

JOY WAY

An Exposition of the Epistle of Paul

TO THE PHILIPPIANS

by

Guy H. King

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CHRISTIAN LITERATURE CRUSADE Pennsylvania

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

A FLY IN THE OINTMENT - Philippians 4:1-3

THIS passage for our present Study is a very short one, but it is none the less important on that account. So often the little things of Scripture turn out to be big in value. That little word "**so**" for instance - one of the unfathomed words in the Bible: "**God so loved. . .**", John 3:16: how deep, how high, how wide, how long is that "**so**"?

That little verse, John 11:35, "**Jesus wept**"; how expressive of His tender compassion concerning the affairs of His friend.

- That little book Haggai, with its needful message on Work;
- or Philemon, with its word to Management and Labour;
- or III John, and its dissertation on "How do you do?"
- That little man, Zacchaeus, so wondrously converted.

Yes, the Bible's little things have a strange way of suggesting the arresting quality of bigness. So we turn to our brief portion, feeling sure that blessedness will be found there. Let us confine our first attention to the first verse; and for all its sweetness, let us give to it the title of

THE ODOUR OF THE OINTMENT

We recall at once the lovely incident in the Gospels, one of whose beautiful influences was that "**the house was filled with the odour of the ointment**", John 12:3. There is a like refreshing fragrance in our first verse. This precious nard is compounded of a number of sweet-smelling ingredients - some of which have already claimed our attention.

"**Therefore**" - sending us back to the conclusion of the previous chapter, with its reminder of the all-sufficiency of the power of GOD. How reassuring it is to know that, as the base and basis of this mixture of mercy, we have this strong and all-permeating essence of His might.

The scent of it, even by itself, has revived the spirits of many a fast-fainting soul, that from the

depths of despondency has been brought back to take on, as it were, a new lease of life.

Its detected presence has spurred on many a CHRIST'S warrior with a spirit of battle and an assurance of victory.

Power: that is what every earnest Christian is seeking for. His Power: that is what will prove adequate to the answering of every call made upon us. In this Philippian church, a situation has arisen which has so far baffled all attempts to settle it.

In all Christian ages, and circles, we find the same problem, equally obstinate of solution; but let us all be quite certain that, as we saw last Study, nothing is beyond the power of GOD.

And to the expectant, obedient, soul there comes again and again the old promise, "**Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you**", Acts 1:8:

- power for witness,
- power for consistency,
- power for understanding,
- power for ministry
- power for enthusiasm,
- power for holiness.

I thank GOD that this "therefore" is present as the very foundation of this unguent.

"**My brethren**" - Paul meant what he said. It is so easy to use the term formally, for a man to call another Christian "brother", for a minister to address his congregation as "Dearly beloved brethren" - it may be the expression of his real feeling, but it may be sheer, cold, meaningless phraseology.

On Paul's lips, as he dictated it to his stenographer, it was real. His chained companion of a Roman soldier would, of course, overhear, and perhaps would wonder at the evident feeling that his prisoner put into his use of the common word. You would imagine that they really were his brothers - as they really were! For writer and readers were members of a family; they rejoiced in one Father, and were, therefore, each, brother or sister.

It is good to recognise in the make-up of the ointment this delightful component of the Family spirit. Yet, I fancy that this word "**brethren**" carried for Paul a scent of memory, whose fragrance would never die. Years before he had been a cruel and fanatical persecutor of the Christian faith, till he was "**apprehended of Christ Jesus**" (3:12).

Blind, alone, dejected, in his Damascus lodging, he was granted a vision of a man coming in to minister to his utter need. What manner of attitude would this Ananias adopt? Only one was possible in the estimation of this now stricken man - cold, stiff, aloof, revengeful. Saul of Tarsus would know that he deserved it all. And now, at the knock admitting the visitor, the erstwhile persecutor expects the worst; but Ananias, crossing the room to where the blind man sat, put his hand on him, Acts 9:17, and said, "**Brother Saul . . .**"

Brother? It would almost break the heart of this deeply emotional man. Brother, Brother - he called me Brother! I suspect that, from that moment it became for him a sacred word; and when he called others brothers, this was, at least, part of the reason why his use of the name was invested with such sincere meaning.

