

JOY WAY

An Exposition of the Epistle of Paul

TO THE PHILIPPIANS

by

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CHRISTIAN LITERATURE CRUSADE Pennsylvania

CHAPTER NINE

A COUPLE OF FINE SPECIMENS

Philippians 2:19-30

WE have just been thinking about lights, and here now we have two magnificent examples. Two Christian men utterly consistent, good, through and through. It used to be said that the difference between linoleum and cork-linoleum was that in the one the pattern was on top and eventually wore off, but in the other the pattern went right through. This was the style of these two men - Christian all through, inward and outward.

The late beloved Taylor Smith used to say, "It isn't the label on the bottle, but what's inside". With Epaphroditus and Timothy the two coincided - Christian in name, Christian in nature.

The passage is a homely one and reflects the real affection existing, on both sides, between Paul and his beloved Philippians.

Let us get the picture clear. Back in the summer these European Christians had sent Epaphroditus to Rome to carry a gift to Paul in prison. Now, according to Professor David Smith, it is November, and Paul has not yet acknowledged the present not that he was unappreciative of their kindness, nor that he was careless of such a courtesy, but just that he had had no one to send. You couldn't, in those days, pop a letter in a pillar-box!

Meanwhile, Epaphroditus had been given instructions by the Philippian church that he was, having delivered the goods, to stay by the apostle for a while and help him in any way he could.

This he did to such purpose that he made himself ill - so ill, that he was like to die. However, to Paul's relief and joy, he was spared and raised up to life and service again. His distress now was that the Philippian friends, who had sent him, had got wind of his illness and were worrying about how things were going with him, and was he getting on? Paul, therefore, unselfish as ever, decides to send him back to his own people - he will, in that case, be able to carry the apostle's belated thanks for their generosity to him, and they will also have the comfort and satisfaction of

getting their friend home once more. For his own part, Paul expects to be able to visit Philippi at some future date. At the moment that cannot be, for he is a prisoner and must await his appearance in court; but as soon as he knows how his case has gone, he will be off to see them [which, probably he did].

Before he can himself get started, he will send their highly esteemed friend, Timothy, to bring them the news of the decision - for there was no wireless then. And, as they await the result, Epaphroditus is dispatched, carrying with him this priceless letter, so full of affectionate happiness. There is the story; and now let us examine the verses, in more particular reference to these two typical specimens of the all-out and all-round Christian.

READY TO GO ANYWHERE

Suppose GOD planned to send you to some dark pagan corner of the globe to be His light to benighted, groping, heathen souls, would you go? Said Henry Martin, on the eve of his departure for the dark mission-field, "I go to burn out for GOD." Would you be prepared for that, if it proved to be GOD'S will for you? Here before us are two men ready, any moment, to go anywhere on Paul's errands in the service of the Master.

Note Paul's decision "**to send Timotheus**" (19), and "**to send... Epaphroditus**" (25). He knew there was no question of their prompt obedience, nor of their consulting their own convenience.

How interesting it is to mark this fine quality in GOD'S servants to go wherever they be sent, in spite of the errand being fraught with possible danger.

Look at some.

"**And Moses went**," Exodus 4:18 - yes, back to Egypt, from which, forty years before, he had fled for his life. He had made every excuse for not going; but, when he saw that this was GOD'S plan for him, he "**went**." And to what purpose.

"**And Elijah went**," I Kings 18:2 - sent to go and meet cruel undisciplined Ahab, who had been searching the land to find him that he might silence his awkward, prophetic ministry. In this case it seems that there was no hesitation. As soon as GOD'S plan was plain, he "**went**", to what a scene of triumph for JEHOVAH on Carmel.

"**And [Philip]... went**," Acts 8:27 - but he was the leader of a great revival movement in Samaria. Surely, it must be a mistake; it would appear to be clear that he cannot be spared from his truly strategic position as centre, and pivot, of the widespread blessing. Especially as he is bidden to betake himself to a desert region and eventually to devote himself to one man. Spite of what must have been his mystification, he "**went**" - to lead that one highly placed official to CHRIST, and who, in his turn, was seemingly used to the founding of the once-virile church in North Africa. What a good thing he went!

