

Commendation and Encouragement

*“To all the saints
in Christ Jesus
which are at
Philippi, with the
bishops and
deacons: Grace be
unto you, and
peace, from God
our Father, and
from the Lord
Jesus Christ.”*

—*Philippians 1:1,2*

THE CONGREGATION OF

Christians at Philippi was the first to be organized in Europe. It was the result of the Apostle Paul's answer to the call to go to Macedonia and help those hungry for the Gospel message. (Acts 16:9-40) The apostle's later epistle to these brethren reveals a strong personal attachment he felt toward this small group

of the Lord's people. It is quite a different letter from many of his others written to the various churches he had helped to establish. For example, Paul does not mention his apostolic title in this epistle at all. He did not need to, because all the brethren at Philippi knew that he was an apostle of Jesus Christ and accepted him as such.

How different when he wrote to the Christians in Galatia, where possibly some of them doubted his apostleship. To these, he addressed with these strong words: “Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father).” By contrast, when writing to the church at Philippi, in no place did he say, “Oh foolish Philippians, who hath bewitched you,” as he did in his letter to the brethren in Galatia. It was not necessary.—Gal. 1:1; 3:1

Paul’s letter to the Philippian church was one primarily of commendation and encouragement. One of the things that the apostle had in mind in writing this epistle was to inspire the brethren to take hold of the truths of their salvation, and apply them toward the spirit, attitude, and actions of their Christian life. After mentioning the high standards of such behavior, he climaxes his exhortation in the last chapter of his letter by telling them where their thinking must be centered in order to successfully develop the Christian character. He says, “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.”—Phil. 4:8

It has been well said that the mind is the battleground of the Christian. It is in our thoughts that our actions have their real beginning. Therefore, in his exhortation to “think on these things,” Paul is simply saying that as followers of the Master we are to be very careful of the things that we think about. Wrong thinking will result in wrong conclusions,

which in turn may result in wrong words or actions, while right thinking will result in proper conclusions and lead to good words and works.

Another point emphasized in this epistle is to avoid the spirit of dissension in the church of God. Paul did not criticize them along this line, but rather warned that those who promote dissension are evildoers and are “enemies of the cross of Christ.” (Phil. 3:18) For us also, how much better if, in our thinking and in our doing, we endeavor to develop the spirit of unity and the spirit of holiness.

Paul also gives us in this letter that great theme which we would like to think we have absorbed into our own life—namely, that we are rejoicing Christians. Time and again the apostle speaks of “rejoicing” to the Philippian brethren, and in chapter 4, verse 4, he says, “Rejoice in the Lord alway: again I say, Rejoice.” When we think of the many blessings we have received—the blessings of the knowledge of God’s plan, the blessings of fellowship, the blessings of walking in the footsteps of Jesus, and the glorious prospect of helping to bless all the families of the earth in Christ’s kingdom—we have every reason to rejoice.

BLESSED MEMORIES

For the balance of our lesson, we will focus on Paul’s words in the first chapter of this loving epistle. In verse 3, Paul writes, “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you.” This is the way the apostle felt about the church at Philippi. We, too, know brethren of whom we could make the same statement. Many have been examples to us in the faith and who have mentored and guided us in the

narrow way of sacrifice. When we apply this text of Scripture to those who have been such examples to us of Christian character and service to the Lord, we understand the feeling the Apostle Paul had for his brethren at Philippi.

Paul then says, “Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now.” (vss. 4,5) The Apostle John later wrote concerning this wonderful fellowship: “That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.” —I John 1:3

No wonder Christian fellowship is such a wonderful thing! It is the Gospel message that brings us together, and our resulting fellowship is not only with one another, but also is with our Heavenly Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. It is because of this intimate relationship that our hearts are bound together in the bonds of Christian love.

Paul uses the expression, “fellowship in the gospel.” The *Emphatic Diaglott* uses the word “participation” and translates the verse this way: “Always, in every prayer of mine, making supplication on behalf of you all with joy, on account of your participation in the glad tidings, from the first day till now.” One of the reasons the Apostle Paul had such sweet fellowship with those at Philippi was their participation in the Gospel from the first time that they heard it until the time he wrote the epistle.

The privilege of participating in the Gospel is a precious one, and there are so many ways that we can participate. By ourselves we could perhaps do

very little, but because of others enjoying this fellowship, or participation, in the Gospel, the message of the kingdom goes out by many different means and reaches the ears of people throughout the world.

