

Studies In Philippians

BY

R. C. Bell



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LESSON 1

In Acts 16 is found a graphic account of Paul's founding at historic Philippi, about A.D. 52, the first church in Europe. According to the book of Acts, when Christ attacks one of Satan's heathen strongholds, Satan bestirs himself in opposition. After unsuccessfully resisting the gospel beachhead on the continent of Europe by trying to have men think that "a maid having a spirit of divination" was in alliance with Paul, he turned to persecution, and beat and imprisoned Paul and Silas. This second method of opposition failed so miserably, however, that Paul's jailer became a Christian, and probably with Lydia and the maid formed the nucleus of the church in Philippi.

Inasmuch as there can be no alliance or compromise between God and Satan, Paul refused true testimony when it was given by Satan's instrument. Likewise, Christ rebuked demons when they declared who he was (Luke 4:34, 35). Neither Christ nor Paul would suffer such profanation of truth. "The prince of this world," the father of lies, never speaks truth unless the circumstances are such that God will be dishonored and man duped, for as Christ said, "there is no truth in him" (John 8:44). The adage, "Take truth and good wherever you find them," because of its strong appeal to human pride and sufficiency, has been disastrously used by Satan from Eden onward. Men cannot discern between fundamental truth and error, between ultimate good and evil. Their only safety lies in following "the good Shepherd," who can so discern, and in knowing "not the voice of strangers." "The way of man is not in himself" (Jer. 10:23).

Philippians Is Autobiographic

Philippians is more peaceful than Galatians, and more personal than Ephesians. Instead of being largely an answer to questions like 1 Corinthians, or a treatise of theology like Romans, it contains much intimate, personal matter like 2 Corinthians. There is a world of difference, however, between these two letters. In 2 Corinthians, Paul is forced, much against his preference, to talk

about himself in order to maintain his apostleship against envious “false apostles” toward whom he has no cause for gratitude, while in Philippians he is pouring out spontaneous, fatherly affection upon his dearest children, upon his kindest and best-loved church; in the two letters, he tells his experience for altogether different reasons. Paul knows that he is God’s spiritual laboratory where greater things are being wrought than any alchemist could ever discover in a physical laboratory. From his Roman prison, therefore, he tells the Philippians by what means he has become the Christian he is, hoping that they also may be moved to try the Christian experiment fully. “Brethren, be ye imitators together of me, and mark them that so walk even as ye have us for an example” (3:17) may be called the key verse of the book. O how much we all need Christianity as Paul understood, taught, and lived it!

Blemishes To Be Corrected

Although Paul does less chiding in Philippians than in letters to other churches, he hopes to correct two ugly blemishes in Philippi, the first of which is disunion. In the first chapter, after saluting “all the saints,” he uses the word “all” with the same import several times in such expressions as, “I long after you all,” as if he could not bear to think of them as being divided among themselves. In the same chapter, in order to show that he thinks of them as one in grace and service, he writes: “Stand fast in one spirit with one soul striving for the faith of the gospel.” The second chapter begins with a strong personal plea for unity: “Make full my joy, that ye may be of the same mind.” Then in the last chapter, still more personally and earnestly, he beseeches: “I exhort Euodia, and I exhort Syntyche, to be of the same mind in the Lord.” What can all this mean but that Paul, though likely no doctrinal differences and open breaches existed, looked with anxious eye and grieved heart upon some personal differences that were gnawing at the peace and usefulness of the church?

The second blemish that he hopes to correct is despondency. The church, founded in bitter persecution, has continued “to suffer in his (Christ’s) behalf” throughout its existence of some ten

years—ample time after “the first sprightly running” for an Ephesian drift from “first love” (Rev. 2:4). But Paul exhorts, “in nothing affrighted by the adversaries” (1 :18). Moreover, Paul’s long imprisonment and longer absence so depresses them that he is constrained to write: “So then, my beloved, even as ye have always obeyed, not in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling”; for though I am absent, God, “who began a good work in you,” is still present and “worketh in you both to will and to work, for his good pleasure” (2:12, 13); therefore “Rejoice in the Lord always again . . . rejoice” (4:4).

The word “all” as the opposite of disunion, and the word “rejoice” as the opposite of despondency are used so repeatedly throughout the book that they may be called keywords. It is said that the devil upon being asked by his imps why he depended so much on despondency as a weapon against God explained that it was easy to discourage Christians, and that when once discouraged and despondent they made his best, especially undercover, workers. And thus the enemy sows “tares also among the wheat.”

Skeletal Outline of Philippians

Theme: Rejoicing in the Lord always.

1. Rejoicing in evangelism and in facing death. Chap. 1.
2. Rejoicing in lowly service and in brotherhood. Chap. 2.
3. Rejoicing in imperfections and in heavenly citizenship. Chap. 3.
4. Rejoicing in anxiety and in privation. Chap. 4.

Christ’s name (not counting pronouns) occurs about fifty times in the 104 verses of Philippians. According to the book, Christ lives in each one of us who can say with Paul, “For me to live is Christ” (1:21). In the four chapters, Christ, successively, is our life, our example, our object, and our strength. The rich cream of Paul’s long personal experience with Christ rises in this prison epistle. May we all remember ever that no faith can live itself out in our

lives that is not sustained and renewed by memory, experience, and hope.

QUESTIONS

1. Relate, according to Acts 16, the circumstances of the founding of the church at Philippi.
2. Why did Satan “tempt” Christ personally in the wilderness, and later relentlessly oppose his church?
3. Name two methods that Satan used in opposing the establishment of a Christian beachhead in Europe.
4. Where and in what condition was Paul when he wrote Philippians?
5. What interpretation did Paul put upon his persecution by Jews and Romans, and upon the hostility of his false brethren?
6. Contrast, in general character, Philippians and Galatians; Philippians and Ephesians; Philippians and Second Corinthians.
7. Name two faults in the church at Philippi which Paul hoped to correct by this letter.
8. State the general theme of Philippians, and tell what particular phase of it each chapter treats.
9. What does the statement. “The cream of the gospel rises in this letter,” mean?

LESSON 2

The salutation in part reads: “To all the saints in Christ Jesus that are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons.” Members of the church at Philippi were all saints and Christians (the words are synonymous), for all were called out of the world and set apart, or sanctified, unto Christ. When some of these saints met certain qualifications and manifested special aptitude for spiritual leadership, the church selected and appointed them bishops, or overseers. Others, upon becoming qualified to “serve tables,” were appointed deacons.

Here is the simple organization and government of the local New Testament church. A church may be either too highly or too loosely organized for efficiency. In the former case, power finally centers in one man, which inevitably corrupts, while in the latter case, the potential gifts and powers of members remain undeveloped. Scriptural church polity, properly balancing these two extremes, demonstrates its divine wisdom by encouraging every member of the congregation, up to his measure, to worship, work, and grow.

Retrospective-Prospective Introduction

(1:3-11)

This opening passage brims with thanks, gratitude, prayer, and joy. Though its author is fast in prison some 700 miles away, uncertain of his earthly future, its recipients must have felt his eager, buoyant, dynamic spirit among them again. As a saint among saints (Paul does not call himself “apostle” as he usually does in his letters), he tells them that he holds them fondly in his heart as joint-heirs of grace and as fellow-workers in his “bonds and in the confirmation of the gospel from the first day until now.” The Philippians, having been taught that, when truth is learned, duty begins, became missionaries immediately and “sent once and again” to Paul’s need in Thessalonica, where he established the second Macedonian church. Later, Paul used the exceptionally

liberal giving of these churches as an inducement to move the Corinthians to give. The substantial Macedonians, descendants of the Macedon of Philip and Alexander the Great, and of the Romans, by their being so ready to help him preach the gospel in the spirit of the gospel, appealed especially to Paul's great evangelistic soul.

In "He that began a good work in you will perfect it (God deserts no task till it is finished) until the day of Jesus Christ," Paul uses the past as a springboard of prayer for the future. After generously giving thanks for the strong things in the church, he prays for their mutual love, the lack of which is probably their greatest weakness. "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and all discernment; so that you may approve the things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and void of offense unto the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness."

Thus Paul waters his epistle with a prayer of six items. He prays that they may be a loving, knowing, discerning, sincere, inoffensive, fruitful people. Love is the bud that opens out into the others. As one without sight cannot discern color, so one without love cannot be sensitive to the wishes and the rights of his brethren, and "approve the things that are excellent." Love, illuminating reason to see truly and quickly what hurts or offends the one loved, can heal the disunion in Philippi. With loveless hearts, Christians cannot think lovely thoughts and do lovely deeds. Only by sincere love abounding "yet more and more in all knowledge and discernment," not by sheer effort of intellect and strength of will, are the deep urges of the natural man to be controlled. From this heavenly prayer, may we not all learn how to pray for and live with our friends? Spiritual dwarfs do not pray that others may become spiritual giants.