"**And Ananias went**," Acts 9:17 - it was surely putting his head in the lion's mouth. This Saul of Tarsus, arch-persecutor, and here in Damascus for that very intent - again, there must be some mistake. When, however, this disciple was reassured, he "**went**", and had the joy of being the

first Christian to give to this remarkable convert the right hand of fellowship, and the first to minister to his deep need. Thanks be to GOD for these, and others, who so bravely "**went**" on GOD'S errands.

I remember hearing the saintly F. B. Meyer, then still preaching at eighty-two, say "I have only one ambition: to be GOD'S errand-boy"! How beautifully in tune with that lovely self-portrait of Gabriel, which I love to quote, in Luke 1:19, "**I am Gabriel that stand in the presence of GOD; and am sent . . .**"

That was the intention of the Master for His disciples, "**He ordained twelve, that they should be with Him, and that He might send them . . .**" Mark 3:14. Might He have us, to be absolutely at His disposal, to take messages anywhere?

READY TO HELP ANYONE

Note this spirit of helpfulness in the case of Timothy (20-21).

Here are what one might call three directions of help.

(a) Ourselves - "**all seek their own**". How common a trait it is, in the generality of people, to be always careful to look after Number One. Even when such folk do good things, it is only to gain kudos and a reputation for themselves: they are of the same ilk as the "**hypocrites**" of Matthew 6:1 ff, who performed the creditable functions of giving, praying and fasting; "**to be seen of men**", "**that they may have glory of men.**" I - is their god; Self - is their goal; Me, Me, Me - is their slogan. Well now, Timothy was not one of these - as the implication of the passage shows.

(b) Others - "**who will naturally care for your state**" (20). That was this young man's outlook. When Sir Bartle Frere returned from India, the carriage was sent to the village station to bring him to his home. When the new footman, but newly engaged, asked how he should recognise Sir Bartle, his aged mother said. "Look out for somebody helping someone else." Sure enough, when the London train had drawn in, the manservant observed a gentleman assisting an old lady to the platform and then jumping back into the carriage to fetch out her luggage. Going straight up to him, the footman enquired, "Sir Bartle?" Yes; it was he.

What a lovely reputation to have! To be known as one who is always on the look-out to see when, and how, one can help others.

Others: yes, that was a supreme characteristic of the Master, "**He saved others,**" Matthew 27:42. I suspect it was a mark of Timothy's life also. Do you observe that word "**naturally**" in verse 20?

He was a Christian, and was therefore a possessor of that new nature that comes from the indwelling of the HOLY SPIRIT. It should always be a quite natural thing for a Christian man to be an "others" man, for "**the fruit of the Spirit is love**", Galatians 5:22.

Non-Christian people sometimes display this quality of others-ness. With them, it is like apples tied on a tree; with us it is fruit growing out naturally. But, but, but - is it always so seen in us Christians? Are not we sometimes very self-centred - self-seeking, showing little of the "**care**" of

others which was so manifest a feature in Timothy's make-up?

Described as we are, in Isaiah 61:3, as "**trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He might be glorified**", we have become fruitless trees, and He is not glorified, and others have not been helped.

(c) Our Lord - "**the things which are Jesus Christ's**" (21). The inference here is that those who help others help Him. We know how the opposite of that is true, for we remember how the Living Lord says to Saul, "**Why persecutest thou Me?**"

It was the Christians he was hurting. Yes; and, in so doing, he was hurting Him. We recall, too, His words, "**Inasmuch as ye have done it . . . done it unto Me... Inasmuch as ye did it not . . . did it not to Me**"; Matthew 25:40, 45.

All this apart, there are those, and Timothy was one of them, whose lives are devoted, not consciously to their own interests, but to the concerns of the Lord - who care, above all else, that His Name shall be honoured among men, that His Kingdom shall be furthered through the world, that His Will shall be done in earth as it is done in Heaven, Matthew 6:9-10.

