

**The secret is receiving, not doing!****~Other Speakers S-Z: Victory Over Sin:**

At the risk of labouring the point, let me say again: all that Christ has done, and all that we have in Him, is already ours. As children of God we are already in Christ; we are one with Him. We don't hope to be; it is already done. The only question is, do we really believe God's Word when we read it?

We have been crucified and buried and raised and seated together with Christ. If His death is past, so is ours. No man can say that Christ's death is future; then how can ours be? Ours is one hundred per cent as complete and finished as His; not ninety-nine per cent! Not all the sin and weakness in the world can alter that fact; sin is another question entirely.

Before we see this, we long to die in order to escape from sinning. When, however, we see that we have already died in Christ, our outlook on both sin and death is completely changed. It is not prayerful people but praising ones who reach the way of holiness—those who see, and who seeing believe, and who believing praise.

Many of us read Romans 6:11: 'Even so reckon ye also yourselves to be dead unto sin, but alive unto God in Christ Jesus.' Oh! we exclaim, I have tried that. I have tried to reckon myself dead to sin, but I always find I have sinned before I have had time to get the reckoning done!

But what is reckoning? Here is a check for five dollars in my wallet. I reckon I have five dollars, for the simple reason that I have it here. What use would be reckoning if I didn't have it? Reckoning means book-keeping, keeping accounts. And common sense tells us that accounts must bear a direct relation to the cash in the bank.

God commands us to reckon ourselves dead because we are dead, and for no other reason. 'Our old man was crucified with him' (6:6), and we know this. Therefore we are told to count upon it. The fact of the death comes before our reckoning on it, not the other way round. That is the difference between victory and defeat. The money is in my wallet, whether I reckon it is there or not; and I am dead with Christ, whether I reckon upon the fact or not. On the cross of Christ, God included me in Him, and so I have been crucified.

Let me repeat that. It is not that I identify myself with Christ; it is that God has included me in Him. He has already done it. This is something that can come to us with a flash of new-understanding. Just as once God opened our eyes to see our sins laid upon Christ, so again He must open our eyes to see our own selves in Christ. And this is something He delights to do. Suddenly we see with a flash of insight that all that Christ has already done has become ours. Thus union with Christ in death disposes of our whole unhappy past.

But this negative value to us of the finished work of Christ in respect of the old way of life is matched by a positive value to us of His living person in respect of the new. God comes with this further revelation to my heart, that Christ is in me. Christ is my Life, fighting for me, triumphing on my behalf, doing what He wants to do in me, and doing it now.

It is not that I have strength through Him to seek humility, meekness, holiness. He is all that in me; for He is my Life. The Christian has not a lot of odds and ends of virtues; indeed, he has no virtues; he just has Christ. The question is again, do we believe God's Word? Do we believe 1 Corinthians 1:30?

Oh yes, we know we should have victory, so when we meet with a temptation we take great care, and we watch, and we pray. We feel it is our duty to fight against that thing, and to reject it, so we make up our minds not to do so, exerting our wills to the utmost. But that is not our victory. Christ is our victory. We do not need willpower and determination to resist the tempter. We look to Him who is our life. 'Lord, this is Your affair; I count on You. The victory is Yours, and You, not I, shall have the credit.' So often we gain a kind of victory, and everyone knows about it! We achieved it ourselves; but communion is broken and there is no peace.

This is a matter that God delights to bring to us with a new flash of understanding. Suddenly one day we see that Christ is our life (Colossians 3:4). That day everything is changed.

There is a day when we see ourselves in Christ. After that, nothing can make us see ourselves outside of Him. It alters everything. Then also there is a day when we see that Christ within us is our life. That too alters our whole outlook. They may be different days with an interval between, or both may come together. But we must have both; and when we do, then we begin to know Christ's fullness, and to marvel that we have been so stupid hitherto as to remain poor in God's storehouse. Ours is the God. We are entering into God's inheritance.

