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becomes aware of a need, and gets to appreciate that there is a place where that need can be satisfied, as the child nestles on the mother's breast. Peter tells us that 'as new born babes desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby'. No child of God need suffer hunger pangs for there is ever at his disposal the 'sincere milk of the word' by which development can be obtained.

The wise man Solomon could say 'feed me with food convenient for me'. The infant of faith requires the milk of the Word; but those who are developed spiritually can indulge in strong meat which belongeth to them that are of full age—Heb. 5:14.

The philosopher Job could say 'I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food': Job 23:12. It is true we do not live to eat; but we do eat to live! This spiritual food—the Word of God—was esteemed more highly than the 'meat that perisheth'. Do you take more care and concern over your body than you do over your soul? One dear brother used to say 'No Bible, no breakfast!'

May we feel encouraged to put more stress on the Word of the living God as that which provides a satisfying portion for the soul than on the food that we partake of for the sustenance of our bodies!

Christ said in John 6:35 'I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.'

STUDIES IN PHILIPPIANS

R. NORTH

Introduction

The epistle to the Philippians has been called on epistle of Christian experience. In each of the four chapters Paul delights to occupy his readers with Christ. The object of all Christian experience is that Christ may be better known. It is the most personal of all Paul's collective writings. Written in the straits of an unjust imprisonment, it is not merely free from complaint but is actually full of joy. Joy is not a passing emotion: it is

the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). Like his midnight songs of praise to God from the inner prison at Philippi, this epistle written nearly ten years later from his confinement in Rome, has a joyful sound throughout. Paul had such an experience of Christ that he could rejoice in the Lord when everything seemingly went wrong.

Suggested headings for the four chapters are:

Chapter 1—Christ the believer's Life (The key verse is v. 21).

Chapter 2—Christ the believer's Pattern (The key verse is v. 5).

Chapter 3—Christ the believer's Object (The key verse is v. 14).

Chapter 4—Christ the believer's Strength (The key verse is v. 13).

The subjective result in the believer, who is occupied with Christ presented in this way, may be stated thus:

Chapter 1—the devoted mind.

Chapter 2—the lowly mind.

Chapter 3—the heavenly mind.

Chapter 4—the contented mind.

CHAPTER I

Christ the believer's Life

Salutation (v. 1, 2)

Although Timothy is associated with Paul, as one well known to the saints in Philippi, the use of the first person singular throughout the epistle makes it clear that Paul was the sole writer. The nature of the epistle, and the close bond of affection that existed between Paul and the saints, made it unnecessary for him to refer to his apostleship. The designation 'bondservants of Jesus Christ' is, however, a wholesome reminder that Paul's experience of Christ is not purely apostolic, but that it is open to every other servant of Jesus Christ and is therefore a stimulus to us all.

The epistle is not addressed to the church of God in Philippi, but to 'all the saints in Christ Jesus', because Christian experience is individual. 'Bishops and deacons' are probably mentioned separately because they had taken the initiative in collecting and sending the saints' gifts of love. The repetition of the word 'all' in verses 1, 4, 7, 8 and 25 emphasizes the large heartedness of Paul, and should have sent a crimson blush to the cheeks of the saints as they reflected upon the spirit of disaffection and lack of unity that had crept in amongst them during his absence. How much more should we feel the lack of unity that exists amongst the saints in Christ Jesus today!

Thanksgiving for the saints (v. 3-5)

The ground of Paul's thanksgiving was their 'fellowship in the gospel'. Besides being one of the key words, the thought of 'fellowship' runs through the epistle. Some Christians have the strange idea that unless plenty of scope is given them for preaching from a platform they are not being allowed fellowship in the gospel. Did not Lydia have fellowship in the gospel when she constrained Paul and his companions to come into her house and abide? Did not the jailor when he washed his prisoners' stripes, brought them into his house and set meat before them? (Acts 16:15, 33, 34). The fellowship of the saints in Philippi was expressed in sending to meet Paul's necessities, an aspect of fellowship in which all the saints may share (cp. Heb. 13:16). It was not an occasional thing, an outburst of enthusiasm now and again. They had identified themselves with the interests of the gospel, sharing in its conflicts and rejoicing in its triumphs, from the first day they had received it to the moment of Paul's writings. He knew, therefore, they would be interested to hear of the furtherance of the gospel in Rome.

Paul's confidence (v. 6-8)

Whether it be the work of regeneration, or the fruit of regeneration, one cannot imagine God beginning a good work without completing it. This was the ground of Paul's confidence, that He Who began a good work in the saints would perfect it until

the day of Jesus Christ. Writing to the churches in Galatia, and thinking of their ways, he said 'I stand in doubt of you' (ch. 4:20); but when he thought of them in connection with the Lord, he said 'I have confidence in you through the Lord' (ch. 5:10). It is a question of viewpoint. It is a grand thing to view the saints in relation to God. Paul acknowledges it was only right for him to have this confidence, 'because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as . . . ye are all partakers ("sharers together", from the same root as "fellowship") with me of grace'. The same grace is available for all the saints as was enjoyed by Paul. The 'defence' of the gospel supposes opposition. 'Confirmation' of the gospel is the unfolding of the gospel by preaching and teaching, to establish the saints.

