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COMMENTARY

**DARBY'S SYNOPSIS OF THE
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by John Nelson Darby

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John Nelson Darby, 1800-1882

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PHILIPPIANS

In the epistle to the Philippians we find much more of christian experience, and the development of the exercise of the heart, than in the generality of the epistles. It is in fact proper christian experience. Doctrine and practice are found in them all, but, with the exception of the second to Timothy which is of another nature, there is none that contains like this, the expression of the Christian's experience in this toilsome life, and the resources which are open to him in passing through it, and the motives which ought to govern him. We may even say that this epistle gives us the experience of christian life in its highest and most perfect expression — say, rather, its normal condition under the power of the Spirit of God. God has condescended to furnish us with this beautiful picture of it, as well as with the truths that enlighten us, and the rules that direct our walk.

The occasion for it was quite natural. Paul was in prison, and the Philippians (who were very dear to him, and who, at the commencement of his labors, had testified their affection for him by similar gifts) had just sent assistance to the apostle by the hand of Epaphroditus at a moment when, as it appears, he had been for some time in need. A prison, need, the consciousness that the assembly of God was deprived of his watchful care, this expression on the part of the Philippians of the love that thought of him in his necessities, although at a distance — what could be more adapted to open the apostle's heart, and lead to his expressing the confidence in God that animated him, as well as what he felt with regard to the assembly, unsupported now by his apostolic care, and having to trust God Himself without any intermediate help? And it was most natural that he should pour out his feelings into the bosom of these beloved Philippians, who had just given him this proof of their affection. The apostle therefore speaks more than once of the Philippians' fellowship with the gospel: that is to say, they took part in the labors, the trials, the necessities which the preaching of the gospel occasioned to those who devoted themselves to it. Their hearts united them to it — like those of whom the Lord speaks who received a prophet in the name of a prophet.

This brought the apostle into a peculiarly intimate connection with this assembly; and he and Timotheus, who had accompanied him in his labors in Macedonia, his true son in the faith and in the work, address themselves to the saints and to those who bore office in this particular assembly. This is not an epistle which soars to the height of God's counsels, like that to the Ephesians, or which regulates the godly order which becomes Christians everywhere, like the two to the Corinthians; nor is it one which lays the foundation for the relationship of a soul with God, like that to the Romans. Neither was it destined to guard Christians against the errors that were creeping in among them, like some of the others which were written by our apostle. It takes the ground of the precious inner life, of the common affection of Christians towards each other, but of that affection as experienced in the heart of Paul, animated and directed by the Holy Ghost. Hence also we find the ordinary relationships which existed within an assembly: there are bishops and deacons, and it was the more important to remember them, since the immediate care of the apostle was no longer possible. The absence of this immediate care forms the basis of the apostle's instructions here, and gives its peculiar importance to the epistle.

The affection of the Philippians, which expressed itself by sending help to the apostle, reminded him of the spirit they had always shown; they had cordially associated themselves with the labors and trials of the gospel. And this thought leads the apostle higher, to that which governs the current of thought (most precious to us) in the epistle. Who had wrought in the Philippians this spirit of love and of devotedness to the interests of the gospel? Truly it was the God of the glad tidings and of love; and this was a security that He who had begun the good work would fulfill it unto the day of Christ. Sweet thought! — now that we have no longer the apostle, that we have no longer bishops and deacons, as the Philippians had in those days. God cannot be taken from us; the true and living source of all blessing remains to us, unchangeable, and above the infirmities, and even the faults, which deprive Christians of all intermediate resources. The apostle had seen God acting in the Philippians. The fruits bore witness of the source. Hence he counted on the perpetuity of the blessing they were to enjoy.* But there must be faith in order to draw these conclusions. Christian love is clear-sighted and full of trust with regard to its objects, because God Himself, and the energy of His grace, are in that love.

[* Read in verse 7 as in the margin, “because ye have me in your hearts.”

To return to the principle — it is the same thing with the assembly of God. It may indeed lose much, as to outward means, and as to those manifestations of the presence of God, which are connected with man’s responsibility; but the essential grace of God cannot be lost. Faith can always count upon it. It was the fruits of grace which gave the apostle this confidence, as in Hebrews 6:9, 10; 1 Thessalonians 1:3, 4. He counted indeed, in 1 Corinthians 1:8, and in Galatians, on the faithfulness of Christ in spite of many painful things. The faithfulness of the Lord encouraged him with regard to Christians, whose condition in other respects was the cause of great anxiety. But here — surely a much happier case — the walk itself of the Christian led him to the source of confidence about them. He remembered with affection and tenderness the way in which they had always acted towards him, and he turned it into a desire for them that the God who had wrought it would produce for their own blessing the perfect and abundant fruits of that love.

He opens his own heart also to them. They took part, by the same grace acting in them, in the work of God’s grace in him, and that with an affection that identified itself with him and his work; and his heart turned to them with an abundant return of affection and desire. God, who created these feelings, and to whom he presented all that passed in his heart, this same God who acted in the Philippians, was a witness between them (now that Paul could give no other by his labor among them) of his earnest desire for them all. He felt their love, but he desired moreover, that this love should be not only cordial and active, but that it should be guided also by wisdom and understanding from God, by a godly discernment of good and evil, wrought by the power of His Spirit; so that, while acting in love, they should also walk according to that wisdom, and should understand that which, in this world of darkness, was truly according to divine light and perfection, so that they should be without reproach until the day of Christ. How different from the cold avoidance of positive sin with which many Christians content themselves! The earnest desire of every excellence and likeness to Christ which divine light can show them is that which marks the life of Christ in us.

Now the fruits produced were already a sign that God was with them; and He would fulfill the work unto the end. But the apostle desired that they

should walk throughout the whole of the way according to the light that God had given, so that when they came to the end there should be nothing with which they could be reproached: but that, on the contrary, set free from all that might weaken or lead them astray, they should abound in the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God. A fine practical picture of the Christian's normal condition in his daily work towards the end; for, in the Philippians, we are always on the way towards our heavenly rest in which redemption has set us.

Such is the introduction to this epistle. After this expression of the wishes of his heart for them, reckoning on their affection, he speaks of his bonds, which they had remembered; but he does so in connection with Christ and the gospel, which he had most of all at heart. But, before I go beyond the introduction into the matter of the epistle, I would notice the thoughts which lie at the foundation of the sentiments expressed in it.

There are three great elements which stamp their character on it.

Firstly, it speaks of the Christian's pilgrimage in the wilderness; salvation is viewed as a result to be obtained at the end of the journey. Redemption accomplished by Christ is indeed established as the foundation of this pilgrimage (as was the case with Israel at their entrance into the wilderness), but the being presented risen and in glory before God, when victorious over every difficulty, is the subject in this epistle, and is that which is here called salvation.

In the second place, the position is characterised by the apostle's absence, the assembly having therefore itself to maintain the conflict. It had to overcome, instead of enjoying the victory gained over the enemy's power by the apostle when he was with them and could make himself weak with all who were weak.

And, thirdly, the important truth, already mentioned, is set forth, that the assembly, in these circumstances, was cast more immediately on God — the inexhaustible source for it of grace and strength, of which it was to avail itself in an immediate way by faith — a resource which could never fail it.*

[* We shall find the whole tenor of a life which was the expression of the power of the Spirit of God brought out in it. It marks this, that sin, or the flesh as

working evilly in us, is not mentioned in the epistle. It gives the forms and features of the life of Christ; for if we live in the Spirit, we should walk in the Spirit. We shall find the graciousness of christian life (chap. 2), the energy of christian life (chap. 3), and its superiority to all circumstances (chap. 4). The first more opens the apostle's heart as to his actual circumstances and feelings, as was natural. Exhortation begins with chapter 2. Still even in chapter 1 we find the apostle entirely superior to circumstances in the power of spiritual life.]

