

XII.

CHRIST THE ONLY GAIN.

“That I may win Christ, and be found in him.”—PHILIPPIANS III. 8, 9.

THIS is perfect security and consummate blessedness. The language indicates at once a goal and a starting-post ; an end and a beginning ; that I may win Christ, the goal or end I have been seeking to reach ; that I may be found in him, ready, not only for resistance to old adversaries, but for a new start and onward movement towards divine perfection.

“That I may win Christ.” Observe how this idea of winning Christ fits into the apostle’s previous statement of his experience. He speaks of certain things which he had been accustomed to regard as gain (ver. 7). He enumerates some of them (vers. 5, 6). They are all of them spiritual privileges or attainments ; qualifications valuable in a religious or spiritual point of view. No doubt they secured to one possessing them,—and especially to such a one as Paul,—a large measure of what men are wont to covet as prizes in this world. Never man surrendered a more hopeful career than Paul did when he became a Christian. But it is not to any loss of that nature that he here points. The things in respect of which he once thought he might trust in the flesh, he prized not as giving him a good standing before men, but as giving him a right standing in the sight of God. In that view they were gain to him. But he was led to count them

loss. "I have done with them all," he cries. "I count them but dung, if, instead of them, I may win Christ."

"That I may be found in him." For if only I once win Christ, then, whosoever seeks me finds me in Christ. Whatever may be the purpose for which I am sought, I am found in Christ. Is it, on the one hand, that I may meet and answer old charges brought against me? I am found in Christ (ver. 9), not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is of the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith. Is it, on the other hand, that I may merge the past in the future; forgetting things behind, reaching forth unto things before, pressing towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus? Still let me be found in Christ (vers. 10, 11), "that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead."

Let us consider—

I. What it is to win Christ.

II. What it is to be found in Christ.

I. To win, to gain (*κεκτήσθω*, ver. 8) Christ, is—1, to count him gain (*κέκτην*, ver. 7); 2, to covet and seek him as gain; 3, to appropriate him as gain; 4, to enjoy him as gain.

1. To count Christ gain. Once, my circumcision, my place in a pious family, my strict sect, my fervid zeal, my blameless observance of the law—these, and the like gifts and endowments, were, in a religious view, as grounds of confidence, gain to me. Now I count them all loss for Christ. Christ is now to me what these other things were, gain. Christ alone is, in that view, the only gain. There is here a great change of mind from what is natural to us. There is an entirely new estimate of gain and loss. And observe

what is the object in question with reference to which this new estimate of gain and loss is formed. It is my standing before God, my relation to him, my acceptance in his sight. What is gain to me is what puts me on a right footing with God. This I once thought that my personal qualifications of birth, profession, privilege, attainment, might do. Now I see that for any such purpose they are useless, and worse than useless. In the view of the end for which I once prized them, I now perceive that Christ is gain. There is much implied in your really, with true conviction, perceiving this.

(1.) You are in earnest as regards the end with reference to which you estimate what is gain. That end is your being in a position (ver. 2) to worship God in the spirit and with joy; your being entitled to have confidence in his presence; your being upon terms of favour with him. Now, are you in earnest here? Is your standing before God really matter of concern to you? Is the question a serious one with you, Do I stand well with my God? Is it felt to be vital?

Naturally it is not so. You care little, or not at all, for the righting of your position towards God. You may care for your being safe in the position in which you are. You may have some anxiety about the consequences of continuing in that position, and some desire to evade or to escape from them. You may prize and welcome any device that looks that way. The trees of the Lord's garden to hide among; fallen fig-leaves sewed together to cover your nakedness; these are in that view gain to you. As to anything more; as to what God thinks of you, how God feels towards you, what you are to him and he is to you,—as to all that,—alas! how indifferent and unconcerned can you be!