Here, then, is Timothy, ready to help anyone, whether in secular, or whether in spiritual matters; anxious above all to help his spiritual "**father**" (22). Many a little fellow loves to help daddy; many a grown-up son counts it a joy and privilege to help the old gentleman. Just so was Timothy - as the Philippians had "proved" (22) - eager to serve with Paul in the fellowship, and adventure, of "**the gospel**."

Only let Paul use him to the full, and the young protege was happy, whatever be the difficulties that were in the way. Paul, on his part, is so glad to use so enthusiastic a helper, and sends him hither and thither on gospel errands - to Philippi, almost immediately (23), to Ephesus to take up the oversight of the churches in the vicinity (I Timothy 1:3). The man will prove a succourer of many - of any he can help.

*Note this spirit of helpfulness also in the case of Epaphroditus (25-30). Paul writes of him as "**he that ministered to my wants**."*

For "**ministered**" he uses an interesting word. He could have employed other words, but he chooses this which, as a matter of fact, refers specifically to Temple service - as if the things this man did for the apostle were of a religious nature, because done also for the Lord. Verily, there is nothing secular that is done for JESUS' sake - even "**a cup of cold water**."

Never forget that when this same apostle writes, in I Corinthians 12:28 about great spiritual gifts, "**first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings . . . governments, diversities of tongues**," he has in that blank space the word "**helps**". Those other things are out of the reach of most of us, but we can all be helps.

What a help Epaphroditus was, "**My brother**" - fellow-believers: as such born into the family of the Father. All His sons are brothers of each other. Alas, we don't always behave brotherly towards our fellow-Christians, as Galatians 6:10 says we ought "**especially**" to do.

My "**companion in labour**" - fellow-worker: no distinction drawn between the foreman and the ordinary hand.

The apostle places his helper as on the same footing in this building operation. My "**fellow-soldier**" - fellow-campaigner in this "World War One" against all the allied forces of entrenched evil. Then Paul turns to simpler tasks performed by this helper.

"**Your messenger**" - the one sent by the Philippian church with the love and largesse of the believers there. He had doubtless, with gladness, accepted this commission. Lastly, "**that ministered to my wants**" - what were these wants, and how catered for, we do not know. What we do know is that he wore himself out in this "Temple ministry". As the passage ends, "**to supply your lack of service toward me**" - it doesn't mean that they were ignorant of his need, nor idle to supply it, but that, for some while, they had had no chance to do what their heart longed to do.

All that distance over land and sea away, they had no one to take the supplies, until Epaphroditus had become available for the purpose. And now, Paul reports, his friend "**was full of heaviness**" - full of gladness that he was the better of his sickness, but so sorry because the news of his grave illness had somehow reached Philippi, and he knew how grieved and anxious they would be.

Thus is revealed the deep affection of all to each.

How Paul loved Timothy and Epaphroditus; how they loved him. How Paul loved the Philippians; how they loved him. How Epaphroditus (and even Timothy, 20) loved the Philippians; how they loved him. See how these Christians loved one another!

Ere we come to consider a last thought or two from our passage, may we turn aside to ponder the sad lack of love in the Church to-day.

There is no lack of learning - and we welcome it all, as it seeks to unravel for us the secrets of GOD's universe and GOD's truth. There is no lack of organisation - and we recognise the usefulness of it, so long as it does not strangle the organism. There is no lack of busy-ness - alas, that so much of it is not real business. There is, however, a strange and sad lack of love - and love is the true test of discipleship.

Are you a Christian? Here is the sign by which you may be sure: listen carefully: "**We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love . . .**" I John 3:14. Do others know we are Christians? Here is the test: listen carefully: "**By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love . . .**" John 13:35.

Oh, that all we Christians everywhere would pray, and pray again, and yet again for a great baptism of love, as in the first days of the Church. What revolutions would be brought to pass. We cannot achieve this by any energy of our own: the secret lies in the full understanding and experience of Romans 5:5. And now back to our passage, where we shall find our two good specimens

READY TO SACRIFICE ANYTHING

We thought in our last Study of the self-sacrifice involved in the light. A single phrase written in the account of these two men will be sufficient to indicate the same truth in their case, magnificent lights that they are.