The Supernatural in the Natural

As Paul in his Roman prison reviews his strange, dramatic life since his arrest in Jerusalem—the murderous Jews, the "law's delays" before the Romans, his appeal to Caesar, the perilous

shipwreck and deadly viper on Malta; remembers his disappointments, sufferings, and the numerous times it looked as if his career had received a fatal blow—to encourage them he writes: “Now I would have you know, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the progress of the gospel; so that my bonds became manifest in Christ throughout the whole praetorian guard, and to all the rest; and that most of the brethren, being confident through my bonds, are more abundantly bold to speak the word without fear.”

Paul thinks how the soldiers whom he met in prison at Caesarea have helped prepare for his fruitful work in Nero’s bodyguard and “Caesar’s household”; thinks how his bonds have emboldened others, even some with wrong motives, to be more active in the preaching denied him, thus building up the church in general; thinks how divine purpose threads through the tangled affairs of earth, and how God’s providences, like some languages, can be read only backward, and then not in fragments for they all “work together for good.” Thus thinking, he realizes that only God knows when a man in chains will reach farther than if left at liberty, and rejoices that God has trusted him with persecution and sorrow, for what happens to him, if Christ be proclaimed, matters not. He remembers that when the ark of God was captured by the Philistines, Dagon, their god, fell (1 Sam. 5:1-5).

The many cases in the Bible of God’s working in and through men, good and bad—the supernatural in the natural—have nothing to show more illuminating and edifying than the lives of Joseph and Paul. Recall what Joseph suffered through his unnatural brothers, and hear him tell them many years later in Egypt: “As for you, ye meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring to pass, as it is this day” (Gen. 50:20). Unto this day, God’s government has not changed. But only men today who have the faith of Joseph and Paul can have their God. They did not understand it all, even as we do not. But faith fulfilled in experience was sufficient for them, and it must be for us. No man who believes in God, or even observes nature, can ever doubt anything just because its roots reach down into mystery.

This “study” closes with invincible Paul of the evangelistic mind, in spite of everything, triumphantly shouting: “This shall turn out to my salvation, through your supplication and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ . . . in nothing shall I be put to shame.”

QUESTIONS

1. As used by Paul, what does the word, “saint,” mean?
2. Describe Scriptural church government.
3. How old should a church be before it undertakes evangelistic work?
4. Give the substance of Paul’s prayer for the Philippians.
5. Why is brotherly love of such vital importance in Christian living?
6. As used in this article, what is the meaning of the phrase, “the supernatural in the natural”?
7. Show that Paul’s view of life enabled him to rejoice in all of his extreme persecutions and sufferings.
8. Show that Joseph (Genesis 37-50) possessed this same view of God’s sovereign government of the world.
9. In this field of thought, what does the sentence, “God writes straight with crooked lines,” mean to you?

LESSON 3

As Paul faced possible execution by Rome, he wrote the Philippians: “Through your supplication and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ . . . Christ shall be magnified in my body whether by life or by death.” Paul was so entirely devoted to Christ that he had a holy indifference as to whether he served him by living, or by dying. Greek scholars say that “supplication” and “supply of the spirit” are so intimately related that they are virtually one, as if Paul said, “As your prayers ascend, the Spirit will descend.”

In the same circumstances and about the same time, Paul wrote Philemon: “But withal prepare me also a lodging: for I hope that through your prayers I shall be given unto you.” Who can think that Paul was in error, or insincere, when he wrote his friends that prayer and the Holy Spirit would effect his courage and imprisonment? Why did he think that God hears such prayer and “supplieth . . . the Spirit?” (Gal. 3:5). He knew that availing prayer and the workings of the Spirit were much older than his Bible. Remember, Paul also wrote the Philippians: “These things which ye . . . heard and saw in me, these things do.”

Life or Death

Some men, balancing the comparative desirability of life and death find difficulty in deciding which is preferable. For a worldly man, sooner or later, is a choice between two evils. Hamlet’s famous soliloquy, “To be or not to be,” is the classic literary example. To Hamlet, the disadvantages of living, or dying, were so evenly matched that he, true to his basic weakness of character, could not decide, and consequently continued to be dominated by circumstances. Voltaire, a French philosopher and skeptic of two centuries ago, said that he hated life and dreaded death. How different from Paul! To him, neither life nor death was evil. Both were so good that in thinking of a choice of either against the other, he was “in a strait betwixt the two.”

To depressed Christians of any time, Paul's, "For to me, to live, is Christ, and to die is gain," is a great tonic. Paul was telling the Philippians, if he were freed from prison, he would continue to live a life dead to the flesh in order that Christ might still live in, and express himself through, him; but, if he were executed, instead of serving him on earth in privation and suffering, he would be enjoying him in heaven, which would be "very far better." Christ's living in Paul made his life on earth and his life to come in heaven one continuous, undivided life. He was so enlivened with Christ, as a graft with the root, that he was happy serving him on earth, happier in the thought of enduring death that he might go to him beyond death, and happiest in the hope of being with him forever in heaven. To depart was better for him, but since his staying on earth was more needful for them, he, Christlike, was willing to stay.

Paul had already been "caught up into Paradise" (2 Cor. 12:2-4), and his ignorance as to whether or not his body went along is proof that life apart from the body may continue, as a watch continues to run, removed from the case. The passageway from earth to heaven, the outer and the inner mansions of God's house, is a very short corridor. The great romantic adventure of death is a new stage in the progress of union and communion with Christ. Paul knows nothing of either purgatory or soul-sleeping. To him death, ushering a Christian into the immediate presence of Christ, is comparable to a change of address.

But what can men without the Bible know about death and its gain? Socrates said to the judge who condemned him to death: "If it is true that the souls of just men know felicity after death, let me die, not once, but many times." One of the last things he said to his friends as the hemlock did its deadly work was: "The time has come for us to part—for me to die and for you to live—but which of us is going to a better thing is uncertain. Socrates, one of the very best pagan minds of all time, died like a philosopher, but without Paul's living hope and certain gain. The fuel which fed the fire that burned so steadily and brightly in Paul is not to be found among natural men.

Christian Unity

“Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you or be absent, I may hear of your state, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one soul striving for the faith of the gospel: and in nothing affrighted by the adversaries: which is for them an evident token of perdition” (1:27, 28). This exhortation consists of three pleas: first, that their conduct be consistent with, and worthy of, the Christian calling; second, that in unity of life, they all stand solidly together, a compact body like the historic “Macedonian Phalanx,” in their fight against the world; third, that they be courageous and fearless of soul, for since both sides cannot win a war, their present success is a Sign of the enemy’s final defeat.

Need it be said that, though all Christians are required to be absolute in their commitment to all fundamental Christian doctrine, conformity and mechanical sameness in secondary matters are not required. Indeed, the manifold diversity of nature and condition found among Christians make such conformity impossible. Furthermore, it is undesirable, because these dissimilarities provide brethren who love each other ideal conditions for mutual study, edification and growth. Christian unity is organic unity in diversity.

Twin Gifts

The close of this chapter throws light on the problem, why do good men like Paul suffer. It teaches that both faith in Christ and suffering for Christ are divine gifts “granted” unto men. That suffering is a privilege and an opportunity is a hard lesson for us. Nevertheless, “Whom the Lord loveth he chasteth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.” Suffering for Christ makes men patient, kind, compassionate, and neighborly. Had Paul suffered no thorn in his flesh, we would miss the mellowness, the gentle pleading, and the tender wooing that quiver throughout his writings. He, like his adored Master, has a heart as large as his head. In Philippians, as is usual with him, his heart is so full that he cares to keep back nothing. “Blessed are they that have been

persecuted for righteousness' sake.”

QUESTIONS

1. How effective does Paul think prayer is?
2. Does he think that the Holy Spirit will help him to live aright in his trying circumstances?
3. Explain in its setting Paul's “in a strait betwixt the two.”
4. What consideration made Paul willing to live on earth longer?
5. Contrast Paul's view of death with Hamlet's, with Voltaire's, and with Socrates', respectively.
6. Show that Paul's experience of being “caught up into Paradise” proves that man's soul may live apart from his body.
7. What linked Paul's life on earth and his life to follow in heaven into one harmonious, happy whole?
8. What does the statement, “Christian unity is organic unity in diversity,” mean?
9. What benefits should Christians get from their sufferings?

