

# Seven Exhortations

Philippians 4: 1-9.

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The first nine verses of the fourth chapter of the Epistle to the Philippians bring before us the seven closing exhortations of the Epistle. These exhortations were never more important, and comforting, than in these last difficult days.

The day of grace draws to its close. Evils, within and without, oppose us. To meet these different trials we have the encouragement of these seven exhortations, which, if taken to heart and carried out, will lift us above the sorrows of the way and guide us through every trial.

### **1 "Stand fast in the Lord" (v. 1 )**

This great exhortation brings before us our resource in the presence of every kind of opposition. When the Apostle gave us this word, he, himself, was in bonds — the prisoner of the Lord. Within the Christian circle he was opposed by jealous men who were even preaching Christ out of envy, strife, and contention seeking to "arouse tribulation" for him (Phil. 1: 15, 16). Outside it adversaries were plotting for his life (Phil. 1: 28).

Nevertheless, he is not cast down nor overcome by one or the other. Do professors seek to add to his afflictions by preaching out of envy; then, at least, he can rejoice that Christ is preached. Do adversaries seek his life? He is not terrified.

What then sustained him, and enabled him to stand unshaken in the presence of every opposition? It was this, his confidence was entirely in the Lord — in a word, he stood fast in the Lord. And having experienced the sustaining grace and support of the Lord, he passes on the exhortation to the saints of all ages. In the presence of every opposition we may have to meet, he says, "*Stand fast in the Lord.*"

The adversaries without, and the "envy", "strife" and "contention," within the Christian circle, that existed even in the Apostle's day, have increased on every hand in our day. Yet we have this comforting exhortation, "Stand fast in the Lord."

We are neither exhorted, nor expected, to stand fast in our own strength, or knowledge, or wisdom. We are to stand fast against every effort of the enemy to further break up and divide the

people of God, whether from within or without, by standing fast in the strength of the Lord, the living Lord, who is exalted above every name, and is "able even to subdue all things unto Himself" (Phil. 2: 9; Phil. 3: 21).

## **2 "Be of the same mind in the Lord" (v. 2)**

Nothing is more distressing to the heart, and enfeebling to testimony, than the differences of judgment that exist among the true people of God. In the second chapter of the Epistle the Apostle traces all envy and strife to this one root — "Vainglory" (Phil. 2: 3). Even in the very presence of the Lord, there was a strife among the Apostles because each wanted to be accounted the greatest (Luke 22: 24). So, in the Apostle's day, there was strife, as the result of the vainglory of some who wanted to be great. And in our day, all the division and strife that has come in among the people of God can be traced to this one root — someone wanted to be great.

The vainglorious man will ever be an envious man — jealous of every one that is more spiritual or more gifted than himself. And jealousy expresses itself in malice, and malice ends in strife (James 3: 14-16).

How, then, can we "be of the same mind in the Lord"? The Apostle clearly shows that this can only be as we are marked by "lowliness of mind," and, to have the lowly mind, he says, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." His was the lowly mind that led Him to make Himself of no reputation in order to serve others in love. Self likes to be served, and thinks it is exalted when being served by others; but love delights to serve.

If, then, we each forget self, refuse to seek a reputation for ourselves, and seek only to serve others in love, according to the lowly mind of Christ, we shall have the mind of the Lord, and "*be of the same mind in the Lord.*"

## **3 "Rejoice in the Lord always" (v. 4)**

The Apostle has been telling us:

- (1) that within the Christian circle there are some marked by envy, strife, and contention;
- (2) that all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's;
- (3) that many walk in such a way that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ.

Alas! these things are still found among the people of God, and may well call forth sorrow and tears, even as they did with him.

But the Apostle tells us more; he not only looks abroad and sees the failure of the saints, but he looks up and sees the glory of Jesus. He sees Christ in the glory, the prize of the calling on high (Phil. 3: 14). He sees that God has called us to be with Christ and like Christ in glory, and he sees the blessed end of the wilderness journey with all its sorrows and failure. With this glorious end in view, he forgets the things that are behind and presses on to the goal.

Moreover he not only looks up to Christ in the glory, but he looks for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ to change our bodies of humiliation into bodies of glory. Looking around he may weep, but looking up, and looking on, he rejoices, and exhorts us to "*Rejoice in the Lord always.*"

We cannot rejoice in ourselves, our service, or our walk: we cannot always rejoice in our

circumstances or in the saints. But with the living Christ on high, and the coming Christ before us, we can "Rejoice in the Lord always."

#### **4 "Let your gentleness be known of all men. The Lord is near" (v. 5, N. Tr.)**

It is only as we walk with the Lord before us, according to the first three exhortations, that we shall be able to carry out this exhortation which sets before us the character of gentleness by which we should be known of all men. Too often we are known for our self-assertiveness, for our strong opinions, and perhaps violence of expression, in relation to the affairs of this world. If our minds are set on things above we shall not be eager to assert ourselves in regard to things on earth. As to these matters we do well to yield to others and be reticent of asserting our opinions. Thus we shall wear the beautiful character of Christ who was marked by "meekness and gentleness" (2 Cor. 10: 1). We are to beware of being drawn into strife with those who may oppose, for "the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men" (2 Tim. 2: 24). Let us remember it is more important to exhibit the character of Christ, than to assert our opinions, even if right, or to defend ourselves. Men can oppose our opinions, our assertions, and our violence; but who can stand against gentleness? As one has said, "Gentleness is irresistible."

