

THE EPISTLE TO THE PHILIPPIANS

BY

Arno Clement Gaebelein

1861-1942

In the Public Domain

THE EPISTLE TO THE PHILIPPIANS

Introduction

The city of Philippi was built as a military position by Philip the Great of Macedon to keep the wild Thracians in check, which were the neighbors of the Macedonians. Later it became a Roman colony by Augustus, as a memorial of his victory over Brutus and Cassius. It was not a very important city. The Jews had not settled there at all, so that the city did not contain a synagogue. In Acts 16:12 Philippi is called "the chief city of that part of Macedonia." This does not mean that Philippi was the chief city of all Macedonia, which Thessalonica was; but Philippi was the chief city of that district and the first city to which Paul and his companions came. The historical record of the apostle's visit to Philippi and how the gospel was preached there, for the first time on European ground, is found in the book of Acts (chapter 16). The conversion of Lydia, her hospitality to the servants of Christ, the demon possessed girl and her deliverance, the suffering of Paul and Silas on account of it, their prayer and praise in the prison, the earthquake, the conversion of the jailer and of his house, are the interesting and blessed incidents connected with the beginning of the church in Philippi. The apostle probably visited this city twice after this (Acts 20:1 and 6), though the details of these visits are not reported in the book of Acts.

The church in Philippi was greatly attached to the Apostle Paul. He had no need to defend his apostleship and authority, for the Philippians had not been affected by the false Judaizing teachers, who had wrought such havoc in Galatia and Corinth. This must have been due to the fact that there were few Jews in that city. But the apostle evidently feared the invasion of the Philippian assembly by these false teachers. This we learn from the warning given in chapter 3:2. The church itself was poor and had much trial and affliction; yet did they minister out of their deep poverty to other needy saints (2 Cor. 8:1-2; Phil. 1:28-30). They had also ministered liberally to the apostle twice shortly after he had left them (Phil. 4:15-16); he received their fellowship in Thessalonica. The third time they had remembered him. Epaphroditus was their messenger who brought the love-gift to the prisoner of the Lord. In return the apostle sent to the beloved Philippians another gift, this beautiful Epistle, dictated by the Spirit of God.

Written From Rome

That this Epistle to the Philippians was written by Paul seems almost impossible to doubt. "Indeed, considering its peculiarly Pauline psychological character, the total absence from it of all assignable motive for falsification, the spontaneity and fervor of its effusions of feeling--he must be a bold man who would call its authorship in question" (Alford). Yet the critics are bold and leave nothing unquestioned and some have questioned the genuineness of this document. Needless to say the Epistle has not suffered by this foolish criticism. The ancient testimony of Polycarp, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria and others mentions this epistle as being Pauline and written by him in Rome, during his imprisonment, of which we read in Acts 28:30-31. The question arises at what time of his prison life he wrote this letter. It was not in the very beginning, but must have been to wards the end. The Philippians had heard of his imprisonment and had made up a sum of money which Epaphroditus carried in person to Rome. And Epaphroditus had fallen sick and the Philippians had heard of his severe illness "nigh unto death" (Phil. 2:30). This sickness of their beloved Epaphroditus had been in turn reported to them (Phil. 2:26) and the apostle heard how they had been grieved on account of it. All this necessitated a number of journeys from Rome to Philippi and back. This took a good many months. And furthermore, in the beginning of his stay in Rome he dwelt for two years in his own hired house and seemed to have perfect liberty (Acts 28:30). In his epistle to the Philippians he writes that he is in the praetorium and no longer in his own house. "But I would have you know, brethren, that the circumstances in which I am here turned out rather to the furtherance of the gospel, so that my bonds have become manifest as being in Christ in all the praetorium and to all others" (Phil. 1:12-13, revised translation). The praetorium was the place where the praetorium guards were kept, next to the palace of the Emperor Nero. He had now been put in stricter confinement and felt his bonds more severely (Phil. 1:18). The Epistle must therefore have been written by him after the Epistles to the Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon, that is, about the middle of the year 63 A.D.

The Epistle of Christian Experience

Philippians is put in our Bibles between Ephesians and Colossians. A better arrangement is to put this Epistle after Colossians. The Epistle to the Ephesians shows the believer's position in Christ and what he possesses in Him; Colossians reveals the glory of Christ as the Head of the body in whom all the fulness of the Godhead dwells bodily. Philippians also speaks of Christ, but not in a doctrinal way. It is an Epistle which describes the walk and the life of one who has apprehended his position in Christ and walks therefore in the power of the Spirit of God. It shows what manner of lives those should live on earth who are saved by grace and who are waiting for glory. The epistle assumes the knowledge of what the salvation of God is. We therefore find nothing said about justification, peace with God or assurance of salvation. The word "salvation" as used in Philippians has nowhere the meaning of salvation by grace in the sense of deliverance from guilt and condemnation. Philippians shows us what true Christian experience is in the power of the Spirit of God. The words "sins" and "sin" are not found in this Epistle. The true believer knows that his sins are put away and that the old man was crucified with Christ. The question of deliverance from the guilt of sin and from the power of sin, as so blessedly revealed in Romans, does not enter into true Christian experience. True Christian experience is to walk in the power of the Holy Spirit and to manifest Christ in that walk. This the Epistle to the Philippians reveals from beginning to end. The name of our Lord is used over fifty times in the four

chapters. He is the believer's life; Christ must be always before the heart and He must be made known by the believer in his life, following Him as the pattern and looking to Him as the goal.

The words "joy" and "rejoicing" are used eighteen times in Philippians. It is the Epistle of rejoicing. "He went on his way rejoicing" is the description of the experience of the eunuch after he had believed on the Lord. The true believer's way should be one of constant rejoicing. The whole atmosphere of this Epistle is that of joy, and so the believer in whatever earthly circumstances he may be placed should manifest the joy of the Lord. Paul, the great apostle, and now the prisoner of the Lord, as years before in the Philippian prison, sends forth from the Roman prison the triumphant song of faith and holy joy. There is not a word of murmur or complaint. It is "counting it all joy" and "glorying in tribulation." He had Christ; He knew Christ; Christ was his all; he knew himself in His hands and the glorious goal was ever before him and the Holy Spirit filled him therefore with joy. And such should be the experience of every believer. The word Philippians means "those who love horses." The racehorse in fullest energy stretches its neck to reach the goal. This epistle describes also the Christian race. This is especially seen in the third chapter where the energy and holy ambition of the new life to win Christ, to attain and to reach the goal is given. The Epistle likewise reveals the real affection and fellowship which exists between the servant of the Lord and those who have received blessing through his ministry. The annotations of this precious little Epistle contain many hints on the true Christian experience and walk.

