

Philippians

L.M. Grant

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MOMENTS WITH THE BOOK

PO Box 322 • Bedford, PA 15522

(814) 623-8737 • www.mwtb.org

PHILIPPIANS

First MWTB Printing, 1966
Third Printing, 2006

This work originally appeared as a series of articles in the monthly publication *Things New and Old*.

Quotations from the Bible are from the King James Version except for those from the New Translation of J.N. Darby (denoted by “JND”).

Published by:
Moments With The Book
PO Box 322
Bedford, PA 15522 USA

To order this or other books by this author, visit www.mwtb.org

Printed in the United States of America

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Foreword

With a deep, peaceful joy Paul writes his Epistle to the Philippians, from circumstances which would in themselves tend rather to misery and discouragement. Imprisoned in Rome, he considered himself the Lord's prisoner, placed there by Divine wisdom for the carrying out of God's will and work. Hence, his joy comes from the highest source: his loneliness and bondage but give occasion to the more constant, real fellowship of the presence of God, and his cup runs over. The Philippians, too, had known him at the beginning as persecuted for Christ's sake, and how real a comfort to his soul it was that this only increased their attachment to him, rather than frightening them. This attachment had been unwavering from that time, until now, eleven years having passed since he had first visited them with the Gospel. This we can easily understand would increase the joy with which he writes to them.

The epistle is plainly pastoral, refreshing, encouraging, rather than correcting, or setting forth the doctrines of Christianity. Experience consistent with the doctrine is more properly the subject here—not indeed the experience of every Christian, but the experience normally begotten by the knowledge of Christ. Paul himself appears as the example of this experience; and who can fail to see that this is intended to decidedly stir our souls to follow his example?



Chapter One

Christ the Motivating Power of the Believer

Consistently with the character of the epistle, in his addressing the Philippians, Paul does not do so as an apostle, but linking Timothy's name with his own, makes use of the lowlier title, "servants of Jesus Christ." It will be noted that in those epistles in which he writes as an apostle, he makes an authoritative communication of the mind of God, which rightfully requires the obedience of faith. As an apostle he is invested with God-given authority. As a servant, on the other hand, authority has no place, but lowliness of subjection to God. The power of this epistle lies therefore in his lowly example rather than in firm authority. Each is of course perfect in its place and appropriate as regards those who are addressed.

Timothy had but newly joined Paul in his missionary travels when Philippi was first visited: he had remained a true and steadfast helper in the work, despite an evident natural timidity which needed encouragement in the face of widespread departure and ignoring of Paul's doctrine. This is seen in Paul's last epistle to him. Timothy was therefore in Rome at this time, and closely identified with Paul. Whether a fellow-prisoner at the time may be doubtful, for Paul speaks of trusting in the Lord to send him shortly to Philippi. But the epistle to the Hebrews was written the following year (A.D. 63), perhaps only a few months intervening,

and Paul informs them that Timothy had been set at liberty. It may be of course that at the time Paul wrote the Philippians, he was anticipating the liberation of Timothy.

As the “servants of Jesus Christ” therefore they write “to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons.” This form of address is used only in this epistle. He does not address them as an assembly, for Christian experience is a personal thing which he seeks to promote in every individual. He is careful also to avoid the slightest partiality, for he addresses “all the saints.” Five times in the first eight verses he speaks of them “all,” a lovely indication of his pastor’s heart.

Yet he refers directly to “the bishops and deacons,” and thus does not ignore the proper order of the assembly. The bishops (simply overseers) were responsible to maintain godly government, not one bishop in the gathering, but “bishops,” an order far removed from that which formalism has developed today. Deacons were delegated to care for the temporal arrangements and details (cf. Acts 6). It was no elaborate system, but simple and direct, thus order maintained with a minimum of form and arrangement.

It is important however to observe that bishops (or elders, cf. Titus 1:5-7) were appointed only by apostolic authority — Paul also giving title to Titus and Timothy to make such appointments. This was a matter **never** left in the control of the church as such; and there is today no more authority in the church to this end than there ever was. Hence, it is evident that this official appointment was confined to the original establishment of the church in its proper order. It remains unquestionable of course that such men of godly qualifications and spiritual weight are preserved to the assembly; but official appointment is both unnecessary and without Scriptural authority. Let us rather today emphasize the need of spiritual exercise to recognize the wisdom of godly men and to follow their guidance according to Scripture, without according them any official position.

Clearly, we cannot get back to the beginning of Christianity, for there are no divinely appointed apostles living on earth today. If men insist on an apostolic succession, they must acknowledge that Scripture is **not** their guide. In 1 Timothy, where the establishment of the church in proper order is contemplated, Timothy is instructed as to the qualifications of those desiring oversight. This plainly involved the appointment of bishops (or overseers) to an office. But in the second epistle, no mention is made of bishops or deacons, for the epistle contemplates rather the “great house” of Christendom long after the original institution of the church.

Is there then no means of preserving godly order in the midst of surrounding disorder? Thank God that fullest provision is made for this; but **not** by official appointment, nor official succession. Timothy is simply told, “And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to **faithful men**, who shall be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:2). This is true succession and the only true succession according to Scripture. The faithful man is not accorded an official place, nor indeed today would a faithful man seek it, for to seek it would not at all be faithfulness to the Word of God. Thus, order according to God is to be maintained only by spiritual exercise in subjection to His revealed Word. This sacred principle should govern both our individual lives and our corporate testimony.

The apostle wishes them the grace that supplies their souls’ needs in practical life, and the peace that is tranquillity of soul in whatever circumstances. These can come only “**from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ,**” and when it is so they are known in pure, living reality.

“**I thank my God upon every remembrance of you,**” he assures them. Few as the disciples may have been after his first visit to Philippi, how could he forget the reality of the work of God there? — a work that had been sustained and developed in evident truth and stability. The record in Acts 16 has an attraction

peculiar to itself. But it was Paul's habit to thank God for the saints.

And prayer attends his thanksgiving; not in this case with "anguish of heart" and "many tears" as was true in the writing of his first epistle to the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 2:4); but rather "making request with joy." They were going on well, and his heart was free, and full.

"From the first day until now" they had shown fullest fellowship with him in the Gospel. Their hearts were bound up with the message of Divine grace committed to him, and they had, immediately after conversion, ministered to his support, sending help to him twice while he was in Thessalonica (Philippians 4:16) at a time when he received nothing from other assemblies. This fellowship had continued, and another gift at this time is evidently the occasion for this epistle from prison. Moreover it was by no means wealth that made this possible. For Paul in writing to Corinth mentions "the churches of Macedonia; how that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power, they were willing of themselves" (2 Corinthians 8:1-3).

This was the manifest work of God in their souls, and Paul speaks of his confidence that God would complete this good work He had begun. The completion is nothing short of "the day of Jesus Christ," this is when He shall be manifested and they also manifested as the finished product of His workmanship.

He felt it perfectly right to think this of them all, "because," as he says, "I have you in my heart; inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace." He could not question the reality of their faith — of the fact that it was really God's work in their souls. For in spite of his imprisonment and suffering for the Gospel's sake, they had remained firmly attached to him and the Gospel

he preached. They willingly participated in the same grace that sustained him in all these things. They, too, stood firm for the Gospel. What is real will absolutely endure, for it is God's work.

The heart of the apostle responded fully to their faith. God bore witness to his great longing toward them **“in the bowels of Jesus Christ.”** It is the expression of deepest feeling begotten through the love of Christ known in the soul. For as the soul dwells upon Christ, so is it expanded in love toward His saints and in concern for His interests.