THE DAY OF CHRIST

Paul continues, “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it [Greek: fulfill completely] until the day of Jesus Christ.” (Phil. 1:6) The one who has begun the good work in us is God, and he is able to complete it. There is no doubt about the completion of his work in us, if we are submissive to him and his perfect will.

The phrase that finishes this verse is very interesting: “until the day of Jesus Christ.” This is speaking of the time of the Messianic kingdom, over which Christ Jesus will be the ruler. The *Weymouth New Testament* translation reads, “In preparation for the day of Jesus Christ.” This is the reason we have been called out of darkness into light, out of the kingdom of this world into the kingdom of God’s dear Son. Our participation in the Gospel at the present time is feeble, but is in preparation for a greater ministry, a greater participation, a greater joy, during “the day of Jesus Christ.”

Paul told the Philippian brethren that they had the privilege of participating with him “in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.” (vs. 7) These words are expressive of the privilege that the apostle so thoroughly demonstrated in his life—the defense of the Gospel. There were many times when he had to defend the Gospel against the errors

of his day. At the same time he had the privilege of “confirming” the Gospel in the hearts of the humble, the teachable, and those who wanted to have its message fortified to strengthen their faith.

This text of scripture also includes us in that privilege, for we are all partakers of the Gospel with him. There are errors today, as then, and it is God’s Word of Truth that is our defense. The truths that defend against the errors of our day are the fundamental teachings of the Scriptures for which we stand and which we delight to declare. Not only do we have the privilege of defending the Gospel, we also have the privilege of confirming it, of encouraging one another in this most holy faith, of building up one another and being established in the faith, and of helping one another to recognize the beauty and force of the Gospel in our Christian life.—Jude 1:20; Col. 2:7

The privilege of participating in the Gospel is not limited just to the elders of our ecclesias, nor to only those more directly involved in putting forth the glorious message of the coming kingdom. This privilege belongs to all of us. Every child of God has the opportunity of cooperating in the defense and in the confirmation of the Gospel.

Philippians 1:8 reads, “For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ.” In other words, Paul’s love for the brethren at Philippi was so intense that he was emotionally affected as he saw the spirit of Jesus Christ reflected in them. Verses 9 and 10 continue, “I pray that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be

sincere and without offense till the day of Christ.” The Greek word translated “judgment” in verse 9 means “discernment” or “perception.” Paul wanted the Philippian brethren to have spiritual discernment. He wanted them to have personal knowledge and perception in order to make proper decisions and to express proper judgment.

THE BEST THINGS

The *International Standard Version* renders the first part of Philippians 1:10, “That you may be able to choose what is best.” When we discern between thoughts, words, or actions that differ, we want to choose that which is “best” for our development in the likeness of Christ. The only way we can choose the best things is by having spiritual discernment. There are two types of values set before us in many of our experiences. First, there are those along fleshly or temporal lines. They might involve business, or family, or home. Though we surely are not to ignore these, we must treat them as of more or less temporal consideration.

There are also those values which are unseen. These are the eternal things and are “best” for our eternal spiritual welfare. In II Corinthians 4:18 Paul speaks to this very point: “We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.” Thus we are to develop spiritual understanding, discernment, and perception that we may choose those things that are best—the unseen things, the things that the world does not understand, the things that are eternal.

Choosing the things that are “best” for us spiritually will result in our being prepared for the greater work during the “day of Christ.” This is why it is worthwhile to walk in the narrow way. This is why understanding the Gospel message is such a privilege. The Master said, “He that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal.” (John 4:36) As Jesus further stated, we receive “an hundredfold now in this time,” and “in the world to come” something even better, “eternal life.” (Mark 10:30) All this is being done in our lives in preparation for the “day of Christ.”

FURTHERANCE OF THE GOSPEL

Philippians 1:11-14 reads, “Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God. But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the Gospel; So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace [residence of the Roman guard], and in all other places. And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.”

Here Paul said his going to prison in Rome was a blessing in disguise because it had resulted in the furtherance of the Gospel. It had encouraged some of those who prior to this, because of fear, were holding back from speaking the Gospel. This word “furtherance” is an interesting one. The Greek words from which furtherance is translated mean to “drive forward” or “advance.”

