

## PHILIPPIANS: THE SECRET OF CHRISTIAN JOY (study 1)

# Prison, Progress, Prayer & Providence

*My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.*

JAMES 1:2,3

### Study 1a: THANKFULNESS in TRIALS (1:1-11)

#### 1:1-8 Despite Paul's personal situation, what seems to be his constant meditation? (Col.2:3,4,9)

[1:2] Notice the little word "ALL." It is used very significantly in this epistle -- in a way not found anywhere else in the writings of the apostle Paul. Observe its use in verses 4,7,8,25 in this chapter, and verse 26 in chapter 2. Is it not plain that Paul desired to bind all together in one bundle of love in this way, refusing to even seem to recognize any incipient division among them? He greeted them *all*, he thought well of them all, *he prayed for them all*. He knew it would in the end be well with them *all*. [Ironside 16]

It is remarkable to notice also the number of times in which he mentions the Saviour's name. It occurs forty times in this Epistle, that is, on an average, in every two or three verses ... He was a slave of Jesus Christ; he viewed all saints as living, with himself, in Christ; his life was full of Christ; Christ was his life; to die was to depart to be with Him; his rejoicing was in Christ Jesus; and steadfastness was only possible, as he and his converts stood fast 'in the Lord.' [Meyer 17]

[1:3] So he meditated upon the names and faces of the saints at Philippi with his marvelous faculty for recalling them, happy trait for any preacher who thus can bind people to him. Time blurs names and faces for most of us, but Paul had zest in the life of people. He was fond of folks and joys in all of them through the haze of the past. Indeed, it almost sounds as if Paul did nothing else but dream about the Philippians, "always in every supplication." Memories of his work all over the world came to him often in moments of despair and of cheer (cf. 2 Cor. 11). These hallowed associations with the elect of earth spur one on to fresh endeavor. One feeds upon rich experiences of grace and can go in the strength of this meat for many days. [Robertson 31]

[1:4] We cannot do as Luther, who was accustomed to say, 'I have so much work to do to-day that I cannot get through it with less than three hours of prayer'; or as Bishop Andrewes, who regularly set apart five hours each day for private devotion; or as Law, the author of the *Serious Call*, who was accustomed, as the clock rang out each third hour, to turn to prolonged prayer, allocating to each occasion some



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special subject. Our habits of life, and perhaps our methods of thought, forbid our adopting anything quite so absorbing and prolonged; but that we should pray more, that we should labour in prayer as Epaphras did, that should cultivate the art of prayer, is clear ... . There should be, as far as possible, one room and one spot in the room, or one garden path, or a walk over the moor or beside the sea, where our seasons of private devotion are spent, and our prayers are wont to be made. [Meyer 20,21]

#### v.6 Note Paul's certainty about the saints in Philippi

[1:6] He who fashions the seed is also Lord of the Harvest. He creates initial impulse, and He also matures the character. The quickening ministries of the spring are His; His also are the ripening ministries of the autumn ... He will not leave us in our spiritual babyhood, nor will He make us precociously old. He will "perfect us," adding grace and strength to the growing years ... There shall be "fruit every month," and fruit shall be appropriate to our growth. [Jowett 12]

#### 1:9-11 What is the secret of love's abundant success, and progress in bearing 'fruits of righteousness'? (Col.1:6)

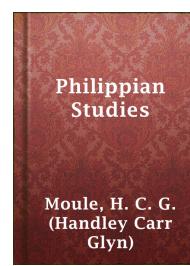
[1:11] 7 times in these 11 short verses "Christ Jesus" is explicitly named; as the writer's Possessor; as the Philippian saints' Life and Head; as the Giver to them,

## The 'singular light & beauty' of Philippians

Amongst the Epistles of St Paul Philippians shines out with singular light and beauty ... Looking at the other Epistles, each with its own divine and also deeply human characteristics, we find Philippians more peaceful than Galatians, more personal and affectionate than Ephesians, less anxiously controversial than Colossians, more deliberate and symmetrical than Thessalonians, and of course larger in its applications than the personal

messages to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon ... It presents more than one important passage of doctrine, some of these passages being revelations of the first order. It is full of pregnant precepts for Christian character and conduct, whether seen in the individual or in the community ... And the whole is suffused with a singularly sweet light of "joy and peace in believing." It is written by one who was, as he wrote, at once resting and moving in the peace of God which passes understanding, and in the love of Christ which passes knowledge; and what is felt in his soul comes out inevitably on his page. The letter, written in a prison, and addressed to a mission-church

always exposed to insult and assault, yet seems in a wonderful way to call us "apart, to rest awhile." "A glory gilds the sacred page," the glory of the presence of the Lord in all His majesty of Godhead and nearness of Manhood ... A peculiar sort of joy, which is impossible without at least the experience, if not the presence, of sorrow, rests and shines over the whole. It is the joy of the heart which has found at length "the secret of the Lord," His hiding-place from the tyranny of circumstances and time; the way how always to be of good cheer, naturally yet also supernaturally, not by a hard-won indifference to life, but by living amidst everything external, "hidden with Christ in God." [Moule 6]



with His Father, of grace and peace; as the Lord of the longed-for "Day," ... as the mighty Sphere of regenerate family-love; as the Cause and Condition of the Christian's fruitfulness for God. [Moule 35]