His prayer for them is that their **“love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment.”** Our measure of this love can never be too great; and as we progress in the Christian path the love ought to deepen and become more full in every way. Alas, that too often when knowledge increases, love begins to grow cool! This must be watched against with utmost care and godly exercise. Knowledge is badly abused if it decreases love in any measure.

Yet also, if love is to be exercised in proper moral balance, this requires **“knowledge and ... all judgment.”** Love must not remain ignorant of the true needs of its objects; and it must also have discernment as to the godly means of meeting those needs. Thus it has far greater scope than the mere feeling of affection. 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 lists some of the solid characteristics of love: it is well worth our quiet meditation.

This real activity of love is required in order to **“judge of and approve the things that are more excellent” (JND).** This is the character of godly balance, the discernment of things in proper proportion. If there is a tendency to magnify small things, there will be a comparative overlooking of more important things which ought to deeply engage the soul. Such a case discloses a serious lack of love's true activity. Or if, on the other hand, we are content with things because we **“see no harm in them,”** it is not real love that is motivating us. Love according to God seeks the things that

are “**more excellent.**” This is indispensable if we are to be “**pure and without offense**” (JND) in view of “**the day of Christ.**” Is this not certainly the character in which we desire to be presented before Him? If so, we must cultivate it now.

It is important to observe that this produces “**the fruits of righteousness ... by Jesus Christ.**” Merely seeking to do right never produces the fruits of righteousness: only the pure love of God known and responded to in the soul can do so, and it is sufficient for a real fulness of these fruits also. Again the mere object of doing right does **not** have God’s glory as its purpose; but “**the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ**” are shown to be “**unto the glory and praise of God.**” Nothing can be truly right except as it is held in intimate relationship to God.

In verse 12 the apostle turns from his speaking of the constancy of the Philippians — so real a joy and encouragement to him to assure them concerning his circumstances, which were so contrary to their own hearty fellowship, contrary to him, contrary to God and to the Gospel of His grace. These things could not take his joy from him, and his confidence is only increased by the overruling of God’s hand in producing blessing not only in spite of the opposition, but by its means. The things that had happened to him had resulted in the furtherance of the Gospel, and this he fully perceives. How great God is! Paul would rather encourage the Philippians than have them discouraged by his imprisonment.

His bonds were manifest as being “**in Christ,**” and this not only in Caesar’s court, but to all who knew of his imprisonment. It was known that he was suffering, not for evil-doing, but for Christ’s sake. This drew attention to Christ Himself, and the Gospel was furthered. Moreover, many brethren in the Lord were strengthened in faith by this, to speak the Word without fear.

There were some indeed, he fully realizes, who preached Christ “**even of envy and strife**” — their motives being thoroughly false. Envious of Paul, they evidently supposed that he would suffer

more in prison, the more Christ was preached. It was subtle evil, of course, but they reckoned without the great power of God and the firm faith of the apostle, who cared not for his own sufferings so long as Christ was proclaimed. But how serious an admonition for our own souls, to take care that love should be the true and real motive behind every service. A spirit of rivalry and envy may stir up great zeal and energy, but while it may be that God will sovereignly bless His Word proclaimed even with such motives, yet he who so preaches will have to answer before Him for these motives.

Those who, on the other hand, preach Christ “of good will” and “of love” will not fail to be rewarded “in that Day” (2 Thessalonians 1:10). Persuaded of Paul’s firm purpose of heart, they would wholeheartedly back him up in his testimony of the Gospel. Let us take heed to the motives behind our every work, for the best of things may be done with the worst of motives. Our God is moved by love and good-will, and we must be also if we would represent Him.

But the apostle’s heart of love toward the Lord is not at all dismayed whatever the motives of men. Indeed, he says “**Notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretense, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.**” This is the bright triumph of faith, which of course neither excuses unholy motives nor in any way links himself with those guilty of such motives. But he is persuaded that the hand of God perfectly overrules all this, and when Christ is preached, this in itself causes him unfeigned joy of heart. May we in this be true followers of Paul.

“**For,**” he adds, “**I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.**” This salvation is plainly in reference to the circumstances in which Paul was — not of course salvation of the soul, but salvation from the difficulties and dangers of his path. God would turn these

things in his favour, however unfavorable they may appear for the time. But he includes their prayers as having a very real part in this, and **“the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.”** God would make his own soul to triumph in the blessed confidence that by all these things God was glorifying His own Name. This, after all, was the reason for Paul’s labours whether free or bound, indeed, he had made it the very reason for his life. Thus he was content. How blessed thus to lose sight of self in the joy of the knowledge of God glorified!

Hence, he is assured that all will work according to his **“earnest expectation and ... hope.”** This hope was not for his release from prison, but rather that, whatever his circumstances, **“in nothing”** he **“shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always,”** Christ should be magnified in his body, **“whether it be by life, or by death.”** Whether life or death, he would be as thoroughly content with one or the other, if only he might boldly and unashamedly magnify Christ in his body. This patience and submission in suffering is how blessed a proof of the reality of faith — proof of the reality of the sustaining hand of the Lord. It is the same blessed spirit seen in the Master Himself in the face of His supreme suffering: **“The cup which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?”** (John 18:11).

“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” Living, Christ was the very principle and motivating power of his life. Dying, he would have the greater joy of being with Him for Whose sake he had lived. **“But,”** he adds, **“if to live in flesh is my lot, this is for me worth the while”** (JND). There would be definite value in his living, whether in prison or otherwise. Hence, if it were for him to choose, he would simply not know which way to decide. Good indeed it is that He who has infinite wisdom makes this choice for us.

“For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better.” Precious and rewarding

as were his labours for Christ, yet far better is the privilege of being with Him — even in the disembodied state. How clear a proof of the conscious bliss of the believer even while the body lies silent in death. For it is plain that at death the body does not “depart,” but the spirit and soul depart from the body, and in the case of the believer there is immediate entrance into “paradise,” the very presence of the Lord. Thus the day of the crucifixion, the one thief was with Christ in paradise (Luke 23:43). The Lord Jesus Himself, in dying, said, “Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit” (Luke 23:46). Stephen also, later, in being stoned to death, used similar words of triumphant faith, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit” (Acts 7:59).

Who will doubt that Paul’s desire was a true and precious spiritual one? Yet he will forego this for the time being, because he adds, “to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.” Blessed to see this spirit of unselfish devotion to the care of the saints, because they belonged to Christ.

This settles the matter. **“Having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith; that your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again.”** There can be no doubt whatever from this that the apostle was later liberated and saw the Philippians again. True of course that here he is simply expectant of this; but he writes as having ascertained the mind of God in the matter; and since what he writes is Scripture, we are shut up to regarding this as a Divinely inspired prophecy. His coming again to the Philippians would cause them abundant rejoicing in Christ Jesus, for the fact of his being so manifestly preserved and delivered by the hand of God, as well as for the help he would be to them.

But he turns to their practical conduct. Joy in the Lord’s manifest goodness was one thing; but this should be carried into the details of everyday life. Their manner of life was to be

worthy of the Gospel of Christ, “that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel.” How important a part of worthy conduct is the steadfast unity of saints in standing for the grace of Christ in the face of opposition. This demands the submerging of merely selfish interests, consideration of others, forbearance and longsuffering. Moreover, it should be practiced as fully and diligently when the apostle was absent as when he was present. This is a searching word for our consciences.

