fleeing for our lives.

Happy is the man who can appeal from the verdict of obvious results, of his fellows, of the inner circle of dearest friends, and even of his own heart, and say, “**With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man’s judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God**” (1 Corinthians 4:3-5).

To each of us a stewardship is committed, of wealth, or time, or influence, or talent in thought and speech. With Paul, each of us can say, “**a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me**” (I Corinthians 9:17). Now surely it is required in stewards, not that they should realize all

the dreams that suggest themselves to their imagination, but that they be found faithful to Him that appointed them. Judge your lives not by results, but by their motives, and by the smile of his good pleasure who appointed you.

His plan of living also greatly ministered to his success.

In point of fact, he had no plan at all. For him the way had been prepared in the counsels of God before the worlds were made, and he had only to discover its track. The scheme of the temple of his life had been conceived by the Divine Architect; he had only to get it by communion with Him on the Mount. He need do nothing from himself, in the sense of self-origination, but what he saw his Saviour doing. His one aim was to repeat in the time sphere what He was doing in the unseen and eternal.

This made the Apostle so cautious in referring to his future program. Whatever should betide, he must keep in the current of the will of God. To purpose according to the flesh, that there should be the Yea, yea, Nay, nay, of human forecast, was foreign to the habit of his mind. He was ever living in such dependence on the Holy Spirit for guidance, and for the unfolding of the Divine purpose, that from some apparently trivial circumstance he would “gather” the movements of the pillar of cloud by day, and of fire by night. And interval there was none between his apprehension of the Divine purpose and his endeavor to strike his tent and follow wherever it might lead (Acts 16:6,7).

When, in the present century, the purpose presented itself of completing that magnificent specimen of Gothic architecture, the Cologne Cathedral, it was not necessary to prepare a plan for gathering up and carrying forward the results of previous centuries into a symmetrical and beautiful edifice.

The architect to whom the task of completion was entrusted had but to exhume and study the plan as it was first conceived by Meister Gerard in the thirteenth century, and as it is still preserved in his own pen-and-ink outlines. So Christian workers should never forget the injunction, four times repeated to Moses, of making all things according to the pattern shown them in the Mount. The pattern of the Body of Christ, of the position of each individual believer among its members, and of the work which each should accomplish, was fixed before the worlds were made. “What didst Thou mean for me, O God, in my creation, redemption, and the ordering of my life? Teach me to do thy will, for Thou art my God. Thy Spirit is good: lead me into the land of uprightness.” Such should be the prayer of each Christian worker.

But, perhaps, the secret of Paul’s success lay most of all in his faculty of extracting power from his weaknesses.

He had eminent gifts of character, of energy, of power to command and lead and organize, of thought and speech; but had it not been for the presence of his infirmity, he might never have become the great Apostle of the Gentiles, or accomplished such splendid work. He might have yielded to self-confidence in his heart depths, and relied on these extraordinary endowments, instead of casting himself absolutely, as he was compelled to do, on the power of God; in consequence of which his life work was accomplished, not by himself, but by God

operating through the frail organism of his mortal body.

Judging from the words of his detractors, which he seems to endorse, his bodily presence was weak, and his speech contemptible (II Corinthians 10:10), the former phrase referring to his thorn in the flesh, of which we have spoken; and the latter to a lack of those graces of oratory which the Greeks were wont to expect in their public teachers.

It was very humbling to the flesh; but it drained away the last remains of human pride, and left him, as the forty years in the desert left Moses, a vessel meet for the Master's use, because so utterly dependent on the Master's hand to direct and empower.

In early life he was one of Gamaliel's most promising pupils, strong, self-reliant, vehement, clear in thought, incisive in speech, swift in action. Among the men of his age few could outmatch Saul of Tarsus, who earlier than was customary became a member of the Jewish Sanhedrim. Would you recognize him in the weakness, the fear, and the much trembling of this broken man? Or, if you did, might you not be tempted to regret that he had opposed Christ in his strength, and had brought only his weakness into his service? But such regrets would be wholly unnecessary.

Had Paul been strong, he might have been - we borrow the expression - an Apollos, a Chrysostom, an Augustine, a Luther, but never Paul. Because he was weak he was strong; because he bore chains he was the great emancipator from chains; because he was poor he succeeded in making so many rich.

After this, let no one complain. The only thing of which we need to be sure is whether we have been called of God to certain work for Him. Then, if limitations and hindrances suggest the impossibility of ever accomplishing it, let us dare to glory in them, and discover in their presence the ground for believing that we have been selected for the work to which they might threaten to become a fatal barrier.

In other words, let us do by faith the work which others do by human might.

Another element in the success of the Apostle's work must be found in his self-abnegation.

He had large and liberal views of truth and life, and could probably have permitted to himself many things which he carefully eschewed, lest his influence for Christ should be impaired. In I Corinthians 8:13 he tells us that if meat should make his brother to offend, he will eat no flesh while the world last.

In I Corinthians 8 he explains that, though as far as his own conscience was concerned, he could eat in an idol's temple without condemnation, yet he dare not do it, lest he should cast a stumblingblock before the undecided, halting, feet of some weak disciple.

In I Corinthians 9 he alleges his determination to forego the delights of wife and child, though his was a very tender nature; to forego the support which his converts might voluntarily offer, though he had as much right to take it as oxen their corn, or priests their share of temple offerings. And at the close of that chapter he explains how carefully he kept his body under,

bringing it into subjection, lest he should fail to do the utmost possible for the souls of men, and compel the Lord to substitute an instrument more suited for his purpose. Again in II Corinthians 6:3 he speaks of giving no offence in anything, that the ministry might not be blamed.

