

JOY WAY

An Exposition of the Epistle of Paul

TO THE PHILIPPIANS

by

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CHRISTIAN LITERATURE CRUSADE Pennsylvania

CHAPTER FIVE

HAPPY WARRIORS - Philippians 1:27-2:4

"**STAND FAST**" - "striving together" - "your adversaries" - "the same conflict." You see, there's a war on. Consider:

THE THING WE FIGHT FOR

"**Striving . . . for the faith of the gospel**" (27). When writing to the Thessalonian believers (1 Thessalonians 2:4), Paul says "**We were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel.**"

Speaking under this military metaphor, it is as if the gospel standard were placed in the hands of the Christian army, to be planted in other lands, and in other lives. That is one of the mighty privileges "allowed" to us believers - privileges, yes, and responsibilities, too.

This is what the soldiers' would call a strategic front - especially with Paul himself always seeking to carry the fight to the points of influential life, and busy traffic, such as this Philippi, and that Thessalonica. It is also a strategic operation when you and I seek to capture one soul by the gospel of JESUS CHRIST, for who, but GOD Himself, can tell what that one may be, or do.

Truly, Christian history justifies us in applying to this case the words of Isaiah 60:22, "**A little one shall become a thousand.**" Besiege that one, strive for that one - that the gospel flag may be thus far advanced among the kingdom of men.

No one who has ever engaged in this godly burden will deny that it is a strenuous front - this work of soul-winning is no easy matter, for the enemy will concentrate all his forces to prevent, if he can, our taking the city.

All that is implied in that word "**striving**" will be required from us; all that lies behind the exhortation to "**stand fast**" - to stand your ground, in face of the foe's counter-attacks - may be called for. Such battles are not normally won simply by the happy little handing of a tract, and the putting up of a simple little prayer - though GOD forbid that I should belittle the immense possibilities of a tract and a prayer.

It is only the careless, and almost flippant, manner in which this is sometimes done that I am warning myself and you about. Do you remember that verse of Horatius Bonar's

"Go, labour on while it is day:
The world's dark night is hastening on;
Speed, speed thy work; cast sloth away;
It is not thus that souls are won."

All the modern hymn-books have that last line thus: but in an earlier day we used to sing it differently, and as I feel sure was Dr. Bonar's original wording

"With strong great wrestlings souls are won."

How GOD had to wrestle for Jacob's soul - "**there wrestled a Man with him**", Genesis 32:24. It was there, at long last, at Jabbok, not at Bethel, in chapter 28, that the patriarch was, as we should say, converted. Ay, this planting of the Flag is not for slothful Christians, but for those who are prepared for strenuous wrestling.

One further thing we will note as, through the telescope of this passage, we survey the scene of the spiritual combat: that it is a single front - "**in one spirit**", he says, and "**with one mind**"; it is a "**striving together**"; and they share "**the same conflict**."

One is at one end of the line, Paul at Rome; others at the other end, those at Philippi - but it is the same line. Zephaniah 3:9 has a beautiful idea in the margin, "to serve Him with one shoulder." Have you ever seen a military march past? Not a shoulder out of place: for all the world as if it were but one shoulder. What a picture of a united front!

There may be different regiments - call them, if you will, Anglicans, Congregationalists, Baptists, Brethren, Methodists, Presbyterians, and so on; but it is the same army, facing the same enemy, in the same Cause, under the same Commander, the "**Captain of the host of the Lord**", Joshua 5:14, "**the Captain of their salvation**", Hebrews 2:10, a "**Commander to the people**", Isaiah 55:4.

- Uniformity - means wearing the same uniform, which I don't know that we want;
- Unity - means fighting the one cause, for which CHRIST Himself prayed, "**that they all may be one . . . that the world may believe**", John 17:21.

Let us, then, forswear fighting each other, and see that we are found "**striving together for the faith of the gospel**." For, ponder -

THE ENEMY WE FIGHT AGAINST

"**Your adversaries**" (28). Ah yes, whenever we are seeking to advance the Flag of the Faith there will be foes who, whether consciously or unconsciously, are under the direction of the chief enemy of souls - "**your adversaries**" are the tools and instruments of "**your adversary**", I Peter 5:8.

All along the line Paul had had painful experience of adversaries - even in this very Philippi, to which he was writing, as Acts 16:22-24 tells us. And, inasmuch as he always practised what he preached, he is able authoritatively to exhort these believers to be "**in nothing terrified**" by the opposition.

The word is "*scared*" - the idea is of a horse shying from sudden fright. So, says the apostle, and he knew what he was talking about, don't shy at anything that the enemy shall do, or threaten - but seek grace from GOD to "**stand fast**" to your purpose (27).