Courage too was not to be lacking: there were adversaries, certainly, but what were they when measured against the power of God? Was our Lord intimidated by the strength of His enemies? Nor ought we to be. As Timothy personally was told, “Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the Gospel according to the power of God” (2 Timothy 1:8), so also the Philippians collectively are told, “**in nothing terrified by your adversaries.**” If there were this firm, faithful boldness in standing for Christ, it would be “**to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God.**” To the adversaries this would be a strong testimony to the solemn reality of judgment against sin; and on the other hand, the fact of their having this courage **from God** was an evidence to themselves that God would deliver them.

Suffering for Christ’s sake is no misfortune; quite the reverse: it is a God-given privilege. “**Unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake.**” Christ is no longer suffering on earth for the glory of God, but it is the believer’s privilege to suffer on His behalf. Rather than fainting or becoming resentful, we ought to “rejoice, and be exceeding glad ... for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you” (Matthew 5:12). Though it may seem dishonor from

a human standpoint, yet if our thoughts simply rise to God, we recognize it as great honour, for it is the path of our Master.

And it was the path of Paul also. The Philippians honoured him for his steadfast faith in suffering for Christ's sake: he may well encourage them to be partakers of the same conflict as he himself. They had seen it when he was with them, and had heard of his present suffering. They would well remember his imprisonment in Philippi for the Gospel's sake: now he was prisoner in Rome.



Chapter Two

Christ the Example of the Believer

In the first chapter we have seen that Christ is the very principle of life that motivates the apostle in whatever circumstances — and so indeed it should be for all believers. Chapter 2 now brings Christ Jesus before us in His voluntary humiliation and obedience unto death, as the great **Example** of His people. Vibrant life and freshness of soul is sweet, but it will soon vanish if it does not issue in lowly obedience. Thus, if souls have found “**consolation in Christ ... comfort of love ... fellowship of the Spirit ... bowels and mercies**” — as indeed was truly the case at Philippi, and which they had heartily shown by ministering now to the apostle, then for this very reason he urges them to make his joy full by their cultivation of these fruits among themselves, in consistent humility. “**Fulfill ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.**”

Here is a significant test of the true activity of life in the soul. For while this life is most personal, and faith a thoroughly individual thing, yet it cannot be content with our personal blessing: it must necessarily go out to include the people of God, to consider them and to care for them, to seek real and godly unity with them. This is a fundamental aspect of obedience to God.

There is necessarily much involved in this. “**Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory.**” The evil tendencies of our

own hearts must be honestly judged. Striving to gain a point is not godliness, but is closely related to vainglory, which is merely seeking our own exaltation in the face of the actual fact that we are entitled to nothing but the lowest place. All such pretension is empty as wind. **“But in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.”** This is not so difficult if we observe ourselves honestly, for we surely know the evil propensities, motives and failures of our own hearts better than we do those of others. Can we then dare to consider ourselves better than they? It is one of the perverse characteristics of our hearts to strongly denounce another for a certain fault while closing our eyes to the many things in ourselves that we know are evil. In reference to our own shortcomings we are all too quick to plead extenuating circumstances. But we ought never to excuse ourselves on such grounds, though it is our wisdom to make allowances for others in considering their circumstances.

Verse 4 takes us yet a step further: **“Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.”** This is simply a very real concern for the well-being of others, a happy characteristic of Christianity in a world so entirely selfish. We cannot however suppose that all Christians are characteristically Christian in the practice of this virtue. Indeed, Paul in this very chapter, in commending Timothy, laments, **“I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ’s”** (vv. 20, 21). This selfish attitude is, alas, all too natural to us, and we shall not be otherwise minded without both real purpose of heart and having our eyes fixed on the right Object.

Hence, the apostle immediately sets before us the great Example of the Lord Jesus in His voluntary humiliation. How can this fail to appeal with power to the renewed heart? **“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.”** It is the mind that willingly takes a lower place than that which is perfectly

rightful. In fact, this is not all, for He whose rightful place is the highest has come down to the lowest. Such a sacrifice is far greater than is possible for any other. But we are bidden to have the same lowly mind.

We begin with the infinite glory of His Person, “**subsisting in the form of God**” (JND). Few are the words to describe this august dignity, yet sublime in their simple beauty. Only God could subsist in the form of God. Thus, when John speaks of “the Son of God,” he also insists, “This is the true God, and eternal life” (1 John 5:20). There could therefore be no robbery in the thought of His being equal with God. This was the very thought which in Satan had been monstrous guilt. Being merely a creature, he aspired to “be like the Most High,” and by this pride he fell (Isaiah 14:12-15). Adam too fell in a similar way (Genesis 3).

But He who was infinitely higher than Lucifer — “**being in the form of God**” — being “**equal with God**” — has “**made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a Servant.**” Every angel, every created intelligence, is by the very fact of creation in “**the form of a servant;**” but His rightful state of being was “**in the form of God,**” so that His becoming in the form of a servant involved a thoroughly voluntary and Divinely purposed self-humiliation. Yet in no sense did this mean His giving up the nature of God: such a thought is banished utterly by many Scriptures, as “For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Colossians 2:9). He is the same blessed Person, but come in a different form, a thing which no one could have title to do save Him who is “over all, God blessed for ever” (Romans 9:5).

But although angels are in the form of servants, yet our Lord did not become an angel: rather He “**was made in the likeness of men.**” Being altogether above angels, He “was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death” (Hebrews 2:9).

Manhood is thus seen to be a lower class of being than

that of angels. Angels are spirits (Hebrews 1:14), who “excel in strength” (Psalm 103:20), while man is “spirit and soul and body” (1 Thessalonians 5:23), and is characterized by weakness, at least so long as connected with the first creation. This is seen also in the Lord Jesus — Him Who is without sin — as John 4 teaches us: “Jesus therefore, being wearied with His journey, sat thus on the well” (v. 6). This marvellous stoop of love on the part of the Lord Jesus, in grace assuming such limitations of Manhood, is that which should command our most profound adoration.

It is to be remarked, however, that in the resurrection state this characteristic weakness is not seen. Indeed, of believers we are told that the body “is sown in weakness; it is raised in power” (1 Corinthians 15:43). We shall not be confined by the limitations of our present state, but shall know “**the power of His resurrection**” (Philippians 3:10), our bodies then “**like unto His glorious body**” (Philippians 3:21), thoroughly suited to spiritual conditions.

But the voluntary humiliation of our Lord did not end with His becoming Man. Unspeakably blessed as it is to gaze upon the lowly form of the Lord of Glory become Man upon earth, this was not in itself sufficient to meet the deep need of our souls: He must come yet lower. “**And being found in fashion as a Man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death.**” Death could have no claim upon a perfectly obedient man: it was only sin that drew down death’s sentence upon mankind. So that, while every other life was forfeit on account of sin, He alone had perfect title to live.

His death, therefore, was in the fullest sense voluntary, as that of none other could be. “I lay down My life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of My Father” (John 10:17,18). After becoming Man then, He has further humbled Himself in a lowly obedience to the Father’s will even “**unto death.**” How

thoroughly and blessedly sacrificial is this death in every way! — awakening the deeper chords of thankful worship.

But let us look more closely still at the actual circumstances of His death. Where do we see the noble dignity of which such a sacrifice is worthy? Ah, it is not to be found! Despised and rejected of men, there is every kind of shame and abuse heaped upon Him. No honour is accorded Him for this supremely magnificent sacrifice; but gross contempt!

But more: the heavens are utterly darkened; no voice of God is there to vindicate and honour Him, and His own voice pierces the darkness with pathos unutterable: “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” (Matthew 27:46). All this, and more, is involved in that pregnant expression, **“even the death of the cross.”**

His was no ordinary death, but the death of the curse, the bearing of guilt and suffering on behalf of ruined sinners, agony unparalleled in all history. Well knowing previously, too, the horror all this would entail, yet His willing self-humiliation did not end until He had come to the lowest place, in which He could reach and save the lowest sinner. Indeed, it was only this that could save any sinner: He must come to the lowest place possible, and this He did in willing sacrifice. Blessed be His Name forever!