Prayer of the saints (v. 9-11)

Paul's prayers were not vague and indefinite: they were specific. *This* I pray 'that your love may abound yet more and more'. We may wonder that they should even have begun to love one another, when we remember that the saints may have comprised the jailor and his household, Lydia and her household, Euodia and Syntyche, Epaphroditus, Clement and others whose names are in the book of life. Yet, like the Thessalonian converts, they had been 'taught of God to love one another' (1 Th. 4:9), and Paul prays that their love may abound more and more. There is always room for our love to increase, but this of itself is not sufficient. It must be accompanied by knowledge of the truth, and by keen spiritual discernment, for there is so much allowed to pass for love that is little more than weakness or sentimentality. Paul prayed that their love may abound yet more and more, in knowledge and all discernment, so that ye may approve the things that are excellent' (or 'try the things that differ' margin). We are not to accept everything that is presented to us. We are to try the things that differ and approve the more excellent. Unconverted people can usually distinguish between right and wrong, as a short-sighted person can detect black from white. Paul's prayer is not simply that the believer should be able to distinguish good from evil, but that he should be able to discriminate

between what is good and what is even better. The only test for this is the Word of God. Divine principles never vary, but spiritual discernment is needed for their true application.

It is possible to approve the things that are excellent, and for one's personal character not to stand the light of day. Hence the apostle also prays 'that ye may be sincere and without offence till (or "in view of") the day of Christ,' when we shall all be manifested in our true character. A 'sincere' man is usually taken to mean an earnest, well-meaning person, who does what he believes to be right even though he may be wrong. The word 'sincere' in verse means 'pure when viewed in the sunlight'. It is an Anglicized Latin word meaning 'without wax', used to translate a Greek word meaning 'sun tested'. In the East, where the streets are narrow, and awnings are used to keep out the sun, it is often too dark to judge articles for sale except in the daylight. Dealers used to sell vases worth large sums of money, and if one was cracked it meant a great loss. So a wax was invented to enable them to pass a cracked vase as sound; but, if held to the light, the wax was detected immediately. Honest dealers therefore marked their wares 'sine cere' (without wax). The test of sincerity is that we are willing to let the light shine through us, that we are willing to be tested by the sunlight of God's truth and holiness, to evince the purity of our principles and motives. An 'offence' is something over which men may stumble. 'Without offence' is the character of the man who walks without stumbling, and who gives no occasion of stumbling to others. 'Sincere and without offence' are the features of a man who has nothing to hide, a man of transparent character, whose outward life is the manifestation of his true inner self.

Paul's condition at Rome (v. 12-26)

In verse 12 Paul writes to assure them that the things which happened to him had turned out rather to the furtherance of the gospel, than to the hindrance as they might have feared. Firstly, because his confinement had been the means of the gospel penetrating to places where before it was wholly unknown; and secondly, because this seeming disaster became a challenge

to others to speak the Word of God without fear. His manner of life, so different from that of other prisoners, made it abundantly manifest, in the whole Praetorium and to other inhabitants of Rome, that instead of being imprisoned as a malefactor or political intriguer his bonds were for the cause of Christ. The guard, being constantly changed, provided him with opportunities which he could not miss. If he had tried to evangelise the guard he could not have found a more effective way; but it was possible only because his spiritual experience transcended his environment. Doubtless many a soldier, who had heard the message of the gospel from the lips of Paul, was drafted to other parts of the Empire, there to rehearse the story to others. Visitors were allowed to see him, and many found Christ in that way (Acts 28:30).

There were timid Christians then, as there are today; but most of the brethren in the Lord gained confidence by Paul's bonds to cast aside their apathy and fear, and were emboldened to speak the Word of God fearlessly themselves. So the devil had a two-fold surprise. He sought to curtail the labours of Paul, and to stop the mouths of others through fear; instead of which Paul's confinement provided him with a unique opportunity of spreading the gospel, and others who might have been cowed into silence were stimulated by his bonds. Thus it often comes to pass that what seems to be most adverse proves to be the most advantageous.

Various motives manifest themselves, even in the preaching of Christ. Some preached out of love to Christ and to Paul; others preached out of envy and strife, thinking to make his bonds more galling and to add to his distress. It is another evidence of the subtlety and malignity of the adversary that, having failed to stop the testimony, he does his utmost to stir up a spirit of envy and strife among the brethren.

