

JOY WAY

An Exposition of the Epistle of Paul

TO THE PHILIPPIANS

by

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CHAPTER TWO

THE GOOD COMPANIONS - Philippians 1:3-8

IN verse 5 Paul uses the words "**your fellowship**", which give the keynote of this section; and, indeed, the thought is not far away all through the Epistle. Some of the commentators, in fact, consider that "**fellowship**" is the real theme of the Letter, and there is much to be said for that view.

Here they are, then, the Philippian Christians and the Apostle, the good companions along the way. There are difficulties, of course, and there will be disappointments, perhaps, but judging from what he says, and from what they do, it is a very happy comradeship that they have - for them, at least, it is the Joy Way through life. Mark, please, that it is:

A FELLOWSHIP BEGOTTEN IN LOVE

"Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love", sings John Fawcett; and that should ever be the golden thread uniting all believers.

It was one of the characteristics of the early church which so profoundly impressed the pagan onlookers, "See how these Christians love one other". The very same words are sometimes used by the world concerning us Christians to-day - only now they are spoken ironically!

If only they were employed again as expressive of a reality, how greatly enhanced would be the power of our impact upon our age. Love is still the most impelling force in the universe. I always enjoy that legendary conversation between the Wind and the Sun, arguing which of them was the more powerful. Espying a man on earth heavily overcoated, they conceived the idea of testing their respective power by seeing which of them could the more quickly make him remove his coat. The wind began the contest, blowing his ferocious and icy blasts, only to cause the man to hug himself the tighter in his warm wrappings. Then the sun started, pouring down its rays of heat, with the result that soon first the gloves, then the scarf, came off - and then the overcoat. The sun always wins.

Oh, for a great outpouring of love from the Church upon this poor, chilly world.

It must, I think, begin with ourselves - the all-too-frequent criticism, and back-biting, and ignoring of one another must go, and the all-too-rare quality of brotherly concern and loving-kindness must flourish amongst fellow-believers, Galatians 6:10.

We must learn to walk as Good Companions, after the secret of Romans 5:5, "**The love of GOD is shed abroad in our hearts by the HOLY GHOST which is given unto us.**"

See this true warm affection in our passage.

(a) "**I have you in my heart**" (7). This is better than having people

(i) *On our minds* - for our thoughts about them might be either full of assurance, or full of anxiety, might be glad or sad. In the Philippians' case. Paul says, "**it is meet for me to think**" well of you; but it would not be so in every instance. Again, this is better than merely having people

(ii) *On our lips* - to be constantly talking about them, whether for praise or blame. Paul never tired of talking about his beloved converts; but, then, he did not stop at talking of them to others, but talked about them to GOD. Then, this is better than having people

(iii) *On our nerves* - though we are bound to confess that some folk are uncommonly trying: be it whispered that some of us Christians are amongst the most trying of all-such bores, or such rasps, as we often are. If ever people like - well, if ever people got on Paul's nerves, I am sure that he very soon got rid of them there; for it was his habit, as it should be ours, to have people

(iv) *On our hearts* - then will their weaknesses and shortcomings be allowed for; then will their daily needs be catered for, then will their constant welfare be sought for; then will their deepest blessings be prayed for. There are some ministrations that are not possible to everybody; but the ministry of kindness, so fruitful for the harvest of the Kingdom, is open to all.

Notice also this further phrase,

(b) "**How greatly I long after you all**" (8).

He longs to see them again, as he probably did, after his acquittal and release from his present imprisonment; for it seems likely that he resumed his journey in between his two trials, including a proposed visit to Philippi, "**I trust in the Lord that I also myself shall come shortly**" (2:24).

He longs to hear how they are faring - "**that I also may be of good comfort, when I know your state**" (2:19).

He longs to thank them personally for all the love gifts of creature comforts that they had sent him - through such as Epaphroditus, "**your messenger**" (2:25). He longs that, in their turn, they may have the very deepest, highest, widest, richest blessings that GOD can impart, and so for "**this I pray**" (1:9).

