

The background of the cover is a photograph of a stone archway, likely a Roman ruin, with a large blue letter 'E' and the word 'BOOK' in red. The archway is flanked by statues and has a decorative keystone. The scene is set against a clear blue sky with some greenery visible in the distance.

The Epistle to the
PHILIPPIANS

E
BOOK
PUBLICATION

by Given O. Blakely

LESSON #1

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:6, KJV)

INTRODUCTION

The role of the Lord in our salvation is generally understated. The thrust of much contemporary preaching and teaching appears to be on the responsibility of the individual. There is, indeed, an important place for declaring the necessity of our involvement. That needful participation, however, will become effective only to the degree that we perceive Divine commitment to our salvation. The Spirit here affirms the interaction of the Lord with us from the beginning of life in Christ until its conclusion in the world. The apprehension of this declaration will produce unparalleled confidence and consistency in the believer. There are to be no apologies for straightforwardness of this word, or for its prominent position. Faith can embrace what is said in this text, build upon it, and realize victory in life.

THE INDISPENSABLE CONFIDENCE

“Being confident of this very thing . . .” The awareness of consistent Divine involvement in the salvation of individuals is a source of great confidence. The ingenuity and wisdom of men, however effective they may appear, can never produce such confidence. There is an obvious thread of this kind of confidence in Paul’s writings. It reflects a faith that is strong, and a heart that is rooted and grounded.

Paul affirms his confidence in those who received the Truth, and does so with remarkable freedom. He does not worry about it contradicting a theological stance, or producing spiritual lethargy in the hearers. To the Corinthians, for example, Paul wrote, ***“Therefore I rejoice that I have confidence in you in everything”*** (2 Cor 7:16, NKJV). Again, when challenging them to contribute liberally to necessity of poor saints, he said, ***“because of the great confidence which we have in you”*** (2 Cor 8:22, NKJV). He knew the Source of new life, and reckoned upon its effectiveness.

When writing to the retrogressing Galatians, Paul also expressed confidence in them. ***“I have confidence in you, in the Lord, that you will have no other mind; but he who troubles you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is”*** (Gal 5:10, NKJV). Mind you, that was affirmed in the face of false teachers who were seeking to lure them away from Christ.

The Thessalonians experienced some confusion concerning the coming of the Lord. Included in his elaboration of the facts concerning Christ’s return, Paul expressed his confidence in the Thessalonians. ***“And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, both that you do and will do the things we command you”*** (2 Thess 3:4). Compare that with the expression of Moses to the recalcitrant Israelites. ***“You have been rebellious against the LORD from the day that I knew you”*** (Deut 9:24). What was the difference? It was not in the speakers Moses and Paul. Both were godly, and were being used mightily by God. The difference was in the people. Israel was not regenerate and the the Thessalonians were.

Paul wrote to Philemon about a very sensitive situation. Onesimus was Philemon’s run-a-way slave. He had been converted through Paul’s ministry, and now Paul sent him back to Philemon. What would this master do? Knowing of his faith, Paul wrote, ***“Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say”*** (Phile 21). The rarity of such an attitude confirms it comes from closeness to the Lord and clear spiritual perception.

Every person who labors in the Kingdom needs this kind of confidence. It is difficult enough to expend our energies for the Lord without entertaining continual doubt about those who receive our words.

The results of receiving and obeying the truth are not only realized by those who do it, but by those who sow the seed. When there is evidence of Divine working, confidence can be expressed with joy. If that evidence is lacking, doubts will assault the laborer concerning his work. What a marvelous ministry each believer has when they live by faith and walk in the Spirit. Those who have taught them will have confidence in them.

THE WORK WAS BEGUN BY GOD

“ . . . that He which hath begun a good work in you . . .” Ungodly men trust in strategies. Godly men trust in the God of salvation. How was it that Paul knew who had ***“begun a good work”*** in the Philippians? Some might suppose it was revealed to him. Indeed, I do not discount that is involved. However, as in other cases, there was **evidence** that God has started a work in the Philippians. Of the Colossians, Paul said, ***“For though I am absent in the flesh,***

yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ" (Col 2:5). Indeed, he had heard of the excellent progress of the Colossians from Epaphras (Col 1:4,6-9).

Wherever the Lord works, there is evidence. He does nothing **"in a corner"** (Acts 26:26). Take the Thessalonians as an example. Paul knew they were elected by God: **"knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God"** (1 Thess 1:4). This knowledge was prompted by evidence. **"For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake. And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit"** (1 Thess 1:5-6). The same was true of the Ephesians. **"In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise"** (Eph 1:13). The same was said of the Colossians (Col 1:6).

This same type of evidence was found in the Philippians. They had been noted for their instant response **"from the first day until now."** That response was not the result of self-discipline, but of Divine working! Paul knew it was the exclusive **"power"** of God that is at work in believers, and had confidence it would continue (Eph 3:20).

The Lord does not simply **"begin"** the work, but is also pledged to **"finish"** it. He truly is **"The Author and Finisher of our faith"** (Heb 12:2). The authoring of faith is the same as the beginning of the work. Faith is the well from which the experience of spiritual life springs—and it was authored by Jesus! It is a **"good work,"** as any who have participated in it will confess.

Holy beginnings are the source of joy and confidence in those who have them, as well as those who behold them. How often the apostle would call upon believers to recall their beginning in Christ Jesus (Rom 6:17,20; 1 Cor 6:10-11; Eph 1:13; Eph 2:12-13; Eph 5:8; Heb 10:32). And why so? **Because the recollection of God's work in our conversion will stimulate confidence that He will it, performing it until the day of Christ!**

Let every child of God think often, and in an extended manner, upon their beginning in Christ Jesus. It was God who **"began a good work in you."** It was good in its inception, and it is still good. If you are ever tempted to think there are no advantages to life in Christ, consider your beginning. Consider how good it was. Whatever sorrows life may have dealt you, life in Christ Jesus is a **"good work."** It is something GOD did! It is HIS work. There is nothing faulty about it, but it is altogether good, even as the One Who gave it to you. The work is not the point, but the ONE Who performed it!

PERFORMED UNTIL JESUS COMES

" . . . will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." While men tend to glory ONLY in spiritual beginnings, the eye of the Apostle reaches further. He looks at the work of God as consummating in **"the day of Christ."** As marvelous as regeneration is, it is the beginning, and not the ending. **Men count how many start the good fight of faith – the Lord counts how many finish! It takes God to finish the work as well as to start it!** Were the Lord ever to stop working, we would instantly be severed from Him, and consigned to the lake of fire. I do not believe many have seen this.

"The day of Jesus Christ" is the day of His revelation—when He will be unveiled in all of His glory to an assembled universe (1 Tim 6:15). Later in this epistle, Paul refers to **"the day of Christ"** (Phil 1:9). To the Corinthians, he spoke of **"the day of our Lord Jesus Christ,"** and **"the day of the Lord Jesus"** (1 Cor 1:8; 5:5; 2 Cor 1:14). To the Thessalonians, he wrote of **"the day of the Lord"** coming as a thief in the night (1 Thess 5:2). Peter also referred to it as **"the day of the Lord"** (2 Pet 3:10).

This is the consummate day—the most significant day! If the individual does not stand in that day, life has been lived in vain! For that reason, it is simply called **"the day,"** emphasizing its singular importance (1 Cor 3:13). The eyes and hearts of the faithful are toward that day—the revelation of Jesus Christ. The work that was started in us must continue until that time, advancing and being perfected. If, in that day, we are rejected, it will make no difference what occurred throughout the entirety of our lives!

There is a certain essentiality to be seen here—the working of God throughout the *duration* of our lives. There is no place of mythical safety in this world, where Divine activity is no longer required! What the Lord has started, He must finish! The work must continue in this world until the Lord comes, for only then will our adversary be once and for all removed. Only then will the living be relieved of the handicap of a mortal frame.

Paul had confidence this working would occur in the Philippians because of their obvious faith and love. They were living by faith, walking in the Spirit, and resisting the wicked one. God continues the work in such as this. It is for this reason that stern Apostolic warnings are issued to the spiritually lethargic and indifferent. Divine working will not continue where the door of entrance is shut to Him. One has only to review the word of Jesus to *the church of the closed door*—Laodicea—to confirm this (Rev 3:20).

Child of God, if you will avail yourself of the Divine fellowship into which you have been called (1 Cor 1:9), the Lord will perform the work until the day of Christ. If you will live by faith and walk in

the Spirit, the Lord will ***“finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness”*** (Rom 9:28). The Father can ***“make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ”*** (Heb 13:21). When we know this, and behold the beginning of spiritual life in our brethren, we can have confidence the work will be completed. There is a certain relief ministered to the soul in the awareness of these things that cannot be induced by human wisdom or self-confidence. Thanks be unto God for it!

LESSON #2

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

TEXT

“Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Phil 1:1, KJV)

INTRODUCTION

Apostolic salutations tell us much about several things. In them, we see the **thrust** of the Kingdom of Jesus. We also see the **nature** of life in Christ, and the **key elements** required to maintain it. Additionally, the **heart** of the Apostle himself is exposed, revealing the nature of the Apostolic office, and how it had affected his person. The salutation before us is a common one in the Apostolic writings. However, we must not allow its familiarity to cause us to pass it by. *Just as common food is essential and good for the nourishment of the body, so common salutations and other expressions are food for the soul, bringing us much needed nourishment.* These wonderful greetings encourage a spiritual perspective of both the people of God and the truth of God. They reveal the willing involvement of the Godhead with the saints, and encourage us to fervently seek that involvement.

GRACE BE UNTO YOU

“Grace be unto you . . .” The grace of God is such a marvelous resource it cannot be overemphasized. *Grace never encourages wrong, never glosses reality, and never leaves the child of God deficient. Grace is always from the Lord, always profitable, and always strengthening.* The fact that grace is consistently pronounced upon the people of God confirms its indispensability. Not only is it necessary for the forgiveness of sin and the circumcision of *“the body of the sins of the flesh”* (Col 2:11-12; Rom 6:6), it is also essential for living to the Lord (Rom 6:11).

Because of doctrinal corruption concerning grace, many have chosen to neglect it, virtually hiding it from the people, as though the knowledge of the grace of God would encourage sin. Those with legalistic tendencies, or inclinations to justification by law, are particularly fearful of any emphasis on the grace of God. Jude warned of false *“ungodly men”* who were known for *“turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness”* (Jude 4). The flaw, however, was not caused by grace, but by *“ungodly men.”* Failing to declare *“the true grace of God”* (1 Pet 5:12) only encourages the harbingers of heresy to purvey their corrupt teaching among men. Error can only be neutralized by truth, never by silence or neglect.

“Grace” is more than a doctrine, or a mere word to be bantered about in the arena of theological controversy. It speaks of a Divine trait, or quality. Preeminently, it opens to us the very heart of God—His favor, approval, sanction, and blessing. This is not a mere Divine medication, given to remove the infection of sin. *It is a sphere of Divine influence wherein spiritual graces flourish and heavenly fellowship is realized.*

The antithesis of the grace of God is the wrath of God. Apart from Jesus Christ, the *“wrath of God”* remained upon us (John 3:36). We were, in fact, *“children of wrath, even as others”* (Eph 2:3). Whatever one may think about the Lord’s view of humanity, He is *“angry with the wicked every day”* (Psa 7:11). We must ever be mindful of the fact, *“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”* (Heb 10:31).

However, the grace of God is like the sun shining in its full strength upon the reconciled ones. God is inclined to the redeemed, loves them, and prefers them. He has written them upon the palms of His hands, unwilling to forget them (Isa 49:16). The words of Haggai are fulfilled in those who taste of the grace of God. *“I will . . . make you like a signet ring; for I have chosen you, says the LORD of hosts”* (Hag 2:23, NKJV).

Grace is the domain in which we *“stand”* (Rom 5:2). It is the experience of the smile of God, and His personal delight in us. It all comes through Christ Jesus, yet it *does* come to us. All of this means

there is no need to live a life that provokes the Lord—not if His grace can be to us! This wonderful salutation means grace is available. It means God is disposed to give it. It means the saints can experience it!

By addressing the saints in this manner, the Spirit raises their consciousness concerning grace. He calls their minds up higher, where Divine fellowship and approval are more than a theological position.

PEACE BE UNTO YOU

“Grace be unto you, and peace . . .” What a needful possession peace is! An agitated soul is a weak one, and a person in turmoil is a person in jeopardy. **“Peace”** is an exceeding large word. It involves satisfaction, calmness, composure, and quietness. Above these, it entails harmony with God, unity with His purpose, and repose in His will.

“Peace” is not the product of human effort. It comes from the Lord. Like the land of Canaan was to the Jews, we cannot enter into peace until the Lord gives it to us. But He IS inclined to give it, as our text affirms. Jesus said to His disciples, **“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid”** (John 14:27). Peace, then, results from the imparting of the **“Divine nature”** (2 Pet 1:4). It is the personal experience of a Divine perspective. When experienced, we will not allow our hearts to be troubled or dominated by fear. Only a casual reflection on these words will confirm our desperate need of **“peace.”**

Again, the fact that **“peace”** is sent to us confirms our need of the same. No one is beyond the need of **“peace,”** regardless of life’s circumstances. Peace is not only for troublesome times, it is for **all** times. It can sit upon the throne of our lives, exercising a beneficent reign over us. As it is written, **“And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful”** (Col 3:15).

The consideration of peace governing our hearts is challenging. It does not rule us ruthlessly, but mercifully. Peace is a considerate ruler, calming troubled waters, bringing spiritual strength, and opening the door of hope. It is a ruler that prevails over all intrusions. But we must **“LET”** it rule in our hearts! **“Peace”** will not reign if we refuse to allow it to do so.

In Christ Jesus, we have been **“called”** into a state of **“peace.”** This is not peace in the world, for there we **“will have tribulation”** (John 16:33). Rather, this is kingdom soil—but another view of the heavenly places. **“Peace”** is the ambience in which spiritual growth and fruitfulness take place. As it is written, **“Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace”** (James 3:18). When we are at peace with God, and know it, evil is neutralized and righteousness is maximized. *A settled soul clears the eyes, sensitizes the heart, and opens the ears.*

The Gospel is a **“gospel of peace”** (Rom 10:15). The kingdom of God is **“in peace”** (Rom 14:17). Jesus came and **“preached peace”** to we who were **“afar off”** (Eph 2:17). God is declared to be **“the God of peace”** (1 Thess 5:23). What is more, **“peace”** can be multiplied to us (1 Pet 1:2). It can come to us in increased measures.

How appropriate, therefore, that this letter includes **“peace to you”** in its salutation! It is a letter written within the framework of reconciliation to God and deliverance from the power of darkness. It has the covering of hope upon it, and pulsates with the freshness of newborn life. **“Peace”** is what we need, and **“peace”** is what we can have! Let every child of God be mindful of this, and seek to be a conveyor or such a benefit among the people of God.

FROM THE FATHER AND JESUS CHRIST

“Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.” Grace and peace are **not** supplied, housed or distributed by a religious organization. They are Divine resources, given and maintained by Deity! Those propagating an academic Gospel, with no life or hope, know nothing of either grace or peace. They promote a Platonic relationship, based solely upon human reason, and saturated with religious theory. But such a view will not sustain the soul. There must be contact with the Living God and the Lord Jesus Christ, else we will perish. Thus grace and peace are said to come to us **“from God OUR Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.”**

Fourteen times, grace and peace are said to come from the Father and the Son (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2; Phil 1:2; Col 1:2; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:2; 1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2; Tit 1:4; Phile 3; 2 John 1:3). They do not come from a book, but from the Persons of the Father and the Son. They are personally dispensed, not absorbed through mental disciplines.

Twenty-one times we read of **“the grace of God”** (Lk 2:40; Acts 11:23; 13:43; 14:26; 15:40; 20:24; Rom 5:15; 1 Cor 1:4; 3:10; 15:10; 2 Cor 1:12; 6:1; 8:1; Gal 2:21; Eph 3:2,7; Col 1:6; Tit 2:11; Heb

2:9; 12:15). Once we read of ***“the grace of Christ”*** (Gal 1:6), twice of ***“the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ”*** (Acts 15:11; 2 Cor 13:14), and ten times of ***“the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ”*** (Rom 16:20,24; 1 Cor 16:23; 2 Cor 8:9; Gal 6:18; Phil 4:23; 1 Thess 5:28; 2 Thess 3:18; Phile 25; Rev 22:21).

We learn from this that **both the Father and the Son are favorably disposed toward us**. It is not that God is angry with us, and Jesus is warding off His anger by intercession (a commonly held view). We have really been ***“reconciled to God”*** (Rom 5:10), and are really ***“in Christ”*** (Rom 8:1). Were this not the case, neither God nor Jesus would give us ***“grace and peace.”***

The fact that ***“grace and peace”*** come from God the Father confirms He is satisfied with the atoning death of Christ, and pleased that we have received the reconciliation (Rom 5:11). He is ***“not ashamed”*** to be called our God, because we have renounced earthly priorities to embrace His great salvation (Heb 11:16). If it was said of Israel, ***“The LORD your God in your midst, The Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing”*** (Zeph 3:17), how much more will be said of those in Christ Jesus, to whom God promises an ***“abundance of grace”*** (Rom 5:17).

The fact that ***“grace and peace”*** come from the Lord Jesus Christ confirms He has ***“received us to the glory of God”*** (Rom 15:7). It comes through Him as the exclusive Representative of our race, for whom this grace is reserved. Those in Christ Jesus are, by that very circumstance, are qualified to receive this grace. The Lord confirmed this grace by becoming poor, that ***“we through His poverty might be made rich”*** (2 Cor 8:9). But it did not end there! Rather, that was the beginning. Now His grace can be ***“with your spirit”*** (Gal 6:18; Phile 25), within the most basic part of your person. Jesus will give it to you freely because you have ***“received”*** Him (John 1:12). You have every reason to be optimistic about your future!

LESSON #3

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“I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now.” (Phil 1:3-5, KJV)

INTRODUCTION

Spiritual life involves associations with kindred spirits. Having been brought into **“one body”** by the grace of God, there are interdependencies within that body that are essential and enjoyable. This is particularly true as we walk in the Spirit, and live by faith. The anticipation of brethren dwelling together in unity was expressed by the Psalmist, for the Lord commands the blessing of **“life forevermore”** in such sacred environs (Psa 133:1-3). A religion that promotes isolated living is a robber to the souls of men. We begin new life in association with kindred spirits, and, in the end, we will enter an eternal **“city.”** Blessed is the person who knows, and takes advantage of, holy associations in this world. They will be better suited for the life that now is, and that which is to come.

THANKFUL UPON EVERY REMEMBRANCE

“I thank my God upon every remembrance of you . . .” The faith-life is a selfless life. By that I mean it is not self-centered. There are, indeed, personal considerations, but they are within the context of a greater life than our own. First, our lives are **“hid with Christ in God”** (Col 3:3). Second, they are intertwined with those who are also **“in Christ Jesus.”** Our life is a shared life, **“for we are members of one another”** (Eph 4:25). There are spiritual benefits that simply cannot be received in isolation from those who are holding to **“the Head”** (Col 2:19).

Knowing this, Paul made a practice of remembering believers with whom he came into contact. Guided by Divine providence into such holy associations, he gained much advantage from them. The Philippians are a case in point. What a marvelous circumstance is confessed in this statement! **“I thank my God on EVERY remembrance of you.”** This was not true of everyone Paul remembered! There were some recollections that brought a weight to his soul. He once spoke of **“the care of all the churches”** which came like a debilitating weight upon him every day (2 Cor 11:28). He also recalled how Demas forsook him (2 Tim 4:10), Alexander opposed him (2 Tim 4:14), and Hymenaeus and Philetus had erred (2 Tim 2:17). He did not give thanks for such associations, which brought pain to his heart. But this was not the case with the Philippians.

The **“remembrance”** of which he spoke implies something that stirred the memory—a mentioning of the Philippians, considerations, or sights and sounds that brought them back to his mind. Paul wrote of hearing of the faith of the Ephesians and Colossians, and giving thanks for them (Eph 1:15-16; Col 1:3-4). He recalled the labor of the Thessalonians, and mentioned them in his prayers (1 Thess 1:2-3). He told Timothy he remembered him in his prayers **“night and day”** (2 Tim 1:3). Hearing about Philemon’s faith and love, Paul always mentioned him in his prayers (Phile 1:4-5). The powerful effects of spiritual life upon others must not be undervalued.

Interestingly, this is the only place this precise statement is found. It reveals the spiritual stability of the Philippians. There are countless professed believers I have met whom I rarely recall. They provided no sustenance for the soul, and gave little indication of involvement with God. They do not flee from my memory because I disdain them, but because they lacked mutuality in the Son. As you walk in the light, you are drawn to kindred spirits. It is not merely a sense of camaraderie that produces such influences. Such associations bring strength to the soul. Faith is refurbished, hope renewed, and joy made more full when we behold the life of Christ in others.

Even the memories of holy associations have a calculated effect upon the soul. With the Philippians, **“every remembrance”** of them produced thankfulness in Paul’s spirit. Any mention of them, a visitor from them, or a recollection of their spiritual consistency brought profit to the Apostle. Oh, it is a noble aspiration, indeed, to seek to so live that the very remembrance of us will bring benefit to our brothers and sisters. There is no way to estimate the value of remembering godly influences God has orchestrated.

REQUESTS THAT ARE MADE WITH JOY

“ . . . always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy. . . ” Here is a most unique expression revealing the interdependence of life in Christ’s body. When Paul prayed for the Philippians, he did so **“with joy.”** Contrast this with the effect of hearing of divisions in Corinth (1 Cor 11:18), or of reversions to the Law in Galatia (Gal 4:11). Paul did not mention special prayers for either of those congregations. He made no allusion to joy produced by their memory, or to a strong desire to be with them. He thanked God for what was given to the Corinthians (1 Cor 1:4), but not for the manner in which they were using those dispensations. Neither congregation is said to have brought joy to the Apostle—only concern.

The Philippians, however, were so absorbed with the work of the Kingdom, that every time Paul prayed for them, he did so **“with joy.”** When Paul prayed, the Philippians would come into his mind. The recollection of past associations with them produced **“joy.”** The knowledge of the inheritance reserved for them produced **“prayer.”** Joy spoke of the past, and prayer of the future—both gloriously entwined in the spirit of the Apostle.

Here is an aspect of prayer we do well to explore. Jude spoke of praying *“in the Holy Spirit”* (Jude 20). James spoke of prayer *“offered in faith”* (James 5:15, NASB). Paul wrote of praying *“with the spirit and with the understanding”* (1 Cor 14:15). Here, however, we read of praying *“with joy.”* For some, this is doubtless a totally new thought. There are some who never pray unless there is a crisis. For them, prayer is always related to sorrow, concern, and a heavy heart. Others only pray perfunctorily—out of habit. For them, prayer brings neither exhilaration nor debilitation. But what about praying *“with joy”*—when your heart is lifted up, and your spirit wafted into the heavenlies on the wings of cheerful radiance?

You know the impact of receiving the Gospel *“with joy of the Holy Spirit”* (1 Thess 1:6). Think of the effect of joy permeating your prayers! It will bring the joyful note of spiritual optimism to them. There will be a sound of expectation in your prayers as requests are mingled with anticipation. Oh, for more of this experience—praying *“with joy.”*

Here is a remarkable ministry we can have toward each other. Our lives can be so conducted that the recollection of them will produce joy in the hearts of our brethren. That joy can be experienced when they pray. Ponder, for a moment, the versatility of prayer. When your heart is in tune with heaven, and the gates of your spirit are opened to heavenly influences, your prayers can be helped by holy recollections. Do not pray with restricted vision and dull hearts—seek to have a heart large enough to remember saints when you pray. The memory will help you pray better. It will cause joy to come into your heart and make your thoughts more clear. Faith and hope will join together in making your prayers more effective.

That is a ministry we can have to one another. What a marvelous potential for the Kingdom! There is every reason to believe you can be an advantage to your brethren, even when you are not with them. The memory of your person and work can impact upon the prayers of fellow believers.

FELLOWSHIP IN THE GOSPEL

“ . . . for [because of] your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now.” Here is a remarkably large verse! The Apostle states the reason for his joyful recollection of the Philippians in prayer. First, they had participated in the Gospel, having received it by faith. Second, they responded immediately to the Gospel (i.e., *“from the first day”*). Third, they were continuing in the *“fellowship [participation] in the Gospel.”* An additional consideration is their continued support of, or sharing with, the Apostle in his labors (Phil 4:14), although that appears to be a secondary consideration here.

The word *“fellowship”* is a significant one, having to do with nearly every aspect of the Kingdom. It speaks of sharing, participation, affiliation, and joining in. Believers have been called into *“the fellowship”* of Jesus (1 Cor 1:9), the *“fellowship”* of ministering to saints (2 Cor 8:4), and *“the fellowship of the Spirit”* (Phil 2:1). There is even *“the fellowship of the mystery”* which has been hidden in God (Eph 3:9), and *“the fellowship”* of Christ’s sufferings (Phil 3:10). Spiritual life is not being a spectator, or identification with a mere organization. In Christ, we are participants.

To *“fellowship,”* or participate, in the Gospel, is to experience union with the Christ of the Gospel. We are dead with Him (2 Tim 2:11), buried with Him (Rom 6:4), and are risen with Him (Col 2:12). We are seated together with Him in heavenly places (Eph 2:6), and anticipate sitting with Him in His throne (Rev 3:21). That is *“fellowship in the Gospel.”*

The Philippians entered into this fellowship *“from the beginning.”* They were not tardy in their response to the Gospel. Their participation was not the result of a long and arduous process. Promptly, upon hearing the truth of the Gospel, these brethren embraced it through faith. That was the case with Lydia and her household (Acts 16:14-15), and the Philippian jailer and his household (Acts 16:27-34). It is rare indeed, that we hear of such souls—those who immediately respond to the Gospel. Such are sources of great joy.

This church was noted for its constancy in the faith. They not only reacted in faith *“from the first day,”* they maintained that posture *“until now.”* How many are the souls who have left their first love (Rev 2:4), departed from the faith (1 Tim 4:1), and whose love has waxed cold (Matt 24:12). Multitudes have drawn back, failing to press into the most holy place (Heb 10:22-39). They have not gone on *“to perfection”* (Heb 6:1), or grown up into Christ *“in all things”* (Eph 4:15). While there is grace for constancy to be common, it appears that few have availed themselves of it.

But this was not the case with the brethren at Philippi! They continued in this life-sustaining fellowship, causing joy to well up in the heart of the Apostle. It is a most noble ambition to aspire to spiritual growth and constancy. Our faithfulness can bring the strength of joy (Neh 8:10) to weary pilgrims along the way. It will cause renewed life to course through the souls of Kingdom warriors, enabling them to pray *“with everlasting joy upon their heads”* (Isa 35:10; 51:11). Kingdom laborers need the advantages brought by the recollection of our fellowship in the Gospel! Let us be sure they have it.

LESSON #4

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:6, KJV)

INTRODUCTION

The role of the Lord in our salvation is generally understated. The thrust of much contemporary preaching and teaching appears to be on the responsibility of the individual. There is, indeed, an important place for declaring the necessity of our involvement. That needful participation, however, will become effective only to the degree that we perceive Divine commitment to our salvation. The Spirit here affirms the interaction of the Lord with us from the beginning of life in Christ until its conclusion in the world. The apprehension of this declaration will produce unparalleled confidence and consistency in the believer. There are to be no apologies for straightforwardness of this word, or for its prominent position. Faith can embrace what is said in this text, build upon it, and realize victory in life.

THE INDISPENSABLE CONFIDENCE

“Being confident of this very thing . . .” The awareness of consistent Divine involvement in the salvation of individuals is a source of great confidence. The ingenuity and wisdom of men, however effective they may appear, can never produce such confidence. There is an obvious thread of this kind of confidence in Paul’s writings. It reflects a faith that is strong, and a heart that is rooted and grounded.

Paul affirms his confidence in those who received the Truth, and does so with remarkable freedom. He does not worry about it contradicting a theological stance, or producing spiritual lethargy in the hearers. To the Corinthians, for example, Paul wrote, ***“Therefore I rejoice that I have confidence in you in everything”*** (2 Cor 7:16, NKJV). Again, when challenging them to contribute liberally to necessity of poor saints, he said, ***“because of the great confidence which we have in you”*** (2 Cor 8:22, NKJV). He knew the Source of new life, and reckoned upon its effectiveness.

When writing to the retrogressing Galatians, Paul also expressed confidence in them. ***“I have confidence in you, in the Lord, that you will have no other mind; but he who troubles you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is”*** (Gal 5:10, NKJV). Mind you, that was affirmed in the face of false teachers who were seeking to lure them away from Christ.

The Thessalonians experienced some confusion concerning the coming of the Lord. Included in his elaboration of the facts concerning Christ’s return, Paul expressed his confidence in the Thessalonians. ***“And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, both that you do and will do the things we command you”*** (2 Thess 3:4). Compare that with the expression of Moses to the recalcitrant Israelites. ***“You have been rebellious against the LORD from the day that I knew you”*** (Deut 9:24). What was the difference? It was not in the speakers Moses and Paul. Both were godly, and were being used mightily by God. The difference was in the people. Israel was not regenerate and the the Thessalonians were.

Paul wrote to Philemon about a very sensitive situation. Onesimus was Philemon’s run-a-way slave. He had been converted through Paul’s ministry, and now Paul sent him back to Philemon. What would this master do? Knowing of his faith, Paul wrote, ***“Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say”*** (Phile 21). The rarity of such an attitude confirms it comes from closeness to the Lord and clear spiritual perception.

Every person who labors in the Kingdom needs this kind of confidence. It is difficult enough to expend our energies for the Lord without entertaining continual doubt about those who receive our words.

The results of receiving and obeying the truth are not only realized by those who do it, but by those who sow the seed. When there is evidence of Divine working, confidence can be expressed with joy. If that evidence is lacking, doubts will assault the laborer concerning his work. What a marvelous ministry each believer has when they live by faith and walk in the Spirit. Those who have taught them will have confidence in them.

THE WORK WAS BEGUN BY GOD

“ . . . that He which hath begun a good work in you . . .” Ungodly men trust in strategies. Godly men trust in the God of salvation. How was it that Paul knew who had ***“begun a good work”*** in the Philippians? Some might suppose it was revealed to him. Indeed, I do not discount that is involved. However, as in other cases, there was **evidence** that God has started a work in the Philippians. Of the Colossians, Paul said, ***“For though I am absent in the flesh,***

yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ" (Col 2:5). Indeed, he had heard of the excellent progress of the Colossians from Epaphras (Col 1:4,6-9).

Wherever the Lord works, there is evidence. He does nothing *"in a corner"* (Acts 26:26). Take the Thessalonians as an example. Paul knew they were elected by God: *"knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God"* (1 Thess 1:4). This knowledge was prompted by evidence. *"For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake. And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit"* (1 Thess 1:5-6). The same was true of the Ephesians. *"In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise"* (Eph 1:13). The same was said of the Colossians (Col 1:6).

This same type of evidence was found in the Philippians. They had been noted for their instant response *"from the first day until now."* That response was not the result of self-discipline, but of Divine working! Paul knew it was the exclusive *"power"* of God that is at work in believers, and had confidence it would continue (Eph 3:20).

The Lord does not simply *"begin"* the work, but is also pledged to *"finish"* it. He truly is *"The Author and Finisher of our faith"* (Heb 12:2). The authoring of faith is the same as the beginning of the work. Faith is the well from which the experience of spiritual life springs—and it was authored by Jesus! It is a *"good work,"* as any who have participated in it will confess.

Holy beginnings are the source of joy and confidence in those who have them, as well as those who behold them. How often the apostle would call upon believers to recall their beginning in Christ Jesus (Rom 6:17,20; 1 Cor 6:10-11; Eph 1:13; Eph 2:12-13; Eph 5:8; Heb 10:32). And why so? **Because the recollection of God's work in our conversion will stimulate confidence that He will it, performing it until the day of Christ!**

Let every child of God think often, and in an extended manner, upon their beginning in Christ Jesus. It was God who *"began a good work in you."* It was good in its inception, and it is still good. If you are ever tempted to think there are no advantages to life in Christ, consider your beginning. Consider how good it was. Whatever sorrows life may have dealt you, life in Christ Jesus is a *"good work."* It is something GOD did! It is HIS work. There is nothing faulty about it, but it is altogether good, even as the One Who gave it to you. The work is not the point, but the ONE Who performed it!

PERFORMED UNTIL JESUS COMES

" . . . will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." While men tend to glory ONLY in spiritual beginnings, the eye of the Apostle reaches further. He looks at the work of God as consummating in *"the day of Christ."* As marvelous as regeneration is, it is the beginning, and not the ending. *Men count how many start the good fight of faith – the Lord counts how many finish! It takes God to finish the work as well as to start it!* Were the Lord ever to stop working, we would instantly be severed from Him, and consigned to the lake of fire. I do not believe many have seen this.

"The day of Jesus Christ" is the day of His revelation—when He will be unveiled in all of His glory to an assembled universe (1 Tim 6:15). Later in this epistle, Paul refers to *"the day of Christ"* (Phil 1:9). To the Corinthians, he spoke of *"the day of our Lord Jesus Christ,"* and *"the day of the Lord Jesus"* (1 Cor 1:8; 5:5; 2 Cor 1:14). To the Thessalonians, he wrote of *"the day of the Lord"* coming as a thief in the night (1 Thess 5:2). Peter also referred to it as *"the day of the Lord"* (2 Pet 3:10).

