

PAUL AT HIS BEST

Philippians iv.ii: For I have learned in whatsoever state I am therewith to be content.

Our theme is "Paul at his best." You may find a protest in your heart against such a theme when applied to St. Paul. You say "Was not Paul always at his best? When did he ever have a spiritual slump? When did he ever confess to spiritual defeat? When does he sing in a minor key? You say Paul was ever at his best, and his best today was ever getting better tomorrow by that law of spiritual progress of which Paul was such an able advocate and practical exponent.

But, brother, we can have no quarrel when you understand my meaning. I firmly believe that even in the life of Paul and in his experiences as recorded by himself, there were times when he seems to rise to a higher note of victory than at other times. Not that he ever was defeated, but with Paul as with the other great saints and warriors of the Cross there were times when he was pressed out of measure. "Without were fightings; within were fears," he said. And right at this time, this hero of many battles, who was a "One-man army" for God, confesses his indebtedness to an almost unknown saint, Titus by name, for the encouragement he rendered him on this occasion. We seem to come nearer to Paul in many of our experiences, when we hear him say: "Nevertheless God who comforteth them that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus." I hardly think this was a confession of weakness, but of the fact that this mighty man of God felt the need of human sympathy and love, or rather felt the need of divine love and sympathy reaching him through a human intermediary. In his infirmities, and battles, in his limitations and absolute dependence upon God, Paul never planted himself upon a pedestal of superiority to be regarded as a "Wonder man." He loved to call himself "Less than the least of all saints," and to attribute all he was or expected to be to the free unmerited favor of God, which he described so often in that comprehensive and intensive word "GRACE."

As we analyze some of Paul's experiences with trial and opposition we each have our individual reaction to these. What most impresses one may not be so impressive to another. Some may admire most the militant character of Paul. They may like to read especially those parts of his epistles to the Corinthians and the Galatians, when he seems to flay them with a whip of many lashes; they may like to read his mighty polemics that "hew error in pieces as did Samuel hew Agag; they feel a thrill of approval when Paul, after having been struck in the face by an attendant at the instigation of the High priest, flashed his eagle-eye upon that potentate and cried, "God shall smite thee thou whited wall." "That makes one naturally pugnacious and still a lover of fair-play and justice, feel like shouting with clenched fist, "Go to it, Paul, I am for you with the little strength I have!"

Some may admire Paul most when they see him the center of agitation or making his defense before the rulers of the land. I confess that before Agrippa and Felix, Paul seemed the judge and they the criminals in the dock. Those governors liked to hear him speak, but when he got down to where they lived the sermon was long enough, for he reasoned, not

ranted, but he reasoned of temperance, righteousness and judgment," till Felix trembled. Paul seems so dominating and aggressive even in jail at Philippi when he and Silas prayed themselves out of their stocks and bonds; prayed open the doors of the great prison; prayed the jailer and all his household into the kingdom, and told the Roman officials that he was not going to run nor sneak out of town; that he was a Roman citizen and stood on his rights of citizenship and they must come and bring them out.

From the foregoing we must conclude that Paul was naturally a man of strong emotional impulse and imperial will. When he went in for anything he went in all over. He was no opportunist nor pussyfooter; he could not nod his head with everybody, contradicting to one what he affirmed to another. You always knew where to find Paul. But in spite of all this he was so sensible and wise that where principle was not involved, he could throw all little minor matters to the wind and with heaven-inspired diplomacy become all things to all men if by all means he might win some to Christ. That was good sense as well as good religion.

He who was so aggressive and militant; who had seen so often the hand of God revealed in his behalf in miraculous power, whose whole soul was enthused with the mighty passion of carrying out the commission of Jesus to preach the Gospel to every creature; whose heart throbbed with sympathy for every child of Adam's race and regarded him as of the same blood—this Paul I believe reached his highest pinnacle of sainthood, and revealed the greatest strength of character in his sweet and complete acquiescence to the will of God which allowed him to be shut up in prison, there to languish for several years, apparently cut off from a more successful ministry.