Is it otherwise with you now? Is it a distress to you,—a real grief,—that there should be any misunderstanding between you and your Maker? Are you so smitten with a

sense of his glorious and amiable majesty, and the misery of your being outcast from him, that no mere measure of indulgence on God's part, and no imagination of impunity on your part, can content you now? Ah! you cry, I would not merely reckon on the chance of somehow not being condemned at last. I desire to stand right with my God now. I care not, in comparison, for mere impunity. It is not exemption from suffering I solicit. I think I may almost say I could accept the punishment of my sins. But, oh! I want this long and dreary warfare between my Maker and myself to be well ended. I would fain see how again all between us may be peace? Is that, or anything like it, your desire?

Then (2) it is no wonder that what things were gain to you are now counted loss. There are many things a man may have about him, many things he may do, that may have a certain kind of value, if all he cares for is the patching up of a sort of truce or compromise with God,—or rather not so much with God as with his own conscience. But how worthless are they all when the question comes to be, Are God and the man personally to be thoroughly at one? For in truth they have no real bearing on that question at all. They may be thought perhaps to have an efficacy as modifying or mitigating the results of the relation already subsisting between the parties. But the relation itself they do not touch. They do not cancel guilt. They profess only to supply a sort of set-off against it. They do not overcome alienation. They can only serve to dissemble and disguise it. They do not establish cordial faith and love. Rather they are to be taken as a substitute for these affections; as making up for the want of them. The things in respect of which I once thought I might have confidence in the flesh—my Christian birth, my baptism, my strict profession, my freedom from gross vice, my punctual devotion, my

zealous service,—what are they all now to me, when I am made to feel that there is something originally, radically, fatally, wrong in the footing on which I am with my God, and that I never can be happy or free or loving until that is righted? I may increase my painstaking in every pious duty. I may strain every nerve in trying to do good and to be good. I may wage a fierce warfare with the evil that is in me. I may chastise and mortify myself. I may exhaust myself in efforts to please him in whose hands is my life. But alas! it is all in vain. These methods will stand me in stead no longer. They do not heal the hurt. They do not mend the matter. Rather, as regards a really good understanding, things grow worse and worse. The more I seek to stand right with my Father in heaven, the more hopeless does my miserable state of wrong standing become.

(3). But just as all things else are thus felt to be worthless dung, Christ is seen to be gain. Oh! the relief, the joy, of a single glimpse of Christ breaking in upon the dark experience of a man desperately trying to be just with God! Oh! the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus! Yes; in your extremity, all the supports you ever thought you could lean on before God giving way, Christ may well be counted gain; Christ the reconciler; Christ the peacemaker; Christ the expiator of guilt; Christ the justifier of the ungodly; Christ the Son, coming forth from the Father to open to you the Father's heart, that you may know and believe the love wherewith the Father loveth you! This is the Christ who now comes instead of all that you ever reckoned gain, all that you ever thought might warrant confidence before God. And how infinitely surpassing, in that view, is the excellency of the knowledge of Christ! It is indeed, you now cry, an excellent thing to know Christ; Christ is worth the knowing, worth the winning. Is he not a Christ who,

if I win him, will thoroughly meet my case ? Having him, I must be complete. For I see in him sin, all sin, freely pardoned, without price or penance of mine ; myself a sinner, of sinners the chief, no longer under condemnation, but acquitted, justified, accepted ; the prison garb of my guilt exchanged for the fairest robe child ever wore. I see an instant end of the weary attempt to amend the old position, and instead of that the way wonderfully opened for the immediate occupying of a new one. I see free grace, perfect righteousness, a holy salvation, life, love, liberty, all in Christ. All else is loss ; Christ alone, Christ is counted gain.

2. Christ is coveted and sought as gain. You not merely count Christ as gain, but covet and seek him as gain. But are not these two things the same ? Or does not the one include the other ? What I count or reckon to be gain, how can I but covet and desire and seek ? Nay, the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked : who can know it ? The question must be faithfully pressed home. Are you really so thoroughly in earnest in this matter as not merely to perceive that Christ is gain, but to be honestly willing to possess this gain ? Nor is it merely to the careless and unconverted that the question applies, but even perhaps still more to not a few of those who are awakened and convinced.