This is the consummate day—the most significant day! If the individual does not stand in that day, life has been lived in vain! For that reason, it is simply called *"the day,"* emphasizing its singular importance (1 Cor 3:13). The eyes and hearts of the faithful are toward that day—the revelation of Jesus Christ. The work that was started in us must continue until that time, advancing and being perfected. If, in that day, we are rejected, it will make no difference what occurred throughout the entirety of our lives!

There is a certain essentiality to be seen here—the working of God throughout the *duration* of our lives. There is no place of mythical safety in this world, where Divine activity is no longer required! What the Lord has started, He must finish! The work must continue in this world until the Lord comes, for only then will our adversary be once and for all removed. Only then will the living be relieved of the handicap of a mortal frame.

Paul had confidence this working would occur in the Philippians because of their obvious faith and love. They were living by faith, walking in the Spirit, and resisting the wicked one. God continues the work in such as this. It is for this reason that stern Apostolic warnings are issued to the spiritually lethargic and indifferent. Divine working will not continue where the door of entrance is shut to Him. One has only to review the word of Jesus to *the church of the closed door*—Laodicea—to confirm this (Rev 3:20).

Child of God, if you will avail yourself of the Divine fellowship into which you have been called (1 Cor 1:9), the Lord will perform the work until the day of Christ. If you will live by faith and walk in

the Spirit, the Lord will ***“finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness”*** (Rom 9:28). The Father can ***“make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ”*** (Heb 13:21). When we know this, and behold the beginning of spiritual life in our brethren, we can have confidence the work will be completed. There is a certain relief ministered to the soul in the awareness of these things that cannot be induced by human wisdom or self-confidence. Thanks be unto God for it!

LESSON #5

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“Just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace. For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ.”
(Phil 1:7-8, NKJV)

INTRODUCTION

There is a fellowship in Christ that is intensely personal and enjoyable. It transcends institutional affiliation and identity with cherished traditions. It is more profound than anything related to career development, social agendas, or national interests. In Jesus we come into the religion of the heart. Grace sensitizes us to the things and the people of God. In our most severe trial, the saints of God become exceeding precious to us as they fellowship in the very grace we have experienced. This is contrary to man’s natural bent, which causes him to be basically self-centered.

IT IS RIGHT FOR ME TO THINK THIS IF YOU

“Even as it is meet (right or proper) for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart . . .” (KJV). The imprisoned Apostle has expressed confidence that God will continue performing the work He has started in the Philippians, until Christ’s appearing. He now affirms this is not the mere expression of fleshly emotion. It is **not** a fervent desire that God will continue working in them, but a confident persuasion that He will—and there is a vast difference between the two.

There are some people for whom strong spiritual aspirations are questionable. Their condition is uncertain, and we do not know if they will finish the race or not. Compare the assurance in Paul’s expression to the Philippians with his words to the Galatians: ***“I am afraid for you . . . I have doubts about you”*** (Gal 4:11,20, NKJV). For the Galatians, it was **“right”** to desire that Christ be **“formed”** in them (Gal 4:19). With the Philippians, it was **“right”** to expect it would be accomplished. This is a higher level of expectation, prompted by the recognition of a present Divine working.

A certain relief and consolation comes with confidence that God will continue working in someone until the day of Christ. This is the opposite of **“the deep concern (anxiety)”** for the churches which came upon Paul (2 Cor 11:28). There are spiritual weights that are decidedly reduced when those with whom we labor are growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ. When doubt of them completing the race is replaced with a certainty of its victorious completion, grace is ministered to the heart.

Now Paul affirms the rightness of this confidence is owing to them being in his heart. This is an expression denoting the love of the brethren—**having them in our heart**. Remember, Paul’s recollection of unbelieving Israel caused him to say, ***“I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart”*** (Rom 9:2). He could not forget their condition, and it weighed him down. But with the Philippians, great confidence was sanctified by having them in his heart. That is what **“the love of the brethren”** does for the soldier of Christ. This type of confidence was expressed by the aged John. ***“We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren”*** (1 John 3:14). *That is having the people of God in your heart!*

At least one other translation of this verse reads, ***“because you hold me in your heart”*** (NRSV). But the meaning is the same—he is speaking about the love of the brethren. This is a preference for them—a longing for them. Their company is enjoyed and sought. Their good is contemplated and pursued. The individual who loves the brethren abides in the light (1 John 2:10). Loving the brethren is evidence you have been born of God (1 John 4:7). If we love one another, God dwells in us, and His love is being perfected in us (1 John 4:12). What powerful evidence is delivered to us when we have the brethren in our heart—when we love them!

Consider that all of this was prompted by the faith and faithfulness of the Philippians. Their spiritual demeanor confirmed that God had begun a good work in them. That is what endeared them to the Apostle—what God had done in them. It also made it **right** to be confident He would complete the work.

PARTAKERS OF MY GRACE

“ . . . inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace . . . ” (KJV). The manner in which Paul speaks of grace is refreshing, and contradicting of the world’s way of reasoning. He associates grace with his bonds (chains) and defending and confirming the Gospel. In the former, men restrained him for preaching. In the latter he was granted liberty to do so. In both, grace was the consistent and present factor.

He calls it **“my grace”** because he had participated in it. Grace had enabled and sustained him, upheld and strengthened him. The Philippians had joined with him in this experience, identifying themselves with him. They had associated themselves with Paul by ministering to him and praying for him. Thus they were **“partakers”** with him in the grace he experienced.

Paul considers his life in Christ as one contiguous whole. He does not view it as differing and contradicting segments. As he says later, ***“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain”*** (1:21). He associated all of his life with Christ and experiencing His grace. He takes the extremities of his experience, and gathers them together under the canopy of grace.

Some will think it foolish to consider imprisonment an advantage from God. Yet Paul relates his ***“bonds,”*** or chains, to the grace of God. How can this be so? In Christ Jesus, suffering is the appointed prelude to reigning (2 Tim 2:12). Jesus told us we are blessed ***“when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake”*** (Matt 5:11). The reason for the blessedness is glorious: ***“for great is your reward in heaven”*** (Matt 5:12). The opposition of men thus becomes the evidence of a reward in heaven. The greater the opposition, the greater the reward. It is BECAUSE of the reward that the godly are persecuted. A place for Kingdom laborers has been prepared in God’s Kingdom ***“from the foundation of the world”*** (Matt 25:34). It is necessary, however, that we be ***“counted worthy”*** of that Kingdom—thus the suffering (2 Thess 1:5). Little wonder the Apostles, after they had been beaten severely, ***“departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name”*** (Acts 5:41). There is not only grace, therefore, to sustain us in the bonds, but grace brings us into the afflictions themselves, giving us unspeakable benefit IN them. The Philippians had fellowshiped in this grace by sending Epaphroditus, who was with Paul in prison (2:25-27).

Paul refers to the unrestrained preaching of the Gospel as ***“the defense and confirmation of the gospel.”*** He knew grace had been given Him to minister ***“the Gospel of God”*** (Rom 15:15). To the Ephesians he confessed grace was ***“given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ”*** (Eph 3:8). True preaching consists of defending and confirming the Gospel: showing its relevance, and substantiating its power. The substantiation of Gospel power is seen in its effects within those who embrace it. It is the means employed by God to accomplish salvation. The Philippians were participating in Paul’s ministry of the Gospel, hereby confirming their acceptance by God.

I LONG AFTER YOU

“For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ” (KJV). Paul now calls the God of heaven to witness the truth of what he says. Those who have a Sinai-view of oaths cannot receive such a word. Yet, Paul often spoke in this manner. ***“For God is my witness”*** (Rom 1:9), ***“before God, I lie not”*** (Gal 1:20), ***“God is witness”*** (1 Thess 2:5), ***“I call God for a record upon my soul”*** (2 Cor 1:23). Holy men and women speak with God in perspective, summoning heaven to confirm that what they say is the truth. This requires a strong faith, for no person unsure of their relationship to God through Christ can speak in this manner.

While false prophets resort to ***“flattering words”*** to motivate their hearers, the Apostle speaks of what is in his heart. He speaks before the heavenly gallery, calling the God of all the earth to attest to the truth of what he says. It would be most illuminating were modern preachers and teachers to follow this procedure!

The Apostle confesses to having a great longing, or yearning, for the Philippian brethren. This is a remarkable testimony to the spirituality of those saints. No man of God has aspired to be with those whose hearts are hard, vision stunted, and conscience seared. There were only a few people Paul acknowledged he longed to see. The Romans (Rom 1:11), the Thessalonians (1 Thess 3:6), and Timothy (2 Tim 1:4). That does not speak less of other saints, but it does accentuate the effect of especially vigorous saints.

Paul’s longing for the Philippians was not a mere human emotion. He longed for them ***“in the bowels of Jesus Christ,”*** or ***“with the affection of Jesus Christ”*** (NKJV, NASB, NIV). The word ***“bowels”*** refers to the **seat** of the affections, rather than the affections themselves, and is a more literal translation. They are to affection what the spring is to the water—**the source!** Of this expression, Vincent well says, ***“Describing his longing, not as his individual emotion, but as Christ’s longing, as if the very heart of Christ dwelt in him. ‘In Paul not Paul lives, but Jesus Christ’”*** (Bengel). This is precisely what Paul described in Galatians 2:20: ***“Christ liveth in me.”***

Paul’s longing for the Philippians was a fellowship with Christ (1 Cor 1:9). It is how Jesus felt about them, and Paul shared in that affection. This is a remarkable benefit of living by faith—to possess Christ’s view of His people! It is part of having ***“the mind of Christ”*** (1 Cor 2:16), allowing that mind to be ***“in”*** us (Phil 2:5). This is another way of saying Paul did not know these saints ***“after the flesh”*** (2 Cor 5:16).

It is no wonder the Spirit says we are ***“taught of God to love one another”*** (1 Thess 4:9). It is by granting us fellowship with the very seat of Christ’s affection for His people. The apparent rarity of this experience attests to its greatness. I have met precious few souls that had a strong affection for deeply spiritual people—those who fellowshiped in the afflictions and proclamations of the Gospel. Yet, this perspective is available to all who are in Christ Jesus. They can live with the ***“mind of Christ,”*** and obtain a view of His people that He Himself possesses. May the Lord grant us an eagerness to possess this mind, being an encouragement to His saints.

LESSON #6

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ . . .” (Phil 1:9-10, NKJV)

INTRODUCTION

The heart of the Lord Jesus was resident in the apostle. Jesus prayed for those who would believe on Him through the word of His Apostles (John 17:20-21). Now Paul joins that prayer, providing details not revealed in Christ’s supplication. The reason for the elaboration is obvious. Paul is not only relating how he prays, he is teaching the saints where to place their focus, and what to expect. In this prayer we are at the very heart of the Kingdom. We are being exposed to the purpose of God, the objective of salvation, and the effectiveness of grace. In short, these words reflect the real meaning of walking in the Spirit and living by faith.

ABOUNDING LOVE

“And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more . . .” (KJV). In salvation, the love of God is *“shed abroad,”* or poured, into our hearts (Rom 5:5). That love, however, is *“perfected,”* or brought to maturity, in the believer (1 John 2:5). This is a principle of the Kingdom that must not escape our attention. What we receive from God does not remain static within us, but increases. For example, faith is *“obtained”* (2 Pet 1:1), and is to be *“increased”* (1 Cor 10:15). We *“receive”* Christ (John 1:12), and yet He is *“formed”* within us, causing us to become increasingly like Him (Gal 4:19). In the parables of the *“talents”* and the *“pounds,”* the Lord revealed the necessity of this Kingdom increase (Matt 25:15-28; Lk 19:13-25). A professing Christian that is not growing, is drawing back to perdition (Heb 10:38-39). Spiritual life is manifested in root going downward and fruit upward (Isa 37:31). Where this does not take place, there is no hope of being conformed to the image of Christ, an absolute requisite for glory.

The expression of this verse is impressively strong. There is nothing casual about it. The love they have received from God is said to be **their** love because they are stewards of it. For the same reason, faith is called *“your faith”* (Rom 1:8), fruit is called *“your fruit”* (Rom 6:22), and righteousness is called *“your righteousness”* (2 Cor 9:10). Believers have entered into the matter of salvation with the God of salvation.

Because *“love is of God”* (1 John 4:7), Paul prays that it would *“abound yet more and more.”* Love is a Divine quality that will never find a leveling-off point in the believer. Further, it is not simply to be found in us, but to abound, excel, increase, and be found in abundance. The power of this *“love”* is seen in the following statement concerning faith. *“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love”* (Gal 5:6). Love, in this case, is the vehicle through which faith works, or is productive. An abounding love, therefore, becomes the occasion for the effective expression of faith.

Paul does not simply exhort the Philippians to abound in love, he PRAYS they will do so. The phrase *“more and more”* denotes the increasing quality found in all spiritual graces. It speaks of ever increasing enlargement. It is another way of saying *“grow up into Him into all things”* (Eph 4:15). This is the process involved in being *“changed into the same image from glory to glory”* (2 Cor 3:18), or going *“from strength to strength”* (Psa 84:7).

This love includes, but involves more than, brotherly affiliations. This is primarily our love for God (1 John 4:21)—a robust craving for God Himself. It also includes *“the love of the truth”* (2 Thess 2:10)—a hearty appetite and preference for the truth of God. It also includes the *love “of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Eph 6:24)—a fervent longing to know Him and be with Him.

The objects of such love are like a vast and unfathomable ocean—without limit. They cry for more of us, more of our affection, and more of our devotion. There is no place in spiritual life for settling down—no place where love ceases to abound, or becomes listless and monotonous. Let us join in this prayer by supplication for others, and abounding in love ourselves.

KNOWLEDGE, JUDGMENT, AND APPROVAL

“. . . in knowledge and in all judgment; That ye may approve things that are excellent . . .” (KJV). The results of an abounding love show the exceeding greatness of this prayer. Here is an observation of which flesh is not capable. The desired result of abounding love is not found in the realm of emotion. It is not even found in the area of good deeds. Both of these will be present, but neither of them is dominant. The objective desired is *“knowledge”* and *“all judgment,”* or discernment.

The *“knowledge”* of reference is not academic, but spiritual. It is called in Colossians, *“the knowledge of His will”* (Col 1:9). This is nothing less than an acquaintance with the Person and purpose of God as revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul referred to this when he spoke of his unrelenting quest to *“know Him and the power of His*

resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death" (Phil 3:10). This is produced by the abounding love for which Paul prays.

Here is another way of saying we will not appropriate the required knowledge if we do not love it and pursue it. There is no Kingdom advance that is not preceded by a fervent longing for the same. It is not possible to lay hold on the knowledge if our love does not **"abound more and more."** The explanation for Scriptural and spiritual illiteracy within the professed church is found at this point. Their love for God, Christ, and the truth is deficient.

Still, there is a reason why this knowledge is required—why the outline of Divine purpose must be seen. Because we are in a hostile world, facing a cunning adversary, we must be able to discern or judge what is around us. We cannot be **"ignorant"** of Satan's **"devices,"** or unable to recognize the hand of the Lord. Solemnly we are admonished, **"Be not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is"** (Eph 5:17). The Apostle did not set up a workshop to teach people how to avoid being unwise. Rather, he prayed their love would **"abound yet more and more."** *Defective hearts are the cause for all spiritual deficiency.*

Now we come to the bottom line, so to speak. The prayer for abounding love was in order to the obtainment of knowledge and discernment. However, that learning and perception would equip them to **"approve the things that are excellent."** The word **"approve"** means more than mere acquiescence or intellectual sanction. To **"approve"** something is to test it and find it to be good. The experience is like that of Jonathan, who tasted a little of the forbidden honey, and found it to enlighten his eyes (1 Sam 14:29).

Elsewhere Scripture refers to this same process in these words. **"And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God"** (Rom 12:2). All around us are **"things"** provided by the Lord.

They are necessary to wage a successful warfare and run a victorious race. The procurement of them, however, requires an abounding love, discernment, and a preference for them. It is not possible to approve of them if we do not see them. Too, it is not possible to see them if we do not love them. Additionally, it is not possible to have a heart for them without possessing abounding love.

SINCERE AND WITHOUT OFFENSE

"... that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ" (KJV). The gravity of our text is seen in the expression of ultimate desire: Sincerity and without offense till the day of Christ. The word **"sincerity"** literally means *judged by sunlight, or tested as genuine*. The idea is that of holding a bottle of liquid up to the sunlight to see if any contaminants are visible. Joshua admonished the Israelites to be **"in sincerity and in truth"** (Josh 24:14). Paul exhorted the Corinthians to serve the Lord **"with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth"** (1 Cor 5:8). This is **"godly sincerity"** and is confirmed by a good conscience (2 Cor 1:12). If one questions the validity of sincerity, remember a special blessing is pronounced upon **"all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity"** (Eph 6:24).

The expression **"without offense"** touches the heart. It will not allow for an indifferent attitude toward sin, or the possession of a cold and lifeless heart. You may recall the time when Jesus rebuked Peter, saying he **was "an offense"** unto Him" (Matt 16:23). Too, it was a single **"offense"** that plunged the entire human race into sin (Rom 5:15,17,18,20). How marvelous!-- to be **"without offense"** for any length of time. No mark against us, no Divine displeasure, nothing in us with which the Lord is annoyed or disturbed!

Do you remember when David sinned with Bathsheba, also having her husband sent to his death? It is written, **"But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD"** (2 Sam 11:27). Zechariah spoke to Israel of God being **"sore displeased with your fathers"** (Zech 1:2). The opposite of displeasing the Lord is being **"without offense."** It should be stated here that salvation makes full provision for this condition. **"And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous"** (1 John 2:1).

The duration of this blessed state is **"till the day of Christ."** That means as long as we are in this world, or until Jesus comes, it is possible to offend the Lord—to be found outside the circumference of His approval. **"The day of Christ"** is the day of His appearing (1 Tim 6:14), revelation (2 Thess 1:7), and showing (1 Tim 6:15). Until then, we must commit ourselves to resisting the devil and knowing the Lord.

The prayer of the Apostle reveals something of the intricacies related to maintaining a soul that can stand up under Divine scrutiny, and being without offense. This will be accomplished to the precise degree that our love abounds yet more and more. It will come only as we are adept at approving what is excellent—what will stand the test of eternity. **"Knowledge and judgment"** must be strengths of we are to survive.

One final word. The fact that Paul prays for these things confirms they really come from God. They are not the products of mere human activity, although such involvement is essential. It is ever true, **"Except the LORD build the house, they labor in vain that build it"** (Psa 127:1). Unless a wave of Divine activity comes over the child of God, he will not be equal to the challenges he faces. Knowing this, Paulo prayed as zealously as he preached. He supplicated as eagerly as he exhorted. He knew the nature of salvation, as well as the intensity of the battle into which it thrusts us.

LESSON #7

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.” (Phil 1:11, NKJV)

INTRODUCTION

There is only one acceptable frame of reference when speaking in the behalf of God: the Lord Jesus Christ, and the redemption that is in Him. If the world and the things that are in it become the primary context of our speaking, it at once becomes unprofitable to the hearers. If you were to remove Jesus and salvation from the writings of Paul, there would be nothing left. He never wrote with the world and its circumstance as his main consideration. The health and financial conditions of his readers were never what compelled his writing. He knew if a person gained the whole world, yet lost his own soul, nothing whatsoever had been gained.

FILLED WITH THE FRUITS

“Being filled with the fruits of righteousness . . . ” (KJV). The Kingdom of God is characterized by **ABUNDANCE!** Nothing about it is sparse, and frugality in spiritual things is never urged or commended. Those who want a *little* Jesus, or will settle for a small portion of grace, will **not** realize their desire. Salvation in all of its aspects is bounteous and generous. Sin had taken much from us, and consequently salvation brings plenty to us.

God is *“abundant in goodness and truth”* (Ex 34:6), and is to be so known by us. Abundance characterizes His grace (Rom 5:17), faith and love (1 Tim 1:14), and mercy (1 Pet 1:3). The life Jesus came to bring is *“more abundantly”* (John 10:10). God is represented as able to do *“exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think”* (Eph 3:20). In salvation, He has poured out His Holy Spirit upon us *“abundantly”* (Tit 3:5-6). Jesus said the faithful person will receive *“more abundance”* (Matt 13:12). That is the nature of the Kingdom of God, and we do well to endeavor to clearly see it.

Paul prays for the Philippians in strict accord with the nature of the Kingdom. He does not ask the Lord to help them simply survive. His request involves more than them not being deceived by the Tempter (as with Corinth, 2 Cor 11:3). All of that is involved—but there is more! He seeks for them to be *“filled with the fruits of righteousness.”* And what are these *“fruits”*? Elsewhere the Scriptures speak of the *“fruit (singular) of righteousness”* (Heb 12:11; James 3:18). Both the singular and plural form of the word describe the same thing. Using the singular, it would be like saying *the fruit of a tree*, or *the fruit of the vine*—a plurality of inherent in the word.

“Fruits of righteousness” refers to sanctification—the outgrowth of spiritual life. When God imputes His own righteousness to us (Rom 4:6-22), it is designed to have an effect within us. Just as sin, when we were without Christ, expressed itself through our members, so does righteousness. As it is written, *“for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness”* (Rom 6:19). This is the abundant life to which Jesus referred, when the Divine nature expresses itself through us. This is done with our consent, and in accordance with our desires.

To be *“filled with the fruits of righteousness”* equates to *“always abounding in the work of the Lord”* (1 Cor 15:58). It is the condition described in Colossians 3:17. *“And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.”* The persons so filled do not live for themselves, but for the Lord. In a very real sense, they confess with Paul, *“Christ lives in me”* (Gal 2:20).

There is no room in such an individual for worldly ambition. The capacity is there, to be sure, but the *“filled”* person will not allow that ability to sit upon the throne of his heart.

It is possible for the believer to be *“filled with the fruits of righteousness”*—to be so dominated by faith that *“to live is Christ”* (Phil 1:21). God is able to work within us in a manner greater than we think (Eph 3:20). Being filled with the fruits of righteousness is when He DOES!

WHICH ARE BY CHRIST JESUS

“. . . which are by Jesus Christ . . . ” (KJV). While bringing forth fruit involves considerable effort by us, that effort is not the CAUSE of being *“filled with the fruits of righteousness.”* In a very real sense, much of our effort is spent in casting down inhibiting influences, and ridding ourselves of competitive interests (2 Cor 10:4-5). The *“fruits”* themselves are *“by Christ Jesus.”* He is the One Who causes them to spring forth. This is the circumstance described in the words, *“Christ lives in me”* (Gal 2:20).

Jesus spoke of this productive indwelling when He said, *“If a man love me, he will keep my words: and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make our abode with him”* (John 14:23). It is nothing less than the life of the *“Vine”* producing fruit in the *“branches”* that abide in It (John 15:4). As the Mediator of the New Covenant, Jesus not only remits our sins and gives us a new nature, He works the will of God

within us.

Herein is a marvelous thing. We have a heavenly treasure in an earthly vessel. On the exterior, we have a weak and condemned frame, but within everlasting life resides. This is described in the words, ***“And if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness”*** (Rom 8:10, NASB). The KJV refers to the ***“Spirit”*** (Holy Spirit), while other versions use ***“spirit”*** (human spirit). There is no contradiction here, because the Holy Spirit and the human spirit are joined together in Christ Jesus (1 Cor 6:17). Both refer to the same blessed reality.

The idea is that Jesus lives within us. He can do so because we have been made righteous in Him. That righteousness, however, is made productive by Him. He exhibits the Divine life through our thoughts, words, and deeds, thereby producing ***“the fruits of righteousness.”*** This involves more than simply doing what is correct, or approved by God. It involves participation with Christ in His great work—the work He is currently doing.

Take, for example, the matter of Christ’s intercession. He ***“ever liveth to make intercession”*** for those being saved (Heb 7:25). In our text, Paul joins in that ordained work, interceding for the Philippians, praying they will be ***“filled with the fruits of righteousness.”*** Jesus also declared He ***is “the Good Shepherd,”*** giving His life for the sheep, knowing, leading, and feeding them (John 10:11-14). In the book of Philippians, we see Paul joining in the work—doing the same thing. He is not emulating, or copying Christ. It is Christ producing ***“the fruits of righteousness”*** in him. The benefit of Paul’s life to others involved his own commitment and discipline—but it was ***“by Christ Jesus.”*** He did not preach and teach as a scholar, but as one joined to Jesus.

Paul knows this experience was not uniquely his. He prays the Philippians may enter into the same glorious fellowship. Christ is in them, and Paul desired a full measure of fruit to be produced in them as well. This would mean they would enter into the work of the Lord with great zeal and expectation. If they were ***“filled with the fruits of righteousness,”*** other competitive involvements would be pushed into a subordinate position. As a consequence, Christ would work in them mightily, producing fruit that would both satisfy them, benefit others, and glorify God.

UNTO THE PRAISE AND GLORY OF GOD

“ . . . unto the glory and praise of God” (KJV). Here we come to the very heart of salvation—the purpose for it all. The redemption that is in Christ Jesus involves the rescue of fallen humanity, but that is not its primary objective. ***“The praise and glory of God”*** is fundamental in every aspect of His ***“eternal purpose.”*** This is never placed into the background, allowing human needs or interests to drive the Kingdom agenda. It is evident from the general condition of Christendom that this is not common knowledge.

For example, God has given us to the Son, in order that He might bring us to glory (John 6:39; 17:24; Heb 2:10,13). Jesus, praise the Lord, has received us. When apprehended, the outcome of this reception brings spiritual perspective. ***“Christ also received us to the glory of God”*** (Rom 15:7). The NIV reads, ***“Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.”*** Were it not for God and His glory, Jesus would not have received or accepted us! It is God who sent, sustained, raised, exalted, and enthroned the Son. And it is God that will ultimately receive the glory, i.e., ***“that God may be all in all”*** (1 Cor 15:28). Jesus is *God’s* Lamb, Christ, and King (John 1:29; Acts 4:26; Psa 2:6). Everything our Savior has done and is doing is for God’s glory.

As Jesus lives within us, He will not depart from His declared agenda. While in the world he confessed, ***“the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner”*** (John 5:19). In everything He did, He was driven by the will of God. He delivered us from this present evil world ***“according to the will of God and our Father”*** (Gal 1:4). When we see the accomplishments of Jesus from the heavenly perspective, we understand the will of God, and glory in His wisdom.

In the end, God will receive glory for the greatness of His salvation. He planned it and He wrought it through Christ. His wisdom is being made known ***“now”*** to heavenly powers ***“through the church”*** (Eph 3:9-10). As Jesus works in us to produce ***“the fruits of righteousness,”*** God Himself is receiving praise and glory from these heavenly hosts. Praise and glory are also redounding to Him from those who benefit spiritually from such productivity (2 Cor 4:15). Such praise and glory are produced when it is apparent that God, through Christ, has worked in us ***“that which is well pleasing in His sight”*** (Heb 13:21). Those perceiving this are drawn closer to Christ through the ***“fruits”*** they have witnessed.

Remember, Paul has prayed the Philippians will be ***“filled with the fruits of righteousness.”*** He is jealous for the glory of God—like Jesus was when He cleansed the temple. He does not come to bring honor to the governor, or to exalt some ecclesiastical figure. He desires for the Lord to be known, and for His knowledge to fill the earth, as well as heaven. He also knows salvation is calculated to cause this to happen. When a great painter produces a masterpiece, the glory does not go to the painting, but to the one who painted it. So it is with salvation. When the ***“fruits of righteousness”*** are found in people, the glory does not go to those in whom they are found, but to the One who has produced them ***“by Christ Jesus.”***

LESSON #8

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ” (Phil 1:12-13, NKJV)

INTRODUCTION

The life of the Apostle centered in Christ and His great salvation. He viewed life's circumstances as directly related to those priorities. For him to live was Christ. That, of course, is the Kingdom standard. Such a perspective is to be viewed as ordinary in heavenly places. In fact, it is the only acceptable posture of life. When we walk in the light, we will respond to life's trials in the same manner as Paul, according to our measure of faith.

THE THINGS WHICH HAPPENED TO ME

“But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me . . .” (KJV). Here is the godly viewpoint of the most difficult of human experience: ***“the things which happened to me.”*** In these words we find a minimization of the circumstances themselves, i.e., ***“the things.”*** In another place Paul itemized some of these ***“things,”*** showing they were by no means ordinary human experiences. ***“Stripes . . . prisons . . . deaths . . . five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice . . . beaten with rods, once . . . stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness”*** (2 Cor 11:23-27). Experiences are of less magnitude have crushed many a soul. Faith, however, makes us superior to situations.

Paul wanted the Philippians to know about ***“the things which happened”*** to him. He was not looking for sympathy, nor was he promoting a personal agenda. Later he says, ***“Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content”*** (Phil 4:11). Those who draw attention to their circumstances apart from their association with the Gospel of Christ may not be seeking our welfare.

The Apostle is emphasizing identity with the cross of Christ, which is a source of offence to those who walk after the flesh. The things which ***“happened”*** to him were the direct result of his labors in the Gospel. They revealed the ***“offence of the cross”*** upon those who are ***“enemies”*** to it (Gal 5:11; Phil 3:18). He was being persecuted for righteousness sake, and desired that the Philippians know the outcome of the opposition he was experiencing.

It is needful to note the necessity of seeing life from the proper perspective. When trials and hostility are viewed incorrectly, they bring a great weight upon the soul which is difficult, if not impossible, to bear. Too, when we see our brethren suffering at the hand of their oppressors, we might be tempted to think their labors are in vain. Countless souls have ceased to exert themselves for Christ because they have been opposed. Others have chosen to avoid such labors because of the contention experienced by others. What soul has not heard of men that decided not to enter the ministry because they heard of the oppositions others were called to bear? That is why spiritual light must be shown upon sufferings for Christ's sake.

The Apostle is endeavoring to keep the Philippians from being discouraged, and even deterred, by the adversity he was experiencing. Such sensitive souls are not common in our day, and are, consequently, exceeding precious. Too, when there is such love for the brethren that we are deeply concerned for their welfare, we are enjoying true fellowship. We are admonished, ***“Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep”*** (Rom 12:15).

But Paul will not let them weep long. He will have them know the Kingdom is marching forward, and the cause of Christ is flourishing. ***“How is the Lord's work doing?”*** That is the real issue with Paul! He knows that is also how the Philippians feel, and thus assures their hearts.

THE FURTHERANCE OF THE GOSPEL

“. . . have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel . . .” (KJV). Those who give their lives to the propagation of the Gospel will not be disappointed! This is owing to Divine undergirding! God is supporting the work! Here is abundant confirmation that ***“all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose”*** (Rom 8:28). One might wonder how this can be the case with Paul. Ultimately, of course, all of this worked together for his personal good. But it also did so for the moment. The Apostle's heart was in his work. He was not a sectarian, nor was he promoting a private agenda. Christ called him into the work of reconciliation, and he had entered into it (2 Cor 5:19-20).

Like Paul, those whose hearts are with the Lord are never more pleased than when His Gospel flourishes. For them, it is a glad day when the Word runs, has free course, and is not hindered (2 Thess 3:1). Even though Paul suffered himself, he considered the **“furtherance of the Gospel”** of greater consequence than his personal hardship. He was not living for himself! He was crucified to the world, and the world to him (Gal 6:14). He had died with Christ, and had been raised to sit with Him in the heavenly places. The things he experienced in the body and in the world, therefore, were not of primary importance. He had, in fact, adopted the heavenly agenda.

This also is the standard of the Kingdom. Jesus makes no provision for us to **“live after the flesh,”** with this world and our persons in the prominent position (Rom 8:13).

And what is **“the furtherance of the Gospel?”** This speaks of the enlargement of the borders within which the Gospel is heard. Its sound reaches further! Its reception becomes more extensive. It is when the Gospel is preached **“in the regions beyond”** (2 Cor 10:16). It is when the Gospel is preached **“with the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven”** (1 Pet 1:12). The Gospel was furthered, for example, during the early persecution of believers when **“those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the Word”** (Acts 8:4). The more the world opposed them, the more the Word grew.

Oh, that more of this were being experienced in our own country! A gross darkness has descended upon the professed church that has brought a state of near-total ignorance of the Gospel of Christ! There are agendas being promoted by the nominal church that have little to do with the Gospel! Just as the furtherance of the Gospel brought great joy to the Apostle, the suppression of that Gospel causes great sorrow.

How can the devil succeed in his diabolical intentions? In this text, the old serpent, working under Divine auspices, has Paul incarcerated. But it does not stop the spread of the Gospel, which announces Satan’s overthrow (Col 2:15; Heb 2:14; 1 John 3:8). In fact, **“the things”** that **“happened”** to the Apostle resulted in the furtherance of the Gospel rather than its suppression. It is true, **“we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us”** (Rom 8:37). Satan cannot win, and Jesus cannot lose! The only question is whether or not we are incorporated in the work. If so, what happens to us will **“fall out”** to the furtherance the Gospel.

IT HAS BECOME EVIDENT

“ . . .so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ” (KJV). Among other things, the power of living by faith is found in its evidence. It is true, **“A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid”** (Matt 5:14). The burden of Apostolic labors was not found in exhorting believers to shine, but in getting some light into them so they would shine. The Philippians themselves were told they *were* shining **“as lights in the world”** (Phil 2:15).

Spiritual light is so prevailing that it shines **“out of obscurity, and out of darkness”** (Isa 29:18; 58:10). Take Paul’s imprisonment as an example. He speaks of **“the whole palace guard”** (NKJV). The word **“palace”** may also be translated **“praetorian guard”** (NASB). This was a special guard, stationed in Rome. It is understood this was the very hall and palace of Nero. Rather, however, than viewing himself as a prisoner of the State, Paul referred to himself as **“an ambassador in chains”** (Eph 6:20, NKJV).