The Division of Philippians

The division into four chapters is the correct one. As stated in the introduction it is true Christian experience which this little Epistle unfolds, showing the motives which should govern the believer in his life, the energy he should manifest, the resources which are at his disposal and the victory over all circumstances through Christ. The Christian in a normal, spiritual condition as seen in this Epistle has been aptly described as on a journey with an object before him, which is Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ is therefore the theme of each chapter. Hence we have four aspects of the true Christian life and experience.

In the first chapter Christ is made known as the all-controlling principle of the life of the believer. Christ is our life; He indwells the believer, and true Christian life and experience is to live for Him and be fully controlled by the Lord. "For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain" (1:21). In the second chapter Christ is seen in His humiliation and obedience as the believer's pattern. The One who passed through this life, who left the glory to humble Himself, who was obedient unto death, the death of the cross; He who endured the cross and despised the shame, who is now exalted at the right hand of God and has a name which is above every name, is to be constantly before the believer's heart. "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (2:5). In the third chapter Christ is the bright object and the final goal before the believer. In the energy of the new life the believer reaches out after that goal, never satisfied with anything else. It is the desire to win actually Christ, to lay hold of that for which he has been laid hold of by Christ. "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 from the dead" (3:10-11). In the fourth chapter we learn that

Christ is enough for all circumstances. The believer, who, like the great apostle, can say, "for me to live is Christ"; who ever follows His path of self-humiliation and obedience, constantly reaching out for the goal, will find that Christ is sufficient for all earthly circumstances. "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me" (4:13). This then is the division of this brief but most important and practical Epistle:

- \I. CHRIST, THE CONTROLLING PRINCIPLE OF THE BELIEVER'S LIFE (1)
- II. CHRIST, THE BELIEVER'S PATTERN (2)
- III. CHRIST, THE OBJECT AND THE GOAL (3)
- IV. CHRIST, THE BELIEVER'S STRENGTH, SUFFICIENT FOR ALL CIRCUMSTANCES (4)

Analysis and Annotations

I. CHRIST, THE CONTROLLING PRINCIPLE OF THE BELIEVER'S LIFE

CHAPTER 1

1. The introduction (1:1-2)
2. The fellowship in the gospel (1:3-8)
3. The apostle's prayer (1:9-11)
4. Paul's victory (1:12-20)
5. Paul's life and confidence (1:21-26)
6. Exhortation to walk worthy of the gospel (1:27-30)

Verses 1-2. The introductory words to this Epistle differ from those of the preceding epistles in that he does not mention his apostleship. The reason for this omission is because his letter to the Philippians does not unfold the great doctrines of the gospel, nor does it correct evil teachings. In writing to them about his own experience as illustrating Christian experience, he does so as a member of the body of Christ. Associating Timotheus, his son in the gospel, with himself as servant of Christ Jesus, he addresses all the saints in Philippi with the bishops and deacons.

Notice the way the name of our Lord is used in this opening verse of the Epistle: "Servants of Christ Jesus" (not Jesus Christ as in the authorized version) and "saints in Christ Jesus." Christ is His name as the Risen One, as Peter declared on the day of Pentecost, "God has made Him both Lord and Christ." The attention is directed at once to Him as the Risen, Glorified One by putting His title "Christ" first.

Believers are saints, that is, separated ones, and servants in the risen, exalted Lord; He must ever be before the heart in life and walk down here and all service must come from Himself. All the saints are mentioned first and then the bishops and deacons. The bishops are the overseers, who are also called elders; the deacons were ministers. The custom of ritualistic Christendom in electing a man a bishop, who has charge over a diocese, the oversight of so many churches, with certain functions of authority, is not according to Scripture. They had a number of bishops, overseers, in the small assembly in Philippi as well as in Ephesus. Acts 20:28 gives their work and responsibility. "Take heed therefore unto

yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers (bishops), to feed the Church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood." And these chosen ones who labor for the flock are to be recognized and esteemed. "And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you. And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake" (1 Thess. 5:12-13). The deacons probably ministered more in temporal affairs. Of bishops and deacons and their qualifications the apostle writes more fully in 1 Tim. 3.

Verses 3-8. And as he remembered them all and thought of their love and devotion he thanked God for them. "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, because of your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now." He remembers with praise to God their fellowship in the gospel, how they took part in the trials, labors, conflicts occasioned by the preaching of that gospel. They had taken a zealous part in the gospel Paul preached and manifested a loving interest by ministering to the needs of the Lord's servant. The remembrance of all which had happened when he was in Philippi and their combined fellowship and steadfastness filled the prisoner of the Lord with gratitude and joy. Therefore he prayed for them continually; he carried them upon his heart and in the prayer of intercession mentioned their names before the throne of grace. How Christ-like this was. He ever carries His dear people upon His heart and intercedes for them.

if we love the saints of God we also will pray for them. This gives joy, courage and confidence. "Being confident of this very thing, that He who hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. Even as it is meet for me to think of you all because ye have me in your hearts, and that, both in my bonds and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace." (The Authorized Version has it "because I have you in my heart"; the correct translation is "Ye have me in your hearts.") The grace of God had wrought this loving spirit in the Philippians; the Lord had produced all this interest in the gospel and their whole-hearted devotion. And so the apostle is confident that He who had done all this in them, who had begun the good work, would surely complete it until the day of Jesus Christ, when all His saints meet Him face to face. They had him in their hearts, not merely as a fellow-saint, but they had loving sympathy for him in his sufferings and as the one who suffered for the defence and confirmation of the gospel. And Paul, knowing their love and heart-fellowship, in return longed after them. The response to their affection was his affectionate desire. What a blessed illustration of the command of our Lord, "A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another, as I have loved you, that ye also love one another" (John 13:34). How little of this real affection there is among the children of God! How much faultfinding, sectarian exclusion from fellowship, especially among those who claim deliverance from sectarianism, and how little real manifestation of love towards all the saints! It is one of the leading characteristics of the Laodicean condition.

Verses 9-11. The apostle now utters his inspired prayer for them. It is still the prayer of the Holy Spirit for God's people. They had love, but he prays that their love may abound yet more and more. But this abounding love is to be "in knowledge and all intelligence." Love must not and will not tolerate evil. If the heart is fixed on the Lord Jesus Christ, then the Christian will manifest this love in knowledge and all intelligence, having

discernment of good and evil. As Christ is before the heart the believer will abound yet more and more in love and also "judge of and approve the things that are excellent." Walking after this rule means to be "pure and without offence till the day of Christ." That day is not the Old Testament day of the Lord, when He is revealed on earth in power and glory to judge and to establish His kingdom, but it is the day for the saints when they meet Him in the air and then appear before His judgment seat. And such a walk produces the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God. Thus it is seen that love is the source of everything in the life of the believer.

