

The Epistle to the Church At Philippi

Pasture for the Flock of God · Philippians

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the Church At Philippi In considering any book of Scripture, it is most helpful to have a knowledge of some particular line of truth of which it treats. For instance, Ephesians sets forth most blessedly the Church of God, the body of Christ; Colossians, the glories of the Head of the body, and the mischievous results of not holding the Head. In Galatians, the apostle contends most uncompromisingly for the finished work of Christ -- glorying in the cross, as separating us from the world, putting an end to all fleshly pretensions, and refusing everything supplemental to the work of Christ as subversive of it, and damaging to souls. In Philippians, we have devotedness prominently set forth. There is much more, no doubt, in all these epistles; but in these remarks we refer to prominent points. In turning to Philippians, some may be ready to ask, What are we to understand by devotedness? To which we reply, Did not our Lord refer to this subject when He said, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me {Luke 9:23}?

Devotedness is heartily yielding ourselves to the claims of Christ, and therefore refusing the claims of self, and of the world. In a word, devotedness is following Christ, walking as He walked. You will observe that this epistle is addressed to those who are in Christ -To all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi {Phil. 1:1},

as we read in the first verse. This is surely where God began with us -When we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, . . . and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus {Eph. 2:5, 6}.

This is the beginning of our history as saints, and is the startingpoint of true devotedness. A person cannot be said to be intelligently on the ground of devotedness, till he enters, by faith, upon this new position, which God has given him as a new creation in Christ Jesus. This is again alluded to in the third chapter, where four characteristics of true Christians are grouped together. 1. With such there is no question of mending, or improving man in the flesh. The death of Christ forbids the thought. On the contrary, we have judged the flesh, with its affections and lusts {see Gal. 5:24},

to be so irremediably bad, that we have accepted its crucifixion under the judgment of God, with Christ, and set it aside as unfit for God or His service -We are the circumcision {Phil. 3:3}.

2. We so know God in Christ as the Giver of His Son, and the source of all our blessings, that our hearts adoringly go out to Him in praise --

We worship God in the Spirit {Phil. 3:3}.

3. We so know Him who has loved us, and glorified God in our redemption, as to delight in the infinite glory of His person, and His highest exaltation -We rejoice in Christ Jesus {Phil. 3:3}.

4. Seeing God's estimate of our old man in the cross, we refuse the claims of the flesh, its resources and pretensions, as unworthy of our trust; and that not only as regards flesh in ourselves, but as in any one else -We have no confidence in the flesh {Phil. 3:3}.

It is plain, then, that the starting point of all true devotedness is the apprehension of our new standing, position, and relationships "as in Christ Jesus."

The energy of devotedness is connected with rejoicing in the Lord. Apart from Him we are perfect weakness. Without me,

said Jesus to His disciples, ye can do nothing {John 15:5}.

Taken up with Him, we are attracted to Him, find Him to be our strength, and are drawn on in His ways. Again and again, in this brief epistle, is this rejoicing alluded to, like another witness, reminding us that the joy of the Lord is our strength {see Neh. 8:10}.

The heart being set free from self and sin, finds in Him an unchanging source of joy and strength. In this epistle there is no question of guilt or sins taken up; but the soul is taken up with the Lord, and stayed upon Him. Peace, communion, and devotedness is the divine order. It is when the heart is enjoying the sweetness and perfectness of divine love, disentangled from self and circumstances, standing in liberty in Christ, that we are free to follow Him with girded loins, holding forth the word of life. And it is because He changeth not, is above all circumstances, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever, that it is our happy privilege to rejoice in the Lord alway {Phil. 4:4}.

The spring of true devotedness is the knowledge of the moral excellencies, perfections, and worth of Christ Himself. The apostle Paul could say, What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, &c. (Phil. 3:7, 8).

Paul had seen the Man in the glory. The perfections of Him had

disclosed to him the failure of all else. The brightness of that light had made manifest the imperfection of all that he had gloried in. His righteousnesses now looked like filthy rags. His comeliness was turned into corruption. He saw that His religiousness was totally unfit for God. The ineffable beauty and glory of that blessed Savior had shown him that what he had hitherto boasted of was altogether a corrupt and foul mass, which could now only be counted by him as dung. That which man most glories in looks poor indeed in the light of the glory of the risen and ascended Son of God. Weighed in the balance with Christ, all is lighter than vanity. Measured by the standard of His eternal excellencies, all comes far, far short, and is found only dung and dross -- corrupt and unclean in God's most holy presence. No one could speak more truly of a blameless life in his dealings with his fellow-men than Paul. As to his pedigree, he was of pure Israelitish blood, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, of