Imprisonment did not shut the mouth of the Apostle. He did not spend his time sulking, or wondering why he was locked up. He carried out his commission from the place of confinement! It became **“evident”** to **“the whole palace guard”** that Paul was in prison for the sake of Christ. He was not suffering as an evil doer, and that became clear to all who confronted him. Believers are solemnly admonished, **“But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men’s matters”** (1 Pet 4:15). Although, according to appearance, Paul was suffering **“trouble, as an evil doer”** (2 Tim 2:9), it became evident to those guarding him this was not at all the case. His character was not contaminated.

Not only was his demeanor commendable, the guards doubtless heard the Gospel from the captive over whom they kept watch. Later, Paul will send greetings to the brethren at Philippi from the saints **“that are of Caesar’s household”** (Phil 4:22). Under the most difficult circumstances, the child of God can still bear fruit to God! Therein the Father is especially glorified (John 15:8). Just as the grape yields its precious juice under the pressure of the feet treading the grapes, so the child of God sends out the sweet fragrance of the Gospel under the heel of the oppressor.

Jesus affirmed that the water of life would cause that water to be the one drinking it, **“a well of water springing up into everlasting life”** (John 4:14). In another place our Lord said of the believer, **“out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water”** (John 7:38). This is precisely what occurred with Paul. The river of life flowed out from him under oppressive circumstances. Like Jeremiah, the Word broke forth from within him, for he could not contain it (Jer 20:9). Everyone who came in contact with this man of God knew what constrained him. They did not associate his imprisonment with him being a Jew. Nor, indeed, did they consider him a perpetrator of a self-promoting agenda. It became **“evident”** that the Gospel is what drove him. It was what he *declared* that provoked the response of men, whether for good or evil. But this was not only true in the palace. It was also true **“in all other**

places.” The conclusion was always the same. Paul was suffering for Christ’s sake.

LESSON #9

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“ . . . and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear . . . ” (Phil 1:14, NKJV)

INTRODUCTION

The beloved Apostle continues to assess his life in light of the ministry of reconciliation. He does not live for himself, but for the Lord – which is standard in the Kingdom of God. A consideration of the work of the Lord tends to mitigate the impact of difficult circumstances. That is because in our thoughtfulness of Christ’s work, we experience His tenderness toward us. One of the great secrets of spiritual stability is a keen interest in *“the work of the Lord”* (1 Cor 15:58). The enterprise of salvation is large enough to productively dominate our thinking. Our personal involvement in what the Lord is doing brings His influence to bear upon our circumstances. That Divine association is experienced only to the degree we are preoccupied with the revealed objectives of our Lord.

MOST OF THE BRETHREN

“ . . . and most of the brethren . . . ” (NKJV). Again, we are exposed to the Apostle’s pattern of thought. Although personally afflicted, his mind has not been moved from the things of God. He is not caught up the vilification of his accusers, or the supposed injustice of those who have incarcerated him. Instead, he looks to the family of God.

The phrase *“most of the brethren,”* is a refreshing one. He does **not** say *most of MY brethren* – although they were surely that. He does not view this sacred assemblage as engaged in his personal agenda, or having embraced his position or that of some *church father*. Such associations are altogether too common in our time. Many a *churched* soul thinks of *“brethren”* only in association with their particular theological persuasion or denomination. Some are not even capable of thinking that broadly, but consider *“brethren”* to be only those with whom they have immediate fellowship. Thus were born such expressions as *“our church,” “our movement” “our people,” “the true church,”* etc., etc. But this is not Paul’s manner of speaking. Nor, indeed, is it acceptable for anyone to speak in such a manner.

This brotherhood is not in interpersonal associations. It is not our relationship to one another that makes us *“brethren,”* but our affiliation with the Lord of glory. Jesus stated it this way, *“For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is My brother, and sister, and mother”* (Matt 12:50). Affirming that a superior class does not exist among His disciples, Jesus said *“One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren”* (Matt 23:8). The word *“brethren,”* therefore, denotes all that are in Christ Jesus, and not a mere segment of them. They are truly *“brethren in the Lord,”* Who has drawn them together in *“one body.”*

Elaborating on this theme, Scripture affirms Jesus *is “the firstborn among many brethren”* (Rom 8:29). The Spirit also affirms that, because God is our Father by regeneration, Jesus is *“not ashamed to call [us] brethren”* (Heb 2:11). The Holy Spirit assists us to possess *“unfeigned love of the brethren”* (1 Pet 1:22).

Now, Paul tells us that *“most of the brethren”* have had a God-honoring reaction to his imprisonment. This does not seem to coincide with other expressions of Paul: i.e., *“no man stood with me, but all men forsook me”* (2 Tim 4:16). In both instances, Paul is describing specific circumstances, not the general demeanor of saints at all times. At his *“first defense,”* everyone forsook him. But God did not allow this to be a constant condition. In this case, He brings sweet relief to the blessed Apostle in this imprisonment.

When men forsake us, we must allow ourselves to think no other condition will ever take place.

God can not only cause our enemies to be at peace with us (Prov 16:7), He can send comforters (2 Cor 7:6) and *“helpers”* to buoy up the suffering soul (Rom 16:3). The Lord will not allow His work to languish for lack of comforters and hearty workers. As we devote ourselves to the *“ministry of reconciliation,”* He will see to it that we are not overcome. He is able to marshal *“most of the brethren”* at any given occasion. I find this a most reassuring consideration.

HAVING BECOME CONFIDENT

“ . . . in the Lord having become confident by my chains . . . ” (KJV). The phrase *“in the Lord”* can apply to both *“brethren”* and becoming *“confident.”* The point of this verse is that *“in the Lord”* the brethren became *“confident,”* assured and poised in their spirits. One of the greatest assets in the work of Christ is *“confident”* laborers. Such do not appear common in our day – but that situation can change. In our text, most of the brethren BECAME confident as a result of Paul’s imprisonment and chains.

How is it that the *“chains”* of an afflicted brother would stimulate confidence in other brethren? Does not the oppression of Christ’s workers tend to dishearten us rather than give us confidence? Indeed, were this the only consideration we entertained, this might be true. When, however, we behold the saints keeping the faith in adversity, we

take heart! When holy and oppressed saints show by demonstration that **“nothing”** can **“separate us from the love of God,”** we are emboldened to hold on our way (Rom 8:32-39)! Paul did not **“pine away”** in prison as Israel did by the **“Rivers of Babylon”** (Psa 137:1-4). Instead, he gathered strength from the King of kings, and continued his ministry with zeal and consistency. Even the prison guard and members of Caesars’s household came to the knowledge of Christ through his ministry at that time. It was Paul’s REACTION to the affliction that caused **“most of the brethren”** to **“become confident.”**

There is something valuable for us to learn here. When our brethren are oppressed, it is good and necessary that we learn of it. They need our prayers and our hearts during such times. But we must also hear of their faithfulness and continued labors. Tell us how they are keeping the faith – how they refuse to cease believing or close their mouths. The report of their faithfulness under oppression will bring a resurgence of spiritual strength and confidence to us. What soul is there who has not been encouraged by hearing or reading of **“brethren”** who kept the faith and continued their labors under the most difficult of circumstances?

Why is this the case? How is it that news of the faithfulness of oppressed brethren can bring confidence to those hearing of it? It is because the Lord Himself is active in the matter. He not only works in the individuals who are oppressed, but in those who identify with them. Here is an oft overlooked facet of the Kingdom. When we are admonished to **“weep with them that weep”** (Rom 12:15), and remember those in bonds **“as bound with them”** (Heb 13:3), an opportunity for Divine fellowship is being made available. As we identify with oppressed laborers in our hearts, the Lord pours His strength, peace, and encouragement into us. By so doing, He ensures the continuance of His work. He also causes great consolation to come to the oppressed as they behold the Lord’s work going forward.

Those who are touched with the adversity of Christ’s brethren will themselves be used more mightily in the Kingdom. They will be empowered to take up the work of the Lord that appears to have been hindered. Thus, Satan is overthrown mightily. In Paul’s case, where the devil managed to incarcerate one man, a host of brethren took up the work of the Lord!

SPEAKING THE WORD WITHOUT FEAR

“ . . . are much more bold to speak the word without fear.” (NKJV). The confidence gained by **“most of the brethren”** was put to good use. It was not merely confidence to face life with its difficulties, but confidence to **“speak the Word.”** If you question that such speaking takes spiritual confidence, contemplate for a moment how very little of the Word you hear spoken these days. Think of those who know what to say, but are afraid to say it. Consider the unimaginable number of former Kingdom laborers who have stopped their mouths and ceased to work for Christ because of discouragement and disillusionment. Many of them are in this very area. Contemplate the men who are restrained from speaking the Word because of a church board, or recalcitrant elders, or others who have no heart for the truth.

If the work of the Lord is to flourish, this condition must be remedied. That correction will not come by means of a mighty awakening alone. I fear many are waiting for truth to become popular and sought after before they will speak it. If, however, men will consider faithful servants who have maintained their Kingdom posture in the midst of adversity, they will become **“more bold to speak the Word without fear.”** This is much different than reading books written by institutionally-effective preachers. Real workers for Christ need confidence more than they need practical tips!

Think of the phrase, **“more bold to speak the Word without fear.”** It does require boldness to so speak the Word. By saying **“more bold,”** the Spirit means they ventured farther in their labors than they had before. Their ministry was not only sustained, but expanded! If Paul could be sustained in his difficulty, so could they. If He could continue declaring the Word in a king’s palace where he was held prisoner, what ought they be able to do! Here is something the church sorely needs today–**“MORE boldness!”** There is no reason why the tide of retrogression cannot be reversed to a condition of **“more boldness!”** May the Lord cause it to happen!

“Without fear” describes a condition where no debilitating thought is given to the rejection of the message. The driving force behind the proclamation is the Lord’s work, not how the message is received. If enemies are confronted, the message is declared anyway. If it causes suffering, the messenger lifts up his voice with boldness. To speak boldly in a time when the truth is being received is one thing. To declare it in the presence of jeopardy is something else.

Zachariah, father of John the Baptist, said those in Christ would **“serve him without fear”** (Lk 1:74). But our text seems to go even farther with the thought. The **“brethren”** were **“MORE bold”** in the proclamation of the Word, extending themselves into new territory. And why so? Because they gathered strength from the stability of Paul. Instead of Satan gaining an advantage by the captivity of Paul, his Kingdom was dealt an even more devastating blow. Thus the superiority of Christ’s reign is once again revealed. God is able to **“turn the curse into a blessing”** (Deut 23:5), and will surely do so for those who maintain faith in Christ. If your cause is a godly one, it will not suffer loss when you are handicapped!

LESSON #10

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from good will: The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice.” (Phil 1:15-18, NKJV)

INTRODUCTION

Paul’s interest in the Gospel is not casual. He is deeply committed to the One who loved him, and whose Gospel He proclaims. Knowing that ***“God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself”*** (2 Cor 5:19), he found great joy in hearing of the declaration of that Gospel. His world did not revolve around himself or his circumstances. To Paul, the Lord Jesus was the most significant Person, and the accomplishments and ministry of Christ the most meaningful and desirable circumstances. With care, he refuses to draw attention to himself, even when he is oppressed, and removed from the public arena to which he had been called. In this text, we will again be exposed to the heart of the Apostle – one which was dominated by the love of God.

PREACHING WITH IGNOBLE OBJECTIVES

“Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and . . . The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds” (NKJV). From the very first, charlatans have penetrated the the body of Christ. It is evidence of the alertness and ferocity of our adversary that this condition occurred so quickly. This is also owing to a spirit of lethargy that soon crept into the church, opening the door to pretenders. An Apostolic assessment of this situation will be profitable to briefly explore.

The bonds of Paul brought boldness to some to ***“speak the Word without fear”*** (v 14). All such speaking, however, was not driven by noble objectives. Some ***“preached Christ out of envy and rivalry”*** (NIV). Here is a case where men did not preach because of their love for the Lord Jesus, or a desire for the Gospel to be more fully known. They were promoting their own party and sectarian interests. They really preached for their faction. It is needful to note that *party-zeal* can make a person aggressive. Such bear resemblance to committed preachers of the Gospel—but they are not among that number.

The Pharisees, for example, were extremely zealous for their traditions. Jesus said of them, ***“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves”*** (Matt 23:15). The Pharisees, in fact, are called a ***“party”*** in Scripture (Acts 23:9). Such zeal is still within the professed church, and to an alarming degree.

You sense from this text that these preachers were restrained when Paul was among the people. They found it difficult to promote their sectarian interests when the Gospel was preached in sincerity. Now that Paul was bound, these men felt more free and bold to promote their selfish interests.

There are several ***“works of the flesh”*** that create the ***“party spirit,”*** a dreadfully dominant condition in our day. Galatians 5:20-21 mentions ***“contentions*** [argumentative, debate, discord], ***jealousies*** [ferment of spirit] . . . ***selfish ambitions*** [strife, rivalry], ***dissensions*** [divisions, standing apart], ***heresies*** [disunion, or party], ***envy*** [envious because of the success of another].” All of these reactions are provoked by Satan, and carried out through the expression of ***“the flesh,”*** or the fallen part of man. Do not question that in our day, many are preaching Christ in the interest of their sect, and not out a regard for the Lord Jesus and His ***“great salvation.”***

Paul adds that these sectarians preached ***“Christ out of partisanship, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment”*** (RSV). They supposed Paul was altogether like unto themselves. As the Lord said through the Psalmist, ***“You thought that I was altogether like you”*** (Psa 50:21). They thought Paul would be disheartened because their sect was being promoted.

We ought to note that it is possible to say the right things out of impure motives—to preach the Gospel ***“out of contention,”*** seeking sectarian interests. In Paul’s case, these doubtless were the Judaizers who plagued him everywhere he went (Acts 15:1ff). They believed Christ was the Messiah, yet mingled their tradition with the Gospel, seeking to promote their own interests. Surely, they reasoned, this would make Paul even more miserable.

PREACHING WITH NOBLE OBJECTIVES

“Some indeed preach . . . also of good will . . . of love, knowing that I am set for the defense of the gospel (KJV). Other brethren, learning of Paul’s imprisonment, preached Christ with holy motivation. Here partisanship is compared with ***“good will”*** and ***“love.”*** By ***“good will,”*** Paul means these individuals meant to be a blessing to him. They knew their efforts would bring great delight to Paul. That, however, was not their only constraint. They also preached ***“out of love”*** (NASB). These brethren considered it a disgrace to detach themselves from Paul and his Gospel because of his imprisonment. They loved the Christ of the Gospel, the Gospel of the Christ, and Christ’s Apostle. Such is a thorough love, and is exceeding rare in our time!

Spiritual love brings a sanctity and effectiveness to the preaching of the Gospel that cannot be equaled. Faith constrains all of these aspects of love. It knits our hearts to the Lord Jesus Himself—**“the love of Christ compels us”** (2 Cor 5:14). It also produces unparalleled delight in the Gospel of Christ—**“I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ”** (Rom 1:16). Inherent in that love is a high regard and affection for Christ’s brethren—**“loving one another fervently with a pure heart”** (1 Pet 1:22).

A religion that does not produce these three expressions of love gravitates to sectarian interests. A love for Christ will be displaced by a love for the party. The love of the Gospel will be superseded by devotion to the message of the party. The love of the brethren will be exchanged for a preference for those who have adopted the party line. The commonness of such things affirms the activity of our adversary in the *Christian* arena.

Note what these noble spirits knew of Paul. He was **“appointed for the defense of the gospel”** (NASB). It is one thing to be designated by Christ to proclaim the Gospel. It is something else for that to be perceived by others. Herein is a most interesting thing. Here, Paul does not say he was appointed to **“preach”** the Gospel, although that is said elsewhere (1 Cor 1:17). Rather, he states he has been appointed for the **“defense”** of it.

Earlier, in verse 7, he affirmed his involvement in **“the defense and confirmation of the gospel”** (1:7). In this case, the Gospel is seen as conflicting with the wisdom and philosophies of men. He was appointed by Jesus to not only affirm the Gospel itself, but to throw down arguments that opposed it, showing them to be erroneous. The **“weapons of our warfare”** are quite capable of doing this (2 Cor 10:4-5).

In the Apostle’s unfolding of the Gospel, he would often throw down opposing arguments, showing them to be in conflict with the Gospel. Thus did he expose the fallaciousness of the world’s wisdom (1 Cor 2:7-8), continuing in sin (Rom 6:1-2), and committing fornication (1 Cor 6:18-20). He also showed the reasonableness of justification by faith and not works (Rom 7:1-4), the necessity of purging sin from the church (1 Cor 5:6-7), and then necessity and privilege of godly judgment (1 Cor 6:1-4).

These effective defenses were due to Divine appointment and enablement. There were faithful brethren who knew this, and this picked up the work Paul was unable to do while imprisoned.

REJOICING BECAUSE CHRIST IS PREACHED

“What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice” (NKJV). Here, the Apostle rises to heights realized by very few. The ability to rejoice that Christ is being preached, whether in pretense or in truth, is exceeding rare. In fact, some would imagine it to be improper, and even ungodly. By way of contrast, notice how firm Paul is in this confession. He not only rejoices that Christ is preached—regardless of the motivation—he WILL continue to so rejoice. Rest assured, Paul would not promote ignoble ministers, but he will rejoice that Christ is being proclaimed.

Christ was announced – and this pleased Paul. Gospel facts were made known more widely – and this pleased Paul. He did not condone all those who preached the message, but he did not recoil from approving of the Christ they preached. See how free the Apostle was from a party spirit! What soul is there amongst us who has not come in contact with individuals who were awakened by the Gospel preached by a sectarian, or even charlatan? That was God working through His Gospel. This is not His ordinary way of working, but it is His prerogative to get the message out, even if it is through a person serving self or party interests. Like Paul, we too can rejoice in such working. When God accomplishes anything good through pretentious men, we should rejoice! We can glory in the message without condoning the person used.

Think of the profound insight revealed in this rejoicing. Preaching in **“pretense”** is preaching without the involvement of the person who is preaching. It is a show, a mere cloak for a fleshly agenda that drives the proclamation. That kind of condition is compared to preaching the Gospel **“in truth,”** or **“sincerely”** –yet Paul rejoices in even that Christ is preached.

The Apostle’s response unveils an aspect of the Kingdom worthy of exploration. Preaching Christ is a loftier exercise than issues of polity, morality, and worship—which are often primary subjects of current preaching. Paul does not rejoice in the preaching of morality, but in the preaching of Christ! Even though Christ may be partially preached—and we do not rejoice in that—yet He is preached in such a manner as to provoke farther inquiry.

On one occasion, the disciples confronted a man casting out demons who did not walk with Jesus. They told Jesus of the situation. **“Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name; and we forbid him, because he followeth not with us. And Jesus said unto him, Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us”** (Lk 9:49-50). We do well not to carry Christ’s words too far, but we are NOT doing well to ignore them. Factious people and factious doctrines are wrong—but preaching Christ is always right. If the name of Jesus will get out, God will go to work—sometimes in spite of the messenger. It is better that people hear of Christ from a partisan than not to hear of Him at all! Better to have some bread crumbs, than nothing at all.

With an attitude like that, it is no wonder Paul’s spirit could not remain suppressed. He found something in which he could rejoice—even the pretentious preaching of Jesus. God can use a person

like that to empower the message of Jesus that is being declared by even a factious soul. Believe it!

LESSON #11

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death.” (Phil 1:19-20, NKJV)

INTRODUCTION

A person can have spiritual insight into LIFE as well as Scripture. In fact, an understanding of God’s Word is the foundation upon which a proper comprehension of life itself is appropriated. The groping philosopher asks, *Who am I?, Why am I here?, and Where am I going?* You will observe our text is free from any such confusion. Paul knows how his adversity will turn out. He knows the means through which this outcome will be accomplished. The Apostle also perceives the effect of the outcome upon himself. With strong faith, he affirms Christ will be enhanced by his life, whether it is in living or dying. The confidence with which Paul speaks discloses his faith.

KNOWING THE OUTCOME

“For I know that this will turn out for my salvation” (KJV). In this text, I prefer the word ***“salvation”*** (KJV) to *deliverance*. The word used here is the one consistently used to identify the ***“great salvation”*** that is in Christ Jesus. Of the 44 times it is used in Scripture, all but one instance clearly refer to ***“eternal salvation.”*** The single exception is found in Acts 27:34, where Paul spoke of the imminent deliverance of those on a sinking vessel.

While the word ***“deliverance”*** is, technically, an appropriate translation, its use tends to accentuate temporal deliverance. In our text, this is not the case. Paul here uses ***“salvation”*** in the generally understood way. This is the ***“salvation”*** that begins with our extrication from sin, and is brought to completion when we are ***“forever with the Lord.”*** Christ is at the heart of it, not deliverance from earthly dilemmas (Rom 1:16). This is a salvation that has an appointed day of completion (Rom 13:11). It began with the exaltation of Jesus, and will conclude when He returns (2 Cor 6:2; 1 Pet 1:5). Let it be clear, Paul has seen an association of his imprisonment with the salvation of which he was an ***“heir”*** (Heb 1:14). This is the most elevated way to view trouble, opposition, affliction, and extraordinary hardship.

This was not something which Paul craved in a spirit of uncertainty. It was something he KNEW! In this matter, he was in accord with the Lord of glory, Who knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation (2 Pet 2:9). We know from the text he was not limiting himself to the consideration of temporal deliverance, because he spoke of glorifying God by dying as well as in living. He knew his ***“chain”*** could neither interrupt nor diminish his salvation. Faith views life through the prism of Divine glory. While an earthly prism tends to distort and color what is viewed, Divine glory clarifies what is perceived through it—as Scripture says it, ***“in the face of Jesus Christ”*** (2 Cor 4:6). Paul’s familiarity with Jesus produced this confidence.

The expression before us is another way of affirming Romans 8:28. ***“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose”*** (NASB). The gracious intentions of God through Christ Jesus are not disrupted or thwarted by trouble (Eph 3:10). Our Lord has chosen to bring us to glory through ***“this present evil world.”*** In this way, He causes both glory and thanksgiving to be given to Himself. It is much like saving Noah by means of a flood (1 Pet 3:20), bringing Joseph to Egypt and the throne through slavery (Psa 105:17), and bringing Israel to Canaan through the Red Sea and the wilderness (Psa 106:9). This is the Divine manner.

It is one thing to be acquainted with this kind of language; it is quite another for the heart to lay hold of its truth. You may recall the ***“hope of salvation”*** is likened to a protective ***“helmet”*** (Isa 59:17; Eph 6:17; 1 Thess 5:8). The effect of putting on this ***“helmet”*** is seen in this text. It produces a sustaining confidence in the midst of difficulty. It constrains the believer to stand when all is not well. With the eagle eye of faith, those wearing this marvelous ***“helmet”*** peer into the future and behold ***“the end of their faith.”*** They know salvation will actually be enhanced by their greatest trials!

THE APPOINTED MEANS OF DELIVERANCE

“ . . . through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ” (KJV). Divine appointments are carried out through Divine means, or agencies. Thus sin is forgiven ***“through”*** Christ’s blood (Eph 1:7), and the ***“heirs of salvation”*** are brought on their way by angels (Heb 1:13-14). When God created the natural realm, it was summoned into being ***“by the Word of God”*** (Heb 11:3). He simply said ***“Let there be . . .”*** and ***“there was”*** (Gen 1:3,6,14). In the creation of all animal life, God simply called the creatures into existence (Gen 1:20-25). In salvation, however, a degree of Divine involvement is found that cannot be found elsewhere. More agencies and personalities are involved in this enterprise than in the creation of the world.

Paul identifies two Divinely appointed means, employed in bringing us to the fulness of salvation. His statement is arresting, because it reflects a harmony between heaven and earth. The created and the Eternal join together in a common objective. In my judgment, these two means should be more

of an emphasis than is common.

Through your prayers. Too often, prayer is viewed only as a means of human expression. However, this text reveals prayer is a means God uses to accomplish His will. An example of this type of reasoning is found in Ezekiel 36:37. After declaring His intentions and affirming He would fulfill them, the Lord says, ***“I will also let the house of Israel inquire of Me to do this for them.”*** In other words, the prayers of His people would be one of the means He employed to accomplish His will. Thus the Apostle sees the involvement of God’s people with the Divine will. As in the Revelation, what God has determined is mingled with the prayers of the saints (Rev 5:8; 8:4). By means of prayer, the people of God enter into the work of God. A persuasion of this will enhance our view of prayer, as well as our involvement in it.

The supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. This expression refers to WHAT the Spirit supplies. Thus other translations read, *“the help of”* (RSV), *“help given by”* (NIV), and *“provision of”* (NASB). The word literally means *“contribution of.”* What a marvelous consideration! The Holy Spirit is presently contributing things to us that ensure our salvation. One of these contributions is mentioned in Romans 8:26. ***“Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.”*** Other contributions include abounding in hope (Rom 15:13), putting to death the deeds of the body (Rom 8:13), waiting for the hope of righteousness (Gal 5:5), and obeying the truth (1 Pet 1:22).

At no point is the matter of salvation left in our hands alone. We DO have a part to play, but it is NOT the only part (Phil 2:12-13). Our salvation has both human and Divine involvements: i.e., the brethren and the Holy Spirit. Both have been given to us by our Lord, and we are to reckon on them. The prayers of the saints and the help of the Holy have been joined together by Divine appointment, and they will work together for our salvation. The persuasion of this contributes to praise to the Lord, and our thankfulness for and love of the brethren. It also strengthens a confident and joyful spirit.

HAVING THE RIGHT EXPECTATION

“ . . . according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death” (NKJV). What is to be EXPECTED by those in Christ—i.e., eagerly anticipated? Our adversary would have us expect unfettered life in this world—a life without setbacks, hindrances, or heartache. Those entertaining such notions are easily discouraged by hardship and sorrow, often drawing back from the Lord because of such things. But this is not the posture of faith.

We catch a glimpse of the heart of Paul in this statement of what he is earnestly expecting. Here he defines his ***“hope,”*** or what constrained and motivated him. Here we see what compelled Paul to do live, and respond to life, as he did. He gives both a negative and a positive view: what he is confident will NOT happen, and what he is persuaded WILL happen. These are not impersonal expectations, but reflect the fervent longings of his heart.

In nothing ashamed. Is this not a noble ambition? He is speaking of shame before the Lord. He looks to the end—the consummation of all things—and says he expects NOT to be ashamed. It is the peculiar prerogative of faith to bring this to pass. As it is written, ***“For they shall not be ashamed who wait for Me”*** (Isa 49:23), and ***“whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame”*** (Rom 9:33; 10:11). In the end, no person who has lived for, and relied upon, Jesus will be embarrassed, humiliated, or mocked. The knowledge of this reality sustained Paul in difficulty.

The fact that he says ***“in nothing”*** shows how thoroughly he lived for the Lord. He had abandoned personal interests to take hold of Divine purpose. He allowed nothing to dominate his life that was unrelated to life in Christ. We do well to maintain such a frame of spirit (Phil 3:15-16).

That Christ may be magnified. Flesh seeks self-exaltation. Spirit seeks for Jesus to become eminent. Mind you, Jesus exists and IS exalted above all. That is His current status. Paul, however, lived so this would become conspicuous. When Christ is ***“magnified,”*** He is exalted, drawing attention to Himself. But notice how Paul says this is accomplished: ***“in my body.”*** Showing this to be his consistent desire, he adds ***“now as always”*** (NASB). In beholding Paul’s condition, and response to it, attention was actually drawn to the Lord Jesus! His light was shining ***“before men”*** (Matt 5:16). Some might prefer Christ to be exalted through a great sign or wonder, or some historical event. Paul was confident it would occur in his ***“body.”***

The means through which Christ would gain prominence were incidental. Whether in living or in dying, Paul wanted the attention to be drawn to Christ. Living well and dying well require Divine power. They require personal determination as well. The key ingredient here, however, is confidence—an ***“earnest expectation.”*** How God-glorifying it is when we exude a confidence like this: fully persuaded that Jesus will be perceptibly elevated by our living and our dying.

The manner in which we live, and the manner in which we die, is helped along by the prayers of our brethren, and supplies given by the Holy Spirit!

LESSON #12

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil 1:20, NKJV)

INTRODUCTION

In his introduction, Paul has focused our attention on the Kingdom of God. He views the Philippians as ***“saints in Jesus Christ”*** (1:1), and prays that grace and peace from God will be their portion (1:2). His recollection of them reaches its apex when he is in prayer (1:3-4). His association with them was one of joy, because of their participation in the Gospel. From the very first, they had taken hold of the truth of the Gospel, and joined Paul in the journey to glory (1:5). The Apostle expresses his confidence that the good work God has begun in them will be performed ***“until the day of Christ”*** (1:6). How glorious to be a church that can be addressed like this!

To people like this, Paul can speak freely about his condition. He can divulge the glories of suffering with Christ, and the confidence that everything will turn out to his salvation. These people can receive this truth. He even goes so far as to share what personally motivates him – and it is lofty! The Apostle is confidently casting his pearls before these people.

THE PERSONAL VIEW OF PAUL

“For to me” (KJV). When Paul says, ***“For to me,”*** he is not stating a mere opinion, or a private view. Rather, he is affirming his faith—declaring what he has been given to see through the grace of God. This is an important thing to see. He is, as Peter would say, giving us a reason ***“for the hope that is in him”*** (1 Pet 3:15). This is involved in the ***“profession”*** or ***“confession,”*** as used in the book of Hebrews. ***“. . . consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus . . . let us hold fast our profession . . . Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering”*** (Heb 3:1; 4:14; 10:23, KJV). More recent versions use the word ***“confession.”*** This is an *acknowledgment* of a deeply rooted motivation.

Often men voice opinions about issues that are of little concern to them. Such things are not matters of life and death, nor are they primary incentives in their lives. Thus they entertain views about everything from politics to religion, and athletics to customs. But their lives are not shaped around these opinions. They are not an ideology or solid conviction. Let it be clear, when Paul says ***“For to me,”*** i.e., ***“As far as I am concerned,”*** he is speaking of the impetus of his life—the conviction that constrained him to do everything he did. This conviction was to his life what the heart is to the body.

He did not share with the Philippians what he thought about the government of the day (Rome), or the particular one ruling at that time (Nero). His view of the family, general social trends, or the comments of great philosophers, did not lie at the root of his thinking. None of those matters were large enough to touch every border of life. Small thinking, you must concede, makes small people!

Paul now takes an overview of life. He scans the horizon of life in this world and tells us what he sees. He rises high, where daily difficulties become small, and circumstance is incidental. He soars above the realm where men have undue concern about what they eat and drink, and how they are clothed. As a soaring eagle, he views life from the heavenly realms. He is going to tell us how it is to live with eternity in view. He will share the effect of regeneration upon life’s motivation. Life is seen through the eyes of faith, and from within the domain of good hope and everlasting consolation.

It is good for us to consider our own view of life. What really motivates us? What is your perception of living and dying? You will at once notice how different this approach is to that of the contemporary church member. Most people appear to be stimulated more by what they will receive in this world. For them, time is the real boundary line. They do not consider things before time, nor are they disposed to contemplate realities enduring beyond time. Such approaches to living are not of God, and have no place in the body of Christ. Let it be clear, Paul’s confession is the manner of the Kingdom. His was not an isolated view, but one common to all who are in Christ Jesus.

Since we have been ***“illuminated”*** (Heb 10:32), we see life differently. When asked to give a ***“reason for the hope that is in us,”*** we rise beyond the realm of time. We are constrained by the consideration of eternal verities—things that lie outside of ourselves, but with which we are now aligned.

LIVING IS CHRIST

“. . . to live is Christ . . . ” (KJV). Here Paul strikes at the very heart of true and ***“pure religion”*** (James 1:27). The Apostle now explains why he is content to either live or die. He sees advantage in both of them. In life he gains benefit, as well as in death. This is triumphant language. Again, it is the norm of the Kingdom. This is the way in which regenerative life speaks.

What a remarkable statement! He does not say living is “for Christ,” but that it ***“IS Christ.”*** The phrase ***“for me to live is Christ”*** equates with the Psalmist’s expression ***“my Portion”*** (Psa 73:26; 119:57; 142:5).

Jeremiah also affirmed this when he said, ***“The LORD is my portion”*** (Lam 3:24). These expressions mean more than the Lord being the **REASON** for living—although that is surely the case. It is more broad than living to **PLEASE** the Lord, i.e., obeying His commands and seeking to do His will. Paul is saying Christ is expressing Himself through him—living His exalted life in and through the Apostle.

Elsewhere the Apostle confessed, ***“it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me”*** (Gal 2:20). This is a remarkable circumstance. It is nothing less than the result of seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matt 6:33). Christ was ***“dwelling”*** in his heart ***“by faith”*** (Eph 3:17). This condition dwarfed all outward circumstance, reducing it to relative insignificance. Paul’s eyes were consistently upward.

See this yet another way. Christ being our life involves bringing ***“every thought captive to obey Christ”*** (2 Cor 10:5, RSV). In this case, the intellectual life is so wrapped up in Christ that plans and hopes center in Him, and Him alone. As with Jesus, one’s ***“meat,”*** or source of nourishment and satisfaction, is to ***“do the will”*** of God, and to ***“finish”*** the work He has given us to do (John 4:24). It is a tragedy that within the professed church this noble frame of spirit is so rare. Too often we confront religious leaders who ***“seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus”*** (Phil 2:21, NASB).