Languish did I say? Pardon me. I mis-spoke myself. Paul did not languish, nor did he repine, nor fret nor worry. He was satisfied to know that he was living in the will of God, and that all things worked together for his good while there, whether he or anybody else understood it or not. Paul's imprisonment must have been a great test to the churches that looked to him for spiritual instruction and supervision. Paul had many friends who would have died for him if need be; but he too had many enemies who could glory in his afflictions, and could argue that Paul could not be right or God would have dealt with him differently.

I can imagine one of these saying to some of Paul's friends, something like this: "Yes, I am willing to admit that Paul was once a great man of God. There was a time when it was ill for anybody to get in his way. He had the power to smite his enemies with blindness and even with death. Even the Roman power was nothing to Paul in those days. They put him and Silas in prison but they could not keep them there. God in answer to their prayer shook that whole place—literally turned things upside down. That was when Paul was at his best. But look at him now—in that Roman prison and can't get out. Oh, he may be trying to make the best of a bad matter, and be whistling to keep his courage up, but you know and I know that there never was a time when such men as Paul were needed to preach the gospel as now; it is a reproach upon God that such a man should be laid aside or a revelation of the fact that he is out of step with

God. He may have had a break back yonder and be suffering for it now. I prefer to stand for God rather than Paul. He has either changed from what he once was or God has changed. If Paul had the same power with God that he once had he would soon open those prison doors and make even Nero tremble upon his throne."

I can imagine how some of those judaizers were talking, and how some of Paul's dearest friends were wondering; but all the time Paul was singing, "I have learned in whatsoever state I am therewith to be content." I know how to be abashed and how to abound; I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." Thank God there were those even at Philippi, where Paul had perhaps the most marvellous outward display of God's power for his physical deliverance, who understood Paul and some of the workings of God's mysterious providences. They knew that while Paul was physically bound yet his soul was free; they believed he could perform even a more effective ministry there than by going from place to place; the letters he wrote rang with the spirit of holy triumph and were saturated with holy Christian love. He carried them individually in his heart. He rejoiced in the Lord always and urged them to the same spiritual exercise. He was rejoicing in God's will and filling up that which was behind of the sufferings of Christ. "Poor Paul," do you say? I say, "noble, victorious Paul, you are making a more notable contribution to the cause of Christ by your spirit of love, humility and holy optimism than by any spectacular triumph over physical forces. In the midst of your loneliness, isolation, bondage and seeming defeat you have a kingdom which cannot be moved." (To be continued)

A DEBT TO A GODLY HOME

"Yes, my people are all religious, all the family, way back, although I don't take much stock in that kind of thing myself," said a young man in a hospital ward.

The physician looked at him kindly for a moment, and then said: "My boy, do you know why you are recovering so quickly from your accident—why the bones knit and the wounds heal so rapidly? Well, I'll tell you. It's because those ancestors of yours, whom you were talking about just now, bequeathed to you good, clean blood and a sound constitution—the physical make-up of those who have kept God's laws. If I were you I'd begin to take some stock in that kind of thing. You owe it, not only to yourself, but to those who come after you."—Forward.

MARKS OF A GOOD PREACHER'S WIFE
(Continued from Page One)

how to abound, but has learned in whatsoever state she is therewith to be content.

She has no spirit of envy or jealousy when others supersede her. She is broad-minded and not sensitive to slights or injuries. We are sorry for the preacher who is afflicted with a narrow-minded, pettish wife, whose feelings are being continually hurt. "More grace" is a good antidote.

The good preacher's wife has learned to govern her tongue. She is no gossip nor talebearer. She can keep a discreet silence where certain matters are being discussed. Her aim is to maintain unity in the church and she is no party to the scattering of seeds of dissension.

To sum up: A good preacher's wife is a woman with a good measure of grace, some natural adaptation for the position and much common-sense.

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