I resume the consideration of the text with verse 12, which begins the epistle after the introductory portion. Paul was a prisoner at Rome. The enemy appeared to have gained a great victory in thus restraining his activity; but by the power of God, who orders all things and who acted in the apostle, even the devices of the adversary were turned to the furtherance of the gospel. In the first place, the imprisonment of the apostle made the gospel known, where it would not otherwise have been preached, in high places at Rome; and many other brethren, reassured as to the apostle's position,* became more bold to preach the gospel without fear. But there was another way in which this absence of the apostle had an effect. Many — who, in the presence of his power and his gifts, were necessarily powerless and insignificant persons — could make themselves of some importance, when, in the unsearchable but perfect ways of God, this mighty instrument of His grace was set aside. They could hope to shine and attract attention when the rays of this resplendent light were intercepted by the walls of a prison. Jealous but hidden when he was present, they availed themselves of his absence to bestir themselves; whether false brethren or jealous Christians, they sought in his absence to impair his authority in the assembly, and his happiness. They only added to both. God was with His servant; and, instead of the self-seeking which instigated these sorry preachers of the truth, there was found in Paul the pure desire for the proclamation of the good news of Christ, the whole value of which he deeply felt, and which he desired above all, be it in what way it might.

[* In the first edition I had taken this as the effect of the apostle's imprisonment in arousing the faith of those inactive when he was active. And this would be the sense of the English translation and is a true principle. But it seems that the force of the words is "rather got confidence as to my bonds." They were in danger of being ashamed of him, as if he were a malefactor.]

Already the apostle finds his resource for his own case, in God's operating independently of the spiritual order of His house with regard to the means

that He uses. The normal condition of the assembly is that the Spirit of God acts in the members of the body, each one in its place, for the manifestation of the unity of the body and of the reciprocal energy of its members. Christ, having overcome Satan, fills with His own Spirit those whom He has delivered out of the hand of that enemy, in order that they may exhibit at the same time the power of God and the truth of their deliverance from the power of the enemy, and exhibit them in a walk, which, being an expression of the mind and energy of God Himself, leaves no room for those of the enemy. They constituted the army and the testimony of God in this world against the enemy. But then, each member, from an apostle down to the weakest, acts efficaciously in his own place. The power of Satan is excluded. The exterior answers to the interior, and to the work of Christ. He who is in them is greater than he who is in the world. But everywhere power is needed for this, and the single eye. There is another state of things, in which, although all is not in activity in its place, according to the measure of the gift of Christ, yet the restoring energy of the Spirit in an instrument like the apostle defends the assembly, or brings it back into its normal condition, when it has partially failed. The epistle to the Ephesians, on the one side, and those to the Corinthians and Galatians, on the other, present these two phases of the history of the assembly.

The epistle to the Philippians treats — but with the pen of a divinely inspired apostle — of a state of things in which this last resource was wanting. The apostle could not labor now in the same manner as before, but he could give us the Spirit's view of the state of the assembly, when, according to the wisdom of God, it was deprived of these normal energies. It could not be deprived of God. Doubtless the assembly had not then departed so far from its normal condition as it has now done, but the evil was already springing up. All seek their own, says the apostle, not the things of Jesus Christ; and God allowed it to be so during the life of the apostles, in order that we might have the revelation of His thoughts respecting it, and that we might be directed to the true resources of His grace in these circumstances.

Paul himself had to experience this truth in the first place. The bonds that united him to the assembly and to the work of the gospel were the strongest that exist on earth; but he was obliged to resign the gospel and

the assembly to the God to whom they belonged. This was painful; but its effect was to perfect obedience, trust, singleness of eye, and self-renunciation, in the heart, that is, to perfect them according to the measure of the operation of faith. Nevertheless the pain caused by such an effort betrays the inability of man to maintain the work of God at its own height. But all this happens in order that God may have the whole glory of the work; and it is needed, in order that the creature may be manifested in every respect according to the truth. And it is most blessed to see how, both here and in 2 Timothy, the decay of individual life and ecclesiastical energy brings out a fuller development of personal grace on one hand and ministerial energy on the other, where there is faith, than is found anywhere else. Indeed it is always so. The Moseses, and Davids, and Elijahs are found in the time of the Pharaohs, and Sauls, and Ahabs.

The apostle could do nothing: he had to see the gospel preached without him — by some through envy and in a spirit of contention, by others through love; encouraged as regards the apostle's bonds, these desired to alleviate them by continuing his work. Every way Christ was preached, and the apostle's mind rose above the motives which animated the preachers in the contemplation of the immense fact, that a Savior, the deliverer sent of God, was preached to the world. Christ, and even souls were more precious to Paul than the work's being carried on by himself. God was carrying it on; and therefore it would be for the triumph of Paul, who linked himself with the purposes of God.* He understood the great conflict which was going on between Christ (in his members) and the enemy; and if the latter appeared to have gained a victory by putting Paul in prison, God was using this event for the advancement of the work of Christ by the gospel, and thus in reality for the gaining of fresh victories over Satan — victories with which Paul was associated, since he was set for the defence of that gospel. Therefore all this turned to his salvation, his faith being confirmed by these ways of a faithful God, who directed the eyes of His faithful servant more entirely upon Himself. Sustained by the prayers of others and by the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, instead of being cast down and terrified by the enemy, he gloried more and more in the sure victory of Christ in which he shared. Accordingly he expresses his unchangeable conviction, that in nothing should he be made ashamed, but that it would be given him to use all boldness, and that Christ would be

glorified in him, whether by his life or his death; and he had death before his eyes. Called to appear before Caesar, his life might be taken from him by the emperor's judgment; humanly speaking the issue was quite uncertain. He alludes to this, chapter 1:22, 30; 2:17; 3:10. But, living or dying, his eye was now more fixed on Christ than even on the work, high placed as that work might have been in the mind of one whose life could be expressed in this one word — "Christ." To live was for him — not the work in itself, nor only that the faithful should stand fast in the gospel, although this could not be separated from the thought of Christ, because they were members of His body — Christ; to die was gain, for he should be with Christ.

[* There is blessed faith in this. But then a man must have made the work his life. "To me to live is Christ." If so, if the work prospers, he prospers; if Christ is glorified, he is content, even if the Lord has laid him aside.]

Such was the purifying effect of the ways of God, who had made him pass through the ordeal, so terrible to him, of being separated for years, perhaps four, from his work for the Lord. The Lord Himself had taken the place of the work — so far at least as it was connected with Paul individually; and the work was committed to the Lord Himself. Possibly the fact that he was so engrossed with the work had contributed to that which led to his imprisonment; for the thought of Christ alone keeps the soul in equilibrium, and gives everything its right place. God caused this imprisonment to be the means through which Christ became his all. Not that he lost his interest in the work, but that Christ alone held the first place; and he saw everything, and even the work, in Christ.

What consolation it is, when we are perhaps conscious that our weakness has been manifested, and that we have failed in acting according to the power of God, to feel that He, who alone has a right to be glorified, never fails!

