

A Brief Exposition of the Epistle to the Philippians.

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To the reader.

The following brief exposition of the Epistle to the Philippians was written in 1894, and appeared at that time in the form of articles in a magazine which has long ceased to exist. Perhaps a new circle of readers will find help and profit from this re-issue. This precious Epistle has been happily divided thus:-

Chapter

- 1 — Christ our Life.
- 2 — Christ our Pattern.
- 3 — Christ our Object.
- 4 — Christ our Strength.

Thoughts on Philippians.

Philippians 1.

The Epistle to the Philippians is experimental rather than doctrinal in its character; we get the inner life of the saints and of the Apostle unfolded in a very precious way. The first epistle to the Thessalonians also brings before us Christian experience: but with this difference; the saints in the latter place were but young converts, consequently we see in them divine life manifesting itself in all its first freshness and vigour; whereas the Philippians when Paul wrote to them were tried saints; they had run the race for many years, and had proved God faithful throughout. The Thessalonians were characterised by their work of faith, labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ; they had turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for His Son from heaven: the Philippians had weathered the storm, and had patiently continued their support of, and fellowship with, the Apostle in all his labours and necessities.

In Philippians 1, we get the blessed motives of the Apostle's heart; in Philippians 2, what has been appropriately termed the graciousness of the Christian life; in Philippians 3, its energy, steadily pursuing its heavenly Object; and in Philippians 4, its superiority over all circumstances.

"Bishops and deacons" are found in the address (in the plural, note). These were local officers, the one to care for the spiritual, the other, the secular, affairs of the saints; and must not be confounded with the gifts for the edifying of the body, as in Eph. 4.

Paul thanked God for his "whole remembrance" of these saints; to no other company does he speak quite in the same way. In some quarters he was able to thank God for some things, while groaning over others; here there was nothing to cause him pain. We get thus a striking illustration of Heb. 13: 17. He gave account of the Philippians with joy, and not with grief: to their profit undoubtedly. What particularly refreshed his heart was their fellowship in the Gospel: they had borne him as a labourer on their hearts before God, had sent once and again unto his necessity, and, more than all, had shared with him its trials and reproach. This he recognised as God's work in them, and his heart was assured that, having begun a good work in them, God would perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ. This remark of the Apostle's is to be noted; for he regards the saints in this epistle as counting on God for themselves, he, the Apostle of the Church, being no longer active, but in prison. This letter prepares the way, as it were, for the Church being left entirely without apostolic care. Apostolic succession is unknown to it: God working in the saints, to will and to do of His good pleasure, is prominent.

It was only just that the Apostle should be assured concerning them all; he knew he had a place in their hearts;* they had been partakers of the afflictions of the Gospel according to the power of God, they were also partakers of the grace wherewith Paul had been supplied. Further, God knew how greatly he longed after them all in the bowels of Jesus Christ. The same tenderness of affection is seen in 1 Thess. 3. He greatly desired to see them, as they to see him, night and day praying exceedingly that he might see their face, and perfect that which was lacking in their faith. His dear Philippians he also describes as "dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown." Precious outflow, and acknowledgment, of affection!

{*v.7 must be read, "because ye have me in your hearts}

He prayed for them: desiring that their "love might abound more and more in knowledge and in all judgement." Love must not be unwisely displayed — it must learn in God's school. At times, love speaks tenderly, at other times sharply; to act and speak aright in love, knowledge and discernment are needed. Love must be evenly balanced by other divine qualities. He desired, too, that they might approve excellent things — the new man exercising himself by the Spirit in God's presence as to good and evil; that they might be sincere and without offence until the day Christ. Note, "the day" is always introduced when it is a question of responsibility. (Compare Rom. 13: 12, 1 Cor. 1: 8, 1 Thess. 3: 13). "The fruit of righteousness" (1 John 3: 7, Rom. 4: 18, 19) is before the mind of the Spirit here; "the fruit of the light" in Eph. 5, "the fruit of the Spirit in Gal. 5. "To the glory and praise of God," the Apostle adds: ever, surely, the object of the believer's life and ways.