All these longings are quickened by, measured by, and constrained by, "**the bowels** [yearnings] **of Jesus Christ**" (8). Well - plain fact, as well as pattern for us, this is the tender affection of his part of the fellowship; later, he will have further opportunity to mention the love on their part. Such is one of the marks of the Good Companions. See next that it is -:

A FELLOWSHIP EXPRESSED IN SERVICE

Someone has oddly defined friendship as "Four feet on the fender" - quaint, but surely inadequate, for it is one side of the thing only. Certainly, Christian fellowship is also "Four feet on the road". Paul's good companions were not just fellows of the armchair - but fellows of the workshop and of the warpath. Their friendship expresses itself in service - to one another, and to the common cause.

That common cause is "**the Gospel**" (5, 7). Paul and his friends knew this gospel as *a Saving Message* - a life-transforming "good news". Up against the bad news of their sinfulness came this good news of CHRIST'S Saviourhood.

Like in the old pre-war days, boys and men would parade the streets selling their newspapers with their placards of big events before them, so Paul had arrived in Philippi with the good news, as he says in writing Galatians 3:1 "**before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth** [placarded among you as] **crucified among you.**"

In those days a magistrate placarded his proclamation in a public spot that an execution had taken place - as, indeed, is done outside the prison in like circumstances to-day. So this apostle preached CHRIST crucified to these people, who had turned from their sin, and taken Him for their Saviour, and trusted Him for all.

Thus they found this gospel "**the power** [Gk., 'dynamite'; blowing them right side up] **of God unto salvation**", Romans 1:16 - a saving message.

Straight away they conceived this "**Gospel**" as *a Serving Ministry* - they could not now deny it to the world that needed it so much, even as they themselves had previously done.

How intrigued they would have been with the story of the four lepers in II Kings 7:3, who, regaling themselves with the surprising blessing of "**bread enough and to spare**", Luke 15:17, suddenly realised their responsibility to break the news to other starving souls, "**We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings** [a gospel day], **and we hold our peace**". So was it with these Philippian converts.

To quote Dr. Plummer, "Every convert had become a missionary"; right from the start, "**from the first day**" (5), and their enthusiasm showed no sign of waning, "**until now**", they had demonstrated that their fellowship with Paul, their gospel-bringer, was that each of them should be a gospel-bearer to others.

The apostle himself had lost no time in enlisting for this glorious adventure; for immediately following upon his conversion, Acts 9:20, records of him that "**straightway he preached Christ**

in the synagogues".

Does all this condemn us - that we have been so shy, so scared, so slow to speak the word for Him?

These first European believers soon discovered, however, that this happy fellowship in the gospel involved *a Suffering Membership* - they would not have the easy, comfortable time that most of us have. They were:

"**partakers of my grace**" (7), and it was as well for they were henceforth committed to a life spent in the "**defence**" negatively, or in the **confirmation**", positively, of the gospel - all which, in the conditions and circumstances in which they found themselves, might so easily lead to "**bonds.**"

Paul's own proclamation of the gospel in their city had brought him to that fearful, fetid "**inner prison**", Acts 16:24, after the cruel suffering of scourging. Yet, how well worth while the apostle would have declared it to be, seeing what mighty results followed. Indeed, one of the contributing factors to those results was the joy of the two good companions who mingled their prayers with their praises, thanking GOD that they were counted worthy to suffer for His Name.

They were like the Psalmist who, though speaking of "**my sore... in the night**", speaks also of "**my song in the night**", Psalm 77:2, 6. Ah, it was the Master Himself "**Who, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame**", Hebrews 12:2. And we, as co-inheritors with Him, as Romans 8:17 explains, "**if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together.**"

We shall look further into this part of the "**fellowship**" when we come to study 3:10 of this Epistle. Meanwhile we turn now to consider this blessed partnership as -:

A FELLOWSHIP IRRADIATED BY HOPE

It is a noteworthy thing that Christianity is the only religion that has this quality of hope.

- It is not found with the Buddhist, whose keynote is pessimism, and whose longing is to fade away into the forgetfulness of nirvana.
- It is not found with the Mohammedan, whose characteristic is fatalism.

