

CORINTHIANS - The MORE EXCELLENT WAY

STUDY 22

Lord of Light and Life

... the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ
... we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord
... the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ ...
the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.

2 COR.4:4-6,10

Study 22a: The ESSENCE of the TRUE GOSPEL (4:1-6)

4:1,2 Note what Paul links with shameful things Christians must renounce (2:17)

[4:2] If by “the word of God” Paul means the Old Testament Scriptures, the deceitful handling of it would refer to the wresting of passages from their context and their misapplication, probably in a judaizing manner. But it seems preferable to understand “the word of God” here to mean the message of Jesus Christ, in which case the deceitful handling of it would refer to the falsification of the gospel, probably by robbing it of its unique glory and essential content in such a way as to suggest that the old covenant was still in force. [Hughes 123]



Philip E. Hughes

4:3,4 What is the goal of the god of this world in ALL false gospels? (Jn 8:12; 14:26,30; 15:26; 16:14)

[4:1-6] All human religions teach men that there is something they can do and must do whereby they can placate God and earn their own salvation. The gospel, and the gospel alone, tells men that they are utterly helpless, that they can do nothing to merit divine favor, but that they do not need to do anything, for God Himself has come out in loving-kindness in the Person of His Son to save men by grace alone. This is no human thought; this did not come from the human mind; this is a revelation that came from heaven. [Ironsides 95]

Never trust men? Or is it never trust men – including self – for salvation?

4:5,6 Why do believers never have to trust humans – or organizations – for guidance?

(CAUTION: While this is true of the gospel (vv. 3,4), it is not true of the Bible, which we are expressly told contains things ‘hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort ... to their own destruction’ – 2 Pet. 3:16)

[4:6] The clinching reason why there is no place in a genuine evangelical ministry for self-esteem and self-proclamation is that in the believer's experience of salvation all is of God, nothing of self. This truth Paul emphasizes in the clearest terms a little later in the epistle, when he writes: “All things are of God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave unto us the ministry of reconciliation” (5:18). [Hughes 132]

Study 22b: The PARADOX of GOD'S POWER (4:7-18)

4:7-10 How is Christian discipleship the very antithesis of triumphalism, i.e. the gospel of prosperity? (Matthew 16:21-26)

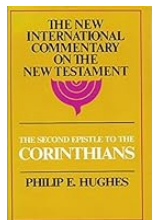
4:11-15 How are suffering, faith, grace and God's glory connected in Paul's thinking?

[4:15] That man's gratitude is the proper response to God's grace is a biblical commonplace: ‘in the New Testament, religion is grace, and ethics is gratitude’ (R.N. Flew, *Jesus and his Way* (1963), p. 13, quoting *Letters of Thomas Erskine*, p.16). [Bruce 198]

4:16-18 These words brand any gospel that fixes on the temporal as FALSE (Matt.6:19-21)

The Christian estimation of the body

There is no contempt for the body either here or elsewhere in the New Testament, such as we find in the idealism of the Greek philosophers and in the cognate dualism of the Docetic (Gnostic) cult which threatened the Church in the first century. The body is respected as coming from God's creative hand ... When their salvation is completed, that is, when justification and sanctification merge in glorification, the redeemed will not find themselves in a disembodied state; for to be disembodied is to be less than fully man ... And fulness of humanity is realized only when at last man's body is conformed to the body of Christ's glory (Phil. 3:21). Man in heavenly state is the fullgrown man who has attained to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ (Eph. 4:13). God saves man as man: accordingly the redemption procured through Christ extends to and includes the body (1 Cor. 15:35ff.) ... To this every aspect of the Christ-event bears witness – His incarnation, circumcision, baptism, transfiguration, suffering, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, glorification, and future appearing: none is dissociated from the body. [Hughes 143,144]



5:1-5 For what 'very purpose' are Christians prepared? (Romans 5:1-5 -- note our present suffering, the Christian hope and the giving of the Spirit connected here too)

[5:1] Today I am looking into the faces of many who are growing old. It is a wonderful thing to grow old in Christ. Personally, I rejoice in every year that goes by ... every passing year is bringing me nearer the time when I shall see the face of Him who loved me and gave Himself for me ... My hope is brighter now than it ever was; my joy in Christ is greater than it has ever been; the world means less to me today than it has ever meant, and the applause of men means less. But the approval of the Lord means more than it has ever meant. [Ironsides 121,122]