In dealing with a case of genuine spiritual distress, when the conscience has been deeply moved, the understanding enlightened, the whole inner man agitated. I meet with a sort of unconquerable repugnance to the acceptance of the gospel, an obstinate refusing to be comforted, which fairly baffles and greatly perplexes me. The sufferer, I cannot for a moment doubt, is sincere. He sincerely owns guilt. He sincerely renounces all confidence in the flesh. He sincerely believes that salvation is, and can be, only of grace, through

faith in Christ. Intelligently and devoutly, with full consent, he responds to all I say when I tell him of the worthlessness of all creature righteousness, and tell him also of the worthiness of the Lamb that was slain. But alas ! he complains it is to him like the cup of Tantalus, ever near to his burning lips, and yet ever escaping his grasp. It is in vain that I represent to him, however affectionately, the entire and absolute freeness of the gospel offer, the ample warrant he has for taking Christ and taking comfort in Christ, the infallible certainty and wide sweep of that gracious promise, "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." Thou art perishing, I cry ; thou art lost. But once win Christ, and all is well. I see it, I feel it : he answers ; but, woe is me ! I cannot.

Weary of expostulation, argument, entreaty,—sick of the task of meeting in detail the endless difficulties and objections he conjures up, I turn upon him with the abrupt question, Are you willing to have this Christ ? Honestly, do you desire him ? For may not this depression really cover either an indolent and dilettante sort of spiritualism, treating the most solemn realities of eternity as if they were merely sentimental miseries ; or a morbid fondness for being melancholy, and being sympathised with as melancholy ; or a secret reluctance manfully to face and grapple with some sacrifice of self-esteem or self-indulgence felt to be inevitable if Christ is to be won ? Ah ! it will not do to be for ever treating unbelief, even when it takes the guise of most earnest spiritual soul-exercise and soul concern, as a misfortune, a calamity ; to be sympathising with it, and almost apologising for it. I cannot give you credit for counting Christ gain ; at all events, I cannot give you credit for that conviction being very genuine and deep, unless you show that you really covet him as gain by being willing and con-

sending to have him. I must remind you that convictions, however genuine and deep in the conscience and the understanding, are not saving unless there goes along with them the willing heart.

This renewing of your will, indeed, is the main part, the very essence, of the Spirit's work in your conversion, your effectual calling. There may be a sense of sin and a knowledge of Christ. The sense of sin may be so poignant as to stir the soul's profoundest fountains of grief, and shame, and fear. The knowledge of Christ may be so clear and captivating as to prompt the feeling—"would he were mine; were he but mine, I would be blessed indeed." But all that, as you need to be continually told, is compatible with an unrenewed will, with the entire absence of any real and hearty willingness to have Christ as your gain. And oh! remember, brethren, that while the convinced conscience craves for Christ, and the enlightened understanding sees Christ, it is the willing heart that wins him.

Oh! make sure, then, of the willing heart, the willing mind. Wanting that, you may have much spiritual exercise about sin and about Christ all in vain. Having that, even though your sense of sin may as yet be very inadequate, and your acquaintance with Christ very imperfect, still it is enough. Let the stress of your concern as regards your spiritual state be all in the direction of the willing mind, the willing heart. Lay yourselves out for that. Let the desire of your souls be towards Christ. Earnestly seek Christ. Think not that he is to be won unsought. Think not that he is to come in some mysterious manner into your arms, merely because you feel your need of him and see how good a thing it would be for you to have him. If he is worth the winning, he is worth the seeking. Therefore seek ye the Lord. Seek with the earnestness of the merchantman seeking

goodly pearls. Seek with the importunity of the woman who would take no denial. Seek with the perseverance of the widow who would give the judge no rest. Seek, and seek on till you find.