LESSON 4

By being more specific in the opening of chapter 2 than he was in the general exhortation for unity near the close of chapter 1, Paul discloses what was amiss at Philippi. The nature and fervency of this prolonged exhortation is evidence that legitimate differences about secondary things and personal matters were needlessly disturbing the peace of the church. Their mishandling such things, rather than the things themselves, was the chief trouble.

Giving relatively small things more prominence than they merit, and wrangling over them, always causes weakness and sin in a church. With Christian treatment, many “important things” soon become very unimportant. When saints agree on essentials, let them beware of dissension over incidentals. Moreover, we all need superhuman wisdom in order to distinguish between supplementary and contradictory things. “If any of you lacketh wisdom, let him ask of God . . . and it shall be given him” (Jas. 1:5). Honest study of the Bible and believing prayer are indispensable for a spiritual, functioning church.

Discord at Philippi

In spite of all his troubles, Paul comes through chapter 1 rejoicing, and encouraging the Philippians, “Soldiers of the cross, shoulder to shoulder”; yet his joy is not complete. He writes: “Make full my joy, that ye may be of the same mind, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.” (Note how affection delights to repeat and linger). In tenderness he pleads that if their experience in Christ is real and has power to stir the heart and to move the will; if they find love, consolation, fellowship, and compassion; if they can be entreated at all, they do “nothing through faction or vainglory, but in lowliness of mind each counting other better than himself; not looking each to his own things, but each of you also to the things of others” (2:1-4).

When the Philippians read this, could they fail to see that though

the gospel had delivered them from Satan's dominion, it had not taken them beyond the range of his temptations? fail to see that pride and selfishness were the cause of their disunion and of Paul's exhortation? Could they fail to realize that the stubborn pride of nature must be broken down before grace can really be received as grace, and that only the lowly-minded can be like-minded?

In the beginning man fell through pride, and he must be restored through humility. Christ's first beatitude is, "Blessed are the poor in spirit (self-renounced); for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." If love is the summit of Christianity, humility is its foundation. The gate of life is as low as it is narrow. Christian humility springs, basically, from man's realizing that without the grace of God he is hopelessly lost in time and in eternity. Self-sufficient men cannot live the Christian life. "To be Christless is to be lifeless."

Christ's Essential Glory

"Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, existing in the form of God. . . emptied himself; . . . and being in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross." Just before his arrest Christ prayed: "Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was" (John 17:5). Since Christ retained his essential glory and was still God during his sojourn, on earth, it was only the heavenly glory and divine prerogatives of which he emptied himself. In him met all the attributes of the Godhead and all the perfections of manhood. He was God-man, the first but not the last, of a new order of life in the universe. As God he "emptied himself."

Christ's Acquired Glory

"Wherefore God highly exalted him, and gave him a name which is above every name; that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow . . . and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord." A sketch of Christ's history runs: essential glory of the Godhead from all eternity, humanity redeemed by his service on earth, and return to his original glory with the Father plus the

acquired glory for having saved a lost world. This is the high exaltation of our text. Earned, double exaltation for Christ and undeserved redemption for man! When Christ went back to heaven after his dive down to lowest humiliation on earth, he took mankind, to him a salvaged priceless treasure, on his shoulder with him. This acquired glory is the glory he shares with his bride now and evermore. The grand argument of Hebrews 2 involves this consummate truth.

Since as eternal God, Christ could not be exalted, only as Mediator was his exaltation possible. Therefore his mediatory name, his saving name, “Jesus,” the name Gabriel gave him before his birth to be worn forever, is “the name” that every tongue shall confess as “*Lord*, to the glory of God the Father.”

Faithless Speculations

Paul knew that discord about secondary things could not exist among the Philippians after they possessed the mind of Christ; he knew that their friction grew out of the fact that some of them were not truly converted from self unto Christ; he knew also that the way to get them actually to give Christ precedence over self, thus becoming able to count others better than themselves, was to hold Christ up before them in all his unselfishness as an example. This explains how this great scripture,, which has caused so much useless and destructive speculation down through the centuries about the divine-human nature of Jesus, got into this informal letter. Probably the opposite extremes of these speculations are Unitarianism and Mariolatry: the former robs Christ of his deity, and the latter ascribes deity to a woman. Paul did not intend these verses to become a battleground, in the realm above human understanding, for theological disputation; he used them as practical, powerful persuasion.

If all Christians could have always divested themselves of the pride of learning, admitted that “without controversy great is the mystery of godliness” (1 Tim. 3:16), and in faith accepted Christ as God-man without trying to explain him, ambitious, divisive heresies about his person could not have arisen. Christianity still

suffers from the pride of scholarship and intellectualism.

QUESTIONS

1. What does the earnest exhortation at the first of chapter 2 reveal about conditions in the church at Philippi?
2. How may a failure to distinguish between supplementary and contradictory things cause sinful disunity in a church?
3. How may Christians acquire wisdom to make this difficult distinction?
4. Why is it that only the lowly-minded can be like-minded?
5. What is the real, deep basis of Christian humility?
6. For what purpose did Paul introduce the great passage dealing with Christ's timeless, personal history?
7. In what manner has the passage been desecrated and made to serve an unholy purpose?
8. Distinguish between Christ's essential glory and his acquired glory.
9. Can all "the mystery of godliness" be resolved by man?

LESSON 5

When Julius Caesar was stabbed to death by Roman conspirators, his friend Mark Antony, bent on revenge, made an oration over the body to citizens in the market place of Rome. As the climax of his politic eulogy, he uncovered the mutilated corpse and feelingly spoke in vivid detail of the many wounds, suffered by Caesar as their benefactor. According to his design, the citizens were aroused to frenzy for vengeance on the conspirators.

Does not this illustrate Christ's strategy of emptying and humbling himself even unto death with pierced and disfigured body? Can you think of anything more profoundly moving than the mangled, bloody body of your best friend who died trying to help you? What a wrench the very thought gives you! Remember Christ did not have to come to earth at all; nor die after he came. And might he not have died in the friendly home at Bethany? Or in any other way he chose? Nay. Only the cross could give him power to subdue and save men.

When men are tempted to question the power of the cross, let them read Paul's, "We preach Christ crucified . . . the power of God, and the wisdom of God," to the Corinthians, over whom the power of Grecian rhetoric and philosophy had cast a spell. Or let them try to imagine what the world was before Christ died, or what it would be today if he had never died. Cannot men learn that they at least owe it to themselves to give the cross of Christ a trial by faith, and see what happens. "There is. . . wonderworking pow'r in the blood."

As Antony correctly foresaw Roman reaction to Caesar's wounds, so Christ by his cruel, vicarious death purposes to kindle men to fiery enthusiasm for him. Wherein lies the fault that not more Christians are so enkindled? Paul was. In gratitude all should be constrained to love, stoop, suffer, serve, and save lest men go unsaved and Christ be disappointed. This is God's ideal character as fulfilled in Christ, which none can ever attain apart from him.

“Your Own Salvation”

According to the book of Acts, Luke helped Paul plant the church at Philippi, and apparently remained a few years. Paul also revisited Philippi a few times before he wrote Philippians. For a few years before the book was written, however, neither Paul nor Luke had been in the city. In the book the church appears somewhat depressed. Paul affectionately reminds them of their obedience when he was with them that he may more effectively exhort: “Now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (2:12).

With all this in view, the conviction that the church was suffering from having depended too much on human help, and that in the absence of Paul and Luke it was taking its opportunities and obligations too lightly, is almost unavoidable. That the church lacked unity and some of the members were quarreling among themselves would lower its efficiency, elders included, and discourage their planning, working, disciplining, praying, paying, and suffering as they should. When personal grievances must be reconciled or difficult decisions made or intricate problems solved in a church, it is always easy to rely too much on noted preachers and teachers. It is God’s will, and therefore to the best interests of a congregation, that congregational matters be handled from within.

Paul wants them to realize that their connection with God is so close and personal that his or Luke’s presence, however desirable and seemingly useful, is not necessary; that when opportunities or difficulties arise in the congregation, since his absence throws them more directly upon God, they should with trembling earnestness and anxiety, lest they fail in duty, assume, not shirk, their responsibilities. He is saying to Philippi what he had already written Corinth: “Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.” He expects them to feel their direct relationship to God, and that “Each man must bear his own burden” (Gal. 6:5), of opportunity, responsibility, and accountability. To realize that we must account to God individually for what we indifferently fail to learn, to do, and to become is a mighty inducement and

encouragement to move us to work out our “own salvation with fear and trembling.”