Verses 12-20. After the words of love and prayer Paul speaks of himself and his circumstances. But how does he speak of that which had happened unto him? There is not a word of murmur or complaint. Not a word of uncertainty or doubt. Not even a thought of self-pity or discontent. He might have accused himself about having gone to Jerusalem; to create sympathy he might have complained and described his bonds and the sufferings. But he rises above all. Christ is in his life the controlling principle. His own self is out of sight and he bears joyful testimony how all turned out for good, for the furtherance of the gospel. He had written to the Romans years before that all things work together for good to them that love God. In Rome, a prisoner, he shows practically the truth of that statement. The overruling hand of the Lord was manifested in the furtherance of the gospel, even in the praetorium, adjoining Nero's palace. it was enough for him who was so devoted to Christ and the gospel of grace. And his bonds encouraged many in becoming more bold to speak the word without fear. Who were they who preached Christ out of envy and strife, who tried to add still more affliction to his bonds? They were such who were selfish, envying the great apostle for his gifts and power. They were jealous of him. And now when he was in prison, his widespread activities completely arrested, they began to speak against his person and perhaps used his imprisonment as an evidence against him, that claiming too much authority, the Lord had set him aside. By their envy and strife, they would add affliction to the apostle. And yet they preached Christ. The prisoner of the Lord rises above it all. He is not self controlled, but Christ controls him. And so he writes, "What then? notwithstanding every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice." God was with His servant; and instead of the self-seeking which instigated these sorry preachers of the truth, there was found in Paul the pure desire for the proclamation of the gospel of Christ, the whole value of which he deeply felt, and which he desired above all, be it in what way it might. His own self was completely out of sight. Christ was his all; in Him he rejoiced and though he was in prison he was filled with joy and the worthy Name was being proclaimed.

He speaks next of his confidence that this will turn out to his salvation through their prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. What salvation is it he means? It is not salvation in the sense of deliverance from guilt and condemnation. Of this the Apostle Paul was not in doubt; for this he did not need the prayers of others. Deliverance from the guilt of sins and from condemnation is the gift of God in Christ Jesus. We are saved once for all by the finished work of the cross. To this salvation nothing can be added. Believers are saved and forever safe in Christ. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). Salvation in the New Testament has two more meanings. There is a salvation for the believer when the Lord Jesus comes again. "We are saved in hope" (Rom. 8:24). And there is a present salvation which the

believer needs day by day as he journeys towards the blessed goal. In the midst of trials, temptations, hardships and other perils, victory over all these things is to be gained and Christ's name to be exalted and glorified. The salvation we have in Christ through Christ is to be practically manifested. For this the apostle desired the prayers of the Philippians; for this he needed, and we also, the supply of the Spirit. The latter certainly not in the sense, as some teach, of a new baptism of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit indwells the believer and if the heart is set upon Christ and controlled by Him, the supply of the Spirit will not be lacking. Therefore the apostle's earnest expectation and hope was that he would be ashamed in nothing, that he would be victor in all these circumstances. Christ would be magnified in his body whether by life or by death.

Verses 21-26. The great principle of his life, the all governing principle, was Christ. He was all in Paul's life. "For me to live is Christ" means that Christ lived in him (Gal. 2:20); he lived by Him and for Him. If death should come it would be gain, for it would bring him to Christ. But he finds himself in a strait betwixt two things. He has a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which would be far better and yet, if he was to live still down here, it was worth his while. Far better for him personally to depart and be delivered from all the conflicts, trials and sufferings; but, on the other hand, the needs down here, the saints who needed him and his labors, induce him to decide to choose "to abide in the flesh," for it was more needful for them. So he decides to remain, no matter what sufferings were still in store for him, so that he might minister unto their spiritual needs. How unselfish! How very much like Christ! Self again is all out of sight. And there is no mention made of Nero and his power. Through faith Paul knew himself not in the hands of Rome but in the hands of Christ.

We must not overlook the argument against the false doctrine of soul-sleep, which is contained in the words of the apostle, "to depart and be with Christ, which is far better." This false doctrine claims that when the believer dies he passeth into a state of unconsciousness. if this were true it would certainly not be "far better" to depart, or as the original states, "much more better." Enjoying the fellowship with the Lord is a good and blessed thing. To pass out of the body and to be with Him is "much more better," for in the disembodied state, the saints of God enjoy and know the Lord in a degree that is impossible down here. And the best of all is when the Lord comes and all the redeemed receive their glorified bodies.

Verses 27-30. And now he desires that their life should be worthy of the gospel he loved so well. He wants them to stand fast in one spirit and with one mind striving together for the gospel; this was to be their attitude whether he was present with them or absent. only the Holy Spirit could accomplish this; He only can give to believers oneness in all things and power to strive together for the gospel. Walking thus believers need not to be terrified by the adversaries, those who oppose and reject the gospel. These adversaries always try to inspire fear, like the enemies of Israel in the land. But looking to the Lord, letting Him govern all things, walking in the Spirit, was an evident testimony of their own promised salvation (which here means the final deliverance) and to their enemies an evident token of perdition. And suffering through which they passed in Philippi, as well as that of the apostle in the prison of Rome, is viewed as a gift of God, just as much as believing on Christ. It is then a gracious, God-given privilege to suffer for His sake. Murmuring and complaining will be completely silenced when suffering for Christ's sake is

looked upon as a gift of grace. "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so persecuted they the prophets, which were before you."

II. CHRIST, THE BELIEVER'S PATTERN

CHAPTER 2

1. Oneness of mind through self effacement (2:1-4)
2. The humiliation and exaltation of Christ (2:5-11)
3. Work out your own salvation (2:12-13)
4. As lights in the world (2:14-16)
5. The example of Paul (2:17-18)
6. The example of Timotheus (2:19-24)
7. The example of Epaphroditus (2:25-30)

Verses 1-4. This chapter puts before us Christ as our pattern. The path He went is to be the believer's path. He trod the way, and the many sons He brings ere long with Himself to glory are called upon to follow Him in the same way. And what honor, what glory, to be called to follow in the same path! The chapter begins with a loving appeal of the prisoner of the Lord. He reminds them of the comfort in Christ which was their blessed portion, of the comfort of love and the fellowship of the Spirit and the bowels of mercies, the result of these precious possessions of the gospel. And now while they had manifested all this in a practical way among themselves and towards the apostle, he tells them that they would fulfill his joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, united in soul and thinking one thing. That they had difficulties among themselves may be learned from the fourth chapter. And so he desired that all might be one. it is a precious echo of our Lord's prayer in John 17. Nothing is to be done among His people in the self-seeking spirit of strife or vainglory. This is the spirit of the natural man and of the world.

