

HIS . . . IN JOYOUS EXPERIENCE

The Christian's Joy Book
Paul's Epistle to the Philippians

by

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INTRODUCTION

Practical—Historical—Analytical The Practical Approach

The Epistle to the Philippians has no doctrines to expound. It has no errors to correct; no issues to refute. It has a living Christ to introduce and commend to human need. Not a Christ disassociated from life's living, but a Christ experienced and proved in the utmost stress of life.

Christian doctrine such as one meets in the Epistle to the Romans is here transmuted into life and experience. In Romans we see the why and how of our salvation—its technique; in Philippians we see it at work, put to the test in life and action.

The difference of method and approach is much the same as when one studies a flower. We may take it to the laboratory to examine its structure and cellular secrets under the microscope; or we may go into the garden and see it in life, growing in simple beauty, exhaling its sweet fragrance. Free from scientific concern we see it as it is. It speaks to our heart, rather than to our head. Such is the Epistle to the Philippians. Yet, as the laboratory knowledge quickens the eye to detect added beauties in the garden, so the one who has mastered the doctrines of Romans will have the keener appreciation of Philippians as he detects these doctrines transmuted into living experience.

The Need of Knowing God

Man today knows something of everything—everything but God. Through a multiplication of schools and books, of papers and magazines, of mechanical inventions and devices, the heavens above, the earth beneath, the facts and forces at work around us, all things perceivable by the five senses, have become matters of universal knowledge. Yet, even today, man is still ignorant of God and His Christ. True today, as when John first spoke them, are the words, "**There standeth one among you, whom ye know not**" (John 1:26). Men of our day have not seen "**the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ**" (II Corinthians 4:6). The result is gross ignorance, darkness and blindness.

There is a remedy for this in the message to the Philippians. Here is the Christ of God, as found of those who trusted Him, as experienced by men like ourselves; lifting, strengthening, cheering; proving Himself the greatest boon of life. Such experimental knowledge is incontrovertible. It is the greatest need of our day.

Proving Christ Under Test

Philippians is the furthest removed from theorizing. Paul has his feet on the ground all the while. Through years of adversities and testings, the stress of which is still upon him, he writes of the proven, practical value of Christ to the one who has learned to appropriate Him under all circumstances. There has been ample occasion for disillusioning if this faith were mythical or mental; but instead, each new tensity of testing but added to his clarity of conviction and tenacity of trust. Of purpose Paul was compelled to fathom the deepest of waters that he might prove the worth of Christian experience to the very depths and bring the findings back to us. What Paul found of Christ, any child of God's grace can prove for himself today.

The Antidote for False Faith

Modern unbelief in its varied forms must stand baffled and abashed before the Christ of Philippians. Here He is, beyond the reach of false theories that would alter His person or limit His power; the real Christ, the historic Christ, the living Christ of today, built, beyond misrepresentation, into human experience.

The life that has possessed itself of such experience is safe. It knows the Son of God. It has plumbed spiritual reality. By contrast it knows the counterfeit. It will not leave the Living Bread for proffered husks. This soul-anchorage of experimental certainty is the one safe refuge for these perilous, delusive days.

Many examples could be cited. We give but one that comes to us through a ministerial friend. A preacher of the Gospel went abroad for further study. He spent some years in such institutions and under such instruction as have served to undermine the evangelical faith of many. Upon his return it was observed that he preached the old Gospel of Grace, as the power of God unto salvation, with the same fervor and the same fidelity. Asked how this came to be, his reply ran somewhat thus: "When a man has known Christ in His Word, has met Him face to face on his knees, has proved Him faithful in his hours of need, he cannot turn his back on his Saviour for any modern infidelity."

How many disciples would the cults draw away by their vagaries if all had a Pauline experience of Christ, as reflected in his Philippian Epistle? It would make us moderns a race of spiritual stalwarts; "**steadfast, unmovable,**" "**faithful unto death,**" like the sainted Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna. Threatened with martyrdom at the age of ninety-five, unless he renounced his faith in Christ, Polycarp gave as his reply: "Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never did me any injury. How then can I blaspheme my King and my Saviour?" With a prayer for his slayers he gave up his life for the One whom he had known and loved and served. May his spiritual seed increase.

Section 2—The Historical Approach From Prison to Prison: Nevertheless “Rejoice”

The Philippian Church came to its birth in a prison at Philippi. The Philippian Epistle found birth some ten years later in a prison at Rome. The intervening years have been tense with the vicissitudes of privation and persecution, of hardship and suffering. It is this setting of circumstances that floods the message of the Epistle with a wealth of meaning. What is it that causes one thus circumstanced to continually rejoice? And to call on others to rejoice? If the Christian faith has in it that which finds normal expression in such Christian experience, we may well ask ourselves whether our experience measures up to the standard. Is ours the real and the genuine?