a favored tribe, zealous in the Jews' religion above many, an out and out Pharisee, strict adherent to Jewish ordinances and legal ways; but when he put all these things together in the light of the presence of the glorified Son of God, he found that self and pride, unbelief and vain-glory, abounded in them all; so that those things which had been gain to him he now felt to be positive loss, and not for the honor of God. Having had to do with that blessed Man in the glory, who is at God's right hand, Paul's heart was so captivated that he never could be satisfied till he was with Him. He could not bear to be outside the light and joy of His blessed presence, or fail to respond to the desires of His heart. Nothing can make up for a lack of personal acquaintance with Christ. Intimacy with Himself is certainly the secret of true devotedness. Occupied with Him, the heart readily detects, and refuses the voice of the stranger, and cannot but own the Lord's claims to be paramount. Nothing so thoroughly tests the state of our hearts, as whether or not we have intimacy with the Lord Himself. "Far from Him, we faint and languish; Oh, our Savior, keep us nigh!"

The characteristics of devotedness are largely set forth in this epistle. It is to have in us the mind which was in Christ Jesus {see Phil. 2:5};

like Him, to be blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation . . . lights in the world, holding forth the word of life {Phil. 2:15, 16}.

As redeemed by Christ, standing in Christ, and aiming to walk as He walked, it is easy to understand that such would therefore see everything in relation to Christ, and value everything according to Him; and this is remarkably brought out in the first chapter of this short epistle. Thus, if, as in the sixth verse, he thinks of God's present work, or, as in the tenth verse, he is occupied with the walk of the saints, he looks at both as they will appear in the day of Christ -- that day when everything will come out according to God, when all will be made manifest, and all His saints shall have reward from Him according to their works. If his heart goes out after the saints, he thinks and feels for them, not as they are seen of men, but as they are precious to the deepest feelings of the heart of Him who loveth them, and washed them from their sins in His own blood. He could say,

God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:8).

If he looked at the galling chains which bound him, and so painfully pressed upon him, as a prisoner for the truth's sake, he could think of those heavy irons as associated with the Lord Jesus, whom he served, and for whom he suffered. Hence he called these fetters his bonds in Christ.

He saw Christ, as it were, written on every link of his chain. By faith he so looked to Him, so dealt with Him, and so received everything out of His hand, that he knew himself to be the prisoner of Jesus Christ, and felt his chains to be as he said, his bonds in Christ (Phil. 1:13).

Then as to preaching. Here too the person of his adorable Lord was everything. It was not merely the quantity, as people now call it, of evangelical machinery, but whether Christ -- that blessed Man in the glory -- was exalted in it. It was not enough for the apostle that persons preached about Christ, but whether the person -- Christ Himself -- was exalted; that was the point; and if so, no matter by whom this was, he could say, I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice (Phil. 1:18).

If bodily health or bodily suffering were the subjects, he seemed to have had but one desire animating his soul; and what could that be in one who knew Christ in the glory to be the one absorbing object of his heart? Could he consider his own body apart from Him? Certainly not. It was therefore that Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether by life, or by death (Phil. 1:20).

As to this present life, he could say, For me to live is Christ.

Blessed testimony! True mark of the faithful! It is not merely holding doctrines about Christ, however orthodox they may be, but expressing Christ, showing forth His characteristics, exhibiting His ways, habits, and spirit continually -- being really yoked with Him who was meek and lowly in heart. What is devotedness but this? Happy those who, rejoicing in Christ, are seeking in all points to be like Christ -- obedient, faithful, meek and lowly, not seeking to do their own will, but subject in all things to His will. Wondrous expression, For me to live is Christ (Phil. 1:21).

Then as to departing. It was not rest, or joy, or heaven, or happiness, that fired his soul with hope when he thought of putting off this tabernacle. No! As in other matters, so here, he looked at it in relation to the great object of attraction before his heart -- Christ Himself. His joy in the prospect of departing was to be with Christ. Blessed prospect! It was not the crown, the deliverance from sorrow, or even the positive and eternal enjoyment of the place. No; it was to be with Him, as it must be with every truly devoted heart; Christ there as well as Christ here -having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ (Phil. 1:23).

We find examples of devotedness in the second chapter. The Lord Himself of course stands first and foremost in all His

infinite and glorious perfections; then Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus, each in his measure, are strikingly set before us. The dear apostle's sorrow at this time was, that all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's {Phil. 2:21};

that other interests came in to displace the paramount claims of Christ; so that self became an object, The apostle therefore pointed them to the lowly, obedient Son of God, as the true and perfect pattern of devotedness, marked as it was with humiliation and rejection here, though followed with the highest exaltation above. He desires, therefore, that this mind which was in Him may characterize them. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore also God hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven, and in earth, and under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father {see Phil. 2:5-11}.