God Works in Christians

Paul has told the Philippians that God will continue the good work he began in them (1:6). In this supplementary verse, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God that worketh in you,” he puts side by side the divine and the human works of redemption that they may realize how vital their part in this joint work, which God makes possible but not easy for either himself or them, really is. Co-laborers with God! Who would not tremble!

What Paul uses to stir Christians to vehement earnestness, theologians again have turned into a battlefield for theorizers. No theory has ever been advanced that explains the apparent contradiction between God’s predestination and man’s freedom, yet Paul here, and Peter on Pentecost, preach both, not to puzzle men, but to make them humble and earnest. This verse, addressed to Christians, teaches them that they can do nothing toward their sanctification without God, for God first works in what they work out. God works primarily, therefore they can work secondarily. “Apart from me ye can do nothing,” said Christ. On the other hand, God does nothing without the willing cooperation of Christians. However, their work can never supersede or make superfluous God’s perpetual workings.

QUESTIONS

1. Why did Christ choose to die by crucifixion rather than by some less *painful and shameful* form of death?
2. How does the funeral of Julius Caesar illustrate the strategy of Christ’s death?
3. What does Paul’s statement that “We preach Christ crucified . . . the power of God, and the wisdom of God” mean?
4. Why are men, even some Christian men, so indifferent to

Christ's vicarious sufferings?

5. In what sense do men work out their own salvation?
6. How is it that men can neither save themselves nor be saved without, or in despite of, themselves?
7. Did either Peter or his audience on Pentecost understand intellectually how men who slew Christ "by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23) could ye be murderers?
8. Explain the statement that "Congregational matters should be handled from within."
9. Are Christians accountable to God for truth they do not try to learn, for duty they neglect to do, and for failure to grow?

LESSON 6

On the background of self-exaltation and consequent dissension at Philippi, Paul, as we saw in the preceding “study,” throws the portrait of Christ in his extreme self-renunciation and consequent, pre-eminent exaltation. He paints this picture in order to add power to his great appeal, “Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” As Christ’s deep self-effacement and obedience even unto the cross was the bloody path he trod to glory and exaltation, so men who are to share his triumph must start, paradoxically, downward as he did. They must lose their lives in order to find them.

We also saw that Christians in working out their salvation, since they already have justification as a gift through the merit of Christ’s death, are not working for justification. Rather, in gratitude to him who justified them and in distrust of self to live worthily, they depend on the triune God, who is working in them, to provide “sanctification of the Spirit” as he did justification—blood for sinners and enabling power for saints. God’s workings in men, as in nature, exclude miracles, but include human collaboration. In all respects, men are basically dependent creatures; apart from God, they can do no more to justify or to sanctify themselves than they can to feed themselves bodily.

Note that Paul expects to correct the personal, local shortcomings at Philippi by an appeal to the universal, fundamental principles of Christianity—little things to be settled on big principles. He thinks that obedience to God and dependence on God as practiced by Christ will right everything. The essence of human sin has ever been man’s rejection of his creaturehood and his foolish desire to be wise and independent like God (See Gen. 3:4-6). God proposes in Christianity to bring man to a realization of the distance between himself and his Creator that he may be returned to the status of a dependent creature, and live as he was created and conditioned to live.

“The Mind of Christ”

“Do all things without murmurings and questionings; that ye may be blameless and harmless, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom ye are seen as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life” (2:14-16). The roots of this passage lie in, “Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (2:5). And inasmuch as it is a picture of Christ, it shows what having the mind of Christ means. The language, being unlimited, forbids complaining about anything whatsoever. Instead of questioning life’s mysteries and contradictions, and God’s providences, saints with the mind of Christ pray as he did in Gethsemane, “Not as I will, but as thou wilt.” All murmuring is treason against the mind of Christ.

These verses prune personal character that more fruit may be borne. That the church, in a dark and dead world, give light and save life, is its primary purpose and mature fruit. When Christians keep busy “holding forth the word of life,” they have little taste and time for petty quibbling and quarreling. As the color and fragrance of flowers, according to naturalists, are to attract bees that carry pollen to fertilize other flowers, so Christians are beautiful and attractive that the pollen of Christ may fertilize other lives.

Paul— (2:16-18)

In the rest of Philippians 2, Paul names and characterizes himself, Timothy, and Epaphroditus as men worthy of imitation because they have the mind of Christ. He wrote the Corinthians: “Be ye imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1). To these Philippians he writes: “The things which ye saw in me, these things do” (4:9). In our immediate scripture his Christ-like self-abnegation is truly amazing. It is as if Christ instead of Paul were doing the living. Indeed, this is the way he explains his life to the Galatians: “It is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me” (Gal. 2:20). Humble men do not think meanly of themselves; they just do not think of themselves at all.

Paul here tells them that his sufferings and possible execution are but the drink-offering that forms an insignificant part of their

burnt-offering of service. Note the unity in Christ: Paul in Rome and they in Philippi constitute but one sacrifice. They are his “joy and crown,” and should they fail “in the day of Christ,” it would be irreparable loss for him too. The passage closes: “I joy, and rejoice with you all: and in the same manner do ye also joy, and rejoice with me.” This chapter is full of rejoicing in lowly service.

Timothy — (2:19-24)

Paul does not know the future, but he hopes that his sending Timothy to Philippi, to be followed soon by his own coming, is in line with the will of God. In all literature, no more elevated friendship than that between Paul and Timothy exists. Their both having the mind of Christ accounts for their selfless likemindedness; each like the Good Shepherd has a true shepherd-heart. On this occasion at least, Paul has no other man to send who has such “small regard for his dinner” and self-advancement, and who can therefore so well heal their diseases. Self so successfully squirms itself into our religion that death to self is still a rare thing. Of how many may, “They all seek their own, not the things of Jesus Christ,” be written today? This, too, is treason against the mind of Christ; he “pleased not himself,” but sought the things of others.

Epaphroditus — (2:25-30)

The last of the Christ-like trio is Epaphroditus. The church at Phillippi had sent him, one of their number, to Rome with supplies and “news” for Paul. He had fallen “sick nigh unto death,” but now, through God’s mercy well again and no doubt bearing this letter, is going home. As a devoted son, sick, away from home, is distressed because his mother is grieved on his account, Epaphroditus longs to get back for the comfort of homefolk. Paul writes: “I have sent him . . . that, when ye see him again, ye may rejoice, and that I may be the less sorrowful.” How touching, even unto pathos, that Paul feels he has enough sorrow without being indirectly the cause of sorrow to others. A house, even a hired house, that shelters these three is a veritable hothouse of Christian consideration, tenderness and courtesy. Who can doubt that Paul is

reducing his, “Walk even as ye have us for an ensample” (3:17), to life for the church at Philippi?

QUESTIONS

1. What does to have the mind of Christ mean?
2. Explain the paradox that one must go down in order to rise.
3. To what extent are men basically dependent upon God?
4. In what does human sin essentially consist?
5. Why is complaining and murmuring treason against the mind of Christ?
6. What is the chief activity of the church?
7. How does Paul account for his having the mind of Christ?
8. Characterize Timothy and Epaphroditus.
9. For what purpose are the lives of Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus brought into the last half of Philippians 2?

LESSON 7

The general theme of the largely autobiographic book of Philippians is rejoicing. Chapter 1 shows Paul's rejoicing in afflictions occasioned by both worldlings and false brethren; chapter 2 shows his rejoicing in lowly, obscure service, unnoticed by the world; now, chapter 3, which begins, "Finally, my brethren rejoice in the Lord," shows his rejoicing in spite of imperfection because he hopes to become a perfect man when he receives at Christ's coming a risen, spiritual body, "conformed to the body of his (Christ's) glory."

It may seem odd, near the center of the book, to find the word, "finally." But the same thing is found in both of the Thessalonian letters. Romans closes with a postscript. Is it strange that a man who could write, "Out of many afflictions and anguish of heart . . . with many tears" (2 Cor. 2:4), and "My little children, I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you" (Gal. 4:19), and who warns these Philippians "even weeping," finds tearing himself loose from his weak, misguided children in the Lord and bringing his letter to an actual close difficult? Tenderness and strength are not incompatible.

No Confidence in the Flesh

Paul teaches in many scriptures that the flesh and the spirit are mutually antagonistic and exclusive. His depraved, self-sufficient "natural man," who "receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God" (1 Cor. 2:14) and "the flesh," which is so corrupt that it must be born again, are equivalents. A Christian cannot carry "the flesh" with him on his pilgrimage through this world.

