

## JOY WAY

An Exposition of the Epistle of Paul

TO THE PHILIPPIANS

by

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### CHAPTER TEN PROFIT AND LOSS ACCOUNT - Philippians 3:1-11

BEFORE taking up the main theme, let us deal with one or two other matters that are mentioned at the opening of the passage.

**"Finally, my brethren"** - as if he is thinking of concluding the letter; we have the same thing at 4:8. In both cases, how glad we are that the Epistle did not end there - for there follow in each instance, precious utterances that we should be sorry indeed to miss.

**"Rejoice in the Lord"** - everything for Paul is **"in the Lord"**: it is, as Plummer says, the Christian's natural environment.

**"To write the same things to you"** - reiteration is one of the great rules of a good teacher, and the apostle was one of the best of tutors. For instance, this **"Rejoice"** of his - how often he repeats it - yet never so often as to be **"grievous"**, or irksome, to himself, nor unnecessary to their welfare.

The reiterations of GOD make a moving study - **"The word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time"**, Jonah 3:1; **"God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this; that power belongeth unto God"**, Psalm 62:11; **"How often would I . . . and ye would not"**, Matthew 23:37; **"Behold I stand [keep on standing] at the door, and knock [keep on knocking] . . ."**, Revelation 3:20.

Our Lord Himself did the same thing; and often when there seem to be discrepancies as between the two utterances of what appears to be the identical statement, there turns out to be no contradiction, but He is repeating a story, an illustration, in different contexts, and He alters the form somewhat to suit other circumstances, other audiences.

Have you noticed that, while in Luke 15:4, He tells about the Lost Sheep in allusion to the publicans. He repeats the story, in Matthew 18:12, in relation to the children? All we preachers occasionally repeat an old sermon!

Ah yes, there is value in reiteration. "**Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision**" - the presence, in the Greek, of the definite article shows that he is referring not to these dangers in general, but to particular people, whose activities were well known to the readers.

Wherever Paul worked he was, it seems, opposed by, troubled by, one or other of two powerful false teachings - Judaism or Gnosticism. In Colossians, it was particularly the latter that was the problem; in Philippians, it was the former, with their strong and specific demand that all Christians must adhere to the Mosaic law, and be circumcised. By this and other aberrations from the truth, these people [like some 'Isms, and 'Ists of to-day] were a constant menace and nuisance. "**Dogs**" - Paul calls them, for he can be very blunt in his language.

He does not mean the little pet dogs of the home that JESUS mentions in Matthew 15:26, but the Eastern ill-conditioned pariah dogs that prowl for garbage, whose bark was unnerving, and whose bite was poisonous. Jews always called Gentiles "**dogs**" - as Paul himself would have done in his unconverted days; but now he turns the opprobrious epithet upon these Judaisers.

"**Evil workers**" - they certainly are, sowing the seeds of doubt, sapping the strength of confidence and enthusiasm, stopping the testimony of some who were once so keen.

"**The concision**" - Paul labels them, which means a "**cutting**." Circumcision was a sacred rite; but these people had robbed it of all truly religious significance, and made it no more than a physical formality - it was as worthless as the gashings of the prophets of Baal, in I Kings 18:28.

"**We are the circumcision**" - the true circumcision, the inheritors of that for which the old covenant rite stood. "**Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham**", Galatians 3:7.

"**We worship God**", not merely in the letter, but "**in the spirit**"; and we "**rejoice**" in having the One for whom the old covenant was the preparation; and we set no store by the mere cutting of "**the flesh**." We look for "the true circumcision of the spirit."

There we may finish our preliminary considerations, and go on now to the main teaching of the passage. The apostle is very quick to seize upon anything in common life to provide him with an illustration of spiritual truth. How apt was his Master in that same practice. So now the apostle goes to the world of business and brings out a meditation on spiritual accountancy, drawing up for himself, and for our instruction, what we have called a "Profit and Loss Account."

He says "**I counted**" (7), "**I count**" (8), "**[I] count**" (8).

### **THE PROFITS THAT PROVED LOSS**

What a list of investments he puts down. Gilt-edged securities, he had considered them, but they had grossly depreciated, and now he was forced to write them off as worth just nothing. The scrip was just scrap.