Now, since Christ was everything to Paul, it was evident gain to die, for he would be with Him. Nevertheless it was worth while to live (for this is the force of the first part of verse 21), because it was Christ and His service; and he did not know which to choose. Dying, he gained Christ for himself: it was far better. Living, he served Christ; he had more, as to the work, since to live was Christ, and death of course would put a stop to that. Thus he was in a strait between the two. But he had learnt to forget

himself in Christ; and he saw Christ entirely occupied with the assembly according to His perfect wisdom. And this decided the question; for being thus taught of God, and not knowing for himself which to choose, Paul lost sight of himself, and thought only of the need of the assembly according to the mind of Christ. It was good for the assembly that he should remain — for one assembly even: thus he should remain. And see what peace this looking to Jesus, which destroyed selfishness in the work, gives to the servant of God. After all, Christ has all power in heaven and earth, and He orders all things according to His will. Thus when His will is known — and His will is love for the assembly — one can say that it will be done. Paul decides as to his own fate, without troubling himself as to either what the emperor would do, or the circumstances of the time. Christ loved the assembly. It was good for the assembly that Paul should remain; Paul shall then remain. How entirely Christ is everything here! What light, what rest, from a single eye, from a heart versed in the Lord's love! How blessed to see self so totally gone, and Christ's love to the assembly seen thus to be the ground on which all is ordered!

Now if Christ is all this for Paul and for the assembly, Paul desires that the assembly should be that which it ought to be for Christ, and thereby for his own heart to which Christ was everything. To the assembly therefore the apostle's heart turns. The joy of the Philippians would be abundant through his return to them; only let their conduct, whether he came or not, be worthy of the gospel of Christ. Two thoughts possessed his mind, whether he should see them or hear tidings of them, that they might have constancy and firmness in unity of heart and mind among themselves; and be devoid of fear with regard to the enemy, in the conflict they had to maintain against him, with the strength that this unity would give them. This is the testimony of the presence and operation of the Spirit in the assembly, when the apostle is absent. He keeps Christians together by His presence; they have but one heart and one object. They act in common by the Spirit. And, since God is there, the fear with which the evil spirit and their enemies might inspire them (and it is what he ever seeks to do; compare 1 Peter 5:8) is not there. They walk in the spirit of love and power and of a sound mind. Their condition is thus an evident testimony of salvation — entire and final deliverance — since in their warfare with the enemy they feel no fear, the presence of God inspiring them with other

thoughts. With regard to their adversaries, the discovery of the impotence of all their efforts produces the sense of the insufficiency of their resources. Although they had the whole power of the world and of its prince, they had met with a power superior to their own — the power of God, and they were its adversaries. A terrible conviction on the one side; profound joy on the other, where not only there was thus the assurance of deliverance and salvation, but they were proved to be salvation and deliverance from the hand of God Himself. Thus, that the assembly should be in conflict, and the apostle absent (himself wrestling with all the power of the enemy), was a gift. Joyful thought! unto them it was given to suffer for Christ, as well as to believe in Him. They had a further and a precious portion in suffering with Christ, and even for Christ; and communion with His faithful servant in suffering for His sake united them more closely in Him.

Note, here, how thus far we have the testimony of the Spirit to a life above the flesh, not of it. In nothing he had been ashamed, and fully trusted he never should be, but Christ magnified in his body, were his lot life or death, as He ever had been. He does not know whether to choose life or death, both were so blessed; to live, Christ; to die, gain, though then labor was over; such confidence in Christ's love to the assembly that he decides his case before Nero by what that love would produce. Envy and strife against himself leading some to preach Christ would only turn to victorious results for himself: he was content if Christ was preached. The superiority to the flesh, living above it so completely, was not that it was not there or its nature changed. He had, as we learn elsewhere, a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet him. But it is a glorious testimony to the power and working of the Spirit of God.

But this, too, produced its effects. The apostle desired that their joy should be full, and that unity among the Philippians should be perfect; for his absence had allowed some seeds of disunion and disaffection to germinate. Love had been sweetly and powerfully demonstrated by the gift they had sent to the apostle. Consolation in Christ, comfort of love, fellowship of the Spirit, tender mercies were displayed in it, giving him great joy. Let them then make this joy perfect by the full establishment of this same bond of love among themselves, by being of one accord, of one mind, having the same love for each other, being all like-minded, allowing

no rivalry or vain-glory to display itself in any way. Such was the apostle's desire. Appreciating their love towards himself, he wished their happiness to be complete through the perfecting of that love among themselves: thus would his own joy be perfect. Beautiful and touching affection! It was love in him which, sensible to their love, thought only of them. How delicate the way in which a kindness, which precluded reproof, made a way for what really was one, and which a heart that added charity to brotherly love could not leave unuttered!

Now the means of this union, of the maintenance of this love, was found in the abnegation of self, in humility, in the spirit that humbles itself in order to serve. It was this which perfectly displayed itself in Christ, in contrast with the first Adam. The latter sought to make himself like God by robbery, when he was in the form of a man, and strove to exalt himself at God's expense; being at the same time disobedient unto death. Christ, on the contrary, when He was in the form of God, emptied Himself, through love, of all His outward glory, of the form of God, and took the form of a man; and, even when He was in the form of a man, still humbled Himself. It was a second thing which He did in humbling Himself. As God, He emptied Himself; as man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross. God has highly exalted Him; for he who exalts himself shall be humbled? but he who humbles himself shall be exalted. Perfect love, glorious truth, precious obedience! A man by the just judgment and act of God is exalted to the right hand of the throne of the divine Majesty. What a truth is the Person of Christ! What a truth is this descent and ascension by which He fills all things as Redeemer and Lord of glory! God come down in love, man ascended in righteousness; entire love in coming down, entire obedience by love also. Worthy from all eternity as to His Person to be there, He is now as man exalted by God to His right hand. It is an act of righteousness on God's part that He is there; and our hearts can take part in it, rejoicing in His glory — rejoicing also that by grace we have part in it as to our own place.

His humiliation is a proof that He is God. God only could leave His first estate in the sovereign rights of His love; it is sin for any creature to do so. It is also a perfect love. But this proof is given, this love accomplished, in the fact that He is man. What a place has He acquired for us in Himself! But it is of Him, not of us who are its fruits, that the apostle thinks. He

rejoices in the thought of Christ's exaltation. God has exalted Him to the highest place, and given Him a name which is above every name, so that everything in heaven and earth, and even in infernal regions, must bow before this exalted man, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

It will be remarked here, that it is the lordship of Christ that is presented in this passage, not His divinity in itself. His divinity is indeed the primary point of departure. All in fact has its origin there — the love, the self-renunciation, the humiliation, the marvelous condescension. Nothing of all this could have been, or would have its value, without the former; but it is of the Lord, complete in His Person in the position which He took as man — it is of Him who humbled Himself, who when He had gone down to the lowest possible place, was exalted by God; it is of Jesus, who could, without exalting Himself, be equal with God, but who emptied Himself, who went down even into death, that the apostle speaks: of Jesus, Lord of all, and who, thus exalted as man, shall be owned as Lord throughout the whole creation to the glory of God the Father.*

[* Observe also, that it is not with regard to that which He suffered, as the effect of His submission to the will of God in the position which He took, that Christ is here presented as our pattern. It is in His voluntary humiliation, the fact that in love He took the last — the lowest-place, that we are called to follow Him. Love serves, love humbles itself — readily takes the meanest position (meanest according to the pride of man) in order to serve, and delights in it. Christ acted from love; He chose to serve. Christ chose to take the low place — He who was able to humble Himself — and we?