Obviously, Paul in writing, "Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the concision: for we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God, and glory in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh," has Judaizers in mind. Some scholars think that this warning rather than the exhortation to rejoice is what he is pleased to teach repeatedly for their safety.

The passage consists, first, of three stern epithets, which characterize legalists: they are profane dogs that tear asunder the body of Christ, carnal evil workers, and their circumcision (“concision”), since the inauguration of Christianity, is no more than heathen gashings and mutilations of the body, forbidden by Moses. Then follows a threefold comparison of Judaizers and Christians: the carnal worship of the former is contrasted with the spiritual worship of the latter; their glorying in the law with the glorying of Christians in Christ, and their “concision” with a “circumcision not made with hands, in the putting off the body of the flesh, in the circumcision of Christ” (Col. 2:11). How utterly unworthy of confidence is the flesh! “The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are contrary the one to the other” (Gal. 2:17).

Scale of Values Upset

“If any man thinketh to have confidence in the flesh, I yet more.” After making this statement, Paul lists seven of his advantages of the flesh—the first four are hereditary and the others are personal acquisitions. In Gal. 2:14, he writes: “I advanced in the Jews’ religion beyond many of mine own age among my countrymen, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.” He might have added that he was born a Roman citizen, and that in both Greek and Hebrew learning he was highly educated. If any man could plume himself on his pedigree, native endowments, training, ambition, industry, moral integrity, religious drive, and works, and apart from Christ save himself, it was Paul.

“Howbeit . . . I suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but refuse, that I may gain Christ, and be found in him, not having a righteousness of mine own, even that which is of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ.” This passage shows that Paul named his advantages in order to teach what being a Christian means; to teach that having the mind of Christ so upset his scale of values that he counts all his fleshly advantages but refuse.

Can words say that meritorious, legal righteousness is incompatible with righteousness by faith in Christ more plainly?

More plainly say that confidence in the ability of the flesh to earn righteousness by keeping law must be surrendered before Christ can save? Since the very flesh itself competes with Christ for the soul's confidence, it must be crucified. The grossest sins of the flesh are no more contrary to the principles of Christianity than is the spurious righteousness of the flesh. "The mind of the flesh is enmity against God . . . and they that are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom. 8:7, 8). The statement is not "do not," but "cannot," please God. Who can have confidence in the flesh? And yet, it is much to be feared that some of us Christians are not so truly converted from self to Christ, from flesh to Spirit, as greatly to upset our scale of values. Had Paul not been so upset, what kind of a Christian would he have been?

Paul's dying to every fleshly ambition and descending from the Pharisees, the popular Jewish sect, to the lowly "sect of the Nazarenes," of whom probably three-fourths were slaves, is sufficient proof that he possessed the mind of Christ, who descended from highest heaven to lowest earth. With Christ and Paul in view, one might wonder if heaven is not for men who fail on earth.

Letting the World Go By

The statement that the world owes most to those who renounce it, contribute little to its success, participate little in its activities, and reap few of its honors may seem false. But a little study of the Bible with the right key shows it to be true. Of course, Christ is the supreme example of this extraordinary truth. But glance at three men who probably stand next to Christ as mankind's benefactors—Abraham, Moses and Paul. Abraham lived a full century among the Canaanites in a tent, confessing himself to be a stranger and a pilgrim. Moses apparently renounced the throne of the Pharaohs, forsook Egypt, and lived forty years a forgotten man in training for forty more years of service in the Wilderness. As we have just seen, Paul counted all that the world could offer but "refuse," and reaped chains and death. Think of the world's debt to these three! With a fulcrum and a lever long enough, Archimedes said he could lift the earth. But the fulcrum must have been outside the earth.

God's people are always "A people that dwelleth alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations" (Num. 23:9)—a peculiar people who are content to let the world go by.

QUESTIONS

1. In what sense does Paul use the phrase, "the flesh"?
2. What relationship exists inherently between the flesh and the Spirit?
3. Give the substance of Paul's contrast between legalists and Christians.
4. Summarize Paul's attainments according to the flesh.
5. What caused Paul to lose all confidence in such exceeding wealth of the flesh?
6. Could Paul have been "born of the Spirit" and lived the Christian life without this upset of values?
7. What is the difference between the righteousness "of the law" and the righteousness "through faith in Christ"?
8. Is the expression, "worldly Christian," self-contradictory?
9. How do the lives of Abraham, Moses, Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus, all, throw light on this eighth question?

LESSON 8

Some twenty-five years after Paul suffered the loss of all things in becoming a Christian, years filled with extreme hardship and drastic ostracism, he did not rue his choice, for he wrote: "I . . . count them but refuse, that I may gain Christ. . . that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, becoming conformed unto his death" (3:8-10). As Paul progressively learned "the excellency of the knowledge of Christ," in whom all divine and human virtues, combine, and to whom all sheaves bow, Christ grew in value to him, and he became better and better pleased with his bargain.

Although Paul wrote these words within prison walls, they are remarkable for their freedom and elevation. Later, when he faced certain execution, he wrote for Timothy's encouragement: "I suffer hardship unto bonds, as a malefactor; but the word of God is not bound." In his conversion, Paul made his irrevocable choice, which brought him the inevitable assurance of Christ's companionship, comfort, and compensation for all loss. Before Damascus, he thought that Christ was a grand impostor, but upon his conversion he and the living Christ became such fast friends, with common interests and purposes, that one spirit sufficed for both. More and more, he experienced contact with the live Christ.

Paul's conversion did not consist primarily of a set of new convictions, but, deeper than that, of a new person. With the apostle's increasing knowledge and appreciation of his new Friend, their friendship ripened into an intimacy, steadfastness, and richness far beyond the range of human friendship. All historic facts and intellectual knowledge about Christ and the Bible that do not bring men to Christ himself are but splendid, delusive ignorance which aggravates their doom (John 5:39, 40). To how many pretended friends does Christ say: "I never knew you; depart from me"? No matter what men profess, without personal acquaintance and living experience with Jesus, they gain naught and lose all. With it, though they possess naught besides, they have all.

Christianity Spans Two Worlds

Paul had embarked upon an enterprise so vast and awarding that two worlds, time and eternity, are required for its realization. He needed to know Christ, “and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings,” which would enable him to live while in the flesh worthily of his ambitious undertaking, “becoming conformed unto his (Christ’s) death”—that is, Christ’s bodily crucifixion would be re-enacted in his Christian life by his crucifying “the flesh with the passions and the lusts thereof.” The fact that suffering with Christ is the criterion of real fellowship with him should reconcile us to our sufferings for his sake. Thus far, the passage deals with a Christian in this world. The next verse, “If by any means I may attain unto the resurrection from the dead,” leaps beyond this world. Paul thinks that no suffering for Christ, even unto violent death like Christ’s, can be too high a price to pay for the assurance of getting his body back “in the resurrection of the just.”

Before his imprisonment, Paul wrote Corinth, “I die daily.” He said that his work for Christ and his “bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus” (2 Cor. 4:10) were killing him. But if he died in service, his death would but speed his race unto perfection, even as Christ was made “perfect through suffering”; and, since death is “to depart and be with Christ” (1:23), it would not disrupt his friendship with Jesus. Moreover at Christ’s return, he would come with him and get his risen body, “conformed to the body of his (Christ’s) glory,” to live in again. A Christian’s death is just another step in the progress of a closer union with Christ. A man “in Christ” can suffer no defeat unless Christ suffers defeat. Christ turns dreadful death into gain. “O death, where is thy sting?”

The attainment of “the resurrection from the dead” is dependent on fellowship with Christ. Fellowship and identity with Christ lead Christians through a life of conformity to Christ’s death, either to being “caught up . . . to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thes. 4:17) at his coming, or to death and resurrection. Either of these weds the two worlds and leaves the warm, fragrant, beautiful friendship with Jesus begun here below to be continued in eternity.

Imperfect, Yet Perfect

“Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect: but I press on, if so be I may lay hold on that for which I was laid hold on by Christ Jesus” (3:12). Paul understood the nature of his encounter with Christ; he knew that Christ was weaving him into a mighty, far-flung pattern whose importance justified his perpetual best and all by way of cooperation. This is why he counts everything loss for Christ, and why he holds so unflinchingly to his threefold program: “I count not myself yet to have laid hold: but one thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before, I press on toward the goal unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” Here is the fixed concentration, the solid contentment over losses and sacrifices, and the quivering, youthful expectancy of a strong, honest man who has perfectly turned away from his dead self to the live Christ.

“Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, be thus minded: for if in anything ye are otherwise minded, this shall God also reveal unto you: only whereunto we have attained, by this same rule let us walk.” Just after protesting his perfection, why does Paul now place himself in a class of perfect Christians? He is but recognizing the difference between his attitude of perfect acceptance of and commitment to God’s purpose in Christ, and his imperfect cooperation in its accomplishment. His reach exceeds his grasp; he sees things he wishes to do, but cannot. God has always done his work through imperfect servants; earth at best is but twilight. Paul’s perfect Christians are therefore perfect in attitude, but imperfect in life and service. They are both perfect and imperfect at the same time.

But some Christians do not have even this perfect attitude. On Christ’s deep moral principle that, “If any man willeth to do his (God’s) will, he shall know of the teaching” (John 7:17), Paul reminds such Christians that they are dealing with a moral God, who requires moral integrity in his servants; tells them that, if they will be honest with God and continue to obey him faithfully, he will see that they grow into fuller knowledge and implementation

of Christianity. No more than do sinners, do Christians have to do everything.

QUESTIONS

1. Why did Paul never regret becoming a Christian?
2. Distinguish between knowing about Christ and knowing him.
3. How was Christ's death re-enacted in Paul's life?
4. What is the criterion of fellowship with Christ?
5. What Is It to know in this life the power of Christ's resurrection?
6. Only on what one condition could a faithful Christian ever suffer final defeat?
7. State Paul's threefold spiritual program.
8. In what sense are Christians at the same time both imperfect and perfect?
9. Why need no honest man upon learning of Christ ever have doubts about his genuineness?

LESSON 9

In the first part of Phil. 3, Paul says the goal and prize of his strenuous race is to be dead to the world, as Christ was, that he may attain the Christian resurrection; says nothing the world can offer has any interest for him. Christ, even to Paul, who knows him so well, is as a fabulously rich mine, just opened. That the mine can never be worked unto depletion is a priceless asset, especially to elderly Christians. Whatever a Christian's progress, he is but a novice. "Nothing can keep old saints out of heaven long."

Paul thinks his is the correct attitude to which all Christians should aspire. He knows that many do not have it up to his measure, but, since to become Christians without some measure is impossible, he says a Christian is on the right road, and if he but has the will to walk in it, God stands pledged to "reveal," as he needs them, increasing knowledge and the strength to obey (15). "Whereunto we (Paul includes himself) have attained, by the same rule let us walk" (16). This has direct bearing on the lack of unity among the Philippians: since they had reached fundamental common ground in being baptized into Christ, they should learn and grow together harmoniously until all "attain unto the unity of the faith, and to the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a full-grown man ...grow up in all things into him, who is the head, even Christ" (Eph.4:1-15).

May I add a personal note? I have been trying to teach the Bible for more than fifty years. To my knowledge I do not teach anything now that contradicts anything I have ever taught. What I knew at first has been supplemented, but it has been neither discarded nor discounted. Christianity throughout is a self-consistent, expanding, mounting highway that opens out into eternity. No traveler need ever get lost, run into dead ends, remain on the same spiritual level (not even Paul), or be estranged from his brethren. It is the only way without blasted hopes and wrecked careers—the only way of gain.

“Who Mind Earthly Things”

“Brethren, be ye imitators together of me, and mark them that so walk even as ye have us for an example. For many walk, of whom I told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is perdition, whose god is the belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things” (3:17-19). In asking the Philippians to unite in imitating him, Paul alludes to their disunity again, and offers his example as a slip for resetting. Seemingly, this severe language is descriptive of a condition in the church at large rather than of the actual condition in Philippi. Though Paul has often warned them against such a condition, the Philippians are still earthly enough, however, to need a stern warning and this intimate, tearful appeal.

In this passage, Paul has in mind both Judaism and Antinomianism. Judaism, declaring itself to be perfected Christianity, was in reality an insidious disease eating out its very heart. Antinomians, arguing, “We continue in sin that grace may abound,” perverted Christian liberty into license, and, “turning the grace of God into lasciviousness,” debauched the church openly. “Whose god is the belly, and whose glory is in their shame” fit, as gloves do hands, the ignorant, wicked boast of nominal Christians who say that God’s grace makes their morality and decency unnecessary. Jewish legalism and Gentile licentiousness were vipers that, had not God raised up Paul to do them heroic battle, would have, humanly speaking, destroyed the church in its cradle. Paul’s campaign against these twins, that perpetually “creep and intrude, and climb into the fold,” restrained, but did not slay them. Ritualism and Carnality, in modern dress, are inexorable foes of the church still, exceedingly strong and perilous.

Can you visualize the weeping Paul in his prison dictating this letter? The emotional content of Paul’s soul is almost frightening at times, as when he writes that he had great sorrow and unceasing pain in his heart because of the Jews’ unbelief, and could wish himself accursed for their sake (Rom. 9: 2, 3). Paul wrote with tears in his pen, and spoke with tears in his tone. Should not his “example” prime our hearts and dry eyes? How good that God,

when he made us, did not forget to put in a heart!

Citizens of Heaven

After, in tears dooming worldly Christians to “perdition,” Paul says to true Christians: “Our citizenship is (not shall be) in heaven; whence also we wait for a Savior” (3:20). On this subject Christ says to his disciples: “Take heed lest haply your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that day (his return) come on you suddenly as a snare: for so shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of all the earth. But watch ye . . . that ye may prevail to escape all these things . . . and to stand before the Son of man” (Luke 21: 34-36). Either sheep or goats; no neutrality.

Beginning with Abraham, God’s people have always “confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth,” for while occupied by Satan it cannot be a fit home. Peter’s appeal, “Beloved, I beseech you as sojourners and pilgrims, to abstain from fleshly lusts,” has life in it because it turns on this pivotal truth. Since Christians cannot be heavenly minded unless they are conscious of their heavenly citizenship, that they be right at this point, indeed is pivotal. Instead of sojourners settling down and accumulating property, they send things home and collect them to take back with them. Nor do they when sojourning among savages become savages. Of course, having citizenship in heaven does not make rebels on earth; or make people so heavenly minded that they are of no earthly use. According to Christ, they are the salt and the light of the world.

As Father and Son and Spirit comprise the divine trinity, so “spirit and soul and body” comprise the human trinity, which is to be “preserved entire . . . at the coming of the Lord” (1 Thess. 5:23). A Christian cannot lose: if he live till Jesus come, he, his body “changed” into “a spiritual body” (1 Cor. 5:44-51), is “caught up . . . to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thess. 4:17) to be with him evermore; if he die before Christ return, he, unbodied, goes to a “very better” life with Christ, to await the fashioning anew his body of humiliation like unto Christ’s glorified body. A

disembodied spirit is not an “entire” man as God made him, and as he shall be again when his redemption from Satan’s ruin is completed. As Paul’s faith, “he is able,” satisfied him, like faith must satisfy us. Faith is the only coin we have that will buy this knowledge, hope and comfort.

QUESTIONS

1. What does the statement, no matter what a Christian’s maturity he is but a novice, mean?
2. Dilate upon the statement that Christianity Is a self-consistent, expanding, mounting highway that opens out Into eternity.
3. How did Judaism eat the heart out of Christianity?
4. How did Antinomianism turn the “grace of God Into lasciviousness”?
5. What do you think of ritualism and licentiousness as perpetual enemies of the church?
6. Comment upon the emotional quality of Paul’s soul.
7. In what sense are Christians citizens of heaven?
8. Name the essential parts of the indestructible human trinity.
9. Upon what contingency may Christians miss the resurrection?

LESSON 10

“Wherefore,” the first word in the last chapter of Philippians means that what follows grows out of what precedes. Paul has just assured the Philippians that their acceptance with God was complete when they took Christ as their Savior; that their life as citizens of heaven, seeking “after a city which is to come” (Heb. 13:12-14), while it would make them alien to earth, would culminate in the perfection of their redemption from Satan’s devastation, at Christ’s coming, by their becoming “able-bodied” citizens with bodies like Christ’s risen, glorious body. From this premise, he draws an eightfold, hortative conclusion: “Wherefore,” be steadfast, be united, be joyous, be forbearing, be prayerful, be thankful, be peaceful, be imitators of “me.” An impressive “Be-hive”!