What was Paul's reaction? His mind rose above the unworthy motives that animated some of the brethren, and he rejoiced that Christ was preached. What can the devil do with a man like that? Beat him and put him in prison at Philippi, and he sings praises to God; attach him to a soldier with a chain at Rome, and he preaches Christ to him; stir up brethren to preach out of

envy and strife, and he rejoices because Christ is preached! I wonder how we would re-act in similar circumstances?

It is in that connection that he adds, in verse 19: 'For I know that this shall turn to my salvation, through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ'. He was not thinking of salvation which the gospel brings; nor was he thinking of deliverance from prison. He was thinking of salvation from the ill-effects of trying circumstances, and of contentious brethren; from being cast down because of his bonds, and from chafing because of the mixed and unworthy motives some were exhibiting. He knew that all these circumstances would turn to his salvation through their prayers, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to his earnest expectation and hope, that in nothing he would be put to shame, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also 'Christ shall be magnified in my body', whether by a life of service or by a martyr's death.

This brings us to the grand climax of the section in verse 21: 'For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain'. Christ was the one all-absorbing, governing motive of his life day by day. As some men's minds turn spontaneously to money, to business, to fame, to sport or to pleasure, and they live for these things, Paul says 'To me to live is Christ'. This is Christian experience in all its fulness and joy. Every Christian should be able to say 'To die is gain'. How many of us can truly say 'For to me to live is Christ'?

Paul was hemmed in between two opposing considerations. If he lived on in the flesh there would be fruit for his labour, in sinners being converted and believers established in the faith. On the other side there was his own personal gain, if he departed to be with Christ. He was in a strait betwixt the two. 'What I shall choose I know not'. It was remarkable language to use when, humanly speaking, his life might have been taken at any moment. Yet he speaks as though life or death were not for the Emperor to determine. He speaks as though God had put the choice into His servant's hands; and his answer was that, although it would be 'very far better' for himself to depart to be with Christ, it was more needful for the saints that he should remain, and his

love for the saints outweighed his own personal desire. Whatever the Emperor might think or determine, Paul said 'I know that I shall abide and continue with you all, for your furtherance and joy of faith'. When some great alternative rises before us, we naturally think of what would be most beneficial to ourselves. Paul thought of what would be most advantageous to the saints.

Exhortation to steadfastness (v. 27-29)

Paul was writing from the capital of the Roman Empire to members of a Roman colony, and he applied the idea of 'citizenship' to the life of the Christian. 'Only' (this one thing I urge upon you, whatever happens to me) 'let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ' (v. 27). 'Behave as citizens worthy of the gospel of Christ; that, whether I come and see or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit: with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel'. Some have thought that he had in mind the ancient battleships, with a row of hooks down one edge and a row of eyes down the other, so that when they stood together, and linked their shields together by means of those hooks and eyes, the whole company formed an impenetrable shield against which the assaults of the enemy broke in hopeless confusion. How necessary the injunction in the present day that we should stand shoulder to shoulder, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel, instead of dissipating our energies by diverse interests to the detriment of the saints and the hindrance of the gospel.

There will always be adversaries, but we ought not to be terrified by them like a horse startled or terrified in battle. The fearlessness and courage of the Christian in defence of the gospel is a double token: to the adversaries, whether they realise it or not, of their ultimate perdition unless they repent; to Christians, of their present and eternal salvation—and that from God Himself.

This is confirmed in verse 29 by the double proof of God's favour, granted to us in the behalf of Christ: not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for his sake. We rejoice that we have been granted the privilege and honour of believing on Him.

May we also remember that the privilege has been granted to us of suffering for His sake. The sufferings of the saints in Philippi might have seemed to them very small in comparison with Paul's sufferings, but it was the same conflict. Are we ready to take our share?

FOR HIS NAME'S SAKE

ERNEST BARKER

Psalm 106:7, and 8. 'Our fathers understood not Thy wonders in Egypt; they remembered not the multitude of Thy mercies; but provoked Him at the Red Sea, even at the Red Sea. Nevertheless He saved them for His Name's sake, that He might make His mighty power to be known'.

It is difficult for us to realize adequately the appalling sufferings which were inflicted on the Children of Israel in Egypt. They were treated as worthless chattels; they were compelled to serve with rigour; their lives were made bitter by hard bondage. Their sufferings were so severe that they sighed by reason of their bondage, and their cries reached the ears of God in Heaven, Who graciously heard their cry of distress, and came down to deliver them. It was a wonderful deliverance. He brought them forth with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm; with great signs, and terribleness and wonders.

In due time they arrived at the borders of the Red Sea, and there both their courage and their faith failed. Their memories were so short lived that they soon forgot both their deliverance and their Deliverer. Their ungrateful hearts reverted to their former state, and they said to Moses, 'Because there were no graves in Egypt hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness'.

'Nevertheless He saved them', notwithstanding their shocking ingratitude. But why did He save them? Certainly not because they deserved His salvation. In point of fact they deserved His condemnation. *He saved them for His Name's Sake.—He saved them for His glory*, that He might make His might and power to be known.