The apostle's heart enlarges whenever he speaks of the Lord Jesus; but he turns to the objects of his solicitude; and as he had spoken of the self-renunciation and the humiliation of Christ, as a means of union which would take all occasion from carnal rivalry, he has also been led to speak of the obedience of Christ in contrast with the first Adam and the flesh. He now applies this principle, also, for the instruction of the Philippians: "Wherefore," he says, "my beloved, as ye have always obeyed." And here the effect of his absence and removal from the work is introduced" — not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for," he adds, "it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do." That is to say, while he was among them he had labored; now they were themselves engaged with the

enemy, without the aid of Paul's presence and spiritual energy; but God Himself wrought in them, and they ought to work so much the more earnestly in that they found themselves in such a warfare, God Himself being engaged for them as acting in them for this conflict, and they themselves striving in their own persons, directly with the power of the enemy. This was not the moment to boast in their little gifts, on account of the absence of that which had thrown them into the shade, nor to be at strife among themselves. On the other hand, if they were deprived of Paul, they were not deprived of God. God Himself wrought in them. This is the great principle, and the great consolation of the epistle. The Christians, deprived of the important aid of the apostle, are cast more immediately on God. The apostle himself, separated from the assembly, finds his own consolation in God; and commits the assembly in its lack of his personal care, to God Himself, in whom he had himself found this consolation.

It is to be carefully remarked here, that it is the very opposite of an exhortation to our own working in contrast with God's effectual power. "Your own" is in contrast with Paul in his absence, who had labored for them, because God did work in them to will and to do. They were to work, because, if Paul was absent, God wrought in them. I have noticed already that salvation, every blessing, is looked at everywhere in this epistle as at the end of the Christian's course, even the manifestation of their righteousness (chap. 3:9). This passage is an example. There are two ways the Christian is seen in the New Testament. In Christ — here is no progress, no question: he is accepted in Him — a complete, perfect, present state. But he is also a pilgrim upon earth, having to attain the goal: so always in Philippians. This gives occasion to every kind of exhortation, warning and "if." Thus he learns obedience and dependence — the two characteristics of the new man. But with this he is led to the sure infallible faithfulness of God to bring him through to the end, and bound to reckon on it. See 1 Corinthians 1:8, which I cite because they were going on very badly; but passages abound.

Diligence and earnestness ought to characterise the walk of Christians in these circumstances, in which immediate connection with God and personal conflict with the enemy have to be realised.

The apostle returns to the spirit of meekness and peace, in which the fruits of righteousness are sown. “Do all things,” he says, “without murmurings and disputings, that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life”: a very striking passage, because it will be found that in every member of the sentence it is an exact statement of what Christ was. Whatever may be the circumstances in which the assembly is found, such, as respects itself, should ever be its state and its walk. Grace sufficient for this is ever there in Christ.

Unity of spirit among themselves by grace, and a walk according to God, in order that they may be as heavenly lights amid the moral darkness of this world — always carrying, and thus holding forth, the word of life: such was the apostle’s desire. They would thus give proof by the constancy and practical effect of their faith, that the apostle had not run or labored in vain; and they would themselves be his glory in the day of Christ. Oh, if the assembly had continued such! Be that as it may, Christ will be glorified. The apostle thus unites his work and the reward in the day of Christ with the blessing of the assembly. He would not be separated from it in his death. This union of heart and faith is very touching. He presents himself as capable of being poured out (that is to say, his life) upon the sacrifice and service of the Philippians’ faith. They had shown their devotedness to Christ in thinking even of His servant; and he looks upon all their faith as an offering to the Savior and to God; looking at them, Christ’s people, as the substance of the offering, the great thing, himself only as a libation — his life poured out upon the offering. Perhaps his life would be poured out in the service of the gospel, to which they consecrated themselves on their part, and be a seal to this offering of theirs, which was dedicated to God by this sacred bond with the apostle. He rejoiced, if it were so, that his life was poured out: it would crown his work for the Gentiles. He desires too that they also in the same spirit should rejoice in the same thing. It was all one thing, their faith and his, and their common service, offered to God, and well-pleasing to Him; and the most exalted proof of it should be the source of the most sacred joy. This world was not the real scene of that which was going on: what we behold here in connection with the divine work is but the outside. The apostle speaks this language of faith, which ever sees things as before God.

Nevertheless his watchful care did not cease, although he committed the Philippians to God. It is always thus. The love and the faith which commit everything to God do not cease to think according to God of that which is dear to Him. Thus in 1 John, chapter 2, the apostle, while saying that the little children in Christ needed not that any one should teach them, yet instructs them with all tenderness and foresight. Here also the apostle, full of holy solicitude for these souls who were dear to Christ, hopes soon to send Timotheus that he may know their state. But the condition of things is evident. He sends Timotheus because he had no one else in whose heart the same feelings towards them flowed forth from the same spring of love. All sought their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. What an exercise for faith! But what an occasion for its exercise!

Still, with regard to Timotheus, these beloved Philippians should receive him with a heart that responded to the apostle's confidence. They knew how he had served Paul in the gospel. The bonds of love in the gospel are but the stronger — God be praised — when all grows cold. And observe, that God carried on His work, when as to the common testimony of the assembly, everything failed through a coldness which oppressed the apostle's heart; for God does not weary in His work. This bond however does not fail here with the Philippians either. As soon as Paul knew how it would go with himself, he would send Timotheus to them; but, as he had said, he had confidence in the Lord that he himself should come shortly.

But there was also Epaphroditus, who had come from the Philippians to carry their testimonial of affection to the apostle; and who, the faithful instrument and expression of their love, had risked his own life and suffered from dangerous sickness, in order to accomplish their service. This fine testimony of christian love breaks out here on every side. Epaphroditus so counts upon the love of the Philippians, that he is much troubled, because they had heard he was sick. He reckons on the feeling they had towards him — the place he had in their affections. Would it not be thus with an affectionate son, who knew that his mother had heard such tidings of him? He would hasten to inform her of his recovery, in order to tranquillise a heart whose love he knew. Such is christian affection, tender and simple, confiding, because pure and unsuspecting, and walking in the light of God — walking with Him and in the affections which Christ had consecrated as man. Divine love, no doubt, goes higher; but brotherly love,

which acts before men and as the fruit among men of that divine love, displays itself thus in grace.

The apostle responds to this affection of the Philippians for him who taught them and labored in the Lord for them (the Holy Ghost also remembers it here), and he sends back Epaphroditus, encouraging and seeking to sustain this feeling in the heart of the Philippians. He takes part in it himself, and brings into it God's own tender love. Paul would have had sorrow upon sorrow (and he had much already), if the Philippians had lost their beloved servant and messenger by means of the services he had rendered them; but God had spared Epaphroditus and the apostle himself. He would however have them assured of it by the presence of Epaphroditus again among them; and thus the apostle's own heart freed from all anxiety, would be also relieved. What a picture of mutual love and kind solicitude!

