

JOY WAY

An Exposition of the Epistle of Paul

TO THE PHILIPPIANS

by

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CHRISTIAN LITERATURE CRUSADE Pennsylvania

CHAPTER SEVEN

NOW, AND HOW - Philippians 2:12-13

NOTICE that little word "**now**" in verse 12, and remind yourself that Christianity is a Religion of Now - "**Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation**", II Corinthians 6:2.

A faith which is concerned exclusively with a past salvation, being saved from our past sins, as it is put; a faith that is concerned exclusively with a future salvation, being saved from hell's eternal penalty for our sin - both these fall short of the New Testament conception, which visualises a present salvation; which tells us that we ought to enjoy, and may enjoy, a "Now" Salvation, negatively being saved from the practice and habit of daily sinning, and positively being saved unto the practice and habit of daily holiness.

These introductory thoughts will serve as a useful background to the study of this interesting and important passage, wherein Paul is pressing upon his beloved converts a kind and quality of happy Christian life for "now". He starts with

A PRESENT EXAMPLE

"**Wherefore**", says the apostle - and let us remember, in all our Bible study, how important it is to give due weight to the conjunctions of Scripture: so much instruction is to be gleaned from them - and here the word throws us back again to the previous passage and bids us, as did verse 5, take note of our Lord JESUS as our example.

He "**became obedient**", even up to the extreme limit of His substitutionary death - "**wherefore**" we also are to be utterly obedient to GOD. Some of us have yet to grasp the strategic value of this quality of plain obedience. Trust and Obey - are the two feet on which the Christian successfully pursues his pilgrim way; they are the two hands with which he grasps the great gifts of GOD; they are the two eyes to which are revealed the ever-growing truth of GOD; they are

the two ventricles of the heart by which is shown the deep love of the Christian for his Lord.

"Trust and Obey - for there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus, but to Trust and Obey"

indeed, to be anything in JESUS. Not trust alone, not obedience alone; but the two in happy partnership. Or, as the practical James would say, Faith and Works.

At this point we must recollect that when the inspired writer is urging these Philippians to take CHRIST for their example he is addressing Christians. To press upon non-Christians to follow Him thus is to mock them - such an endeavour is beyond them.

They must experience Him first in another capacity.

First, *as Emancipator* - as Saviour. As well tell the Hebrews to enter Canaan while they are still in Egypt as expect people to enter the Christian life when they are not yet Christians. To copy CHRIST (the secret of which we shall learn later in this very passage) is possible only to Christians. When Peter says that He has left us "**an example that ye should follow His steps**", I Peter 2:21, it is to be remembered that the "**us**", and the "**ye**", are believers; and only so can they be followers.

Next, *as Exemplar* - now that the order is established, the Order can be insisted upon. It is a specific command, "**Be ye therefore followers [imitators] of God, as dear children,**" Ephesians 5:1; and the Greek is the word from which our "mimics" is derived. What mimics the dear children are.

Some people have quarreled with Thomas a Kempis' title "*The Imitation of CHRIST*", as if that were something impossible; but there it is, as a command of Holy Writ, and therefore possible, now that we have got things in their true sequence.

Then, *as Enabler* - it is not we, but He. How often we have heard it said that GOD'S commands are His enablings. If left to ourselves, it would be indeed a hopeless quest; but we are not left like that, He is ever present with us as our daily pattern, and our constant power: His "How" for our "Now". Some come to-

A PRESENT DUTY

"**Ye have always obeyed . . . in my presence . . . now much more in my absence**" - obeyed the precepts of GOD, of course, not of Paul - as CHRIST Himself, your Example, did (v. 8). Here we are, then, again at this primary Christian characteristic of obedience. And Paul felt able to bear glad acknowledgment of it!

And now there of their upright spiritual behaviour all the time he was with them - their daily following of the Exemplar had been exemplary. Now, however, he is far away from them, in Rome, and he is deeply concerned that their Christian consistency shall in no way be dependent upon his presence. He has said the same thing in 1:27, "**Only let your conversation [behaviour] be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come . . . or else be absent, I may**

hear . . . that ye stand fast". Hear, too, the apostle John. "**I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth**", III John 4.

This Paul is a great student of human nature, as is evidenced in a score of passages from his pen. He knows so well how often, for moral rectitude and spiritual fidelity, we lean on one other. The convert at a mission is gloriously keen, so long as the great effort lasts, but when the evangelist is withdrawn, he begins to lose his ardour, and the Church is sad to find that he no longer walks with them.

A Christian schoolboy, who had badly backslidden, said, by way of explanation to his friend, who had left - and I heard him say it - "I was all right while you were still here."

Now, says the apostle in effect, you have been splendid in my company, "**much more**" let your conduct and character be true "**in my absence**". But why "**much more**"? Would it not have been sufficient if they had been told to continue "just the same"?