By saying, ***“For me to live is Christ,”*** the Apostle expressed his oneness with Christ. To him, being ***“joined to the Lord”*** (1 Cor 6:17) was more than a legal transaction. Not only did he feel at home in Jesus, Jesus was at home in him. Having taken up His ***“abode”*** with Paul, Jesus was making Himself known to and through him (John 14:21,23). His was a life of participation in the Divine nature (2 Pet 1:4). In an inspiring expression of this truth, Paul said he would not ***“speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed, in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit”*** (Rom 15:18-20, NASB). For him to live was ***“CHRIST!”***

In our own measure, each of us can experience this—***Christ living out His life in us***. The most prodigious mind has not touched the hem of this garment! The degree to which Christ can live in us has yet to be plumbed. There is a vast world of possibility available to every believer—a world that is both effective and gratifying to the human spirit. It is found in our alliance with the Lord Jesus. It is realized when Divine purposes are fulfilled in us. Our wills are thus swallowed up by His will, and it is glorious!

DYING IS GAIN

“. . . and to die is gain” (KJV). This is a remarkable statement, revealing aspects of Kingdom life that are most refreshing. ***“Gain,”*** in this case is glorious. It is possible, for example, to ***“gain the whole world,”*** and lose your soul (Matt 16:26). It is also possible to ***“buy and sell, and get gain”*** in this world, yet be miserably unaware of the Lord (James 4:13). All such gain requires the individual to ignore death. Death has no place in the appropriation of worldly gain. But it is not so in the Kingdom.

“Gain” refers to something that is experienced, and not to mere status. For example, those who have embraced the soul-sleeping nonsense imagine this ***“gain”*** to be mere release from the difficulties of life. The cessation of trouble, however, is not ***“gain.”*** In fact, it is just the opposite. If, in death, we are no longer conscious, nothing really is ***“gained.”*** In fact, believers will lose a lot if their death reduces them to inactivity and a loss of awareness.

Now—in this world—we have been ***“called into the fellowship”*** of Jesus (1 Cor 1:9). We experience ***“righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit”*** (Rom 14:17). God Himself fills us with ***“all joy and peace in believing, that we may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Spirit”*** (Rom 14:17). The Holy Spirit produces Divine fruit in us (Gal 5:22-23), and we are made ***“partakers of Christ”*** and of the ***“Divine nature”*** (Heb 3:14; 2 Pet 1:4). In confirmation of our sonship, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts (Gal 4:6), and that Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are ***“the children of God”*** (Rom 8:16). All of these things are experienced by the believer through faith and our conscience.

For dying to be ***“gain,”*** an **enhancement** of these things is required, as well as the cessation of trouble and affliction. It is not possible to profit by the diminishment of Divine fellowship, and the loss of a realization of His Presence. To become inactive is no ***“gain”*** for the one absorbed in the work of the Lord! The very thought is offensive to one possessing Christ’s mind.

In dying, the child of God will obtain more of Christ than was realized when living in this world. In living now, Christ brings inexplicable benefits. In dying, even more are brought. Not only do we pass beyond the domain of cursing, we come more fully into the realm of blessing—else there would be no ***“gain.”*** In dying, not only are we ***“absent from the body,”*** we are ***“present with the Lord.”*** That is why faith makes us ***“willing to be absent from the body”*** (2 Cor 5:8). Were there no gain in death, we would not be willing to be absent from the body. It would be far better to experience fellowship with the Lord in the body, than to have none with Him at all.

Until dying is viewed as ***“gain,”*** living will not be wholeheartedly toward the Lord. The soul that does not look forward to gaining in death will become absorbed with this world. But for that insightful person who sees the ***“hope”*** of God’s calling (Eph 1:18), living here becomes a preparation for gain there. Life in Christ brings every true advantage, both now and then—in life and in death. There are NO real disadvantages in spiritual life. Even the conclusion of life in this world is but a door leading to greater abundance, a fuller realization of Divine fellowship, and greater participation in His life.

LESSON #13

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you.” (Phil 1:22-24, NKJV)

INTRODUCTION

The nature of spiritual life has been greatly obscured by institutional religion. We scarcely hear of someone whose total life is wrapped up in Jesus Christ. Yet, this is the norm of the Kingdom. Here we have an expression of the mind of Christ. This is not a statement of how we *ought* to live, but what this means: *“for me to live is Christ.”* In Jesus, a very real death to self occurs. The view of life is radically changed, as it is viewed in strict association with the Lord and His objectives. As far as priorities are concerned, Jesus and His people are first. The reason for and effectiveness of life is seen from this perspective.

LIVING ON IN THE FLESH

“But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor” (KJV). Paul has stated the regenerative view of both life and death. ***“For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”*** Now he further defines what is involved in living. ***FIRST***, living is not to be taken for granted: i.e., ***“IF I live!”*** Satan tempts people to think they are assured of life. For some, the only thing that interrupts this delusion is a crisis of health or an accident. Those who walk in the light, however, know that their days are ***“numbered.”*** They seek for Divine assistance to live with an acute awareness of that (Psa 90:12). The truth of the matter is, we will live only ***“if the Lord will”*** (James 4:15).

Paul’s language is very descriptive: ***“if I live on in the flesh.”*** He knows, from one perspective, the child of God will ***“never die”*** (John 11:26). The life that is lived to God **cannot** be interrupted. That is why it is called ***“eternal life.”*** Death cannot disturb or suspend spiritual life—else death would not be ***“gain.”*** Were this not the case, the phrase ***“live on in the flesh”*** would not have significance. Elsewhere this view of our life is called being ***“in the body”*** (Heb 13:3), and being ***“in the world”*** (1 Pet 5:9).

The Apostle is talking about Divine appointment. The NASB captures this perspective: ***“But if I am to live on in the flesh.”*** Life is thus seen as controlled by the Lord. Faith joyfully acquiesces to this situation, seeing living in this world and passing into the unseen world as advantages. Keep in mind, Paul is in prison. Yet, he views living ***“on in the flesh”*** as advantageous. He had experienced temptations to think otherwise, but was moved to consider even them from a heavenly point of view (2 Cor 1:8-9).

The Apostolic expression is thought-provoking. He does not say if he lives on in the flesh he will have more opportunities to preach, even though that is what he was sent to do (1 Cor 1:17). He rather speaks of ***“fruit,”*** or spiritual results. The NKJV reads, ***“this will mean fruit from my labor.”*** The NASB reads, ***“this will mean fruitful labor for me.”*** What a marvelous expression of faith! He had captured the truth of the Psalmic expression, ***“He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him”*** (Psa 126:6).

Do not be tempted to think your labors are vain in the Lord. They are not. Those chosen by Jesus are ordained to bring forth fruit (John 15:16). The Word they sow will not return to the Lord without results! ***“So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it”*** (Isa 55:11). While that reaping is to the glory of God, it is charged to the account of the laborer (Phil 4:17).

Living to the Lord is a most rewarding experience! Even when oppressed, fruit can be expected. Whether we are in the desert like Moses, a prison like Joseph, or as Isle like John, fruit can come from our labors. This is not an assessment of sight. It is the perspective of faith. We have been called into the fellowship of God’s dear Son (1 Cor 1:9). We are enlisted in His sowing and reaping program, and fruit will be realized by our labors as long as we are ***“in the flesh.”*** We must not allow anything to hide this from us.

HARD PRESSED BETWEEN THE TWO

“ . . . yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better” (KJV). Here Paul divulges both the intensity and diversity of spiritual life. His life was so intertwined with Christ that he could not choose between life and death. You may remember that Elijah, under the juniper tree, did not have such a difficulty (1 Kgs 19:4). Of course, that was a low time for the prophet. Paul is expressing his normal manner of thinking.

The NIV reflects the strength of the expression. ***“I am torn between the two.”*** The idea is that of being caught between two strong forces. He experienced pressure to die and pressure to live. Some are constrained to live, but not to die. Others are pressured to die, but not to live. The Apostle, however, lived so close to Christ that both compulsions were experienced simultaneously. Mind you, this is what he meant when he said, ***“For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”*** It was not the mere joy of living that pressured him to live. From one perspective, life had been cruel to

him. Many a soul would have despised life, had they passed through the difficulties negotiated by Paul. Among them he lists stripes, prison, deaths, beatings, shipwreck, isolation, perils, weariness, hunger, thirst, nakedness, and the push of concern (2 Cor 11:23-28). These were *“frequent,”* not occasional!

He acknowledges the superiority of one desire – so it is not a matter of simply choosing what is best. Departing and being with Christ is *“far better.”* There is really no comparison between the experiences of life and death. Death is, in every way, *“better.”* He is speaking of the ADVANTAGES or EFFECTS of life, and not life’s experiences. This is a high view, and much to be coveted by all believers.

Notice how Paul refers to death. He does not say he prefers to die, as Elijah said. Rather he prefers to *“depart and be with Christ.”* Here his love for Christ spills out, unable to be contained. Faith had joined him to the Lord, and he knew it (1 Cor 6:17). He had eternal life, and knew it (1 John 5:13). There is a confidence reflected in this expression that may be possessed by every believer. There are multitudes of professing believers who stand in doubt about their coming death. They are not sure whether they will be with the Lord or not. This condition severely hampers their life. It does not need to exist in any child of God. Departing from this world and our frail body can be anticipated, all the while also being pressured to live with Christ here.

Let it be clear, Paul’s desire to live was not driven by the anticipation of any earthly advantage. He was not motivated by thoughts of a wife, family, or other earthly associations. The values associated with each of those things are good in their place, but they are inappropriate as basic motivations. Fellowship with Christ lifts us higher, allowing us to enjoy lower associations to the fullest, yet be stimulated by higher considerations. It is not a matter of enjoying the best of both worlds. Rather, it is experiencing the life of God in both worlds—and there is a vast difference. Paul’s life was being lived in rich communion with the Lord. That affiliation brought righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, making it difficult to choose between life and death.

MORE NEEDFUL FOR YOU

“Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you” (KJV). Now Paul divulges why he had difficulty in choosing between staying and departing. It was not his own earthly advantage that made it difficult, but the consideration of the Philippians. The extent to which Paul partook of the Divine nature is revealed in this expression. His heart was in his Apostleship! He not only had affiliation with the people of God, they were in his heart. As he said earlier, *“I have you in my heart”* (1:7). This was not a sentimental feeling, but a profound spiritual experience. He did not merely seek to be with them, or to enjoy their company. The Lord had given him something they needed, and Paul wanted to give it to them. He knew what he had received. He also knew the relevancy of his gifts to the life of faith.

He does not say remaining was joyful, but *“needful.”* Without wavering, he associated his life with his Apostolic calling. He is saying that as long as he lived, he would fulfill his calling. He would minister, whether with a chain or without one. Prison would not interrupt his ministry, but would only expand it. He would continue to strengthen the faith of the saints.

The work we have been given to do must not be discontinued because of life’s circumstances. The people of God need the gifts that have been distributed and are administered by the Spirit of God. As is well stated, *“But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all”* (1 Cor 12:7). Often, being *“good stewards of the manifold grace of God”* involves choosing life when there are no apparent personal advantages in it (1 Pet 4:10-11). This is what Scripture calls *“preferring one another”* (Rom 12:11). Also, Paul had a mind to finish the work given to him, even as Jesus completed the work given to Him.

There is something else to be seen here. The Philippians would gain an advantage by the continuing of Paul’s life. This cannot be said of everyone. Those who do not bring us advantages by their life will take nothing from us when they depart. Notice, Paul does not say his life would bring some happy moments to the Philippians. The extension of his life would not merely be nice. The saints would receive from him things **NEEDED** for faith-life .

The choice of expressions is significant: *“far better”* and *“more needful.”* The *“more needful”* was on the Philippians part. The *“far better”* was on Paul’s part. I cannot help but observe that it is better for some to stay in the world, for they are not yet ready to depart. A far better state, indeed, to be able to say *“I am now ready”* (2 Tim 4:6).

Paul was willing to stay for them! Oh, the blessedness of being so responsive to the Lord we are advantaged by the lingering life of holy people! In a day when *“the aged”* ministers of God (Philemon 9) are easily forgotten, we need to hear this word. Although he was old, infirmed, and in prison, Paul still brought advantages to the people of God. This sort of thinking is summarily rejected by the institutional church—but it reflects Christ’s manner of government. May God grant a restoration of this mind-set.

Suffice it to say, those who live for Christ can eagerly anticipate departing to be with Christ, while also eager to advantage the saints.

LESSON #14

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith, that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again.” (Phil 1:24-25, NKJV)

INTRODUCTION

I continue to be impressed by the direction of spiritual thinking. Much contemporary *Christian* thought is bent toward the earth. It borrows its nomenclature from the condemned realm, and seems to process everything through the filter of the *“wisdom from beneath.”* But this is not the Apostle’s manner, nor is it the practice of any who are walking in the light and living by faith. Jesus Himself is the heart of spiritual thought. The *“great salvation”* found in Him is the environment in which profitable expressions are formed. If you were able to remove Christ and salvation from Paul’s thought processes, he would have nothing whatsoever to say to the churches. They, and they alone, were his constant frame of reference, as attested by this letter.

I KNOW I SHALL CONTINUE

“And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all . . . ” (KJV). Paul first preached the Gospel in Philippi around A.D. 53. Now, about nine years later (A.D. 62), he writes this epistle. Although presently encumbered with a chain, the Apostle is convinced he will continue for a season—how long, he does not know. History tells us Paul was martyred in A.D. 67-68. Thus he did, in fact, *“abide and continue”* for 5-6 years. His *“confidence”* was thus an expression of faith, and not a mere fleshly desire to live on. I do not understand this text to mean he received a special revelation concerning the duration of his imprisonment. Rather, it seems to have resulted from his close proximity to the Lord Jesus, and his willing involvement in God’s eternal purpose.

Some believe this passage indicates Paul confidence that he would be released from prison. While he may have anticipated this, I do not believe the language of the verse demands this conclusion. *Abiding and continuing* with the Philippians did not *require* a release from prison, nor do I believe the Apostle was prone to think in this manner.

There is a sense in which spirits are together, though separated by circumstance, and even time. Take, for example, Paul’s instruction to the Corinthians concerning the unfortunate presence of a fornicator in their midst. Even though he was not with them in the body, he was, in another sense, present with them. *“In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus”* (1 Cor 5:4-5, NKJV). Again, he wrote to the Colossians, *“For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ”* (Col 2:5, NKJV).

Paul lived with an acute awareness of the spiritual company into which faith had brought him. This is a posture of life that can be occupied by every child of God. After all, we have come into a remarkable cosmic fellowship in Christ Jesus. As it is written, *“But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel”* (Heb 12:22-24). Paul’s continuance in the body was seen from this perspective—the fellowship into which salvation inducts us.

Abiding and continuing are perspectives of faith. They are not to be equated with mere existence. The *abiding* was in Christ as well as in the body, and in grace as well as in circumstance. *Continuing* involved remaining in the faith as well as in this world, and functioning as an Apostle as well as a protraction of earthly life. It is refreshing to consider living from this vantage point. It diminishes the tendency to be overcome with the difficulties of life. It also brings great glory to God, for it reflects His mind.

FUTHERANCE AND JOY OF FAITH

“ . . . for your furtherance and joy of faith” (KJV). Paul did not live for himself! For him to live was *“Christ”* (1:21; Gal 2:20). If he was ever diverted by temptations to live only for himself, he never expressed it in his writings. Although such dreadful impulses, no doubt, came, they were subdued by the grace of God. In so doing, he maintained a *“sound mind.”*

The continuance of Paul’s life would result in the *“furtherance”* of the people of God. Other versions translate the word *“progress.”* The language portrays the life of faith as a journey from one place to another; from earth to glory. Spiritual life is, by its very nature, progressive. It is not static or motionless. According to God’s purpose, the Holy Spirit is changing us *“from one degree of glory to another”* (2 Cor 3:18, NRSV). This is nothing less than being *“conformed to the image of His [God’s] Son”* (Rom 8:29).

For some, *the Christian life* finds its apex in a well-ordered home, moral stability, or financial soundness. In their place, all of these are fine—but that is not what spiritual life is all about. Real development consists of making spiritual

progress. It involves becoming more like the Lord Jesus Christ in thought, word, and deed. Where this does not occur, there has been no genuine **“furtherance,”** or progress. The Scriptures, particularly the Apostolic writings, offer no commendation to those who have a handle on their marriage, children, or home. It is not that such things are despised. They are simply not at the heart of spiritual thought.

It is most refreshing to ponder the impact of one godly life upon another. You must ask yourself what advantage your continuance in this life is bringing to the people of God. Rest assured, your influence can be significant.

Now Paul uses an expression that expands our thinking: **“joy of faith,”** or **“joy in the faith.”** Joy and faith have been wed in Christ Jesus! To the Corinthians Paul wrote, **“Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand”** (2 Cor 1:24). The clear implication is that faith is assisted greatly by spiritual joy. Little wonder Nehemiah said, **“the joy of the LORD is your strength”** (Neh 8:10).

The **“joy of faith”** is the joy that relies upon and nourishes faith. It is nothing less than **“joy in God”** (Rom 5:11), **“joy in the Holy Spirit”** (Rom 14:17), **“joy in the God of my salvation”** (Hab 3:18). Such joy is produced when we see God as **our “Savior”** Lk 1:47), and His salvation is perceived as belonging to **us** (Eph 1:13).

Valid Kingdom ministries contribute to spiritual progress and a joy that relates to faith. Where these two affects are not produced, there has been no acceptable ministry for Christ Jesus. The alarming thing about this consideration is the overwhelming lack of these evidences in the Christian community. This is a circumstance that calls for both prayer and labor. The body of Christ stands in need of laborers whose presence aids growth in Christ Jesus. Further, there is no real need for any professed *minister* who does not contribute to our conformity to Christ’s image, or who does not increase our joy in the Lord. On the other hand, as long as the world stands, there will be a need for those who bring advantages in these vital areas.

MORE ABUNDANT REJOICING

“ . . . that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again” (KJV). Here we again behold Paul’s desire to be with the Philippians. They were in his heart (1:7), and he longed to be with them. The closeness of one child of God to another cannot be fully perceived in this life. Nor, indeed, can the advantages that can be realized by such holy associations be seen in their fulness.

But this text goes deeper than Paul’s desire to be with the Philippians. He sees his presence giving them the advantage in Jesus Christ. Were he able to be with them again, their rejoicing for him would be **“more abundant.”** This would not occur merely because they were friends, or close associates. The rejoicing would be **“in Jesus Christ.”** In keeping with the nature of the Kingdom, Paul knew **“no man after the flesh”** (2 Cor 5:16). It is apparent from this verse that the Philippians also held that proper view.

Elsewhere, Paul states that God has given profitable **“ministers”** to **“every man.”** They are the appointed means through which spiritual growth and conformity to Christ are realized. **“Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one?”** (1 Cor 3:5, NKJV). The ministers themselves are NOT the point, but the advantages they bring to the people of God. A minister who does not build up the people of God is an unfaithful servant—like a servant who does not serve, a helper who does not help, and a worker who does not work. Although it is fashionable to glory in men—even godly men—such is forbidden. **“Therefore let no one boast in men. For all things are yours: whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come; all are yours”** (1 Cor 3:21-22). Should this be taken seriously by professing Christians, it would revolutionize the churches.

The presence of godly people can make a difference to believers. Paul was **“comforted . . . by the coming of Titus”** (2 Cor 7:6). Onesiphorus was **“often”** a source of refreshment to Paul (2 Tm 1:16). Philemon is said to have **“refreshed”** the **“hearts of the saints”** (Phile 7). The Apostle was once **“glad about the coming of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus . . . For they refreshed”** his spirit, as well as that of other saints (1 Cor 16:18). Oh the blessedness of such holy associations.

There is such a thing as coming in the name of the Lord, but bringing no spiritual advantage. With great zeal, the people of God must avoid falling into that category. With the Psalmist, we must strive to say, **“Those who fear You will be glad when they see me, Because I have hoped in Your word”** (Psa 119:74). The believer’s close association with their Lord, and their walk of faith, is what endears them to the brethren. What is more, the Lord works, by means of their fellowship with Himself, to strengthen His people. He makes their faith stronger and their joy fuller by means of kindred spirits.

It is no wonder we read, **“As iron sharpens iron, So a man sharpens the countenance of his friend”** (Prov 27:17). In Christ Jesus, much more of that is realized than Solomon saw. His expression is but a faint reflection of what **“One greater than Solomon”** has provided for His people.

LESSON #15

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel, and not in any way terrified by your adversaries, which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that from God.” (Phil 1:27-28)

INTRODUCTION

The believer’s manner of life is not the result of following laws, but of walking in the Spirit and living by faith. No other life is acceptable with God. Where there is no reliance upon the Lord, and no hearty embrace of the Gospel, living is off-center. For this reason, the Spirit will now associate living with the Gospel—not with a code of conduct, or a series of procedures. This is an arresting consideration, and is not at all common in the churches. Yet, this is the manner of the Kingdom, and it is glorious to behold Remember, Paul has the churches in his heart when he himself is oppressed.

CONDUCT WORTHY OF THE GOSPEL

“Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ . . .” (KJV). The word ***“only”*** shifts the attention from Paul and the response of the Philippians to his ministry. While they have profited from his life and ministry, their primary responsibility is not to the Apostle. Their lives have been enhanced by his presence, but they must NOT be diminished by his absence. True ministers bring a message that liberates the souls of men and women to live in a manner that complements the Gospel.

Ponder the weight of this statement. Conduct is compared with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The spiritual yardstick for living is the Gospel! This differs radically from a *rules and procedures* approach to life. It is true that spiritual immaturity requires ***“tutors and governors,”*** or ***“guardians and managers”*** (Gal 4:2). That state, however, is not meant to be a permanent one. It also excludes the individual from ***“strong meat,”*** or solid food (Heb 5:12). Such a state, though initial in spiritual life, is not complementary to the Gospel of Christ, any more than an infant brings great honor to its parents.

By saying ***“worthy of the Gospel,”*** the Spirit indicates there is a walk of life that is a reproach to the Gospel. Such is a manner of living that causes the name of God, His doctrine, and the Word, to be blasphemed (Rom 2:24; 1 Tim 6:1; Tit 2:5). Without question, lethargic and infantile believers are among the greatest enemies of the faith, and are reproaches to Christ Jesus.

“Worthy” means in *a manner proper to*, or in harmony with, the Gospel. Our new life was initiated by a vibrant fellowship in the Gospel. We died with Christ, were buried with him, and raised to walk in the newness of life (Rom 6:3-4). A life that is in harmony with the Gospel is one that is lived to the Lord, and is dead to sin and the world. It is written of the Christ of the Gospel, ***“knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God”*** (Rom 6:9-10). A Christ Who was not raised from the dead would be ineffectual for sinners. Neither, indeed, could we be helped by a Savior who repeatedly died for sin, and was continually tempted by it. If death had dominion over Him, He could not enable us to triumph over it. If He did not live to God, He could not make intercession for us. This is essential to the Gospel.

The relevance of this is seen in the next verse. ***“Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord”*** (Rom 6:11). That is the ONLY life ***“worthy of the Gospel!”*** Where such a life is not found—regardless of profession—reproach is heaped upon Christ, the Gospel is neutralized, and the good confession voided.

In this world, men may maintain their citizenship, even though they live in flagrant contradiction of it. But this is NOT the case with our heavenly citizenship (Phil 3:20). No grace will be given to those who insist on living in contradiction of the Gospel. That is, those who do not crucify the flesh and appropriate the life of Christ, will not obtain Divine approval. While this may appear to be strong, it is necessary for us to think in this manner. If we fail to do so, Satan’s temptations will have more power against us.

STANDING FAST IN ONE SPIRIT

“. . . so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel” (KJV). The glory of spiritual life is found in its consistency. When life is lived in harmony with the Gospel, continual monitoring by other brethren is not necessary. The notion of *accountability* that is so popular today, is fraught with flaw. That some value may be found in it cannot be denied—but it is only at the novice level. Further, growth out of that condition is imperative. Joseph must be able to live for God in Egypt, even when his family is not there. Moses must trust God in the wilderness when he is alone. David must maintain a tender heart when he cares for sheep in a solitary place. Daniel and the three Hebrew children must trust in God when they are in the king’s court, and isolated from kindred believers. If this point is not reached, a fall is sure.

The idea expressed in this verse is this: *whether I come and personally behold you, or hear about you from a distance, the message of your faithfulness will be the same.* By saying **“your affairs,”** Paul does not mean everything they are doing. He is referring to their walk of faith, their life in the Lord, and their progress to glory. The incidentals of life, important though they may be at times, were not the focus of his attention. He wanted to know if the seed he had planted was continuing to yield fruit.

The expression **“stand fast”** is common in Scripture (1 Cor 16:13; Gal 5:1; Phil 4:1; 1 Thess 3:8; 2 Thess 2:15). This is the maintenance of spiritual stability in the face of trial and opposition. It is sustaining faith when the scorching heat of persecution arises, and the fiery darts of the wicked one are hurled at the believer in unusual measures (Matt 13:21; Eph 6:16). This is holding our ground, and not relinquishing aspects of life to the devil.

But this is a joint endeavor. Paul longed to hear of the Philippian brethren standing fast as a whole—in **“one spirit”**—with single-heartedness. It would be uncomely for them to be divided in this matter. One “mind” was to dominate them all: **“with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.”** The **“faith of the Gospel”** is the faith initiated and maintained by the Gospel. Striving for that faith is exerting effort to **“keep the faith,”** so that it grows **“exceedingly”** (2 Thess 1:3). There are vistas of truth yet to be experienced, but striving to obtain them is necessary.

Standing fast and endeavoring to keep the faith are not spiritual luxuries, to be sought by a select few. The very nature of spiritual life demands these activities. We are in a hostile world, facing an aggressive enemy, and dwelling in frail houses of clay. Anyone imagining that such a circumstance allows for casualness will be disarmed by that imagination. Satan thereby gains the advantage, and a fall from grace is imminent.

The exceeding rarity of this spirit in the churches is a cause of great concern. Scarcely can a congregation be found that is united in their effort to keep the faith and live in consonance with the Gospel. It seems that this is an exceedingly rare thing in nearly every congregation. It is a condition that requires the fervent prayers and labors of every believer.

NOT TERRIFIED BY OUR ADVERSARIES

“ . . . and not in any way terrified by your adversaries, which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that from God.” (KJV). A lack of spiritual fervor causes this verse to sound peculiar. Many professed believers do not think of themselves as having **“adversaries,”** or opponents. There is a brand of *Christianity* that imagines all men are our friends, and we are friends to all men. But this is not the case at all. One has only to consider our blessed Lord, the personification of both love and truth, to confirm this.

Faith causes some people to become our adversaries, or antagonists. An adversary is aggressive, and launches spiritual initiatives against the child of God. Who does not know this to be the case? Think of Lot, Joseph, Moses, Israel, Daniel, John the Baptist, and the Apostles. Consider the early church that was scattered abroad by contentious persecutors (Acts 8:1-4). An unopposed church is probably not a good one.

The adversaries of which Paul spoke were not known for simply casting aspersions at the people of God. They would take their property (Heb 10:34), kill them (Rev 2:13), and beat them (Acts 18:17). Their wicked advances, however, were not to strike terror in the hearts of believers. If we fear anyone, let it be God, not man. Jesus once said, **“And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!”** (Lk 12:4-5). It is evident God does not always restrain our adversaries from harming us—but we are not to be terrified by them.

The fact that our adversaries oppose us proves they are condemned! **“This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed”** (NIV). Strong language, indeed! The Thessalonians were told, **“it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you”** (2 Thess 1:6). Not only does their unbelief confirm the wrath of God abides upon them, but their antagonism toward the elect corroborates that fact. This is an awesome consideration, designed to console those who endure suffering.

An even more profound thing is seen in this text. The existence of adversaries—opposition because of our faith—proves we **“will be saved”** (NIV). This is affirmed repeatedly in Scripture. Persecution proves we possess the Kingdom of heaven (Matt 5:10). It is one of the means through which we are **“counted worthy of the Kingdom of God, for which”** we suffer (2 Thess 1:4-5). When, therefore, we are asked to pass through periods of great opposition and persecution, we must lift up our heads, and be of good cheer. We are en route to glory, and to a sure reign with Jesus (2 Tim 2:12).

The Spirit adds one more word to bolster our faith: **“And this is God's doing”** (NRSV). Both the destruction of the wicked and the salvation of the righteous will be carried out by the Lord. There is not the slightest chance that either of these will fail of fulfillment! We are to take hold of this word, and refuse to let it go. Our adversaries will face the Lord, and therefore we are not to be terrified by them. We ourselves will be saved by the Lord, and therefore are not to tremble before opponents. A comforting word, indeed!

LESSON #16

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me” (Phil 1:27-28)

INTRODUCTION

The truth of salvation by grace permeates everything written by the Apostle of the Gentiles. Even in his most personal remarks, Paul finds a place to reaffirm the nature of our participation in reconciliation. While men are prone to zealously guard doctrines that support their particular persuasions, the Apostle is careful to give glory to God in all matters. By so doing, he removes the glory from man, and encourages thanksgiving and praise. Proper responses to life are the result of accurate spiritual perception. Each of us can contribute to the stability of our brethren by encouraging spiritual insight.

FOR CHRIST’S SAKE

“For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake . . .” (NASB). Everything related to salvation is associated with the Lord Jesus Christ. Remove Him from the picture, and there is no salvation, either doctrinally or experientially. For example, God has forgiven us: ***“And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you”*** (Eph 4:32). Other versions read ***“God in Christ . . .”*** The idea is that were it not for Christ, God would not have forgiven us. He, and He alone, removed our sins, and He alone has the merit.

The word ***“sake”*** means *by reason of, or on account of*. For ***“Christ’s sake,”*** therefore, means on account of, or because of, Him. It is important that we see the implications of this declaration. First, this puts the salvation of God, in all of its fulness, within our grasp. While God does behold our persons and our progress, He is motivated by His Son. He has not only exalted Jesus, but deals favorable with men because of Him.

This is precisely why the Kingdom of God is Christ-centered. *Anything that pushes Jesus to the periphery moves us beyond the blessing of God.* Neither faith nor the fellowship of Christ’s suffering will ever be realized while Jesus remains in the background of men’s thinking. I cannot overemphasize the enormous penalty that is paid when men choose to emphasize an institution, movement, or humanly-devised doctrine.

Just as God Himself is motivated by the Lord Jesus, so those who are blessed in Him are constrained by a consideration of Christ. The Apostles preached, placing themselves in the background, because of Jesus. ***“For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus’ sake”*** (2 Cor 4:5). They subjected themselves to great dangers, in order that the life of Jesus might be made known through them. ***“For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus’ sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh”*** (2 Cor 4:11). Jesus is the reason for the grace of God toward men. He is also the reason for all valid Kingdom labors.

In the last analysis, Jesus Christ is the only man God honors. Everything hinges on Him! God will NOT confer a blessing independently of Him. Our faith and our suffering are both determined by Christ—both by His relation to God, and our relation to Him. Few texts of Scripture affirm this any stronger than the fifth chapter of Romans. The ***“grace of God”*** and the ***“gift by grace”*** are because of Jesus (Rom 5:15). The ***“free gift”*** results in the ***“justification”*** of sinners, is because of Jesus (Rom 5:16). The ***“reign in life”*** by the saints is because of Jesus (Rom 5:17). We are ***“made righteous”*** because of Jesus (Rom 5:19). It is through Christ, and Christ alone, that grace reigns to ***“eternal life”*** (Rom 5:21). God has received and blessed us because of Christ, and Him alone. *We are to view both our faith and our suffering for Him as evidence God has received us, and is preparing us for glory.*

Cursed, therefore, be any and every approach to God that minimizes the Lord Jesus Christ. When other things are allowed to upstage Jesus, we move beyond the domain of blessing, and into the realm of cursing

BELIEVING IS A GIFT

“For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake . . . to believe in Him . . .” (KJV). Our *intellect* is involved in believing, but it is not the whole of the matter. Often faith is portrayed as the result of weighing evidence, then accepting the affirmation confirmed by the evidence. It is particularly fashionable in academic circles to view believing in this manner.

Our will is also involved in believing, but neither is it the whole of the matter. *Wanting* to believe does not make it so. We see this in the expression of a man confronted with the possibilities of faith. ***“I believe help thou mine unbelief”*** (Mark 9:24). Even then, ***“help”*** is given ***“for Christ’s sake,”*** or ***“in the behalf of Christ”*** (KJV).

CALLED TO BELIEVE. The fact that we have been ***“given to believe”*** confirms *this is God’s objective for us*. This is the means through which the righteousness of God is conferred upon us (Rom 1:17; 3:22; 4:5,13; Phil

3:9). It is also what makes us pleasing to the Lord (Heb 11:5-6). Faith, or believing the record God has given us His Son (1 John 5:10-11), is the sole means of appropriating Divine benefits. Our level of attainment in the Kingdom of God is primarily measured by our faith.

IT HAS BEEN GRANTED. Although we have often referred to the gift of faith, I never tire of its consideration. It is ever true that we have *“believed through grace”* (Acts 18:27). In a poignant expression of the source of our salvation, Scripture affirms, *“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God”* (Eph 2:8). Some linguists, unduly influenced by their preconceived theology, insist that the phrase *“it is the gift of God”* has no reference to *“faith,”* but to the salvation which faith appropriates. Our text, however, confirms faith, or believing, to be *part* of that great salvation. Whether in its beginning or in its ending, we have *“obtained like precious faith”* (2 Pet 1:1). Too, when it is said *God “purified their hearts by faith”* (Acts 15:8), the whole of the action is attributed to God Himself. God has *“allotted to each a measure of faith”* (Rom 12:3, NASB).