Thus this perfect One is traced in the path of unfailing obedience and self-abnegation, making Himself of no reputation, always delighting to do the will of Him that sent Him, and not stopping short of the entire surrender of Himself unto death, and that even the death of the cross {Phil. 2:8}.

To Him their eyes are here directed as the One to be imitated and followed, who certainly looked not on His own things, but whose heart was set on glorifying the Father on the earth, and finishing the work which He gave Him to do. And the apostle tells the Philippian saints of his readiness to be offered up, joyfully sacrificing his own life in the service of his blessed Master. His heart's desire so goes out after others, that he entreats them so to walk, that he may rejoice in the day of Christ that he has not run in vain, neither labored in vain. Yea,

said he, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all (Phil. 2:17).

In all this he certainly has the mind which was in Christ Jesus {see Phil. 2:5},

and is looking not on his own things, but on the things of others. Then Timothy is brought before us, as another whose heart was unselfishly set upon the welfare of others, at a time too when all seek their own, and not the things which are Jesus Christ's {see Phil. 2:21},

The apostle on this account speaks of sending him to Philippi, if the Lord so ordered. He says, I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheus shortly unto you, that I also may be of good comfort, when I know your state; for I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state (Phil. 2:19, 20).

Epaphroditus is also introduced into this blessed group of

devoted servants, in company with our adorable Master. Instead of seeking his own things, we are told that for the work of Christ he was sick nigh unto death; and so completely did he set aside selfish considerations, that he did not regard his own life, so that he might accomplish his service to the beloved apostle of our Lord. The chief sorrow too of dear Epaphroditus was, not that he himself was sick, but that the saints at Philippi had heard of his sickness, for he knew this would distress their hearts. We are told he was full of heaviness, because that ye had heard that he had been sick {Phil. 2:26}.

His journey to Rome, to take the ministration of love to the apostle in prison, is spoken of as the work of Christ, and the saints are enjoined to receive him in the Lord with all gladness, and to hold such in reputation, (Phil. 2:26-30). Thus in the second chapter the perfect One is first set before us as the great exemplar of devotedness, and then men of like passions with ourselves, who, through grace, had, in their measure, the mind in them which was also in Christ Jesus.

The path of devotedness is blessedly and plainly marked out in the third chapter. It begins with the excellent knowledge of Christ (Phil. 3:7), and terminates with His coming again (Phil. 3:20). The one who pursues this path resembles a runner at the games, pressing on most perseveringly toward the mark for the prize. His heart is so single that "one thing" absorbs his energies. He has but one object -- that he may win Christ -- be actually where He is, in the soul-satisfying enjoyment of his precious Master face to face. Nothing less can meet the fervent desires of his longing soul; for he has already had to do with Him, and a glimpse of the glorified One had convinced him that there was no beauty elsewhere, nothing comparable to Him. He counted all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of his blessed

Lord, so that he could run the race, looking away unto Him, and sing -“Compared with Christ, in all beside No comeliness I see.”

In pursuing the path of devotedness, pressing toward the mark for the prize, there were three things which the apostle diligently sought -- knowledge, power, and position, while looking for the coming of the Savior at the end, as the bright and blessed hope which lighted up every step of the path. To sight and sense the way is fraught with difficulties, while faith knows no halting-place, counts nothing worthy of a moment's delay, and looks for no rest till with the Lord. The soul that ardently pursues this path longs above every thing to win Christ, and be found in Him, not having a righteousness which is of the law, but the righteousness which is of God by faith. Let us now look at these four marks of the path of true devotedness -- knowledge, power, position, and hope. And it should not be unnoticed that the path of worldliness and unbelief proposes the same four objects, yet, alas! how wide the contrast as to their real worth. 1. As to knowledge, the press in this day can scarcely print copies fast enough, even with the facilities of steam power, to

supply the increasing craving for knowledge of the teeming millions. It is found too among all classes. The cheapest and lowest forms of periodical literature abound to meet the growing thirst for knowledge among the poorest of our neighbours; while scientific and refined volumes of learning and intelligence for the more advanced and polite are equally numerous. But what is the object and end of all such knowledge? Does it really climb a step beyond the range under the sun of vanity and vexation of spirit? It boasts of “looking from nature up to nature's God”; but does it ever know God in this way? Are we not told that the world by wisdom knows not God {see 1 Cor. 1:21}?