Verses 1-11 are a sort of introduction: in verse 12 he commences upon the subject matter of his epistle. His unselfish heart rejoiced that God had so over-ruled his bonds that the things which had happened unto him had fallen out rather to the furtherance, than to the hindrance, of the Gospel: he would have his brethren know it, that they might rejoice together. Instead of his being regarded as a malefactor, as Satan desired, God had made it plain that his bonds were for Christ's sake, and it had turned to a testimony. How wise is our God; and how blessed to simply trust in Him! To the human eye the imprisonment of such a labourer as Paul (and at such a time, when decay was beginning to set in all around) was disastrous, but the Lord knew best. Paul's chain enabled him to reach persons in Caesar's court, and elsewhere in Rome, whom he probably could not have reached under ordinary

circumstances. It is striking that the only note Scripture gives of an apostle being at Rome is as a prisoner; and that many years after the planting of Christianity there.

His bonds had operated also in another way. Many brethren in the Lord, who at first were discouraged by his imprisonment, were now waxing confident as to it, trusting the Lord, and were much more bold to speak the word without fear. What a cheer to the heart of the true-hearted prisoner! If he was bound, the Word of God was not: it was running its course. Though this joy was not without alloy; for some persons were preaching Christ of envy and strife, supposing to add affliction to his bonds. How unworthy! Yet his unselfish heart could rejoice, because Christ was being preached, so assured was he that that Name could not be set forth in vain, whatever motives might operate in the speaker. Besides, he felt that all was contributing to the final victory over Satan — all was leading up to the Apostle's final salvation. "Salvation" in verse 19 is not, I judge, his deliverance from prison — that is alluded to in verse 26 — but deliverance at the end, which is quite in accord with the use of the word throughout Philippians. Salvation is at the end of the warfare, i.e., at the coming of the Lord Jesus (the salvation of the soul being enjoyed meanwhile). He counted on their prayers too, and the supply of the Spirit of Christ Jesus. The vessel needs to be kept constantly filled with the pure oil from above, that the light may shine out.

Verses 20 - 30. The Apostle too had confidence in the Lord — it was his earnest expectation and hope — that the grace which had sustained him hitherto would sustain him to the end; that in nothing he might be ashamed; but that, as always, Christ might be magnified in his body, whether by life or by death. 'For," says he, "to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." So thoroughly was Christ before him, and so thoroughly was he yielded up, body and soul, to Him, that he was content to live or die, as might best suit the Lord, and conduce to His glory. In such language we observe self completely displaced, and the Lord — His service and His glory — filling the vision and heart. Christ was his one object: to live longer here was to labour further for the honour of His Name, and to become more deeply acquainted with Himself. To die would be undoubtedly gain to the suffering Apostle, for then he would be with Christ — he would be at home with the Lord. To one so true of heart, how painful to have to write in Philippians 2: 21: "All seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's." Few walked as himself and Timotheus; the many, even in his early day, mixed self with the service of the Lord.

It was happy to remain, it was happy to depart: he felt in a strait betwixt the two. "If I live in the flesh, it is worth while"; for so the verse should read. But he thought of the Church: he was its minister in an especial manner; he bore it on his heart, sharing the affections and feelings of the Head for His members; and it was this which made the difficulty. For him it would be far better to depart, and leave all the suffering and affliction behind; but "to abide in the flesh is more needful for you." We must remember that decline was setting in on every hand, though the days were early: evil men were already at work, seeking to corrupt the testimony of the Lord, and lead astray the saints. Paul knew that the evil would spread — he told the Ephesian elders so (Acts 20.) some time before the writing of this letter to the Philippians — he desired therefore to stay, and guide the Church's barque a little longer over the troubled sea. And having this desire, and this confidence that his abiding in the flesh was needful, he knew that he should abide, and continue with the saints, for their furtherance and joy of faith. Observe the calm elevation of the man! Viewed from a human standpoint, it rested with the Emperor whether he stayed or not; but he looked not at man, whether in power or otherwise; but calmly settles his own case in the presence of the Lord. It was needful for the saints that he should remain for a season: neither Jewish hatred nor Imperial caprice therefore could interfere. He was persuaded he should see his beloved Philippians again; and he reckoned on their love, that, when they saw him, their rejoicing would be abundant in Christ Jesus.