In ancient Greece, the military had an engineering corps the name of which was based upon the same word that is here used by Paul. They were used for the “furtherance” of the army, to remove the obstacles so the army could go forward. Thus the apostle says that his imprisonment has resulted in the “furtherance of the gospel”—the removal of obstacles to the preaching of the Gospel, and he appreciated the privilege of going to prison to that end.

Paul explains that all in the Roman guard knew his stand. Because the brethren recognized that he was willing to preach the Gospel in his bonds, the result was that many became more confident and were further emboldened to speak forth the Gospel without fear. The obstacles of doubt and fear had been removed from the hearts of the brethren, and the spread of the message of God’s Word grew.

It took great courage to preach the Gospel in those days when the Apostle Paul was in prison—in most cases more than it takes at this present time, because it was at the risk of life itself. In the Roman Coliseum many faithful Christians paid with their lives for the privilege of witnessing to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

IT STILL TAKES COURAGE

Indeed, it took great courage in Paul’s day to preach the Gospel, and it also takes courage to do the same today. Now, however, it is rarely in fear of death. It is possibly for fear of what our neighbor or business associates might think of us. It is the fear of the opinion of other people. The odd part of it is that the world’s opinion of our spreading the

Gospel message does not truly matter. Nevertheless, fear can often be the obstacle that gets in our way.

We recognize that the understanding of God's plan for man's recovery from sin and death is the most wonderful thing that has ever come into our lives. It is the message of the Heavenly Father's love—its "breadth, and length, and depth, and height." (Eph. 3:18) Along with his love, it reveals his attributes of justice, wisdom, and power. It means everything to us, and yet sometimes we find that in talking to people it is far easier to talk about the mundane things of life than it is to speak of the things which we recognize are the most wonderful and valuable that the Lord has given us. Paul said he was "not ashamed of the gospel of Christ." (Rom. 1:16) May every obstacle be removed that hinders us from having part in the proclamation of the Gospel!

Some, due to age or physical infirmity, are unable to directly participate in preaching the Gospel. Even here, though, they can pray for those who are able to engage more fully in the vineyard. Paul speaks of such who "became companions of them that were so used," commending them for their support of those at the forefront of service to the Lord. (Heb. 10:32-34) All of this is part of the cooperative effort in which all the Lord's people can participate of proclaiming the message of the Gospel.

Paul continues, "Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: ... notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretense, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice. For I know that this

shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. ... As always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life or by death.”—Phil. 1:15-20

A peculiar situation arose when the brethren began to preach Jesus Christ in Rome. Some of them, Paul said, preached from good will, but some of them preached the Gospel as if it was a weapon to force upon others. What was the attitude of the apostle? Sometimes just one word from a person’s lips lets you know their depth of spirit or depth of maturity in Christ, and here Paul indicates that some were proclaiming the message in such a way as to get him into more trouble. However, that did not matter to him. If the Gospel was being preached, even if it meant more suffering for him, he said, “I therein do rejoice.”—vs. 18

Verse 27 reads, “Only let your conversation [behavior or conduct] be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel.” Above all else, Paul admonished, the brethren’s conduct of life should be that which is in heart harmony with the glorious message with which they had been entrusted. Whether he were ever to see them again or not, he desired that they be unified in one spirit, in one mind, striving together to be faithful.

PRIVILEGE OF SUFFERING

Paul closes this chapter with these words: “For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only

to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake; Having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me.” (Phil. 1:29,30) The Apostle Paul loved the Philippian brethren. One might think that because of his love he would have told them how they could avoid suffering, but he did not. He told them that part of their joy was not only to believe on Christ, but also to suffer for his sake.

This was the privilege of which Paul spoke elsewhere of presenting our bodies a living sacrifice, our reasonable service. (Rom. 12:1) It is the privilege of going “outside the camp, bearing His [Christ’s] reproach.” (Heb. 13:13, *New King James Version*) It is under these conditions that we have become prospective members of the body of Christ, and of having the hope of joint-heirship with him.

Unless these conditions are accepted and acted upon now, we will never have the privilege of joint-heirship on the other side of the veil. “If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.” “If we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him.” (Rom. 8:17; II Tim. 2:11,12) This is the true meaning of the Christian life. If we are faithful in this participation and fellowship in the Gospel, we shall hear the words, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant: ... enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”—Matt. 25:21 ■