The true way which becomes the followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, who live by Him and for Him, is to esteem the other better than himself in lowliness of mind, regarding not each his own things (or qualities) but each the things of others also. To walk in such a manner is only possible with those who have received, by being born again, a new nature and walk in the power of the Spirit of God. To be utterly forgetful of self, complete self effacement and self-denial and thus the absence of strife and vainglory and the manifestation of true humility, is the manifestation of the mind of Christ. But is it possible at all times to esteem each other better than himself?

We let another answer: "There will be no difficulty in this if we are really walking before God; we shall be occupied with each other's good, and the one will esteem the other better than himself, because when the soul is really before the Lord, it will see its own short-comings and imperfections, and will be in self-judgment; and according to the love and spirit of Christ see all the good that is from Him in a brother and one dear to Him, and will therefore look upon his fellow-Christian as better than himself, and so all would be in beautiful harmony; and we should be looking after each other's interests too"--(J.N. Darby, Philippians). How true it is, love likes to be a servant; selfishness likes to be served.

Verses 5-11. With the fifth verse begins that portion of the chapter which reveals Christ as our pattern. Christ in His humiliation and His exaltation; Christ who did not please Himself, who was obedient unto death, the death of the cross; Christ, who is now exalted and has a name which is above every other name, is blessedly before us in these verses. There are seven steps which lead down deeper and deeper, even to the death of the cross. And there are seven steps which lead up higher and higher.

His Humiliation

1. He thought it not robbery to be equal with God
2. He humbled Himself
3. He became a servant.
4. He was made in the likeness of man.
5. He was found in fashion as a man.
6. He became obedient.
7. Obedient to the death of the cross.

His Exaltation

1. God highly exalted Him.
2. Gave Him the Name above every name.
3. Every knee is to bow at His name.
4. Things in heaven must acknowledge Him.
5. Things on earth.
6. Things under the earth.
7. Every tongue must confess Him as Lord.

"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." The Spirit of Christ is in the believer for this very purpose, not that we should be imitators of Christ, but that His own life may be reproduced in us. We have this mind of Christ in the divine nature. What wonderful grace that we are called with such a calling, to be in His fellowship and follow His own path! Having delivered us from guilt and condemnation we are called to walk even as He walked down here, the author and finisher of the faith.

We trace briefly His path. We behold Him first in His absolute deity, "subsisting in the form of God." He ever was and is God; as we know from the opening of the gospel of John, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God." Who can describe what glory was His? And the equality with God which is His He did not esteem an object to be grasped at, but He emptied Himself (This is the correct translation and better than the King James version, "He made of Himself no reputation.") He gave up something which was His; He laid aside His outward glory. Some teach that He laid aside His deity. This is positively an unscriptural and evil doctrine. It is widely known in theological circles as the kenosis-theory, which is so dishonoring to our adorable Lord. He could never be anything else but the true God and the eternal life. He came down from the heights of eternal and unfathomable glory and took on a body prepared for Him, yet in that body He was very God. John 17:5 shows of what He emptied Himself.

The next step tells us that He who gave up, came down. "He took upon Him the form of a servant, taking His place in the likeness of men." Had He taken upon Himself the form of an angel, it would have been a humiliation, for He created the angels. But He was made a little lower than the angels. He took on the servant's form in the likeness of men. But in Him was no

sin, so that it was impossible for Him to sin, for He knew no sin and was in all points tempted as we are, apart from sin.

But the path did not end with this. He who gave up the glory, He who came down and became a servant also became obedient. It was an obedience unto death, the death of the cross. Wonderful condescension and love. It was all for our sake. And redeemed by His precious blood, called into His own fellowship, His way must become ours; we are to follow Him. If we then consider Him and let this mind be in us which was also in Christ Jesus, self will have nothing more to say; all strife and vainglory will be at an end. And this path of giving up, coming down, true humility, self-denial and true obedience is the only one in which there is perfect peace and rest for the child of God. "Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart and you shall find rest for your souls."

The description of His exaltation follows. God has highly exalted Him and given Him a name which is above every name. God raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory. What glory it is! In the first chapter of Hebrews we read that the risen man Christ Jesus is the heir of all things, "made so much better than the angels, as He hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they" (Heb 1:4). In Him we have also obtained an inheritance. Before He ever received that glory He prayed to the Father "the glory Thou hast given me I have given to them" (John 17:22). In His glorious exaltation He is likewise our pattern. We shall see Him as He is and shall be like Him, His fellow-heirs. And while we follow in His steps down here we can look upon Him seated in the highest heaven and rejoice that we shall someday be with Him and share His glory. Every knee must ultimately bow at the name of Jesus, even beings under the earth, infernal beings. They must own His title in glory. Yet this does not make them saved beings. Nor does this passage teach that ultimately all the lost will be saved, as claimed by restitutionists and others. The fact that every tongue will have to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord does not mean the salvation of the lost. In Col. 1:20 things, or beings in heaven and on earth are also mentioned in connection with reconciliation, but then the things under the earth are omitted. See our annotations on that passage.

Verses 12-13. Words of exhortation come after this blessed paragraph in which the Lord Jesus is put before us as our pattern. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who worketh in you both to will and to do according to His good pleasure." These words are misunderstood by many Christians. It is being taught that Christians should work for their own salvation. This is the grossest perversion of this exhortation. Every true believer has salvation which is given to Him by grace. It is his own salvation; he does not need to work for it. Others say that one who is really saved by grace must work in order to stay saved, and work with fear and trembling. They tell us, if a believer does not keep on working, if he fails and sins, he will fall from grace and is in danger to be unsaved and lost again. This also is Unscriptural; the Word of God teaches the eternal security of all who have received eternal life, the gift of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. The exhortation does not mean that we must work to keep ourselves saved, but it means that our own salvation which we have in Christ is to be worked out into result. Salvation is to be practically manifested in the life and walk by glorifying Christ. We are to work it out after the blessed pattern of Christ with fear and trembling, not the fear of being lost, but the fear of failure in not walking in lowliness of mind, in true humility and in obedience. This will ever be the chiefest concern of the believer who walks in the Spirit. "It is this,

therefore, which is to induce the fear and trembling; not in selfish dread, but the sense of our responsibility to Him to whom we owe our all and whose our life is. Plenty there is to make us serious in such work as this, but nothing to dishearten us. if God has taken in hand to work in us after this fashion, that is ample security for our success. The fact that the apostle was now absent from them, he whose presence had been so great a comfort and blessing to their souls, was only to make them more completely realize this divine power which was carrying them on to the full blessing beyond" (Numerical Bible).