Mark, he desired to stay for their “furtherance and joy of faith.” Sweet and simple language from an Apostle, one armed by the Lord with authority. As far as possible he always avoided any display of authority, being very far removed, in spirit, from those who would lord it over God's heritage; he preferred to say: “Not for that we have dominion over your faith; but are helpers of your joy; for by faith ye stand” (2 Cor. 1: 24). But, whether he came or not, he desired that the walk of the saints should be good: “only let your conversation be as becometh the Gospel of Christ.” This was his joy; as he said to the Thessalonians: “Now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord” (1 Thess. 3: 8). And as John: “I have no greater joy, than to hear that my children walk in the truth” (3 John 4). Precious identification with the glory of Christ!

He desired two things for the Philippians: (1) that they might “stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel,” and (2) that they should not be terrified by their adversaries.

Practical unity is a precious thing, and of the first importance, as the Apostle earnestly shows in Phil. 2: 1-4. “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity” (Ps. 133). The Spirit of God is the bond of unity, as also its power. He, working in the hearts of the saints, fixes them upon one Object, and binds (or knits) them together in one purpose and aim. Outward uniformity must not be mistaken for this. The latter may be brought about by a general subscription to a creed, or submission to a code of laws, or to a person, as in Popery: but the oneness of mind which the Spirit produces and sustains is a transcendently higher and more blessed thing.

“Striving for the faith of the Gospel,” is, I conceive, a different thing from “contending earnestly for the faith once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3); the latter is in view of internal corrupters, the former is in view of a hostile, and in the case of the Philippians, a pagan, world. They were not to be terrified by their adversaries, knowing that He Who was in them was greater than he who is in the world. They were to present a courageous front to the persecutor. This calm courage which grace supplies operates in two opposite ways: — to the enemy it is an evident token of perdition; to the suffering saints, it is an assurance of salvation, and that of God. The enemy on the one hand is made to feel that the Christian is invincible, that the worst only deepens his bliss; and he cannot resist the conviction in his conscience that he is fighting against God, which can only result in perdition, “seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you.” But the saint, on the other hand, feels that the grace which is preserving him through the furnace, will keep him to the end; and, having for an helmet the hope of salvation, he goes forward undaunted and with holy calm. To suffer is a privilege, the Apostle tells us. Compare Mark 10: 35-40. There is a difference between suffering with Christ and for Him. The first is the necessary fruit of having His nature, and is the portion of every Christian in a greater or less degree; the latter is the result of identification with Him and His cause in the world. It is for Christ here. Paul had suffered at Philippi, and was suffering at Rome; the Philippians were now tasting the same cup. But it was “for His sake,” and that sweetened all; even as when Israel were at Marah, and could not drink of the waters because they were bitter, and God showed Moses a tree, which, when cast into the waters, made them sweet to the taste.

Philippians 2.

The Apostle had in Phil. 1: 27, expressed his heart's desire that the Philippian saints might walk together in unity; this he now follows up in a touching way. “If there be therefore any consolation [or encouragement] in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one

