

JOY WAY

An Exposition of the Epistle of Paul

TO THE PHILIPPIANS

by

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

ONE HUNDRED PER CENT - Philippians 4:4-9

SOME of us Christians are only half-and-half; others are out-and-out. Some are "A.1"; others are "C.3". Travellers on the Gospel Train can choose which Class they go to Heaven by: Third Class, which means, CHRIST present; Second Class, which means CHRIST prominent; or First Class, which means CHRIST pre-eminent, Colossians 1:18. Paul is out for the best; he is all in favour of the first class; he wants his Philippian converts to be 100 per cent Christians. So he sets before them, and us, a fourfold ideal of spiritual life. Can it be achieved? Or, is it too much to expect? Well, let us study it carefully, and see.

UNFAILING JOY

"Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice" (4).

Joy, more Joy, much Joy - yes; but unfulfilling joy? Let us remind ourselves that this is outstandingly the Epistle of Joy - the word "**Rejoice**" comes no less than eleven times in these four chapters; and, in addition, the word "**Joy**" occurs five times.

To have such repetition within so small a compass surely gives the tone and tendency of the whole.

The writer is not just quoting from a book, nor repeating what someone else has said; he has himself this joy in his own heart, and that, be it remembered, in spite of

(a) his fetters - chained by the wrist all the time to the Roman soldier, who would be amazed at his prisoner's exuberance of spirit, and that he seemed to expect that everybody holding his religious beliefs should be uniformly happy, judging from the things he was dictating in his letter to Philippian Christians. Moreover, his joy was there in spite of

(b) his future - he was awaiting trial, and knew not how things would go, (2:23); but whether this, or that, he would "**count it all joy**", James 1:2.

It had been the same when he was actually with them in Philippi. Observe him, with Silas, his back torn and bleeding, his limbs chained to the dank wall of the filthy inner prison.

Now we shall see! He said "**alway**" - was he talking rhetoric, or reality? Listen, "**at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God**", Acts 16:25. Ah yes, for him "**alway**" may stand. We would not allow any man to say "**Rejoice alway**" to us, who had himself known nothing but sunshine; but we'll take it from this man Paul.

Do you remember, also, how our Lord, in the Upper Room, facing the awful realities of the cup of Gethsemane, the chastisement of Gabbatha, and the cross of Golgotha, yet speaks of "**My joy**", John 15:11. It seems that with the song of joy in our hearts we may move happily along the road of life.

"There are in this loud, stunning tide
Of human care and crime,
With whom the melodies abide
Of the everlasting chime;
Who carry music in their heart,
Through dusty lane and wrangling mart,
Plying their daily task with busier feet
Because their secret souls some holy strain repeat."

So wrote John Keble for "St. Matthew's Day", and how happily appropriate for every day. How great an evangelistic force is this quality of joy - to let the world see and know that there is a fount of joy persisting through the strains and sorrows of life. Gloom is the word that too often we allow the unbeliever to associate with our religion: may we help them to find gladness there instead. We are not to confuse this quality with mere boisterous hilarity. As Paul's friend Seneca once said, "True joy is a serene and sober motion, and they are miserably out that take laughing for rejoicing." Rejoice in our gifts, our friends, our interests: yes, but even if we lose them all, we may Rejoice "**in the Lord**" - He is Himself the source of gladness, as of all blessing, as this Epistle is constantly reminding us.

UNENDING SELFLESSNESS

"**Let your moderation be known unto all men**" (5). This "**moderation**" carries with it the same meaning as "*forbearance*", or "*yieldingness*". The Christian art of giving way. Not on principles - one recalls this very apostle writing about the troublesome Judaisers, "**to whom we gave place . . . no, not for an hour**", Galatians 2:5; there are some in the Church who are prepared to give everything away for the sake of peace; by all means, so far as we can, but we must not sacrifice principles.

But let us be ready to give up:

- our rights - if, as Christians, we have any;
- our pleasures - if they should be a cause of harm to others;
- our preferences - if we can thus be a help to someone else.

What a difference it would have made if Euodias and Syntyche had displayed this spirit of yieldingness. "**Unto all men**" - some to whom we are attracted, it would be easy to yield to them, but "**all**"? Though Christians, we are yet human!

Ah but, "**the Lord is at hand**" (5) - therein lies the possibility of the hundred per cent. The phrase does not, I think, here refer to our Lord's Second Coming and its near approach.

The apostle is an ardent exponent of that theme elsewhere, but not in this verse. Paul means that his Lord is near by him, with all that His close presence brings.

In that prison room were four:

- Epaphroditus, to whom he was dictating the letter: it was a comfort to have him near;
- the soldier, so near that the apostle was chained to him by the wrist with a chain of steel, embarrassingly near;
- but Another was nearer still, bound to him with a chain of love - the Lord was at hand, at that same hand as the Roman was.

So would Paul find a secret of yieldingness, even to the whims of his irksome companion; and so would he impress upon us all the duty, and the possibility, of this truly Christian characteristic.