This, too, is a path in which we may follow the steps of this great servant of Jesus. All Christian workers, zealous for the coming of God's Kingdom, must at once forego indulgences and practices which are not in themselves unlawful, that the ministry may not be blamed, nor souls hindered. Consideration of the effect which may be produced upon others is a very real and urgent factor in determining our action with regard to matters that lie in the great twilight borderland, between what is clearly defined as right and clearly defined as wrong.

The more widespread our influence over souls, the more absolute the necessity of considering the effect on others of methods and actions in which we are left with large liberty of self-determination and choice.

In this enumeration let us not forget the eloquence of his tears.

“Remember,” he said to the elders of the Ephesian Church, **“that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn everyone night and day with tears”** (Acts 20:31).

Each word is significant! Not content with appealing to them by day, he must needs invade his nights; when worn by emotion, labor, and teaching, his tired body might surely claim repose. Nor was this a spasmodic devotion to be followed by spells of indolence and lethargy. He did not cease this ministry for three long years; but pursued it without relaxation, without interruption, without pause. Nor was this work prosecuted with the persistence of a zealot or the eagerness of a partisan; but with the tears of a soul lover.

“Do not complain,” says the eloquent writer already quoted, “of his importunity! You, unthankful, he disturbs but once; his own repose is broken every night, if not for you, for others. Nay, more; whatever you are, he will not let you go until he has obtained what? Some favor, some kindness? Ah! the greatest favor, the greatest kindness you can manifest is to be converted to the Lord Jesus Christ, or to serve Him with greater fidelity. You refuse him, you repulse him, notwithstanding his entreaties; but before you leave him, look at him - he weeps. He weeps over the sins in which you continue; over the injury your example does to the Church; over the stumbling block you set before the world; and, above all, for the future you are preparing for yourself. What do you say to this Apostle in tears before you I was going to say prostrate at your feet? The God whom he serves once summed up in a single sentence all that his Apostle ought to be: **‘Behold, he prayeth.’** You now in your turn, you to whom he preaches, may sum up all that he does for you in a single sentence behold, he weeps.”

Why is it that this fount of tears seems denied us? We have tears for all things else than the infinite loss of those who have rejected the Gospel. For this, alas! no single drop trickles along the dry water courses. We are smitten by a terrible drought, our heart a very Sahara: our water springs frozen by remorseless cold or scorched by relentless heat. In losing the power of tears we have lost one great power of causing them. It is by broken hearts that hearts are broken; by wet eyes that eyes are made to brim over with the waters of repentant sorrow.

Lastly, let us not forget the Apostle's individual interest in his converts.

"I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears," is one evidence of this; and for another we turn instinctively to Colossians 1:28: **"Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man, in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus."**

How he dwells on that phrase, **"every man"**!

He had no sympathy with the reckless haste that shakes the boughs of the fruit trees to obtain their precious harvest. He knew too well the peril of injuring the delicate bloom. All the fruit he gathered for God was handpicked. He was more fond of the hand net than the seine. Like his Master, he would go far out of his way if he might cast the demon out of one possessed spirit, or persuade an Agrippa to become a Christian. One soul, for whom Christ died, was in his sight of unspeakable worth.

But underlying all these, there was the fundamental conception that it was not he, but the grace of God that was with him, and the power of God which wrought through him.

He energized according to the energy of a mightier than himself, who energized in him mightily. He wrought, yet not he, but Christ wrought in him. Anything save what Christ wrought in him was wood, hay, and stubble, of which he dared not take account. He did not work for Christ, but offered himself to Him without reserve, that Christ might penetrate and irradiate the inmost recesses of his being, and then, through its cleansed panes, go forth to illuminate the hearts of men.

All his care was to purify himself, that he might at all times be meet for the Master's use. His one desire was to yield himself to God, and that his members might be used as weapons in the great conflict against the powers of hell.

This is, after all, the first and last lesson for the Christian worker.

- Be clean, pure of heart, and simple in motive. See to it that there be no friction between your will and Christ's.
- Be adjusted, in gear, well set and jointed.
- Subdue your own activities as much as your own natural lethargy.
- Stand still till God impels you.
- Wait till He works in you to will and to do of his good pleasure.
- Exercise faith that God should accomplish in you the greatest results possible to the capacity of your nature.

Let there be no thought of what you can do for God, but all thought of what God can do through you. Nothing will make you so intense and ceaseless in your activity as this.

There will be an end of cowardice and of pride: of cowardice, because you will find yourself borne along by an irresistible impulse; of pride, because you will have no occasion to boast. As soon might Milton's pen have been proud of writing the Paradise Lost, as you of what Christ

may have done through you. **“Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith? or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it?”**

These words apply to us all, not less to those whom God has given the ministry of suffering and pain, the care of little children, the daily round of familiar duty. In these we minister to Him who judges, not by the character, but by the spirit of our work; not by its extent, but by its depth; not by results, but by the spirit that animates and inspires.

In all such there is the certainty of the gracious cooperation of the Holy Spirit.

Whenever they stand up to speak, the Spirit of God bears witness to their words, so that they come with his demonstration to prepared hearts. Wherever they bear witness, whether by lip or life, the results that accrue testify to the presence and power of a mightier than they. And whenever they cross the threshold of some new soul, or home, or land, men become aware that the Gospel has come unto them, not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.

Be it ours so to live, testify, and minister, that we may be workmen not needing to be ashamed, good stewards of God's manifold grace, coworkers with God, ambassadors through whom God Himself may beseech men to be reconciled.

~ end of chapter 19 ~

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