KEEP THE FAITH. The fact that it has been *“given”* to us to believe sheds a great deal of light on keeping the faith. This is, in fact, a mark of the saints of God (Rev 14:12; 2 Tim 4:7). What the Lord has given to us is to be maintained and increased. When it was *“given to us to believe,”* we did not receive faith in full bloom, but in the bud. **That faith, because it came from the Lord, can increase through Him.** The disciples sensed this while Jesus was among them. Remember their request? *“Increase our faith”* (Lk 17:5). Paul commended the Thessalonians for the surpassing growth of their faith (2 Thess 1:3). That growth was evidence of Divine activity.

Jesus is truly *“the Author and Finisher of our faith”* (Heb 12:2). It might interest you to know that the word used in this text (faith--πίστεως) is used 94 times from Acts through 1 Peter. In every single instance, it is used of *“faith”* as ordinarily represented--*“the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen”* (Heb 11:1). Such faith was authored, or originated, in us by the Lord Jesus. Faith is a gracious gift vouchsafed to us for Jesus sake, in order that we might lay hold on eternal life.

THE GIFT OF SUFFERING

“ . . . For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake . . . to suffer for His sake, experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me” (NASB). Suffering is not pleasant, but it is sanctified in Christ Jesus. Here the Spirit brings us to consider the ultimate reason for our suffering – it is a gracious gift from God, for Jesus’ sake. The suffering of reference is *“for His sake.”* Such suffering does result from righteousness, but it is also evidence that the Kingdom of God already belongs to us (Matt 5:10). This is the perspective of our text.

The gift of suffering is NOT an end of itself, but the means to an end. The objective is to *“reign”* with Christ. The means to that end is suffering with Christ (2 Tim 2:12). Because this world is *“evil”* (Gal 1:4), and those belonging to its order *“alienated from the life of God”* (Eph 4:18; Col 1:21), there are consequences to being identified with Christ Jesus. Well did Jesus say, *“If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you”* (John 15:20).

If God has *“granted”* us to suffer for Christ’s sake, that suffering cannot alienate us from Him. This is involved in the Spirit’s affirmation, *“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us”* (Rom 8:35-37). Rather than such adversities being viewed as curses, or evidences of Divine withdrawal, they are to be seen as gifts—preludes to glorification.

The gift of suffering for Jesus’ sake is a means of qualifying us for glory. As it is written, *“your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure, which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer”* (2 Thess 1:4-5). The *“righteous judgment of God”* is to be seen in the suffering itself, as well as those through whom it came. In it, saints are *“counted worthy of the Kingdom”* and their persecutors made worthy of tribulation God will heap on them (2 Thess 1:6).

It is no wonder the Apostles, after being beaten *“departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name”* (Acts 5:41). In their sufferings they saw a confirmation of Divine acceptance and future reward. Their rejection by the enemies of God verified their reconciliation to Him.

Suffering is granted in direct proportion to the reward reserved for us in heaven. Remember, our role in the Kingdom is appointed; i.e., God places the members in the body where it has pleased Him (John 15:16; 1 Cor 12:18,28). Take Paul as an example. The Lord placed him in a high position, therefore great suffering was also allotted to him (Acts 9:16). In suffering for Jesus’ sake, *“the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you”* (1 Pet 4:14), a most remarkable circumstance. That Spirit is *“given”* to us, and is what causes the suffering to occur. Once seen, this circumstance produces great confidence.

In view of this, let us speak more of the glory than the suffering. Let us behold in our sufferings for Christ evidence of the future glory. The Giver of the suffering will not allow them to overcome us as we walk by faith.

LESSON #17

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind” (Phil 2:1,2. NKJV)

INTRODUCTION

In Christ Jesus there are spiritual realities that are only apparent to faith. When ministering to the saints, men of insight consistently draw attention to these verities, calling upon believers to focus upon them, and occupy their minds with a consideration of them. The reason for this action is apparent: they have a sanctifying affect upon the soul. When these unseen verities dominate our thinking, we are lifted higher, and enabled to live in a manner consonant, or in harmony, with heaven. Only then do proper attitudes and expressions become pleasant, and therefore doable. This is a sort of Kingdom secret that is not at all common in our time.

CONSOLATION AND COMFORT

“Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love” (NKJV). Here are two Kingdom realities that are indispensable to living by faith. Note, two effects and two causes. The affects are **“consolation”** and **“comfort.”** The causes are **“Christ”** and **“love.”** The affects are experiences—conscious experiences. They are ministries for the household of faith. Other versions translate the expressions **“encouragement in Christ”** and **“consolation of love.”**

By saying **“If there is any . . .”** the Apostle is not suggesting there may not be such a thing. It is a rhetorical way of saying, *It is abundantly evident there IS consolation in Christ and comfort of love—therefore, we should proceed with the ministrations and reception of it.*

This is not the statement of a theological position, but an appeal for the Philippians to continue their ministry to Paul while he is in prison. The humility of the Apostle is seen in this text. His lofty position in the Kingdom did not exclude him from the ministry of God’s people.

Some, basing their opinion on possible meanings of the word translated “consolation,” say this is an appeal, or exhortation: i.e., *If there is any exhortation or strong attraction in Christ.* Young’s literal translation takes this view. The strength of the passage, however, is neutralized by this view.

“Consolation in Christ” refers to encouragement, cheer, and inspiration. It involves the gathering of strength under duress, and the lifting of the human spirit in conflict. It is true, God has given us **“everlasting consolation”** in Christ Jesus (2 Thess 2:16). However, that consolation, or encouragement, is often ministered THROUGH the people of God. The fatigued human spirit is refreshed and renewed by the consistency of those to whom that individual has ministered. That is the point of Paul’s words. The spiritual constancy of the Philippians would bring refreshment to Paul. That is one of the indispensable benefits of being **“in Christ.”** This speaks of the REALM of consolation, which is Christ.

“Comfort of love” also addresses the matter of consolation, relief, or solace. This phrase, however, emphasizes the MEANS through which the balm is ministered—**“Love.”** This occurs when the life of Christ finds expression in the believer—when the child of God has a preference for God and the people of God. In this case, the devotion of the Philippians to Christ and His salvation moved them to faithfulness. It also constrained them to consider Paul, and do their best to minister to him. Those expressions brought relief to Paul’s spirit. They reduced the hardship he was experiencing, and made him equal to grievous circumstances laid upon him.

There is no way to accurately estimate the adverse affects unfaithfulness and inconsideration have upon the servants of God. Many a soul has nearly fainted because of the meager efforts of professed believers with whom they labored. But this need not be the case. Great **“consolation,”** encouragement, and renewal, can be ministered through consistent believers. Those who live with an acute awareness of Christ, and who express their devotion in thoughtful and considerate love, bring great advantage to Kingdom laborers.

FELLOWSHIP, AFFECTION, AND MERCY

“. . . if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy” (NKJV). These are Kingdom realities that are indispensable to the faith-life. They are not luxuries to be experienced by a select few, but common graces provided for all who are in Christ Jesus. The language of the text confirms this to be the case. By saying, **“If there is . . . ,”** the Apostle is saying: *The sure existence of these things makes what I am saying possible.*

“FELLOWSHIP OF THE SPIRIT” refers to our union with Deity. Elsewhere, this is called **“the communion of Holy Spirit”** (2 Cor 13:14), and points to Divine involvements with the redeemed. In this **“fellowship,”** the work of the Spirit is the preeminent work. He sheds the love of God abroad in our hearts (Rom 5:5), making us capable of serving God and ministering to His people. The **“fellowship of the Spirit”** is the means through which God **“abides in us”** (1 John 3:24). This is how we are brought into the work of the Lord, and equipped to bring encouragement and

edification to the saints. The **“fellowship”** is enjoyed by both the Spirit and ourselves.

“AFFECTION.” The KJV translates this **“bowels.”** That is an archaic term that means **“the seat of pity, tenderness, or courage.”** It goes much deeper than the ordinary perception of **“affection,”** which means fondness, attraction, or strong feeling. The Holy Spirit uses the word to identify a CAPACITY for preference and attraction, and the DOMINANCY of that capacity. It does not lie on the surface of feeling, which is not at the heart of our persons. Other uses of the word are found in 2 Cor 6:12, Phil 1:8, Col 3:12, Phile 7,12,20, and 1 John 3:17. It deals with our **“hearts,”** or the deepest part of our persons. In this text it means a strong heartfelt preference for God and the people of God. It is a reality granted in the new birth.

“MERCY.” The word means pity and compassion, or godly consideration. It is the capacity to tenderly and effectively minister to God’s people when they are oppressed. **“Mercy”** is a more noble and higher emotion. It is not simply doing something, like casually offering a gift. It proceeds from a heart that has seen a need, and has a fervent desire to meet it in the power of the Spirit. It also implies **tenderness**, where great care is taken not to complicate the condition of the oppressed. It should be apparent that this is a Divine quality, enjoyed by those in Christ Jesus.

The people of God must learn to reckon upon the reality and availability of the mentioned resources: **“Consolation in Christ,” “comfort of love,” “fellowship of the Spirit,” “affection,” and “mercy.”** All of them come from God. All have to do with the new creation. All are experienced by faith. We cannot meet the need of our brethren through fleshly means. The **“flesh,”** or that which is natural about us, is impotent when it comes to giving the advantage to the people of God.

We must perceive and grasp the manner in which Paul wrote. He counted on Divine resources being employed by the saints, and exhorted them with this in mind. He did not simply urge them to be better and work harder. Rather, he enclosed his exhortation in the envelop of Divine provision, calling upon the Philippians to think in terms of what they had in Christ.

WHEN JOY IS FULFILLED

“ . . . fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind” (NKJV). The Apostle was NOT brought to his highest state by convenient and pleasant personal circumstances. If this were the case, he would have asked the Philippians to pray for his release, for merciful guards, and an understanding political ruler. While he would surely have received such benefits thankfully, he did not place the highest priority on his own welfare. His heart was brought to its most joyful state when the people of God were growing in grace and truth. The maturity of the work of the Lord made his joy full, bringing it to its highest level. To put it another way, the failure of the people of God to grow up into Christ in all things contributed to Paul’s sorrow, and made life more difficult (2 Cor 11:28). It should be apparent that this is an exceedingly rare frame of mind.

As the Philippians drew upon the resources made available in Christ, the desired results would occur. When Paul said, **“If there be any . . .”** he was saying, **these are the things that will produce my desire for you.**

Even though there is diversity in the body of Christ, it is not divided. There is a vast difference between diversity and division! Division involves competition, conflict, and opposing views and action. Diversity speaks of differing activities that blend together to meet a common objective. Thus we read, **“For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another . . . For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ”** (Rom 12:4-5; 1 Cor 12:12).

“Like-minded,” “same love,” “one accord,” and “one mind” have to do with working toward a common goal or objective. The latter three expressions are an explanation of the first one (**“like-minded”**). Being **“like-minded”** does not mean we merely believe the same thing, or embrace the same creed. It goes deeper than that! It is much like clocks of different looks and sounds all sounding the hourly chime at the same time. They sound different, they look different, but they are in synch with one another. In our text, that unity is preeminently with the Lord Jesus Christ. That is what produces the desired conditions **“same”** and **“one.”**

“Same love” addresses the focus of our affection. **“One accord”** speaks of simultaneous and united effort. **“Like-minded”** (Rom 15:5; Phil 2:20), refers to the manner in which the believers think. They are all motivated by their love for Christ and the truth. They work together because they are engaged in a common effort. They are like-minded because the same considerations dominate their minds.

These conditions would bring Paul’s cup of joy to its fullness. It would confirm the effectiveness of his work, and the validity of the Philippians profession. All of this was God’s work, in which Paul found great delight.

Behold what a ministry our spiritual maturity can have! Many a Kingdom laborer, fainting under oppression, may be revived by hearing of our like-mindedness, same love, and being in one accord.

LESSON #18

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others” (Phil 2:3-4. NKJV)

INTRODUCTION

The Holy Spirit never takes our faith for granted, and neither can we. Even though the Philippian church had conducted itself commendably, and *“from the very first”* participated in the Gospel, yet they were admonished. The reason for this circumstance is apparent: believers do not live in a moral vacuum. They are regularly subjected to influences that tug at their hearts, luring them away from the Savior. Seeking to impart his own nature to us, the devil entices us to live with ourselves at the center of our consideration. The Spirit, however, contends against Satan, urging us to enlarge our vision to include the brethren with whom we have been united by faith.

SELFISH INTERESTS AND CONCEIT

“Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit . . .” (NASB). The world fosters selfishness—that is what of its unvarying traits. Our introduction to the devil finds him tempting Eve to consider only herself, ignoring the Word of her Creator (Gen 3:1-6). The KJV translates the word, with even more clarity, as ***“strife.”*** The idea is that of RIVALRY, which is devastating to any congregation. It occurs when people are zealous to maintain their own opinions, even to the point of disrupting the ***“unity of the Spirit”*** (Eph 4:1). If believers allow themselves to depart from being ***“of one mind,”*** their separate interests will cause strife within the body. The Lord has a single focus, and so must His people. The Spirit will develop this extensively by an in-depth exposition of the mind of Christ (verses 5-8).

One of the traits of love touches on this subject. ***“Love . . . does not seek its own”*** (1 Cor 13:5). In Christ, we have been liberated from the domination of self, or the flesh. The principle by which faith constrains us to live is stated in Second Corinthians 5:16. ***“He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.”*** All of our personal interests are met in, and satisfied by, the Lord Jesus Christ. All of the sectarianism and dissension that arise in the Christian community are due to someone promoting self-interests. The Spirit does not allow for some expression of selfish concerns within the body of Christ, but strongly admonishes, ***“Do nothing out of selfish ambition”*** (NIV).

All of us must remember that Eve fell because of selfishness. Cain also slew Abel due to the same corrupt drive. Satan cunningly tempts believers to shine the spotlight on themselves, seeking their own interests. But God will not allow it. He has held out His Son as the preeminent Person, having exalted Him ***“above every name that is named”***—***“FAR ABOVE”*** (Eph 1:21).

“Empty conceit” is vainglory, or taking pride in the flesh. The Lord does not allow such boasting in His Presence, and it is not to be allowed in the church. The Law of the Kingdom is, ***“that no flesh should glory in His presence”*** (1 Cor 1:29). Apart from Jesus Christ, ***“all the glory of man [is] as the flower of the grass”*** (1 Pet 1:24). Any and every achievement wrought independently of Christ Jesus is destined to futility. It will not be able to survive the ultimate confrontation of the Living God. The only validity that may be found in our persons or accomplishments is found in ***“the grace of God”*** (1 Cor 15:10). That is a truth that cannot be effectively contested.

The admonition of this verse is a declaration of war against the flesh. It is a Divine renunciation of the ***“natural man”*** (1 Cor 2:14). That is the source of all carnal contention. The fact that we are warned about such intrusions indicates we will have to struggle with them. This is an area where we can expect our adversary to be especially active: ***“strife and vainglory,”*** or ***“selfishness and conceit”*** (RSV). Conceit is another term for arrogance, egotism, pride, and vanity. It is glorying in what CANNOT survive the end of the world. Such boasting is a dreadfully corrupting influence that pulls men into the quagmire of condemnation and alienation from God. Resolve that such encroachments will not come through you.

HUMILITY OF MIND AND REGARD

“. . . but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself” (NASB). Humility of mind differs greatly from a mere appearance of humility. True humility is found in how we think. From one point of view, *it is simply acknowledging the truth about ourselves.* I particularly like the KJV on this verse. It refers to ***“lowliness of mind.”*** That assists us in recognizing humility is the opposite of pride, or having exalted and pretentious views of ourselves.

Notice, there is a single remedy put forth for the infections just mentioned (strife and vainglory). It is ***“humility,”*** or ***“lowliness of mind.”*** This is a view of ourselves that acknowledges we had to be saved from the course we had chosen. The words and deeds that flowed from ourselves had to be forgiven, because God was not their object. Whatever good is in us has been placed there by our Lord. If His Laws is in our hearts, it was written there (Heb 8:10). If anyone is ever tempted to ***“think of himself more highly than he ought to think”*** (Rom 12:2), ***let him ponder the reality of the case for a moment.”*** Every advantage we now hold is owing to the working of the Lord. Stated succinctly, ***“But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the***

name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God (1 Cor 6:11). “***Lowliness,***” or “***humility of mind,***” is living in thankful and joyful acknowledgment of that reality.

Still, the Holy Spirit elaborates further. “***Lowliness of mind***” is esteeming oneself as less than others. Someone has said, “***Every one has in himself the mind of a king, by claiming everything for himself.***” This was the spirit that dominated Cain (1 John 3:12), Herod (Matt 2:13), and Diotrephes (3 John 9). Unless we fight against this mind-set, it will also dominate us.

This is too difficult for the flesh. Considering others better than ourselves is not something that is to occur occasionally, at some unusual moment, or while we are especially tender. This is the normal pattern for believers. The Lord does not call us to occasional humility or to seasons of grandeur.

If we are tempted to think there are deep concerns that cannot be met unless we make ourselves the center of attention, we must believe the Word. “***Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you***” (1 Pet 5:6-7). We have not been cast upon the sea of life alone. God Himself seeks our betterment, and takes up our cause.

This is not a mere passing thought, but a frame of mind that causes us to be mindful of our brethren, and doing good “***unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith***” (Gal 6:10). In spiritual love, or regard, we “***serve one another***” (Gal 5:13). It compels us to “***consider one another***” (Heb 10:24), even before ourselves. For those who live by faith, it is no inconvenience to seek the welfare and edification of the people of God. Nor, indeed, are we put back if required to “***feed***” their “***enemy when he is hungry, and “give him drink”***” when he is thirsty (Rom 12:20). If anyone is to be placed into the background, let it be ourselves! Thus will the Lord Himself come to our aid, minister to our needs, and exalt us in due time.

LOOKING OUT FOR OTHERS INTEREST

“***. . . do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others***” (NKJV). Both ourselves and others have “***interests,***” or “***own things***” (KJV). These are not incidental concerns, hobbies, or the likes. This is a frame of spirit that majors on correcting our faults, and being a source of blessing to others. Flesh reasons to the contrary, seeking to correct the faults of others, while lifting up self. This is exactly how our adversary, the devil, conducts his affairs. He not only sought to exalt himself (Isa 14:14), but is the “***accuser of the brethren***” (Rev 12:10).

The NKJV captures the sense of the text when it says “***merely look.***” Those in Christ Jesus do not *ignore* their own needs. Indeed, they are admonished to “***Provide things honest in the sight of all men***” (Rom 12:17), and “***provide***” for those of their “***own house***” (1 Tim 5:8). Their lives, however, are not confined to themselves. They do not live in a small world that centers in their own needs and interests.

The word “***look***” indicates more than a passing glance. Just as we do not occasionally consider our own needs, so we are not to ponder the needs of others only now and then. ***Faith is not seasonal!*** There is a sense in which God’s people are dependent upon one another. As it is written, “***so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another***” (Rom 12:5). Take, for example, the necessity of speaking “***truth***” to one another—always speaking with an eternal perspective. The reason for doing this is simply stated. “***Therefore, putting away lying, Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor, for we are members of one another***” (Eph 4:25). God has placed us in Christ so that we may be a blessing to each other. If, however, we consider our own interests above those of our brethren, we cannot be an advantage to them. The Lord does not honor such a preference.

This frame of mind is stated another way in 1 Peter 5:5. “***Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.***” Submissiveness to one another includes receiving needful admonitions and teaching from others. It is not, however, confined to that type of activity. It also includes submitting our personal needs to those of our brethren. This is, of course, the very thing that occurred when Jesus considered us above “***being equal with God,***” a subject that is expounded in the following verses.

What are some of the “***interests***” of our brethren? For what kind of opportunities are we to be alert and watchful? A brief sampling will suffice. Edification (Rom 15:2). One overtaken in a fault (Gal 6:1). Need of food or clothing (James 2:16). Ministration of comfort (2 Cor 1:4). Those over us in the Lord (Heb 13:7,17,24). Brethren that are oppressed (Heb 13:3).

In all of these matters, and more, we are not simply to await some news about the saints, but to “***LOOK***” upon their interests, seeking to be used by God to meet them. This is something that cannot be legislated—that is the Spirit employs exhortation. We must see that our involvement in this sort of consideration brings us within the circumference of Divine utility—that is, it puts us where God can use us. Thus, we will become a blessing.

LESSON #19

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God” (Phil 2:5-6. NKJV)

INTRODUCTION

God sending His Son into the world remains one of the great mysteries of Scripture. While men are tempted to view it simplistically, we stand in wonder at the threshold of this truth. Our hearts sense we are considering something that is beyond our abilities of comprehension. As we ponder the incarnation, it is as though we are merely touching the border of its magnitude. Yet, right here we can be lifted out of ourselves into a higher realm, where God, Christ, and salvation come into fuller view. Here is a truth that must be comprehended spiritually rather than intellectually. It is something that is grasped more with the heart than it is with the mind. Here is confirmed the vastness of what was required to save a fallen race.

LET THIS MIND BE IN YOU

“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus” (NRSV). In this section of Philippians, the Spirit is emphasizing humility. The previous verses have exhorted us to be lowly in mind, regarding others better than ourselves. Not only are we to look out for our own interests, but for those of others also. Now we are directed to a consideration of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is where we behold true humility. Being humble is not a manner of life, but a frame of mind—an attitude, or personal view of life. It is found preeminently in Jesus, because He is the apex of humanity—man brought to his highest. Any time we want to see the ideal of humanity in any of its aspects, we will be summoned to a consideration of the Lord Jesus.

Not a mere goal. The NRSV uses the phrase *“same mind,”* which, technically, is not in the text. It does, however, convey the sense of the text. We are not being asked to try and imitate the mind of Christ. His manner of thinking is not held out as a mere goal for which we are to strive. This is a reality to be embraced—something that is already in tact, so to speak. We are considering an aspect of the *“Divine nature,”* in which we participate by the grace of God (2 Pet 1:4). While there is a sense in which this *“mind”* is developed, or matured, in us, there is another sense in which it is obtained, or acquired. There is such a thing as *“the mind of the Spirit”* (Rom 8:27), *“the mind of the Lord”* (Rom 11:34), and *“the mind of Christ”* (1 Cor 2:16). While we cannot expect to experience the fulness of the Divine mind (i.e., His judgments and ways, Rom 11:33), there are aspects of it that we can have. Here, the Spirit briefly discusses what is available to us.

The expression *“LET this mind . . .”* suggests this mind is available to us if we will only receive it. We allow it to be in us by subduing the temptation to be *“otherwise minded.”* This is a work of faith, and it is imperative that we consider how different it is from the world’s way of thinking. In the world, goals are set before men, and they attempt to reach them through self-discipline. This is precisely the manner in which the Law, which *“is not of faith”* (Gal 3:12), operated. Faith, on the other hand, embraces something that is offered. Thus, by faith we *“receive the promise of the Spirit”* (Gal 3:14), *“understand”* creation (Heb 11:3), and are *“kept by the power of God”* (1 Pet 1:5). The *“mind”* in our text is obtained in the same way—by faith. It is our faith that allows *“this same mind”* to be in us.

It is important to note that this is the ONLY mind that is acceptable to God. No other pattern of thought is appropriate or recognized by our Lord. If we do NOT have *“the mind of Christ,”* we have an unacceptable mind. Among other things, Jesus lived out acceptable thinking when He dwelt among us. He did not show us merely HOW to live, but exposed us to the manner in which the Divine mind functions in this world. When the *“fulness of the Godhead”* dwelt bodily in Jesus (Col 2:9), that *“fulness”* thought in a certain way. No other way is acceptable. Jesus could not fulfill His mission by thinking any other way, and we cannot fulfill ours by adopting a variant form of thinking. When our hearts accept this, we at once become aware of our deep need of the Lord, and His working within us.

JESUS CHRIST . . . IN THE FORM OF GOD

“ . . . Who, being in the form of God” (KJV). In a single verse, the Spirit calls upon us to survey both time and eternity—to see Jesus before He entered into the world, and after He became a man. Prior to being *“made flesh”* (John 1:14), our Savior not only existed, but *“existed in the form of God”* (NASB). By saying *“form,”* the Spirit is not suggesting God has a body, as some suppose. The word *“form”* comes from a word meaning appearance, or nature. It is something that is apparent. The verse is stating that *Jesus possessed all of the attributes of God, and was so recognized in heaven.* In the words of John, He *“was God”* (John 1:1). As such, before He entered into the world, our Lord was NOT a created being, as some sects suggest. One of the aspects of the God is eternity (Deut 33:27; Rom 16:26).

There are frequent references to our Savior in His pre-incarnate existence. They all confirm His Deity. Micah, foretelling of the coming of the Messiah, affirmed His origin was *“from of old, from everlasting”* (Mic 5:2). In His High priestly prayer, the Lord Jesus spoke with His Father about His pre-existence. *“And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was”* (John 17:5). That *“glory”* is the *“form”* referred to in our text.

In another expression of this truth, Jesus told His enemies, ***“Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I AM”*** (John 8:58). Notice, He did not say *I was*, but ***“I AM.”*** The expression is one of eternity. It affirms there never was a time when He was NOT. You may recall this is how God revealed Himself to Moses, and how He told Moses to make Him known to Pharaoh. ***“And God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM’; and He said, ‘Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you’ (Ex 3:14, NASB). Every major translation says precisely the same thing: “I AM has sent me...” (KJV, ASV, RSV, NIV). It is another way of saying, “Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life” (Heb 7:3).***

This is the ***“FORM”*** of reference in our text—the ***“form of God.”*** It was in this ***“form”*** that our Savior created the worlds. As it is written, ***“All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. . . the world was made through Him . . . one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things . . . God who created all things through Jesus Christ . . . For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him . . . through whom also He made the worlds”*** (John 1:3,10; 1 Cor 8:6; Eph 3:9; Col 1:16; Heb 1:2). Such glorious things cannot be ascribed to anyone created. Only one ***“in the form of God,”*** possessing Divine qualities, and Himself God, could do this.

This is not a mere point of doctrine, and ought not to be so approached. Too frequently men affirm this teaching without the life and vitality it is meant to convey. The Spirit will now begin to show us something of the involvements of considering others above ourselves.

DID NOT CONSIDER IT ROBBERY

“ . . . did not consider it robbery to be equal with God” (NKJV). Beyond all question, this is one of the most profound utterances in all of Scripture. It is the description of the ***“mind”*** we are to allow to dwell within us. On the surface, the phraseology may appear difficult. It is **NOT** saying Jesus did not consider being equal with God a detraction from God Himself—a sort of robbing God of His glory. Other versions read as follows. ***“did not regard (consider, count) equality with God a thing to be grasped”*** (NASB, RSV, NIV). The NRSV reads, ***“did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited.”*** But all of that does not seem to clarify the matter.

The idea being expressed is not that of aspiration—i.e., wanting to take hold of Divine attributes. Rather, it affirms something Jesus was willing to relinquish, or let go of. ***“Grasped,”*** in this case, means hold on to, or keep grasping. ***“Robbery,”*** means Jesus did not consider Himself to have been robbed when asked to give up His former glory. The text is affirming that Jesus let go of equality with God to enter into the world. When asked to do so, He did not consider Himself to have been exploited or taken advantage of. Rather, He viewed the will of God as preeminent and right. He considered it best and preferable to step down in order that we might step up.

More detail of this is provided in the tenth chapter of Hebrews. ***“Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: ‘Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, But a body You have prepared for Me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure. Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come; In the volume of the book it is written of Me; To do Your will, O God.’ Previously saying, ‘Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure in them’ (which are offered according to the law), then He said, ‘Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God’”*** (Heb 10:5-9).

In order for us to be saved, Jesus had to forfeit His equality with God—the ***“form of God.”*** He had to lay his glory aside, so that He did not appear to be God. He was required to enter into a body—a created body—and be subject to restriction. He would have to become obedient, and do so willingly. He would have to become totally dependent upon the Father, live by faith, be tempted in all points as we are, suffer, and die. He could NOT do ***this “in the form of God,”*** but only as a Man. He could choose to hold on to ***“equality with God,”*** or let it go. He could choose to remain ***“in the form of God,”*** or let it go. He chose to let it go! He did not consider Himself robbed in doing that. He did not think the loss of humanity was worth maintaining His grasp on Divine equality. That is the solemn declaration of this verse.

Remember, this is an exposition of humility—humility that we are exhorted to embrace. It is opening up ***“the mind of Christ,”*** showing us how our Savior thought. That manner of thinking is the mode of the Kingdom. No other mind-set is acceptable.

If we imagine that considering others ***“better”*** than ourselves, and considering the interests of others as well as our own, too difficult an assignment, let us consider Jesus. More than that, let us allow His mind to be in us. To conduct our lives in any other manner is to exalt ourselves. In such a case, God will surely abase us. If, on the other hand, we choose to let this mind be in us, our God will exalt us in due time.

LESSON #20

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“ . . . but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.” (Phil 2:7-8. NKJV)

INTRODUCTION

The greatness of our salvation is confirmed by the the involvements of Christ’s entrance into, and accomplishments in, this world. What He was required to do reveals the seriousness of the human dilemma. When someone in the image of God falls, coming short of His glory, it requires Divine wisdom to correct the situation. Willingness on the part of the Savior is also necessary, together with a forfeiture of Divine prerogatives and the sacrifice of life. Once seen, these extraordinary requirements move us to embrace the Savior without reservation. The paltry things we surrender are seen as *dung* when compared with what Jesus relinquished, and what He now offers.

MADE HIMSELF OF NO REPUTATION

“ . . . but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant . . . ” (NASB). This is one of the most arresting statements in all of Scripture. Here language appears a pauper, and words appear inadequate containers. Unless our faith grasps this statement, it will be too challenging to retain. The RSV, NRSV, and NASB read **“but emptied Himself.”** The NIV reads, **“but made Himself nothing.”** The word **“but”** allows a contrast between what the Lord WAS, and what He BECAME in order to save us. **“Equality with God”** is thus contrasted with **“emptied Himself,”** or **“no reputation.”** The willing transition was from the highest (*not higher*) to the lowest (*not lower*).

The word translated **“emptied Himself”** is unusually strong. Lexically, it means (1) lit. *remove the content of something*; (2) (a) as taking away the *effectiveness* of something. *deprive of power*; (b) as taking away the *significance* of something. *destroy, make invalid, empty*; (c) as taking away the *prerogatives* of status or position *empty, divest; He emptied himself*, i.e. took an unimportant position. When Jesus came into the world, He began a new kind of existence, or presence. That is why Scripture affirms, **“Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee”** (Heb 1:5; 5:5). He entered the world in the most frail of all forms—as an infant, totally dependent upon others. He was first dependent upon God the Father, and next upon Joseph and Mary. Christ’s humanity was as real as His Deity—a staggering consideration.

In emptying Himself, the basic Person of our Lord was not changed. Rather, He was divested of the freedom and privileges belonging to Deity. The vessel was the same, but the contents were poured out. He had to **“learn”** to be obedient (Heb 5:8), be subject to limitation and handicap (Lk 12:50), and be **“subject”** to those He created (Lk 2:51).

The **“emptying”** refers exclusively to His manhood. He Who could NOT be concealed placed the cloak of flesh over His Deity so it could not be seen. His flesh was to His Deity what the veil was to the Holy of Holies (Heb 10:20). As long as He was in the world, He could not be seen as He really was in Person or character. A small portion of that Deity burst through His skin and garments when He was transfigured (Matt 17:2). Even then, Jesus strictly charged His disciples not to make the transfiguration known, that His Deity might remain concealed (Matt 17:9).

Remember, the Spirit is exhorting us to esteem others better than ourselves—to be willing to forfeit what may be rightfully ours. The supreme example of this is found in our Lord Jesus. Due consideration of His humiliation will subdue any inclinations to regard ourselves too highly.

He took upon Himself the **“form,”** or appearance, of a **“bond-servant.”** He embraced this **“form”** willingly, and was not forced to take it. In this, He differed from ordinary slaves. He became like the slave who could be free, but chose to be bound to his master, as prefigured in the Law (Ex 21:1-6). He Himself said He came **“to minister”** (Matt 20:28). Isaiah prophesied of our Lord, **“Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights!”** (Isa 42:1). The contemplation of what would RESULT from the humbling experience of His humanity brought great delight to God. What it would yield was worth sending Jesus, and worth Jesus emptying Himself!

COMING IN THE LIKENESS OF MEN

“ . . . and being made in the likeness of men” (NASB). The humility of Christ is accentuated by the **“appearance”** He assumed. We are categorically told **“He took not on him the nature of angels,”** but was, in fact, **“made for a little while lower than the angels”** (Heb 2:9,16).

The **“form,”** however, was not that of Adam when first created. He did not come into the world to merely give man a fresh start, and reproduce the nature and conditions enjoyed at the first by Adam! With great care, our Lord’s identity is said to be with **“the seed of Abraham”** (Heb 2:16)—a fallen race to whom God had made a promise.

According to appearance, Jesus was no different from any other man. His **“form”** was not that of a superior man, but an ordinary man. The Spirit takes this matter further in Romans 8:3; **“God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh.”** He Himself was not a sinner, yet appeared like those who were! That is

why His critics could speak so derisively of Him. “*You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?*” “. . . *we know that this man is a sinner.*” “*Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber*” (John 8:57; 9:24; Matt 11:19). He was “*numbered with the transgressors*” in His death (Mark 15:27-28), and in His life as well.

How is it that men could speak so derisively of our Lord? How could they oppose Him so publically and fearlessly? How could they dare to oppose and finally kill Him? It was because of His form, or appearance. He was “*made in the likeness of men.*” They could not see His Deity because of His humanity. Jesus was sinless and without guile as man, and none could convict Him of sin (John 8:46)! Yet, that holiness was not so apparent it could not be denied. He had “*emptied Himself,*” so His glory could not be seen.