But with what majestic honour is He conducted back in triumph to the Glory! No longer now could Heaven be silent: His mighty work of sacrifice was finished, perfectly finished, and God, true to His nature, will righteously reward Him who has humbled Himself, highly exalting Him and giving Him a Name which is above every name. Blessed answer of perfect righteousness!

This is not the fact affirmed of His returning to His previous glory (which of course is also blessedly true), but of God’s having rewarded Him as the Man Christ Jesus with an official glory that is above every other title ever conferred by God upon anyone. It is the glorious result of His blessed work. How sweet beyond all

thought to contemplate the glories of the Man upon the throne of God!

This exaltation, too, involves the decree **“that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of heavenly and earthly and infernal beings, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to God the Father’s glory”** (JND). Indeed, how could any other conclusion be right and proper? Since the eternal God has been manifested in flesh — has become Man — in order to accomplish the great work of redemption, then certainly nothing in creation can be excused from bowing the knee to Him, whether **“things in Heaven”** — the highest angels; or **“things on the earth”** — every class of mankind; or **“things under the earth”** — fallen spiritual beings. This is an imperial decree. Those who now refuse to bow to Him will eventually be compelled to do so, but under chains of eternal punishment.

On the other hand, those who willingly bow are simply taking the creature’s place, the place proper to them, and this means eternal blessing for their souls. This of course is only possible where there is faith in the resurrection of Christ. If He is not raised, what authority could He have? what real bearing could His Name have upon men’s lives? Thus the vital heart of the matter is clearly expressed in Romans 10:9: **“That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.”** This simple, real submission and confession anticipates the great Day of manifestation, the heart willingly giving glory to God the Father. But He will be glorified in all, however unwillingly may be the eventual submission of the lost. It is not simply the exaltation of the blessed Son of Man that shines out in this, but the glory of God the Father, which has been the blessed object of the devoted sacrifice of the Lord Jesus.

The latter part of our chapter brings before us three men who are practical witnesses in lovely measure to the possibility of truly

following Christ in self-sacrificing devotion. Can we dare excuse ourselves from a similar path?

“Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.”

The apostle’s heart is manifestly refreshed in being able thus to speak of the consistent obedience of the Philippian. And he encourages this, particularly since he is absent, and not therewith in such close touch with their circumstances as to be able to help them work out the daily problems and difficulties that continually arise. How far indeed does a truly obedient spirit go in solving the difficult questions of daily life! Let us be sure first of all to have this, and the working out of our salvation will be greatly simplified.

For the salvation here is certainly not “the salvation of souls,” but deliverance from the cares, temptations, perplexities and defilements that commonly beset our pathway through the world. It is the Lord Jesus who has already worked for the salvation of our souls at Calvary. Our temporal salvation we are to work out ourselves. It is on this line that Paul writes to Timothy: “Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee” (1 Timothy 4:16).

Thus the saints are to “**work out**” in result their “**own salvation.**” But it must be well remembered that “**it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.**” The internal work is certainly by far the more important, but we are responsible to respond to this in a spirit of thorough obedience. God is sovereign, and we therefore are responsible to be subject.

“Do all things without murmurings and reasonings” (JND). Murmuring is utterly foreign to a servant’s true character: he ought to accept with prompt willingness his Master’s will. And once that

will has been expressed, then reasonings as to the advantages or disadvantages of obedience can only indicate treachery against the Master. The Master, not the servant, is the judge of what is suitable.

“That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world.” Our effect upon others is no light matter, and nothing becomes more harmful than **“murmurings and reasonings”** (JND). They may appear in a very specious light, and for this reason are more dangerous. **“Blameless and harmless”** is put in contrast to **“murmurings and reasonings”** (JND). Galatians 4:4-7 shows that all believers are sons of God in actual fact, by faith in Christ Jesus: the passage now before us exhorts us to be this in actual **practice** — **“Sons of God, without rebuke.”** We are to rightly represent the character of Him Whose sons we are. This is the more important in view of the contrary character of **“a crooked and perverse generation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world.”** A light is intended to be in sharpest contrast to the surrounding darkness.

Defensive character then is not sufficient in the Christian warfare: he must be prepared to carry the battle into the enemy's stronghold. **“Holding forth the Word of life”** is a noble privilege consistent with the dignity of being **“sons of God.”** Yet, let us take heed that this is no mere attacking of evil, but the overcoming of evil with good — the presentation of the pure, positive **“word of life.”** This alone will accomplish results for God. Evil will not be put down by mere denunciation. **“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds”** (2 Corinthians 10:4). Let our souls be deeply impregnated with the precious, living Word of God, for this only will enable us to faithfully represent our Lord in a contrary world.

Thus Paul encourages this energetic devotedness in the Philippians, that he himself would thereby have occasion to

“rejoice in the day of Christ,” for such results would be blessed proof that he had neither run his race in vain, nor in vain spent his labours upon them.

But he will go further, to speak of his present joy in **“the sacrifice and service of your faith.”** Who can doubt that his very life was being **“poured out”** (JND) in the service of Christ? But he speaks not as though this was any sacrifice to him: rather he gives importance to **their** sacrifice and service, the fruit of their faith. And just as a drink offering of wine was poured upon the lamb of the continual burnt offering (Numbers 28:7), to signify unselfish joy in the sacrifice, so the apostle attributes to them the sacrifice and service of devoted faith, while he takes the lesser place of being simply the drink offering poured out upon their sacrifice, having unfeigned joy in devoting his very life to the furthering of their devoted affection to Christ. He rejoices, and does so in common with them all: he had joy in their joy of faith. And for this reason he expects them also to rejoice, and rejoice with him in his joy. It is a most sweet comment on the intertwining of true Christian affections and interests, in which all the saints have common part. And Paul’s imprisonment at the time makes it much more sweet. Would that we knew more of his unselfish, unaffected spirit!

“But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheus shortly unto you, that I also may be of good comfort, when I know your state. For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state.” This is a refreshing commendation of Timothy, whose very character was such that Paul could trust him to care for the welfare of the Philippians. He has no hesitation in sending him — expecting comfort, too, in hearing through him of their state. With sorrow he has to record that the general tendency was quite in contrast to Timothy’s lowly spirit of service. **“For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ’s.”** Yet he can appeal to their own knowledge of Timothy, and does so with quiet suitability: **“Ye know the proof of him, that, as a son with**

the father, he hath served with me in the gospel.”

Still, hoping as he does to send Timothy as soon as possible, he also adds, **“But I trust in the Lord that I also myself shall come shortly.”** His being imprisoned did not at all hinder his confidence in this respect.

Along with these two lovely examples of unselfish faith and lowliness, the chapter concludes with the commendation of a third — Epaphroditus — who had come to Paul from the Philippians with supplies for his need and comfort in the prison. Now Paul is sending him back, bearing this epistle, saying of him, **“Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellowsoldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants. For he longed after you all, and was full of heaviness, because that ye had heard that he had been sick.”** Here is again the “mind” that was “in Christ Jesus,” the extreme opposite of self-commiseration. His love to the Philippians was such that it pained his soul to think of their distress at the news of his sickness. It shows, too, the confidence he had in their own unfeigned love toward him — love that truly thinks more of its object than of itself.