Let us look them over for our guidance in our Life's business.

(1) "**Circumcised the eighth day**" - which shows that he was a true Jew; Ishmaelites were circumcised at thirteen years old; proselytes - that is, Gentiles who embraced the Jewish faith - were circumcised at any age, upon admission to Judaism.

Paul never forgot his Jewish nationality, and wherever he went he always sought to preach first in the synagogue.

Only after they refused him a hearing did he assert, "**Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean; from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles**", Acts 18:6.

Though he became the apostle of the Gentiles, and though he is writing to Gentiles, he yet says, "**To the Jew first**", Romans 1:16; and in the very same Epistle (10:1), he declares, "**My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved** ." Are we so earnest for the spiritual blessing and welfare of the nation to which we belong?

(2) "**Of the stock of Israel**" - this is the religious name of the nation, and meant so much to the real, pious Jew. Paul would assess the material value of the ancient people as very high, but it was, for him, the spiritual side that held highest honour. To have come from such a stock was privilege indeed.

(3) "**Of the tribe of Benjamin**" - what a tribe to belong to. "**Little Benjamin**", as the Psalmist affectionately called it, Psalm 68:27. It was specially noteworthy for its having the Holy City within its borders, and as being the birthplace of the people's first king, after whom Paul's Jewish name was taken. Inhabitants thereof are proud of being Lancastrians, Devonians, Northumbrians, and so on: thus would some Israelites be proud of being a Benjaminian, or is it Benjamite? Paul was.

(4) "**An Hebrew of the Hebrews**" though living at Tarsus, Acts 11:25, and educated at the great University there, Paul was pure Jew. Concerning Timothy it is said, Acts 16:1, that "**his father was a Greek**"; but there was no such heathen blood in our apostle. Both his parents were pure Jews, so that he is properly here described as "a Hebrew sprung from Hebrews." One can imagine how, as a rising young Rabbi in training, he set so much value on his pure, unmixed descent. He felt that, in his future work, it would stand him in good stead.

(5) "**As touching the law, a Pharisee**" - this was his religious adherence, and he would be very strict in all the daily observance of "**the law**", with all the Scribal accretions attached; he would be very haughty in demeanour. As a sect, they came under the scathing denunciation of our Lord, because of the arrogance of their outward conduct alongside the putridity of their inward corruption - "**whited sepulchres**", as He called them, Matthew 23:27. There was, of course, a different type of Pharisee, strongly political, eager nationalist, anti-Roman, who, especially during their history in the time between the Old and New Testaments, the period of the Maccabees, showed heroic qualities on behalf of their race. Ah well, they were a mixed company; but we have a feeling that Paul himself was of the ardent, the upright, the better sort.

(6) "**Concerning zeal, persecuting the church**" - how praiseworthy and creditable it had

seemed. As an abnormally young member of the Sanhedrin, he had, from the first, been in touch with what he would then doom the heretical JESUS movement. He may even have been present at the Trial; but now He was dead and done for - making Himself equal with GOD, indeed! But this man, in his fanatical indignation, was not going to sit at ease; he would stamp out the remembrance of the Nazarene's name, and root out every disciple and believer. So it was that "**Saul . . . made havoc of the church**", Acts 8:3. Until the dramatic moment when he heard the dead Man's voice again - amazed, arrested, "**apprehended**" (12). How gloriously he brought all his gifts, and all his zeal, into the service of his new-found Master and Saviour.

(7) "**Touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless**" - One thinks at once of that other religious young man, who, under the gaze of holy, penetrating eyes, was able to say of the law's demands, "**Master, all these have I observed from my youth**", Mark 10:20. Concerning Saul, as he then was, Plummer writes, "Minute duties were scrupulously performed, and no Pharisee, however strict, could have blamed him for laxity". Would that we were as "**blameless**" relating to the Christian code.

There it all is, then - what riches they once had seemed; but now it had all fallen about his ears. It took his blinded eyes to see how worthless it all was. His spiritual finance was in a hopeless tangle. Becoming his own auditor, he could only certify the whole as dead loss, and himself a miserable and hopeless bankrupt. "**What things were gain to me, those I counted loss . . .**" (7).