Verses 14-16. If we thus work out our own salvation, with Christ ever before us as our pattern, following after Him in the same path, we shall do all things without murmurings and reasonings. These are the fruits of the old self. But following Him as our pattern there will be no more strife and vainglory; we shall esteem the other better than ourselves and consequently there will be no murmurings. Furthermore, like our Lord was "harmless and sincere," we shall be harmless and sincere, irreproachable children of God in the midst of a crooked and perverted generation, without any self-assertion whatever. And as He was the light down here, so are believers now to shine as lights. As He on earth was the Word of life, holding it forth is what the apostle writes believers should also do, "holding forth the Word of life, that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither labored in vain." (See 1 Thess. 2:20.)

Verses 17-18. Three witnesses follow whose experiences tell us that the grace of God can produce such a character after the pattern of Christ in the believer. First, the apostle speaks of himself "Yea and if I am poured out as a libation on the sacrifice and ministration of your faith I rejoice in common with you all. For the same cause also do ye joy and rejoice with me." With death threatening, the prisoner of the Lord expresses His joy. Paul speaks of what the Philippians did, their ministrations of faith as the greater thing; he looks upon it all as a sacrifice and himself and his service only as a libation; that is, he views his own life poured out upon it. Thus he manifested lowliness of mind. In regarding the devotion of the Philippians as the sacrifice, and the devotion of his own life he regards only as poured out as a drink offering (the symbol of joy) upon their sacrifice.

Verses 19-24. Timotheus is the next witness. Of him Paul writes, "For I have no one like-minded who will care naturally for your state (or, who will care with genuine feeling how ye get on). For all seek their own things and not the things of Christ." Many already there lived selfishly, seeking in service their own things and not serving and walking, glorifying Christ. So it is today in the Laodicean condition into which Christendom is fast sinking. But Timotheus, Paul's spiritual son (1 Tim. 1:2) was a blessed exception. He was in fullest fellowship with the apostle, like-minded, who forgot himself completely and cared genuinely for the Philippians. They knew the proof of him, for as a son with the father, he served with the apostle in the gospel. The two, Paul and Timothy, illustrate what it means "to be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind" (verse 2). And thus it ought to be among all the members of the body of Christ. What a comfort Timotheus must have been to Paul in the Roman prison! What cheer and joy to have such a one with him! What refreshment to his soul! But he is willing to give him up. "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." Not seeking his own, in self-denying devotion, he is willing to part with him, so that the

Philippians might enjoy his fellowship.

Verses 25-30. Another gracious witness is Epaphroditus. He also manifests the mind of Christ. Epaphroditus was the messenger of the Philippians. He brought to Rome the collection, expressing the fellowship of the church in Philippi. But he had been taken violently ill in the exercise of his service, "for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death." He did not regard his own life and in this he exemplified the Lord Jesus Christ. "Greater love can no one show than that he lays down his life for his friends." His was a service in entire forgetfulness of self. And when he was sick nigh unto death "God had mercy on him." The Philippians also heard of the dangerous illness of their beloved messenger. They must have been deeply grieved. Then unselfish Epaphroditus was greatly distressed because the Philippians had heard of his illness. In his suffering, nigh unto death, his thoughts were with the saints in Philippi, and he was grieved that they had anxiety for him. It all shows the mind of Christ.

III. CHRIST, THE OBJECT AND THE GOAL

CHAPTER 3

1. The true circumcision (3:1-3)
2. Paul's past experience (3:4-7)
3. The one passion (3:8-11)
4. Pressing towards the mark (3:12-16)
5. The goal of glory (3:17-21)

Verses 1-3. Finally (or, for the rest), my brethren, rejoice in the "Lord." Rejoicing in the Lord, not merely in the salvation which is ours, nor in His mercies, in His gifts or in our service, but in Him, is what gives strength and victory down here. He rejoiced in Him because He knew the Lord was controlling all and that he was in His hands; he followed the same path in humiliation, which he knew would lead him to the glory where He is. And the prisoner of the Lord enjoying the blessedness of fellowship with Christ, following Christ, looking to Him and not to earthly circumstances, exhorts the beloved Philippians to find their joy in nothing less than the Person Christ. It was not a grievous thing for him to write them the same things, but it was safe for them. They needed the exhortation in the midst of spiritual dangers, for nothing else keeps from evil as heart occupation with the Lord Jesus Christ. He warns "beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision." By these terms the same false teachers are meant which disturbed the Galatian churches, which did such evil work also among the Corinthians. He speaks of these perverters of the gospel in severe terms, but not too severe. They boasted of religiousness, of righteousness by the observance of ordinances and the keeping of the law; they trusted in the flesh and set aside Christ. They, with their religion of the flesh, are branded by the apostle as dogs, unclean and outside, therefore unworthy of fellowship. They called the Gentiles dogs, but now the Spirit of God shows that they are not better than the Gentiles. (See Gal. 4:8-10.) They were evil workmen who led souls away, as the havoc they had wrought shows. They gloried in ceremonies, the circumcision of the flesh; in reality they were the concision, the mutilators of the flesh, who knew nothing of the true separation through the cross of Christ and union with a risen Christ in whom the believer is complete.

Dogs, evil workers and the concision, are terms which fit the many cults today, including "Christian Science," the "new thought," the "new religion and modern theology," all of which deny the gospel of Jesus Christ. True believers are the circumcision, not a circumcision made by hands, but a spiritual circumcision, the putting off of the body of the flesh by the death of Christ (Col. 2:11). The cross of Christ separates the believer from the flesh, the religious forms, and self-improvement, and separates him unto God. And knowing that Christ is all, glorying in Him with no more confidence in the flesh, the believer worships by the Spirit of God, and no longer in ordinances. The indwelling Spirit fills the heart with Christ, glorifies Him, and true worship by the Spirit is the result. To have no more confidence in the flesh, to expect nothing whatever from ourselves, to glory only in Christ Jesus is true Christian attainment and experience.

Verses 4-7. And this blessed servant of the Lord Jesus speaks of his experience as a Hebrew. He might have had abundant reason to place confidence in the flesh. We had something as a natural, religious man to glory in. What fleshly advantages were his! He was circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law a Pharisee; concerning zeal persecuting the Church; touching the righteousness which is in the law blameless. He had indeed, as he testified before, "profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my father" (Gal. 1:14). He was a very religious man, for he belonged to the most religious sect of his day, with a blind zeal which led him to persecute the church, yet touching the righteousness in the law, he knew himself blameless.