## Study 1b: Our EXTREMITY, His OPPORTUNITY (1:12-26)

### 1:12-14 In which 2 ways had Paul's personal extremity been turned into a blessing? (Acts 4, esp. v.20, 23-37)

[1:12] ... the cloud, which appeared so ominous, brought a gracious shower; the restriction became the mother of a larger liberty; the prison was the appointed place of richer and more glorious vision. [Jowett 20]

[1:13] It needs only a passing effort of imagination to understand something of the exquisite trial to every sensibility which such a custody must have involved, even where the conditions were favourable. ... It is a noble triumph of grace when such a test is well borne, and turned by patience into an occasion for God. When Nicholas Ridley, for a long year and a half (1554-5) was committed at Oxford to the vexatious domestic custody of the mayor and his bigoted wife, Edmund and Margaret Irish, it must have been nothing less than a slow torture to one whose fine nature had been used for years to the conditions of civil and ecclesiastical dignity and of a large circle of admirable friends. And it was a spiritual victory, second only to that of his glorious martyrdom ... when the close of that dreary time found the once obdurate and vexatious Mrs Irish won by Ridley's life to admiration and attachment, and also, as it would seem, to scriptural convictions. [Moule 48,49]

[v.14 and Acts 16] Again the order of these conversions is significant: first, the proselyte, next the Greek, lastly the Roman. Thus the incidents at Philippi in their sequence, not less than in their variety, symbolize the progress of Christianity throughout the world. Through the Israelite dispersion ... the message of the Gospel first reached the Greek. By the instrumentality of the Greek language and the diffusion of the Greek race it finally established itself in Rome, the citadel of power and civilization, whence directly or indirectly it was destined to spread over the whole world ... But while conversions at Philippi had thus a typical character, as representing not only the universality of the Gospel but also the order of its diffusion, they seem to illustrate still more distinctly the two great social revolutions which it as effected. In most modern treatises on civilisation, from whatever point of view they are written, a prominent place is given to the amelioration of woman and the abolition of slavery, as the noblest social triumphs of Christianity. Now the woman and the slave are the principal figures in the scene of the Apostle's preaching at Philippi. [Lightfoot 54,55]

### 1:15-18 A lesson for us who are quick to criticize others 'naming the Name'! (Mark 9:38-41)

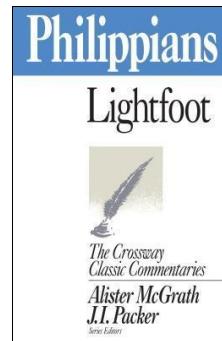
[1:18] And when, as here, he saw around him men, however misguided, who were aiding in the "announcement" of the Name and salvation of Christ, he thought more of the evangelization than of the breach of coherence, which yet most surely he deplored. He speaks with perfect candour of the unsound spiritual state of the separatists, their envy, strife, and partizanship. But he has no anathema for their

methods. He is apparently quite unconscious of the thought that because he is the one Apostle in Rome grace can be conveyed only through him; that his authority and commission are necessary to authenticate teaching and to make ordinances effectual. He would far rather have order, and he knows that he is its lawful centre. But "the announcement of Christ" is a thing even more momentous than order ... It is an instructive lesson. Would that in all the after ages the Church had more watchfully followed this noble precedent! The result would have been, so I venture to hold, a far truer and stronger cohesion, in the long run, than we see, alas, around us now. [Moule 54]

### 1:19-23 When Paul contemplated his reasons for remaining on earth, what came first? (2 Cor.5:1-11)

[1:19] Has the Church of Christ adequately realised the vast wealth of her spacious inheritance? She has a power which can raze mountains to their base, and divert the channels of the floods ... Our prayers cut channels for the river of God's gracious Spirit. No sincere prayer ever fails. It cuts a path for God; it prepares "the way of the Lord." [Jowett 30]

### 1:24-26 Where does Paul find his -- and the Philippians' -- principal joy? (Matt.5:10-12; James 1:2-6)



## 'God is ever standing within the shadow'

How often has God overruled the designs and deeds of evil men for the glory of His name, the success of His Kingdom, and the salvation of His saints. What they mean for evil He turns to good. The oppression of Pharaoh, as we have seen, secures the establishment of Israel in their own land. The persecution of the Sanhedrin forced the early Christians to become evangelists throughout the empire. The Pope's bull against Luther inaugurated modern Protestantism. The persecution of the Stuarts urged the Pilgrim Fathers to lay the foundations of the great commonwealth in the United States. Truth has again and again been brought to the scaffold, and wrong has swayed the sceptre, but God is ever standing within the shadow 'keeping watch upon His own.' Be of good cheer, lift up your heads, your redemption draweth nigh! [Meyer 46]

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