"It is a wonderful thing to grow old in Christ"

5:6-10 Why will the saint who is truly born again NEVER trample on the sacrifice of Christ? (even if he believes in eternal security! -- Heb.10:29; Eph.2:10; Phil.2:13)

[5:9] Once again notice, he is looking on to the things unseen, the things that are eternal. And is there anywhere a finer or more beautiful description of the life on the other side than that -- "at home with the Lord"? [Morgan 241]

[5:9,10] [Paul] tells us that God has made us "accepted in the Beloved" (Eph. 1:6). As believers we are all accepted *in* Christ, but here we find that he is urgently desirous of being accepted *of* Christ. Notice the difference. Accepted *in* Him -- that is my standing. God sees me in Him, and Christ Jesus is made unto me wisdom, even righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. He is my perfection. I am complete in Him. But now I who already am complete in Him, who already have been accepted in Him, am to be exercised about being accepted *of* Him. Accepted *of* Him really means being well-pleasing to Him. You see, accepted *in* Him is my standing, accepted *of* Him has to do with my state. I wonder whether this is our ambition. Let us search our hearts and ask what our ambition really is. [Ironsides 132]

[5:10] To be made manifest means not just to appear, but to be laid bare, stripped of every outward facade of respectability, and openly revealed in the full and true reality of one's character. All our hypocrisies and concealments, all our secret, intimate sins of thought and deed, will be open to the scrutiny of Christ -- a clear indication, incidentally, of the absolute Deity of the Redeemer, for it is only the divine gaze which penetrates to the very essence of our personality: "man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7). The conduct of our lives should constantly be influenced by the solemn remembrance that "there is no creature that is not manifest in God's sight, but all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of Him with whom we have to do" (Heb. 4:13; cf. 1 Cor. 4:5) ... The tribunal of Christ serves the purpose of absolute justice. It vindicates the holiness and impartiality of God. It is a salutary reminder to the Christian that, although it is true that he has been justified by faith, and is no longer under law but under grace, yet the moral values of God's universe have not therefore ceased to be his concern. [Hughes 180]

The condition of the dead in Christ

He had no special revelation to help him with this problem, but he tackles it in the light of what he already knows, both from revelation and from experience. The resurrection principle he sees to be already at work in the people of Christ, by grace of the indwelling Spirit; in some sense the spiritual body of the life to come is already being formed, as the inner man undergoes daily renewal, so that physical death will mean no hiatus of disembodiment but the immediate enjoyment of being 'at home with the Lord'. [Bruce 200]

[5:8] How did he know it would be far better? Well, you say, he was an inspired apostle and the Lord revealed it to him. That is true, but there is more than that. The apostle Paul at one time had been permitted to have a certain experience which proved to him beyond the peradventure of a doubt that it is far better to be with Christ in heaven than to live for Him on earth ... When he went through this experience he was not conscious as to whether he was in the body or out of it ... Paul says "If I was in the body I didn't know it, and if I was out of it I didn't miss it." [Ironsides 128,129]

[5:4] The same figure is found in Plato, who speaks of "the soul naked of the body", but for whom soul-nakedness was welcomed as a desirable state. The Pythagorean doctrine, that the body is the prison-house of the soul from which the soul of the wise longs to be liberated so that without restraint it may soar upwards and be reunited to the supreme soul of the world, was characteristic not only of Platonism and of the contemporary Philonism but also of Gnosticism which, in its various forms, presented so serious a threat to the early Church. The Apostle's teaching, however, is anything but Pythagorean ... At death the soul is separated from the body, and man's integral nature is disrupted. This important aspect of the disintegrating character of death explains the Apostle's desire that Christ should return during his lifetime so that he might experience the change into the likeness of Christ's body of glory (Phil. 3:21) without first having to undergo the experience of "nakedness" which results from the separation of soul and body at death. There is, of course, no question of death separating the believer from Christ, but only the soul from the body, for nothing, not even death, can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:39). It is also true that for the Christian (Phil. 1:21-23; and cf. vv 6-8 below) and his state after death is consequently one of peace and bliss. This, however, is not the consummating gain, but only that of an intermediate state in which he still awaits the glorious reintegration of soul and body in an incorruptible union. [Hughes 170,171]

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