And the apostle assures them, **“For indeed he was sick nigh unto death: but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. I sent him therefore the more carefully, that, when ye see him again ye may rejoice, and that I may be the less sorrowful. Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness; and hold such in reputation: because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me.”**

It will be observed here in how lovely a manner Paul intertwines the Christian affections of the Philippians with that of Epaphroditus and himself. How deeply he himself values the self-sacrificing character of his “fellowsoldier.” Sickness in this case was evidently occasioned through an arduous journey to

reach the apostle, for the sake of the work of Christ. What the Philippians were unable to do for Paul personally, Epaphroditus had done through being their messenger. Now his recovery is deep comfort to the apostle's heart, and he so counts upon the warm affection of the Philippians also toward Epaphroditus, that he sends him immediately that they may rejoice in seeing that he is recovered, and their joy will further alleviate Paul's sorrow.

Let us note also that his recovery was “**mercy**” to him and to the apostle. There is no suggestion that they considered making any claim upon miraculous instantaneous healing, even in a case where sickness had been brought on altogether for Christ's sake. This lowly character is most becoming and instructive; and as we have seen, the chapter presses that we should follow such example: “**Let this mind be in you.**”



Chapter Three

Christ the Object and Prize of the Believer

It is far from irksome to the apostle to turn again to speak of rejoicing in the Lord. Simple and elementary as is his exhortation, he is not wearied in repeating “**the same things**.” “**For you it is safe**” he assures them. Blessed it is that most fundamentally vital things are the most simple and clear — yet bearing the most profound results. The springs of our souls’ delight must be “**in the Lord**” Himself: this is the one secret of all soul-prosperity. Nothing must be allowed to usurp His place of sole pre-eminence.

This chapter therefore appropriately sets Christ before the soul, not as does chapter 1 — the motivating power of life in the believer — nor as chapter 2, the example of the believer — but as the one Object to attract the eye and heart. Nor is He seen in humiliation on earth, as in chapter 2, but exalted in Glory — the Goal and eventual Prize of His saints. The mind of the believer, therefore, is to be one of seeking the greatest possible attainment — not attainment of any kind on earth, but that of conformity to Christ in Heaven — the attitude of one not satisfied with any gain or accomplishment in this world, but with every aspiration centered upon “the mark for the prize of the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus.”

In verse 2 the apostle uses strong, solemn terms in warning the saints against those who would, with subtle ingenuity, rob them

of their only real protection in a hostile world — their joy in the Lord. **“Beware of dogs”** — those unclean in nature, **“beware of evil workers”** — those evil in their works, **“beware of the concision”** — those vain in their so-called self-denial.

The verse evidently connects with verses 18 and 19, where we see assumed a specious religious character, but in reality enmity against the cross of Christ. Such are as **“dogs,”** bound merely by their earthly appetites. Working also to influence others in seeking earthly things, their work is branded as **“evil”** because it turns men’s eyes away from Christ in Glory. And finally, their boasted self-denial and meticulous religious scruple is shown as no real denial of self at all. For the apostle will not allow that such are the circumcision, but the **“concision,”** which means merely **“a cutting in the flesh”** — the flesh still very much in evidence and proud of its self-abnegation! How solemn an indictment against Russellism and other earthly-minded religions of men, which do not set Christ in Glory as the Goal and Prize before the souls of men.

For the true **“circumcision”** are those who **“worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.”** Circumcision is no mere **“cutting”** in the flesh, but a **“cutting off”** of the flesh. The flesh is allowed no place whatever: it is God who is worshipped, and not by means of carnal ordinances, fleshly sacrifices, penances, and the like, but **“in the Spirit.”** **“The true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth”** (John 4:23). In this, self is forgotten, and the soul will simply **“rejoice in Christ Jesus.”** For He is worthy of utmost confidence and adoration: the flesh, in its most favorable and pleasing forms, or in its most austere forms, is utterly treacherous and worthy of contempt.

Moreover, as verses 4 to 7 demonstrate, Paul speaks as one fully acquainted with the higher forms of religious advantage, refinement, and dignity with which the flesh may adorn itself.

If any man could rightly have confidence in the flesh, Paul was the man. If another could boast, he could boast more. But rather than boast, he would utterly repudiate any confidence in all such things. How clear and striking an example, which honesty cannot but face.

There are seven points that he now enumerates. Let us be clear that it is not that he now hates these things, but he thoroughly rejects all confidence in them: they are counted as **“dung,”** that is useless, not as hateful or contemptible.

First, he was **“circumcised the eighth day.”** This was exact religious ritual. Secondly, **“of the stock of Israel”** — the one race of God’s choice. Third, **“of the tribe of Benjamin,”** the only tribe that remained faithful to Judah when the ten tribes defected. Fourth, **“an Hebrew of the Hebrews.”** This name denotes the pilgrim character of the Jews, and in practical reality Paul was of the utmost separated Hebrew character, glorying in his separation from Gentiles. Fifth, **“as touching the law, a Pharisee,”** that is, of the most strictly orthodox sect. Sixth, **“Concerning zeal, persecuting the church,”** that is, unsurpassed in religious zeal. And seventh, **“touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless,”** his conduct outwardly blameless. To find greater external religious distinction would be impossible.

“But” he adds, with unhesitating conviction of faith, **“what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.”** Be it remarked here that he speaks not of the repulsive, undesirable evils of the flesh, but of the naturally desired and admired things — things that were valuable to him before his conversion. But one true glimpse of Christ, and their value becomes nothing: all is loss; for true gain is seen to be only in Him. Is this not a marked contrast to his Old Testament namesake, King Saul? When the latter was commanded by God to “smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have,” God’s Word was backed up by His enabling power, “and Saul smote the Amalekites.... And he took

Agag the king of the Amalekites alive.... But Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them: but every thing that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly” (1 Samuel 15:3-9). Amalek simply a type of the lusts of the flesh, and Saul was not prepared to destroy the finer, more respectable things of fleshly advantage. This sealed God’s rejection of him as king (v. 23). It is a question simply of whether Christ and His Word means more to us than the finest dignities, virtues, and advantages to be attained on earth.

“But surely I count also all things to be loss on account of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord” (JND). Thus the apostle sweeps the entire old creation into the discard, with no regrets, no looking back. In the knowledge of Christ there is supreme excellency, infinitely above everything that the most exalted experience on earth could afford. Nothing henceforth can turn his eye from Him whom He calls **“Christ Jesus my Lord.”** For Him he had **“suffered the loss of all things:”** note the expression **“all things”** for the second time in the verse. It was not merely that he gave up certain advantages out of appreciation for what Christ had done for him; but that the blessed Person of Christ as now glorified at God’s right hand, had so captivated his heart that he would deliberately and fully count everything as “refuse,” that he **“may win Christ.”**

This is manifestly not the subject of having Christ as the vital principle of life in his soul, as in chapter 1, nor having Christ as his Example, as in chapter 2, where the humiliation of the Lord is so dwelt upon; but rather having Christ as the Object and Prize before him — the ultimate end to which he aspires with longing heart. This aspiration is of course never to be realized on earth, but only in the Glory where the Object of such hope is seated at God’s right hand. His eyes look on to the end of his course: nothing less than arriving where Christ is can ever satisfy his heart.

But after speaking of this desire to “win Christ,” he adds, “and be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.” Only in that day will this be “found” fully and perfectly to be true of the apostle, as of every child of God — that is, it will be seen in its perfection as never before.