Above all, seek with the sincerity of a perfect willingness to comply with all the terms on which the finding of Christ depends ; a willingness to count all things but loss for Christ ; a willingness to have no other righteousness but Christ, no other strength but Christ, no other life but Christ, no other portion but Christ ; a willingness to bear the reproach of Christ, to take up the cross of Christ, to fill up in your bodies the measure of the suffering of Christ ; a willingness to fall in, absolutely and without reserve, with the plan and purpose of the Father that the undivided glory of your salvation should belong to Christ, that you should be nothing, and Christ should be all in all. Seek ye the Lord thus as your gain. Covet, desire, seek him, in such a spirit as this. Instead of ever complaining that you cannot get him, instead of always condoling with yourselves, and asking all men to condole with you, because your case, as you choose to imagine, is not with sufficient personality and particularity met and provided for, be up and doing. Gird up the loins of your minds ; go out of yourselves in search of Christ. Search for him in the word. Search for him in the gospel. Search for him in ordinances. Search for him by prayer. Search for him as willing, anxious to find him. "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found." "I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in a day of salvation have I succoured thee." "Behold, now is the accepted time. Behold, now is the day of salvation." "Seek, and ye shall find."

3. For now Christ is appropriated as gain. "He that seeketh findeth." He who seeks Christ, willing, just as he is, to have Christ just as *he* is, finds him, and in finding Christ,

appropriates him, and in appropriating Christ, feels him to be gain. It is for this, and nothing short of this, that you are asked to count all things but loss that you may thus win Christ. It would be a poor gospel that called you to renounce all your confidence in the flesh, to let go those palpable grounds of trust which might be felt to give you some standing before God, and did not also provide for your winning Christ in the full sense of your being enabled, not merely to count him to be gain, nor merely to covet and seek him as gain, but to appropriate him to yourselves as gain, actually to win him as your own.

Yes ; it is that I may win Christ that I am to part with everything else. Surely, therefore, if I am not to make a foolish bargain, an unprofitable exchange, Christ may be won.

Do you ask how ? I reply, by faith, by faith alone ; faith making Christ mine, as thoroughly, personally, consciously mine, as those other things were mine. These things were at all events really in my possession, actually mine. As to my being "circumcised on the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews ; as touching the law, a Pharisee" (ver. 5) ; as to all these qualifications there could be no room for doubting that they really belonged to me. There could be no question as to their being mine. But now I am to discard them all. And for what ? for whom ? For Christ. But not surely for the mere knowledge of Christ, however excellent ; not for the mere sense of my need of Christ ; not for a continual seeking of Christ. No ; but for Christ himself ; for Christ found, attained, appropriated as mine ; that I may win Christ.

Ah ! if Christ were not thus to be won, it were better for me to keep by those old, original grounds of confidence, which at least have this recommendation, that they can be sensibly apprehended, estimated, weighed, and measured. The good

upon me, in me, about me, in which I used to trust, is mine ; undeniably mine. I can recognise, touch, and handle it as mine. And if I am to let it all go for the sake of another good, the good that is in Christ, the good that Christ is, on the mere chance of that good being some time and some way, I know not when or how, mine ; I commit myself to a most intolerable experience of suspense and hazard. I am willing to let all go. I do in fact let all go. But it is that I may win Christ ; that I may really get hold of him ; that I may have him as mine.

But how ? you ask again. Again I answer, by faith ; by faith alone. The thing cannot be made plainer to you by definition or description. If there be any remaining difficulty, it must be removed by experiment. "Seek, and ye shall find." Seek and win Christ. Believe and be saved. Believe and live.

Nay, but still you ask, how shall I know that I have appropriated, or am appropriating, Christ ? How shall I know that I have won, or that I am winning, Christ as mine ? That, I rejoin, is not now the question. I am not speaking of that reflex assurance of faith which concludes, on credible evidence, that my belief is genuine, and that therefore Christ is mine. I speak of the direct, immediate, simple, and straightforward acting of faith ; faith dealing not with itself but with its object ; dealing with Christ ; with Christ offered in the gospel ; with Christ freely given by the Father ; Christ commended by the Spirit ; Christ owned by your own conscience ; Christ welcomed into your very heart. Oh ! be sure you have not far to seek. You have not long to wait.