The contrasts we have adduced above represent two experiences that run parallel throughout Scripture and are integral to our Christian life. The trouble is that we are apt to give our attention to one of the two only. There are, on the one hand, some very strong, almost extreme words in Scripture. 'God . . . always leadeth us in triumph.' 'Sin shall not have dominion over you.' 'To me to live is Christ.' 'I can do all things through Christ.' They are bold, strong, almost boastful affirmations. Yet the same people who say these things must also say: 'I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling.' 'I am chief of sinners.' (Note there the present tense in the Greek. 'We have no hope in ourselves.' 'The blood of Jesus his Son cleanseth us from all sin.' 'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves.' 'We also are weak in him.' 'When I am weak, then am I strong.' 'Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my weaknesses.'

So we see another kind of Christian, utterly weak, sinful, trembling. We see another kind of Christian life, altogether lacking in self-confidence. These two together, one with his confidence in Christ, and one with his self-knowledge, are the life of the Christian.

It is because we only see one side of this that there are so many divergencies among those who preach the victorious life. We must know Christ's fullness, but we must also know our own corruption. These are things we must see, and these are what the God shows us through the schooling of the Spirit, until we reach the place where we really know ourselves. In too many of us there is a departmental knowledge of God. We know the Fatherhood of God, but not the positiveness of Christ. Or we know this, but lack the brokenness of the Spirit. Many see their own weakness, but do not know Christ's strength. No wonder they feel depressed about it! If we want a full knowledge of God we must know Him in all of these three ways, and even then we shall find that we are constantly making further progress!

We ourselves possess an old man, sold under sin. It is he that must be put out of the way, and as we saw, God has already done this on the Cross in Christ. But that is only the beginning of God's problem with us, for there is still our natural man to be dealt with. We not only sin in the sight of God; we do a whole lot of things with the best intention of pleasing God that are mistimed and misdirected and fail altogether to satisfy Him. Take the man who is always indiscriminately broadcasting all he knows about spiritual things. That is not the old man but the natural man at work. To speak of spiritual things is not sin, but the natural man is doing it out of his own zeal and not because the Lord wants it.

The natural life is just that, doing what we want and not what God wants. We may do many quite good things, building quite an impressive edifice on the foundation that is Jesus Christ. Nevertheless God calls them wood, hay and stubble (I Corinthians 3:12). Such materials are not refuse but represent things done by man. True, the man is doing God's work of building; yet the work is judged. It is not a question of whether the workmanship is good or bad, but of who is doing the work.

The difference between the natural man and the old man is a basic one. God has given us His Son. When we enter into Him and He into us, what happens? One day we receive Him as our Saviour and Lord, and quickly discover that our old man was dealt with once and for all in His Cross (Romans 6:6). God made no effort to patch him up or improve him, but crucified him outright in Christ, finishing him for good. Therein the question of sin was settled. To know this is of the greatest importance. In God's eyes the old man had to die. Then our eyes are opened and the truth dawns on us that he is already dead in Christ; and that Christ Himself is our new life, indwelling, empowering, becoming to us everything. This is a tremendous discovery.

God not only hates man's sin; He has no room for the natural man. Not merely did our Lord Jesus never sin; He never depended upon Himself to do good-indeed to do anything at all. God's dealings with our natural man are designed to bring us to the place that Christ Himself chose to take. By nature we are so strong, so able to think and plan and do, and God must bring us to the place of weakness, the place where we cannot think or plan or do apart from Him.

As we have just said, nothing is ever done to the old man; he died in Christ. Something, however, is done to the natural man. He is not patched up, it is true; he is weakened. He is progressively incapacitated. Step by step the Spirit weakens our natural life until at length, by a last drastic divine touch, we are as dead before Him. But for what? To show us what? To lead us whither?