Yet, on the other hand, however little these precious truths are made publicly manifest and apprehended today, **they were no less true of Paul at that time than they will be in Glory**; and they are perfectly true of every believer today, though not yet publicly seen. That is, every saint of God is already “in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.” But though this is truth most vital and real to the soul, do our hearts not long for the day when it will be seen in all its full and blessed significance? This is what moves the apostle’s heart in writing as he does: he desires that everything might be seen fully to redound to the glory of God. It is quite the reverse of aspiring after his own exaltation, but it is nevertheless seeking the truest, purest blessing possible — for it is seeking Christ, **where He is**.

“That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.” Just as in the previous verse, so also in this, it was true already in one sense: Paul did know Christ and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death. This was a present, deep reality to his soul, wrought by the Spirit of God. But this viewpoint must not be confounded with that which he takes in penning this chapter. His desire here is to “know Him” by being in His very presence in Glory, to know literally “the power of His resurrection,” that is, through having to pass through sufferings from men, as the Lord

Jesus did, and actually experiencing death, as did his Lord, he might also actually experience the power of God in resurrection; thus knowing in literal experience — not simply in spiritual power — that which his Lord and Master has known. **“If by any means,”** he adds, **“I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.”** Let us mark here that he thus will consider nothing short of the coming of the Lord — the rapture of the saints — as any proper attainment. This is further confirmed by verses 20 and 21; but verses 12 to 16 show us the very real effects in the apostle’s whole conduct and character that were produced by the fact that this present life on earth will never gain pure satisfaction for the soul.

“Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.” Whatever might be accomplished for the Lord on earth, this was not his objective: if those things were proper results, they were the results of a proper objective, which was far beyond anything in the way of present blessing. Paul took not the slightest pride in any of these “attainments,” as men would call them: indeed he had not yet attained what he desired; he was not yet **“perfect,”** but still following after, He arrested him on his downward course and saved his soul. Christ Jesus had apprehended him for eternal glory: how could he settle down content with some earthly attainment?

It may be remarked here that this is but one of three ways in which the apostle views the subject of perfection. Here the question is that of perfection in attainment, and no one can in this way be perfect until with Christ in Glory. However, in this same chapter, verse 15, Paul writes, **“Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded.”** Here it is evident that he considers **some** believers to be perfect, and others not so. But the context shows this to be **perfection in our present attitude of mind.** That is, those who forget the things that are behind, and press toward the mark for the prize of the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus, are **“perfect”** or

“full grown” — that is mature in their attitude. But not all believers are perfect in this way. The third viewpoint is found in Hebrews 10:14: “For by one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.” Verse 10 shows that the “sanctified” refers to **all** who are redeemed by the blood of Christ — every true believer. This however has to do with **perfection in our acceptance before God**, an eternal perfection because dependent fully upon the one offering of Christ. Thus it will be noted that from the first point of view **no** believer is perfect; from the second, **some** believers are perfect; from the third, **every** believer is perfect.

“Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” Any present attainment was still only connected with the old creation which was passing away. Paul left this behind, and as an earnest racer set his mind on the goal and the Prize before him, “the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus” (JND). Let us note his words, “this one thing I do:” his undivided attention was given to this one object. This is truly the “single eye,” the “single heart,” and it is this that brings true results according to God.

“Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.” Thus the apostle makes full allowance for the individual exercise of faith. If one has been so drawn and enlightened by the Spirit of God as to see all fulness in Christ in Glory, and therefore emptiness in present things, let him apply this blessed truth in practice. If some are otherwise minded, however, the apostle does not at all encourage them to remain so, nor does he demand that they conform to his thoughts; but he turns their eyes to God, Who will reveal the truth to those who desire it. Yet, to whatever level faith

may have risen, let us act fully upon the truth that has been made known to our souls. My personal responsibility is to be measured by the Word of God, not by what I may see in others, though in deed the godly example of others may be a means of awakening in my soul some more true realization of my own responsibility. Yet it is always well to take care that only faith leads me to follow another's example.

Plainly, the apostle seeks to awaken this real exercise of personal faith as he exhorts, "**Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample.**" The context must be considered in reference to such a statement. Paul certainly sought no mere followers for himself; but in the attitude of mind expressed in this chapter, he is a decided example of believers. In this we may well be diligent to follow Paul, that is, to have our hearts and minds so set upon Christ in Glory, that nothing will detract us from "**this one thing.**" This is quite the opposite of being mere followers of Paul, but is following him in his devotedness of faith.

It was necessary for the saints to consider this carefully, for they must "**mark them which walk,**" that is, they must distinguish as to what was truly godliness on the part of those who professed Christianity. Let them be measured by the apostle's example. It may be observed that Paul also in 1 Corinthians twice exhorts the saints to be followers of him. In the first case (4:16) he presents his example of willingness to take the lowest place, suffering reproach and shame with cheerfulness for the Lord's sake. In the second case (11:1) he is an example in the spirit of lowly self-sacrifice that gladly gave up his personal rights if it might tend toward the blessing of another soul. These three exemplary characteristics have a close connection with one another, and form a lovely combination.

It is all too likely that we shall be deceived by the specious arguments and smooth words of those "**enemies of the cross of**

Christ” if we ourselves allow any lower objective than being with Christ in Glory to influence us. How well then to consider seriously and meditatively the character of the apostles, that thus we may be held fast in the path of God for us.

“**For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.**” How urgent a warning this, written with tears, yet how utterly forgotten and despised in our day! Even then it was no extraordinary thing that there were those professing Christianity who were yet enemies of the cross of Christ: “**many**” were of this character. But today, how greatly multiplied! And how sad beyond expression that saints of God will allow themselves to be grossly misled by men whose end is destruction. 2 Peter 2 shows us in clear terms the present-day development of this dreadful evil: “**And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of**” (v. 2).

This does not necessarily infer at all a low, debased type of moral conduct such as is easily discernible as evil in the world’s eyes. Doubtless it may lead to this in the end; but the character of such men as we find here is that of seeking earthly attainment, advantage, prominence, loudly urging the betterment of world conditions etc., and by this very attitude opposing the cross of Christ, which violently cuts off all that is of earth. Thus they dare to use Christianity for a purpose diametrically opposed to that for which it was given! The true and great purpose of the work of Christ is simply and pointedly expressed in Galatians 1:4: “**Who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from [or ‘out of’] this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father.**” Utterly in contrast to any object of improving the world, He came to save sinners out of the world, a world destined to the dreadful judgment of God. How great a crime then is that

manipulation of the Scriptures by which deceivers would blind men to the solemn truth of the imminent judgment of the world, as well as to the blessedness of knowing Christ in the Glory.

If it seems strong language to say that their god is their belly, it is still perfectly accurate: their sole object is really the satisfying of their personal, present desires: the true God is not in their thoughts. And they proudly boast in the very things which are actually to their shame! How grossly perverted are the thoughts of religious pretension! Their description ends with the simple statement which not even they would think of denying, **“who mind earthly things.”** Indeed, some are so blinded as to consider it sinful if we do **not** mind earthly things. Witness the indignant cry of democracy to the effect that we flagrantly fail in our duty if we refrain from voting and entering into political matters. Can the true children of God be deceived by this kind of hollow vanity? Alas, that such cases are greatly multiplied today. Is our heart really for the Lord, or is it for earthly comfort, prosperity, and advantage? Shall we who know Christ be so misled as to resemble these mere empty professors of Christianity, **“who mind earthly things?”** The ungodly world itself is not so blind but that it can discern the difference between the selfish, earthly-minded motives of such profession and those motives of godly faith that seek not mere earthly advantage, but the **“things which are not seen”** (2 Corinthians 4:18).

