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The Christian – a Paradox

Have you ever thought of this before? The Christian is a paradox. What is a paradox? Its essence is to have two apparently contradictory statements about the same person – yet both of which are absolutely true! And this is precisely the case with the Christian.

The Puritan minister, Richard Sibbes, wrote: ‘A Christian is a strange person. He is both dead and alive, he is miserable and glorious... He grows downwards and upwards at the same time; for as he dies in sin and misery, and natural death approaching, so he lives the life of grace, and grows more and more till he end in glory’. That’s exactly what we mean when we say that the Christian is a paradox. Moreover, this is true Christian experience – not abnormal, not unusual, not the case only with some Christians but not others – no! – this is the true Christian experience for every true Christian.

The apostle Paul testifies to it with the utmost clarity in 2 Corinthians 6:8ff. Indeed, he employs a whole succession of paradoxes each of which serve to enforce the point: ‘as deceivers, and *yet* true; as unknown and *yet* well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and *yet* possessing all things’.

Notice the final phrase in that sequence: ‘as having nothing, and *yet* possessing everything’. There are so many things ‘of the world’ which Christians may not possess, whether of material riches, great reputations, high advancements and such like. Furthermore, we live out our Christian lives surrounded by the godlessness of the nation, the turmoil of the markets, the perversion of society, the worldliness of the church, the array of human fears and the emptiness of so many people’s lives and longings.

If we are not to be overwhelmed by all of this, what do we need to grasp more and more as we press on into this new year? This above all else: that although in so many ways we ‘have nothing’, yet in that which matters most we ‘possess everything’. We are rich in God and all the blessings of his salvation. We are rich in his divine promises, all of which have their ‘Yea’ and ‘Amen’ in Christ. We are rich in daily fellowship with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. We are rich in a heavenly inheritance which never fades away.

So lay hold upon this afresh. Remember that ‘Solid joys and lasting treasure, None but Zion’s children know’. And seek, by grace, to stand with the prophet Habakkuk, who, after speaking in terms of a ‘worst case scenario’ where the bottom seemed to be falling out of everything, affirmed, ‘Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation’ (Habakkuk 3:18).