A Greek wrote before Christ: “Good men weep easily, the better, the easier.” It is not surprising that within five verses Paul weeps over some Christians and rejoices over others. Many are too callous to know much feeling. But Christ sensitizes men and makes them care and feel until, as surroundings dictate, they experience a wide range of emotion. Joy and sorrow are concomitant rather than antagonistic. The “Prince of peace” was “a Man of sorrows.” Paul describes himself as sorrowful, yet always “rejoicing.” That Christians rejoice only, cannot be in this world. Worry, not sorrow, is the kill-joy. The Philippians, “beloved and longed for,” by Paul, his joy and his crown, must not disappoint him, but “stand fast in the Lord.” If more of us preachers and teachers had Paul’s heart and other worldliness, more Christians would say: “Our citizenship is in heaven; whence also we wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Unity, Joy, Forbearance

Euodia and Syntyche, possibly baptized ten years before as members of Lydia’s household, and possibly distraught by anxious work for Jesus even as was Martha, are mutually estranged. Women were prominent in this church at first, and, apparently, still

are. Does this help account for the excellencies of the church? or for its lack of unity? Prudently avoiding all allusion to the nature of the quarrel, or taking side with either, Paul exhorts them equally to be “of the same mind in the Lord.” To agree religiously out of the Lord would be conspiracy against the Lord. Paul does not mean, of course, that these women try to be alike in gifts and traits of personality, for Christianity does not require mechanical conformity. Too many differences in constitution and circumstances exist between any two people for this to be possible, or even desirable. God cuts each individual after a new pattern. Men as different as John the Baptist and Christ, or as Peter and John, can be “of the same mind in the Lord.”

No doctrinal, just personal disagreement, seemingly, is involved. And yet, their wrangling is so damaging that Paul beseeches an unnamed yokefellow, Clement, and the rest of his fellow-workers “to help these women.” Some heathens may be willing to come into the church after they compose their differences. Had these women known that their names would be put down as sowers of “discord among brethren” in a book to be read around the earth until the end of time, think you they would have been so quick to quarrel, or so hard to reconcile? At best, earth-bound life is a foolish, little thing; it is half ridiculous and half pitiful to see how seriously men take its paltry distinctions and ornaments. Even as we think about Euodia and Syntyche, can you imagine how they now feel about their petty strivings in the long ago? For “all flesh is as grass” (See 1 Cor. 7:29-31).

“Rejoice in the Lord always: again I will say, rejoice.” Not rejoice some times, but all the time. How easy it would be to obey, if this only read, “groan always: again I will say, groan?” Some rebel against God, others sulkily resign to him, but only Christians can always rejoice in him. Apart from the Lord, it is useless for thoughtful men even to try to be habitually cheerful. Much easier than reasoning our troubles away is singing and praying them away. As reading small print tires our eyes, so, without counter-working Christian joy and patience, little, nagging irritants wear us down to fussy impatience and jangling tongues. “Then let us offer up a sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit

of lips which make confession to his *name*” (Heb. 13:15).

“Let your forbearance be known unto all men.” Do our acquaintances and members of our families know us, in matters of personal opinion and preference, to be forbearing, gentle, reasonable, easy to get along with, and pleasant to have around? Christians should have lovable personalities, and abilities to meet the needs of others. Do not overlook Paul’s discreet precaution in, after naming or identifying several fellow-workers in the congregation, reminding others who might feel slighted that their “names are in the book of life.” None should have felt slighted, of course, but practical Paul knows the weakness of the flesh.

Prayer, Thanksgiving, Peace

It seems that the sentence, “The Lord is at hand,” in this great hortatory passage may be applied doubly as follows: Since Christ stands by and knows all, be steadfast, united, joyous, forbearing; and, since his second coming may occur at any time, being prayerful, thankful, and “patient until the coming of the Lord” (Jas. 5:7-9) will keep you perpetually ready. Thus Paul mightily persuades Christians to be citizens of heaven and pilgrims of earth.

“In nothing be anxious; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God ... shall guard your hearts.” Prayer is cooperation with God in the spiritual realm as our daily work is in the physical realm. God releases energies from his person into the world through prayer as well as through gravitation. When in live faith Christians contact the live God, things in both nature and religion happen. Dealing with supernatural forces, they may expect supernatural results. In childlike simplicity, Paul actually believes what he writes and is at peace, anxious about nothing. We believe less and are anxious about many things. What a tragedy when the child in us is dead. That you talk to God about small things is evidence of your large faith in him. Christ casts out the unholy trinity of the flesh, fear, worry, and anxiety. Doubt and worry, not sorrow and trouble, cast out peace. Forgetting about the reasons for things, just make your requests to God and leave results, as you do

in seeding your field, to him who feeds sparrows and marks their fall. As prayer advances, care recedes. A beautiful and fruitful union is formed when prayer and praise wed.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the import of “wherefore,” the first word in chapter 4?
2. Why does having citizenship in heaven make one a sojourner on earth?
3. With respect to what kind of things may Christians compromise, and with respect to what kind may they not compromise?
4. Suggest two meanings for the sentence, “The Lord is at hand.”
5. How is it that sorrow and rejoicing may be concomitant?
6. In what respect are prayer and gravitation similar?
7. How may Christians banish worry and anxiety from their lives?
8. How and why does Christ sensitize men?
9. How should the truth that earthly interests when compared with heavenly interests are nothing show up in our daily lives?

LESSON 11

Being incurably religious by creation and unable to get away from the sense of God, in some way all men pray. The Christian way is for men to pray to their Creator about everything and to be thankful for anything. Christians pray to “the God of peace,” who dispenses peace through his Son, and come to possess “the peace of God, which passeth all understanding.” This peace, transcending all human philosophy, is Christ’s priceless legacy to his apostles and their converts: “Peace I leave with you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be fearful” (John 14:27). Such peace is possible only to men who trust God far beyond their own understanding to make “all things work together for good” (Rom. 8:28). No man can be a Christian (or a gardener either) unless he “consents to apprehend much that he cannot comprehend.”

To clinch the teaching and exhorting of this book, Paul offers himself again as an example in thinking, teaching and living. This is like setting before a man of poor appetite a dish to make him hungry. Paul names true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, and blameless things as proper subjects for thought. How much do these six adjectives need changing to make them fit our thinking! Had Euodia and Syntyche followed this, would they have fallen out?

Perhaps because the common heathen word for moral excellence was “virtue,” Paul, becoming “all things to all men,” adds: “If there be any virtue, and . . . any praise, think on these things.” Christians need not hesitate to take truth from any man, for it is theirs by right. To the factious Corinthians, Paul had written: “All things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas; all are yours; and ye are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s” (1 Cor. 3:21-23). Christians should not wear the name of preachers as the Corinthians were doing, for they belong to Christ, not to preachers. However, since preachers belong to Christians, whatever truth Paul, Apollos, Cephas, Luther, Wesley, or Campbell teaches belongs to all Christians. But who wants other than truth from any man?

Paul's Contentment

With the arrival of supplies from the Philippians after a considerable interval, Paul's prison room is fragrant with gratitude and worship as he writes: "I rejoice in the Lord greatly." How much a simple deed of brotherly kindness means to the great, tender soul! Note his generous spirit and refined courtesy in putting the best possible light on their temporary neglect; and the grace and delicacy with which he lets them know that he has been in want. No matter what else Paul's character may comprise, he is at least a perfect Christian gentleman.

"I have learned, in whatever state I *am*, therein to be content. In everything and in all things have I learned the secret. . . both to abound and to be in want." Who can believe that this self-drawn sketch of Paul with its transparent sincerity and humility gets into his book through his egotism and vanity? Nay. Rather it is God's chosen way openly to set forth for Christians of all time what he can make of a self-surrendered man, who wholly yields himself to his making, and suffers the evil spirit of the flesh to be cast out.

Paul repeats that he has learned the close secret of contentment. He means that he has come to believe that anything he experiences is by God's will, and therefore good and usable. Here are the naked bones of Paul's mature faith and religion. We know him too well to think he means the contentment of indifference and self-complacency. At the time he writes these words, he is content with his body chained to a soldier, for his spirit is at large, ranging the universe. He never writes of doing the best he can "under the circumstances," he is always on top of circumstances, undiscouraged by the ups and downs of life. Suffering and hunger without despondency, and success and abundance without pride characterize him. Since second causes are but God's means, he is ready for anything, at any time, from anywhere. The scale of his life is so exactly balanced between want and abundance that the indicator always points straight up. Paul's contentment must ever be a locked secret to all except those who have his key. When Cicero and Seneca, heathen moralists who had written much on courage and manly virtue, were banished from Rome, they filled

the air with complaints and entreaties to be brought home. How incomparably stronger and nobler is Paul.

Paul's Strength

After Paul rises to the level of the greatest of the naturally great men of earth, he continues to rise. In noble purpose, disinterested service, moral grandeur, living power, and lasting achievement, he rises far above them all. He explains this by humbly saying, "I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me." He realizes that he is not living merely, or mainly, in his own strength. Without the superhuman aid, probably he would be no stronger than Julius Caesar or others. Whether Paul's "him" refers to God, Christ, Spirit, or to all three, the practical meaning is the same, for the three are "one Jehovah" (Deut. 6:4). The Trinity, though it transcends human reason, it is not contrary to it.