And observe the ways in which God, according to the apostle, takes part in it. What are presented to us here are His compassions, not the counsels of His love, but compassions worthy of God, and affections of which He approves among men. These affections and this value for laborers are sometimes feared; and so much the more so, because the assembly has in fact to disentangle itself from all false dependence on man. But it is in the entire failure of manifested strength and outward organised bond, through the apostle's absence, that the Spirit of God develops the play of these inward affections and bonds for the instruction of the assembly; as he acknowledges all that remains of the ruins of its primitive position and its outward bonds. He does not create these anew; but he acknowledges that which still exists. It is only the first verse of the epistle which speaks of this — no more was needed; but the inward bonds he develops largely, not as doctrine, but as fact. God Himself, the apostle, his faithful Timotheus, the valued servant of the Philippians, who was so dear to them, and the fellow-laborer of Paul, the servant of the Lord, the Philippians themselves, all have their part in this precious and beautiful chain of love. The graciousness of the christian life is thus developed in every part of this chapter; the delicacy of his reproof of the spirit of division; his sending Timothy when he can let them know how it went with him, but Epaphroditus at once because they had heard he had been sick. This graciousness, and consideration of others, note, connects itself with a

Christ who humbles Himself. A lowly Christ humbling Himself from Godhead-form down to death, is the spring of lowly graciousness; an exalted One sought in glory, the spring of energy which counts all to be dross and dung to win Him.

After all it was in the Lord Himself that they had to rejoice, and the apostle now puts them on their guard against that which had eaten away the life of the assembly, and produced the painful fruits that filled his heart with anguish, and the deplorable consequences of which we see at this day, even as he foretold — consequences which will yet ripen for the judgment of God. Be this as it may, the Lord does not change. “Rejoice,” he says, “in the Lord.” There all is sure.

That which might prevent their thus rejoicing is developed, as well as the true knowledge of Christ, which preserves us from it: not here according to the doctrine and the practice that belong to the high position of the assembly’s union with a glorified Christ as His body, nor according to the unity which flows from it. This is the subject of the Ephesians Neither is it according to the urgent necessity of cleaving to the Head, because all fullness is in Him. This is the instruction of the epistle to the Colossians. But, in accordance with the general character of the epistle, the subject is here treated in connection with the personal experiences of the Christian, and, in particular, of the apostle. Accordingly — as was seen in his personal combats and sorrow — he finds himself on the road to the full enjoyment of this object whom he has learnt to know, and the state which his heart desires. This ought to be the Christian’s experience, for, if I am united by the Spirit to the Head as a member of the body of Christ, and if by faith I apprehend this union, it is none the less true that my personal experience (although this faith is its basis) is necessarily in connection with the paths which I follow in order to reach the glory this entitles me to. Not that the sentiments awakened by that which I encounter on this path either falsify or contradict my position in Christ, or destroy the certainty of my starting-point. But, while possessing this certainty, and because I possess it, I know that I have not in fact reached the result of this position in glory. Now, in this epistle, we are on the road, we are individualised in our relations with God; for experience is always individual, although our union with each other as members of Christ forms a part of this experience.

In CHAPTER 3 Paul resumes his exhortation; but it was not burdensome to him, and it was safe for them (danger being present and his tender love watchful), to renew his warnings and instructions respecting the admixture of Judaizing principles with the doctrine of a glorified Christ. It was in fact to destroy the latter and to reinstate the flesh (that is, sin and alienation from God) in its place. It was the first man, already rejected and condemned, and not the second Man. Yet it is not in the shape of sin that the flesh appears here, but in that of righteousness, of all that is respectable and religious, of ordinances which had the venerable weight of antiquity attached to them, and as to their origin, if all had not been done away in Christ, the authority of God Himself.

To the apostle, who knew Christ in heaven, all this was but a bait to draw the Christian away from Christ, and throw him back again into the ruin out of which Christ had drawn him. And this would be so much the worse, because it would be to abandon a known and glorified Christ, and to return to that which had been proved to be of no value through the flesh. The apostle therefore spares neither the doctrine nor those who taught it.

The glory which he had seen, his contests with these false teachers, the state into which they had thrown the assembly, Jerusalem and Rome, his liberty and his prison — all, had gained him the experience of what Judaism was worth as to the assembly of God. They were dogs, evil workers, that is workers of malice and wickedness. It was not the circumcision. He treats it with profound contempt, and uses language, the harshness of which is justified by his love for the assembly; for love is severe towards those who, devoid of conscience, corrupt the object of that love. It was the concision.

When evil without shame, and laboring to produce evil under a disgraceful veil of religion, is manifested in its true character, mildness is a crime against the objects of the love of Christ. If we love Him, we shall in our intercourse with the assembly give the evil its true character, which it seeks to hide. This is real love and faithfulness to Christ. The apostle had certainly not failed in condescension to the weak in this respect. He had carried it far; his prison testified it. And now the assembly, deprived of his energy and that spiritual decision which was full of love to all which is good, was more in danger than ever. The experience of a whole life of

activity, of the greatest patience, of four years' reflection in prison, led to these forcible and urgent words, "Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision." The doctrine of the epistle to the Ephesians, the exhortation of that to the Colossians, the affection of that to these Philippians, with the denunciation contained in chapter 3:2, date from the same epoch, and are marked with the same love.

But it sufficed to denounce them. Elsewhere, where they were not well known, he gave details, as in the case of Timotheus, who had still to watch over the assembly. It was sufficient now to point out their well-known character. Whatever Judaized, whatever sought to mingle law and gospel, trusting in ordinances and the Spirit, was shameless, malicious, and contemptible. But the apostle will rather occupy himself with the power that delivers from it. We are the circumcision (that which is really separate from the evil, that which is dead to sin and to the flesh), we who worship God, not in the false pretension of ordinances, but spiritually by the power of the Holy Ghost, who rejoice in Christ the Savior and not in the flesh, but on the contrary have no confidence in it. We see here Christ and the Spirit in contrast with the flesh and self.

Paul might indeed boast, if needful, in that which belonged to the flesh. As to all Jewish privileges, he possessed them in the highest degree. He had outstript every one in holy zeal against innovators. One thing alone had changed it all — he had seen a glorified Christ. All that he had according to the flesh was thenceforth loss to him. It would place something between him and the Christ of his faith and of his desire — the Christ whom he knew. And, observe, that here it is not the sins of the flesh which Christ expiates and abolishes that he rejects; it is its righteousness. It has none, we may say; but even if the apostle had possessed any righteousness of the flesh — as, in fact, he did possess it outwardly — he would not have it, because he had seen a better. In Christ, who had appeared to him on the way to Damascus, he had seen divine righteousness for man, and divine glory in man. He had seen a glorified Christ, who acknowledged the poor feeble members of the assembly as a part of Himself. He would have nothing else. The excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord had eclipsed everything — changed everything which was not that into loss. The stars, as well as the darkness of night, disappear before the sun. The righteousness of the law, the righteousness of Paul, all that distinguished

him among men, disappeared before the righteousness of God and the glory of Christ.

It was a thorough change in his whole moral being. His gain was now loss to him. Christ was become all. It was not evil which disappeared — everything that belonged to Paul as advantage to the flesh disappeared. It was another who was now precious to him. What a deep and radical change in the whole moral being of man, when he ceases to be the center of his own importance; and another, a worthy of being so, becomes the center of his moral existence! — a divine person, a man who had glorified God, a man in whom the glory of God shone out, to the eye of faith; in whom His righteousness was realised, His love, His tender mercy, perfectly revealed towards men and known by men. This was He whom Paul desired to win, to possess — for here we are still in the paths of the wilderness — he desired to be found in Him: “That I may win Christ, and be found in him.” Two things were present to his faith in this desire: to have the righteousness of God Himself as his (in Christ he should possess it); and then, to know Him and the power of His resurrection — for he only knew Him as risen — and, according to that power working in him now, to have part in the sufferings of Christ, and be made conformable to His death.