The reaction of men to Christ proves He “*emptied Himself!*” No person knowingly confronting Deity has ever laid a charge against Him. Fear and trembling has gripped the heart of every person, godly or not, that has faced the Living God. Israel trembled (Ex 19:16). Moses trembled (Heb 12:21). Isaiah cried out in despair (Isa 6:5). Daniel fainted (Dan 10:8,16,17). John fell down (Rev 1:17). They all KNEW Who was before them. However, when Jesus “*emptied Himself*” and assumed the “*likeness of men,*” He was not recognized. The world “*knew Him not*” (John 1:10), and thus could hate and oppose Him. His own people—the very ones to whom He was sent—thought of Him as “*the carpenter,*” and “*the carpenter’s son*” (Matt 13:55; Mark 6:3). They viewed Him as uneducated (John 7:15), and one who gravitated to the baser sort of people (Lk 7:34). They could not see His Deity! They could not perceive He was the son of God! He had “*emptied Himself*” and assumed the likeness of men.

It is the humanity of Jesus that became the vehicle of our salvation. Our condition was so serious, identity with us required the sheathing of Deity. If you are ever tempted to think too highly of yourself or some other mortal, ponder what was required of Jesus in order to save us. To become like us, he had to pour out His Deity so it could no longer be observed. He had to become a slave that we might be made free. That makes sin reprehensible.

HUMILITY AND OBEDIENCE

“*. . . And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross*” (NKJV). As though it were not enough to pour out His Deity, and assume the “*form of a servant,*” our Lord went even further. Too, “*emptying Himself*” was not enough. AFTER He was “*found in appearance as a man,*” He further humbled Himself by becoming “*obedient.*” Mind you, obedience was involved in coming into the world (Heb 10:7,9). However, entering the arena of conflict was not enough. While here, He had to “*learn obedience*” (Heb 5:8). He did not “*learn*” it by occupying a classroom, or by sitting at the feet of the doctors of the Law. He “*learned*” it “*by the things which He suffered.*”

His obedience was not “*learned*” as a wild horse learns by being tamed, or sinners learn by subduing their sinful preferences. Nor is this learning meant to suggest He was ignorant of the will of God. In the crucible of suffering, He “*learned*” obedience was not automatic. In that learning experience, He could not rely upon his Deity, or inherent power. He had to empty Himself of that BEFORE entering the arena of hardship and conflict. After His baptism, and the announcement of His mission, “*Immediately the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness,*” to be tempted of the devil (Mark 1:12).

The obedience that He “*learned*” prepared Him for the ultimate act of obedience, which was “*death on a cross.*” That single work was so critical to our salvation, Jesus had to embrace it willingly and heartily. He would be subjected to such atrocities, that the slightest twinge of disobedience could not be entertained. The salvation of the world hinged on that obedience.

Just as our fallen state is traced to a single act wrought by a single man (Adam), so our salvation is traced to a single act of obedience accomplished by Jesus. “*But not as the offence, so also is the free gift . . . the offence of one . . . the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ . . . by one man’s offence death reigned by one . . . they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ. . . . by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one . . . by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous” (Rom 5:15-19).*

Death on the cross was a death of Divine cursing (Gal 3:13). The reference is not merely to Roman cruelty, but to Divine renunciation. In order to save us, Jesus not only was required to “*empty Himself,*” but to become “*obedient.*” His obedience required more than obeying the Law. He had to endure the greatest of all suffering, and submit to the most grievous of all deaths. He had to tread the winepress of the wrath of God “*alone,*” and descend into the devil’s domain without the sword of Divinity in His hand. Men could not be saved unless God’s wrath against sin was thorough.

The “*death of the cross*” refers more to what occurred at that time, rather than the bodily sufferings Jesus experienced there. On the cross He carried our sins. On the cross, He experienced being forsaken. On the cross He was ravaged by both men and the powers of darkness. He had to “*humble Himself*” to undergo such things – and He did, praise the Lord!

LESSON #21

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Phil 2:9-11. NKJV)

INTRODUCTION

The ultimate example of the outcome of true humility is seen in the Lord Jesus Christ. He ***“humbled Himself and became obedient”*** more extensively than any of the sons of men. On earth, it did not appear this was in His own best interests. But behold the response of Almighty God to our Savior’s unparalleled condescension and unfaltering obedience! He has been exalted to such a high position that all created personalities, regardless of their location, will publically acknowledge His superiority. No one will be excluded. It is only a matter of time until it happens.

GOD HAS HIGHLY EXALTED JESUS

“Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name” (NASB). ***“Therefore . . . ,”*** i.e., BECAUSE the Lord Jesus emptied Himself, humbled Himself, and became obedient, even to the death of the cross—because of that, God ***“highly exalted Him.”*** This did not occur simply because an unparalleled feat was performed—something that had never been done before. Rather, a Divine requirement was met in Christ’s submission. God could not save humanity without the condescension of Jesus! He ***“so loved the world,”*** and fervently desires that ***“all men be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth”*** (John 3:16; 1 Tim 2:4). Yet, they could NOT be saved or come to know the truth through their own effort. They had fallen too far and become too weak to correct their own situation. It was because of this circumstance that what Jesus accomplished brought such great satisfaction to God.

The word ***“Therefore,”*** means ***“for this reason.”*** There is, however, something important to be seen here. On the surface this may appear trite, but we must not allow ourselves to so think. Jesus did not humble Himself so that He might be exalted – He was already exalted, and emptied Himself of that. **This describes more the response of God than the goal of Jesus.** It is as though He said, ***“I will make You the Captain of salvation because you have emptied Yourself of glory in order to fulfill My will, absorb the curse, and defeat the devil in his own territory.”*** That sanctifies all obedience to God!

Although largely unrecognized in the world, Jesus has been ***“highly exalted.”*** He is ***“the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords”*** (1 Tim 6:15). If this were believed, churches would be filled whenever they were opened. Cries of ***“What shall we do?”*** would rise from men and women everywhere. ***“The people that do know their God”*** (Dan 11:32) would be sought out and told ***“Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you”*** (Zech 8:23). Men would seek His favor, inquire concerning His will, and engage in an unrelenting quest to ***“know Him.”*** The general absence of these traits confirms how little this truth is really known.

By ***“highly exalted,”*** the Spirit means Christ’s exaltation is not apparent—it is not visible, or in this world. He has been elevated to God’s ***“own right hand in the heavenly places.”*** There, He is ***“far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named”*** (Eph 1:20-21). The exaltation is very real—so real that anyone who becomes aware of Him submits to Him.

His ***“name”*** commands the respect of all who hear it. It is ***“above”*** every other name. He is not using the word ***“name”*** as commonly used among men. This does not refer to a mere appellation, but refers to His Person and character. Men can have a name that does not match their persons—i.e., a good name with a bad character. But the name ***“Jesus”*** (the Lord saves) precisely describes Christ’s Person! It is a name that reveals Jesus, and Jesus alone has been commissioned to save humanity. All men will bow before Him in that capacity—the Savior. The ***“name above every name”*** is the name of a Savior, a Deliverer! What a high priority that places on this ***“great salvation!”***

EVERY KNEE WILL BOW BEFORE HIM

“ . . . that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE SHOULD BOW, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth” (NASB). God has bestowed honor upon Jesus, and has determined that all created beings will do the same—willingly or unwillingly. The word ***“should”*** does not mean “ought to,” but ***“surely will.”***

“The name of Jesus” is related to His **humanity**. It is the One who ***“humbled Himself”*** and ***“became obedient”*** that will be acknowledged—***“the Man Christ Jesus”*** (1 Tim 2:5). God the Father has recognized and exalted Him in the capacity of a glorified Man. Presently, only those who are washed, justified, and sanctified bow to Him. Even though He took away the sins of the world, reconciling it to God, yet the vast majority of men are not submissive to Him. It is not owing to any deficiency in Jesus that men do not bow their knees to Him. He has been exalted, and given a superior name. Were men to recognize and embrace His Person, they would call upon His exalted name, that they might be saved (Rom 10:13).

Notice the extent of our lord’s exaltation. By saying ***“every knee will bow,”*** the Spirit includes every

created intelligence, whether in heaven, earth, or the unseen realms—**“under the earth.”** In His capacity as a glorified Man, angels, men, and demons will bow before Him! Even when He was upon the earth, the demonic world submitted to Him (Matt 8:31; 12:28; Lk 4:34). What do you think they do now that He has been exalted? If the unseen world recognized Who He was when clothed with flesh, what must they do now that He is enthroned in glory? How glorious the words, **“who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him”** (1 Pet 3:22).

The appointed universal recognition of Jesus is mentioned elsewhere. The Spirit makes clear He is speaking about the day of judgment. **“For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written: As I live, says the LORD, Every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall confess to God”** (Rom 14:10-11). In vivid language, John describes the scene He was given to see—a scene of appointed destiny. **“And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: Blessing and honor and glory and power Be to Him who sits on the throne, And to the Lamb, forever and ever!”** (Rev 5:13).

There will be a universal recognition of the exalted Christ. It will be acknowledged before an assembled universe that He, and He alone, has been invested with **“all power in heaven and in earth.”** For some, the acknowledgment will be the induction of condemnation. For others, it will be the confirmation of **“eternal salvation”** – but all will acknowledge the truth.

Make no mistake about this: because Jesus humbled Himself and became obedient to the death of the cross, He alone is worthy of our submission and obedience. To give ourselves to anyone or anything else is nothing less than rebellion. Too, if Jesus was highly exalted as a consequence of His obedience, we must view humility as something to be gained at all cost.

EVERY TONGUE WILL CONFESS THE LORD

“ . . . and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (NASB). Again, this is something that has been determined by God. He has appointed this because of the humility and obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ. In this world, men can choose whether or not to confess Christ with their tongues. In the world to come, there will be no choice. Whatever a person chooses to believe about the **“free will”** of man, it must be acknowledged that God has appointed a day when His Son will be confessed by every tongue, whether they want to or not.

This is not a superficial confession, but one dictated by the revelation of the King of kings. When men see Him as He really is, a confession will erupt from their mouths: **“Jesus Christ IS Lord.”** No earthly king will be acknowledged as lord! Although the devil is presently the **“God of this world,”** he will not be so recognized then! Only the Son of God will be honored! All crowns will be cast before His throne (Rev 4:10).

In this world, tongues do not readily confess Jesus is Lord. Every Lord’s day, countless multitudes acknowledge other lords. Wherever people choose to serve other interests, Jesus is not confessed as Lord. But the day is coming when this will not be the case! It is at the appointed time when His enemies will become His **“footstool”** (Heb 1:13; 10:13).

Through Isaiah, nearly 800 years before Jesus, God revealed His intention. **“I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear [allegiance, NASB]”** (Isa 45:23). The objective for every person is to confess the Lord with the tongue now, in **“the day of salvation.”** Only now, in this world, are men given a choice to do this. In the day of judgment, they will have no choice in the matter. That is why believers are told, **“with the mouth confession is made unto salvation”** (Rom 10:10). Confession presumes the recognition of the one confessed. Such recognition leads to salvation in this world. O, that men were more inclined to this.

This universal acknowledgment of Jesus will be **“to the glory of God the Father.”** It will confirm that everything He said about the Son was precisely true. It will also substantiate that the exaltation of Jesus was right, and in strict accord with truth. God never misrepresented Jesus! He is everything God has declared Him to be. He accomplished everything the Father affirms He accomplished. The Father is properly seen now ONLY **“in the face of Christ”** (2 Cor 4:6). He cannot be comprehended in a saving sense anywhere else. If honor is to be brought to the Father, it must come through the Son, to Whom the Father has committed everything. As it is written, **“He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him”** (John 5:23).

The purpose belonged to God, and thus God will be glorified when the Administrator of that purpose is confessed by every tongue! Thus the time will come when the Son will turn the kingdom back to the Father that He might be **“all in all”** (1 Cor 15:24-28).

The due consideration of these realities will confirm the high worth of humility, and esteeming others better than ourselves.

LESSON #22

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.” (Phil 2:12-13, NKJV)

INTRODUCTION

The nature of salvation has been debated by theologians throughout nearly two millennia. Some consider the Lord to be the primary Worker in salvation from beginning to end. Others see God as providing the salvation initially, but leaving the matter wholly in the hands of man, while remaining personally aloof from the process. Our faith, however, must not rest in human perception, but in Divine declaration. Faith comes by **“hearing,”** not by understanding. Rather, it is **“by faith”** that we **“understand”** (Heb 11:3). This text states the situation precisely. Men are exhorted to involve themselves in the process of salvation. They are also told the Source of effective working. Those choosing to believe this representation of the case will find a great deal of comfort and encouragement for the good fight of faith.

YOU HAVE ALWAYS OBEYED

“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence . . .” (NKJV). Here is an exceedingly rare expression: **“always obeyed.”** It is not only unusual in our time, it has ALWAYS been uncommon. The character of the Philippians endeared them to the Apostle. From the very **“first day”** of their exposure to the Gospel until the writing of this Epistle, they had maintained a **“fellowship in the Gospel”** (1:5). They had, in fact, availed themselves of the grace that is attainable to every believer. They excelled, not because they were unusual people, but because they loved and embraced the truth.

We know this is the case because obedience is a facet of salvation. It is something we are to do, but it is not done in human strength alone. Peter reminds us that our salvation is in strict accordance with the **“foreknowledge of God”** (1 Pet 1:2). It involves an **“eternal purpose”** that has never been modified or adjusted to the human circumstance. Part of this great salvation involves the indispensable work of the Holy Spirit. Peter refers to salvation as being accomplished **“by the sanctifying work of the Spirit”** (NASB). That **“sanctifying work”** relates to removing us from Satan’s employment, and enrolling us as **“laborers together with God”** (1 Cor 3:9). It is also like dying to the Law, that we might be married to Christ and produce fruit to God (Rom 7:4). Peter particularly cites the objective of the Spirit’s separating work. He says it is **“UNTO OBEDIENCE and sprinkling of the blood of Christ.”** The NIV reads, **“for obedience to Jesus Christ . . .”**

We know from our text, therefore, that the Philippians had not quenched or grieved the Spirit of God. They did not resist His holy work, but yielded to it in faith. The result: they **“always obeyed.”** Previously, the Spirit reminded us that Jesus Himself was **“obedient unto death, even the death of the cross”** (verse 8). In their obedience, therefore, the Philippians fulfilled the admonition of the Spirit: **“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus”** (verse 5). Christ Jesus was dwelling in their hearts by faith (Eph 3:16-17), and had so divulged Himself to them as to constrain obedience.

The obedience of the Philippian brethren was prompted more by faith than the appearance of a person of faith. They obeyed when Paul was present, and when he was absent. Their faith had knit them to the Lord. They were driven by an awareness of their Savior. No wonder it is written, **“The love of Christ constraineth us”** (2 Cor 5:14). Those who are consistently obedient live with an acute consciousness of God, and in fellowship with Christ.

Where obedience is partial or lacking, a serious condition exists. There is no room in the Kingdom of God for disobedience. One man’s (Adam) disobedience made all men sinners (Rom 5:19). That is how serious disobedience is. Disobedience is evidence of the dominion of Satan, who works in the **“children of disobedience”** (Eph 2:2). The wrath of God is promised to such children (Eph 5:6; Col 3:6).

Thus the Philippians manifested the real nature of salvation. Their manner of life confirmed their participation in the purpose of God. It validated their profession, and provided a great light to their generation.

WORK OUT YOUR OWN SALVATION

“. . . work out your own salvation with fear and trembling . . .” (NKJV). These arresting words are not spoken to recalcitrant and slothful believers, but to those who had **“always obeyed.”** They do not, therefore, reflect the state of the Philippians, but the nature of salvation. No believer will ever arrive at a point in this world where these words become obsolete or unnecessary. The words **“work out your own salvation”** are consistent in every major translation.

The words **“work out”** mean **“complete,”** or **“carry on until it is finished.”** The very words contradict whole bodies of theology. They presume **WE** are involved in the salvation itself. A parallel can be seen in Israel’s deliverance

from Egypt—an inspired view of salvation. God delivered them from Egypt, but they had to work out that salvation in the trip to Canaan. Some of them did not work it out. That very deliverance is cited as an example of our responsibility in 1 Corinthians 10:1-11.

Everything pertaining to life and godliness has been supplied to us through *“the knowledge of Him”* (2 Pet 1:3). Those things are *“freely,”* or abundantly and without cost, given to us (Rom 8:32). That very circumstance suggests there is something for us to do. God does not give supplies to those who require nothing. Nor, indeed, is Jesus bringing us to glory independently of our own involvement. God saved Noah, but HE had to build the ark. The Lord delivered Goliath into the hands of David, but HE had to sling the stone. God always calls men into participation.

Working out our own salvation is availing ourselves of the resources provided in Christ. It is engaging in the good fight of faith and laying hold on eternal life (1 Tim 6:12). It is called *“work”* because it involves intense human effort. We are not working, however, to secure salvation, but for it to be completed in us. We do not have the whole of it yet.

“Fear and trembling” does not suggest slavish fear that drives us away from God. Rather, it describes an alert and cautious spirit in which the individual is aware of the dangers surrounding him. As Israel was in a treacherous wilderness en route to Canaan, so are we in an evil world en route to glory. Look at this frame of spirit as the opposite of cold and lifeless religion—form without power. While in the world, we are also in danger.

It is the awareness of our humanness that brings about the *“fear and trembling.”* When Paul preached, he did so *“in fear and in much trembling”* (1 Cor 2:3). He knew his only capability was in the Spirit and through faith. Left to himself, he would soon be dashed upon the rocks of futility. Servants were admonished to serve their masters *“with fear and trembling,”* knowing their circumstance required a strong faith in God (Eph 6:5).

There are lurking in our members the remnants of the old nature. In a single moment of time, they can bring us into captivity to the law of sin (Rom 7:23). As we set ourselves to work out our own salvation, let us do so with a lively sense of our handicaps as well as our state in Jesus. In that awareness let us not despair, but flee to Christ for refuge. This whole text assumes we need Jesus as much AFTER we are reconciled as we did before.

IT IS GOD WHO WORKS IN YOU

“. . . for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (NKJV). The Spirit buttresses His exhortation by affirming the Divine working within us. These two verse (12-13) may appear to contradict each other, but they do not. Paul has no trouble affirming the need for human involvement, while also declaring Divine Sovereignty. Blessed is the person who is able to take hold of both affirmations. Happy, indeed, is the individual who can throw himself into working out his own salvation, knowing all the while that it is God Who is working within him.

The truth to be seen here is that God works THROUGH our efforts—and does so effectually. In the end, we cannot give credit to our efforts, but to God. Notwithstanding, we work heartily just as though it all depended upon us. The woman who came through the “press” to touch the hem of Christ’s garment had to expend what little energy she had. But had it not been for the power of Christ, she would never have been able to touch His garment.

The Divine working is said to be in two areas: *“to will and to do.”* Again, this is too difficult for one in the grip of a stilted theology. The human will is too often considered in separation from the working of God. But our text will have nothing of such an insipid view. When men are *“willing,”* God has been at work! It is in *“the day of His power”* that they have become willing (Psa 110:3). This is involved in God drawing people to Jesus (John 6:44). A *“willing mind”* (2 Cor 8:12) does not exclude the activity of the person—but neither does it forbid the working of God. This is not a matter to debate. God has spoken with crystal clarity, and we do well to believe it. Wherever there is *“a contrite and humble spirit”* (Isa 57:15), God will *“work to will,”* helping the individual to reject any inclinations to be reluctant.

This text also shows that willingness must precede the doing of God’s will. It simply cannot be done perfunctorily, and by mere routine. Myriads of professed believers are involved in religious doing that is divorced from their wills. They have no preference or appetite for the things of God, yet involve themselves in religious activities. God will have none of it. **Before** He works to *“do,”* He always works to *“will!”*

By saying God works in us *“to do,”* the Spirit is emphasizing that Divine demands exceed our natural capabilities. For example, Christ cannot dwell in our hearts unless we are strengthened by His Spirit (Eph 3:16-17). The requirements to fight a good fight, seek the things that are above, and lay hold on eternal life, are impossible without God working in us *“to do.”* That working is also accomplished *“mightily”* (Col 1:29) and *“effectually”* (1 Thess 2:13). There is no known limits to this working. God is still *“able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us”* (Eph 3:20).

“According to His will” signifies at last two things. First, this type of working is something the Lord desires to do. Second, the working is devoted to the accomplishment of His purpose. Thus we read God is *“working in you what is well pleasing in His sight”* (Heb 13:20-21). Verse 13 is what makes verse 12 doable! Let all saints throw themselves into the work!

LESSON #23

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.” (Phil 2:14-16, NKJV)

INTRODUCTION

Fellowship with Christ, or walking in the light, is a requirement—but it is much more than that. It is a Divinely appointed means of effecting the *“eternal purpose”* of God. A generation is impacted by godly people, like a dark night is invaded by the dawning of the day. That light is produced by what we do NOT do as well as what we DO. Everything about the life of faith is used by God, bringing Divine influences to bear upon an alienated world.

WITHOUT COMPLAINING AND DISPUTING

“Do all things without complaining and disputing” (NKJV). Why is such an exhortation found in this Epistle? From *“the very first”* this church had participated in the work of the Gospel. Yet there were seeds of corruption surfacing even in this congregation. Later Paul will plead with two women to be ***“of the same mind in the Lord”*** (4:2). Looking behind the scenes, our adversary, the devil, was working to penetrate and defile this group of believers, using one of his chief ploys—agitating the waters.

The Lord now introduces a frame of spirit that is applicable to every facet of life. It is to be maintained when doing ***“all things.”*** That also means Satan makes every attempt to influence us in ***“all things.”*** Also notice that the Apostle **assumes activity**, not inactivity—they are in the process of doing.

“Complaining and disputing” is disruptive to both individuals and congregations. Alternative expressions used in other translations include, *“murmuring and disputing”* (KJV), *“grumbling or disputing”* (NASB), *“complaining or arguing”* (NIV), *“grumbling or questioning”* (RSV), and *“protests and arguments”* (BBE). These are the traits of people who, driven by self interests, are troublesome and disturbing. Their presence and manner are disruptive to spiritual life. These are characteristics that conflict with humility, which is encouraged in this section. They are the result of seeking self interests without regard for other members of the body.

MURMURING, or grumbling and complaining, is most serious. The Corinthians were reminded of God’s response to the murmuring and complaining of Israel. ***“Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer”*** (1 Cor 10:10). The Psalmist says of the ancient people, ***“But complained in their tents, And did not heed the voice of the LORD”*** (Psa 106:25). A complaining spirit closes the ears so the voice of the Lord is neither heard nor sought.

DISPUTING and argumentation are forms of contention. They are disruptive because they pit person against person, forgetting that our foes are not flesh and blood (Eph 6:12). Specifically, *disputing* speaks of the promotion of flesh and the exaltation of opinion. It involves wrangling about things of no profit, contending for unworthy things, and being at variance with other believers. It is driven by the flesh, which produces ***“contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies”*** (Gal 5:20). When believers ***“strive about words,”*** it brings ***“ruin”*** to the hearers (2 Tim 2:14). As much as possible, argumentation is to be avoided.

Why should we exercise ourselves to ***“do all things”*** without these uncomely things? Because ***“the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace”*** (James 3:18). The Spirit of the Lord does not work in an agitated environment. It is ever true, ***“the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God”*** (James 1:20)—and both complaining and arguing are evidence of fleshly resentment. There will be times when we will not be able to avoid disputation and contention (Acts 9:29; 17:5 Mk 8:11). However, such disputing is not the motive for what we do. If it does not rise because of the truth, it is not right. Nothing must be done to promote self.

BLAMELESS AND HARMLESS CHILDREN

“ . . . that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world . . . ” (NKJV). The language of this verse is most arresting: ***“blameless—harmless—without fault—shine as lights.”*** If anyone doubts the essentiality of ***“the mind of Christ,”*** let them ponder the weight of this verse. Here is the reason we are to zealously shun complaining and disputing. They will inevitably bring blame and harm, and will extinguish our light. What an unimaginable price to pay for self-interest!

BLAMELESS. This is *unreproveable*—a condition where God Himself finds no fault with us. This differs from the blameless state into which justification inducts us (Col 1:22). This has to do with sanctification, or our personal involvement in working out our own salvation. Elsewhere, it is referred to as ***“blameless in holiness”*** (1 Thess 3:13), and keeping the commandment of the Lord ***“without spot”*** (1 Tim 6:14). It is also a view men have of us, and is reflected in Psalm 35:19: ***“Let them not rejoice over me who are wrongfully my enemies; Nor let them wink with the eye who hate me without a cause.”*** Blameless people are ***“falsely accused”*** by their enemies

(1 Pet 3:16). It is for Jesus *“sake”* that they are opposed (Matt 5:11).

HARMLESS. This was a trait of our blessed Lord. He was *“harmless”* (Heb 7:26). By this, the Spirit means those drawn to Christ were never hurt or disappointed by Him. Those who walk with Him are ministered to, strengthened, and enriched. They find His yoke *“easy,”* and His burden *“light”* (Matt 11:30). Because we are in a wicked world, our Lord admonishes us, *“Therefore be wise as serpents and HARMLESS as doves”* (Matt 10:16). Those drawn to us must not be hurt by us. As *Jesus “went about doing good,”* so are we to *“do good unto all men”* (Gal 6:10).

WITHOUT FAULT. This means *“without blemish”* (RSV), or *“above reproach”* (NASB). It refers to both our reputation and our character, and is how God views us: i.e., *“without fault before the throne of God”* (Rev 14:5). It is having no rottenness of soul or conduct. God has provided us with an *“Advocate”* and continual cleansing to ensure this state is not beyond our reach (1 John 1:7; 2:1). Let nothing take these benefits from you!

SHINING AS LIGHTS. We live in a dark and perverse, or corrupt, world. This spiritual darkness obscures God to men, and draws them into sin. Without light, there is no hope for them. Our lives CAN be lived in such a manner as to penetrate this darkness. Believers are portable lamps that introduce hope, and confirm there is a way out of darkness. But their light must not be extinguished by complaining and quarreling! The bushel of self-interests must not be allowed to smother our flickering flame. God has lit our candle (Psa 18:28), and it is our business to *“let”* that light *“so shine”* (Matt 5:16). Like *“stars in the universe”* (NIV), our lives can stand out against the black sky of a *“crooked and perverse generation.”* Much of their light is determined by our persistence in avoiding *“murmuring and disputing.”* Those uncomely expressions will darken the sky, hide our light, and make men think there is no hope, or nothing higher than the flesh.

HOLDING FAST THE WORD OF LIFE

“ . . . holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain” (NKJV). Unless our hearts and minds have been in heavenly places, this verse will surprise us. He does NOT admonish the Philippians so that THEY may rejoice in the day of Christ. His exhortation is NOT in order that THEY may not have run or labored in vain. While those things will surely occur for them, Paul wrote so *HE* might rejoice in the day of Christ. He made the effort to contact the Philippians from his jail cell so *HE* would not have run or labored in vain.

The idea of *“holding fast the Word of life”* is keeping it before the world. The KJV emphasizes this by saying, *“holding FORTH the Word of life.”* The idea is that murmuring and disputing loosens our grip upon the Word—the Source of life. Thus, it can no longer be seen by those living in darkness. **Our lives are the carriers of the light.** We can, by our conduct, cause the light to shine more brightly, or obscure its glory. Jesus put it this way, *“Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house”* (Matt 5:15). Holding forth the Word of life is keeping it from under the bushel! It is NOT depriving those about us of the appointed means to spiritual life. If men *“live by every Word of God”* (Lk 4:4), that Word must NOT be obscured by us!

If the faithfulness of the Philippians would enhance Paul’s joy in the *“day of Christ,”* their unfaithfulness would take from it. If their spiritual demeanor contributed to him NOT running or laboring in vain, then flawed living among them would reflect upon his running and laboring. *Unfaithfulness not only affects those in whom it is found, it also impacts those who have labored with them—those who brought the Word of the Lord to them.*

Here is an aspect of the truth that is scarcely known in our day. Professional religion has so structured its approach to the work of the Lord, as to hide this indispensable consideration. You may recall Paul was *“afraid”* of the Galatians, that he may have labored among them *“in vain”* (Gal 4:11). He also feared the same circumstance among the Thessalonians (1 Thess 3:5).

The Spirit provides extended teaching on this in First Corinthians 3:12-17. After stating the Corinthians were his *“work in the Lord”* (9:1), the Apostle elaborates on the relationship of those taught to the laborer himself must also pass through the test of the day of judgment, being *“the work”* of even another minister (3:15b).

Our labors are directly related to our reward. We do well to do our best to spend our time in productive areas. We also are to maintain a lively interest in the progress of those impacted by our ministries.

LESSON #24

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all. For the same cause also do ye joy, and rejoice with me.” (Phil 2:14-16, NKJV)

INTRODUCTION

The apostle thought of both living and dying within the context of salvation. He had been liberated from the dreadful curse of considering things according to appearance. Whether things were going well or not, he looked at the things that are not seen, thereby obtaining strength and hope. Now we see the faith of an Apostle joining with and complementing the faith of those who had received his Gospel. This kind of harmony cannot be realized in the flesh. There is but *“one faith,”* and it brings not only people of diversity together, but joins and sanctifies the extremes of human circumstance.

OFFERED AS A SACRIFICE

“Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering . . .” (NKJV). The KJV reads, *“if I be offered . . .”* The word means “to pour out as a libation, or drink offering,” and is so translated in most versions.

The reference is to the *“drink offerings”* of old time. Jacob was the first to present such an offering (Gen 35:14). After God had *“talked”* with Jacob, confirming the Abrahamic covenant with him, Jacob set up a stone pillar in memory of the event. He then poured oil upon it as a *“drink offering.”*

“Drink offerings” were also prescribed under the Law, differing in measures according to the type of animal that was sacrificed (Num 15:5,7,9). A drink offering referred to the pouring out of wine, offered with various sacrifices (see Num 15:1-12; 28:7,8,24). They accompanied another sacrifice, sanctifying it before the Lord.

Here Paul reveals how much of the spirit of Christ was within him. He has already declared the condescension of our Savior in laying Divinity aside to come into the world and die. The Savior *“emptied Himself,”* pouring Himself out, so to speak. Now Paul speaks of his own impending death in the same manner—a pouring out of himself.

From the standpoint of appearance, Paul’s incarceration seemed to be something forced upon him. And, indeed, from a lower point of view, that was the case. He was *“bound”* and in chains (2 Tim 2:9). From a higher point of view, however, he was pouring himself out. He submitted to the confinement rather than deny the Lord—he poured himself out. He chose to suffer with Christ rather than enjoy freedom at the expense of his faith—he poured himself out.

His was a voluntary sacrifice, not one accomplished by coercion. He had, in fact, presented his body as a *“living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God”* (Rom 12:1). Like Moses, he CHOSE to suffer affliction with the people of God (Heb 11:25).

Notice, this is something He is in the process of doing: *“If I am being poured out . . .”* His heart was in the matter. He was in fellowship with Christ (1 Cor 1:9) as he passed through the experience of suffering. He refused to view his circumstances from a fleshly point of view. Rather, he saw them as an extension of his service to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The relevance of this to all believers should be apparent. We too will pass through experiences that are less than comfortable. Often, our faith will be the very occasion of our suffering, provoking wicked people to inflict sorrow upon us. How should we react when these things occur? We must view such suffering as *“for righteousness sake”* (Matt 5:10), and for Christ’s sake (Matt 5:11). It is an occasion when we are summoned to deny ourselves, *“take up”* our cross and follow Jesus (Matt 16:24).

Our reaction to these times of sorrow can be our drink offering—our libation poured out unto the Lord. It is the forfeiture of personal advantages and comfort of life in order to remain in fellowship with Christ Jesus. Such sacrifices are pleasing to the Lord, and will not go unrewarded. May each of us be given grace to view our circumstances in association with our Lord.

A SACRIFICE UPON A SACRIFICE

“ . . . on the sacrifice and service of your faith . . .” (NKJV). Paul’s suffering is like an accompanying drink offering—a sacrifice offered in association with another sacrifice. He refers to the *“Sacrifice and service”* of the Philippian’s faith. The RSV says *“the sacrificial offering of your faith.”* The reference is to the work of the priests of old, who were continually offering up sacrifices to God. While those ancient sacrifices have been obviated by the death of *“the Lamb of God,”* the work of sacrifice goes on.

Sacrifices under the Law were offered in response to a command. In Christ, **faith** is the driving force behind sacrifice and offering. The *“sacrifice and service of your faith”* refers to presentation of one’s entire person to God—something motivated by faith. The persuasion that God is, and that He is a Rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Heb 11:6) proves to be the superior motivation for godliness.

This is a sacrifice that is total—like a “*whole burnt offering*” (Psa 51:19). In most remarkable words, Paul elsewhere refers to “*the offering up of the Gentiles*” being “*acceptable*” to God through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit (Rom 15:16). In this text, the same sanctification is viewed from the standpoint of the individual’s involvement—“*faith*.”

Faith is the sanctifying element in all spiritual sacrifice. It is to our offering what salt was to the Old Covenant offerings—a necessary accompaniment (Lev 2:13). “*Without faith, it is impossible to please*” God (Heb 11:6). While that is generally acknowledged to be the truth, there appears to be an alarming absence of faith in much of what is offered to God. A lively awareness of God, Christ, and a great salvation is not as common as it could be in this day of salvation.

Here we behold the glorious unity of every aspect of salvation. The living of the Philippians and the dying of the Apostle are related to the same sacrifice. Their faith is exhibited in serving the Lord in life. His is revealed in serving the Lord in death. But both blend together, for they are devoted to the same Lord, and motivated by the same faith.