To "**suffer**" for CHRIST Paul counts as high privilege (29) - indeed, martyrdom was eagerly sought by many believers in those perilous days of the early Church: it is honour "**to believe**", it is honour "**to suffer**." Like Wordsworth's *Happy Warrior*, who "Turns his necessity to glorious gain".

Note what is the effect of such steadfastness upon the enemy - "**which is to them an evident token of perdition**" (28). Such stout resistance in the face of all that their opposition and persecution can do fills them with apprehension.

There begins to dawn on them the realisation that the game is up! "**Your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour**", I Peter 5:8; but by faith we may receive the lion-heart of Him who is "**the Lion of the tribe of Juda**", Revelation 5:5. This your fearlessness when menaced by persecution will make it quite evident to the foe that victory lies with you: "**and that of GOD.**"

It is not we, but He that overcomes. You may say that the blushing boy David conquers the massive, booming Goliath - but, in reality, it is GOD that does it, as that brave "**youth**", I Samuel 17:33, was well aware - "**this day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand**" (verse 46).

Well, how depressing to the enemy is the endurance of the saints. It is time we turned our attention to:

THE SOLDIERS WE FIGHT WITH

We do not fight alone; as we saw just now, it is a united front - we are members of an army, combating for a common objective. What, then, is to be our relation to our fellows alongside of whom we battle?

What a difference it makes if the fifteen, or eleven, of a football side, or if the members of a cricket team, or if the masters of a school staff, or if the crew of a racing-eight, or if the people of a local church (hence 4:2), or if the men of the army company, are completely friendly toward each other - they will work, or strive, or serve, or fight, so much the more happily and successfully. What, then, of the personal relations between the soldiers of the Cross?

Dropping all metaphor, verses 3-4 of chapter 2, have much of importance to say to us.

(i) *There is to be no internal strife* - "**of one accord, of one mind**" (2); "**let nothing be done**

through strife or vainglory". Quarrelsomeness can do such a lot of damage, and bring such discredit upon the Cause; yet one does find Christians at loggerheads - and often over such stupid, trifling matters: all too frequently it is concerned with personal grievances and self-glorification.

(ii) *There is to be no fancied superiority* - "**in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves**". The Greek word here translated "**lowliness of mind**" was, according to Lightfoot, always used in a bad sense, meaning abject, groveling; but, as the result of the life of CHRIST, this quality of humility is, in the New Testament, raised to its proper level. There is such a thing as mock-humility, of the Uriah Heep type - true lowliness is so different from this.

Let us not forget that there is also a true and proper pride - a sense of the honour of being in such an Army. Listen to Paul in Acts 27:23, "**God, whose I am, and whom I serve**": with what ringing tones the words are uttered, reflecting his feeling of privilege. It does not spring from any idea of his own worthiness, or achievement; but is the expression of his realisation of the wonder of his Commander. Concerning himself, and relating to others, his attitude is always to be humble-spirited.

(iii) *There is to be no self-seeking* - "**look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others**". That word "**look**" is an unusual one. It means to regard fixedly, so as to aim at. See that man at the butts: how carefully his eye is on that bull, all his attention and concern is on it. So is it with some people that they are so exclusively occupied with their own interests that they are entirely oblivious of anyone else's.

To be for ever looking for, scheming for, his own self-advantage is the mark of a thoroughly bad soldier. See where it led that unfortunate soldier, Achan, in Joshua 7:19. When he saw the gold, the silver, and the garment he thought at once of his own enrichment, with not a thought of what it would entail for his family, and for his fellow-soldiers. Let the Christian warrior take warning. We pass on to think of -

THE LEADERS WE FIGHT UNDER

We have here a moving glimpse of the Human Leader. Paul had meant so much to that church at Philippi, since the day when he crossed over to the city from Troas; he had shown such constant care of them; he held them in special affection; they were joined with him in such an inspiring comradeship - "**having the same conflict which ye saw in me** [when he was beaten and imprisoned in their city], **and now hear to be in me** [imprisoned in Rome]", 1:30.

I am sure that on his next visit he would have chosen, if it had then been extant, as his opening hymn, "Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian Love." It is grand when we can rejoice over those who, under GOD, have been our human leaders. How the present writer thanks GOD for the vicar of his boyhood's church, the late Archdeacon R. C. Joynt, and for two vicars under whom he served as curate, A. Cochrane, and Canon W. E. Daniels - and so many others, his "elders and betters" in the Lord.

Ah yes, it is good to have leaders whom we can esteem and revere. But, says Paul, you must not depend too much on them - "**whether I come and see you, or else be absent**", you are to "**stand**

fast": your feet founded not on him, but on Him.

So we get here a clear view of the Divine Leader. "**In one spirit**" - the One SPIRIT. "**For by one Spirit are we all baptised into one body . . . and have been all made to drink into one Spirit**", I Corinthians 12:13; "**For through Him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father**", Ephesians 2:18.

