

Christ the Power of God

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"But unto them that are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God..." (1 Corinthians 1:24).

"For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2).

In many ways the explanation of Christ being the power of God consists in the fact that He is Christ crucified. This second reference by Paul to his emphasis on Christ crucified is immediately linked with the reminder that Christ is the power of God and largely the explanation of it.

Spiritual Power

The whole subject of spiritual power is most important. So many Christians find themselves involved in a continual struggle to live up to what they know to be God's standard. For them Christianity is a manner of life composed of various rules and regulations. They know what ought to be and what ought not to be, and they therefore struggle to attain to this level of living. Their consciences play a large part in this constant effort, and for this reason they suffer many fears and fail to experience the promised joys. Life for them has become a strenuous business, fraught with much disappointment and many failures. They may from time to time have a sense of attainment and success, with much resultant gladness, but with the fluctuating emotions of the soul, things seem to collapse and go all wrong. So it is that people find the Christian life burdensome; they long to know real victory, true deliverance and the joy of the Lord, whereas they experience the ups and downs of a constant struggle. The Christian life depicted in the New Testament seems so different from their actual experience that the Devil is never slow to pounce in with his suggestions that a life of constant victory is quite impossible, so that all their hopes are but unreal dreams. Satan wants God's people to despair of knowing His power.

But there is an altogether different life, different because it is based on the entering into something already completed in Christ; not something to be attained to but rather that which has already been accomplished. It is not a standard to be lived up to, but a Person to be lived with. It is impossible to measure the vast difference between these two kinds of

life. The former is one of self effort and defeat, while the other consists in enjoying the reality of Christ the power of God.

The Call for Overcomers

We must beware of thinking in terms of advanced or special doctrines. Scriptural teaching is not departmental or sectional. We may hear of 'higher truth' or 'advanced teaching', as though there were something special reserved for the few. So there arises the idea of 'higher life' with 'higher teaching', as opposed to being a simple believer, content with 'the simple gospel'. I want very emphatically to contradict any such notion. Wherever you look in the New Testament you will never find any support for this idea. It is true that we have to face the call for overcomers, but surely the 'overcomer' in the book of Revelation is only the ripe and full product of the work of Christ on His cross; it is only Christ in His fuller manifestation and expression. Overcomers are made possible because Christ is "the power of God". Just exactly as in the commencement of salvation, so in its triumphant consummation, everything is linked with the Lamb slain and the blood of the Lamb.

Nobody should make a special kind of 'Overcomer' teaching, for this is what God intended Calvary to mean for every believer. God had spiritual victory as His thought when He first forgave us our sins, and in His mind this is to be the normal development of every Christian's life. Every movement forward, however, is related to the cross, and there is a sense in which there is not one step forward in the spiritual life which is not preceded by a step backward. What I mean is this, that there has to be some undoing before there can be any upbuilding. The Christ who is the power of God to us is the crucified Christ who progressively applies the cross to us also, so that being released from the flesh which so holds us back, we may advance in the realm of the Spirit. So spiritual progress is not conditioned by special teaching but by ever deeper experiences of the inworking of the cross of Christ.

Jesus Christ Crucified

This being true, we must recognise that everything is bound up with the Person, and must never be regarded merely as spiritual truth. Everything is bound up with Him. It is Christ who is the power of God - Jesus Christ and Him crucified. This explains the working of the gospel, which surely is that Christ crucified is revealed in the heart of the sinner who believes. We are not constituted gospel preachers because we have read somewhere the historic facts that Christ was crucified, raised from the dead and ascended, but because God has revealed in us not just facts but a Person in relation to the facts and the facts in relation to the Person. This, then, brings me back to what I said at the beginning, namely that the life of struggling and failing in self effort is really due to a failure to appreciate the wonder and power of Christ crucified.

When the Holy Spirit comes into our hearts He brings Christ in the completeness of His finished work on the cross, and then proceeds progressively to conform us to Christ. Do you realise that the Christ in you is not an imperfect Christ? When the Lord Jesus wrought His Calvary work He not only dealt with the matter of forgiveness but He went right on to the perfection of redemption, finally reaching the throne as the great Overcomer. In Him, the Person, the whole ground of spiritual experience is covered and completed. There is no experience that can ever come to you or me which makes impossible the reaching of God's end, for Christ has already met and overcome it. So we are not to struggle in vain attempts after perfection, but to co-operate with the Holy Spirit as He seeks to make good in us the power of Christ's finished work on the cross. It is Christ in you who is the hope of glory. Anything less or anything else will bring no hope of glory but rather despair.