“For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.” The Greek word for conversation is that from which we derive our word **“politics,”** and is commonly rendered **“citizenship.”** How manifestly then are all the true interests of the believer bound up in his Heavenly inheritance, not on earth at all. Here we are **“strangers and pilgrims”** (Hebrews 11:13; 1 Peter 2:11) passing through a foreign country; or as **“ambassadors for Christ”** (2 Corinthians 5:20), representing Him to the world through which we pass. Engaging in **their**

politics then would be not only inconsistent, but assuming a role such as would be considered unlawful by the nations of the world. What right has a representative of one country to engage in the political affairs of another?

Such busy occupation with earthly things is certainly no testimony to the fact that **“we look for the Saviour.”** If this blessed hope is a very real thing to our souls, how could we ever think of entangling ourselves with things that in their effect would tend to hold us on earth?

For, be it remembered, as long as we are on earth, we are still in a **“body of humiliation” (JND)**, subjected to numerous things which are intended to humble us and make us feel how transitory and unsatisfactory is everything here. This is the negative side of things. But more important still, why do our hearts not yearn with deepest longing to be in Glory, simply because our Lord is there?

Verse 21 then brings us to the perfection to be attained at the Lord’s coming, **“Who shall transform our body of humiliation into conformity to His body of glory, according to the working of the power which He has even to subdue all things to Himself” (JND)**. The very fact of our having now a body of humiliation enfeebles and mars any attainment on earth — in which only stupidity could take satisfaction. But physically as well as morally we shall be like our Lord. Present limitations of the body, and present humiliation, will give place to unimagined capacity and glory. But enough for us to know that our bodies will be altered and fashioned like His own body of glory. Of this we know that the same body prepared for Him, the body which hung on Calvary and was buried, has been raised in glorified form — a body of “flesh and bones” (Luke 24:39) — and in this body our Lord has ascended back to Glory.

Do we have questions and difficulties as to the details of a bodily resurrection — as to how all this is possible? Surely all is marvellously simplified as we contemplate the resurrection of the

Lord Jesus, which is the pattern of our own. Miraculous power far above our present comprehension of things must certainly be involved; but this fact is only food for the believer's deeper rejoicing in Him who **"is able even to subdue all things unto Himself."** Thus the very act whereby we shall be brought bodily into the presence of Him whom we adore, will be an additional occasion of our wondering adoration. Does this not move our souls even now, as it did the apostle's, with the desire that all our path should take its character from so great and blessed an end?



Chapter Four

Christ the Satisfaction of the Soul

His heart overflowing at the contemplation of such an Object, the apostle in chapter 4 dwells upon the sufficiency of the Lord Jesus to supremely satisfy the soul. If in chapter 3 Christ is his Object in Glory, in this chapter Christ is his Strength for the wilderness pathway; and in contrast to Israel's constant murmuring in the wilderness, he tells us with a full heart, **"I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content."** Sweet testimony to the fulness of love and grace in his adorable Saviour!

And toward the Philippians, too, his heart expands: **"my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown."** This must be the result of all true occupation with Christ. If we thirst for the blessed knowledge of Himself, we spontaneously seek that others, too, might enjoy Him, and the spirit in which we do so will be one of tenderest consideration and entreaty. The Philippians were even then his **"joy,"** and would in Glory be his **"crown."**

"So stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved." Since he loves them, he can desire no less for them than a firm, steadfast stand **"in the Lord,"** in accordance with the moving truths of chapter 2. It will be noted that the first nine verses of this chapter are mainly devoted to exhorting the saints; and it is appropriate that they are first urged to maintain a single-hearted devotedness to the Lord that will not waver in the face of trial.

But this is quickly followed by a plea for unity of mind. He addresses two sisters in the Lord, perhaps both of spiritual character, for their names (Euodias — “well met” and Syntyche — “a sweet smell”) have good implications. Yet each evidently had a mind of her own, and they were at issue. Beautiful it is to note that the apostle will not take sides, but tenderly beseeches them to **“be of the same mind in the Lord.”** For, to **“stand fast in the Lord”** does not mean to be disagreeable toward others. Unity may be maintained, and **should** be, and indeed **will** be, if we simply seek the Lord’s mind instead of our own.

In becoming moral order, helping follows closely with unity; **“I entreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the Gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellowlaborers, whose names are in the book of life.”** This is evidently addressed to Epaphroditus, the bearer of the epistle. It may well be that Euodias and Syntyche were among the women of whom Paul speaks. But he entreats Epaphroditus in this case to help them, not to reprimand them. Those who have sought by labor to further the work of the Gospel will be the special object of Satan’s attacks, and to help them is only right, and particularly spiritually, as the verse doubtless implies. God is not unrighteous, that He should forget their work and labor of love, and the apostle too speaks of it in manifest appreciation, **“whose names,”** he adds, **“are in the book of life.”** Man’s books of history and biography had no place for such, but how infinitely more honored a distinction was theirs!

A fourth characteristic is now strongly urged in verse 4: **“Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, rejoice.”** He has said the same before, but it is a matter to be much emphasized. For, blessed as it is to be a help to others, there is real danger of making this the chief occasion of our joy. Many are turned aside by this snare, and we must be diligent to remember that the joy of being useful cannot in any wise substitute for joy in the Lord. Let us

seek this with humble consistency, for every other occasion of joy has failure, fluctuation, and feebleness in it. **He** abides the same.

Verse 5 however would remind us that such joy should be tempered by a gentleness or moderation that should be evident to all men. If the joy in the Lord is real — not mere effusion — we shall have a readiness to yield our own rights, a gentle reasonableness that seeks not self-importance or self-assertion, so that some have suggested the word “yieldingness” in place of “**moderation.**” This will be possible in just such measure as we realize that “**the Lord is near**” (JND). It is the blessed experience of “endur[ing] as seeing Him who is invisible” (Hebrews 11:27); not exactly the expectation of His coming, but the sweet, **present** sense of His nearness.

But this again is closely followed by another becoming exhortation: “**Be [anxious] for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.**” Unbelief would urge that we are endangering our very existence by a gentle spirit that yields what may be our own rights. Should we therefore be anxious about such things? Far from it: “**be [anxious] for nothing.**” Yet this is an impossibility without prayer. Hence, prayer is our sixth positive responsibility mentioned here. This is the blessed expression of dependence upon the Living God, the only real preservation from distracting care. If we are to be anxious for **nothing**, it manifestly follows that in **everything** we should pray. Blessed reassurance for the soul that not the smallest matter that may concern the believer’s heart is too trivial for our God and Father. All should be brought candidly and earnestly to Him, where it will be well taken care of. In supplication we see this earnestness that pleads in the presence of God, so beautifully exemplified in our holy Lord in Gethsemane: “being in an agony He prayed more earnestly” (Luke 22:44).

But along with this we are given a seventh admonition:

“with thanksgiving.” Here is a most important preservative for our prayers. Even supplication is not to be demanding, but the expression of earnest desire for the will of God. A spirit of thanksgiving will keep us from the doubts and reasonings that are too often present when we are seeking something from God. Has He not met our real needs in the past? And are we not profoundly thankful for this? Thus quiet confidence as to the future is produced in the soul: “**the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.**” Blessed result of true, lowly communion with God.

This is a very practical and experimental peace. “Peace **with God**” (Romans 5:1) is manifestly to be distinguished from this, for all the children of God, on the basis of the sacrifice of Christ, **have** peace with God by faith: it is their eternal possession immediately upon conversion. “**The peace of God**” rather is that tranquillity of soul that rests in the will of God: it is the same blessed peace seen in its perfection in all the path of the Lord Jesus. And such is a very real guard for the heart and mind, as the passage has been rightly translated, “shall garrison your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Yet this infinitely strong protection and comfort can be enjoyed by the believer **only** as he acts truly upon the instruction of verse 6: this alone will give the calm, tranquil peace of a mind and heart resting in the blessed will of God. There is no real reason that this should not be the common experience of all saints: alas, that it is not more constantly so!