mind." All this his heart was deeply enjoying, their gifts and loving messages to him in prison being the immediate cause. To be thus thought of, when so many were forgetting him, and ashamed of his chains, was indeed encouragement, their love had comforted his heart, it was a true display of fellowship in the Spirit, and of bowels and mercies, i.e., the tender compassions of Christ. Would they fill up his cup of joy? One thing would do it — to hear that they were "of one accord, of one mind." He desired them to show the same love among themselves that they had so sweetly shown to him. His heart was not content to see them merely outwardly one (i.e., not outwardly dividing): he wished their hearts to be "knit together in love." Their state was far better than that of the saints at Corinth, where party-making, in the most carnal way, was going on in the assembly. Still the Apostle's heart was not satisfied. He always wished the saints to be what they should be for Christ. He would not have them rest short of a full answer to the mind of God. To rest satisfied with our spiritual state, even if comparatively good, is a snare. Paul could commend the Thessalonians for loving one another and all the brethren in all Macedonia, but would not have them stop there; and adds, "but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more" (1 Thess. 4: 10). To walk together thus in unity lowliness of mind is requisite, and affectionate consideration for each other. The apostle warns against strife and vainglory (compare Phil. 1: 15, Gal. 5: 26); and another apostle tells us that "where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work" (James 3: 16). The opposite spirit should prevail: each in lowliness of mind esteeming other better than themselves. Only grace can enable us to do this: but where grace is enjoyed, and the Spirit is working unhindered, it is a joy to see Christ in my brother, while I see failure and shortcoming in myself. An affectionate interest is enjoined in each other; saints are not to be exclusively occupied with their own interests, but, as Paul puts it elsewhere, by "love to serve one another" (Gal. 5: 6, 13). Love delights to serve; it cannot be self-occupied.

The pattern is given in Christ Jesus, who humbled Himself in love that He might serve us. Marvellous grace! Wonderful and exalted pattern for our souls! He was in the form of God; to Him it was no robbery to be equal with God, but He emptied Himself, and took upon Him the form of a servant. The contrast with the first Adam is very marked. Adam was made in servant's form, and was created to obey, but aspired to be "as God." This was robbery, and brought its judgement. How different was it with the second Man! As the eternal Word, He was in the beginning with God, and was God: without Him nothing was made that was made. But He emptied Himself, choosing to serve. The form of God was laid aside for a while, though never His divine prerogatives. When here in flesh, He could raise the dead, cleanse the leper, command the winds and the waves, and read the hearts and thoughts of men.

He came to serve, saying, "A body hast Thou prepared me . . . Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God" (Heb. 10: 7). To His disciples He could say, "The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister" (Mark 10: 45). And again, "I am among you as He that serveth" (Luke 22: 27). And He has not laid the servant's form aside: He is the girded One still, though in glory. He is the true Antitype of the Hebrew servant, who said, "I love my master, my wife, and my children, and I will not go out free" (Ex. 21.) And even in the future, He will love to serve His own. "Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord, when He cometh shall find watching; verily, I say unto you, that He shall gird Himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them" (Luke 12: 37).

But the Lord, in His downward course in grace, did not stop at the assumption of servant's form: "being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." What a stoop! What a wondrous pathway! But it has ended for Him in glory. He Himself laid down that "he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." God has seen to this. He hath highly exalted Him, and given Him the name that is above every name, and has decreed that every

knee, whether heavenly, earthly or infernal, shall bow to Him, and own His lordship, to His glory. It is important to observe the point of view from which the Lord's humiliation is spoken of in this chapter. It is not that He came to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, though that, blessed be His Name, is true; but that He humbled Himself in love, to serve. This is our pattern: "let this mind be in you."

The Apostle continues to exhort the saints. They had always obeyed; not merely when he was present with them, but much more in his absence. To the Galatians he had to speak differently. "It is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing, and not only when I am present with you" (Gal. 4: 18). And now that the Apostle was absent, the Philippians must work out their own salvation with fear and trembling. They no longer had him to encourage them, and lead them in their conflict with the foe: they must count on God for themselves. If Paul was unable to help them, God was there still, working in them to will and to do of His good pleasure. This is the only resource for the saints now. The Apostle, in bidding farewell to the Ephesian elders commended them to God and the Word of His grace (Acts 20.) Apostles have ceased, but God remains: to Him we turn.

