

PAUL: A SERVANT OF JESUS CHRIST

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CHAPTER SIX

THE INNER REVELATION OF CHRIST

(Galatians 1:15-17)

“The proudest heart that ever beat,
Hath been subdued in me;
The wildest will that ever rose
To scorn thy cause, or aid thy foes
Is quelled, my God,- by Thee!

“Thy will, and not my will, be done:
Henceforth I’d be forever thine;
Confessing Thee, the living Word,
My Saviour Christ, my God, my Lord,
Thy Cross shall be my sign!”

- W. Hone

IN these wonderful verses we have an epitome of the Apostle Paul’s life. There is, first, his separation in the Divine purpose before his birth for the high and blessed work of ministering the Gospel; then his vocation by the grace of God, when a voice called to him which his prepared ear detected, though to others it was as thunder; then the three successive steps with which we have to do now - the *revelation* of Christ; the *ministration* of human sympathy and help; and his *isolation* in Arabia; whilst, to crown all, there is afforded an indication of his life work of preaching among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.

How different to his anticipation was Saul’s entrance into Damascus! He had probably often solaced himself during his weary six-days journey by picturing the reception which would be accorded to him by the authorities at Damascus, on his arrival at their city as the Commissioner of the High Priest, charged with the extirpation of the Nazarene heresy. But instead of honor, there was consternation and surprise. No one could quite explain or understand what had taken place.

Dismounted from his horse, he went afoot; instead of the haughty bearing of the Inquisitor, the helplessness of a sightless man appealed for hands to lead him; shrinking from notice and welcome, he was only too eager to reach a lonely chamber, where he might recover from the awful effects of that collision between his mortal and sinful nature and the holy, glorious Son of God, whom he had so ruthlessly persecuted.

“Trembling and astonished,” he seemed a stricken, dejected, broken man but his soul was radiant with the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus. The fire that shone in the burning bush had suddenly kindled upon him. As a lightning flash illuminates the ink-black night, revealing the precipice towards which the traveller was stumbling, and unveiling for one brief instant the city with its glistening buildings, or the country with its expanse of forest, river, and pastureland, so in a moment he had seen God, Christ, the Old Testament Scriptures, and the mistaken purpose of his life.

It is interesting to notice how much of the teaching, which the Apostle gave out in after days, may be discovered in germ in the records of his conversion.

“I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest”: there is the believer’s identification with the Lord, involving all that wonderful teaching of the oneness of the Head and members.

“To make thee a minister and a witness”: there is the origin of his constant reference to witness and testimony bearing.

“I send thee far hence unto the Gentiles”: on this he rested his claim to be considered specially the Apostle of the Gentiles, and perhaps at this time those two great revelations may have passed for a moment before the eyes of his heart, to be elaborated in after years;

The one that the Gentiles should be fellow-members, fellow-heirs, and fellow-partakers with the chosen nation in all the privileges and rights of the Gospel;

The other, to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery which from eternal ages hath been hidden in the heart of God the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory that even the hearts of Gentiles may become the dwelling place and temple of the living Saviour (Ephesians 3; Colossians 1).

In Acts 26:17, 18, we find an epitome of the first chapter of the Epistle to the Colossians.

It is, in fact, the seed plot of the Apostle’s thoughts on the justification and sanctification of the soul. The whole of his message might be focused around these two points - remission of sins, and an inheritance among the sanctified, through faith in the living Christ.

At this formative period of his life three effective agencies were brought to bear on him: the work of God on his heart; contact with Ananias; and the education of the desert solitudes.

I. THE WORK OF GOD ON HIS HEART

“It pleased God . . . to reveal his Son in me.”

The Apostle knew too much of the divine life to admit that the vast change in him could be entirely accounted for by what he had seen with his mortal, and now blinded eyes. He was aware that a true and lasting work can only be achieved when the inner eye has perceived things that are hidden from mortal sense.

In other words, God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, must shine in the heart to give the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus. Imagine the abundance of revelations made to the blinded man during those three days and nights of silence and solitude in the house of Judas. Is it wonderful that he became oblivious to the needs of the body, and did neither eat nor drink? There are hours when we lose all consciousness of earth, and already live in heavenly places; when the soul loses count of the moments, sets sail from the coast line of earth, and finds itself out on the broad bosom of the ocean of eternity. Such was the experience of this soul.

What mysteries began to pass before him, like the procession of the Divine Nature as God proclaimed his Name to Moses down the mountain gorge! We talk about discovery; we should rather speak of disclosure. Is there such a thing as discovery? Is it not rather true of all invention, of all fresh readings of nature, that God is taking man up into the mountain of vision and showing him the things which have been, and are, and shall be, bidding him write them in a book for the generations to come?

During those wondrous hours God unveiled secrets which had been kept in silence through times eternal, but were manifested to him according to the commandment of the eternal God, that he might make them known unto all nations, unto obedience of faith.