By Divine Constraint

The story of the entrance of the Gospel into Europe is one of divine interposition. Read Acts 16:6-12. Man did not plan it. His thought was to continue in Asia. But they **“were forbidden of the Holy Ghost”** so to do. They attempted to enter another Asiatic province, **“but the Spirit suffered them not.”** Then appeared **“a man of Macedonia”** with a clear call, **“Come over into Macedonia and help us.”** **“And immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the Gospel unto them.”** (The **“we”** in the narrative indicates that Luke, the writer, has now joined Paul and Silas).

They were following the Lord. It was His plan and undertaking; His, too, was the responsibility. In the Lord's work the prime requisite is that we know we are in His ordering. Then He goes before, and we but follow Him. Then we can face any and all difficulties, undiscouraged and undismayed. Christian worker, “follower” of the Lord Jesus, have you the daily sense of being in His will? Of really following His leading?

Woman's Place of Prominence

The narration of the Gospel's beginnings at Philippi next calls our attention to the prominence of women in its reception. Read Acts 16:13-18.

1. Certain women met regularly for prayer (13). It would seem that the Gospel owed its rooting at Philippi to this prayer gathering. Nay, more; the Lord's calling of His messengers into Europe is in response to this prayer. Eternity will have a great story to tell of the trophies, down through the centuries, won by the fidelity of women in prayer.
2. Lydia, a business woman from Thyatira in Asia Minor, becomes the first convert, the Lord opening her heart to His Word (14), and she has the added joy, as many another wife and mother since, of seeing her entire household become a part of the household of God (15).
3. A young woman, demon-possessed (16), yet discerning the divine nature and saving power of the Gospel message (17), is delivered from bondage **“in the Name of Jesus Christ”** (18). In keeping with the place taken by women in the planting of the Philippian Church is the mention of them in the letter.

Whereas but one man of Philippi is alluded to, namely Clement, two women, Euodias and Syntyche, are mentioned by name (4:2), followed by a touching reference to the helpfulness of the women; “**Help those women which laboured with me in the Gospel**” (4:3). All this is prophetic of the state of liberty and esteem into which the Gospel has brought womankind in Europe and America and wherever its message has sounded forth, in contrast to her persisting degradation under heathenism.

Through Persecution and Imprisonment

Read Acts 16:19-40. The conversion of the damsel, through the monetary loss to her masters, occasioned the arrest of Paul and Silas (19); but it also occasioned the experience that is most deeply characteristic of the Philippian Church and the message concerning Christian experience that is now passed on by the Apostle, through them, to all posterity.

Six noteworthy results are discernible:

1. **Paul and Silas**, the evangelists, had opportunity to show the temper of the Christian faith while suffering under the indignities and physical smartings of their unjust treatment (19-25). The “**many stripes laid upon them**” had left them with bleeding backs. They were in torture, unable to sleep. At midnight they were heard “**praying and singing praises unto God.**”

It was the turning-point of the cause of Christ in Philippi. Had they complained; had they claimed their citizenship rights and called for their release; had they simply failed to overflow with holy joy, how different the story. Doubtless no Church would have been established; perhaps no male convert in that city, and a group of women left to carry on a prayer meeting.

2. **God** heard and heeded, in a remarkable manner, attesting His approval of His servants and His pleasure in their praises (26). Their preaching of the Gospel was confirmed; it was “**not in word only, but also in power**” (I Thessalonians 1:5). Hitherto man had been speaking; now God has spoken.

Just as electricity yields its power to the law of a perfect contact, a complete circuit, so the power of God manifested itself in response to the spontaneous joy and praise of His servants. What this means to Him— joy under suffering akin to His own Son's—we humans have yet to learn. So dear to Him is the continual “**sacrifice of praise to God,**” it should never, under any circumstance, suffer extinction upon the altar of our lips. Read Hebrews 13:15.

3. The **Jailor** was so profoundly impressed that he straightway sought the way of salvation (27-34). Note the earnest directness of his question, “**What must I do to be saved?**” It has voiced the hunger-cry of many thousands of souls since his day. And the simplicity of the apostolic direction, whereby he found peace in his Saviour, “**Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved,**” has pointed the way for thousands of thousands of faltering feet down through the centuries.

But the promise was more inclusive: “**Thou shalt be saved, and thy house.**”

The divine plan and provision is “**A Lamb for an house**” (Exodus 12:3). Thus the word of the Lord came savingly to the jailor “**and to all that were in his house.**” A whole family saved for Christ; their life and influence added to His cause at Philippi.