And all this religiousness and zeal for God, his law keeping and blamelessness he looked upon as being of value and gain for him, though they did not give him peace or fellowship with God. A change came. The things which were religious gain to him he now counted loss for Christ. On the road to Damascus he had seen the glorified Christ and that vision had laid him in the dust so that he saw himself as the chief of sinners.

Verses 8-11. From that moment when it pleased God to reveal His Son to him the self-righteous Pharisee could say, "I count all things* loss on account of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I suffered the loss of all things, and do count them refuse that I may win Christ and be found in Him." What had been gain to him he cast aside. He had seen Christ and that was enough, he would have nothing else after that. Christ had become his all. The excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, whom the erstwhile persecutor now blessedly calls "my Lord," made it a joy to suffer the loss of all things, yea, to count them refuse. How he suffered the loss of all things, things needful in life, suffering, hunger, stripes; giving up all earthly distinction and advantage, we know from his own testimony (2 Cor. 11:22-31). He suffered the loss of all things and counted them refuse. "This is the marvelous estimate of one who had all the advantages in the world; and then had known all sufferings from it in behalf of Christ, looking upon the former as worse than nothing, as a detriment, and the latter to be nothing, because the knowledge he had already gained of Christ outweighed them all." All earthly things, all human attainments, everything which exalts man were counted as loathsome things in comparison with Him whom He had beheld in the glory light.

*"He does not say: When I was converted I counted all things loss.

When a person is truly converted, Christ becomes and is everything; the world then appears as nothing. It has passed from the mind and the unseen things fill the heart. Afterwards as the convert goes on with his duties and with his friends, though Christ is still precious, he does generally not continue to count all things loss. But Paul could say, 'I count all things loss' not 'I did.' It is a great thing to be able to say that."

But what does he mean when he expresses the desire "that I may win (or gain) Christ and be found in Him"? Did he not possess Christ already? Was he not in Him and Christ in him? He possessed Christ. He was in Him. Nor does the apostle mean that he reaches out, as some teach, after a "deeper life" experience or some such thing. He had perfect assurance of his standing before God in Christ; no doubt whatever as to that could be in the apostle's heart. Nor did he need some kind of an experience, as some claim, a holiness-perfection experience, to give him greater assurance. His wish to win Christ, to gain Christ, is his longing desire for the actual possession of Christ in glory. Christ in glory is the great object and goal for the believer down here. This object and goal must ever be before the heart in the Christian's race. Like the racer who has no eyes for his surroundings, but whose eye is steadily fixed upon the goal, so the believer is to look to the glorified Christ and press forward toward the mark. This is the truth unfolded in this chapter.

Paul knew that Christ belonged to him, that his destiny was to be forever with Him, and then his passion was to be worthy of all this. And when Christ is gained in glory and the goal is reached then he would be "found in Him, not having mine own righteousness which is of the law (the righteousness which is nothing but filthy rags), but that which is through faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." How he emphasizes this righteousness in which he delighted! And this great servant of the Lord, who knew Him so well, wants to know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His suffering "being made conformable unto His death, if by any means I might arrive at the resurrection from among the dead." The power of His resurrection he desires to know is more than a spiritual power, for he knew that power in practical experience. Of this he had written to the Ephesians (1:15-2:10). It is again the goal of the Christian's life towards which he reaches out. He wants to arrive at the resurrection from among the dead by any means and to get there though it means fellowship with His suffering being made conformable to His death. And this was before him in the Roman prison. He wanted to be with Christ, and to arrive there he desired to be like Christ in participating in His suffering even to be made conformable to His death.

It is important to note here the difference between "resurrection of the dead" and "the resurrection from among the dead." The latter is the correct translation of verse 11. There is a resurrection of the dead, of all the dead. But there is a resurrection from among the dead, which elsewhere in the Word is called the first resurrection. The Lord Jesus was raised from the dead. When the Lord spoke to His disciples of His resurrection from among the dead they were astonished and spoke among themselves "what the rising of the dead should mean." They did not know what it meant. When the Lord was raised He became the first fruits of them that slept, that is, the righteous dead. And God raised Him from the dead, because His delight was in Him, for He had glorified Him and finished the Work the Father gave Him to do.

The first resurrection, the resurrection from the dead, is the

expression of God's delight and satisfaction in those raised; it is His seal on Christ's work. Because He finished that great work which glorified God, all who are in Christ will be raised from among the dead, while those who live when the Lord comes, will not die, but be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye (1 Cor. 15:51-52). But it is not on account of the believer's attainment, but because of Christ that the power of God will take His own out. The rest of the dead will be left until the second resurrection.

The Apostle knew that through grace he belonged to this out-resurrection from among the dead. He had an absolute certainty of it. But in divine energy he presses on towards it. All in him wants to get there where the grace of God in Christ had put him. He reaches out for this blessed goal and when he speaks of attaining "by any means" he gives us to understand that nothing shall hinder him in the race. May the cost be what it will, I want it; I want it because I have it in Christ and through Christ and I want to be worthy of it. And therefore he despised the loss of all things and was ready to suffer and die the martyr's death.

Verses 12-16. The words which follow show that this is the true meaning of the desire he expressed. "Not as though I had already attained (obtained), or am already made perfect, but I press on if so be that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not count myself yet to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before, I press towards the goal for the prize of the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus." The goal had not yet been reached, he was still on the way and had not yet obtained nor was he made perfect. He constantly presses on towards the goal, Christ in glory. He knew that he had been apprehended, taken possession of, by Christ Jesus and for Christ and therefore he also wants to take possession, to apprehend it. He forgets what is behind and even stretches forward to the things which are before, the blessed goal. This was his constant attitude, ever occupied with the Lord Jesus Christ to be like Him and with Him in glory.

"The whole of Paul's life was founded on that and completely formed by that. The Son of God was forming his soul day by day, and he was always running towards Him and never doing anything else. It was not merely as an apostle that he entered into the fellowship of His sufferings, and conformity to His death, but every Christian should do the same. A person may say he has forgiveness of sins. But I say, What is governing your heart now? Is your eye resting on Christ in glory? Is the excellency of knowledge of Christ Jesus so before your soul as to govern everything else, and make you count everything loss? Is that where you are? Has this excellent knowledge put out all other things? Not only an outwardly blameless walk, but has the thought of Christ in glory put out all other things? If it were so, we would not be governed by everyday nothings" (J.N. Darby). Some teach that these words of Paul, speaking of attaining and not yet perfect, mean that he was still in doubt as to having a share in the first resurrection. We quote the words of a leading advocate of this interpretation:

But what was the goal towards which Paul was thus directing his efforts? 'if by any means,' he continues, 'I may attain to the select (?) resurrection out from among the dead.' In other words, his aim was to be numbered with those blessed and holy ones who shall have part in the first resurrection. But we must notice that he had, at the time, *no certain assurance* (italics ours) that he would compass the desire of his heart.