(i) "**Served with me in the Gospel**" (22). A fellow-slave, for so strong is the word. It is interesting to observe how anxious Paul seems to have been to hold both these men as equal partners with himself in the pursuit of the great advantage. By the way, the word "**in**" could easily be "unto", unto the Gospel: Plummer translates it "for the promotion of" - you get the same thing in 1:5.

Here, then, is Timothy slaving away, alongside his father in GOD, sharing the hardships, the perils, the chances of the campaign. All which conjures up in our minds a young man of tough constitution - yet, how different is the case. Look at him as he really is, as the records describe him.

(a) His sheltered home - "**I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice**", II Timothy 1:5. Picture of a quiet and godly home, with Tiny Tim reared in the Scriptures (II Timothy 3:15) and brought up in the faith of GOD, which afterwards, when a boy of say, fifteen, grew into the Christian belief.

(b) His delicate health - "**Use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities**", I Timothy 5:23. Mark that he says "**a little**"!

(c) His sensitive nature - "**let no man despise thy youth**", I Timothy 4:12. So does Paul feel it necessary to take the stand compatible with his position of the Oversight of the Ephesian churches; he is not to be upset by the possible attitude of supercilious superiority of some who might reflect upon the fewness of his years, and the narrowness of his experience.

What impression, I wonder, was made upon this shy, timid soul by the news - and possibly even the sight - of the stoning of Paul in his native Lystra, Acts 14:19. It was there and then, it seems, that Timothy became a believer in that faith for which Paul suffered, and in which he continued to grow, being "**well reported of**" by the Christians there.

And when Paul was next in Lystra, amongst other things looking for another young fellow to join his mission party in place of the deserted Mark, it was to this convert of his that he turned, and constrained to throw in his lot with him, Acts 16:1-3.

So it came to pass that this so unlikely person, knowing full well what of privation, danger, and suffering it might mean, as Paul had already undergone, yet ventured forth with him, utterly regardless of his own comfort and feelings. Tradition has it that he was ultimately clubbed to death, after a life of toil and tumult. Ready for anything was this heroic young man, with self always sacrificed to CHRIST and His cause. Can the Master count upon us for a like complete surrender of ourselves "for the promotion of the Gospel"?

We turn, in conclusion, to that second man, and note, in the account of him, this illuminating phrase, "**not regarding his life**" (30). The Greek word of seventeen letters translated "**not regarding**" is a picturesque one, and really signifies "*hazarding*", or gambling.

We naturally think of Paul and Barnabas, who, in Acts 15:26, are described, though there a different word is used, as "**men that have hazarded their lives for the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ**".

Epaphroditus belonged to that same fine company; "**indeed he was sick nigh unto death**" (27). We may presume that he was a well-enough man when he left Philippi, and that he contracted no trouble on the journey, but that he took the deadly disease owing to his unflagging, self-forgetful zeal for Paul's service, and the work of GOD, in Rome.

Do you remember that the runaway thief, the slave Onesimus, was found in the slums of Rome - "the common sink of all the worst vices of humanity", as Lightfoot called it - and brought to Paul in his prison, where he was converted, Philemon 10? I wonder who discovered him, and fetched him? Was this the kind of thing that Epaphroditus was doing?

Was it there, in the fetid atmosphere of the squalid environs of the back streets and hiding-places of Imperial Rome, that he caught his germ? Run down with strenuous labour, he might so easily have become susceptible to some venomous virus. So, in very zeal he gambled with his life "**for the work of Christ**" (30).

The late Professor Deissman, in his *Light from the Ancient East*, has told us that at Alexandria there was a large guild (and it seems that there were similar brotherhoods elsewhere), called the Parabolani (a name akin to this word for "**hazarding**"), who risked their lives in visiting the sick and burying the dead during the plague.

In the early church there were those who missed the martyr's death, but deserved the martyr's crown.

Yes, here were two valiants, Ready for Anything. How much does GOD see us ready for? How fine a slogan it would be for all of us Christians, who are enlisted as good soldiers of JESUS CHRIST, II Timothy 2:3, just four vows - Anywhere! Anyone! Anything! Any cost!

~ end of chapter 9 ~

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