Was it this midnight experience that assured the first Church in Europe? We think so. We have always surmised that the jailor became its first Elder, and that gathered around the nucleus of this household, added to that of Lydia, many saints were drawn to a like sound faith and satisfying experience.

Query: Have we in our lives that vital something of Christ, which the jailor saw in Paul and Silas, to cause an unsaved soul to seek and find the Saviour?

4. **The Community**, from the rulers down, had a beautiful demonstration of the quiet confidence and unashamed dignity of the Christian life (35-40). These servants of Christ are no criminals. Citizens of the earthly realm, as well as the heavenly, they have acted within their rights. Mistreated, they are now vindicated, before leaving the prison and finally departing from the city.

5. The **Church** at Philippi received an impress that sufficed to turn its life into the channel of deep Christian experience and satisfying Christian fellowship. In all the galaxy of New Testament Churches this at Philippi is outstanding for the manifest exemplification of the grace of God in their midst.

6. The **Apostle and the Philippian Church** are drawn together in a sympathetic bond, strengthening through the years. They suffered together at the start; they share each other's sufferings to the end. The Apostle was poor, so also were the Philippians; yet out of their poverty, such was the tender tie of sympathy, they sent loving help, as did no other Church, “**once and again**” (Philippians 4:15,16).

All this explains much of the personal and experimental nature of the Epistle we are studying.

“Rejoice”—the Dominant Note

In reading the Epistle its recurrent note of “**Rejoice**” constantly resounds in the ear of the soul. Some eighteen times it occurs in varying forms. Surely it is the soul of our faith sounding out its call to all who follow our blessed Lord—“**Rejoice in the Lord always: again I will say, Rejoice.**”

Between that first Philippian prison experience and the one now his as he writes from Rome, Paul had undergone a series of almost unbelievable severities. They are set out before us in Second Corinthians 11:23-32. One is amazed as he reflects upon all this being packed into ten years of one man's life as he went about preaching the Gospel. Were this all, where were the joy? Nothing here to produce it! But this is far from all. This is superficial—the mere experience “**in the body.**” There is another sphere of experience—“**in the Lord.**” By a divine paradox what humanly spells sorrow and suffering, “**in Him**” is turned to joy and peace.

It is this experience that Paul is now, in his letter, seeking to share with the Philippians, who so sympathetically shared his sorrows.

An Invincible Faith

If this is the Christian faith, it is invincible. No Roman tyrant, no prison cell, no privation, no combination of circumstance, can touch or cut off the flow of experience **“in the Lord.”** While they are doing their worst against His servants, He can continue to do for them His best. This more than compensates.

Our Lord Jesus, confronted by the most terrible experiences of the Cross, while men and Satan were cruelly and unjustly plotting against Him, could speak of **“My peace”** (John 14:27) and **“My joy”** (15:11), as imperishable realities He was bequeathing in that very hour to His followers—all because He was Himself **“in the Father”** (14:10), His inexhaustible source of supply.

So in the early Church: **“They departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His Name”** (Acts 5:41).

It was this that made the Church invincible in martyr days: They gave themselves to death, while their tormentors witnessed in them a strange joy and exaltation of spirit. They were rejoicing **“in the Lord.”**

Of this the Scriptures often speak. E.g.

“My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing” (James 1:2-4).

“Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part He is evil spoken of, but on your part He is glorified” (I Peter 4:12-14).

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For Thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:35-39).

Section 3—The Analytical Approach The Contents Reduced to Chart

We turn our attention now to the actual contents of the Epistle Paul wrote to these Philippians, the background of which we have already examined. What is it about? What does it seek to say to them, and through them to us?

Believing that the Holy Spirit has so prompted and guided the writing as to give to us a definite deliverance upon a theme of vital concern to all followers of Christ, we owe it to Him to adopt a mode of approach that will best bring to our minds what He Himself had in mind. This cannot be accomplished at a glance, nor yet by a cursory reading.

Read; Re-Read; Repeat the Reading

We wish to insist upon this method. Do not read this little treatise until you have treated fairly the Epistle it seeks to elucidate.

First—Read it. Second—Read it again. Third—Repeat the reading as frequently as may be possible while engaged in the study.

One of the most serious mistakes, a truly fatal one, in Bible study, is to suppose that one knows what is in a Scripture because he has read it. The experience of Bible students is entirely to the contrary. Such is the hidden wealth of God's Word that new light breaks forth from its pages after years of frequent meditation and familiar acquaintance. To have read it is to merely know its structure, its outer form of words, what it says on the surface. We say we “know” a man upon once meeting him. In reality we scarce know him at all, only his form and appearance. The wife, after years of intimacy, may truthfully affirm her knowledge of him.