It was in His death that perfect love had been demonstrated, that the perfect ground of divine and eternal righteousness had been laid, that self-renunciation was practically, entirely, perfectly, manifested in Christ, the perfect object to the apostle of a faith that apprehended it and desired it according to the new man. Christ had passed through death in the perfection of that life, the power of which was manifested in resurrection.

Paul, having seen this perfection in glory, and being united (weak as he was in himself) to Christ the source of this power, desired to know the power of His resurrection, that he might follow Him in His sufferings.

Circumstances held this as a reality before his eyes. His heart only saw, or wished to see, Christ, that he might follow Him there. If death was on the way, he was only so much the more like Christ. He did not mind what it cost, if by any means he might attain. This gave undivided energy of purpose. This is indeed to know Him, as completely put to the test, and thus to know all that He was, His perfection — of love, of obedience, of devotedness — fully manifested; but the object is to win Him as He is.

Having seen Him in the glory, the apostle understood the path which had led Him there, and the perfection of Christ in that path. Participating in His life, he desired to realise its power according to His glory, that he might follow Him, in order to be where Jesus was, and in the glory with Him. This is what the Lord said in John 12:23-26. Who had apprehended Him like Paul by the grace of God? Observe here the difference between him and Peter. Peter calls himself “a witness of the sufferings of Christ and a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed”; Paul, a witness of the glory as it is in heaven (“as he is,” as John says), desires to share his sufferings. It is the special foundation of the assembly’s place, of walking in the Spirit, according to the revelation of the glory of Christ. It is this, I doubt not, which makes Peter say, that in all Paul’s epistles — which he acknowledges moreover as a part of the scriptures — there are some things hard to be understood. It took man clean out of the whole ancient order of things.

Having then seen Christ in glory, there were two things for Paul — the righteousness of God in Christ, and the knowledge of Christ. The first entirely eclipsed everything of which the flesh could boast. This was “mine own,” the righteousness of man according to the law. The other was the righteousness of God, which is by faith; that is, man is nothing in it. It is God’s righteousness: man has part in it by believing, that is to say, by faith in Christ Jesus. The believer has his place before God in Christ, in the righteousness of God Himself, which He had manifested in glorifying Christ, having glorified Himself in Him. What a position! not only sin, but human righteousness, all that is of self, excluded; our place being according to the perfection in which Christ, as man, has perfectly glorified God. But this place is necessarily the place of Him who has accomplished this glorious work. Christ, in His Person and in His present position,* is the expression of our place: to know Him is to know it. He is there according to divine righteousness. To be there, as He is, is that into which divine righteousness freely, but necessarily, introduces man — introduces us — in Christ. Thenceforth, having seen the righteousness of God in that Christ is there, I desire myself to know what it is to be there: and I desire to know Christ. But in truth this embraces all that He was in accomplishing it. The glory reveals the power and the result. That which He suffered is the work in which He glorified God; so that divine righteousness has been

fulfilled in His exaltation, as man, to divine glory. And here divine love, perfect devotedness to His Father's glory, constant and perfect obedience, the endurance of all things in order to give testimony of His Father's love for men, perfect patience, unfathomable sufferings, in order that love might be both possible and perfect for sinners — all in short that Christ was, being connected with His Person, makes Him an object which commands, possesses, delivers, and strengthens the heart, by the power of His grace acting in the new life, in which we are united to Him by the all-powerful link of the Spirit, and causes Him to be the alone object before our eyes.

[* Not, of course, as to being at the right hand of God — this was personal.]

Accordingly Paul desires to have that which Christ can give, His cup, and His baptism; and to leave to the Father, that which Christ left to Him, the disposal of places in the kingdom. He does not desire, like John and James, the right and left hand, that is, a good place for himself. He desires Christ, he would win Christ. He does not follow tremblingly, as the disciples did in that chapter (Mark 10); he desires to suffer — not, that is, for the sake of suffering, but to have part in the sufferings of Christ. Instead therefore of going away like the young man in the same chapter, because he had much that could profit the flesh, instead of clinging like him to the law for his righteousness, he renounces that righteousness which he had in common with the young man; and all that he had he counted but as dung.

Here then we have the practical personal experience of the operation of this great principle, which the apostle has set forth in other epistles, that we have part with a glorified Christ. Also, in telling of the result as to himself, he speaks of his own resurrection according to the character of Christ's. It is not that of which Peter speaks, as we have seen, the simply participating in the glory that was to be revealed. It is that which precedes. Having seen Christ in the glory, according to the power of His resurrection, he desires to participate in that: and this is the force of his word, "if by any means." He desired to have part in the resurrection from among the dead. If, in order to reach it, it was needful to pass through death (as Christ had done), he would go through it, cost what it might, be it in ever so painful a way — and death was at that time before his eyes with its human terror: he desired fully to take part with Christ.

Now it is the character of this resurrection that it is from among the dead; it is not simply the resurrection of the dead. It is to come out, by the favor and the power of God (as it regards Christ, and indeed us too by Him, by the righteousness of God), from the condition of evil into which sin had plunged men — to come out, after having been dead in sins, and now to sin, through the favor and power and righteousness of God. What grace! and what a difference! By following Christ according to the will of God, in the place where He has set us (and to be content with the lowest place, if God has given it us, is the same renunciation of self as to labor in the highest — the secret of each is, that Christ is everything and ourselves nothing), we participate in His resurrection — a thought full of peace and joy, and which fills the heart with love to Christ. Joyful and glorious hope, which shines before our eyes in Christ, and in that blessed Savior glorified! The objects of divine favor in Him, we come forth — because the eye of God is upon us, because we are His — from the house of death, which cannot detain those who are His, because the glory and the love of God are concerned in them. Christ is the example and the pattern of our resurrection; the principle (Romans 8) and the assurance of our resurrection is in Him. The road to it is that which the apostle here traces.

But since resurrection and likeness to Christ in glory were the objects of his hope, it is very evident that he had not attained it. If that was his perfection, he could not be yet perfect. He was, as has been said, on the road; but Christ had apprehended him for it, and he still pressed onward to lay hold of the prize, for the enjoyment of which Christ had laid hold of him. No, he repeats to his brethren, I count not myself to have attained. But one thing at least he could say — he forgot all that was behind him, and pressed on ever towards the goal, keeping it always in sight to obtain the prize of the calling of God, which is found in heaven. Happy Christian! It is a great thing never to lose sight of it, never to have a divided heart, to think but of one thing; to act, to think, always according to the positive energy wrought by the Holy Ghost in the new man, directing him to this only and heavenly object. It is not his sins properly which he here says he forgot — it was his progress that he forgot, his advantages, all that was already behind. And this was not merely the energy that showed itself at the first impulse; he still counted everything but as dung, because he had still Christ in view. This is true christian life. What a sad moment would it

have been for Rebecca, if, in the midst of the desert with Eliezer, she had forgotten Isaac, and begun to think again of Bethuel and her father's house! What had she then in the desert with Eliezer?

Such is the true life and position of the Christian; even as the Israelites, although preserved by the blood from the messenger of judgment, were not in their true place till they were on the other side of the Red Sea, a freed people. Then he is on the road to Canaan, as belonging to God.

