

The Apostle's Choice.

No. I.

"But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord."—PHIL. iii. 7, 8.¹



HERE is no man, Beloved, that has a reasonable soul, but his soul it has a choice, and something that he counts his good and happiness that fain he would be at; and as many as have reason with them, there is some good thing that fain they would have. And the apostle that speaks these words that now are read, he teaches us his choice.

This text it is the apostle's choice of all things that were in the bosom of the created world, of all things that heaven has, of all things that earth can afford. He tells what is the thing among them all he would fainest be at. Comparing himself with the false apostles who lived then, and being disputing against their ceremonies and service-book, and all such idle toys as these, he turns his back upon them; and after he

¹ In the MS. "at the communion at St. Andrews"—no date is given.

has bidden the Philippians beware of these snares, for they were not apostles of Christ's sending, he tells them in the next rowme¹ what it was that he loved best of all other things, when he had compared his choice and their choice together; for that which the false apostles would have been at was circumcision as under the law, albeit the blind people they saw not this—which was something like unto Christ, and an old ordinance of God—Christ before this time had adumbrate² these shadows. When the apostle compares the two ways together, and considers that he himself was once upon that course, he counts of himself as one that was a king yesterday, but is become a beggar for all these things the day; he counts himself like a drunken man who thinks, in the time of his drunkenness, that he is very rich, but when he comes to himself and is fresh, he counts all that he conceited of then not to be worth a drink of cold water. When he looks unto Jesus and saw His loveliness, the apostle would say no less to them, comparing himself to them, and his choice with the false apostles whom he is forbidding them to follow, than that they should not open the ear in the least thing to mix the law of Moses and Christ's ordinances together. And to induce them to this, he comes in with his own experience of Christ, what he thought of Him beyond all other things, and says this much in effect, that all the false apostles they tell you of ceremonies and of righteousness by Moses' law. And he tells of himself: "If I would be proud of these things, then I might boast with the best of them of as great privileges

¹ Place.

² Given a shadow of Himself.

as they have, whether religious, natural, or civil. But," says he, "when once I gat a sight of lovely Jesus, I abhorred them all, and could not abide them in comparison of the excellence of Christ Jesus my Lord." He says, "I am one who has as meikle¹ to boast of as any of them has. I was circumcised the eighth day as well as they, and so gat the outward seal of the covenant. I am a Jew as well as any of them, and more, I am come of the royal tribe of Benjamin, of whom came the first king that ever was in Israel; for the outward observation of the law I was a Pharisee, and for my zeal I was one who persecuted the gospel and Christ as sore as any did, and for the righteousness which is of the law I was blameless, a civil, honest² man. I carried myself so as no man could spit on my cloak." But that is a sweet turn that follows after the reckoning up of these things. He says, "When once I began to know Christ, fra³ once I gat a sight of that lovely Saviour Christ, then all these things whereof I thought so highly before, and that they were my gain, I thought but basely of them, and counted them but loss. Fra⁴ that time they had no rowme⁵ in my count book, but I cast all of them away, having once fallen in love with Christ."

So will every soul do who has had another lover nor⁶ Christ, and then gets Christ for his lord and love. This is the original work of a soul that has been meikle tane⁷ up with civil privileges in the world, or any outward thing, that has thought meikle of court,⁸ honour, riches, pleasure, &c. And then he comes to know what

¹ Much. ² An outwardly respectable man. ³ Since. ⁴ From.
⁵ Place. ⁶ Than. ⁷ Much taken. ⁸ Influence, station.

Christ is by experience. Such a one shall be forced to say, "I never knew what happiness and blessedness was till now. All those things wherein I placed happiness before were no other but empty appearances thereof until once I met with the Son of God." That is a real mark of a soul that has indeed met with Christ; it can put all other things down laigh,¹ and the Son of God up high in his own rowme.² And it must be so with them who have gotten a sight of Christ, and knows what He is. Bairns they cannot compare youth with old age, because they have never yet known what old age is. But those who are come to old age, they can compare the one with the other, and having tried both, and known what youth is—not other but daffing,³ and hunting after nutshells, in respect of old age. There are none of those who are in glory but they know well enough what it was to be in the estate of sin, and what lying happiness it is that is promised to sinners here. They know well enough what is the ill of night drinking, and what ill is in that to deny a covenant and to quit Christ; they know what it is to sell an exceeding weight of great glory for this present world. Even so the children of God, who are fallen in love with the Son of God, they can speak more of the vanity of all things that are hereaway, and of the excellence of Jesus, than all the world beside can do.