Moreover, to encourage us to gentleness, the Apostle reminds us that "the Lord is near." There is no need for us to assert ourselves and seek to put the world right, for the coming of the Lord is near, and at His coming He will right every wrong.

May we not also say that, in another sense, the Lord is near to us, however little we may realize His presence. He hears and sees all that we say and do. How many a hard and violent word we may have uttered in unguarded moments that would never have been said had we realized His presence.

The disciples, in their hardness, rebuked the mothers who brought their little ones to Jesus. The Lord, in His gentleness said, "Suffer little children and forbid them not to come unto Me." Again, the disciples, in their resentment against villagers that refused to receive the Lord, would, with violence, bring down fire from heaven to destroy them. The Lord, in His gentleness, utters no word against His rejectors, but quietly passes on to another village.

May we then so speak and act while pursuing a separate path as the quiet in the land, that, if the world takes any account of us, it will only be to mark our "gentleness."

#### **5 "Be careful for nothing" (v. 6)**

Here the Apostle's exhortation has in view the circumstances of life. He is not unmindful that, in a world of sorrow and sickness, of want and care, there will be trials to face and burdens to be borne; but, he would not have us racking our poor hearts with them. He, himself, writes from a prison, and had suffered want, and a companion and fellow-labourer had been sick nigh unto death; but in these sorrowful circumstances he had been lifted above all anxious care, and therefore can say to others, "Be careful for nothing."

We may have to face trials in our families, trials in our businesses, trials amongst the Lord's people; sorrows from sickness, sorrows from want, sorrows from the saints, that press upon us as a great burden and, as one has said, "How often a burden possesses a person's mind, and when he tries in vain to cast it off, it comes back and worries him."

How then can we find relief? How is it possible to "Be careful for nothing"? Very blessedly the Apostle unfolds the way to be free, not necessarily of the trial, but of *the burden* of the trial, so that it no longer weighs the spirit down with care and anxiety. He says, "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." Thus only shall we find relief. "In everything," whatever the trial may be, small or great, make it known to God in prayer; and tell God exactly what you wish, "let your requests be made known to Him." The requests may not be for our good, they may not be according to the mind of God; they may even be foolish, but we are to make them known to God.

What will be the result? Will He answer the requests? Will He remove the trial? He may see that to answer the request, or remove the trial would not be for our good. So far as the immediate trial is concerned, He will act in perfect wisdom for our good, according to His perfect love. But this God will do; He will relieve our hearts *from the burden* of the trial. If we pour out our hearts before Him, He will pour in His peace into our hearts — that peace of God which passeth all understanding.

So Hannah found, in the days of old, when, in her sore trial she could say, "I . . . have poured out my soul before the Lord." In result, we read, "Her countenance was no more sad." And yet, at the time, her circumstances were just the same. Afterwards, indeed, the Lord changed her circumstances, but first He showed that He had the power to change Hannah. From grief of heart, and bitterness of soul she was brought into great peace — the peace of God which passeth all understanding — through making known her requests to God (1 Samuel 1: 6-18).

## **6 "Think on these things" (v. 8).**

Rejoicing in the Lord, and set free from care, we shall be able peacefully to delight our souls in the things that are pure and praiseworthy. In a world far from God we are continually faced with evil. It is in us and around us; it presses upon us from every side. At times we have to face it and deal with it in ourselves, or others; but, even so, to have to do with evil, in any form, is defiling, and soiling to the mind. Alas! there is often with us a tendency to pry into evil, and to be over-busy in contending against it!

God would have us to find our delight in all that is true, and noble, and just and pure. The flesh in us is ever ready to listen to slander, and bad reports, and things that are vicious and blameworthy. But says the Apostle, listen to the good report, and if there is anything virtuous and praiseworthy in your brother, "*think on these things.*"

## **7 "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" (v. 9)**

The mind being set on things which are pure will prepare the way for a life that is according to God. Right "thinking" will lead to right "doing." Having said of the things that are pure, "*think on these things,*" the Apostle now says, "Those things which . . . ye have seen in me *do.*"

It is not enough to have "learned" and "received" the truth, through the Apostle's writings, or to have "heard" it from his lips and "seen" it in his life. What we have learned, and received, and heard, and seen, is to be translated into our lives. We are, as another Apostle has said, to be "*doers* of the word, and not hearers only" (James 1: 22).

Then, says the Apostle, if our minds are set on things that are pure, and our lives in accordance

with the truth — if we "think" and "do" rightly — we shall find that not only the peace of God keeps our hearts, but that the God of peace will be with us.

In spite then of all the failure of the Church and the trials by the way, how blessed the portion of those believers who

Stand fast in the Lord;

Have the same mind in the Lord;

Rejoice in the Lord;

Who are known of all men for their gentleness;

Who are careful for nothing;

Who have their minds set on things that are pure, and

Who, in practice, "do" the things they have learned and received.

Such will have their hearts governed by the peace of God, and will enjoy the support of the God of peace. In all these exhortations/here is nothing that cannot be carried out by the simplest and youngest believer, in the power of the Holy Spirit. They demand no special gift; they require no great intellectual attainment. They form the very essence of practical Christian life, and are as applicable in these last difficult days as in the early days of freshness and power.

Thus ever on through life we find,

To trust, O Lord, is best,

Who serve Thee with a quiet mind

Find in Thy service rest.

Their outward troubles may not cease,

But this their joy will be —

Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace

Whose mind is stayed on Thee.