The Christian, until he understands this new position which Christ has taken as risen from the dead, is not spiritually in its true place, is not perfect or full-grown in Christ. But when he has attained this, it is not assuredly that he is to despise others. "If," says the apostle, "they were otherwise minded, God would reveal" to them the fullness of His truth; and all were to walk together with one mind in the things to which they had attained. Where the eye was single, it would be so: there were many with whom this was not the case; but the apostle was their example. This was saying much. While Jesus lived the peculiar power of this resurrection life could not be revealed in the same way; and moreover while on earth Christ walked in the consciousness of that which He was with His Father before the world existed, so that, although He endured for the joy that was set before Him, although His life was the perfect pattern of the heavenly man, there was in Him a repose, a communion, which had quite a peculiar character; instructive nevertheless to us, because the Father loves us as He loved Jesus, and Jesus also loves us as the Father loved Him. With Him it was not the energy of one who must run the race in order to attain that which he has never yet possessed; He spoke of that which He knew, and bore witness of that which He had seen, of that which He had forsaken from love to us, the Son of man who is in heaven.

John enters farther into this character of Christ: in his epistle therefore we find more of that which He is in His nature and character, than of what we shall be with Him in the glory. Peter, building on the same foundation as the others, waits however for that which shall be revealed. His pilgrimage was indeed towards heaven, to obtain a treasure which was preserved there, which shall be revealed in the last time; but it is more connected with that which had been already revealed. From his point of view, the morning star on which Paul lived appeared only on the extreme horizon. For him

practical life was that of Jesus among the Jews. He could not say with Paul, "Be ye followers of me." The effect of the revelation of the heavenly glory of Christ, between His going away and His reappearance, and that of the union of all Christians to Him in heaven, was fully realised in him only who received it. Faithful through grace to this revelation, having no other object which guided his steps, or to divide his heart, he gives himself as an example. He truly followed Christ, but the form of his life was peculiar, on account of the way in which God had called him; and it is thus that Christians possessing this revelation ought to walk.

Accordingly Paul speaks of a dispensation committed to him.

It was not to turn their eyes from Christ; it is on having the eyes constantly fixed upon Him that he insists. It was this which characterised the apostle, and in this he gives himself as an example. But the character of this looking to Jesus was special. It was not a Christ known on earth who was its object, but a Christ glorified whom he had seen in heaven. To press ever forward to this end formed the character of his life; even as this same glory of Christ, as a testimony to the bringing in divine righteousness and to the assembly's position, formed the basis of his teaching. Therefore he can say, "Be followers of me." His gaze was ever fixed on the heavenly Christ, who had shone before his eyes and still shone before his faith. The Philippians were thus to walk together, and to mark those who followed the apostle's example; because (for evidently it was a period in which the assembly as a whole had much departed from her first love and her normal condition) there were many who, while bearing the name of Christ and having once given good hope, so that the apostle speaks of them with tears, were enemies of the cross of Christ. For the cross on earth, in our life, answers to the heavenly glory on high. It is not the assembly at Philippi which is the subject here, but the condition of the outward universal assembly. Many were already calling themselves Christians, who joined to that great name a life which had the earth and earthly things for its object. The apostle did not acknowledge them. They were there; it was not a matter of local discipline, but a condition of Christianity, in which even all were seeking their own interest; and, spirituality being thus lowered, the Christ of glory little realised, many who had no life at all might walk among them without being detected, by those who had so little life themselves and scarcely walked better than they did. For it does not

appear that they who were minding earthly things committed any evil that required public discipline. The general low tone of spirituality among the real Christians left the others free to walk with them; and the presence of the latter debased Still more the standard of godliness of life.

But this state of things did not escape the spiritual eye of the apostle, which, fixed on the glory, discerned readily and clearly all that had not that glory for its motive; and the Spirit has given us the divine judgment, most grave and solemn, with regard to this state of things. No doubt it has grown enormously worse since then, and its elements have developed and established themselves in a manner and in proportions that are very differently characterised; but the moral principles with regard to walk remain ever the same for the assembly. The same evil is present to be avoided, and the same efficacious means for avoiding it. There is the same blessed example to follow, the same heavenly Savior to be the glorious object of our faith, the same life to live if we desire to be Christians indeed.

That which characterised these persons who professed the name of Christ was, that their hearts were set upon earthly things. Thus the cross had not its practical power — it would have been a contradiction. Their end therefore was destruction. The true Christian was not such; his conversation was in heaven and not on the earth; his moral life was spent in heaven, his true relationships were there. From thence he expected Christ as a Savior, that is to say, to deliver him from the earth, from this earthly system far from God here below For salvation is always viewed in this epistle as the final result of the conflict, the result due to the almighty power of the Lord. Then, when Christ shall come to take the assembly to Himself — Christians, truly heavenly, shall be like Him in His heavenly glory, a likeness which is the object of their pursuit at all times (compare 1 John 3:2). Christ will accomplish it in them, conforming their bodies of humiliation to His glorious body according to the power whereby He is able to subdue all things to Himself. Then the apostle and all Christians will have attained the end, the resurrection from among the dead.

Such is the tenor of this chapter. Christ, seen in glory, is the spring of energy to christian life, to win Christ, so that all else is loss; as Christ making Himself of no reputation is the spring of christian graciousness of walk: the two parts of christian life which we are too apt to sacrifice one

to another or at least to pursue one forgetful of the other. In both Paul singularly shines. In the following chapter we have superiority to circumstances. This also is Paul's experience and state; for it will be remarked that it is the personal experience of Paul which runs all through his (humanly speaking) faultless experience — not perfection. Likeness to Christ in glory is the only standard of that. As to this third chapter, many have inquired whether the thing aimed at was a spiritual assimilation to Christ here, or a complete assimilation to Him in the glory. This is rather to forget the import of what the apostle says, namely, that the sight and the desire of the heavenly glory, the desire of possessing Christ Himself thus glorified, was that which formed the heart here below. An object here below to be attained in oneself could not be found, since Christ is on high; it would be to separate the heart from the object which forms it to its own likeness. But although we never reach the mark here below, since it is a glorified Christ and resurrection from among the dead, yet its pursuit assimilates us more and more to Him. The object in the glory forms the life which answers to it here below. Were a light at the end of a long straight alley, I never have the light itself till I am arrived there; but I have ever increasing light in proportion as I go forward; I know it better; I am more in the light myself. Thus it is with a glorified Christ, and such is christian life (compare 2 Corinthians 3).

The Philippians were therefore to stand fast in the Lord. This is difficult when the general tone is lowered; painful also, for one's walk becomes much more solitary, and the hearts of others are straitened. But the Spirit has very plainly given us the example, the principle, the character, and the strength of this walk. With the eye on Christ all is easy; and communion with Him gives light and certainty; and is worth all the rest which perhaps we lose.

The apostle nevertheless spoke gently of those persons. They were not like the false judaizing teachers who corrupted the sources of life, and stopped up the path of communion with God in love. They had lost this life of communion, or had never had more than the appearance of it. He wept for them.

I think that the apostle sent his letter by Epaphroditus, who probably also wrote it from the apostle's dictation; as was done with regard to all the

epistles, except that to the Galatians, which, as he tells us, he wrote with his own hand. When therefore he says (chap. 4:3), “true or faithful] yokefellow,” he speaks as I think, of Epaphroditus, and addresses him.

But he notices also two sisters even, who were not of one mind in resisting the enemy. In every way he desired unity of heart and mind. He entreats Epaphroditus (if indeed it be he) as the Lord’s servant to help those faithful women who had labored in concert with Paul to spread the gospel. Euodias and Syntyche were perhaps of the number — the connection of thought makes it probable. Their activity, having gone beyond the measure of their spiritual life, betrayed them into an exercise of self-will which set them at variance. Nevertheless they were not forgotten, together with Clement and others, who were fellow-laborers with the apostle himself, whose names were in the book of life. For love for the Lord remembers all that His grace does; and this grace has a place for each of His own.