It is time we went into the other side of his Account.

### **THE LOSSES THAT PROVED PROFIT**

There was a queer transposition of the credit and debit sides of the account. Look at it.

"**I have suffered the loss of all things**" (8). He had lost financial stability - at one time he had doubtless lived an affluent life; he could not have studied at Tarsus University, nor moved later in Pharisaical and Sanhedrin circles unless he and his family were quite well-to-do. Now he was a poor man, often, for his livelihood, depending upon his craft of tent-making, Acts 18:3, and sometimes reduced to accepting gifts from his friends for his provision, 4:11-12.

He had lost physical comfort - it would appear that, from the time of his conversion, he was cut off from his family, for they are never mentioned, and he was condemned to a life of privation and suffering such as has fallen to the lot of few. Read his own account of it, in II Corinthians 11:23-28 - "labours, stripes, prisons, rods, stoned, shipwreck, journeyings, perils, weariness, painfulness, hunger, thirst, cold, nakedness, care."

Where was the comfort that once he knew? Does not the list make you a little ashamed, that your Christian adherence causes you so little distress? Do you not think that a bit of persecution, in these days of ease, would perhaps waken us up, tighten us up, smarten us up into something nearer to the virility of the first believers?

He had lost great reputation - the Scribes of the day would look upon this brilliant young man as one of the most promising of their coming leaders; he would be held in high esteem by all who recognised the values belonging to the upright Jewish faith. Now he is regarded, and treated, as

"**the offscouring of all things.**" Yes, he had lost everything that he had held dear. How did he view all that sacrifice?

Let Hudson Taylor, founder of the China Inland Mission, reply, for he experienced something at least of Paul's troubles. Someone, trying to be encouraging, said to him, "Mr. Taylor, you must have sacrificed much." To which the old missionary veteran replied, "Man, I never made a sacrifice in my life." That is just how Paul would have answered. "Sacrifice? No, no; "**for Christ**" (7), on the other side of the scale, the other side of the account, with all His treasure, completely outweighed the seeming loss of things.

Florence Nightingale gave it as the secret of her life, "I have never refused GOD anything" - she gave Him her all. 'Twas no loss for her, for GOD will be no man's debtor: He countered by giving His all to her. You see, others than Paul, have had their strange Profit and Loss Accounts.

"**I count all things but loss**" (8) - all those things that the Jewish world estimated so highly. Even the good things, he rated as of no account seeing that they yielded no interest in the money-market of the soul, paid no dividends to the "**[treasury] in Heaven**", Matthew 6:20.

Even those things that may legitimately be reckoned good, the positions and pleasures of life, the things that He "**giveth us richly... to enjoy**", this man is gladly willing to forgo, that he throw his whole being into the joyful and fruitful service of his Master. "**To what purpose is this waste?**", Matthew 26:8, said the disciples, egged on by the money-grubbing Judas, John 12:4-6, at the prodigality of a devoted woman's love-gift.

They said the same thing when George Pilkington, leading classical scholar of his year at Cambridge, threw up all his fine prospects at home to devote his life to missionary service in Uganda - but what an income accrued from such a loss.

They said the same thing when C. T. Studd, Cambridge and England cricketer, gave away his considerable private fortune, and went off to labour in the mission-fields of inland China, and unevangelised Africa - his earthly waste was heavenly winnings.

They would have said the same when the attractive little corn of wheat fell into the ground and died; but "**if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit**", John 12:24. So found Paul - and many more!

Now, therefore, consider

### **THE GAINS THAT REVOLUTIONISED THE ACCOUNT**

Shall we call the first a *Personal Gain* - "**that I may win Christ**" (8).

The word "**win**" - not by any merits, or deeds, or promises can we win Him: the word "**win**" is "gain". All financial gain, all material gain, all physical gain, all intellectual gain, all moral gain, all religious gain - all these are but such little gains compared with the Great Gain.

This is a matter of personal choice: we may choose to have Him, or we may refuse to have Him. Back of our choice there is, of course, His sovereign will and grace - "**ye have not chosen Me,**

**but I have chosen you . . ."** John 15:16. They had, indeed, chosen Him; but, primarily, the choice was His - is always His; in our case, too.