Do we, I wonder, think of, and treat, our fellow-Christians as real brothers and sisters in CHRIST? The unbrotherly behaviour of some of us is a scandal to faith, and a denial of citizenship - such is not known in Heaven Above, why, then, in Heaven Below?

"**Dearly beloved**" - two doses of it, you observe, in this odoriferous ointment of a verse; and strong doses at that. Not merely love, but dear love! This is something deeper than brotherliness.

Do you recall Peter's Ladder of Christian Character, in II Peter 1:5-7, how we are bidden to ascend rung by rung, thus to "**add to**" one quality the attainment of the next, beginning, of course, with the step of "**faith**"?

When we are almost at the top he says, "**And to godliness, brotherly kindness.**" But we are, even yet, not at the end of the climb; here it is, "**And to brotherly kindness, charity** (love)."

Yes, I said that love was something deeper than brotherliness - I must add, something higher! There may be faults and foibles in our brother (as there are in us!), but love can understand, and overlook - love "**thinketh no evil**" of his brother, I Corinthians 13:5.

No ointment of behaviour is "up to proof" unless it have in it a goodly infusion of up-to-standard love. As we said in an earlier Study, Oh, for a baptism of first-century love upon the twentieth-century church. Paul had it, as we see, in full measure.

"**My joy and crown**" - the first, for the present; the second, for the future.

What delightful perfume of personal appreciation is here added to the compound. Paul was always ready, even quick, to recognise and acknowledge the good in those to whom he wrote, even if there was much in them to reprove; but to none did he pay such glowing tribute as to these at Philippi, in whom, indeed, he found so little cause for dissatisfaction, or reprimand. They were, almost without exception, such a "**joy**" to him, as he thought of them, prayed for them, wrote to them.

And one day they, with others, would prove a "**crown**" to all his endeavour - not the "*diadema*" crown of royalty, but the "*stephanos*" crown of victory.

Have you got a crown coming to you: some whom you have won to CHRIST? What a joy here; what glory hereafter.

"**Stand fast**" - the temptation is to give way.

The pressure of a heathen city is very strongly, and very seductively, anti-Christian; the threat of fierce persecution is even, in those days, to be expected; the not unnatural tendency to a drop in the temperature of their zeal, owing to the absence of their leader, who meant so much to them,

2:12.

These, and other things, might so easily, if they are off their guard, lure them to backsliding. There is no sign of it, so far, in that happy-spirited assembly of GOD's people; but it is always salutary to have warning. "I will thank the Lord for giving me warning", says the Psalmist.

So this astringent ingredient is included in this prescription. The man of mercury, for ever up and down, in and out, will not be a happy Christian, neither will he be a dependable person in the cause of GOD.

As we saw earlier, the Christian race calls for stickers, not sprinters. The satisfactory spiritual life is not governed by the prevailing fashion - he is no chameleon - nor by fears, nor by feelings, but by faith - a whole-hearted trust and reliance, as becomes citizens of a heavenly kingdom. That kingdom will be poorly served by those who, in Meyer's phrases, are "now like a seraph flashing with zeal, now like a snail crawling in lethargy". So stand fast. Remember the word that CHRIST spoke to one of the earliest of His disciples - "**Thou art Simon . . . thou shalt be called Cephas . . . a stone**", John 1:42. May we, too, be transformed (if need be) from the Simon of shifting sand into the Peter of resisting rock.

"**In the Lord**" - ah, there is the secret of steadfastness: "**rooted . . . in Him**", as Colossians 2:7 says.

See that great, towering oak. It began its life as a little acorn, shooting down its little rootlet, sending up its tiny spikelet, and gradually, as it grew, taking firmer hold of mother earth, daily giving evidence of its increasing strength, till it becomes the mighty tree before your eyes. How can it so splendidly stand fast?

It is all in the hold. Not just in the tree's hold of the earth, but principally, primarily, in the earth's hold of the tree.

In other words, it is not We, but He!