Now for the particulars contained in the words. The apostle tells us here what it was that was the wail⁴ of his wit, and ye know well enough what he did, and what he made his choice, for he was no fool; and he says that all the fair satins, and pasments,⁵ and gold-lace, that he

¹ Low.² Place.³ Folly.⁴ Choice.⁵ Strips of lace or silk sewed on clothes as ornaments.

had before he came to Christ, when he came to Christ he counted them all to be beggar's rags, and that is in the seventh verse, "*But what things were gain to me, these I counted loss for Christ;*" and then in the eighth verse he confirms this yet more, for it might [have] been objected: "What, Paul, count ye nothing of circumcision, esteem ye so little of that to be a Jew, to be of the royal tribe of Benjamin, for your profession to be a Pharisee, to have such zeal, to be blameless touching the outward righteousness of the law?" "No," says he, "I rue¹ nothing of what I have said, '*Yea, doubtless I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ.*'" And then in the next verse follows his wish what it is that he desires. And first what it is that he would not have. He says that he would not for the world "be found in his own righteousness, which is by the law." In that righteousness whereof the false apostles teach, in that righteousness that nature has, for as glorious like as it seemed to them. And then he tells what it is that he would have. "*That he might have the righteousness which is by the faith of Christ,*" even to be found in that righteousness which is of God by faith. "That is," says he, "the main thing that I would be in hands with."

First: Look for the dependence of thir words.² How is it that the apostle compares himself with thir³ false teachers, who follow the now dead ceremonies of Moses' law? He says, "Let them who know no better follow these dead ceremonies and services, but for me, I have

¹ Repent.² Look at the connection of these words.³ These.

changed all these things now. I have quit them all, and tane ¹ me only to Christ."

Then we may see that there is a far difference between a minister who is fairly called of Christ under the New Testament, and those false teachers who have their face towards Rome, or any other false religion that leads away from Christ. All these who are false teachers, and lead away from Christ, they would evermore be at nignayes ² and dead ceremonies in the service and worship they profess. But the apostle would say here, and all true pastors with him, "Let the Pharisees and those who know no better, go on with their dead ceremonies and their service-book, but for me, God send me Christ and His righteousness, and if I get Christ and His righteousness to be mine, then adieu to them and all their ceremonies, and to their righteousness by the law, and all these things."

This is a note of the false kirk and of the false apostles; they would evermore be at ceremonies. The religion they would be at is a religion that stands all in fair shows, a religion for Kirk and market. But the religion which is the way to heaven, and the true Kirk, and [which] Christ's ministers would be at, is a religion that is spirit and life, a religion that specially is inward more nor ³ outward. [In] Isaiah i. 18 there is a number there who were for the new moons, holidays, multitudes of sacrifices, meikle ⁴ fat of lambs and rams. But the Lord and His prophet they are for this (Isa. i. 16): "Wash you, make you clean; put away the ill of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do

¹ Taken. ² Unnecessary ornament, gimcracks. ³ Than. ⁴ Much.

well." And Micah vi. 6, there are some there for offering thousands of rams and ten thousands of rivers of oil, for giving their firstborn for their transgression; but the Lord tells what it is that He seeks, "To do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God." And Matt. xv., there is the like dispute between the scribes and Pharisees and Christ. The scribes and Pharisees they were all for religious ceremonies, as they called them, such as eating of meat with unwashed hands, vessels, &c. But Christ and His disciples they were more for keeping the commandments of God than for observing the traditions of men.