... Just before his death, however, it was graciously revealed unto him that he was one of the approved.--Pember, The Church, the Churches and the Mysteries.

Think of it! The prisoner of the Lord who suffered joyfully the loss of all things, who counted all but dung, who walked in such separation and devotion, still uncertain about his share in the first resurrection! This interpretation is not only wrong, but it denies the grace of God in the Lord Jesus Christ, by making the first resurrection a question of attainment when it is purely the matter of divine grace. This teaching aims at the very vitals of the gospel of grace and glory.

An exhortation follows. He exhorts all who are perfect to be thus minded. What does the word perfect mean and who are the perfect? Above, when he said he was not yet made perfect, it applies to Christ-likeness in glory by being conformed to His image. True Christian perfection will be reached when the Lord comes and we shall see Him as He is and be like Him. Now those are the perfect down here who have no confidence in the flesh, who glory in Christ and who know He is all in all, that by one offering He has perfected forever them that are sanctified, that they are accepted in the Beloved and complete in Him in whom the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily. And they are all to be "thus minded" like he was, ever occupied with Christ in glory, doing this one thing--pressing on towards the goal for the prize of the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus.

Verses 17-21. "Brethren, be followers (imitators) together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample." What a blessed thing that Paul could write this! Grace had enabled him to follow Christ fully. But even then there were those over whom Paul wept because their walk showed that they were the enemies of the cross. "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." Were these real believers? The statement "whose end is destruction" answers this question. They could not be true children of God, but were such who had professed Christianity, having the form of godliness, but denying the power thereof (2 Tim. 3:5). They turned the grace of God into lasciviousness. "Their god was really their belly; that is to say, the fleshly craving in them had never been set aside by any satisfaction that they had found for themselves in Christ. The craving of the old nature led and governed them." Instead of minding heavenly things, seeking the things which are above where Christ sitteth, they minded earthly things, showing thereby that they had never really known Christ. If there were "many" then among God's people who were enemies of the cross, who had with all their profession no desire for the heavenly calling, how much larger is their number now at the end of the age. They are religious, yet they cling to the world, love the world and thus deny the cross of Christ, which makes them the enemies of the cross.

"There is nothing like the cross. It is both the righteousness of God against sin, and the righteousness of God in pardoning sin. It is the end of the world of judgment, and the beginning of the world of life. It is the work that put away sin, and yet it is the greatest sin that ever was committed. The more we think of it, the more we see it is the turning point of everything. So, if a person follows the world, he is an enemy of the cross of Christ. If I take the glory of the world that crucified Christ, I

am glorying in my shame" (J.N. Darby).

"They walked according to the flesh, minding earthly things instead of the heavenly, the heavens being the proper and only sphere of spiritual life, demonstrated that they knew nothing of the matter as to the heart, and for the truth of resurrection and life in a risen Christ, were walking according to their own religious feelings, making this their god. And surely there is enough of this everywhere, a bringing down revelation of the truth to the standard of human feelings and experiences, making these the umpire instead of God. It is a religious appetite ruling and hungry, and satisfied with its own sensations when filled. Israel was charged to take heed lest when they had eaten and were full, they should forget Jehovah (Deut. 8:14) and the prayer of Agur in Prov. 30:9 is, 'lest I be full and deny Thee.' The grand object, Christ Himself, is ignored, and religious excitement, like any other intoxication, displaces Him and occupies the soul to its damage and peril. It is the belly, not Christ. It is religious emotion, it is not Christ. It is perfection in and of the flesh; it is having no confidence in the flesh. The flesh may find its satisfaction and growth as much in religion as in the lower passions and the more secular world. The cross came in to put all this to death. Hence these are enemies to the cross of Christ, even though much mention may be made of the cross, and even continual prostrations before it practiced" (M. Taylor).

In the last two verses the blessed goal itself is fully revealed. "For our conversation is in heaven (or commonwealth-citizenship)* from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall transform our body of humiliation into conformity to His body of glory, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself" This is the blessed hope and the blessed goal. All we have as Christians, our relationships, rights and possessions are in heaven. Some blessed day He, for whom we wait, will come and take us to the place where He is transforming our body of humiliation into conformity to His body of glory. Then we shall have attained that for which down here we hope and pray (1 Thess. 4).

* ('conversation', or 'commonwealth-citizenship' -- The Greek word is "politeuma," from which we have our English "politics." Hence one might say "Our politics are in heaven.")

[V. CHRIST, THE BELIEVER'S STRENGTH, SUFFICIENT FOR ALL CIRCUMSTANCES

CHAPTER 4

1. Stand fast and rejoice (4:1-4)
2. Dependence on God and true heart occupation (4:5-9)
3. I can do all things through Christ (4:10-13)
4. The fellowship of the Philippians (4:14-20)
5. The greeting (4:21-23)

Verses 1-4. And now the final testimony of the prisoner of the Lord, telling us from his own experience that Christ is sufficient for all circumstances down here. The first verse is filled with the precious fragrance of the great apostle's affection. What refreshment there is for all His dear saints in these opening words of this chapter! "Therefore my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in

the Lord, dearly beloved." How he loved the saints and longed for them. He looked upon them as his joy and crown; his joy down here and his crown in the day of Christ. So the aged John testified, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth" (3 John 4). They were to stand fast in the Lord, for this gives strength and the Lord constantly before the heart and mind gives victory. Euodias and Syntyche, two sisters in the Lord, are exhorted to be of the same mind in the Lord. They had difficulties and had become separated. How graciously and tenderly they are exhorted to overcome their differences. The true yokefellow is probably Epaphroditus, who was now fully restored and carried this letter to the Philippians. Paul requests him to assist those women who had contended with him in the gospel, of course in the sphere which belongs to woman. And there were Clement and other fellow laborers, whose names are in the book of life. These names are known to Him and in His day their labors will come to light and they will receive their reward. It is enough for the laborers to know that his name, though unknown to the world, is in the book of life, and his service, though unapplauded by the world, has His approval. Once more he exhorts to rejoice in the Lord always, under all circumstances, at all times. And again I say, Rejoice. He did not write such words when he was taken up into the third heaven, but these blessed words come from the prison in Rome. When the Lord is before the heart, if He is the controlling principle of our life, the pattern and the goal, never lost sight of, then He giveth songs in the night.