Verse 8 now supplies the eighth admonition of our chapter, dealing with our very **thinking**. Is it asking too much that our thoughts should be kept in definite bounds? Surely not. Indeed this is a vital though hidden spring of our actions, and if our thoughts are kept pure, certainly our actions will be also. The real reason for outward failure is our more serious failure in disciplining and controlling our minds.

The mind is an amazing instrument, constantly active, and

ever forming itself according to the character of those things which occupy it. Hence we are first told to think on **“whatsoever things are true.”** This sets aside all idealistic fancies, books of fiction, and the like. Of what is true there is far more than enough to engage our whole time: how then find time for the empty imaginings of men’s minds? Secondly, **“whatsoever things are noble”** (JND). For there are some things true that may not yet be noble, not profitable for the soul. Thirdly, **“whatsoever things are just.”** This speaks of the character of equity or fairness, a most needful addition to truth and nobility. Fourthly, **“whatsoever things are pure,”** that which has no admixture of an inconsistent nature. Fifthly, **“whatsoever things are lovely.”** This adds a character of warmth which may be lacking in the former things, but must not be considered apart from them. Sixthly, **“whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise.”** This seems to be an over-all covering of the verse, a sort of crowning of the commendable characteristics that should occupy our minds. **“Think on these things.”**

Verse 9 now ends these admonitions with “doing” in the 9th place, not in the first, as many would prefer. Yet its place is seriously important: doing must flow from the former things or its character will be sadly deficient. **“Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.”** As in chapter 3, Paul is decidedly an example here, and the former chapter may well be again considered in connection with this verse. His single-hearted, devoted path of service to God and man is well worth emulating. “If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them” (John 13:17).

The Philippians had first **learned** the practical character of Christianity through Paul’s conduct among them. They had **received** these things as of God, they had **seen** them in operation, and now that he was gone they had **heard** that he maintained the same characteristics. His was a living example of his own

teachings.

Let them follow him, and they would find the same results as he: **“The God of peace shall be with you.”** God’s own presence in living power with them would give His approval of such ways. We might here be reminded that in verse 7 **“the peace of God”** is the result of dependent, believing prayer: in verse 9 the presence of **“the God of peace”** is the result of **doing** the will of God.

The apostle now turns to speak more personally, **“But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now however at length ye have revived your thinking of me, though surely ye did also think of me, but lacked opportunity”** (JND). The unfeigned and unselfish joy is beautiful to contemplate. The Philippians had desired before to send some temporal help to the apostle, but lacked opportunity, for their temporal resources were strictly limited. Their deep affection strongly affects the heart of Paul, and he greatly rejoices in the Lord at this willing sacrifice of their substance for the Lord’s sake.

“Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.” It was **not his** benefiting that so rejoiced his heart, but rather **their** affection for Christ, which he knew would bear fruit to their account. Wondrous it is to think of Paul’s thorough contentment even in a Roman prison. He considered that he needed little indeed. Let us remark however, that this was not his natural character, but that he had **“learned”** to be content, doubtless through most trying experience and with unfeigned confidence in the Living God. Self-seeking is natural to the human heart: contentment therefore must be learned.

“I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.” Let us note his emphasis on the word **“how.”** For it is all too possible to be abased and to take it in a wrong spirit. Not so with the apostle:

“how to be abased” implies a cheerful acceptance of God’s will in it. On the other hand, **“how to abound”** is in some respects a more severe test for many of us, for this implies a proper and godly use, according to the will of God, of those things in which He has made us to abound. We must also observe another expression here: **“I am instructed.”** In measure like his Master, who “wakeneth mine ear to hear as the instructed.” (Isaiah 50:4 JND). He was not **self-taught** in his contentment with whatever circumstances: **God** had taught him, and the instruction was welcome to his soul.

In all the varied circumstances through which the apostle passed, he recognizes the perfect control of God, Who uses them in His own wise way for the benefit of His servant. Without such experience, he could not have been so instructed. May we not therefore shrink from those experiences through which our God would lead us: they are calculated to properly instruct us, as no other means would do.

Moreover, such things are necessary in order to display the superlative strength that is in Christ and working in His dependent servant. **“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”** This was no mere sentiment or high ideal, so far as the apostle was concerned, but a claim abundantly verified in stern experience. His facing of circumstances as they were, bringing Christ into them, and making them a fruitful field of blessing, is a lovely display of the power of Christ over his own soul. All too lightly others may take such words into their lips — for experience does not bear them out — but the apostle speaks as one who has thus proven Christ in very real experience.

Yet, he is unfeignedly grateful for the affection that moved the Philippians in their ministering to his temporal need: **“Ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction.”** Moreover, he adds that no other assembly had, at the beginning of the Gospel in those parts, shown the same self-sacrificing love in giving of their substance for his support. But they had twice sent

to him in Thessalonica after he had left Macedonia. With them it was no case of “out of sight, out of mind:” they had kept him in their hearts during his absence. This was affecting to his soul, “not” as he assures them, “because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account.” Such indeed is the becoming attitude of the servant of Christ, however rare it may sadly be. But shall we not rejoice unfeignedly at the judgment seat of Christ for every commendation and reward which the Lord Jesus is able to bestow upon His saints? Certainly there will be no selfish or jealous motives then: therefore let it not be so now.

With profound thankfulness the apostle assures them, “**But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God.**” It may be remembered that the sweet-savour offerings in Leviticus were those which speak of the blessed value to God of the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, that which delighted the heart of God in the devoted, voluntary offering of His Son. Thus, the affectionate offerings of the saints of God are a sweet reminder to His heart of the sacrifice of His Son. How acceptable therefore, and well-pleasing to Him! And how becoming a response to His own great love in the sacrifice of His Son.

Would such a God allow them to suffer need because of their liberality? Far from it! Well had the apostle learned in experience the sufficiency of his God: “**But my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.**” Let it be well understood however, that this giving is the intelligent service of devoted affection for Christ. We are solemnly responsible, not simply to give, but to give as honoring the Lord. This must involve exercise of soul as to when, where, and in what manner to give. We could not rightly expect God to supply our needs if we squandered that which He had entrusted to us.

But the resources of our God are infinite, for who can measure

the riches of His glory in Christ Jesus? Nor can His great heart of love suffer any less standard as to supplying the need of His saints. Therefore let His saints consider no lesser standard. The heart filled with Christ cannot but be deeply content.

As to all of this the apostle may well ascribe the glory to **“our God and Father ... for ever and ever.”** If Christ is the satisfying portion and strength of the soul, the glory of the Father is intimately linked with this.

In the closing salutations let us remark once again the pastoral character of the epistle, as the apostle, with expanded heart, writes, **“Salute every saint in Christ Jesus.”** No individual will he ignore. On the other hand, the brethren linked with Paul in his imprisonment join him in sending greetings. And this widens to include **“all the saints,”** and **“specially they that are of Caesar’s household”** (JND). Touching indeed this fruit of the grace of God in the soldiers and prison authorities, whose affection for Paul and all saints had been so drawn out through the apostle’s faithful witness, by which doubtless they had been converted. How manifestly had his imprisonment **“fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the Gospel”** (1:12).

“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.” Thus the benediction, warm and affectionate, ends with the characteristic **“all,”** that is, all the saints of God. Christ is seen to be in every sense the true Centre, and the circumference is complete.