There are few things as diverse as life and death. Ordinarily, they might be considered as wholly unrelated. But behold what a great thing has been achieved in Christ! Now the two have been brought together. Little wonder it is said that both “*life*” and “*death*” belong to us (1 Cor 3:22). Christ is truly “*magnified*” in both the life and death of the believer (Phil 1:20). How different, indeed, from “*the fear of death*” that dominated prior to Christ (Heb 2:15). Now living is an offering to God, and so is dying.

The Philippians were living for the same cause for which Paul was dying. Therefore, his life was being poured out upon their sacrificial life as a sanctifying drink offering. His dying brought a sweet savor to their living, even as the drink offerings of old brought a sweet aroma to the animal sacrifices (Num 15:7,10,24; 28:8).

Because the Gospel preached by Paul had been embraced by the Philippians, they would gain every advantage from his faith—whether by his life or death. God would favor the Philippians because of Paul.

AN OCCASION FOR REJOICING

“*... I am glad and rejoice with you all. For the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with me*” (NKJV). Remember, the Apostle is viewing his coming death. He sees it as a voluntary offering to God that joins with the faith of the Philippians. He now confesses that He is gladdened by such a consideration. When the circumstances of life seemingly turned against him, Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “*I am exceedingly joyful in all our tribulation*” (2 Cor 7:4). To the Colossians he wrote, “*I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church*” (Col 1:24). His view of hardship was NOT that of one being oppressed, but of one in fellowship with the Savior. He correctly saw suffering for righteousness as some of Christ’s adversities left behind for us to experience. They would not be greater than we could bear, but would allow us to have a closer relationship with our Savior.

Now Paul comes to the matter of his own death, and rejoices in the contemplation of it. It will be his ultimate offering to the Lord. He knows death belongs to those in Christ (1 Cor 3:22), and that it cannot separate them from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:38-39). He knows a crown of righteousness awaits him on the other side (2 Tim 4:8), and that his warfare is about to be completed. No wonder he rejoices.

But his rejoicing is not in isolation. He says “*I am glad and rejoice WITH YOU ALL.*” In the Philippians the Apostle has found kindred spirits with whom he can rejoice in the most personal of all experiences—his death. He could tell them about his anticipation, knowing they would understand. Those with whom such things can be shared are a rich treasure, indeed. The Philippians knew they had not only profited from Paul’s life, they would also be advantaged by his death. Perhaps they would share some of his life as the prophet Elisha did the mantle of Elijah following his translation (2 Kgs 2:9-14). I do not know the extent to which the sharing of grace received by others can be experienced. God did put “*of the spirit*” that was upon Moses on seventy men (Num 11:25). The spirit of Elijah did rest upon Elisha (2 Kgs 2:15). The “*spirit and power of Elijah*” was also found in John the Baptist (Lk 1:17). It is a subject worthy of your consideration.

Now Paul exhorts the Philippians to join him in joy. Not only will death be “*gain*” for Paul—and not only will his death be “*gain*” for them—their own death will be “*gain*” for them also (Phil 1:21). They, as well as he, have a “*house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens*” (2 Cor 5:1). The Apostle’s works would “*follow*” him, and their’s would follow them (Rev 14:13). By looking beyond this world, the Philippians could join in the joy.

From one point of view, the death of the Apostle would be a serious loss. But that is not the only view. From another, it would pave the way for the future, proving the superiority of salvation under all circumstances. The power of the Gospel would not diminish, but rather be enhanced, by the death of the faithful soldier. No eternal advantage would be lost for those maintaining their faith. Here is a perspective that can be experienced in far larger measures than is common. It is on the part of wisdom to pursue it.

LESSON #25

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“But 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. For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's” (Phil 2:19-21, NKJV)

INTRODUCTION

The *“mind of the Spirit”* is preoccupied with the things of God. God knows this *“mind,”* which is continually engaged in *“the will of God”* (Rom 8:27). Consequently, those who *“walk in the Spirit”* (Gal 5:16,25) find themselves absorbed with the things of God. They see life from heaven's perspective, and think in concert with the Divine agenda. They are not distracted by the affairs of this world. Such is the example provided by Paul. His thoughts are continually from a spiritual perspective. Everything, including people, are considered from a spiritual point of view. They are weighed in the balances of the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

TRUSTING THE LORD JESUS TO . . .

“But 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.” (KJV). The practicality of life in Christ Jesus is marvelous to consider. Faith touches every aspect of life, with the Lord Jesus joining with us in remarkably practical activities. Endearing to the Philippians because of their faith, Paul determines to send Timothy to them. He does not bother to speculate on how this will be done while he is in prison, or how Timothy would make it over Italy, the Adriatic Sea, and a portion of Asia to Philippi (over 600 miles). Nor, indeed, does he mention an extensive plan that will guarantee Timothy will make the journey. He simply says he is trusting in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy *“shortly.”* What a marvelous testimony of the power of faith!

Other versions read, *“I HOPE in the Lord Jesus . . .”* Paul does not use the word *“hope,”* however, as it is used by the average English speaking person. The word *“hope”* literally means *counting on something, expecting, awaiting, trusting, and confiding in.* *“TRUST”* is a more precise expression. *“Hope,”* in this usage, is an aspect of faith, or reliance on the Lord. In this expectation, Paul was walking by faith. His purpose was in harmony with the plan of Christ, and therefore he could rely on the Lord to bring it to pass. For Him, Christ was the heart of everything: his life, his longings, and his labors. Those choosing to live *“in the flesh”* cannot speak like this.

You may remember Timothy was with Paul when he wrote this letter. *“Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons”* (Phil 1:1). Whatever their association, whether in prison together or merely in the same vicinity, the mind of Paul was not focused on himself, but on the work of the Lord. He made plans in view of the Kingdom, and thus could rely on the Lord Jesus to bring them to pass. He thought of Timothy in view of God's will.

Again, the effect of spiritual thinking is seen in the Apostle. He is sending Timothy in expectation of being comforted in the knowledge of the Philippian's spiritual condition. The flesh derives comfort in the knowledge of good things coming to it. Faith liberates us from such constricted thinking. Though himself oppressed, Paul would experience relief by the news of the Philippian's progress in the faith.

In this, the Apostle reflected the mind of the Lord. God is pictured as rejoicing over the progress of His people. *“So shall your God rejoice over you”* (Isa 62:5). *“He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing”* (Zeph 3:17). Again, it is written, *“The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD, And He delights in his way”* (Psa 37:23). The NIV reads, *“If the LORD delights in a man's way, he makes his steps firm.”* Those who *“have the mind of Christ”* will find themselves comforted and refreshed in the knowledge of the stability of God's people. Thus they can *“rejoice with them that rejoice”* (Rom 12: 15) in rich fellowship.

We cannot leave this section without pondering, How would the knowledge of our state affect the Apostle? How does it affect our Lord?

NATURALLY CARING FOR ANOTHER

“For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state” (KJV). Of all of the commendations found in Scripture, this ranks among the highest. In matters of the Kingdom, Paul declares Timothy is *“likeminded”* with himself. He was a true *“kindred spirit”* (NASB). Paul admonished the Romans *“to be likeminded one toward another”* (Rom 15:5). He also exhorted the Philippians to *“be likeminded”* in their consideration of one another (2:2). But that is not the sense of this text. Here *“likemindedness”* means Timothy is a sort of extension of Paul. This young man was so closely knit to the Lord that it was *“natural,”* or normal, for him to think in concert with the Divine agenda—particularly as it involved the Apostle Paul.

Timothy did not have to be coached to have a concern for the people of God. His thoughts did not have to be jarred loose from the course of this world. More than absorbing the teaching of Paul, Timothy had embraced the Lord of Paul. The likemindedness refers more to having *“the mind of*

Christ” than the mind of Paul. The mind the Apostle urged the Philippians to embrace (Phil 2:5-8) was actually found in Timothy.

The rarity of possessing this mind is seen in the words, *“For I have no one else of kindred spirit”* (NASB). This does not mean no such person existed, but that no one of this spirit was available. How tragic that such a circumstance existed! It should not surprise us that such souls are even more rare in our day, when a great falling away has taken place.

Even though Paul had a burden for all men, desiring their salvation (1 Cor 9:22), yet he viewed them through the eyes of Christ. His assessments were not colored by carnal sympathy, but were driven by his fellowship with Christ Jesus. He weighed people with the purpose of God in mind.

Timothy is said to *“naturally care”* for the *“state,”* or spiritual condition, of the Philippians. It would be profitable to consider how many people you know that fall into this category. Other versions read, *“genuinely be concerned”* (NKJV), *“genuine interest in your welfare”* (NASB), *“genuinely anxious for your welfare”* (NIV), *“truly have care for you”* (BBE), and *“genuinely concerned for your welfare”* (RSV).

The idea is that Timothy was, by nature, aggressive to bring spiritual resources within reach of God’s people. He was instinctively concerned about their progress in Christ Jesus, and could be trusted to contribute to their development in the faith. This goes far beyond, what is commonly called, *“meeting the needs of people.”* Legitimate *“care,”* or interest, does not focus on the self-diagnosed requirements of people. It views their progress to glory, and seeks to assist that growth. It perceives their readiness for the coming of the Lord, and seeks to improve it. This is a mind-set that considers the saints in view of salvation, its provisions, and its consummation. Armed with jealous care for the acceptance of God’s people, the person who *“naturally cares”* for their state brings them food, hope, and consolation. Such individuals become *“helpers of your joy”* (2 Cor 1:24). In harmony with the revealed objective of Christ, they equip the saints for the work of ministry, enabling them to build up the body of Christ (Eph 4:11-16).

ALL SEEK THEIR OWN

“For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ’s” (NKJV). How tragic that such words had to be written! Spiritually naive people see no need for such a statement. They view it as negative and counterproductive. But they are wrong. The eye of faith spans the horizon of the human condition, and does not draw back from proper assessment.

In making this statement, Paul is showing how Timothy has excelled. This young man had not advanced because he was surrounded by an superior group, or because he lived in a time when it was fashionable to *“naturally care”* for the progress of God’s people. He obtained *“the mind of Christ”* when it was not common to do so. Our Lord reminded us of a time when, *“because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold”* (Matt 24:12). That does not, however, justify the love of Christ waning, or people leaving their *“first love.”* In every age, whether in the first century, or in the generation in which we live, the faithful have had to rise above the norm to think properly. Timothy had to go against the religious tide to *“naturally care”* for the state of the saints. It had to press through the normal, and rise above the average. He could not allow himself to be swallowed up by the trends of the time. Others sought their own interests, but Timothy did not!

The words of the Spirit are precise and sharp. Other workers (for Paul is speaking about those associated with the work of Christ) did NOT seek the interest of the flock of God, but *“their own.”* On the surface, their interests might have appeared legitimate and thoroughly *Christian*. Like Demas, however, they *“loved this present world,”* and therefore could not be counted on to bring advantages to the saints (2 Tim 4:10). In another place, Paul speaks of these people in this manner: *“For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things”* (Phil 3:18-19, NKJV). These were supposedly *Christian* laborers!

The dominance of these kind of workers within the professed church is staggering! Precious few there are, indeed, who can be counted on to edify the saints, caring for them, and helping them prepare for the Lord’s return!

Notice the strength of these words. It is not enough for the Spirit to say these teachers do not *“naturally care”* for the condition of God’s people. It is also not sufficient to say they *“seek their own”* selfish interests. He pointedly says what they are seeking, and what they are doing are *“not the things which are Jesus Christ’s.”* They are operating by anti-Christ agenda! By that very circumstance, they are *“against”* Christ, waging war against Him. Jesus said, *“He that is not with me is against Me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad”* (Matt 12:30). Those who *“seek their own”* are viewed by Jesus Himself as *“against”* Him. Their labors are wasted, and will not be blessed by Jesus! Such are hot for self and cold for Christ. They are stimulated by considerations of their own interests, and made insensitive by the thought of God’s purpose. Such individuals are blotches on the canvas of eternal purpose, and will eventually be purged from it.

LESSON #26

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“Therefore I hope to send him at once, as soon as I see how it goes with me. But I trust in the Lord that I myself shall also come shortly.” (Phil 2:19-21, NKJV)

INTRODUCTION

For the believer, the path of life is not always clear. While the way to glory is marked out with clarity, day-to-day life is not so certain. Just as there are sun-splashed mountains upon which things are plain and clear, there are also misty valleys in which we cannot see very far. Faith, however, can navigate in both realms. It can purpose and anticipate, even when the believer is not sure of the fulfillment of certain personal desires. This is an aspect of faith that is now displayed by the Apostle to the Gentiles. In these few words he reveals the effectiveness of faith. He shows us how we can live in the midst of great hardship, uncertain of immediate future.

TRUST REASONS AND PLANS

“Therefore I hope to send him at once . . . ” (KJV). At the time of writing, Paul knew his own death was imminent, yet did not know when. He confessed he was *“hard pressed between”* choosing whether to *“depart and be with Christ,”* or *“remain in the flesh”* to minister (1:23-24). His words confirm to us that the time of choosing had not yet arrived—i.e., he did not know if his imprisonment would result in his death, or he would be released.

For many, this would have been a disconcerting circumstance. Uncertainty can breed fear and disquietude, causing anxiety to rise in the heart. Many a soul has abandoned the work of the Lord simply because their future was not certain. How different a picture we see in our text.

Paul has already acknowledged Timothy to be like none other with him. When they were together, they did not speak of Paul’s imprisonment and death, but of the need of the brethren—particularly at Philippi.

When Paul says *“I HOPE to send . . . ,”* he uses a term that reveals an aspect of faith. This is NOT the *“one hope”* that has been given to us as an anchor for the soul (Eph 4:4; Heb 6:18-19). It is NOT the *“hope”* by which we are saved (Rom 8:24). A different word is used here, usually translated *“trust.”* It is used in the same sense as our text 10 times in Apostolic writings (Rom 15:24; 1 Cor 16:7; 2 Cor 1:13; 5:11; 13:6; Phil 2:19,23; Phile 22; 2 John 1:12; 3 John 14). In EVERY case, it has to do with the uncertain aspect of life—human relationships and circumstances. It is never used to describe the expectation of glory, being forever with the Lord, the resurrection, etc. While our eternal destiny has been revealed to us, the course of our life has not. Occasionally, the Lord did reveal to Paul precise things that would occur in his life (Acts 16:9; 18:10; 23:11; 27:23-26).

However, such Divine illumination was not always Paul’s experience. Our text is a case in point. He had determined to send Timothy to the Philippians for their advantage. His desire was noble, being centered in the will of the Lord. The person he had determined to send was worthy of the assignment, and could be trusted to do the will of God. The ones to whom he was sending Timothy were virtuous, and deserving of such consideration. It was a good and Christ-honoring thing that Paul determined to do.

A purpose like this can be committed to the Lord—even if there is no firm guarantee that it will take place. The apostle lays this matter before the Lord, trusting Him to bring it to pass. By this, Paul means He is relying upon the Lord to do His will in the matter. He is NOT saying he is sure Christ will allow him to send Timothy, but that He is putting the whole matter into the hand of the Lord—willing to let Him work it out. Even if it does not come to pass, he will acquiesce with the Lord’s will. That is trusting, or hoping.

Again, this text has to do with relying on the Lord in areas of uncertainty. It is a facet of living by faith. Often we are led through unfamiliar waters, where the course is not certain. Rather than becoming disconcerted by that circumstance, faith purposes and plans anyway. It purposes with the intention of furthering the cause of Christ, and lays the purpose in the hand of the Lord. Such living cannot be facilitated by a routine. Only faith can live like this.

AS SOON AS I KNOW . . .

“ . . . as soon as I see how it goes with me” (KJV). There are church circles in which such language would be forbidden. There is a strain of religious thought that teaches what we say causes the thing to come to pass. Texts used by those embracing and promoting this view are, *“The tongue has the power of life and death”* (Prov 18:21, NIV), and *“if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him”* (Mk 11:23, NIV). If they say, they are sick, or healed, these people believe that very word will cause the thing to occur. Solomon’s statement, however, referred to the effects of speaking on the individual doing the speaking. It coincides with Christ’s saying, *“For by your words*

you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matt 12:37). The reference to a mountain being thrown into the sea reveals the potency of *faith*, not merely of words. It is NOT having doubt “*in the heart*” that accomplished the deed, not merely speaking to the mountain.

Those in the grip of this teaching believe words spoken in faith have creative power—i.e., they will make things happen. They base this view on Hebrews 11:3: “*Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God . . .*” This is represented as saying God, through faith, spoke the worlds into existence. The true meaning is that we, through faith, believe that He created the worlds from nothing by His word—even though we have no evidence of it. It is not God that had faith, but those who believe.

All of this may appear to have little to do with our text, but that is not the case. Paul writes of a plan and declares his purpose. It has not been hastily conceived or spoken. Yet, Paul does not imagine it will be fulfilled because he said it—and said it trusting, or hoping. Were the teaching to which I have referred true, Paul’s adjoining statement would have been an evidence of unbelief: “*as soon as I see how it goes with me.*” This man of faith could not prolong his life or send Timothy simply by declaring it would be done!

In this sense, uncertainty and faith can cohabit with each other. Mind you, unbelief and faith cannot live together, but that is not what we have here. Paul is acknowledging that everything has not been revealed to him. Like the mighty prophet Elisha, there were some things that were hidden from him (2 Kgs 4:27). Remember, that was not always the case with Elisha. The Lord even revealed to that prophet what the king said in his bedchamber (2 Kgs 6:12). But he did not reveal everything to that choice prophet, and neither He do so to Paul, who “*labored more abundantly than they all.*”

Some things are on a wait-and-see basis. “*If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that*” (James 4:15). We must not allow this circumstance to cause personal agitation or restlessness. It is one of the ways God teaches us to trust and purpose at the same time. It also removes the danger of tender hearts being dashed on the rocks of despair when what they truly desire does not come to pass. If you are willing to “*see how it goes*” with you, you will not be disappointed. Neither, indeed, will you be idle. The desire to benefit the people of God, and plans to do the same, need not be attended with clear evidence that all of it will come to pass. I find this to be a great liberty.

HOPE DOES NOT GIVE UP EASILY

“***But I trust in the Lord that I myself shall also come shortly***” (NKJV). See with what resolution Paul speaks! On the one hand, he is waiting to see how it will go with him. Yet, he does not idly sit, awaiting that knowledge. He is trusting that he himself will be able to come to the Philippians in the immediate future. It is generally understood that Philippians was written around 61-62 A.D., and that no further missionary travels occurred after that. While there is not agreement on this matter, it appears he remained as a prisoner of the emperor in Rome until his death (although early church fathers believed he was released). Even so, you find the faith of Paul alive and vibrant. He is thinking of the churches, and purposing to advantage them.

When Paul says “*I trust in the Lord . . .*,” he uses a different word than he did in reference to Timothy (“*hope*”). It is a stronger word, used in Galatians 5:10 and 2 Thessalonians 3:4). In these texts, as well as the one we are viewing, the trust is expressly said to be “*in the Lord.*” “*I have confidence in you, in the Lord*” (Gal 5:10), “*we have confidence in the Lord concerning you*” (2 Thess 3:4).

Paul placed his plans in the Lord’s hands, having reconciled Himself to the reign of Jesus. He only desired what was harmonious with the will of His King. He left the government of the Kingdom to the King, making himself and his thoughts subject to Him. The purposes Paul has made known are conditional. They are NOT, however, conditional upon the whims of a Roman governor. Nor, indeed, are they conditioned upon some form of fate; i.e., “*whatever will be, will be.*” He knew God had a purpose, and that His purpose was being meticulously executed by the Lord Jesus Christ. His faith had confirmed to him that everything had been placed in Christ’s hand, and that He would bring the purpose of God to a glorifying conclusion. What he did NOT know is precisely how this would impact his own life. He did not know if his role involved a soon-release or continued imprisonment and death. Rather than spending his time trying to discover the answer, he made plans that were in keeping with that purpose, entrusting them to the Lord.

Here is an aspect of faith that is not well known in our day. It involves reasoning after a godly manner, even if our thinking is not precisely correct. We have another example of this in our father Abraham. When commanded to offer up Isaac as a burnt offering, Abraham proceeded to do that very thing, even though it appeared to contradict God’s promise. He reasoned “*that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead*” (Heb 11:17-19). Technically, Abraham was wrong—God stopped him from sacrificing Isaac. However, our father reasoned after a godly manner, thereby bringing glory to God. His thinking had been molded by the promises of God.

This is exactly the manner in which Paul thought. In fact, this reflects the manner in which faith constrains any believer to think. Confident that “*the Judge of all the earth will do right*” (Gen 18:25), noble plans are made and subjected to the will of the Lord. No melancholy here, but joyful trust!

So make your plans! Do so in the interest of the Lord’s purpose and His people. Be ready to fulfill those purposes if the Lord wills. Do not wait until the way is clearly laid out before you, but live and plan for the Lord now!

LESSON #27

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“Yet I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your messenger and the one who ministered to my need; since he was longing for you all, and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. For indeed he was sick almost unto death; but God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow” (Phil 2:25-27, NKJV)

INTRODUCTION

You will notice that the details of life related by Paul are always stated within the context of life in Christ Jesus. If he is in prison, he is a prisoner of Christ. If he contemplates being freed, it is to do the work of the Lord. If he mentions friends, it is regarding their labors for the Lord. His longings relate to the Kingdom of God. His communications are to the people of God. He mentions his prayers, not his meals. Even those who guarded him are brought up within the context of the Gospel and their response to it. Here is a notable example of living unto the Lord. It is a stance greatly to be coveted by every child of God. In this frame of mind Christ is brought to bear upon all of life.

EPAPHRODITUS—FELLOW WORKER, SOLDIER

“Yet I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your messenger and the one who ministered to my need.” The imprisoned Apostle determined to send Timothy to Philippi—even planning to come himself, if the will of the Lord so allowed. However, in the meantime, he resolved to send Epaphroditus to them for the present time. While he waited to see how it would “*go with*” him, he refused to let the work of the Lord stand still. Notice, he states it was “*necessary*” to send Epaphroditus. And why so? It was not owing to any apparent crisis that had risen in Philippi. They were working out their own salvation with fear and trembling in the midst of a perverse nation. That condition requires edification, strength, and encouragement. We see from this that the best of congregations need to be built up in the most holy faith.

We learn from the fourth chapter that Epaphroditus had been sent to Paul by the Philippians. From him, Paul had received things sent to him by the Philippian brethren, “*an odor of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God*” (4:18). We do not know precisely what was sent, but it brought great satisfaction to Paul. Of their gift he said, “*Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you . . .*” They were no doubt practical things, but the satisfying value came from the spirit in which they had been sent—a sacrifice well pleasing to God.

The description of Epaphroditus reveals the manner in which laborers in the Lord’s vineyard are to be assessed. Again, the appraisal of this saint is made within the context of the work of the Lord.

“My brother.” While the technical meaning of this word is “a male relative with the same parents,” that is not the meaning of the word here. Relationships in Christ transcend fleshly ones. Saints are related to one another by virtue of their union with Christ. Our Lord said, “*you are all brethren*” (Matt 23:8). This designation identifies one as a member of the body of Christ. Paul therefore spoke of being “*called a brother*” (1 Cor 5:11), showing it is not to be taken lightly. No less than 55 times, the word “*brother*” is used in this manner in the epistles. It is a high designation.

“Companion in labor.” This is labor “*in the Lord*”—focused efforts in the vineyard of the Lord and with the Gospel of Christ. It is labor that is “*not in vain*” (1 Cor 15:58), is prompted by love (1 Thess 1:3), and is “*in the Word and doctrine*” (1 Tim 5:17). Your experience should confirm to you how relatively few people work together for the cause of Christ.

“Fellow soldier.” As a soldier, he had taken his stand against principalities and powers, and was casting down imaginations exalting themselves against the knowledge of God (Eph 6:12; 2 Cor 10:5-6).

“Your messenger.” An able representative of the Philippian brethren, he brought their gifts and embody their hearts. As such, Paul says, “*He ministered to my need.*” He did so, not only as a representative of others, but as personally joining with the Apostle in his desires and labors.

LONGING AND DISTRESS

“. . . since he was longing for you all, and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick.” Here is an account that reflects real Kingdom thinking. It contradicts current teachings that claim health is guaranteed in the Lord, and that sickness is an unnecessary intrusion into the lives of believers.

Epaphroditus was “*longing*” for his brethren at home. This was not mere homesickness. It was a deep desire for the fellowship they had in Christ Jesus. He had not been longing for *some* of them, but for “*all*” of them—as a body of believers. See the versatility of the redeemed soul. Although away from his brethren, ministering to Paul, and experiencing personal infirmity, he still longed for the brethren at home. Too, there is a suggestion that the Philippians had an equal longing for him. Some believe Epaphroditus was more than a mere representative of the church. They see him as the leader of the congregation, or at least one of them. I am also inclined to this view. The desire of Paul to send Timothy, come himself, and send Epaphroditus indicates churches are not as independent as some suppose. I know of churches

whose leaders would be offended by such considerations.

Now this man of God was “*distressed*,” or made very heavy, because they had heard “*he was sick*.” The word “*distressed*” is a strong one, meaning *sorely troubled, upset, and deeply troubled*. He was not troubled because he was sick, but because his brethren *heard* he was sick. It is as though their concern for him would detract from their thoughts of Paul, to whom they had sent assistance. His sickness is thus viewed as secondary to the work of the Lord, and was not considered by him to be a crisis—even though serious.

The value of this verse is not found in its doctrine, or teaching, but in the spirit of the text. It conveys to us a certain Kingdom manner that is most unusual in our day. Among the churches of our land, sicknesses are viewed as most critical, often being the only things for which people pray. While guarding against insensitivity in this area, we learn from this text of the manner in which holy men regarded infirmity. Paul said he “*gloried*” in infirmities, in order that the “*power of Christ might rest*” upon him (2 Cor 12:9). He knew that his personal weakness became an occasion for Divine power to come upon him. The manner of the Kingdom is, “*when I am weak, then am I strong*” (2 Cor 12:10).

The sustaining of a human soul under the weight of infirmity is no small thing. Whether “*infirmities, reproaches, needs, persecutions, or distresses for Christ’s sake*,” a depletion of personal resources makes one a reservoir for Divine power. This does *not* mean we are indifferent about sickness, whether in ourselves or others. It *does* mean we can capitalize on the occasion, according to the will of God. That is why Paul could leave Trophimus “*in Miletum sick*” (2 Tim 4:20). He knew the manner of the Kingdom.

What a noble soul we behold in Epaphroditus! He was more concerned for his brethren than for himself. Thus, with Paul, he exemplified the mind of Christ in preferring others above himself. May God raise an army of such souls to work in His vineyard—souls who care for the flock.

HE ALMOST DIED FROM THE SICKNESS

“*For indeed he was sick almost unto death; but God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.*” At once we see that Epaphroditus was not suffering from a minor or common ailment. He almost died! Hezekiah was “*sick unto death*” (2 Kgs 20:1). Mighty Elisha died “*of his sickness*” (Kgs 13:14). King Jehoram was smitten by God with an “*incurable disease*,” from which he died (2 Chron 21:18-19). King Asa died of a disease in his feet because he “*did not seek the Lord, but the physicians*” (2 Chron 16:12). There is, indeed, a sickness that is “*unto death*.” For a while, Paul did not know whether this was the case with Epaphroditus or not. Now he writes that the sickness was “*almost unto death*.” He was ushered to the very gates of death by illness, yet was spared for the moment from entering into them. I have often wondered how many of God’s people have been “*sick almost unto death*.”

Those who boast of healing coming from the natural constitution of man will not be able to rejoice with Paul. The apostle does not trace the recovery of this faithful servant to the healing properties of the body, but to the mercy of God: “*God had mercy upon him!*” It is still true, “*Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases*” (Psa 103:3). Those who argue about whether or not God still heals must ponder whether or not He still has mercy upon people. The healing was not traced to a miracle, but to mercy.

Another thing we see here is that Paul, though a mighty apostle, could not heal at will. Spiritual gifts, however notable, are managed by the Giver, not the receiver. We know this is the case, because the recovery of Epaphroditus brought mercy to Paul as well. Their spirits were so knit together that Paul sorrowed and rejoiced with this messenger from Philippi.

Here was a case when sorrows had been rushing like a flood over the Apostle. Although he rejoiced in the Lord, gloried in his infirmities, and brooded with care over the churches, yet he had been given the bitter herbs of sorrow. The mercy extended to Epaphroditus kept Paul from having “*sorrow upon sorrow*.” David spoke of such an experience when he referred to the “*sorrows of death*” surrounding him (Psa 18:4). He called it the “*pangs of death*” getting hold of him, while he “*found trouble and sorrow*” (Psa 116:3). It is a circumstance in which the believer finds “*sorrow in my heart daily*” (Psa 13:2), and “*my sorrow is continually before me*” (Psa 38:17). Our Lord experienced this to the fullest measure, as confirmed by these words: “*A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief*” (Isa 53:3).

Paul does not say having “*sorrow upon sorrow*” was an impossibility, but that he was spared the experience by God having mercy on Epaphroditus—not himself! There is such a thing as coming “*into deep waters, Where the floods overflow me*” (Psa 69:2). Were it not for the mercy of God, this circumstance would be more frequent for the best of saints. But God *is* merciful and faithful, and will not allow us to be tempted above what we are able to bear. Often the deliverance comes when He has mercy on those we love and with whom we labor – and that is something worth thinking about.

LESSON #28

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“I have sent him therefore the more diligently, that, when ye see him again, ye may rejoice, and that I may be the less sorrowful.” ²⁹***Receive him therefore in the Lord with all joy; and hold such in honor:*** ³⁰***because for the work of Christ he came nigh unto death, hazarding his life to supply that which was lacking in your service toward me”*** (Phil 2:28-30, NKJV)

INTRODUCTION

The consideration of the brethren of Christ is the evidence of having passed from death to life. *“We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren”* (1 John 3:14). Few places in Scripture reveal the deep love Paul had for *“the brethren”* as clearly as this passage. Both joy and sorrow were related to his regard for the people of God. In this, he was a partaker of Christ, Who pioneered this type of love. This is the class of love that forfeits personal advantage for the other individual. As the beloved Apostle said of the Lord, *“the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me”* (Gal 2:20). How beautifully this *“mind”* is revealed in Paul. It is lofty, yet practical; Divine, yet revealed through an *“earthen vessel.”*

THAT I MAY BE LESS SORROWFUL

“²⁸I sent him therefore the more carefully [more eagerly, NKJV], ***that, when ye see him again, ye may rejoice, and that I may be the less sorrowful.”*** Just as Epaphroditus was sent by the Philippians to Paul, now he sends him back. We understand Paul sent him back with a letter—the Epistle to the Philippians. Herein is a remarkable evidence of the spirit of Paul. Even though Epaphroditus was a source of great consolation to him, out of consideration for the Philippians, he sent him back to them. Also, just as they had sent something to Paul through this man, so Paul sent something to them through him to them. What a blessing is godly consideration!

Because of their mutual identity with Jesus, the people of God are tightly knit with one another. The Apostle knew the Philippian brethren would *“rejoice”* when they saw Epaphroditus. This response was not prompted by mere fleshly associations, but by the *“unity of the Spirit.”* While they were apart, their colleague was *“full of heaviness”* (2:26). But when they would be brought together, there would be rejoicing.

The unity of believers is held together by spiritual love and affection—an actual preference for one another. That is why the Ephesian elders wept when they realized they would not see Paul again (Acts 20:38). It is also why Paul said he wanted to see Timothy so he could be *“filled with joy”* (2 Tim 1:4). One of the marks of a lifeless church is the absence of this spirit. When professed believers are not anxious to be with one another, and have a preference for the company of unbelievers, something serious is wrong. It is ever true, *“Those who fear You will be glad when they see me, Because I have hoped in Your word”* (Psa 119:74). That is why Malachi said such people *“spake often one to another”* (Mal 3:16). The spiritual qualities we are seeing in this passage are simply the manner of the Kingdom.

The rejoicing to which Paul refers occurs when the sight of a fellow believer brings greater clarity to spiritual matters. A rejoicing heart is a necessity in Lord Jesus Christ. Although it is not the only experience we have in the Lord, it is a vital one. Rejoicing is like a spiritual catalyst that sets other kingdom qualities and things in motion. It also helps to elevate spirit capacities, so that we see clearer and work harder. This type of rejoicing is a higher form of Solomon’s *“merry heart,”* which *“does good, like medicine”* (Prov 17:22). In Philippians, *“rejoice”* is mentioned ten times (1:18; 2:16,17,18,28; 3:1, 3; 4:4), *“rejoicing”* once (1:26), *“rejoiced”* once (4:10), and *“joy”* six times (1:4,25; 2:2,17,18; 4:1).

There is another key thing to see here. When the Philippians rejoiced, Paul said he would *“be less sorrowful.”* The NIV reads, *“have less anxiety.”* Here *“joy”* and *“sorrow”* exist simultaneously, as in 2 Corinthians 6:10. Paul does not say his sorrow would be removed, but that it would be diminished. How grateful we must be when our sorrows and burdens are decreased! Once Paul said there was a burden that came upon him daily: *“the care of all the churches”* (2 Cor 11:28). The reduction of that *“care”* is involved in the phrase *“less sorrow.”* Suffice it to say, each of us has the capacity to increase or diminish the sorrow of those laboring among us.