The first entry, because fact, on the credit side of his account is this personal Gain of CHRIST - not any thing, nor any experience, nor any blessing; it is He alone that can satisfy. And how gloriously He does!

Shall we call the second *a positional Gain* - that I may "**be found in Him**" (9). Here we touch on one of Paul's outstanding themes; over and over again we have the phrase "**in Christ**", or "**in Him**", or "**in the Lord**".

All that we are, we are because of our position; all that we have, we have because of our position; all that we know, we know because of our position; all that we gain, we gain because of our position. "**In Him**", amongst much else, we have a "**righteousness**," a right standing before GOD - not derived from any merit of "**mine own**", a law-righteousness, arising from scrupulous observance of all its regulations: a pretty hopeless proposition.

Ours is, in fact, the spotless righteousness of CHRIST, reckoned to be ours in response to our "**faith**" in Him; and followed by a righteous behaviour, that becomes those who enjoy such a position "**in Him**."

Shall we call the third *a Potential Gain* - big with potentiality, emanating from those two previous gains.

(a) "**That I may know Him**" (10). Having gained Him, and being found in Him, it is only to be expected that we should have a great desire to come to know Him better and better as the days go by.

Knowledge of all kinds, except knowledge of evil, is of great value; but what knowledge could be compared, either for beauty, for satisfaction, or for power, with this growing intimacy with Him.

Abraham was what he was, because he came to be the friend of GOD; Moses did what he did, because he talked with GOD face to face; they knew GOD. And, says the old prophet, "**The people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits**," Daniel 11:32.

Let us, then, join the apostle in so great a desire; and let us, by regular communion with Him over the Word, the Bench, and the Table, and by a daily habit of obedience to His will, seek this wondrous personal knowledge of Himself, which He is so graciously willing to grant to any of His children.

(b) "**That I may know... the power of His resurrection**." Romans 5:9 says that "**by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath**" released from all that is meant and involved in sin's guilt, penalty, stain, by His Cross.

Romans 5:10 says that "**being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life**" - that is, our ability to conquer sin's daily habit, and our possibility of living in daily holiness, are derived from the

power within us of His risen life. "**I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me**", Galatians 2:20.

(c) "**That I may know... the fellowship of His sufferings.**" CHRIST'S sufferings preceded His resurrection; Paul's sufferings followed his knowledge of the resurrection.

Do you recall Acts 9:16, after his knowledge of the Risen Lord, "**I will shew him how great things he must suffer for My Name's sake.**" He had essayed to stamp out the Name; now he must suffer in proclaiming the same.

Being ready, if needs be, to suffer for allegiance to Him is a sure test of our love, and a clear mark of our loyalty. And if such experiences are ordained for us, we shall enjoy a very sweet fellowship in them with the Greatest Sufferer of all.

(d) "**Being made conformable unto His death.**" That means, I believe, the crucifixion of self, in application of the truth of Galatians 2:20, "**I am crucified with Christ**".

Yet, the thought of physical death was probably not altogether absent from the apostle's mind for he goes on

(e) "**If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead**" - although even that could refer to the living of the resurrection life here and now, "**Nevertheless I live,**" Galatians 2:20. "**If ye then be risen with Christ,**" Colossians 3:1.

The doctors disagree!

So the apostle escapes his threatened spiritual bankruptcy. Reviewing, with new understanding, his assets and liabilities, his income and expenditure, he closes his Account with a huge Balance on the right side - a Balance at the Bank of Heaven, for sure keeping, Matthew 6:20; and a Balance in Hand to meet daily expenses, or emergencies.

When the late Sir Leo Page resigned the honorary secretaryship of a charitable fund connected with the criminal courts in Berkshire, he sent the account books to his successor, accompanied by some lines of verse that he wrote, ending with the thought,

"When I advance with faltering feet  
To show my final Balance Sheet"

A friend of his, writing in a Times obituary, 3 September 1951, says, "His account is in order".

So was Paul's; and so "**in Christ**" may ours be.

~ end of chapter 10 ~

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