"Were a light at the end of a long straight alley, I would not have the light itself till I get to it; but I have ever increasing light in proportion as I go forward; I know it better. I am more in the light myself. Thus it is with a glorified Christ, and such is the Christian life."

Verses 5-9. And this walk in Christ and with Christ must be characterized by dependence on God. "Let your moderation be known to all men. The Lord is at hand." Walking thus means to walk in meekness, not reaching out after the things which are but for a moment, content with such things as we have, never asserting one's right. Moderation means to put a check upon our own will. How easy all this becomes if we just have it as a present reality that the Lord is nigh and that when He comes all will be made right. A little while longer and all will be changed. And while we walk here in His fellowship, His command to us is, "Be anxious for nothing." All rests in His loving hands. His people have tribulation down here. He told us so. "In the world ye shall have tribulation; be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). And prayer is our refuge. Most blessed words! How the child of God loves, appreciates and makes use of them! "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." We can cast all our cares upon Him, for we know He careth for us. He is our burden bearer. We may look upon all our burdens as being permitted by Him so that we may give them back to Him and find out His love and power.

"We are in relationship with God; in all things He is our refuge; and events do not disturb Him. He knows the end from the beginning. He knows everything, He knows it beforehand; events shake neither His throne, nor His heart; they always accomplish His purposes. But to us He is love; we are through grace the objects of His tender care. He listens to us and bows down His ear to hear us. In all things therefore, instead of disquieting

ourselves and weighing everything in our hearts, we ought to present our requests to God with prayer, with supplication, with a heart that makes itself known (for we are human beings) but with the knowledge of the heart of God (for He loves us perfectly); so that, even while making our petition to Him, we can already give thanks, because we are sure of the answer of His grace, be it what it may; and it is our requests that we are to present to Him. Nor is it a cold commandment to find out His will and then come: we are to go with our requests. Hence it does not say, you will have what you ask; but God's peace will keep your hearts. This is trust; and His peace, the peace of God Himself, shall keep our hearts. It does not say that our hearts shall keep the peace of God; but, having cast our burden on Him whose peace nothing can disturb, His peace keeps our hearts. Our trouble is before Him, and the constant peace of the God of love, who takes charge of everything and knows all beforehand, quiets our disburdened hearts, and imparts to us the peace which is in Himself and which is above all understanding (or at least keeps our hearts by it), even as He Himself is above all the circumstances that can disquiet us, and above the poor human heart that is troubled by them. oh, what grace! that even our anxieties are a means of our being filled with this marvellous peace, if we know how to bring them to God, and true He is. May we learn indeed How to maintain this intercourse with God and its reality, in order that we may converse with Him and understand His ways with believers!" (Synopsis of the Bible).

Our prayers may not always be answered as we want to have them answered, for He alone knows what is best. We speak to Him about our cares and put them thus into His heart and He puts His own peace into our hearts.

What are thy wants today? Whate'er they be Lift up thy heart and pray: God heareth thee, Then trustfully rely that all thy need He surely will supply in every deed. But every prayer of thine, and every want Of either thine or mine, He may not grant, Yet all our prayers God hears, and He will show Some day, in coming years, He best did know--C. Murray

And in the life down here, surrounded by every form of evil, we are to be occupied with only that which is good, things true, things noble, just, pure, lovely, things of good report; if there be any virtue or any praise, think on these things. This is the way how peace of mind and blessing, happiness and joy may be maintained, not being occupied with the evil which surrounds us, or the evil in others, but with the very opposite. The Word of God is given to us for this purpose. As we read it prayerfully and meditate on it we are kept in that which is good, true, noble, just and lovely. Walking according to these exhortations they would find that the God of peace is with them. And so shall we.

Verses 10-13. Paul also rejoiced in the Lord greatly because their care for him had flourished again, and added "wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity." They had ministered to him as the Lord's servant, in temporal things. The words, "now at last your care of me hath flourished again," indicates that they had delayed their ministrations, but he puts another meaning upon it. He does not insinuate that it was a failure and neglect on their side, "but ye lacked opportunity." He did not mention this in respect of want. "For I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." He had learned it all practically and knew about being abased and abounding--"everywhere and in all things I have learned the secret, both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer want. I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me." The secret of this victory over all circumstances, whether good or evil, was

Christ. It was "not I but Christ." In himself he had no strength, but all His strength to be abased and to abound, to be full or hungry, in abounding and in suffering want, was the Lord Jesus Christ. And this strength continually flows from and is supplied by our relationship with Christ as it is maintained by faith in a close walk with Him. He had learnt to trust Him fully; he trusted Him and walked in fellowship with Him in adversity, and, also, which is more difficult, in prosperity. His faith always reckoned on Christ. He kept him from being careless and indifferent, when he was full and abounded in all things and He kept him from being discouraged and dissatisfied when he suffered privations. He had found Christ sufficient in every circumstance. This is the happy life, which, too, we may live if Christ is our object and our all.

(Prosperity in earthly things is for many children of God a snare. The person who requested prayer for a brother who was getting rich made a good request. We need more prayer and need more watching when all goes well and when we abound. Then the danger to become unspiritual and indifferent is great.)

Verses 14-20. He reminds them of their faithfulness to himself; he had not forgotten their love and what they had done in the past. He delighted in the remembrance of it, nor does God forget the ministries to His servants. "But to do good and communicate forget not, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased" (Heb. 13:16). "For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which you have showed toward His name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister" (Heb. 6:10). Yet he does not want them to misunderstand him, as if he was anxious to receive further fellowship from them for his personal need. Therefore he adds, "Not because I desire a gift, but I desire fruit that may abound to your account. But I have all, and abound; I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odor of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to God." In reminding them and himself of their love he did not desire more gifts for the sake of having them, but he desired the fruit which would result from their faithfulness and liberality, which would abound to their account in the day of Christ. All ministry to God's servants and to the saints should be done from this viewpoint.

"But my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. Now unto God and our Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen." The God whom He had learnt to know so well in all circumstances--my God, as he called Him--would supply all their need. It is not a wish that He may do so, nor a prayer that he prays, but it is an assured fact. He knows his God so well that he counts on Him for the supply of all the need of the beloved saints according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

Verses 21-23. The greetings close this blessed little Epistle of love and joy, so full of the realities of true Christian experience, made possible for every child of God through the indwelling Spirit. He sends his greetings to every saint and conveys the greetings of the saints with him, chiefly they that are of Caesar's household. Blessed hint that even there the gospel had manifested its power in the salvation of some.

[Return to Top](#)