So, to complete the ointment, goes in this oil of dependence on the Lord, binding together all the qualities that constitute its make-up - the brotherliness, the love, the joy, the steadfastness: all are ours, as we are in Him. "**Abide in Me, and I in you**," John 15:4. But now, alas

THE OFFENCE OF THE FLY

This second verse of our passage is such a sad, and bad, contrast to what we have been considering thus far. Two women! Ah, but they were not the only women in the Philippian church - there was Lydia, Acts 16:14, 40, with her quiet acceptance of the Lord JESUS, and her consistent Christian kindness, sympathy, and hospitality.

I wonder how the Church would have got on without its godly women - the sons they have trained for her, the services they have rendered for her, the songs they have written for her, the supplications they have offered for her:

- from Eunice's training of Timothy, II Timothy 1:5; 3:15;
- from Tabitha's originating of the Dorcas meeting, Acts 9:36;
- from Mary's song of Magnificat, Luke 1:46;
- from the women's joining in the Upper Room prayer-meeting, Acts 1:14;

from these onward, the Church has owed a debt she can never adequately repay for all her women's sacrifices, service, and sympathy.

Here, alas, are two ladies that have fallen out.

The pity is that they are evidently women of standing and influence; and certainly they have both been very earnest and energetic in the work, "**women which laboured with me in the gospel**" (3), as Paul testified.

And now, comic in Satan's eyes, tragic in ours, they are quarrelling. As likely as not it will be over some trifling thing - one being preferred rather than the other; one assuming a position supposed to belong to the other; and so, the one thinking hardly of the other, and the other speaking harshly to the one.

Each imagines the other to be in the wrong - of course, they both are. They are Christians, if you please, prominent Christians; a sad pair, this Euodias and Syntyche. They are ruining their own happiness, spoiling the Church's gladness, adding to the devil's joy. And they won't make it up! They won't kiss and be friends, as Christian ladies should.

Mind you, it is not always the women that are thus doing such damage to the Church's blessing and witness. Just as often the culprits are to be found among the men of the congregation, the Mr. Euodias and Mr. Syntyches of the company. Two office-bearers who won't speak to each other - sidesmen who can't stand one another - deacons who bear each other a grudge.

Perhaps they don't realise that the quarrel is not just between each other, but is a controversy of each together with GOD - and His blessing is being held up accordingly: not they only suffer, but the whole congregation and Church likewise. And they won't make it up! They won't shake hands and be friends, as Christian gentlemen should.

Now Paul makes a strong appeal to them, "**I beseech**"; for he knows what harm they are doing by their unseemly wrangle. We don't know what success he had; we can only hope that he was able to bring them to "**the same mind**", that whether it were some general disagreement, or some personal grievance, they came to think alike.

Of course, that could only come to pass if one all-embracing secret be embraced, if they settle the thing "**in the Lord**" - there it is again! They would be likely to arrive at a common understanding, the same mind, if only they would view the matter as in His eyes.

Writing to another company of believers, the apostle says, "**We have the mind of Christ**", I Corinthians 2:16.

Ah yes, if each of these two ladies had the mind of CHRIST, they would have the same

mind. Simple, isn't it? Most of our personal problems are easily solved "in the Lord".

The company of the Church is like to a wheel, whose rim is the circumference of the faith in which all the members are embraced. Those members are the spokes; and if any of them be broken, or get out of place, the strength of the wheel is affected. If, however, all is well, it is found that the nearer they get to the axle, the nearer they get to one another. That axle is CHRIST, and "**in Him**" the members discover their unity, and the welfare of the whole community. Take heed, ye estranged ladies, or gentlemen; and take heart, ye troubled Church. For you have your part to play in bringing about this happy solution.

THE OBLIGATION OF THE OTHERS

There is an interesting change of word used here, in our third verse. To the ladies, Paul used a word for "**beseech**" which almost amounted to a command; to these others, the word translated "**intreat**" asks, as of a friend, a favour. Will these who are now addressed take up this problem as a matter of personal obligation?

The quarrel of any two members of a church really should be a concern to the others - we are to try to "**help those**" who are estranged to come to that "**same mind**" we spoke of.

- It will need courage, often;
- it will call for infinite tact;
- it will most certainly require prayer, much prayer; and, make careful note of this,
- it must be attempted in no spirit of superiority, or condemnation, but in a real spirit of love.