Our Death-Union with Christ

I would like to close on this positive reminder that the Holy Spirit has been charged with and has accepted full responsibility for the conforming of us to Christ. But we must recognise that power in relation to the Holy Spirit is not just an impersonal force but is vitally connected with Christ, and especially on the basis of the cross. For us the power of the Holy Spirit is inseparably bound up with the Person of Jesus Christ and depends on our willingness to accept the implication of union with Him in His cross. When the Lord was discussing this cross with Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration, the word rendered 'decease' should really be 'exodus' (Luke 9:31). Doubtless, then, we can correctly say that Christ's cross is a deliverance, a way out. It is the way out from condemnation, an elementary truth for the Christian but none the less a precious and important one. It is the way out from the power of sin. How can I escape from the bondage of sin which threatens me and seeks still to make me a slave even though I am a forgiven sinner? Only by death-union with the Lord Jesus, for it is His death which has made the escape, the exodus for all who trust in Him. Such trust involves the appropriation by faith of the power of that death as I am led into it in practical ways by the Holy Spirit.

In addition we notice that the Scriptures say that Jesus *accomplished* this exodus. It was an accomplishment on His part, something which He achieved. When we recognise this to be the nature of that death, we get a different conception from that of His just being killed, merely being crucified by men, and realise that this was a mighty work which He completed. He voluntarily took upon Himself all those powers which produce man's failures, defeats and bondage, and then broke through them all and accomplished a perfect way out by His triumphant death upon the cross. So it is for us to recognise that all our problems and enemies have been dealt with by the Lord Jesus in His cross. The Holy Spirit is given to us as the Spirit of His triumphant victory, full of energy and power to bring our besetting weaknesses to that grave where Christ has brought them, so that we may be freed for the will of God. I cannot master my sins but Christ has done it, and can draw me into the power of His delivering death. I can claim my share in the exodus. And this is not just coming into the light of some new doctrine, but sharing the power of a Person. It makes all the difference whether we are trying to deal with our troubles doctrinally or in the power of that Person.

Christ's death is also the way out from the bondage of law. You can have Christian law just as much as you can have Mosaic law; you can be in bondage in Christianity just as much as men were in Judaism. Christianity can be made into an imposed system just as much as Mosaic law was, and there are many Christians today who live under the fear of the 'Thou shalt' and the 'Thou shalt not' of a legalistic conception of the Christian life. You can take the Bible as God's standard for your life and try to fulfil it and yet still be burdened with a sense of constant failure. It is God's standard, and it is a very exhaustive one which leaves no part of the practical life untouched, but those who make the effort to try to live up to it only end in disillusion. No, it is not just a matter of a Book but of a Person, the Person who did live up to that standard, absolutely fulfilling every least demand with the most perfect success, so satisfying God to the full. By His death He has delivered us from the bondage of legal demands. This same Person now lives in us by His Holy Spirit, seeking to work out that perfect will of God not on the basis of some binding instructions from without but as a living force within. We have the law written in our hearts. To be in Christ is a matter of life and not of legalism.

Christ Crucified is the Power of God

CHRIST, and Christ crucified, is the power of God to bring deliverance from sin, from the flesh, from the law and from the world. "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world" (Galatians 6:14). Paul was not glorying that he could enjoy so much of the world and yet have a clear conscience, but was enthusiastic about having been delivered from the world.

For believers the only possible way of staying in this world is to know that they no longer belong to it. Not that we can deliver ourselves. No, it is much too strong for us. But in this matter, as in all others, the cross of Christ has made a way out for us. Alas that some Christians seem to want to hold on to as much of the world as they can without losing their peace of mind, giving up the minimum and holding on to all that they can without having their conscience too disturbed. This is not a powerful life, nor is it a glorious one. The glory of true fellowship with Christ crucified is the rich satisfaction of those who know the delivering power of the Christ and the new fullness of life in the will of God.