Use: Learn to make a difference rightly of the two parts of the controversy that is between the prelates and the land. What is the quarrel that the prelates and their adherents have at Scotland this day? It is not because we will not follow the Bible and God's ordinances in His worship; but their quarrel at us is, because we will not follow a service-book and ceremonies, and because we will not have a creature of their upsetting, a prelate, to be head of the Church. And this is our comfort that the controversy stands thus, that they are not coming against us for not following the Bible and the revealed will of God in His Word, for we are willing that matters shall be judged thereby both in Assemblies and Parliaments. And, blessed be God! that the matter stands so, that it is not religion that they are pursuing us for, but something that is like religion, and we stand for the defence of the true religion. And this also serves to put a difference between an honest person and those who come with an honest and prepared heart to the

communion, and those who have no other motive to induce them to it but for the fashion. Those who come to the communion because they would be illspoken of if they did otherways. O! but that be a naughty end, and such will not come speed. There is a far¹ difference between these and such as come here, and care for nothing else, if so be that they can meet with Christ Himself, and care not what all the men in the world say of them. O! that this were our end and errand this day. And I lay this upon your conscience to try yourself hereby whether your end in coming here this day be to get Christ or not.

The apostle goes on and says, "*What things were gain to me those I counted loss for Christ.*" Then this tells us that the apostle he had what was gain to him, as well as the false apostles had. He had whereof to boast as well as they. "Are they apostles? so am I. Are they circumcised? so am I." The apostle says by this, "I can ride up with the best of them and something more, if they come to a boasting for things of that kind." Compare the life of the believer and the life of the natural man together, and let the natural man lay counts and figures of his state here and multiply them until doomsday. We that are believers, we have all that the natural man has, and something more. And there be four things wherein believers are beyond all the natural men in the world.

First: The wicked have this world, and they have it as the men of this world. They bruick² it as "the men of this earth," as it is Psa. x. 18. And the world it is

¹ Great.

² Enjoy.

their patrimony and hire. The believers have the world also, but in another manner than they have, for we have it only as our inns, to stay in while we are here, and not as our patrimony and hire. There is none of us who lies out of the world more than they do, but the world is only our moveables, while it is their patrimony, and their portion that is ordained for them. That is the difference betwixt the heir and him who is only a servant, for the son has always the estate prepared for him, but the servant he gets no more than his penny fee,¹ and when all is done he is put to the door. Whatever the natural men in the world have we have it also, but we have it after a surer way than they have it. And this should teach us to use this present world as though we used it not, seeing it is not our heritage but only our moveables.

Second: For natural and worldly men, the sun it shines upon them by day and the moon by night, the rain it falls upon the just and unjust; but we have the Sun of Righteousness to shine upon us, which they have not, and that is better nor² all other things that are in the world. They have the sun and the moon and these other profits and pleasures in the world to laugh upon them; but we have Him who made all things and can undo them when He will, to laugh upon us, and that is much better.

Third: Natural men they have the toom,³ empty, and frothy creature; but we have the blessing with these things. They have bread for their use; but we have the staff of bread, which is better. And—

¹ His wages paid in money.

² Than.

³ Empty.

Lastly: and I make an objection of it—they have ofttimes a fairer wind in their sails nor ¹ we have here; but yet they have not law-burrows ² of it that it shall be always so. They have more of court and pleasure, profit and ease, more than we have while we are here—and it is true that we have the cross more than they ofttimes; but they are not sure that it shall continue so. But albeit they have these things, and we want them, yet we have that which is spoken of Rom. viii. 37: “We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.” They have court and kings upon their side, and we have them not; yet this is enough against them all, that we have Him upon our side who to this hour never tint ³ a battle, whatever party He had against Him. They have Spain and antichrist and the powers of the world with them, yet God be thanked that we have Him for us who guides all these at His pleasure. We have Him on our side who gets that stately style ascribed to Him, Rev. i. 5: “The Prince of the kings of the earth,” so that all others, were they never so great, all of them are under Him. And so we may see they have no reason to tire who have sided themselves in a covenant with the Son of God, for before all be said that is to be said, and before the field be done, we shall be forced to say that we have gotten the highest of the brae above our enemies, and that the shadow of the Sun of Righteousness has looked upon us.

“*These things that were gain to me I counted them loss for Christ.*” Here is a strange change, that these things that before were gain are now become loss to the apostle;

¹ Than.