We saw that 'I in Christ' leads to 'Christ in me', the outward fact leading to an inward fact, both of them accomplished acts of God. In the same way the progressive discipline of the Spirit through outward circumstances leads to a formation of Christ within us by the Spirit (Galatians 4:19) so that we live a life that is in a new sense derived from Him.

We have Christ imparted to us so that, in the words of Galatians 2:20, it is 'no longer I, but Christ liveth in me'. We have Christ being wrought in us, so that 'that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God'. It is the Holy Spirit's work to form Christ in us in this latter way. God deals with the natural man that Christ may be inwrought in us, so that we manifest the fruit of the Spirit (5:22).

What God wants today is first that we should know Christ as our life, and in addition, that the Spirit should work Christ into us, to become our characters. Few enough of us know what is meant by the impartation of Christ. Fewer still, alas, know the formation of Christ by the Spirit. Yet this is the whole object of God's dealing with us by chastening.

We all need to know that forgiveness of sins is a gift that must be received. So also is victory over sin. We have nothing of ourselves that is not fundamentally God's gift to us.

We do not progress, we do not advance into wealth: we are born into it. This is true of every spiritual experience we have as Christians. For example, 'The law of the spirit of life' which 'made me free from the law of sin and of death', is something which I possess in Christ Jesus, not in myself. It is not mine as something I have attained; it is what I have received. It is like the miracle of life which keeps the birds in the air in defiance of gravity. It is designed to deliver us from sin and death; and it is God's gift to us. But how many of us Christians really know its secret? No wonder the sparrows think we have no heavenly Father like they have! Yet to be wealthy when you have been born into wealth is surely no problem.

Many of us can see that God is the source of everything. We accept in theory at least that we have to receive everything from Him. Why then is it that so many of us do not take the gift, but go on struggling for it? The answer is that the principle of natural strength, so dominates us. We are so sure that we shall achieve God's end by our efforts.

Let me say something to reassure you. God is not expecting to find those who are naturally 'born good', and who therefore have no need for His dealings with them. He knows well that they are not to be found. He chooses ordinary people like you and me, who are willing to receive from Him His gift of grace, and who are willing also to submit to this discipline in order that the gift should not be abused. The life of God has been made available to us in the gift of His Son. The Holy Spirit deals with us to conserve and expand what we have received. He cuts short our old, self-willed nature, to make way for our new nature in Christ to work in willing co-operation with God. Thus the Spirit moves to attain God's ends by His own means. This is the goal of all God's dealings with His own.

This fact of bestowal and acceptance is the great characteristic of the true Christian. The God of the believer is God the Giver. He is the God who comes out to us. We must know Him in this way as well as knowing Him as Father. He comes to us and gives us everything in His Son. None can go forward and attain to God's purpose unless he knows how to receive in this way. Romans chapter 7 offers us a picture of the man who has not yet found the God in this way. He is for ever under the law, and cries constantly: 'To will is present with me, but to do that which is good is not.' He has not seen that everything is offered to him in Christ, nor how full that provision is. **THE SECRET IS RECEIVING, NOT DOING!** The way through is not by the exercise of the will but by the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:2). We know what God wants—we can't help knowing—but we don't know how to get there until we have found God in this way. Victory, life, salvation, all is bestowed, not attained. When you are born into a wealthy home, it is very difficult to be poor! You are rich; you were born that way.

We never worked for our salvation, gradually scaling the heights until we attained to it. The Lord sought and saved us. Victory over sin is the same; it is received, not worked for. Oh, may we learn to praise God that He has provided for us such bounty in Christ!

Peter says that we 'have escaped' from the corruption that is in the world (2 Peter 1:4). He does not say that we 'are able to' escape, or that we 'hope to' escape, but that we have already done so. What God has done, we receive and enjoy. We are not constantly waiting, hoping, anxiously seeking for it. We are born into the home; we have it all. Inheritance is ours.

Let us get quite clear what the life of the believer is. It is not: 'from here to there'. It is: 'from there to here'. It starts in God. As Paul says, it is the parents who lay up for the children and not the other way round (2 Corinthians 12:14).