He desired them to do all things without murmurings and disputings, and to be blameless and harmless, children of God without rebuke in the midst of a perverse generation. Verses 15-16 are very striking: every sentence reminds of Christ. Was He not blameless and harmless, Son of God without rebuke in the midst of perverse Israel? Was He not the Light of the World, and the Word of life? Saints are thus to have Him before them, and follow His blessed steps. And if the saints so walked, Paul would rejoice in the day of Christ: so evident would it be that he had not run in vain, nor laboured in vain. No labourer boasts of work that turns out badly, even though the fault may not lie at his door. Apostolic exhortations are frequent as to this. See 2 Cor. 6: 3; "Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed." Also 1 John 2: 28; "little children, abide in Him, that when He shall appear, We may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming." And many other passages.

So dear was the service of Christ to him, that Paul was quite willing to be poured out as a drink-offering; to him it would be a matter of rejoicing. In verse 17, he regards the Philippians as a sacrifice, himself merely (so lowly were his thoughts) as the hin of wine poured on the sacrifice. (See Num. 15: 1-10). If this would glorify Christ, he was willing to be martyred and even desirous; and called upon the saints to rejoice with him. Unselfish servant; and unselfish saints, upon whom he could count to rejoice even at losing him whom they so dearly loved that Christ might be magnified. But though he was thus quite willing to be poured out, and expected sooner or later to be so dealt with, he believed he should abide for the present, as we have seen in Phil. 1. Therefore he hoped to send Timotheus to them shortly, that he might be comforted by having the latest information as to their state. He knew not who else to send. Timothy trod in his footsteps, and loved to care for the saints, but he could not say this of all. The majority sought their own things, not those of Christ Jesus. Painful and early departure from the simplicity and singleness of heart of Acts 2 - 4! What is man! Need we wonder at the worldliness and apathy of our own days? Let us examine our hearts: has Christ the first place there? Are His interests ours? Timothy had proved himself: as a son with a father, he had laboured faithfully and well in the Gospel; unlike John Mark, who commenced well, but departed from them at Perga, and went not with them to the work. (Acts 15: 38). Him, therefore, Paul hoped to send presently, trusting in the Lord that he also himself would soon be able to follow.

Meanwhile, however, he would send to them Epaphroditus, who had come to him with gifts from them: "my brother, and companion in labour, and fellow-soldier," as Paul affectionately describes him, "but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants." Verses 26-28 furnish us with a fine picture of delicacy of affection and tender consideration for others. Epaphroditus had been sick, "for the work of Christ he had been nigh unto death;" the Philippians had heard of it, and this distressed the heart of

the devoted sufferer. That he should have caused them a moment's anxiety was a deep trial to him, and caused him to long to see them again, that their hearts might be set at rest. Paul thoroughly shared this feeling, and much as he desired to keep him, he urged him to return, that when the saints saw him again, they might rejoice. Wonderful! What does the selfish heart of man, as man, know of such feelings? This is the Spirit's fruit — He forms the new man after Christ. God had mercifully spared Epaphroditus to Paul and the saints: the Apostle would have him held in reputation. Like Paul, he regarded not his life that he might serve Christ. (Acts 20: 24). Such characters shine the more brightly in the day of declension: we have seen that the Apostle had to groan over the majority of the labourers; here was one who gave his heart (and the heart of God) deep joy.

Philippians 3.

The Apostle now exhorts the saints to rejoice in the Lord; a word, to his mind, so important, that he repeats it emphatically in Phil. 4: 4. He has already spoken of different kinds of joy: (1) In making request for the saints, (2) That Christ was abundantly preached, (3) In seeing the saints walking together in unity, (4) In being poured out as a drink offering. Here he leaves the streams, as it were, and traces all up to the source, directing their hearts to the Lord Himself. To write such things could not be grievous (irksome) to him, and it was safe for the saints. How much we need to be reminded of the true source of all our joy! We undoubtedly find joy in the fellowship of the saints, and in the service of Christ; but it is unsafe for our hearts to rest there. The saints may cause pain and disappointment, and the service may discourage; where then the joy? But if the heart is set upon the Lord, whatever the days or circumstances, all is well.

