

Sermon preached by Mr. J. Raven at Shaw's Corner, Redhill  
on Sunday evening, 28th January, 1951.

"Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours;  
Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or  
death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours;  
And ye are Christ's: and Christ is God's."

1. Cor. 3. 21-23

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The Apostle had occasion tenderly to reprove these Corinthian believers on account of a party spirit that had come in among them. It is true that those ministers for whom they contended were all of them true ministers of Jesus Christ. Some said "I am of Paul," another, "I am of Apollos." There were some who clave to Peter, and some said "I am of Christ", but the Apostle did not approve of them. I remember reading of one Bishop of the early church who wrote to one of the churches where there was schism, and he pointed out to them that the Corinthians in Paul's day were divided, but their division was concerning true ministers of Jesus Christ, but he says, "Your divisions are on account of your cleaving to men who are not ministers of Jesus Christ and setting them up against his true ministers." The Apostle said, "Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours; Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas." Here we have mention of three ministers, all different in their ministerial character. Paul as a minister was used of God in planting of churches. Apollos was abundantly used of God in helping much "Those who had believed through grace." As the Apostle said "I have planted, Apollos watered." Apollos was greatly used in watering those churches that were planted. Paul was a minister of God to the uncircumcision, Cephas was the minister of God to the circumcision. It may seem strange that Peter was the one to whom God first of all made known His purposes concerning the Gentiles. You remember how he was sent to Cornelius, and that he was commanded to call nothing common or unclean that God had cleansed; yet Cephas was not the one appointed by God to be a minister to the uncircumcision. Paul was the minister to the uncircumcision, Peter to circumcision. Well, here you have three different kinds of minister and yet each one a true minister of Jesus Christ, designed, prepared and used by God to the profit of His church. One was not to be lifted up against the other: they were all to be equally esteemed and regarded as good ministers of Jesus Christ. "Therefore let no man glory in men." Has Paul been made useful? It was as an instrument in God's hand that he was useful, and all the usefulness of Apollos was as

God was pleased to use him. All the fruitfulness of Peter in his ministry was due to the fact that he was an instrument in the hand of God. They were labourers together with God yet it was God who did the work. "Ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building." However eminent a minister of Jesus Christ may be in his gifts and in his graces, he is but the instrument in God's hand. "Let no man glory in men." It is one of the most serious mistakes people can make to exalt ministers of Jesus Christ as though they were something in themselves. They are but instruments in the hands of God, and should be regarded and esteemed as such. "Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation. Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever". "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account". Regard them as instruments in the hand of God. Pray for them, sympathise with them in their toils and their pains, but never put them out of their right place.

"Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours. We have here what we may call a believer's inventory, and what a rich inventory it is. It is the inheritance of every true believer. What riches are his. "For all things are yours!" We can scarcely grasp the immensity, the vast extent of this rich inheritance. "For all things are yours". There is a poor believer who has scarce enough to keep body and soul together, poorly clad, miserably housed, and yet as he is a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, all things are his. The world itself revolves on its axis for him, all things exist for his sake, and all things are ordained to be used of God for his benefit. "All things are yours". It is very wonderful when God visits such an one by His Spirit, causing him to look upon and read this inventory of his possessions, and to see that all things belong to him. Although the man has scarcely sixpence to call his own, yet for him to be enabled to say "All things are mine, and if Christ is mine then all is mine".

".....and more than angels know,  
Both present things and things to come,  
And grace and glory too"

"For all things are yours." It may be difficult to reconcile some things with this. There may be some things very inexplicable. Oh how can you make out that such things are the property of God's poor people? How can you make out that such and such things are

working together for the good of the people of God? How can you reconcile the things that we have before our eyes with those concluding phrases of the 8th Romans ? How can you piece them together? Well, as faith is enabled to view them, they are sweetly reconciled, and wonderful it is when a believer is blessed with such faith in exercise as to look round upon things that appear so inconsistent with his well-being and his present comfort, and to believe that all these things are his, that all are ordained by God for his good, to minister to his present and to his eternal good.