Some of us force ourselves to do things we don't want to do and to live a life we cannot in fact live, and think

that in making this effort we are being Christians. The Christian life is lived when I receive the life of Christ within me as a gift, to live by that life. It is the nature of the life of Christ not to love the world but to be distinct from it, and to value prayer and the Word and communion with God. These are not things I do naturally; by nature I have to force myself to do them.

But God has provided another nature, and He wants me to benefit from the provision He has made.

Everything that is demanded, God Himself gives: He shows us His storehouse. Strength, life, and Grace. These all are ours to receive that we may measure up to the divine standard of a vessel for testimony.

The distinctive feature of true Christianity is that it compels people to receive. The letter to the Galatians shows that we are people who receive. We are heirs (3:29; 4:7). We partake of the promises (3:22; 4:28). There is an inheritance in view, and we enter into that inheritance (3:18; 4:30).

In Paul's letter to the Romans he makes it clear that the sinner depends on grace for his salvation. In these chapters of Galatians he shows us that the believer depends equally upon grace for his continuation in the Christian life. We never did anything, or gave God anything, for our salvation. Now we are to go on in the same way, not making even faith something that we do but looking trustfully to His grace and continuing to receive. For Christ has prepared for us everything.

There are two sides to Christ's work expressed in two simple statements. Firstly, you and I are in Christ. Secondly, Christ is in you and in me. Every fruit of our union with Christ is governed by these two statements of what God has done. The Lord Jesus Himself puts this in a concise sentence which says: 'Abide in me, and I in you' (John 15:4).

By virtue of our position in Christ we benefit from all the accomplished facts of His history: His life on earth, His death and resurrection, and His session at God's right hand. All His work becomes ours, all that He has already done and that is covered by the statement, 'It is finished.' By virtue of the further fact that Christ is in us, we become partakers of His life. All His power, all that He can do now, all that He is today, becomes ours. Both these aspects of our union with Him are included in our inheritance; if we want to enter into all our inheritance, then we must see them both. If we only know that we are in Christ, we are passive and weak. If we only know that Christ is in us, life is uphill and something is missing. Neither is sufficient alone. Both are gifts already given to us to provide for our life, our future, our standing before God, our practical holiness-everything.

God begins by giving us a new position so that we have a new start. He does this by placing us in Christ. If I am down at the bottom of a horrible pit, then I continue there with no way of getting out of it, until God lifts me out and puts me upon a rock. That is what He has done for us in Christ. By placing us in Him He has settled all our past, just as by placing the life of Christ within us He has given us all we need for the present and for the entire future. The two sides are necessary to deliver us out of our agonized striving to attain, and into that place of rest where all is from God.

How we need that new start in Christ! We are sinners in God's sight and we need deliverance and a new standing before God. We shall never have it in ourselves. In all these things we are at the receiving end.

As young Christians we take a long time to learn this. Only after bitter experience does it dawn on us that it is no mere question of dropped goods but of the faultiness of the bag containing them. If we find one thing after another is dropping out of our pockets, we eventually give up putting them back in there. We feel around instead to see if perchance the pocket has a hole in it! It is the unfailing recurrence of our sins of hasty speech, quick temper, avid self-seeking and so on, that, even when we know God's forgiveness, exposes the fact that the trouble is within ourselves.

The apostle Paul makes this clear in the first section of Romans where, down to the beginning of chapter 5, he shows us how man's conduct is wrong, and how the cure for this is God's forgiveness through the precious Blood of Christ. Then in the second section, down to chapter 8, he shows us how the man himself is wrong and must be dealt with. What is the remedy here? It is one thing only: for that man himself to die.

God does not say 'the soul that sins must get his sins cleansed'; He says 'the soul that sins must die'. 'He that hath died,' says Paul, 'is justified from sin' (Romans 6:7). There is no other remedy. In the sight of God we must die.