I wonder if the answer is not to be found in the fact that instead of leaning on Paul, the human prop having been removed, they are now thrown exclusively upon the Lord Himself. Many a saint could testify that they blessed GOD for some loss or trouble, because it threw them back on Him, and they came to know Him more intimately than ever they had done, or could have done before.

The furnace of affliction can be a rare place for meeting and knowing GOD, as three men once discovered when they met with "**the Fourth**", Daniel 3:25. How those three would have appreciated the testimony of the Psalmist (119:71), "**It is good for me that I have been afflicted**"; and (verse 67), "**Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept Thy word**".

No wonder that, with all his experience of life, our great English poet said. "Sweet are the uses of adversity"! The particular seeming adversity that our passage is dealing with is the removal of a trusted friend upon whom we have relied for our spiritual welfare - how "**much more**" blessed will that "**absence**" be than that "**presence**", if the soul is brought to rest hard on the always-present Lord, Hebrews 13:5-6. So that our converts - and all of us - might be encouraged to place our entire confidence thus in Him alone.

So shall the life of obedience be not only a duty, but a delight, emerges -

A PRESENT RESPONSIBILITY

"Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."

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Some of us are so enamoured of the sheer joy of the Christian life that we are in danger of forgetting that it is also a grave responsibility. It is not just a picnic! To become a Christian is to be invested forthwith with certain responsibilities - towards GOD, and towards others. It is this more serious side of our Christianity that we are now to study, as guided by this pregnant sentence of the apostle's.

A great Possession is conferred upon us - "your own salvation".

(a) Of course, we must first recognise that it is His salvation before it is yours - "Shew forth His salvation from day to day," as Psalm 96:2 says.

- He purposed it - of His sovereign grace, or we never would have been saved at all.
- He planned it - from before the foundation of the world. I Peter 1:20; the wonderful plan was conceived in the Council Chamber of the Triune GOD.
- He procured it - when the plan was put into operation at Calvary.
- He proffered it - for man's acceptance, if he will have it; for He will not force it upon us, but will leave the gift of free-will, with which He has endowed us, inviolate.
- He pressed it - urging man by the continual influence of the HOLY SPIRIT, by every means short of force, to close with the gracious offer, yet having so often sadly to say, "**How often would I . . . and ye would not,**" Matthew 23:37.

Ah yes, from first to last it is His salvation.

(b) But it became "your own" when, with the hand of faith, you took it from the pierced hand, and what was originally His became eternally yours. Well, have you? Or are you still without this wonderful possession? You could, even as you stop a moment in reading these words, grasp the gift - yea, grasp the Giver - now, this very minute. And how truly wonderful the possession is - which buries the past, changes the present, and ensures the future. May we who have it continually realize the wonder of this Love Gift.

A great Programme is now set before us - "work out". It is sometimes held to be the teaching of this verse that we have to work our eternal salvation out for ourselves; but we can dismiss this at once: because Scripture never contradicts itself, and Ephesians 2:9 says, it is "**not of works**". We are not to work it into our lives, but to work it out by our lives. Here is a great mine.

This mighty salvation, repository of light and warmth and energy, which is ours through the explosive dynamite (the Greek word translated "**power**" in Romans 1:16) of the Gospel has now to be worked out in our daily behaviour, for the blessing of our fellows and for the satisfaction of the Owner of the Mine. Thank GOD, the Christian life is a working concern: what joy, as well as responsibility, is to be found in the fact.

A small boy has just gone to bed when his uncle arrives at the house, and going to his room, presents his young nephew with a lovely clockwork engine. Imagine Jack's excitement as he eagerly hopes for the morning, when he can see how it works! Just so is it that we who have been presented with this gift - no toy - should be eager to display to others that it works. A bolder testimony, a sweeter temper, a gentler speech, a nicer manner, a keener service, a cleaner life, a kindlier behaviour, a wider helpfulness-these are some of the many ways of working it out. Reverting to our simile of the mine, I have come across this interesting sidelight.

The ancient scholar Strabo (b. 64 or 62 B.C.), a Roman, who wrote in Greek, has an account of the once famous silver mines in Spain, in which he refers to the "working out" of those mines, using the very same word as Paul uses here. Strabo meant, of course, as my informant proceeds, that the Romans were operating, exploiting, and getting the utmost value out of what was already

securely in their possession. Such, it seems clear to me, is the apostle's meaning of "**work out**" - I am to mine what is already mine, producing such precious nuggets of personal character as we have just enumerated.

*A great Peril is here hinted at - "**with fear and trembling.**"*

A nervous anxiety to do the right thing, thinks Lightfoot. The phrase is quite common with Paul, for instance in I Corinthians 2:3, II Corinthians 7:15, Ephesians 6:5, in all which passages the meaning seems to be as the learned Bishop suggests.

It is not "**fear and trembling**" lest we might lose our salvation, but lest we might use it amiss.