The necessity for re-reading lies in us—to develop a capacity for seeing the truth that is there. We had once a parishioner who was condemned, for the sake of his eyes, to sit for days in the darkened rooms of his home. We called to see him. Upon entering, we could see nothing, but stumbled our way through the furniture to a chair. Our conversation was in the dark. We supposed it would continue to be so. Did we not have all the light available? But no. After some fifteen or twenty minutes a new light suddenly seemed to break. We were amazed. We began to see things, and fairly clearly. We now saw the features of our friend whose voice we had heard hitherto. It was a happy experience, a reward for tarrying in his presence.

Our spiritual eye is subject to a like adjustment to truth. We err grievously when we judge the truth in a portion of God's Word by what we see in a first hurried reading. Listen longer to His voice; you'll soon see the face of Him who speaks.

Read it again—continue to expose the mind, the retina of the soul, to its rays of truth. You will see more. Note carefully what you see. Repeat, again, and again; and perhaps suddenly, perhaps gradually, a new light seems to break, a second sight seems to come. You wonder you did not see it before. The book, or portion, is yours; you “know” it.

A suggestion: Time yourself in the reading of Philippians. How long does it take you? The writer has asked this of audiences. Some report, “Twenty minutes”; others, “Only twelve minutes.” The average is about sixteen minutes. Not long to spend, and re-spend, in knowing God's mind on a great Christian theme. Any one can afford that. If they think they cannot they do not deserve the Name they bear.

Three Chief Considerations

The writer, in following the method here recommended—one open to all who can read—was impressed as he read and re-read, with three considerations of prime importance in grasping the contents:

1. **The Theme.** What is it about? Very evidently it is not dealing with doctrine—doctrinal discussion is entirely lacking. Nor yet with error—there is scarcely any warning. Nor is it concerned with unworthy living—the very word “sin” is noticeably absent. It is a personal letter familiarly presenting the essential elements of vital Christian living.

Its theme is Christian Experience—what should be, and may be, the experience of the believer in the Lord, under whatever circumstances.

2. **“Christ” the Divine Source.** A further reading calls attention to another feature—the prominence of the Lord Jesus Christ. Seventy times in this brief Epistle reference is made to Him by name or by pronoun. The teaching is clear and striking. Christian Experience is not a thing in itself. *Christian Experience is a matter of relationship to Christ.* He is its Source.

Take two illustrations, of many, from the Epistle:

(1) The exhortation to “Rejoice”; we are not bidden to rejoice in or of ourselves, nor in our circumstances, nor apart from Him, but in Him—**“Rejoice in the Lord.”**

(2) Christian attainment is a matter not of independent effort on our part but of entrance into His attainment for us—**“That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death; if by any means I might attain,”** etc. (3:10,11).

In other words, the Christian life is the furthest possible from being a mere system of ethics, a question of doing right. It is a life that flows from Him and finds its rightness in Him.

Blind ignorance of this fact has caused many to fatally misjudge the Christian faith, and many more to call themselves Christians when they were not at all—merely moralists, strangers to the living Christ.

So extremely vital is this that we desire to stress it by quoting from Masson's remarkable critique in condemnation of Carlyle's misconception of the Christian faith:

“Most important under this head, of course, is Carlyle's attitude towards the Christian religion. Here it is necessary that I should be precise. Christianity, as it has been professed by all the greatest spirits that have really believed in it anywhere on earth through the nineteen centuries of its duration, has consisted of two things, united but distinguishable—a metaphysic, or system of doctrines respecting the relations of God to man, and an ethic, or system of instructions for human conduct. Now, the essence of Christianity, when it offers itself as a supernatural revelation, lies, I hold, in its metaphysic. It lies in the belief that at a particular time in the history of mankind a miraculous shaft of light out of the unseen infinitude struck our earth in Judea, revealing to the Jews first, and afterwards to the Gentiles, certain things about the Divine Being and His procedure with men which men could never have found out for themselves, in the form of certain definite doctrines or propositions astonishing and almost stunning the mere human reason.