This Christ whom you now reckon to be the only gain ; this Christ whom you now really covet and would fain grasp as all your gain ; this Christ is yours ; yours freely, immediately ; yours now for the taking. You win Christ. It is

his own wish ; it is his Father's good pleasure ; it is the aim of his Spirit's coming that you should win him. "Be not faithless, therefore, but believing." Raise not questions. Ask not for signs. Say not that if you saw and felt the scars you would believe. Lift up the eye of faith. Behold and see. Before you, in immediate contact with you, face to face, is the crucified one. "Take me," he cries ; "my birth, my circumcision, my baptism, my obedience, my sufferings, my death, my resurrection, my life, my grace, my glory ;—myself. Take me as an equivalent, far more than an equivalent, for all that you ever thought you might lean on or trust in before God. Come, O doubter, see and feel my wounds ; wounds borne for such as thou art, for thee thyself, thy very self." Wilt thou not fall down before him, absolutely unable to hold out any longer against such love ? Wilt thou not say unto him, "My Lord, and my God !"

4. You win Christ so as to enjoy him as gain. You win him ; not as the miser hoards his wealth, to keep it ; not as the spendthrift gets his property, to waste it. Christ is gain to you, not for show and semblance, for name and reputation merely. He is yours for profitable use ; for peace, contentment, honour, happiness, and whatever else is comprehended in your standing right with God. Be well assured that nothing short of your thus winning Christ, in the full sense of your not merely appropriating him as gain, but using and enjoying him as gain, will reconcile you to the sacrifice you have to make of your self-reliance and self-esteem, or enable you fully and finally to make it. But what a rich compensation for all you have to give up is your thus winning Christ, so winning him as to have, to use, to enjoy him !

To win Christ ! What a prize is this ! It is to win a friend, a brother ; a friend who lays down his life for me ; a brother who shares with me all the love with which his

Father loveth him, and all the glory which his Father giveth him. To win Christ ! It is to win an inexhaustible fulness of grace and truth ; a fountain of atoning blood ever freshly flowing ; an unction of the Holy Ghost, shedding light on all things, breathing love into all things. Oh ! it is a great word this : it is a great thing to win Christ, to get him, to use him, to enjoy him, as really gain to me.

That I may win Christ ! Brethren beloved, it is a real attainment ; it is a positive gain. It is not a bare negation ; a painful exercise of self-denial ; the enforced renunciation of self-righteousness ; the mere emptying myself, or suffering myself to be beggared of all I used to lean on and look to and trust in. That is not Christianity : it is not the doctrine of Christ or the experience of the Christian. The gospel calls me not to famine but to fulness, when it calls me to win Christ. I am to feed on Christ. I am to grow up into Christ. I am to eat his very flesh and drink his very blood. I am to win him, so as to find his flesh to be meat indeed, and his blood to be drink indeed.

Who is he who would persuade me to change my whole natural habit of thought, my whole natural course of life, to forsake the old refuges, the trees of the garden, to cast off the old coverings, the fig-leaves, and to come forth, naked, shivering, shuddering, a guilty soul confronting an angry God ? And what has he to give me to replace the confidence I have lost ? Himself. I may win him. He will be to me instead of all things else. Take me, he cries, take me as a substitute, for whatever you are required to part with. Prove me. See if I am not a rich equivalent for all. My righteousness, the righteousness of the slain Lamb, is better for you than any apron of your own devising. I am a better hiding-place than the best trees of Eden's garden. In me are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge ; unsearchable

riches are mine. The Father's favour is mine for you ; the Father's love and liberality ; the Father's heavenly inheritance. I am myself the Father's gift to you. I ask you to make no sacrifice, without offering to you ample compensation. I call on you to count all things but loss ; but it is that you may win me. And is not that enough ? Yes, Lord, for " whom have I in heaven but thee ? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee. My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever " (Ps. lxxiii. 25, 26).

II. To be found in Christ is the fitting sequel of winning Christ. It is the double fruit, the twofold good, of winning Christ. I am found in Christ.