The Trinity is implicit in the first line of the Bible, for the word "God" is plural. In Gen. 3:15 God promises to send Christ to earth as a man. Isaiah, Joel and others foretell the coming of the Spirit. Christ comes and the Spirit descends upon him at his baptism to abide with him while he stays on earth. During his ministry, Christ has the Spirit without measure (John 3:33), casts out demons "by the Spirit of God" (Matt. 12:28), and tells his disciples that he must go away before the Spirit can come to take his place permanently ("that he may be with you forever") (John 14:16), as representative of the Godhead on earth (John 16:7-15). In fulfillment of this promise, and according to God's unfolding purpose, the transfer of the Spirit from Christ to his disciples was effected on Pentecost, and perfected Christianity was inaugurated. Throughout Acts and the epistles, the church is "a habitation of God (and Christ) in the Spirit" (Eph. 2:22). "If any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Rom. 8:9).

Paul believes he is the nether link of a five-link chain coming down from God—God, Christ, Spirit, Word, Paul. If even one link fails, the chain fails. Since Paul is the only link that can fail, and, since his sole aim is that the triune God express himself through his personality (Gal. 2:20), he knows the chain will hold. This is

what gives him his invincible confidence, strength, and peace. With respect to standing in grace and moral growth, God treats all Christians alike. Unless the Philippians have access to the power whence cometh his strength and contentment, and can learn his secret, why need Paul to exhort them to imitate him?

QUESTIONS

1. What does the sentence that Christians cannot know Christian peace unless they continue to ‘consent to apprehend many things which they do not comprehend’ mean?
2. What would be the effect now, if all leaders in the church could offer themselves as examples in thinking, teaching, and living?
3. Would not Paul’s exhorting the Philippians to imitate his life, had he not known they were “strengthened with power through his (God’s) Spirit in the inward man” to “do all things,” even as he himself was, have been mockery and hypocrisy?
4. In what sense do preachers and books belong to Christians?
5. How may we know that Paul was a gracious, Christian gentleman?
6. Why did Paul never think that he could be and do better in different circumstances?
7. What key did Paul use to unlock the secret of contentment?
8. Is the absence, or the presence, of sorrow and disappointment the more conducive to “the peace of God”?
9. Why did not the Holy Spirit take up his permanent dwelling in Christ’s disciples before Pentecost?

LESSON 12

We are come to our last “study” in Philippians. The book is eminently Christian because it shows what the Christian religion will do for an earnest man, even when circumstances, humanly speaking, are most unfavorable. The final test of any religion or philosophy is the courage and hope it gives its adherents for the deep needs and heavy burdens of life. It is just to judge both Christianity and idolatry by what they do for men. In this respect Christianity outstrips all other religions and philosophies immeasurably.

The book portrays a man, who, instead of being timid, cynical, and despairing as by all human reckoning he should be, is fearless, joyous, ready, and saying, “I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me.” Surely, Paul is the best example of what a man, in the strength that God supplies, can take without becoming discouraged and broken in spirit; surely, the best interpretation of his own doctrine: “God gave us not a spirit of fearfulness; but of power and love and discipline” (2 Tim. 1:7). Paul is ever serene and sober; never gloomy nor gay; always eager and strong. And since he exhorts the Philippians to imitate him, he must know that they have access to the same divine power that sustains him.

Need it be repeated that Paul’s miraculous gifts contributed nothing directly to his moral growth and spiritual character? As all Christians have the opportunity of doing, he learned by the experience of fulfilled faith the secret of letting God by his overruling providence, work out for him either want or abundance as he saw good; learned to see that joy or pain, as God willed, would contribute to his life. Who but God can know infallibly whether in a given case apparent success or failure is better for his child and his church? God has non-miraculous, superhuman wisdom and strength for all Christians (and farmers too) who want them, and are willing to cooperate with him. Paul prays for the Ephesians: “That ye may be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inward man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith” (Eph. 3:20, 21).

A Protest Considered

Some question that the triune God through the medium of, and in conjunction with, his written word gives aid and power to Christians beyond the written word itself, on the ground that they do not see HOW he can do it. If he does not, what is prayer? Does not this protest overlook the truth that “we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7), and take the matter out of the realm of faith altogether? Paul having tested this doctrine in the laboratory of Christian experience for many years, writes the Philippians that he finds it to be true. But he never tries to explain the philosophy of its workings. Indeed, he tells other churches. as he tells the Philippians, that, though it “passeth all understanding” and transcends all human thought, it actually works, and that he knows by verified faith that deliverance, endurance, and strength, according to his need, are unfailingly at hand; that in the thick of battle, he never finds himself unarmed; that his natural strength is always supplemented and strengthened. With the whole Bible contrary to this protest, how can the doctrine of God’s special providence be incredible?

The nature of faith is everywhere the same. Christ’s parables hang by the truth that nature and religion operate on similar principles. The faith of neither scientists nor Christians can be validated by abstract reasoning. Men of scientific faith, acting upon it, find it verified by the response of nature. Likewise, men of Christian faith, acting upon it, find it verified by the response of Christianity. In both realms, progress and assurance come only by way of the “obedience of faith.” In neither do men get beyond faith and hope as fulfilled in experience. In this way Paul learned his “secret,” and found life and peace. He could be happy anywhere; Nero could be happy nowhere.

Christ invites men only to give his way of life a trial, and see if things do not come out all right. Without argument, he throws down the challenge to faith, “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” This takes faith in him. Abstract reasoning and formal logic have great, even fatal, limitations. Paul’s life of verified faith in Christ is the true

interpretation, demonstration, and vindication of the faith Christ asks, deserves and expects. Faith is life's most challenging and wonderful achievement.

Christianity at Work

When Paul's foes at Corinth accused him of preaching for money, he, knowing that if the church believed this, his influence for good among them was ended, refuted the slander by refusing all money from them (1 Cor. 9). He thanks Philippi eloquently for repeatedly sending to his "need," yet in such a manner as to show his own relative unconcern about such, and to give the church a blank check signed by his rich God (4-19). In the chapter that tells about Paul's refusing money is his fullest teaching that a preacher of the gospel "should live of the gospel." In Christian liberty however, lest the gospel suffer harm, he waived this right in Corinth. Paul always preached the gospel in the spirit of the gospel. Preachers especially need to take Paul's example to heart. They may even use the pulpit, as other men use the bar or the theater, for self-display and gain.

We can understand Paul's death to the world and his other worldliness only if we understand Christianity. The story of the paralytic in John 5 is a parabolic representation of Christianity at work. After the cripple manifested a willingness to "be made whole," Jesus said: "Arise . . . and walk." And behold! when he tried, he found that supernatural power was being communicated, for he actually could walk, the first step in 38 years. This bodily miracle is symbolic of the supernatural change which takes place in the maimed spirits of men when they, despairing of natural means, are willing to be made whole by the creative life and power of God as he touches and impregnates their broken lives. Of course he uses his written word as essential means, but to mistake means for end is to become encased in forms: and this makes Pharisees, not Christians. Men dead in trespasses and sins by cooperating with God always find themselves enabled to "do all things in him that strengtheneth." John 5 continues the parallel between these healings, calls healing the spirit the greater work, and has Christ saying that not the scripture, but he himself gives life (40). Both

creating man in the beginning and re-creating fallen man now are God's own personal work—Person must contact person, Spirit breathe on spirit. Paul was a man of great natural gifts who gave himself greatly to the triune God's great redemptive movement. Could the church in Philippi after this letter still be divided and despondent?

QUESTIONS

1. What is the proper test of any religion?
2. Did Christianity step up Paul's natural strength, and vitalize and energize his personality? or did it weaken his will and initiative, and depersonalize him?
3. Show that the workings of faith in physical nature and in Christianity are similar.
4. Is the nature and power of truth in any realm ever weakened just because said truth transcends human understanding?
5. Why did Paul refuse a salary from Corinth?
6. How does Christ's restoring the paralytic (John 5:1-9) illustrate his restoring the otherwise hopelessly maimed spirits of all men?
7. Can a sinner be born of God without God's imparting spiritual life to him?
8. What is the function of the Scriptures in effecting this impartation of spiritual life? (See John 5:39, 40).
9. How is it that Christians today can better understand the constitution, purpose, and practical workings of their religion because the Holy Spirit moved Paul to write so much about himself?