The apostle returns to the practical exhortations addressed to the faithful, with regard to their ordinary life, that they might walk according to their heavenly calling. “Rejoice in the Lord.” If he even weeps over many who call themselves Christians, he rejoices always in the Lord; in Him is that which nothing can alter. This is not an indifference to sorrow which hinders weeping, but it is a spring of joy which enlarges when there is distress, because of its immutability, and which becomes even more pure in the heart the more it becomes the only one; and it is in itself the only spring that is infinitely pure. When it is our only spring, we thereby love others. If we love them besides Him, we lose something of Him. When through exercise of heart we are weaned from all other springs, His joy remains in all its purity, and our concern for others partakes of this same purity. Nothing moreover troubles this joy, because Christ never changes. The better we know Him, the better are we able to enjoy that which is ever enlarging through knowing Him. But he exhorts Christians to rejoice: it is a testimony to the worth of Christ, it is their true portion. Four years in prison chained to a soldier had not hindered his doing it, nor being able to exhort others more at ease than he.

Now this same thing will make them moderate and meek; their passions will not be excited by other things if Christ is enjoyed. Moreover He is at hand. A little while, and all for which men strive will give place to Him

whose presence bridles the will (or rather puts it aside) and fills the heart. We are not to be moved by things here below until He shall come. When He comes, we shall be fully occupied with other things.

Not only are the will and the passions to be bridled and silenced, but anxieties also. We are in relationship with God; in all things He is our refuge; and events do not disturb Him. He knows the end from the beginning. He knows everything, He knows it beforehand; events shake neither His throne, nor His heart; they always accomplish His purposes. But to us He is love; we are through grace the objects of His tender care. He listens to us and bows down His ear to hear us. In all things therefore, instead of disquieting ourselves and weighing everything in our own hearts, we ought to present our requests to God with prayer, with supplication, with a heart that makes itself known (for we are human beings) but with the knowledge of the heart of God (for He loves us perfectly); so that, even while making our petition to Him, we can already give thanks, because we are sure of the answer of His grace, be it what it may; and it is our requests that we are to present to Him. Nor is it a cold commandment to find out His will and then come: we are to go with our requests. Hence it does not say, you will have what you ask; but God's peace will keep your hearts. This is trust; and His peace, the peace of God Himself, shall keep our hearts. It does not say that our hearts shall keep the peace of God; but, having cast our burden on Him whose peace nothing can disturb, His peace keeps our hearts. Our trouble is before Him, and the constant peace of the God of love, who takes charge of everything and knows all beforehand, quiets our disburdened hearts, and imparts to us the peace which is in Himself and which is above all understanding (or at least keeps our hearts by it), even as He Himself is above all the circumstances that can disquiet us, and above the poor human heart that is troubled by them. Oh, what grace! that even our anxieties are a means of our being filled with this marvelous peace, if we know how to bring them to God, and true He is. May we learn indeed how to maintain this intercourse with God and its reality, in order that we may converse with Him and understand His ways with believers!

Moreover, the Christian, although walking (as we have seen) in the midst of evil and of trial, is to occupy himself with all that is good, and is able to do it when thus at peace, to live in this atmosphere, so that it shall pervade

his heart, that he shall be habitually where God is to be found. This is an all-important command. We may be occupied with evil in order to condemn it; we may be right, but this is not communion with God in that which is good. But if occupied through His grace with that which is good, with that which comes from Himself, the God of peace is with us. In trouble we shall have the peace of God; in our ordinary life, if it be of this nature, we shall have the God of peace. Paul was the practical example of this; with regard to their walk, by following him in that which they had learnt and heard from him and seen in him, they should find that God was with them.

Nevertheless, although such was his experience, he rejoiced greatly that their loving care of him had flourished again. He could indeed take refuge in God; but it was sweet to him in the Lord to have this testimony on their part. It is evident that he had been in need; but it was the occasion of more entire trust in God. We can easily gather this from his language; but, he delicately adds, he would not, by saying that their care of him had now at last flourished again, imply that they had forgotten him. The care for him was in their hearts; but they had not had the opportunity of giving expression to their love. Neither did he speak in regard of want; he had learnt — for it is practical experience and its blessed result we find hereto be content under all circumstances, and thus to depend on no one. He knew how to be abased: he knew how to abound; in every way he was instructed both to be full and to be hungry, to be in abundance and to suffer want. He could do all things through Him who strengthened him. Sweet and precious experience! not only because it gives ability to meet all circumstances, which is of great price, but because the Lord is known, the constant, faithful, mighty friend of the heart. It is not ‘I can do all things,’ but “I can do all through him who strengtheneth me.” It is a strength which continually flows from a relationship with Christ, a connection with Him maintained in the heart. Neither is it only ‘One can do all things.’ This is true; but Paul had learnt it practically. He knew what he could be assured of and reckon on — what ground he stood on. Christ had always been faithful to him, had brought him through so many difficulties and through so many seasons of prosperity, that he had learnt to trust in Him, and not in circumstances. And Christ was the same ever. Still the Philippians had done well, and it was not forgotten. From the first God had bestowed this

grace upon them, and they had supplied the apostle's need, even when he was not with them. He remembered it with affection, not that he desired a gift, but fruit to their own account. "But," he says, "I have all," his heart turning back to the simple expression of his love He was in abundance, having received by Epaphroditus that which they had sent him, an acceptable sacrifice of sweet odour, well-pleasing to God.

His heart rested in God; his assurance with regard to the Philippians expresses it. My God, he says, shall richly supply all your need. He does not express a wish that God may do so. He had learnt what his God was by his own experience. My God, he says, He whom I have learnt to know in all the circumstances through which I have passed, shall fill you with all good things. And here he returns to His character as he had known Him. God would do it according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. There he had learnt to know Him at the beginning; and such he had known Him all along his varied path, so full of trials here and of joys from above. Accordingly he thus concludes: "Now unto our God and Father" — for such He was to the Philippians also — "be glory for ever and ever." He applies his own experience of that which God was to him, and his experience of the faithfulness of Christ, to the Philippians. This satisfied his love, and gave him rest with regard to them. It is a comfort when we think of the assembly of God.

He sends the greeting of the brethren who were with him, and of the saints in general, especially those of Caesar's household; for even there God had found some who through grace had listened to His voice of love.

He ends with the salutation which was a token in all his epistles that they were from himself.

The present state of the assembly, of the children of God, dispersed anew, and often as sheep without a shepherd, is a very different condition of ruin from that in which the apostle wrote; but this only adds more value to the experience of the apostle which God has been pleased to give us; the experience of a heart which trusted in God alone, and which applies this experience to the condition of those who are deprived of the natural resources that belonged to the organised body, to the body of Christ as God had formed it on earth. As a whole, the epistle shows proper christian experience, that is, superiority, as walking in the Spirit, to everything

through which we have to pass. It is remarkable to see that sin is not mentioned in it, nor flesh, save to say he had no confidence in it.

He had at this time a thorn in the flesh himself, but the proper experience of the Christian is walking in the Spirit above and out of the reach of all that may bring the flesh into activity.

The reader will remark that chapter 3 sets the glory before the Christian and gives the energy of christian life; chapter 2, the self-emptying and abasement of Christ, and founds thereon the graciousness of the christian life, and thoughtfulness of others: while the last chapter gives a blessed superiority to all circumstances.