"For all things are yours; Whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas"- Yes, the Lord uses his ministering servants for the good of His people. He knows where His people are, He knows what they need, what sorrows they bear, what temptations they meet, what adversities they are wrestling with, the griefs they feel. He has perfect understanding of it all, and He prepares and uses one and another of His dear servants to meet these cases, to speak words in season to such. The true servants of God have to pass through a variety of experiences, and often very painful experiences for which they cannot themselves understand the reason, but they have to pass through them that they may be able to speak for the comfort of God's troubled people, for their instruction, that they may be to them interpreters of the ways of God. And how often it has been that a minister of Jesus Christ has come into a peculiar trial, a painful exercise, been subject to some very acute temptation, and has not known the reason for it, yet afterwards he has gone forth before the people and has been enabled to speak out of his own heart, to speak out of the exercise that he is passing through, and his words have been used of God for the very great comfort of some poor child of God walking in a similar path. In such a peculiar exercise the Lord prepares His servant to minister to His people and He prepares His people to be ministered unto. Sometimes He will use Paul, if I may so speak, sometimes He may use an Apollos, sometimes a Cephas, but they are all instruments in His hands and they are all prepared by Him for that particular work that He has for them to do from time to time. It is well when the people of God realise that His servants are called upon to suffer for Jesus' sake and for the sake of His people. They do not know what depths the servants of Christ have to pass through for their sakes that they may be true ministers of Christ, ministers of consolation to their souls, and as the benefit is realised O how comely and good it is for those who receive the blessing to give the glory to God, and true servants of Jesus Christ would have it so. "For", said the Apostle, "we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves

your servants for Jesus' sake". He was willing to be nothing; he said, "And if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all". He speaks of himself as being "poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing all things". Oh, the peculiar path he had to tread! He rejoiced to tread it, because it was the path ordained for him by God, because it was the path in which the Lord would make use of him for His people.

"Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world". Here the Apostle sums up the whole world, all its affairs, all its people, great and small, all events national and inter-national, "all things are yours", the world is yours if you are a child of God. The world exists for you, this world is being maintained in being for your sake if you are a child of God, and all its affairs are being divinely ordered by the Lord for the good of His people. One said, "God is doing nothing else in this world but polishing His jewels", and the Lord uses people of the world and things of the world in various ways to accomplish His will for and in His people. He fashions them according to His image; the world is called His 'graving tool' whereby He carves His image on the souls of His people. The world is hostile to the things of God and the people of God, yet with all its hostility it can do nothing, except, under the hand of God, polish the graces of His people. How often it has been that the world has been allowed to persecute the saints of God, yet the grace of God in them has shone the more conspicuously under the persecution that they suffer. And how often, as the world has cast out the people of God and cast out their name as evil, it has only been the means of throwing them more and more upon Jesus Christ, shutting them up more and more to Christ, making them the more prize Christ as their inheritance. The world is yours, and although the people of God seem to have a very inconsiderable part in the world, though they are very heartily despised by earth's great ones, and seem of no account at all, yet all the events of this world, the most important and world-shaking events, all revolve round the people of God. I know that to the carnal mind will sound an utter absurdity, but it is none the less true, and it is here recorded in the Scriptures of truth, "all things are yours", and among the 'all things' is included the world, and it is a very comprehensive term as I have attempted to show.

Then he says, "or life"; life, with all that is crowded into a person's life, into the life of a child of God, the many vicissitudes that the people of God experience in this life, the times that pass

over them, as we read concerning David, all things that go to make up their life's history are theirs, wonderfully over-ruled by God and ordained by Him for their good. Nothing can befall a child of God which is outside the covenant, that covenant which is ordered in all things and sure. Nothing can befall a child of God but that which shall conspire with all other things that happen to him, to work for his good. "Or life", This includes some of the sorest temptations, the deepest adversities, the bitterest sorrows and the most terrifying perplexities that may come to a child of God; all are his. They are all ordered by God to minister to his good; although sense and reason cannot see it for a moment, sense and reason are utterly confounded. Look at Job, for instance. Could Job say that the things that had befallen him were designed for his good? No, they seemed so far from being designed for his good that he cursed his day. The loss of his family and property, the boils that came upon his flesh, confounded his wife. His three friends who came to comfort him could not understand it. Yet the things that befell Job were ordained of God; they were used of God for his profit, to teach him needful lessons, to bring him to his right place before the Lord. And what was his right place before the Lord? "Behold I am vile..... I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes". And even in the midst of his trouble there was that work of faith still in his heart, which moved him to say, "He performeth the thing that is appointed for me and many such things are with him". We have in Job an outstanding instance of how things that seem quite contrary to a man's well-being and certainly contrary to his present comfort, are designed by God for his profit. "Lo, all these things worketh God oftentimes with man, to bring back his soul from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living". "Or life". In the lives of some children of God they meet with a good deal of opposition from their fellows, from wicked men who rise up and seek to do them hurt. There are those good men whose bodies have been given to be burned by their enemies because of the loyal adherence to the truth of God. Even these things, the activities of their enemies and all their evil working against them, are among the all things spoken of here. "All things are yours", and faith believes it; faith sometimes can rejoice in it, as the Apostle said, "And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope; and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us".