But there are things that cloud our joy, and intrude themselves between the soul and Christ. The Apostle proceeds to speak gravely of one in particular. Judaising teachers were everywhere at work; active enough when he was moving about, they were probably much more so now that he was a prisoner. He describes them unsparingly as "dogs," for they had no sense of conscience or of shame; as "evil workers," because they were corrupting the work and truth of God; and then contemptuously calls them "the concision." The saints were to "beware": to be led by these teachers after the law and ordinances would ruin their joy, and separate them in heart from Christ. Any merely outward rite * is of no value in the eyes of God (circumcision now is only "concision," i.e., maiming): "we are the concision," finding our death and separation to God in the death of Christ, "who worship God in the Spirit and have no confidence in the flesh."** It is to be observed that it is not the grossness of the flesh that is spoken of in this chapter, but its religiousness: it is worthless, and they that are in the flesh cannot please God.

{*I do not include the Lord's Supper here. That is connected with the new creation and stands on wholly different ground.}

{**It is worthy of remark, as confirming the character of this epistle, that sin is not once named in it, and the flesh here only just to say we have no confidence in it. The believer is regarded throughout as walking in the power of the Spirit.}

If any one thought he had whereof he might trust in the flesh, Paul had more. He was a circumcised man, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, a Benjamite, a Pharisee, zealous against all who appeared to slight the law, and as touching the righteousness which was by the law, he was blameless. Who could show a fairer picture? But whatever Saul of Tarsus might have gloried in, Paul the saint and Apostle gloried in Christ alone. "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ." The ardent legalist and persecutor was arrested by a glorified Christ at the height of his course; he saw, on

that memorable day, the despised Nazarene, whose followers he was pursuing to death, in the glory of God. His conscience was touched, his heart attracted. He saw a righteousness revealed in Christ, which put all human doings in the shade, so that what he had regarded as gain, he now counted but loss; he would no longer stand in his own righteousness, even if it were possible. Henceforward his heart was occupied, not with himself and works, but with Christ. And after many years of suffering and loss for His Name (a path surely of unparalleled trial, except as we remember the path of his Lord) he was of the same mind, Christ was all. Every thing to him was but loss and dung, as compared with the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord. Unlike the foolish Galatians, he continued to run well, allowing none to hinder. He regards Christ here as a prize to be won at the end, and divine righteousness as that in which he will stand in that day, which is quite in accord with the character of the Epistle. In another aspect, Christ was his when he wrote, and divine righteousness too; but throughout Philippians the believer is regarded as passing through the wilderness to the heavenly goal. The Apostle kept the goal before him — Christ; allowing nothing to divert the attention of his heart, and thus he was energised for, and sustained in, the path of peculiar trial, reproach, and labour to which the Lord had, from the first, called him. To him the end was so blessed, to have Christ for his own, and to be found in Him, not having his own righteousness, which was of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith, that he cared not how bitter and rugged the path might be which led him to it. He desired a yet deeper experimental knowledge of Christ, and the power of His resurrection (and who knew it better than he?) and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death. To him it was no small privilege to drink of His cup, and to be baptised with His baptism: indeed the deeper his sufferings, the more he would be like Christ, and that was enough for him. In verse 11 we must read — The resurrection "from among" the dead." What possible meaning can be attached to ;"of the dead"? The general fact of resurrection can scarcely be an object of desire, for no man can evade it, all must rise again; but Paul had before him the glorious day when Christ will return and call His own from their tombs to bear His heavenly image, the rest of the dead being left in their graves until the judgement of the great day. The resurrection of the believer is of the same character as that of the Lord Jesus; "from among the dead," for blessedness, for glory in the Father's house.