But the crowning revelation of all was that on which he lays especial stress.

It was much to learn that Jesus of Nazareth was in very deed the Son of the Highest, and that the Christ must suffer and be the first by his resurrection from the dead to proclaim light unto the people and the Gentiles; much to be taught that remission of sins and the heritage of a holy life were the gift of God to the open hand of faith; much to discover that there was no distinction between Jew and Greek, but that the same God was Lord of all, and rich to all; but more than all was the unveiling of the indwelling Christ, living literally within him by his Spirit, so that whilst he was in Christ, Christ was also in him, as the branch has its place in the vine, and the vine lives through the branch.

O soul of man, has this revelation ever been thy experience?

Dost thou know that Christ is in thee? If thou truly believest in Him, there is no doubt of it.
“Know ye not your own selves that Jesus Christ is in you? except ye be reprobates?”

And yet thou mayest be in ignorance of this transcendent possession. Ask God to reveal his Son in thee, to make thee know experimentally the riches of the glory of this mystery. He will rend the vail of the inner life in twain from the top to the bottom, and in the most holy place of thy spirit disclose the Shekinah of his eternal presence.

Two conditions only must be fulfilled. Thou must be prepared:

- To yield thine own will to the Cross; and
- To wait before God in the silence and solitude of thy spirit.

God was pleased to make this known to Saul of Tarsus. He will be equally pleased to make it known to thee; because He lives to glorify his Son, and afford the full measure of blessedness to his children. Ask for a breath of heavenly grace to part the veiling mist, and show thee the line of sun-lit Alps, irradiate with the morning glow!

II. CONTACT WITH ANANIAS

It is permitted to holy and humble natures greatly to help the spirit which is on the point of emerging from bondage. The little maiden, awaking from her death swoon, required food; Lazarus, whom Jesus had summoned back to life, needed to be unsathed and loosed. The offices which one can perform for another are beautifully illustrated in that simple-hearted saint, Ananias, whom the Lord at this moment called upon the scene, and to whom He entrusted the keys of the kingdom, that he might unlock Saul's way into perfect peace.

We know very little of Ananias, except that he was a devout man according to the law and was well reported of by the Jews, but evidently he was on intimate terms with his Master; and the Lord was willing to enter into explanations and reassurances with him, before sending him forth. A very slender taper, if it has caught the fire, may communicate its glow to the powerful wicks of a lighthouse tower.

He gave him a Brother's Welcome.

Though he was fully acquainted with the object of Saul's visit to the city, he accosted him with the sweet and generous term, Brother, Brother Saul. What a thrill that address sent through the heart of the new convert! Pharisaism had never spoken thus; and as he became conscious of the presence of this new brother standing beside him and laying his hand on his fevered brow, the human love was the sign and symbol of the Divine. Ah! Love of God, what must not thou be, though I have persecuted thee so sorely, if the love of man be so strong and tender!

He communicated Priceless Blessings.

First, beneath the laying on of his hands, sight came clear to eyes which had beheld nothing since they had been smitten by the glory of "that light."

And the touch of this devout man, accompanied as it must have been with the upward glance of prayer and faith, was also the signal for the reception of the anointing grace of the Holy Spirit, in filling, anointing, and equipping for blessed service.

He baptized him.

What a baptism must that have been! What a tidal wave of emotion must have swept over him, as he realized that he was being united with Jesus by the likeness of his death! In years long after, the memory of that solemn moment was fresh to him, and he refers to it in the repeated words of Romans 6.

- **“Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?”**
- **“We are buried with him by baptism into death.”**
- **“We have been planted together in the likeness of his death.”**

That baptism was his final and irreversible break with his past life, the Pharisaic party, and his persecution of the adherents of “**the Way**.”

Henceforth he was avowedly one with the followers of the Nazarene. From that moment he took up his cross, and began to follow his Master. The cross and grave of Jesus must now stand between him and all that had been all his friends, ambitions, and opinions whilst he must turn his face towards labor and travail, hunger and thirst, perils and persecutions, together with the daily deliverance unto death for Jesus sake.

There was an even deeper thought.

He knew that the root of sins was sin, the assertion of I, the body of the flesh. Too long had this been the motive force of his career. His efforts after righteousness, as well as his zeal against the Church, had manifested the intensity and virulence of this strong, selfish principle.

Henceforth, however, he desired to be dead to it, and to accept the position offered to him in the risen Lord, wherein the body of sin should be done away as the center and impulse of his being, because replaced by the indwelling Spirit of Life, which is in Christ Jesus.

“Yea, thro life, death, thro sorrow and thro sinning,
 He shall suffice me, for He hath sufficed;
 Christ is the end, for Christ is the beginning,
 Christ the beginning, for the end is Christ.”

It does not appear that Ananias was cognizant of all that baptism meant to his new brother Saul.