For defence, I am to be found in Christ ; that I may meet every adversary ; that I may silence every answer. For that I can do now, far otherwise than I used to do before. Once I had nothing better to present than my own righteousness. With that I tried to quench the fiery darts of the adversary ; thinking that I might thrust in some goodness of my own to avert the stroke, at whatever point he might assail. Now I have always to present on every side an impregnable front. I have a righteousness, not my own, but wholly divine, to plead in every emergency ; against every adversary who would assail or question my standing, I have the apostle's challenge ; " it is God that justifieth : who is he that condemneth ? It is Christ that died, yea rather that is risen again. " " Who shall separate us from the love of Christ ? "

But I am to win Christ, so as to be found in him, not merely to meet and answer every assault of the accusing adversary, but to meet also and obey the high calling of God in Christ. For winning Christ, and being found in him, I

would press on. As one with him, I would now know him as he is ; I would know more of his mind, and know it with more sympathy of my mind with his. I would know more of his mind, in his passing through my sufferings, which he made his, to his glory, which he makes mine ; through death to life. Yes ! If I am found in Christ, it is that I may die with him into sin, and live with him unto righteousness, and unto God. It is that I may grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is that in him I may go on to perfection.

Thus to win Christ and be found in him, how blessed ! “To be found in him”—when ? Now—O my brother ! most emphatically now. Not an hour, not a moment, to be lost ! Now is the accepted time ; now, and only now !

When ? does one ask again ? when but always, in all circumstances, evermore ? When enemies reproach you, when your heart misgives you, when doubts arise within, and dark questionings invade your peace ; when difficulties are started, which you cannot solve, and the ground seems giving way under your feet : oh to be found in Christ then, as little children nestling in his bosom, not careful to deal with every foe, or with any fear, content to look up into his loving face, and say, Thou shalt answer, Lord, for me ! To be found in Christ, when hell threatens and all its pains take hold on you ; in Christ, who himself descended thither, and spoiled all its principalities on his cross : to be found in Christ when heaven opens, that you may sit with him in the heavenly places ; to be found in Christ when earth vexes, and all on earth is felt to be vanity, still able to say, If I have nothing else worth living for, to me to live is Christ : to be found in Christ, when duty calls, in him who said, “ I must be about my Father’s business :” to be found in Christ, when sin besets, in him who said, “ Get thee behind me Satan :” to be

found in Christ when sorrow comes, in him who wept at Bethany, and as he went on his way to Calvary, could still say, "The cup which my Father giveth me, shall I not drink it?" to be found in Christ in the hour of death, in him who cried, "Father, into thy hands I commend my Spirit!" to be found in Christ in the day of doom, in him to whom, at his own bar, you may lift the living, trusting voice, "Thou hast answered, Lord, for me!"

To be found in Christ! When? does one still ask? When, but through endless ages, in those realms of unfading beauty and bliss, where all the family of God, angels and men together, are gathered into one in Christ? Then shall ye be found in Christ, associated for ever with all the holy ones; found in Christ, sharing his glory and his joy, to the praise of God the Father, world without end. Amen.

And what of you, who in death, on the judgment day, throughout eternity, are not found in Christ? What is to become of you, when, too late, the discovery flashes upon you that you have not won Christ, and are not to be found in him? Where are you to be found? In whom? Lying in the wicked one, doomed to the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels; none to answer for you then; hell opening its wide jaws to receive you.

Oh! ye Christless, Godless men! Is it not high time for you to awake out of sleep? You may have some sort of goodness, in which you think you may perhaps wrap yourselves in the trying hour. You may lean on a name, a profession, a creed, a form; or on some amiable qualities you seem to possess, some decent virtues you cultivate, some pious deeds you do. But will these be gain to you in the day when the secrets of all hearts are revealed, and your deep alienation from God, amid them all, is relentlessly laid bare? What a discovery to make then, that they are loss,

that they are all dung ! to discover that then ; when there is no Christ to be won, and all hope of your being found in him is gone for ever ! Oh ! rather let the discovery be made to you now by the Holy Ghost, and acquiesced in by you, in your quickened conscience and broken heart. “ Seek ye the Lord, while he may be found.”