² Legal security.

³ Lost.

and yet it is a change incident to all those who are in Paul's case; and the reason of it is, because whoever they be who are not in Christ they see not things as they are indeed, but he looks upon them so as they seem to his sophistic reason; but when any comes to Christ and gets His light they will be forced to say, "The thing that before I thought as my very heart or the apple of my eye, whereof I thought quit me of the one as soon quit me of the other, yet when once I came to Christ and gat a sight of Him, I counted nothing at all of these."

The *doctrine* is clear. A man who once comes truly to Christ changes his mind, his estimative¹ faculty is altogether changed. Moses, he lived forty years at Pharaoh's court in Egypt, and there is no question but at that time he thought meikle² of it to be such a great courtier in such a great king's court. But when once he gat faith to behold Christ and the recompense of reward, he had another thought and estimation of things than before. He esteemed Christ's worst things better than the things that were in Egypt; and so do all those who are indeed converted unto Christ. You count meikle of gold now, but if once you knew what Christ is, you would count it nothing in comparison of Him. If you had once your cheek laid to His sweet cheek, and had one blink of that glorious and beautiful face of His, ye shall then change all your opinions and thoughts that now you have, and you shall cry shame upon all the painted idols in the world, in comparison with fair Jesus, when once you have gotten a sight of the Son of God; and indeed it must be so. This says that natural men

¹ Judicial.

² Much.

they have false counters wherewith they lay their accounts¹—the natural man has no good arithmetic. See you not what is counted of Christ by the world. Acts iv. 11: "This the stone which was set at nought by you builders." Men use to write ciphers for nothing, and so they put Christ for a cipher and counted Him nothing. But counted they so of themselves even in slaying of the Lord of glory? No. They counted themselves wise, for they say, "If we receive this man, the Romans will come upon us and take our nation from us." And the woman of Samaria when He came first to the well, and tells what He could do, she says, "Art Thou greater than our father Jacob who digged the well?" And where laid she Christ in the meantime? She thought Him not so much worth as a drink of cold water. This is the estimation the world has of Christ. And the Papists they have this estimation of Christ; they think themselves and the fathers are worth something, but for Christ and His truth they think it not worth a drink of water to them.

Now where fra² comes this, that men in the world count so little of Christ?

Answer: Because there is something broken in them that makes five seem to be seven; there is something wrong in them that makes gold seem to be God. That blind mind that thou hast naturally will never let you see Christ to be Christ. But once come to Christ Himself, and then ye will be put from such thoughts. He will give unto you another sight, that old sight will be put out of the office.

¹ Accounts.

² From.

And there is another reason for this. The apostle says of himself (1 Cor. xiii. 11): "While I was a child I spake as a child," &c. A man, while he is in nature, is no other but a plain bairn; but when once he comes to Christ he becomes an old man, and so his thoughts change. You know what a man of thritty¹ years will think of the nignayes² and the clay houses that he was wont to build when he was a bairn. The timber of them would be of loch-reeds, and the theiking³ of it of leaves of trees, and all these things that they thought meikle of when they were bairns when they hear of them will laugh at themselves, and count nothing of them. Even so is it with a man that is come to Christ, when he is laying his counts he lays down the world and all that is in it for a cipher, and lays down counters for Christ.

A third reason is: A man who is come to Christ he is a man risen from the dead; and what thoughts think you will you have of all things that are here when you see all that is here set on fire together? What will you think of honours, riches, pleasures, &c., when you see the Son of God set down upon a white throne to judge the world, and with your eyes you see all these things consumed and wasted? Will not a man say then that he has been nothing but a fool that set set his heart upon these things that perish so suddenly?