We call to mind his saying in verse 5 of his exquisitely beautiful I Corinthians 13, that "**[love] seeketh not her own.**"

UNRUFFLED PEACE

"The peace of God, which passeth all understanding" (7).

There is a peace which is quite understandable - when the sun is shining, with friends, and comforts, and health, and wealth. This is something so different from that. It is variously described

(a) As a legacy - "**Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you**", John 14:27. Such is a clause in the Master's Last Will and Testament, given on the night before He died.

(b) As a fruit - "**the fruit of the Spirit is . . . peace,**" Galatians 5:22. One of the nine trees in His lovely orchard, whose gates are freely open to His people.

(c) As a garrison - "**shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus**". Shall "*garrison*", is the word: a heavenly sentinel challenging the approach of anything that would worry your mind, or disturb your heart. How attractive is this quality of peace in this troubled world, and how effective in the experience of those who know where to find it.

As with "**My joy**", so now with "**My peace**", we marvel that our Lord was able to speak thus in the face of all that immediately confronted Him. The secret lies not with ourselves, but with Him.

"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace [one hundred per cent] whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in Thee", Isaiah 26:3. I said it is not with ourselves to manufacture this infinitely desirable boon; yet there are preliminary steps towards it that we alone can take.

Careful for nothing - "**be careful for nothing**" (6).

Not wrongfully, distrustfully anxious about things. You are His? Then all your concerns are His care, I Peter 5:7.

There is a very illuminating "**therefore**" in Matthew 6:25. Our Lord has, in the previous verse, been talking about slavery - to "**serve**" means to "be a slave" - and He goes on to stress that because we are His slaves, "**therefore**" all our needs are His responsibility, and we need not be anxious. We enlarged upon the theme in our opening chapter, and need not particularise now - but the fact bears repetition!

Prayerful for everything - "**in everything by prayer and supplication . . . let your requests be made known unto God**" (6). "What a privilege to carry everything to GOD in prayer", as the old hymn says.

When difficulties and distresses surround us, how it ministers towards peace to bring it all before Him in prayer.

Three different words are used in the Greek of this verse for prayer. The word translated "**prayer**" is what we may call,

Prayer in General. A talking with GOD, quite naturally, about everything - smiling to Him in joy; confiding in Him in sorrow; looking to Him for direction; talking over with Him the details of daily life. May we all learn thus to live in the spirit of prayer.

The word for "**supplication**" may be held to represent,

Prayer in Particular. The taking to Him of some specific matter, subject, event, person - whether we intercede alone, or whether "**two of you shall agree**", or whether "**prayer is made of the Church**", as a whole, Acts 12:5.

There is a third word here, rendered "**requests**", which we may be allowed to think of as indicating *Prayer in Detail*.

GOD is, so to say, interested in the Telescopic view, things afar, things at large. He is also interested in the Microscopic view, things near by, things minute - the details.

Shall we put it, by way of illustration: the Concert as a whole; the Programme in particular; the Items in detail. Or, the Men's Meeting in general; the one Man in particular; the Many needs he has in detail.

We think of George Muller's life of Prayer in general, the Orphanage in particular, the Children's

welfare in detail.

Thus are we for ever encouraged to bring to GOD the big things, and the little things of life. How powerfully it all contributes to peace and poise. Thankful for anything - "**with thanksgiving**" (6).

It is remarkable how remiss we Christians often are about this.

It is surely bad manners, to say the least, that we receive so much at GOD's hands without so much as a "Thank You". We teach our children better than that; and yet we children of GOD so sadly forget ourselves.

A famous hymn tells us to "Count your blessings; name them one by one" - but how long a time it would take us to total the tally of them. Our positive blessings, so numerous; our negative blessings, no less - for remember that every misery we haven't got is a mercy we have got. Well, I cannot help feeling that a thankful spirit is a practical contributor to peace.

In fact, all these three things are preparatory to this composed state of mind which the hundred per cent Christian covets earnestly. Having recited them seriatim, the apostle proceeds, "**and the peace of God . . . shall . . .**"

You may say, "You don't know what you are talking about" - perhaps not; but Paul did.

Besides, this is the HOLY SPIRIT inspiring, speaking through him; and He doesn't mock people. He promises this unruffled calm, because it is a possible experience. In the face of all the anxieties and perplexities of the hour, in spite of all the sorrow, and sickness, and even suffering that may visit your own home - peace? You can't understand it? No, neither did Paul, for it is a "**peace... which passeth all understanding**".

Here it is, then, for our trustful acceptance, whatever the conditions and circumstances - "**perfect peace, and at such a time**", Ezra 7:12.

UNBLEMISHED LIFE

To "**think**" right (8), and to "**do**" right (9).