With these, perchance, the reconciliation may be brought about. But we ourselves must be "**in the Lord**", in harmony with His mind.

Who are these people here addressed? "**True yokefellow**" - who is he? We do not know; but all kinds of suggestion have been made. The great New Testament scholar, Professor Ramsay thinks it may have been Luke. Others have ventured the opinion that it was Barnabas, Timothy, Silas.

There was an early belief that it was the apostle's wife; but surely I Corinthians 7:8 means that he was either a bachelor, or a widower; and, in any case, surely if he were referring to a wife, he would at least be careful to make the "**yoke-fellow**" a feminine word, not masculine, as we have it. The same objection applies to Renau's suggestion that it was Lydia.

No - if we have got to cast a vote we shall follow Lightfoot, and name Epaphroditus as the person, who is to carry the letter, and is here urged to use whatever influence he may be able to exert to get the parties to agree. But nothing is anything more than mere conjecture.

The bishop's chief reason for choosing Paul's postman is that "in his case alone there would be no risk of making the reference unintelligible by the suppression of the name".

And then, "**with Clement also**", apparently a Christian gentleman, residing at Philippi, who might be supposed to carry some weight when tackling these difficult ladies.

There seems little to connect him with the famous early bishop of that name - the only point is that his Letter to the Corinthians was written to heal a feud in a distant but friendly church. We are indebted here again to Bishop Lightfoot. No, he was "Clement of Rome"; this was "**Clement**" of Philippi.

"**With other my fellow labourers**" - Paul was anxious to enlist the aid of all that he could lay hands on to try to heal the breach - anyone, anything, so long as the scandal is silenced. Such importance does he attach, and that we should attach, to the squalls and squabbles of church members.

And, as Paul closes the paragraph, he gathers all these Christian believers, yes, including Euodias and Syntyche, within the embrace of a truly wonderful and beautiful phrase and fact - "**whose names are in the book of life.**"

The Old Testament references to such a book are very striking - for instance, Exodus 32:32; Psalm 69:28; 139:16; Daniel 12:1; and when we come over into the New Testament, we find, in the Apocalypse, frequent mention of it - 3:5; 13:8; 21:27; 22:19.

Such continuous allusion would suggest that there is something more than mere metaphor here, that there is some substantial fact indicated, some record of names and personalities, inclusion in whose list is eternal joy, and omission eternal woe.

Would you like to have a peep at its pages; or would you be too apprehensive, lest your name were not there? Some of you will recollect your Final Examination at college, and how the list of passes was posted on the board. You can recapture even now the feeling of dread which prevented you looking, lest your name did not appear. You besought someone else to tell you.

Listen! If you are a real believer you need have no such qualms and fears concerning this record of Heaven's graduates. Revelation 21:27 says it is "**the Lamb's book of life**". Its lists are composed of the names of those who, by faith, have savingly beheld "**the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world**", John 1:29. Inclusion in that Book depends on worth - not our worth, but His.

In the old days of France they used to have a record book, something like our own Doomsday Book. In it was recorded a note of the taxes due from each city, town, and village - a page for a place. At the page assigned to the little village of Domremy, there was the list to be paid by it to the government. But across the page, written in red ink, and of course, in French, were the words, "Taxes remitted for the Maid's sake".

Joan of Arc, the maid of Orleans, was born there, and one of the marks of a, then, grateful government, for her military triumph against the invading English, was to honour her native village with this remission in perpetuity. I see a vision of other "**books**", Revelation 20:12.

If you could open the volume devoted to the record of my unworthy life, you would find across its pages, written in red, as if with the Blood of JESUS Himself, the words, "Sins... forgiven for His Name's sake", I John 2:12.

Continuing in the metaphor of that Revelation verse, I note that, at that Great White Throne, **"the books were opened . . . the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works"**. Not my book; nor yours, if you are a true believer. For when those Red Words cancelled out our **"debts"**, Matthew 6:12, that book was closed for ever, and our names were transferred and inscribed in **"another book [which] was opened, which is the book of life."**

We are not there to come up for judgment!

What joy is ours, and what glad thanksgiving.

~ end of chapter 13 ~

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