It is the dread and danger of becoming so remiss in the outworking that we might cause distress to the Master, and damage to His cause. The world knows instinctively what is to be expected from the professing Christian and reserves its scorn for his failure.

Think not, my friend, that, in your self-confidence, you need have no anxiety on this score. A greater than you, the apostle Peter, felt the same confidence, "**I . . . never!**" Yet, how grievously he sinned. One can only say to oneself, and to others, ere we leave this subject, "**Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.**"

Oh, it is not necessary thus to falter, fail, and fall. The phrase is only intended as a warning, and as a counsel that even the most advanced Christian needs to maintain an attitude of continual watchfulness, Those who climb highest could fall farthest, if they slipped. "**Hold up my goings in Thy paths, that my footsteps slip not,**" Psalm 17:5. "**Unto Him that is able to keep you from falling,**" guard you from stumbling, Jude 24.

So we come, with joyous gladness, to

A PRESENT POSSIBILITY

"For it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure"

- First, let us look at

I. "**His good pleasure.**" Remember now that when GOD had created man and his world it is recorded that "**GOD saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good**", Genesis 1:31 - very pleasing in His eyes.

The glorious thing is that individual men can thus give Him joy, for of Enoch it is said that "**before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased GOD**", Hebrews 11:5. Oh, to have such a testimony! In the whole body of believers, too, He is to take delight, for it is written that "**Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it . . . that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing**", Ephesians 5:25-27.

And when, at the consummation, He looks out upon the whole company of the redeemed, the old

prophet tells us that "**He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied**", Isaiah 53:11 - could anything be more truly amazing? He shall feel that all His suffering for us has been worth while. This is part of "**the joy that was set before Him**", for which He was content to endure the Cross, Hebrews 12:2. So let it be my whole, and holy, ambition - not, on any account, to please myself; nor, merely, to please others, though that is good within legitimate limits; but always, in big things and in little things, in spiritual things and in secular things, to "**please Him who hath chosen**" me, II Timothy 2:4.

Now the happy present possibility that lies before each of us believers is that He is prepared, if we will let Him, so to deal with us that in our personal behaviour, and in our Christian service, and in our inner character, we shall be well-pleasing in His sight.

II. Look next at the all-embracing phrase, "**to will and to do.**"

Here are two distinct things, psychologically apart - doing it, and desiring it.

"**To do**" - is the problem with some of us. We need no instruction as to the right thing to do, the proper course to pursue; it is all plain to us. But we just don't know how.

One of our great scientists (I forget who it was) is reported to have said on one occasion, "If it were possible for a machine to be placed within my nature that would automatically ensure that I would always do what was right, I would close with the offer immediately." But he knew, we know, that there is no such machine.

Instead, some of us are struggling on, never expecting to do, and never succeeding in doing "**His good pleasure.**"

"**To will**" - is the problem with others of us. We just don't want to: that is the plain fact! We prefer to please ourselves; or else, for popularity's sake, or gain's sake, we are all out to please others; we have no real desire beyond these, no longing to please GOD. Isn't it sad? Indeed, isn't it mad?

The late beloved F. B. Meyer relates how that once at Keswick he was confronted with some challenge of the will of GOD about which he was unwilling to surrender. On one of the surrounding hillsides the Lord wrestled with this man, as He did with Jacob, at Jabbok, long ago, Genesis 32:24. until at last Meyer confessed that he was willing to be made willing! Thus did GOD gain the victory in the life of that man that set the seal of mighty blessing upon all his subsequent ministry.

If your life's problem lies here, will you follow F. B. Meyer's example and let GOD know that, with all your heart, you are willing to be made willing for "**His good pleasure**"?

How shall this be accomplished? "**God which worketh in you.**"

Before your conversion He worked on you, by the HOLY SPIRIT, now He works in you. Let us take note of the fact that GOD the HOLY SPIRIT is positively within every Christian. If He be not in us, we are not Christians at all, for "**if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none**

of His", as Romans 8:9 teaches us.

Some Christians are scarcely aware of this solemn and strategic fact: consequently they are living on a low level of spiritual experience, and because they imagine that there is nothing better in store, they are content with this second-rate life - up and down; in and out; to and from; on and off! It was like that with some of the Corinthian believers, just out of heathenism, and still, alas, practising some of the old uncleannesses of their former life. Says the apostle, "**What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you?**" I Corinthians 6:19.

You ought not to be unholy with the Holy One - in residence; and you need not be unholy for the indwelling Holy One is there to make you holy. He is positively within every Christian, however unsatisfactory that individual may be. He is actively within every Christian that is surrendered to Him, that lets Him work in him to bring about the doing and the want to. Thus are we to be "**changed into the same image . . . by the Spirit of the Lord**", II Corinthians 3:18 - not simply at some future date, but Now; and this is How.

Happy thought!

~ end of chapter 7 ~

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