But what sort of salvation would be ours if we were to end there? There is the need for a resurrection to new

life, and a new start. We must not only die in God's eyes, we must rise again. But surely, too, there must be a new position. I must not only live but I must live for God; and He is in heaven, so I must ascend there. Thus there must be a death, a resurrection and an ascension.

How can this possibly be? How can I die, and be raised, and ascend to where God is? The simple answer is that I cannot. Man may seek this kind of death, but he can never attain it. He may seek resurrection, and all he achieves is a grave. He may seek heaven, but he finds himself earthbound. To escape from sin's reign is an insuperable problem.

There is indeed only one solution, and this is clearly stated in 1 Corinthians 1. 30. The Chinese version of the statement is: 'That you are in Christ Jesus, is of God.' This is a most important affirmation. It is God's work that has placed me in Christ Jesus. It is nothing that I have done or could ever do. And everything for my salvation stems from the fact that God has done it.

We have been placed into Christ. When Christ was put to death, we died in Him, because we are in Him (Romans 6:6). Moreover, the work of God did not stop there, for the Lord Jesus rose and ascended to His right hand. But because we are in Christ Jesus, we also were made alive with Him, and raised, and seated with Him in the heavenly places (Ephesians 2:5). Col. 3:3 "For you are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." We have a new standing in the presence of God, and it is not something to which we attained but something which is ours because we are in Christ. These facts, which are historically true of Him, become real also in our experience.

It is important to realize that scripture makes our death, resurrection and ascension to be 'given' historic facts in Christ. The fact that our old man 'was crucified with Him is something we know (Romans 6:6). Unless we have cause to reckon ourselves not to be 'in Christ', we cannot say that these facts are untrue. They follow logically from what God has done in the initial step of our salvation.

I cannot sufficiently emphasize that this is the first element in our inheritance in Christ. Our death in Christ Jesus, and the freedom from sin which goes with that death, are not doctrine but inheritance. They are not things that I have to do but gifts that I have received. However hard I try, I shall only prove to myself that by striving it does not work. But if I see that God has worked, and that that 'old man' who has been such a problem was crucified long ago, then I shall know what it is to walk in newness of life.

Here I must share with you my own experience. Many years ago I came to the point where I knew that there was a lack somewhere in my life. Sin was defeating me, and I saw that something was fundamentally wrong. I asked God to show me what was the meaning of the expression, 'I have been crucified with Christ.' For some months I prayed earnestly and read the Scriptures, seeking light. It became increasingly clear to me that, when speaking to us of this subject, God nowhere says, 'You must be,' but always, 'You have been.' Yet in view of my constant failures this just did not seem possible, unless I was to be dishonest with myself. I almost turned to the conclusion that only dishonest people could make such statements.

Then one morning I came in my reading to 1 Corinthians 1:30. 'You are in Christ Jesus,' it said. I looked at it again. 'That you are in Christ Jesus, is God's doing!' It was amazing! Then if Christ died, and that is a certain fact, and if God put me into Him, then I must have died too. All at once I saw. I cannot tell you what a wonderful discovery that was.

The trouble with us today is that we think crucifixion with Christ is an experience we have somehow to attain. It is not. It is something God has done, and we have only to receive it. The whole difference lies here: Is the Cross a doctrine to be grasped and then applied? Or, Is it a revelation which God flashes upon my heart? It is quite possible, as I have proved, to know and preach the doctrine of the Cross without seeing the wonderful fact.

All God has done, He has done first of all to Christ, and only then to us because we are in Christ. God does nothing directly upon us. Apart from and outside of Christ, God has no work of grace. Here is the preciousness of 1 Corinthians 1:30. God has not only given us Christ but Christ's experience; not only what He can do but what He has already done. From His death onwards, all that He has is ours.