Use First: This serves to let these see who are truly and indeed converted to Christ the first thing that ever they get. See and try if you would know this. If ever you have changed your minds as yet; for that is certain that these whose minds and estimatures are nothing

¹ Thirty.² Gimcracks.³ Thatching.

changed, they are never come to Christ yet. Ephraim is brought in saying, "What have I to do any more with idols?" Fra¹ once Israel returns to the Lord, they will have no more to do with idols, nor anything that may provoke Him. If you love the world, your night drinking, your idols of profit, pleasure, ease as well as well as ever ye did, and be raxing² your arms after these things, until your sinews be like for to break to compass them about, say what you will, and profess what you will, you have gotten no new thing as yet, ye are not come in grips³ with Christ, for you lay down Christ and heaven and glory for a cipher, and your court, favour, profit, pleasure, &c., for all things. O! but there be many false arithmeticians in the world, who in laying their compts⁴ lay down the world for thousands, but when they come to lay Christ, they lay Him down for a cipher or for a penny. But stay till you begin to count over again, and then you shall be forced to say that you laid a fool's count, that thought so meikle of a clayey world that evanishes, and thought so little of Him that made the world and all things therein and endures for ever.

Use Second: We see that men they must either change their thoughts, or it will be very ill with them in the end. They must change. Their thoughts as well as their practices must be changed. We must be cast into a new mould, otherways we are lost and tint⁵ souls. If thou be in Christ thou lookest to pleasant things in the world, as a stranger does to fair meadows, orchards, palaces, coaches, courts, and pleasant countries until he

¹ From. ² Stretching out. ³ Close dealing. ⁴ Accounts. ⁵ Perishing.

is far afield. He looks to all these things with a sigh, if he love home well, and says: "He had rather be at home in his own country nor¹ have them all." Such is the estimation that those who are in Christ have of the things of the world. He can let out a hearty laughter at all things that are in it; and count nothing of them all, to be at home, in glory with Christ, and with His Father.

"*I count all things loss for Christ.*" Was that a loss to be circumcised, to be of the people of Israel, to be descended of the royal tribe of Benjamin, and to be blameless for² the outward things of the law? The apostle tells us by this, that whatever comes betwixt a man and Christ to keep him from a right estimation of Christ, albeit all the brave pasments³ and gold fuilzie⁴ in the world were upon it, it is no other but plain nothing, and we should count so of it. If anything come between me and Christ, whatever it be, away with it. The apostle would say, "The time was when I counted as meikle of these things as they did, but when once I met with Christ, and saw things with daylight"—for the sinner and the man who are in nature see all things with moonlight—then he says of all these things, "I counted them all loss that I might gain Christ" (Matt. xvi. 26). There is a man pre-supposed there to have gained the whole world; and who is there in the world that has gained, if that man has not gained that has gained the whole world? But it is said of such a man, albeit he should gain—as who yet ever gained it all—yet if in gaining

¹ Than. ² With respect to. ³ Strips of lace or silk sewed on clothes.

⁴ Gold-leaf. French, *feuille*; Latin, *folium*.

thereof he lose his own soul, he is a loser when all is done (Rom. x. 9). It is said that the Jews which followed after the law of righteousness they attained not unto it, and so they lost by following thereof, for they tint¹ the righteousness of Christ. Whoever follows after something which seems to be theirs, and that they would be at, and then tines² Christ by following thereof, such men are losers, get they that which they follow, or get they it not. The works that Papists do to merit by them, they are their loss instead of profit, for they come between them and Christ. Whatever it be, court,³ honour, or pleasure, or anything else that thou followest, if it come between thee and Christ, thou art a loser in seeking of it. Aye, if it were in seeking that which is spoken of Prov. i. 13, "All precious substance," or seeking that which is spoken of Prov. vii. 18, "To fill thyself with love," yet if it come between you and Christ it is loss. And there is good reason it should be so. What is it which makes a man lose in the world? Is it that which is taken out of his rent for a year? Albeit, something be tane⁴ away that way, that is not meikle; but if anything be tane⁴ away from a man's stock that is it which makes loss. So whatever takes away any of Christ from us, who is our stock, that is loss indeed, and may be justly called loss. And God knows there be many who lose this way. There be many who for winning of court, honour, favour of kings, profit, pleasure, they care not to sell their covenant, and Christ, and His Kirk. And, alas! what winning is there when all is done. God knows there is just nothing. They use to

¹ Lost.² Loses.³ Influence.⁴ Taken.