In striking contrast, the Christian faith is shot through with this thread of unconquerable and radiant hope.

It is an assured hope - "**being confident of this very thing**" (6): the confidence resting on what "**He**" is to do, not on what we are to do - He, not we, is ever the main emphasis of the New Testament. Be it remembered that, in the New Testament, hope is not something that we have not got, but hope we may get; it is something that we have not got yet, but know we shall get eventually.

Such a confidence is begotten in the apostle's mind concerning the fulfilment of GOD's purpose

in the heart and life of the believer. The reader is taken back to the beginning of things - "**He . . . hath begun a good work in you**".

Our conversion day, our moment of regeneration, was the start.

When Lydia heard this Epistle read in the church, how her mind would travel to her riverside experience three or four years before. When the gaoler, sitting that day in the same congregation, listened to the words, how his heart leapt at the recollection of the never-to-be-forgotten episode - the years between had not dimmed the glory of that night light.

When was your beginning - His beginning in you? Well now, that start is the guarantee of the finish - "**He . . . will perform it.**" You may be very slow, very refractory, very difficult, but in spite of all that we may be quite "**confident**" that He never drops anything half done. He leaves no "unfinished symphony."

The commencement is the surety of the continuation until the completion. He who lays the foundation stone may be relied upon to lay the coping stone. What a glorious hope it is - resting not on ourselves, nor on anything that we do, but entirely on Him.

It is an advent hope - "**until the day of Jesus Christ.**" I find it so interesting that so often, when Christian hope is mentioned, it is linked up with what Titus 2:13 calls "**the blessed** (happy] **hope**"; and I John 3:3 says "**every man that hath this hope in him** [Gk., set upon Him] **purifieth himself**" - again, it is the Advent Hope.

Commenting on this phrase in our passage, Lightfoot says, "the expression implies something more than a temporal limit. The idea of a testing is prominent . . . prepared to meet the day of trial". Such a test does await every Christian, after being called up to meet Him, I Thessalonians 4:16-17, when "**every man's work** [that is, every Christian man's work] **shall be made manifest . . . of what sort** [not what size] **it is**", I Corinthians 3:13.

That is, of course, not a judgment of sin, as in Revelation 20:11-15, but an assessment of works.

Since our conversion, when the work began, how have we been getting on? Have we been improving in holiness, increasing in service? How about our spiritual temperature - has it run down to cold, is it just now at the unpalatable degree of tepid, Revelation 3:16, or does it keep up to boiling-point?

Opportunities have opened out before us: have we seen them, and seized them? "**Occupy till I come**", Luke 19:13, said the departing Master to us; how have we done, will the returning Master enquire. Well - if, by the twin rules of Trust and Obey, we are allowing Him to control us and our lives, the assessment will be "**thou good servant.**" Of His sovereign grace, He began it - by our yieldedness, Romans 6:13, He has been able to continue it - and, by His love and power, He will assuredly finish it, and "**present you faultless**", Jude 24, at "**the day of Jesus Christ.**"

One last thing about the good companions, it is-

A FELLOWSHIP KNIT BY PRAYER

As we tread the gospel road together, we take hold of their arm in affection; and we take hold of GOD for them in supplication.

Both these relationships - the affection and the supplication - were so natural to Paul: again and again they are seen in his fellowship especially with his beloved converts.

With some of them, his prayer is weighted with burden - their need is so great, their progress is so disappointing. With these Philippians it is all so different. His prayer for them arises in sheer "joy" (4).

They are journeying to Heaven along the Joy Way: and even their friends' prayers breathe the happy atmosphere. Every time he thinks of them (3), he thanks GOD for the way they have turned to Him, for the way they are growing in grace, and, no doubt, for the way in which they have always been so ready to minister to his physical necessities. So, in this delightful fashion, thanksgiving and joy are blended with his intercession. Just what he asks for them we shall see in our next chapter, for the verses 9-11 set it out before us. And remember that, as Emerson said, "Your solicitude may do much for those you love, but your prayers will do more."

~ end of chapter 2 ~

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