But we must not stop there. We have seen the fact of Christ, of all that He has already done in the past which we now have in Him, and which settled our own past because we are in Christ. But the other side of the coin is this, that Christ is in us, not for the past but for today and for all the future. His life is given to us, so that now He, exalted in heaven, is our life-power. I, in Him, have received His finished work. He, in me, gives me His power.

How can we be victorious, righteous, holy? First we must understand clearly that God has not constituted Christ our Example to be copied. He is not giving us His strength to help us imitate Christ. He has not even planted Christ within us to help us to be Christ-like. Galatians 2:20 is not our standard for record-breaking endeavour. It is not a high aim to be aspired to through long seeking and patient progress. No, it is not God's aim at all, but God's method. When Paul says, 'Yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me,' he is showing us how only Christ satisfies God's heart. This is the life that gives God satisfaction in the believer, and there is no substitute. 'Not I, but Christ,' means Christ instead of me. When Paul uses these words he is not claiming to have attained something his readers have not yet reached to. He is defining the Christian life. The Christian life is the Christ life. Christ in me has become my life, and is living my life instead of me. It is not even that I trust Him as a separate, sufficient act. No, God gives Him to be my life.

Moreover, in that new life there is a law—the law that determines what that life is like in expression. It is not just that a life is present in me, for if this were all, I would then have to hold tightly on to it. No, there is a law of that life and that law looks after itself. Romans 8:2 "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death."

When we put a book on a table, we do not always need carefully and precisely to place it right down on the table's surface. We can let it go, just as we can drop a piece of paper into a wastepaper basket. The law of gravity is working, and it ensures that the book will fall into place. Without the law of gravity we would have to be more careful, or it might go up instead of down. But the law takes care of it, and we do not have to. Just so, we do not need to look after the law of life in Christ Jesus; the law will look after us!

Often we find something in the Christian life difficult, and so we turn to God for help. Really that is wrong. We are trying to use the life, instead of letting the life use us. Let go, and the law will operate, and the life itself will work. Say to God, 'I cannot do it, but Your life in me can and will. I am putting my trust in You.' There is not even the need and there is seldom the time—consciously to exert faith in this matter. There is a law, and a law must always work; we have only to rest in it. We have everything done for us by the Father.

It is just here that the second half of 1 Corinthians 1:30 is so splendid. 'Christ Jesus was made unto us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption.' This means that my righteousness and yours is not a quality or a virtue; indeed it is not a thing at all—but a living Person. My holiness is not a condition of life but a Person. My redemption is not a hope but Christ in me, the hope of glory. Yes, Christ in me, and Christ in you—this is all we need.

The daily life of the Christian is summed up in the word 'receive'. Every challenging thing that God demands of me long-suffering, meekness, humility, goodness, holiness, joy is not something I am, or something I do, or some virtue I acquire or attain to. It is Christ in me. Each is the manifestation of Him. Let Him be revealed, naturally and spontaneously, and that is enough.

'He is made unto us . . .' If He were our Justifier, Sanctifier, Redeemer, we could understand. But it does not say He does these things. It uses abstract nouns: He is these things. Christ in us meets every demand of God, and every demand of the circumstances around us.

It is not in us to be humble, nor shall we find it helps to trust in the power of Christ to make us humble. Christ is humble, naturally—that is, by His very nature—and He is made our humility, for Christ is our all. Even faith and trust and obedience, if we regard them as virtues by which we attain, will prove ineffective. It is NOT that I trust His Word, therefore I can be long-suffering. It is that Christ is long suffering, and, praise God, Christ is in me! Once again, this is natural, simple, spontaneous, trusting implicitly and without question, because the Father has made absolutely sufficient provision.

It is a question of receiving not doing. What is born of flesh is flesh. Nothing the flesh can ever do will ever produce CHRIST's life within us. Will duty, performance of religious ceremony or customs, human reasonings, or any natural effort or energy ever produce life? NO!! It is impossible for the flesh to ever birth ANYTHING spiritual. I cannot over emphasize the fact that Everything that is demanded, God Himself gives: and Christ in us meets every demand of God.