Yes, He is our Leader, for "**as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God**", Romans 8:14.

Does your watch keep good time? I have a hall-clock, which is a great friend of mine; it was presented to me when I left my first curacy, in 1918. Its only trouble is that it is, in its old age, a bad timekeeper. In my constant attempts to keep it right I am driven to seek a guide. Where shall I look for such leadership? Ah, my watch! No, alas; for while the clock always loses, my watch always gains. You will guess that it is my regular habit to regulate both by TIM - the telephone automatic recording of Greenwich Mean Time.

Learn, then, to go for leadership, not to those who, even the best of them, may go wrong, and lead you astray, but to the fountain head - to the SPIRIT of GOD Himself - not human leadership, but Divine, whether in life's wayfare, or life's warfare.

The story is told that in the French Wars our soldiers were very dispirited on the eve of a great battle, owing to the disparity in the number of the English troops. Gathered around a camp fire as night fell a few men were pessimistically discussing the situation; every now and then another, and another, joined the group, unrecognised in the darkness, but all seemed to agree on the hopelessness of the morrow's fight: they were so heavily outnumbered - their own so few, the enemy's so many. When out spoke a new voice in the discussion - a voice of one who had come unnoticed in the shadows of the fire-light - a voice so well-known to them all - a voice whose ringing tones called them instantly out of their despair - a voice that posed one strategic question: "And how many do you count me for?" It was the Iron Duke himself, the great Duke of Wellington, who led them that next morning, in spite of the French big majority, to a brilliant victory. How much, how many, do you count your Leader for?

If you are even standing alone for Him in the fight - in your office, in your workshop, in your factory, in your school, in your company, in your home - remember the blessed truth that "One, with GOD, is always a majority". Even if there be but two of you, and that, surrounded by belligerent forces, II Kings 6:16 remains true, "**Fear not, for they that be with us are more than they that be with them**". Such, O ye Philippians, O ye my readers, is the Leader under whom this fight of faith is waged to victory. And now:

THE UNIFORM WE FIGHT IN

Qualities of Christian character are, in the Epistles, so often likened to articles of clothing, and pieces of armour, that I make no apology for treating our closing meditation under that suggestive figure.

Look, first, at 1:27, "**Only let your conversation [behaviour] be as it becometh the gospel of**

Christ". It would be altogether unbecoming for you to fight your country's battles in the enemy's uniform; so should we, as Christians, be careful to "**put off**" the old clothes, or habits, of sin, and to "**put on**" the new garments of godliness, Ephesians 4:22-25. "**As it becometh. . .**"

- (a) the gospel of love, "**See that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently**", I Peter 1:22;
- (b) the gospel of peace, "**Follow peace with all**", Hebrews 12:14;
- (c) the gospel of power, "**Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body**", Romans 6:12;
- (d) the gospel of Heaven, "**Love not the world**", I John 2:15;
- (e) the gospel of GOD, "**Be ye therefore followers of GOD, as dear children**", Ephesians 5:1:

Strange dress, do you think, for the military scene; yet this is the uniform in which CHRIST'S soldiers fight best, and which the foe fears most.

Come to 2:1-2. Paul has here a fourfold argument for their rejoicing his heart by appearing in just such a uniform of Christly character as we have been examining.

- "**If there be therefore any consolation in Christ**" - if your experience of Him is any encouragement to you;
- "**if any comfort of love**" - if love exerts any persuasive power with you;
- "**if any fellowship of the Spirit**" - if that fellowship with Him is a reality;
- "**if any bowels and mercies**" - if you have affectionate yearnings of heart. On these grounds "**fulfil ye my JOY.**"

There he goes again: he can't keep Joy out of it. In this brief Epistle he mentions this characteristic under various words, no less than nineteen times - almost five times for every chapter. "My scrip of joy, immortal diet" as Sir Walter Raleigh called it. Dr. Lightfoot has a beautiful paraphrase of this "**fulfil ye my joy.**" He renders it, "you have given me joy hitherto. Now fill my cup of gladness to overflowing."

So Paul sums up the uniform in the words, "**having the same love.**" When he writes to urge the Colossian Christians to don the uniform, he finishes by saying, "**Above all these things put on charity (love)**", Colossians 3:14 - as if love were the overcoat, the cloak, covering, protecting, beautifying all else. What joy it will give this old warrior to watch these young soldiers marching forth to the Philippian battle-ground o'erclad with love. As the familiar hymn says

"Let your drooping hearts be glad;
March in Heavenly armour clad."

That armour is so different from earth's - its girdle is truth, its breastplate is righteousness, its sandals is peace, its shield is faith, its helmet is salvation, its sword is Scripture, its greaves is prayer, Ephesians 6:14-18. Just the kind of things we here have spoken of.

~ end of chapter 5 ~

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