Clearly to this the Apostle had not yet attained, nor was already perfect; but he followed after, if that he might apprehend that for which he was apprehended of Christ Jesus. Christ had laid hold of him for glory; he desired to lay hold of it that the glory might have its full power over his soul. He would forget all the things behind, and do but one thing, pressing toward the mark for the prize of the calling of God on high in Christ Jesus. He would not forget grace, and what it had done for him (1 Tim. 1: 12-16), but would forget, i.e., not rest in — all attainments by the way. If I had a twenty-mile walk before me, I might be thankful when the fifteenth mile stone is passed; but it would not do to rest there, but I must leave the fifteenth and sixteenth behind as all others, and press on towards the end. So pressed Paul: the glory, yea Christ was before him; he would not stop short of that. He exhorts the saints to do the same: "let us, as many as be perfect,* be thus minded "; and if any had not properly learned their heavenly calling, God would reveal even this unto them. But all are responsible to walk up to attainment, whether great or small. The Apostle then calls upon the saints to imitate him (in 1 Cor. 11: 1 he qualifies it, "even as I also Christ") in running this race towards the heavenly goal, and bids them mark any amongst them who walked in the same way.

{*"Perfect" here is in the sense of full growth, in verse 12, it is likeness to Christ in glory.}

There is another class of men we are to "mark" according to Rom. 16: 17 — those who cause divisions and offences (stumbling blocks) contrary to the doctrine which we have learned. Such are to

be avoided, but all who walked as Paul walked, and were thus ensamples to the believers in word, in behaviour, etc. (1 Tim. 4: 12), were to be studied and imitated. The mention of this brought to the Apostle's heart a painful thought; there were those of whom he had often spoken, and of whom he now spoke weeping, who were enemies of the cross of Christ. They were not necessarily persons who had abandoned the profession of Christ, though they never had life; they were enemies of the cross. Having found the path one of reproach and loss, they had renounced it, loving earthly things, and preferring a path of self-indulgence and ease. Their end was destruction; but the Apostle felt keenly the open dishonour to the Name of the Lord Jesus.

The Christian's citizenship is in heaven, not here; his home, his portion, his all, is where Christ is. From heaven we look for Him, as Saviour, to complete His work in us by changing our poor bodies. The salvation of the soul we have now; for the salvation of the body we wait till that day. He will then change our body of humiliation (a better reading than "our vile body"), and fashion it like unto His own body of glory. Wondrous thought! The same power which He will display in the millennial kingdom in subduing all things to Himself, He will presently put forth upon the bodies of all who are His. He is thus the Hope of our hearts in the close of this chapter, as He is the Object of our hearts in the centre of it.

Philippians 4

Verse 1 is a fitting close to the precious subject treated in Phil. 3. "Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved." He had placed them, as it were, in Phil. 3, outside the world, with their citizenship in heaven, Christ in glory the Object and Hope of their hearts: in this position and experience he would have them stand fast, and not be moved by the wiles of the enemy.

The Apostle then appeals to two women who were evidently at variance, "that they be of the same mind in the Lord." Theirs was not strife of the gross and loose character as at Corinth; still it was a defect among the godly which the Apostle could not sanction. "Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines" (Cant. 2: 15). He entreated the mediation of his true yokefellow (probably Epaphroditus). These women had laboured with him in the Gospel, and he had a regard and concern for them: he would have his yokefellow act the blessed part of the peacemaker, as our Lord Jesus Himself enjoined. Again he exhorts the saints as in Phil. 3: 1, to rejoice in the Lord. Precious testimony to the faithfulness of the risen Lord to His poor tried servant; for his own heart was most assuredly enjoying what he here presses on his brethren.

In this chapter we see how the Christian, walking in the power of the Spirit, is enabled to walk above all circumstances. Therefore are we exhorted to moderation (or yieldingness), for the Lord is at hand. It is not the part of the saint to resent wrong, or to contend for rights: doing well and suffering for it is rather our path while the Lord is hidden in heaven. When He is manifested, all will be changed, for His saints will share with Him. Meanwhile it is our privilege to be without care, making known all our requests to God. Not merely large matters, but small also; everything we are invited to pour out before Him. In Matt. 6. the Lord Jesus instructed His disciples in faith as to food and clothing; here the word is wider, "Be careful for nothing." What repose this gives in such a world — -and, may we not add, such a church — as this! We are not told that we shall get all our requests (that might not be well) but that the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Paul requested, yea besought, the Lord thrice to remove the thorn from his flesh; but was simply told that the Lord's grace was sufficient for him, and that His strength was made perfect in weakness (2 Cor.