These comprise the whole of life, and to have these twin-springs pure and sweet is to have the character unsullied, or as James 1:27 would say, "**to keep himself unspotted from the world**". We will here begin with the

Thought life - a strategic point in all being. The apostle does not stay to deal with evil thoughts. Some of our present-day psychologists are, in this particular, almost akin to Keswick teaching and New Testament doctrine; for these are now saying that if we wish to subdue and conquer evil thoughts, we must, on no account, try to fight them, and thus devote our attention to them. That, these say (and, please, I am speaking only of some), is asking for trouble, and will only aggravate their lure. Paul, then, by the HOLY SPIRIT made wise before his time, urges his readers to take the positive line, and to cultivate the good thoughts.

He mentions eight things on which the mind may well concentrate.

"**True**" - probably not in the sense of truth, as of "reality". Paul uses the same Greek word, in the Christian's armour, of being "**girt about with truth**", Ephesians 6:14, where, I think, the same idea is in mind.

The first thing a Roman soldier does when buckling on his armour is to girdle up his ordinary garment and thus prepare for the fixing of his armbands. He cannot wear them without that. Neither can the Christian soldier wear his unless, and until, he is a Christian in reality - only then is he properly compared with the whole panoply of GOD.

"**Honest**" - a difficult word is used, and many renderings have been suggested. I surmise that "honourable" is the likeliest meaning here.

"**Just**" - not merely just in the ordinary, human sense, but "righteous" as in the eyes of GOD.

"**Pure**" - Lightfoot suggests "stainless". Some thoughts leave a stain, which is difficult enough to erase.

"**Lovely**" - wholly "admirable", having an innate beauty, all their own.

"**Of good report**" - the idea of this word seems to be "winsome", having a quality well-reputed, so that such things win not only the approbation but the application of others.

"**Virtue**" - the word so translated is used in II Peter 1:5, "**add to your faith virtue . . .**", where I would venture the suggestion that, if not the meaning, at least the significance, of the word is "consistency"; and, greatly presuming, I would offer the same rendering here.

"**Praise**" - we may put it as "praiseworthy", primarily here, in the estimation of men, but we can go beyond that to the reckoning of GOD.

Well, there they are - how purifying, how stimulating, will the dwelling upon such things be.

But there is an old saying that "you can't prevent a bird flying over your head, but you can prevent it making a nest in your hair". So it is with evil thoughts.

To take the positive line that Paul here wages will certainly reduce the coming of these unworthy things; but, when all is said and done, you will find such an enemy aeroplane slipping through occasionally.

It is not wrong if they come; it is only wrong if you harbour them. What shall be done with those stray thoughts of evil, or these wandering thoughts that invade and invalidate even your prayer-time?

The answer is, act the policeman; which I will explain by referring you to II Corinthians 10:5, "**bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ**". If a policeman saw a man

unlawfully trying to enter a house, he would promptly arrest him in the name of the Queen. That's it!

When that unlawful thought seeks to enter, act instantly, arrest it in the Name of the King - "**captivity . . . to the obedience of Christ**".

We must turn now, in our consideration of the hundred-per cent Christian experience to say something about

the Active life - this "**do**" of verse 9. Two avenues for the guidance of their behaviour are suggested.

(a) Careful instruction - "**those things which ye have both learned and received**" (9). Paul knew the value of a gospel ministry addressing itself to the heart and will of the hearer, seeking to get a verdict for the Master. But he was careful about the educational, as well as the emotional.

When he had got his converts, he was keen about their spiritual advancement, and with them his work became a teaching ministry. Isn't it a fact that there is a woeful lack of teaching in our churches to-day? Read again the Epistles of Paul and see how full they are of massive doctrine - no wonder that there was so little back-sliding among his converts.

They not only "**learned**" it, as a matter of information; but they "**received**" it as a matter of personal experience.

(b) Concrete example - was the second source of their instruction: "**those things which ye have . . . heard and seen in me**". "**Heard**" about my manner of life when I was absent, "**seen**" in me when I was present.

This presenting of himself as an example of Christian living, to which he refers in several places in the Epistle, must not be misunderstood. It is not to be put down to an exalted opinion of his own goodness. The trouble lay in this, that the New Testament had not yet been written, and though a good deal of oral ministry concerning the life of CHRIST was extant, anything in the way of a complete picture was not yet available.

He left us "**an example, that ye should follow His steps**", I Peter 2:21 - but it was not always easy to see His steps. So, says Paul, follow me, and you will be in the way of following Him. Thus he applies it

(c) in practical fashion - "**those things . . . do**" (9). It is not enough to know, we must be sure to do what we know - "**if ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them**", John 13:17.

I am so often impressed with that "**do**" in I John 1:6 - "**do not the truth**".

You see, the Truth is not simply something to be discovered, to be understood, to be admired, to be preached - it is something to be done!

The delightful result of all this hundred-per-cent life is that "**the God of peace shall be with you**" (9). Before, he had said, "**the peace of God**" (7), now, better still, it is "**the God of peace**".

These all-out Christians shall have a new sense of the presence, and power, and purpose of their GOD. Happy people!

~ end of chapter 14 ~

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