Before Abraham was eighty-five his faith was far from perfect. Yet we read that he exercised this deficient faith: 'He believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness' (Genesis 15:6). Praise God, he was justified by faith! It is sufficient just to believe. But in the fifteen years that followed he learnt some tremendous lessons, and how he glorified God when at length the impossible happened and Isaac was given! Paul says that when Isaac was conceived, Abraham already considered himself 'dead' (Romans 4:19). He had given up! The

more utter the impossibility of doing a thing ourselves, the more glory we give to Him who does it. And what God does is always 'very good'.

What is circumcision? The apostle Paul tells us that in Christ 'ye were also circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, in the putting off of the body of the flesh, in the circumcision of Christ' (Colossians 2:11). Elsewhere he says, 'we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God, and glory in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh' (Philippians 3:3). And then he goes on to list the various grounds he had previously felt himself to have for such confidence. They turn out to be things in no way sinful or wrong in themselves. His racial purity, his strict religious upbringing, his sincere zeal for God-these things were not sinful at all. They were simply grounds for natural pride. But 'they that are in the flesh cannot please God' (Romans 8:8). The trouble today is that we do not recognize this. Romans chapter 7 is Paul's description of one who is doing his best to please God in the flesh, and it is one big 'cannot'.

Our natural life has a life principle, which ordinarily we do not recognize. God may take pains to point it out to us, but we do not see it at all until we are in a circumstance, when God brings into jeopardy the thing we have been most proud of. That pride is the thing God hates. The revelation of that natural strength kills what it reveals. Is there something we secretly boast of? Something we are very careful of because it represents our greatest achievement, the best feature of ourselves? When God touches that, we are too ashamed to live. God's touch brings not only weakness but shame.

Many of us, alas, have little idea of what it means to have our natural strength judged and dealt with. Rather do we boast about it. 'I feel this.' 'I look at it that way.' 'In my humble opinion . . .' Secretly we glory in our opinions and in our difference from and independence of others, and we never really recognize this as outright defeat. Those who have not seen themselves by nature judged and cast upon that heap of ruins have not found their place in the Church, nor heard the voice of God there. May God have mercy on us when we dare to think that the Church of God is wrong and we are right. It is not just His people that we are repudiating in doing so, but God Himself, who pleases to reveal Himself among them.

Oh, you say, all this talk about our old nature being dealt with at the Cross of Christ is excellent, but it is rather negative. Now tell us the positive side! Let me reply quite simply that the positive side is just a matter of life-spontaneous, miraculous life. The child who is born does not have to worry where his life comes from; he just lives it quite naturally. The believer who is born again does not have to puzzle out how his new life works. It comes from Christ, he has it, he rejoices in it, and quite naturally and spontaneously he lives it. And the believer who has seen that the life of Christ is a shared life of which all His own partake-he is in just the same position. He accepts the fact and thanks God, and the life flows.

One day we must acknowledge defeat, confessing that we know nothing at all and can do nothing at all. Beware of boasting of God's disciplinary dealings, for until the question of our natural strength is finally settled, this kind of talk can only increase our pride.

The items listed in Galatians 5:22-23 under the heading of 'the fruit of the Spirit' are not virtues that the Spirit gives us; they are the natural, spontaneous fruit of the new character. The good tree is bearing good fruit, just as when a peach and a pear tree are planted side by side in the same kind of soil and given the same care and water and nourishment and sunshine, but each of them bears its own distinctive fruit. These outward things are absorbed by each, and by each they are changed into their own fruit. Just so the sunshine of Christ's own life is transmuted in us into something that is recognizably our own.

What God wants today is first that we should know Christ as our life, and in addition, that the Spirit should work Christ into us, to become our characters. Few enough of us know what is meant by the impartation of Christ. Fewer still, alas, know the formation of Christ by the Spirit. Yet this is the whole object of God's dealing with us by chastening.