say of merchants, they are rich. But another who knows better will say, Stay till all his counts be fitted,¹ and all his creditors paid, and then you will know whether he be rich or poor. It is even just so here. To get a higher style in the world, to quit thy covenant with God, what winning is there when sinners shall once become sin-sick, and their compts² begin to be laid, and they must pay again, all the pleasures that they have gotten that way, and he must vomit it all up again? As it is Job xx. 15, and they will see they are losers. You think you are well set up now, if you get riches and honours and pleasures; but stay till the Lord come, and say, "Pay me for all the court, honour, pleasure, &c., that ever you gat;" and there will be a great poverty soon then. Stay till Christ come to crave a count of men and women, how they have spent their talents, and they shall be seen to be very poor. I speak only of one place (Rev. vi. 15) for clearing of this point—Kings and great men, rich men, chief captains, and mighty men, they are cited there before the Son of God. And what are their great places and their great wages that they gat worth to them then? They cry out, "Mountains and rocks fall on us, and hide us from the face of the Lamb that sits on the throne, and from His wrath, for the day of His wrath is come, and who shall be able to lose [stand?]." So that there is no loss like unto this loss, for me to lose my country, wife, bairns, &c. So did David these things, and the children of God may lose them. But to lose the precious soul, woe to thee for evermore who does this, for thy loss is never kent³ till

¹ Settled.² Accounts.³ Known.

then. Of all the losses in the world that is the most fearful to lose Christ, and so to lose thy own soul.

What is the other part of the apostle's choice, or that which he would be in hands with? "*For the super-excellent knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.*"

Why says he not for Christ Himself rather than for the superexcellent knowledge of Christ? Christ is one thing, and the superexcellent knowledge of Christ another, and yet in substance both of them are one. There is a great question anent this. What it is that is the greatest happiness of the glorified in heaven, and what it is that is the main happiness of those who are journeyers towards this kingdom? But the happiness both of the one and the other stands in this super-excellent knowledge of Christ. There were very grave and learned men who lived at the time when Paul lived, for it is probable that there went letters between Paul and Seneca, who was a very learned man, and that they conversed one with another. But what counts the apostle to be his superlative knowledge? Even this, to trust and believe in a Saviour slain and despised by the world. There was no wisdom in his accompt¹ like the knowledge of this. And look to this superexcellent knowledge of Christ in three things, and you shall find it to be so.

First: All the wisdom natural men can speak with will never make the thing they speak of go into the heart. All that the moralists in the world can speak of heaven or of hell, all that they can speak of the deformity of vice, and of the beauty and comeliness of

¹ Account.

virtue, can never make it go into the hearts of men and women. But Christ, when He speaks in the gospel of these things, He can speak into the heart, and speaks daily to the hearts of many, and whoever gets a sight of Christ Himself in the gospel, O! so fair, so excellent as the knowledge of Him will be to them. All the knowledge of all the sovereigns in the world will be nothing to them.

Second: The gospel is superexcellent in the knowledge thereof. Is there no further knowledge of Christ to be had there as Mary's son, a carpenter's son? Yes, He is to be seen there as a plant of renown, as Ezekiel calls Him; as the branch of righteousness as Zachariah calls Him; and as Isaiah says, He is to be seen there as wonderful in His works. There He is miraculous. In His death He is to be seen as life, so that He is a wonder to all to think upon.

Third: Look into Christ's offer in the gospel, and that is also wonderful, and His knowledge is superexcellent in that: To offer a kingdom to all His followers. How long shall it endure? For an hundred thousand years? Aye. It endures for evermore. It lasts for all eternity. Let Christ make an offer of that when it is racked on God's wheel, it would give meikle at such a time to have an interpreter to repeat its own case to it, meikle more if Christ should make this offer to it. Ye shall find also that in this offer there is peace to a troubled conscience, ease to a troubled mind. To offer a kingdom, thus how great a matter is it? Who is there can offer an eternal kingdom but only He? A soul may dream of a kingdom, but none can speak it into the conscience but He who

can say, "Come and see." Come therefore to this sacrament with disposed hearts, and set to your nose to the sweet smell of the Son of God, bend your ears to hearken to the offers, and ye shall see and hear super-excellent knowledge there.