12.) The same apostle requested to be allowed to go to Rome, but for many years was denied his request (Rom. 15: 23). He desired also "a prosperous journey "; but the Lord saw fit to send him as a prisoner, and to wreck the ship (Rom. 1: 10). We are in the Lord's hand, He orders all in perfect wisdom for His beloved saints; and who can be His counselor?

The peace of God is a somewhat different thought from the peace of Christ; as both differ, though flowing from, peace with God. "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give unto you" John 14.) This is the peace which ever filled the heart of Jesus as a perfect Man of faith below. He committed everything to the Father; we are called into the same path. The peace of God is that which pervades God's own heart above, which nothing disturbs. The heavens have been corrupted, the earth ruined, Israel has failed, the Church likewise; yet nothing disturbs the peace of the Divine heart. His counsels stand, in spite of all creature failure; there God rests and there we rest also.

Food is furnished for our thoughts, for the loins of our mind are to be girded up: the lovely things, the things of good report, etc., are to engage us. Blessed portion! The true heart does not wink at evil, the rather abhorring and shunning it; but it does not dwell upon it. We cannot touch the unclean in any way without contracting defilement. We see this strikingly in Numbers 19. The priest who sprinkled the heifer's blood, the man who laid up the ashes in a clean place, indeed all who had to do with the matter were unclean until even, though they had only acted in putting sin away. We particularly need this injunction as to our thoughts in the present day, when there is so much of a painful character to fill the mind. If our minds dwell on evil, we get defiled, our communion is marred, our spiritual tone is altogether lowered.

If the Philippians practiced what they had learned, received, and heard, and seen in Paul, the God of peace would be with them.

The Apostle proceeds to commend them for their care of him, proved by the coming of Epaphroditus. There had apparently been a long interval without any tokens of love; but the man of God loved to regard it, not as carelessness on their part, but lack of opportunity. In those days saints could not remit by post to the Lord's labourers; the gifts must be carried, perhaps afoot many hundreds of miles. But though thanking them and the Lord for their care the Apostle does not speak in respect of want. "I have learned," says he, 'in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.'" Blessed superiority over all circumstances — Christ engaging the heart, the Spirit operating powerfully in the soul! It is easier to some to be abased than to abound. David, when hunted as a partridge upon the mountains, trusted God; when dwelling at ease in Zion, Satan allured him into the foulest sins. Jehoshaphat, when weak, counted on God, saying, "We know not what to do"; when strong and rich, he joined affinity with Ahab and helped the ungodly.

Paul had been well disciplined. The Lord said when He called him, "I will show him how great things he must suffer for my Name's sake" (Acts 9) Whether full or hungry, Christ was all. What can the enemy do to such? The believer has a life, which, wrought upon by the Spirit of God, rises quite above the difficulties of the way, and is unquenchable.

Still, the Philippians did well in their expressions of practical fellowship. If the Apostle had learned how to suffer need, it ill became the saints to permit him so to suffer. In this respect the Philippians had always ranked well, even sending long distances to minister to the need of the Lord's servant. Paul calls it fruit which would abound to their account; and "an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing unto God." Marvellous! The Spirit uses language similar to that used

of the sacrifice of Christ in Eph. 5: 2; it partook of that character with God. Would the Philippians be the losers by their liberality? Nay, Paul's God would supply all their need according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. The beauty and fullness of this expression is to be found in the Epistle to the Ephesians.

Note, he does not say "our," but "my God"; for he is speaking of experience, not doctrine. He had proved God; he knew Him to be faithful; he could vouch for Him to those to whom he wrote. When it is a question of relationship, he says "our God and Father," as in verse 20; every believer, experienced or not, being a child through grace.

He concludes with salutations from all the brethren with him, mentioning particularly some who were of Caesar's household, proving Christ had a people there, fruit possibly of his labours as a prisoner. Precious simplicity of affection, which our hearts will do well to cultivate more and more.