"All things are yours. Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death". 'Yes,' says the Apostle, 'death is yours'. 'What, death mine?' a believer might say. 'That great enemy, that destroyer of the human race, that death that wears such a repellent face, that makes the heart quake, at which the countenance of the strongest may fall, death mine?' Yes. said the Apostle, "or death". Death is called the last enemy, O how shall death be mine? If I am a true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ' simply on this account, "Jesus conquered death by dying". It is through death He destroyed "him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and delivered them who through fear of death were all their life-time subject to bondage". Christ has said, "O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction," and by His death he abolished death for His people, He "brought life and immortality to light through the gospel". He opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers, so that death is their's, whenever death comes to them, and in whatever form. See how it came to Stephen, the proto-martyr, Death was his - how he triumphed even in death! What joys he had in his soul even in death, violent though that death was, battered by cruel stones, yet death was his and he was enabled to triumph in Christ and say, "I see... .. the Son of man standing on the right hand of God". So he got the victory and passed over to the other side. Death was his. One speaks of death as a "porter at the heavenly gate to let the pilgrims in", and in that view of it how attractive it is! The Lord has helped his people often to look death in the face without blenching, to look death in the face and say 'Welcome death, welcome grave, welcome eternity, welcome heaven with the fair vision of the altogether lovely Jesus, "All things are yours", death is yours. I met with a curious verse some years ago, I do not know who wrote it, but it often lingers in my mind,

"Death, thou wast once a hideous thing,  
But since my Saviour's death has put  
Some blood into thy face, thou art become  
A thing to be desired, and full of grace".

Death is yours. See what death does for a believer. It takes him out of this sinful state, this state of sorrow and affliction, this state where there is so much pain and woe, the fruits of sin always on every hand, releases him from it and ushers him into a state of bliss, the atmosphere of heaven, for "death that puts an end to life shall put an end to sin." Death only releases a believer from all his contractions, from everything here below that has fettered him,

and that has held him down, that has so limited his powers. Death to a believer means the expansion of his soul, and as he passes through the portal of death he finds that mortality is swallowed up of life; he finds himself endowed with immortal powers, with a capacity to breath the air of heaven, to enjoy the bliss of heaven, to view the fair face of his Redeemer, his glorified Redeemer. That is what death means for him. It is as though he were taken from a dark prison house and set at liberty. When death is viewed in the light of the death of Christ and His victory over sin and death and hell, there is after all, a sweetness and a blessedness in it.

"Or things present", whatever things they may be, however distressful they may be, and however much they may make for your present discomfort, all present circumstances, all present activities, whether they be painful or whether they be pleasant; "or things to come". Very often a poor child of God looks forward to the future with a good many misgivings.

"Could we our woes with truth divide,  
The sterling and ideal,  
What crowds would stand on fancy's side!  
How few upon the real!"

Oh, we are "prone to search for ill, and fancy mighty woes". We look forward with trembling to the future. 'How are we going to get through this or that trial? How are we going to get over this mountain, this formidable obstacle? How are we going to pay our way to the end of our days? Oh, the many, many things that try the heart of a believer as he thus peers unbelievably into the future, pries into the future. But the Apostle said, "or things to come", all things future are yours, "all things are yours".

"Then let the unknown to-morrow  
Bring with it what it may;  
It can bring with it nothing  
But He will bear thee through"

and it is good to be enabled to look forward to the future leaning upon an Almighty Arm, as we read, "Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness leaning upon her Beloved?", leaning upon the Saviour's Arm, trusting His almighty and all-sufficient grace. "My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness". "Or things to come, all are yours". Alas, our feeble faith! How unable we are fully to grasp this, but though we believe not He abideth faithful. Though the poor child of God seems scarcely able to believe the good that the Lord Jesus has designed for him, yet He is none the less faithful. "Though we believe not, He abideth faithful".

"And ye are Christ's", His blood-bought possession. He loved the church and gave Himself for it. He purchased it with His own blood. "And ye are Christ's". Oh, His people are dear to Him. He says, "I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me". He gave His own precious blood for them; He has ensured their present good and their eternal blessedness. "And ye are Christ's", to be His possession, His people for whom He appears in the court of heaven.

"He will present our souls  
Unblemished and complete,  
Before the glory of His face  
With joys divinely great".

"And ye are Christ's and Christ is God's". Oh, is there not a blessedness in this, that "Christ is God's"? He is the Anointed of the Father, He is the Son whom the Father sent into the world, the Saviour whom the Father has provided, the Lamb of God. "God will provide Himself a Lamb for a burnt offering" said Abraham to Isaac. "Christ is God's", and as He is God's, how fully satisfying He is to His Father! How He met every claim of justice, every demand of the law, did everything for His people, leaving nothing undone that was needful for their justification, for their everlasting life, for their eternal blessedness! "And ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's". Here I must leave it. Amen.