How different was the heart-longing of the devoted apostle! He desired knowledge, it is true; but it was that I may know Him {Phil. 3:10},

and this was his constant, most fervent desire. What he had already known of Christ had so captivated his heart (and who on earth ever knew Him so well as Paul?), that his whole soul went out after further knowledge of Him. To know more of the infinite worth, unsearchable perfections, and moral excellencies of the Lord Himself, was the knowledge that he so craved. Dear fellow-Christians, are we growing in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? Are we desiring it? Are we searching the Scriptures for it? Are we having such personal intercourse with Christ, as to ensure better acquaintance with Him, His fulness, offices, grace, faithfulness, unchanging, perfect love? 2. With regard to power, what is there that men will not give for a little increase of power over their fellow-men? What sacrifices they often make to obtain it? And, after all, it is only a power that exercises its jurisdiction in a world that is under judgment, lying in the wicked one, and limited by the chilly hand of death. But the power which the Lord's devoted servants desire is not that, but far greater and higher, it is the power of His resurrection {Phil. 3:10}.

God has given to us risen life in Christ, who is the other side of death, and it is the power of that in a world like this -- a power that knows its origin to be beyond this present scene altogether -a life in Him who is the Head of all principality and power. It is a fact that Christ died, and that we died with

Him; it is a fact also that Christ rose from the dead, and that we have life in Him who is risen. It is this risen life in the soul that the apostle so craved the power of, that he might walk here as a risen man, not after the flesh, not like the world, but manifest the walk and conduct of a man on earth who is one with Christ in heaven. Beloved, are we ardently desiring this power? 3. The third point is position. Men will work night and day, and persevere year after year, to raise themselves to a position above others; but the position that Paul so earnestly desired was to be cast out with Christ; to be despised, hated, and to suffer for being like Christ; to suffer for righteousness' sake, and for well-doing; to have the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death {Phil. 3:10}.

Is this, dear Christian brethren, the position in this world that we are honestly seeking? Is it "the fellowship of His sufferings"? If so, we shall, like the apostles, rejoice at being counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of the Lord Jesus {see

Acts 5:41}.

4. As to hope, the world says it is hoping for better days; but, alas, how delusive! How it flatters itself in its own eyes! What boastings are heard of "peace and safety!" How largely too it talks of "progress" and "advancement," thus refusing to accept the divine verdict, Now is the judgment of this world {John 12:31}.

But the Christian's hope is eternally bright and glorious, shedding its gladdening rays over every step of the path of devotedness; for it is the coming of the Lord Himself. As already risen with Christ, seated in Him in heavenly places, one with Him by the baptism of the Holy Ghost, we look for the Savior. As in Christ, according to God's eternal purpose and grace, and by the precious blood of His own Son, having a place in heaven, citizenship in heaven, "we look" not for earthly things {Phil. 3:19},

but we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ {Phil. 3:20},

when redemption-power will be applied to our bodies, and we shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. Then this body of humiliation shall be changed and fashioned like unto His glorious body, and we shall be like Him, and with Him for ever. Then our bodies, as well as our souls, will have capacities for entering into, and enjoying our eternal inheritance, as joint-heirs with Christ. Such is the climax of the Christian's pilgrimage, the terminus of the path of devotedness now laid open to us, and how glorious it is! Then we shall win Christ {Phil. 3:8}.

The race will have been run. Days for faith, and times of failure, will have passed for ever. The wilderness journey will be an event of the past. Hope will be realized. The prize possessed. The glory of God and of the Lamb actually enjoyed. The path began with our being in Christ {1 Cor. 1:30, Eph. 2:10, Phil. 1:1},

and it ends with our being with Christ, and like Christ for ever. As to the end, there is no doubt for those who are Christ's. Jesus said, I will raise him up at the last day {John 6:40, 44, 54};

and He is faithful that promised. He cannot deny Himself. Hence we can truly sing -“We nightly pitch our moving tent A day’s march nearer home.” Some of the hindrances to devotedness are touched on in the fourth chapter. We may briefly refer, first, to a want of yieldingness -Let your moderation (yieldingness) be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand (Phil. 4:5);

and secondly, the heart burdened with cares -Be careful for nothing (Phil. 4:6).

If we trace the ways of Jesus, we never find Him contending for His rights, though He was the only one here who had a right to every thing. But His mind was always to do the will of Him that sent Him. He yielded Himself wholly and unreservedly to the Father’s will. A Christian leaves the path of devotedness, the