To him it was an act of obedience, a symbol of the washing away of sins. This simple soul had never trodden the difficult way of the Cross. How little do we know what is passing in the thoughts of those next to us in life’s strange school!

But his honest help must have been very comforting to the new disciple as he united himself with the Cross of Jesus, and henceforth began to fill up that which was behind of the sufferings of Christ for his Body's sake. All Ananias knew was that the Lord had said, "**I will show him how great things he must suffer for my Name's sake.**"

III. THE EDUCATION OF THE DESERT SOLITUDES

"Immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood; neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went away into Arabia."

It is not quite clear whether he began to preach before going; probably not. He wanted to be alone, to reflect on all that he had seen; to coordinate, if possible, the new with the old, the present with the past. For this he must have uninterrupted leisure, and he hungered for the isolation and solitude of the wilderness.

Men like Ananias might reassure him; the apostles of the Lord might communicate much of his teaching and wondrous ministry; the holy beauty of the life of the infant Church might calm and elevate his spirit; but, above all things, he wanted to be alone with Jesus, to know Him and the power of his resurrection, the anointing which makes human teaching needless, because it teaches all things.

Three years under such tuition would doubtless make him so proficient that when afterwards he met those who were of repute among the apostles they would be able to add nothing unto him.

Arabia probably stands for the Sinaitic peninsula, with its sparse population, its marked physical features, its associations with Moses, and the Exodus, and Elijah.

How much it must have all meant to that eager spirit, who was to interpret to all time the inner meaning of the momentous events of which those gaunt mountain solitudes had been the scene!

- Here the bush had burned with the lire that now burned within his heart.
- Here Moses had seen God face to face, as he had seen Jesus.
- Here the plan of the tabernacle had been communicated, as to him that of the Church.
- Here the water flowed from the stricken rock, and that Rock was Christ.
- Here Elijah stood in the entrance to the cave, and the still small voice stole into his heart; and had he not heard that same voice?
- Beneath those heavens glowing at noon with sultry heat, and radiant at night with myriads of stars, the cloud had moved, directing the march of the pilgrim hosts for him, too, it shone.

Month after month he wandered to and fro, now sharing the rough fare of some Essene community, or the lot of a family of Bedouins; now swept upwards in heavenly fellowship, and again plunged into profound meditation. The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands upon thousands; and they were all waiting at his beck and call to bear him aloft into the heavenly places.

Probably the most important work of those years was to review the entire course of Old Testament truth from the new standpoint of vision suggested by the sufferings and death of the Messiah. There was no doubt that He had been crucified in weakness, and now lived in the power of God. But how was this consistent with the anticipations of the prophets and seers of the Old Testament, who had been understood by generations of rabbis to predict an all-victorious Prince? How eagerly he turned to all the well-known Messianic passages! What ecstasy must have thrilled him as he discovered that they were all consistent with Christ's suffering unto death as the way to enter His glory! And how greatly he must have wondered that he and all his people had been so blind to the obvious meaning of the inspired Word (II Corinthians 3).

We can well understand how, on his return to Damascus, he should straightway proclaim that Jesus was the Son of God; and that he should especially confound the Jews that dwelt there, proving that this is the Messiah. In those silent meditations over the Word he stored arguments for use in many a synagogue for the next twenty years, where he would reason from the Scriptures, opening and alleging that it behoved the Messiah to suffer and to rise again from the dead, and "**that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ** (the Messiah)."

It is almost certain also that he was led at this time to understand the relation of the law to the older covenant into which God had entered with Abraham. Up to this moment he had been a son of the law, laboriously fulfilling its demands, but groaning beneath a perpetual sense of failure and condemnation. Now he was led to see that he and all his people had made too little of the promise made to Abraham, which was conditioned, not on works, but on faith. To employ his own words, he realized that the law, which came four hundred and thirty years after the giving of the covenant, could not disannul it, so as to make the promise of none effect (Galatians 3:17). He graduated backwards from Moses to Abraham. From the loftier summits of Mamre he beheld the temporary and limited ministry of the Law, which was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise had been made.

In the light of this revelation he could better understand his own call to minister to the Gentiles, for this was one of the special provisions of the Abrahamic covenant that in him and in his seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.

But deeper than all was God's work with his soul. Grain by grain his proud self-reliance and impetuosity were worn away. As it happened to Moses during the forty years of shepherd life, so it befell Saul of Tarsus. No longer confident in himself, he was henceforth more than content to be the slave of Jesus Christ, going where he was sent, doing as he was bidden, and serving as the instrument of his will. We all need to go to Arabia to learn lessons like these. The Lord Himself was led up into the wilderness. And, in one form or another, every soul which has done a great work in the world has been passed through similar periods of obscurity, suffering, disappointment, or solitude.

~ end of chapter 6 ~

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