“The ethic without this metaphysic may call itself Christianity, but is not, I hold, Christianity in any sense worth so special a name. To tell men, however earnestly, not to tell lies, not to commit fraud, to be temperate, honest, truthful, merciful, even to be humble, pious and God-fearing, is very good gospel; but it did not require the events of Judea, as Christian theology interprets them, to bring that gospel into the world. The modern preacher who sermonizes always on the ethic and omits the accompanying metaphysic may sophisticate himself into a belief that he is preaching Christianity, but is preaching no such thing. Wherever Christianity has been of real effect in the world, and has made real way for its own ethic, it has been by its metaphysic—that set of doctrines respecting things supernatural which was to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness.” *

* From “*Carlyle, Personally and in His Writings*,” by David Masson, pp. 84-86

This finding concerning Christ—the central key position assigned to Him in the unfolding of the theme—prompts a revision of our wording, from “Christian Experience” to “**Christ in Christian Experience**.”

3. “**Mind**” the Human Channel. Upon re-reading, our attention is arrested by the recurrence of the word “mind.” It appears twelve times in the English translation, while the Greek student finds it supported by a wealth of reference to the inner state or thought-life of man.

It is the human key to Christian Experience. Christian Experience flows *from* Christ as its Source; it flows through the mind of man as its Channel. It is experienced through the mind yielded to Him.

Christian psychology contemplates a mind made over— “**born again**”—made responsive to the mind of God. Thinking with God, we will then act in harmony with Him, and consequently with each other—“**like-minded**.” Only as we are “**transformed by the renewing of our mind**” will we “**prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God**” (Romans 12:2).

This is the grip God wants to get upon us.

We cannot get into the stream of God's will and purpose, reflecting His likeness, until our minds become the willing channel of His thought-currents. *Chart. See opposite page.*

PHILIPPIANS				
CHRIST IN CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE				
CHRIST – The Source		MIND – The Channel		
	CHAP. 1	CHAP. 2	CHAP. 3	CHAP. 4
<u>WHERE</u> HE IS				
<u>WHAT</u> HE IS				
<u>HIS</u> <u>MIND</u> IN US				
<u>APPEAL</u>				

Sectional Chart – Introductory

Let us now begin to form our findings into a Chart, thus to visualize and make definite the progress of our study. Taking the results of our reading thus far to be the outstanding features of the Epistle, we incorporate them into the headlines of the chart.

Next, the Chapter divisions. It is not often the case that the chapters mark the natural and logical divisions throughout a book, but our reading persuades us that this is true of Philippians. So in the next space under the headlines we place the four chapters, ranging across the chart.

Three Corresponding Questions

Having found what we conceive to be the main thought-currents, we now propose to ourselves three questions bearing upon them, the answers to which will reveal to us their development through the successive chapters.

1. Since Christ is central to Christian Experience; since it grows out of relationship to Him, what is that relationship? That is, **Where is Christ?** Where is He pictured as being with relationship to us in each succeeding chapter?

Any one can answer the question, Where is Christ? He is in Heaven (Acts 1:11; Hebrews 9:24). But He is also here with us, nay, in us (Matthew 28:20; Ephesians 3:17). One can readily see that these two positions of Christ, heavenly and earthly, represent two entirely different relationships for us and therefore two very different possibilities and aspects of Christian Experience. What Christ does for us because He is dwelling in us is very different from what He does for us from Heaven.

Then there is the historic Christ, the Christ of the Gospels, He who lived here among us in the past. Likewise, the prophetic Christ, He who is to be revealed in the future.

Here are four aspects of Christ as He relates Himself to His followers—within, behind, before, above. As we read the Epistle it becomes evident that these four aspects, or angles of relationship, determine the varying viewpoint of Christ in each of its four chapters.

And these four will be found to yield for us **four phases of Christian Experience**. They are the four phases essential in the mind of the Holy Spirit to the rounding out of Christian character.

2. A second question: Since Christ is the Source of Christian Experience and He relates Himself to us for this purpose in the four aspects above mentioned, **What is He to us** in these successive relationships? What does He bring into our lives? Evidently this question, asked of each of the four chapters, will bring us into the very heart of the teaching.

3. A third question: Since our Christian Experience progresses in terms of a transformed mind, made over by relationship to Christ, **What mind does He beget** in us in these successive relationships? This question is the focal-point for the definite results we may expect to accrue to us in our experience of Christ.

When we have ranged these three questions down the left side of the chart, and added a space for the summing up of the **Appeal**, we have completed the skeleton of our chart.

The answers to these questions are to be filled in, chapter by chapter, as we proceed with our study.

A Four-Fold Arrangement

Each chapter will receive a uniform treatment, consisting of:

1. Outline.
2. Chart.
3. Note.
4. Comment.

We earnestly urge that each chapter be read through, thoughtfully and prayerfully, with the *Outline*, before proceeding with the further features of elucidation.

~ end of chapter Introduction ~

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