RECEIVE AND HOLD IN REPUTATION

“²⁹Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness; and hold such in reputation.” Even though Paul knows the Philippians will be glad to see Epaphroditus, he admonishes them to *“receive”* him with *“all gladness.”* It is one thing to *“see”* a brother, it is something else to *“receive”* him. The Jews saw Jesus, but they *“received Him not”* (John 1:11). Diotrephes had seen and known John the Apostle and his fellow laborers, but did not *“receive”* them (3 John 9).

To receive someone *“in the Lord”* is to recognize their relationship to Christ. It also involves receiving the ministry into which the Lord has placed them. This can be done with *“all gladness”* because such brethren, like Mark, are *“profitable to me for the ministry”* (2 Tim 4:11). They bring rich resources to us that give an advantage in the good fight of faith. The things of God are made more clear, and come within our grasp because of their presence. The world loses much of its power, and the world to come looms larger, when such brethren are received *“with all gladness.”*

Without dwelling on this matter, it is apparent this type of reception is not common in the nominal church. The institution has grown to such an extent that men and women of God that have been given the ability to build up the body of Christ are neither recognized nor received. A tragic state, indeed!

Now comes an admonition of great significance: *“and hold such in reputation.”* Other versions read, *“hold such men in esteem”* (NKJV), *“hold men like him in high regard”* (NASB), *“honor men like him”* (NIV). The idea is that of being highly prized, precious, valuable, more distinguished, and surpassing on honor (Thayer's Lexicon). Paul once referred to men who should be *“counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the Word and the doctrine”* (1 Tim 5:17). Such men have forfeited personal interests to give advantages to the people of God. They are among us those of whom Jesus spoke, who have *“left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for My sake, and the gospel's”* (Mark 10:30). Jesus is not speaking of the heartless abandonment of responsibilities, but of the assignment of absolute priority to the Lord and His Gospel. Such men are rare indeed, and are a special benefit to God's people.

When we find rare individuals within the body of Christ—people gifted by God to bring great advantages to the saints—we are to regard them highly. Such people have been especially blessed by the Lord, and are to be heartily received by us. This is not a fleshly, or earthly, attitude, but a godly one. People, for example, who *“watch for our souls”* (Heb 13:17), need encouragement. One of the greatest ways to do this is to receive what the Lord has given them. That is what *“receiving him therefore in the Lord”* means. It is not a mere legal obligation. This kind of receiving is pictured in the reception Jesus once enjoyed. *“And it came to pass, that, when Jesus was returned, the people gladly received him: for they were all waiting for Him”* (Lk 8:40). In that very place, Jairus' daughter and the woman with the issue of blood were healed. Godly reception brings blessing!

FOR THE WORK OF CHRIST

“³⁰Because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me.” Paul elaborates on the reason for holding Epaphroditus in high regard. What we will behold in this text differs radically from the notions of honor that exist in the modern church. Men are honored for their educational credentials, or possible for their administrative skills. Most of the time, such honor has to do with fleshly distinctions that have little to do with God's *“eternal purpose.”* Such things, however notable they may appear, have no value in the Lord's government.

Here is a rare quality, indeed! *“Because he almost died for the work of Christ”* (NIV). I understand this to refer to the very sickness from which he nearly died while with Paul (2:26-27). His labors for the Lord brought handicap upon himself. Many would criticize men of God for such action, saying they were not taking care of their body as they should. Such men are considered to be *burning the candle at both ends*, and needlessly jeopardizing their health. In the flesh, this type of reasoning appears sound—but it is not. Were this the only text on this subject, it would be sufficient to destroy vain imaginations which suppose convenience is a comely trait. Both Barnabas and Paul are described as *“men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Acts 15:26). Paul was expelled from cities, and once stoned, ONLY because of his labors for Christ. Elsewhere, the hope of the resurrection compelled holy men to *“stand in jeopardy every hour”* (1 Cor 15:30). The Apostle Paul said his labors for Christ had brought the experiences of *“weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness”* (2 Cor 11:27). Paul wrote the Galatians, *“it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you”* (Gal 4:13, NIV). In travels for the Lord, Trophimus was *“left at Miletum sick”* (2 Tim 4:20). Paul described Priscilla and Aquila as *“my helpers in Christ Jesus: who have for my life laid down their own necks”* (Rom 16:3-4). There was also the household of Stephanus, who had *“addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints”* (1 Cor 16:15).

This is a royal class of people indeed, with whom Epaphroditus was classed. Here and there, you will be blessed to have such people cross your path. They are by no means common, but God has placed them in the body where it has pleased Him. These are people who *“will very gladly spend and be spent”* for the sake of the children of God (2 Cor 12:15). They confess with Paul, *“neither count I my life dear unto myself”* (Acts 20:24). They are willing to give it all to Jesus, even at great personal risk.

This is not an attitude that can be legislated by law. You cannot make people live like this. It is a sort of spiritual sacrifice that can only be made willingly. It proceeds from an unusual grasp of the truth of the Gospel, and an unusual ministry given to them by the King. Such people, wherever they are found, are to be held in high regard. Whether it is an Anna who serves in the temple at an old age, a young David who risks his life to confront a giant, an Apostle willing to die for Jesus, or a minister becoming sick because of his labors for Christ—these people are a treasure for us all.

LESSON #29

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe.” (Phil 3:1, KJV)

INTRODUCTION

While the word “*epistle*” does mean “letter,” it carries a weightier meaning than the average conception of “letter.” Apostolic writing was personal, but it was also inspired. It dealt with personal matters, but in a manner much higher than nature can reach. Such writing considers life within the context of eternity and eternal judgment. Thus, the “Epistle to the Philippians” becomes a message to the churches, and to every believer everywhere. It is a message driven by the need to edify the body of Christ. The people of God must never allow this knowledge to leave them.

The impact of faith upon an individual can be seen in the Epistle to the Philippians. For those in Christ, people are no longer considered from a human point of view. In the words of Scripture, *“Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer”* (2 Cor 5:16, NKJV). Whether it is the Philippians, preachers, Timothy, Epaphroditus, Paul himself, or the Lord Jesus Christ, everyone is seen in view of God’s great salvation. Nothing and no one is viewed in disassociation from that.

Your experience will confirm the rarity of such an approach to life in the average congregation. An invaluable ministry you personally can offer is to restore this indispensable view in your speech and in your manners.

REJOICING IN THE LORD

“Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord.” The word “*finally*” relates what is now said with all of the previous words. It carries the idea of “*in this connection*”—a continuation of thought. While it may appear a small matter, the interrelationships of Kingdom thought are refreshing to contemplate. Faith has a way of grouping our reflections under a common focus, and pointing our words in a single direction. The word “*finally*” also means “*from now on.*”

REJOICING, as I have pointed out, is a common theme in this book (1:4,25,18,26; 2:2,16,17,18,28; 3:1,2; 4:1,4,10). This is not a shallow word, like laughter or happy, as used in common speech. It is not in the flesh, having its roots in the soul. Rather, it speaks of a joy that springs from understanding, not feeling. Rejoicing, as used in this text, rises above circumstances, and exults in the very midst of restriction and difficulty.

Fleshly happiness debilitates the soul, causing it to ignore the harsh realities of life. But this is not the case with “*rejoicing*,” or the “*joy of the Lord.*” Nehemiah once told his fellow laborers, *“the joy of the LORD is your strength”* (Neh 8:10). Rather than disarming the soul, it causes the person to correctly see the task before him, and aggressively do the work of the Lord. In addressing the matter of enduring persecution, Jesus accentuated this truth. He told the persecuted and abused, *“Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven”* (Matt 5:12).

The exhortation is not “*be happy*,” or “*smile*,” but **“Rejoice IN THE LORD.”** That presupposes there is an acute awareness of the Lord, and that it is delightful. The delighting is not in outward circumstance, but in the Lord Himself. A similar exhortation is found in Romans that sheds more light on the subject. **“And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement”** (Rom 5:11). Such joy, or rejoicing, is not generated by nature, but is “*through our Lord Jesus Christ.*” The closer we are to Him, the more apt we are to rejoice. The less conscious we are of Him, the less will be our joy. This joy also centers in reconciliation, not the adjustment of our environment.

This Philippians had heard about Paul’s imprisonment and Epaphroditus’ sickness. The Tempter had doubtless used these reports to try and cause distress and undue care among the brethren. God had also given them **“to suffer for His sake”** (Phil 1:29). But God was greater than their suffering, and they could rejoice in Him—i.e., in His Person and blessing.

Faith focuses upon the Lord, persuaded that **“He is, and that He is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him”** (Heb 11:6). It does not dwell upon circumstances, whether adverse or blessed. That is why, under all circumstances, we can **“Rejoice in the Lord.”** He is unchanging, and His salvation **“shall be forever”** (Isa 51:6). He is good, and His mercy **“endureth forever”** (Psa 118:1-4). The mind and heart that dwells upon Him will confess, **“For You, LORD, have made me glad through Your work”** (Psa 92:4). The exhortation to **“rejoice in the Lord”** is nothing less than a summons to consider the Lord, and what he has done in Christ Jesus. As this is done, we will be able to say, **“My meditation of Him shall be sweet: I will be glad in the LORD”** (Psa 104:34). Rejoice in the Lord!

WHEN WRITING IS NOT GRIEVOUS

“To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous . . .” Other versions read, *“To write the same things again is no trouble to me”* (NASB), *“irksome”* (RSV), *“tedious”* (NKJV). The words “*same*

things” mean *repeating what I have said before*. The *“things”* he is going to mention are twofold. They relate specifically to rejoicing, and generally to false teachers—i.e., spiritual imposters that trouble the church (v 2). Both of these were frequent subjects of Apostolic exhortation. In some of his Epistles, Paul addressed specific heresies and false doctrines (1 Cor 15:12; Gal 1:6-8; Col 2:8,18-20; 1 Tim 4:1-3). This is not the case with the Philippians. They were more spiritually minded, and thus did not require a lot of details.

The frequency of Paul’s exhortation to *“rejoice”* is evident in this Epistle. *“I joy, and rejoice with you all . . . Rejoice with me . . . ye may rejoice . . . Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! . . . That your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ . . . for your furtherance and joy of faith . . .”* (2:17,18,28; 4:4; 1:25,26). It was not grievous, or difficult, for Paul to keep mentioning this matter. He knew the nature of the Kingdom, as well as the frailty of our memories. There are things worth repeating. These are foundational matters which, when thought upon, sustain the soul. In this regard, effective preaching or writing consists more of affirmation than explanation. There are certain matters which always surface when men speak or write with *“the same spirit of faith”* (2 Cor 13).

There is another matter to be seen here. The real Kingdom worker finds joy in his labors—he is not grieved or chagrined by them. I have often seen people working for the Lord who were repulsed by the work itself. They found no delight in laboring for Christ, always cast down by the circumstances under which they labored. This is not an appropriate response, even though it is common. Speaking of laboring together with Himself, Jesus said, *“My yoke is easy and My burden is light”* (Matt 11:39). To His disciples he said, *“In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world”* (John 16:33). This presumes a great delight in the work of the Lord itself.

The experience of Elihu has been exalted and sanctified in Christ Jesus: *“I will speak, that I may be refreshed”* (Job 32:20). Those who have a word burning in their heart cannot bear to keep it in. They long to speak what God has given them. As Jeremiah once said, *“Then I said, ‘I will not make mention of Him, Nor speak anymore in His name.’ But His word was in my heart like a burning fire Shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, And I could not”* (Jer 20:9). In the Prophet’s case, grief was related to keeping it in, not speaking it out! Weariness came when the Word of God failed to erupt from his mouth, and relief came when it did.

This is the experience to which Paul refers. It is common in all who are called of God. Satisfaction cannot be found doing something other than what we have been called and gifted to do. This is why it was not *“irksome”* to Paul to keep admonishing the saints to rejoice, warning them of false prophets. He knew he was called to such a work, and the saints required it.

WHEN IT IS “SAFE” FOR US

“ . . . but for you it is safe.” Other versions read, *“it is a safeguard for you”* (NASB, NIV). The idea is, What I am writing is certain and reliable, and will help to free you from danger. The tenuous nature of living by faith is accentuated in this phrase. A paradox may be seen in spiritual life. We are secure and in jeopardy at the same time. This is a circumstance designed by the Lord. Stated in terms of Scripture, *“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us”* (2 Cor 4:7). Not only do we have the Spirit of God within us, we also can find *“another law in [our] members, warring against the law of [our] mind, and bringing [us] into captivity to the law of sin which is in [our] members”* (Rom 7:23). Although ignored by multitudes of *church folk*, that circumstance can prove to be our undoing if not duly heeded.

Paul thought of the spiritual safety of people, and he did so because he had the Spirit of Christ. This reveals the utter absurdity of a doctrine that affirms there are no dangers or jeopardies for the believer. Various terms have been applied to such doctrines: i.e., “Eternal security,” “Once saved always saved,” “Security of the believer,” etc. To be sure, faith is the victory that overcomes the world (1 John 5:4-5). But that faith must be kept, and fought for (2 Tim 4:7; Rev 14:12; Phil 4:12). The consideration of this constrained Paul to write things that contributed to the safety of believers.

And what things are “safe” for such as have *“from the first day until now”* fellowshipped in the Gospel (Phil 1:5). First, there is safety in the *“joy of the Lord.”* Rejoicing in the Lord is an aspect of faith itself. Such is called *“the joy of faith,”* or *“joy in faith”* (Phil 1:25). This is not a joy that is pumped up through emotional stimuli. It is a joy that erupts when the extent of the Savior and His salvation burst upon the soul. When the soul finds its delight in the Lord, it ceases to walk in forbidden places. The desires of the heart are so sanctified by spiritual joy, that what is craved can be given by God. Thus it is written, *“Delight yourself also in the LORD, And He shall give you the desires of your heart”* (Psa 37:4).

When the heart is weighed down with care, our reasoning becomes distorted. Thus the mighty prophet Elijah reasoned it was better to die than live, and that only he remained faithful (1 Kgs 19:10,14). Martha lost her bearings about Jesus when swept up in the care of servile work (Lk 10:41). When the eyes of the heart are diverted to the troubling affairs of this world, joy is crippled, and all of our spiritual faculties function slowly. How we need exhortations that are “safe” for us.

The *“joy”* that protects the soul requires frequent affirmations of the Lord in Whom it rejoices, and the Divine benefits that cause it to grow. Preachers who feed the people on Law, mere human responsibilities, and philosophical jargon, do nothing for the people. They only move them closer to danger, and crack the door for the devil to enter. Being an aspect of faith, joy must be fed. It must be robust and strong, able to soar above the agitated waters of this world. Only then will the saints be alert enough to detect false teachers and avoid them. A lamenting church will soon be spotted by the devil.

Let us contribute to making our brethren more God-conscious!

LESSON #30

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation!” (Phil 3:2, NKJV) ***“Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision”*** (KJV) ***“Look out for the dogs, look out for the evil-workers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh”*** (NIV)

INTRODUCTION

The Holy Spirit is not gentle when dealing with those proving harmful to the people of God. While men have developed a certain tolerance for those teaching novel and detrimental doctrines, the Lord is unusually intolerant of such people. Believers must remember they are in a war zone—a battle arena in which fierce and relentless foes exist. The principalities and powers against which we wrestle (Eph 6:12), beguile and use unstable souls to corrupt the people of God. We must not recoil at the strong language employed in this text. It is designed to awaken us to both the seriousness and aggressiveness of our adversary. If we cease to be vigilant, we will inevitably fall into the snare of the wicked one. A watchful spirit, however, will be undergirded by Divine power, enabling us to stand against the *“wiles of the devil.”* It is not possible to overstate the weightiness of this passage. While, from one viewpoint, it is not pleasant to consider, from another perspective it is most needful to both probe and ponder. Our salvation is not automatic, requiring our involvement.

BEWARE OF DOGS

“Beware of dogs . . .” The word ***“BEWARE”*** is certainly not to be taken lightly! It assumes imminent danger. Think of the many times this alert is sounded. ***“Beware of false prophets . . . Beware of men . . . Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees . . . Beware of the Scribes . . . Beware of covetousness . . . Beware lest any man spoil you . . . Beware, lest ye being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness”*** (Matt 7:15; 10:17; 16:6; Mk 12:38; Lk 12:15; Col 2:8; 2 Pet 3:17). I fear we are living in a time and place when the *“beware”* of the Spirit are not taken seriously. The casualness that plagues innumerable congregations is sternly rebuked by the presence of this word. If the commendable congregation at Philippi was warned to *“Beware,”* what body of believers in our time could possibly be excluded from the admonition.

Throughout Scripture, people are viewed from the standpoint of their character. Thus, they are frequently likened to various members of the brute, or impersonal, creation. Both good and bad associations are developed in this regard. Believers are to be *“harmless as doves”* (Matt 10:16b), *“wise as serpents”* (Matt 10:16a), *“bold as a lion”* (Prov 28:1, thirst *“as a hart”* (Psa 42:1), soaring as with *“wings as eagles”* (Isa 40:31), fed *“as lambs”* (John 21:15), following the Shepherd as *“sheep”* (John 10:27), able to hide from danger like *“the conies”* (Prov 30:26), and finding residence in the courts of the Lord like *“the swallow”* (Psa 84:3).

Wicked men are also likened to impersonal creatures. They are compared to a *“generation of vipers”* (Matt 3:7), *“a wild ass”* (Hos 8:9), *“ravening wolves”* (Matt 7:15), with *“the poison of asps under their lips”* (Rom 3:13). Thus, in creation the Lord has personalized traits that are brought to their full measure in mankind—both good and wicked.

Frequently, those oppressing the saints of God are said to be *“dogs.”* The term refers to wild and ravenous dogs, not the domesticated type. Jesus is depicted as being surrounded by such ravenous beasts in the 22nd Psalm. *“For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have enclosed me”* (Psa 22:16). Again, that Psalm shows the impact of such souls upon our Lord. *“Deliver Me from the sword, My precious life from the power of the dog”* (22:20). Our blessed Lord warned us, *“Give not that which is holy unto dogs,”* declaring they would *“turn and tear you to pieces”* (Matt 7:6). In a remarkable statement of the case, it is said of the glorified church, *“But outside are dogs”* (Rev 22:15). The Spirit, then, uses this language frequently.

First, for personal gratification, like wild dogs, these teachers bark, making noise and degrading pure doctrine. Of such, the Psalmist said, *“They growl like a dog, And go all around the city”* (Psa 59:6,14). They offer nothing of substance, but only make noise.

Second, they are harmful, biting and devouring the saints because of the conflict they create. Thus *“dogs”* were frequently depicted as devouring their victims (Jer 15:3): *“greedy dogs which can never have enough”* (Isa 56:11).

Third, such teachers are like *“dumb dogs that cannot bark”* (Isa 56:10). They do not warn the people of impending danger, but lull them to sleep with their erroneous doctrines and views. Beware of such men!

BEWARE OF EVIL WORKERS

“. . . beware of evil workers . . .” ***“. . . those men who do evil”*** (NIV). The Spirit is not speaking of unreligious men in the grasp of Satan. Rather, He is referring to those who come under the pretext of godly men, but who

are really ungodly. They are not only “evil,” or exactly the opposite of “holy,” they are “workers,” aggressively seeking to promote their cause among the godly. Many a soul has been led astray because of them. Of such false prophets, Peter wrote, “*And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of*” (2 Pet 2:2). “*Hymenaeus and Philetus*” were evil workers described as those who “*overthrow the faith of some*” (2 Tim 2:8). The “words” of such men are malignant, spreading like cancer wherever they are found (2 Tim 2:17).

“*Evil workers*” are “*workers of iniquity.*” Covered with the garb of religion, they work wickedness in the name of Jesus, and among His people. Whenever recognized, they are not to be tolerated. We must remember the word of the Psalmist to the holy God. “*The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: Thou hatest all workers of iniquity*” (Psa 5:5). Such “*speak peace*” with their mouths, but “*evil is in their hearts*” (Psa 28:3). Rather than bringing any advantage to the saints, “*They utter speech, and speak insolent things; All the workers of iniquity boast in themselves. They break in pieces Your people, O LORD, And afflict Your heritage*” (Psa 94:4).

Although “*evil workers*” represent themselves as ministers of righteousness, their works are evil, and their ministry wicked. Their activities are not aligned with God’s purpose, and their ministry is driven by the flesh, not the Spirit. What they DO is in sharp conflict with what God is doing, and is therefor harmful to the saints.

Let no person doubt the existence of such people—religious people that are actually doing what is evil. Speaking to some of His critics, Jesus said, “*When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open for us,' and He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know you, where you are from,' then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets.' But He will say, 'I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity'*” (Lk 13:25-27). The same assessment was made of people who, in the day of judgment, boasted they had “*prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?*” Our Lord’s appraisal of their works, however, was quite different. “*I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity*” (Matt 7:22-23). Their works were not constrained by love or driven by faith, and therefore they were “*evil.*”

This text assumes we understand the devil’s strategy. He “*transforms*” himself “*into an angel of light,*” offering illumination and understanding. He additionally has “*ministers*” who are also “*transformed*” into “*ministers of righteousness.*” Their end, or final destination, we are told, will be “*according their works*” (2 Cor 11:15). They come in the name of the Lord, but they are “*evil workers.*” Beware of them! They are dangerous.

BEWARE OF THE CONCISION

“*. . . beware of the concision [mutilation (NKJV), false circumcision (NASB), mutilators of the flesh (RSV), those who mutilate the flesh (NIV).]*” Here is a strong play on words. Again, the Spirit assesses according to the NATURE of things, and not according to appearance.

The word “*concision*” means to mutilate. Literally, the word means “*cutting into,*” “*hacking,*” or “*chopping up.*” This is the only place in Scripture where the word is used. It is a contemptuous word for “*circumcision,*” and is directed toward those who imposed that ancient rite on people in Christ. We are told precisely what these people taught in Acts 15:1. “*Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.*” Circumcision was ordained by God. It was, we are told, “*the sign,*” and a “*seal of the righteous*” Abraham had BEFORE he was circumcised (Rom 4:11). Some believing Pharisees, upon hearing of the conversion of Gentiles, contended “*That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses*” (Acts 15:5). With no ambiguity whatsoever, Paul told the Galatian, when practiced as a religious rite, “*that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace*” (Gal 5:2-4). It was, then, no light matter. Of such men Paul said, “*to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour*” (Gal 2:5). Circumcision was for the flesh, not those who are born again.

Although claiming to promote circumcision, these teachers were tearing the body of Christ apart, mutilating it with their teachings. They were like unskilled surgeons, chopping away at the church, dividing and crippling it—and all in the name of Christ. This is the Spirit’s way of saying they imposed on God’s people things God has not decreed. Beware of such men!

There is a principle to be seen here that is of great importance. The Jews who insisted all believers must be “*circumcised after the manner of Moses*” were not the last people to mutilate the body of Christ. We are regularly confronted with self-appointed teachers who inform us of things required for salvation. Naming a few of them will suffice. (1) Those insisting we must keep the Sabbath day. (2) Those teaching we must be baptized in the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues. (3) There are the “*Jesus only*” people who insist we must believe there is only one person in the Godhead, and that His name is Jesus. (4) Others teach baptism into Christ is only valid if accompanied by the words “*in Jesus’ name.*” (5) Some teach “*all nine spiritual gifts*” must be in the church for it to be accepted by God. Add to these some lesser requirements foisted upon the church: i.e., (1) Unless you have a degree you cannot preach, (2) Every church must have elders and deacons, (3) Only church officials can baptize . . . etc., etc., etc.

And what has been the consequence of these teachings? CONCISION, or mutilation! The body of Christ has been divided by these things—matters not bound upon any believer at any time. Are such teachings innocent? Indeed, they are not! We are to “*BEWARE*” of those who divide the body Christ over

matters not bound upon us by the Head of the church!

LESSON #31

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh” (Phil 3:3, KJV)

INTRODUCTION

The Spirit has warned the Philippians about the presence of false teachers. They are destructive and ravishing, and do not spare the flock of God. Such a revelation could strike fear into the hearts of some. Thus, time is taken to identify the real nature of the people of God. We have been brought into a marvelous position in Christ Jesus. What we are in Him is to be grasped by our hearts and minds. Until you have confidence concerning who you are in Christ, you will be vulnerable to the devices of the evil one. False teachers prey on those whose hearts are unsure, and whose faith is weak. Peter said they *“entice unstable souls”* (2 Pet 2:14). That is why a great emphasis is given to the strengthening of the saints. Edification (building up), nourishment (feeding), and comfort (encouraging), are imperative if believers are to survive. One of the key means to accomplishing these things is the affirmation of what we are in Christ—simply stating the truth. A great emphasis is placed on this in the Apostolic writings. Such a declaration is found in this very text—a refreshing statement of who we are in Jesus.

WORSHIP GOD AND REJOICE IN CHRIST JESUS

“ . . . who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus . . . ” (NKJV). There has been a great emphasis in our day on the worship of God. Worship services and worship leaders abound in the land. While there is much to commend what is happening, it is not a sign of unusual spiritual advance.

Regeneration addresses everything sin defiled. Notice, our text does not say we OUGHT to worship God. Rather, those in Christ ***“WORSHIP God.”*** That is what they DO, not what they OUGHT to do! This is a revolutionary thought! In this regard, the emphasis is placed upon the person, not what they do. Jesus said it this way, ***“But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him”*** (John 4:23). Observe that He does not say “true worship,” but ***“true WORSHIPERS.”*** It is ***“worshipers”*** the Lord is seeking, not merely worship! That puts the accent on fellowship, co-laboring, and unity—all of which is accomplished in Christ Jesus.

“True worshipers” are REAL worshipers—those whose hearts are genuinely involved in their service. They prefer the Lord, delight in His Word, and find great pleasure in doing His will. Unlike Israel of old, they do not honor the Lord with their lips while their heart is far from Him (Isa 29:18; Matt 15:8). Their hearts and the lips are coordinated.

Their worship is ***“in the Spirit.”*** This does not mean such worship is unintelligent, but that is in harmony with ***“the mind of the Spirit”*** (Rom 8:27). The saints ***“worship”*** in strict accord with the ***“fellowship of the Spirit,”*** Who bears witness with their spirit, that they are the ***“children of God”*** (Phil 2:1; Rom 8:16). Their worship is in a higher realm, where they are aware of the Person and provisions of the Living God. The truth of God is the domain in which their worship takes place. They are constrained by what they have been given to see. Such ***“worship”*** cannot be initiated or orchestrated by men.

“Worship,” in this text, means ***“do service.”*** It does not refer to a religious routine, but to heartily serving the Lord. In His rejection of Satan’s temptation, Jesus referred to this aspect of worship. ***“Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve”*** (Matt 4:10). The word ***“serve,”*** in that text, is the same word as ***“worship”*** in Philippians 3:3. Paul referred to himself worshiping, or serving, the Lord (Acts 24:14; 27:23). More technically, the word means serving God in an attitude of reverence and veneration. It is precisely the thought expressed in Colossians 3:17: ***“Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”*** Where people do not ***“live unto the Lord”*** (Rom 14:8; 6:11), acceptable worship is absolutely impossible.

By ***“rejoice in Christ Jesus,”*** the Spirit emphasizes the believer’s perception of the personal nature of salvation (Gal 2:20). It is what Jesus has accomplished in redemption that so delights the saved. Their gladness is not found in routine, or in human accomplishment, but in the Captain of their salvation. If you want their joy to be full, tell them of their Savior. Tell them what He has done, and how He is ***“alive for evermore.”*** This also shows us how the Spirit, through Whom we worship, directs our affections.

AND HAVE NO CONFIDENCE IN THE FLESH

“ . . . and have no confidence in the flesh.” Here is a trait of saints that is rarely lauded. They ***“put no confidence in the flesh”*** (NASB), even religious flesh. ***“Flesh,”*** in this case, stands for everything that is natural—everything that has not been regenerated—everything that came from Adam. Speaking of this aspect of our persons, Jesus said the following. ***“The flesh is weak . . . not born [again] of the will of the flesh . . . That which is born of flesh is flesh . . . the flesh profiteth nothing”*** (Matt 26:41; John 1:13; 3:6; 6:63). The Spirit affirms that the law of sin is served ***“with the flesh”*** (Rom 7:25). Those who are not condemned are declared to ***“walk not after the flesh”*** (Rom 8:1,4). Those who ***“mind,”*** or pay attention, ***“the flesh”*** are contrasted with those who are ***“after the Spirit”*** and mind ***“the things of the Spirit”*** (Rom 8:5). With great power it is declared, ***“those who are in***

the flesh cannot please God,” and *“if you live according to the flesh you will die”* (Rom 8:8,13). There is certainly no vagueness in Scripture on this matter.

To have *“confidence in the flesh”* is to trust to nature, to rely on human abilities and achievements, and to be convinced there is inherent value in what can only be traced back to Adam. The prevalence of this kind of thinking in the professed church is staggering. Such confidence is exhibited in trusting in external rites like circumcision. It is also made known in relying upon a religious pedigree, like being a Jew—or in some form of achievement, like being a Pharisee of the Pharisees. It is made known when men rely on the wisdom of this world, fleshly disciplines, or a form of godliness that is void of the power of God. It is ever true, *“All flesh is as grass, And all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, And its flower falls away”* (1 Pet 1:24). You can dignify the flesh, educate it, polish it, and adorn it beautifully—but it remains *“the flesh.”* To borrow from a hackneyed expression, **The flesh by any other name is still the flesh.**

Those who are in Christ Jesus do NOT have SOME confidence, or reliance, in the flesh, but **“NO confidence in the flesh.”** They do not trust that facet of their being, realizing it is a liability, and never an asset. They have learned how fickle it is, and how consistent its inclinations to sin are. They do not *“judge after the flesh”* (John 8:15), walk *“after the flesh”* (Rom 8:1), or *“war after the flesh”* (2 Cor 10:3). They refuse to *“glory after the flesh,”* or make *“provision”* to *“fulfill”* its lusts (2 Cor 11:18; Rom 13:14).

Wherever religious people glory in appearance or rely on fleshly achievements, a chasm is being formed between them and Christ. The Spirit makes no allowance for nature to dominate. If it can only be traced back to Adam, it cannot be trusted! Wherever approval is sought from *“the flesh”* a dissatisfaction with Jesus is revealed. The person trusting in the fallen nature, whether it is educated and refined or not, will find it like trusting in Egypt: *“it will go into his hand and pierce it”* (2 Kgs 18:21).

Again, observe this is not something believers SHOULD do. This is what they DO—*“have no confidence in the flesh!”* Regeneration has really changed them! They place no trust in human opinions, philosophies, or achievements. They are not impressed by appearance or boastful words. The *“worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have NO confidence in the flesh.”*

WE ARE THE CIRCUMCISION

“For we are the true circumcision” (NASB). Early believers contended with false teachers who taught, *“Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved”* (Acts 15:1). Such teachers placed an inordinately high value on the flesh—on external procedures and appearance. Now the Spirit comes to the heart of the matter—what we are in Christ Jesus. Circumcision has been elevated to a spiritual experience.

Moses prophesied of a new kind of circumcision. *“And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live”* (Deut 10:6). Notice the result of this circumcision. God would be loved with all the heart and soul—something essential to spiritual life. Outside of Christ, the heart is uncircumcised. Sin causes a sort of growth over the heart that renders it insensitive to God and impervious to His Word. Jeremiah referred to this condition as *“the foreskins of your heart”* (Jer 4:4). The situation is the similar to having *“hardness of heart”* (Matt 19:8; Mk 3:5; Rom 2:5). Such a heart is described by Jeremiah as *“deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked”* (Jer 17:9). Salvation addresses this unacceptable situation.

Real circumcision, or the circumcision God recognizes as valid, is in the heart, not the flesh. *“ . . . nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh . . . circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God”* (Rom 2:28-29). The heart is the real person—the very center of our being. It is where change must take place if we are to be saved. We are not called to merely make some changes in our appearance, or to engage in certain routines or works. Our hearts must be changed—made sensitive to God and Christ. Men must be stripped of their insensitivity to God and made tender in their hearts. That is what real circumcision does. Note, this is not something need, but something we have!

This is a circumcision Christ Himself performs. It is called *“the circumcision of Christ,”* and is related to our baptism into Him. Our baptism itself is not the circumcision, but rather is when it occurred. It is described as *“the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ”* (Col 2:11-12). This is nothing less than the separation of the whole sinful nature from our essential persons—like cutting away what has been defiled. Romans 6:6 also refers to this as *“the body of sin”* (Rom 6:6). By this, the Spirit does not mean the “sinful body,” but the whole remains of sin—everything rejected by the Lord. It involves the forgiveness of sin (Col 2:13), cleansing of the conscience (Heb 9:14), and justification (Rom 5:1). The separation of this *“body”* from us frees us from enslavement to sin (Rom 6:18-22). It results in life toward the Living God (Rom 6:11). It is not something we SHOULD have, but what we DO have!

This circumcision is not something believers aspire to, it is something they presently possess. They are *“the circumcision!”* Regeneration has made them tender toward God. It has made sin repulsive and glory attractive. They do not need self-acclaimed teachers telling them how to be acceptable with God. They have been *“made acceptable in the Beloved”* (Eph 1:6). This is not what we should be, but what we ARE: *“the circumcision!”*

LESSON #32

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“Though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ” (Phil 3:4-7, NKJV)

INTRODUCTION

Paul now identifies himself with the saints of God—the true circumcision. He does not speak of himself as an Apostle, but as a representative of someone who has *“no confidence in the flesh.”* Although men tend to glory in their position or status, we have no record of any Apostle boasting in their Apostleship. Nor, indeed, did they use it as a means of lording it over people. They knew they were NOT Apostles by achievement, but by Divine selection. As Jesus said, *“Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit”* (John 15:19). This section of Philippians deals a devastating blow to religious pride. It confirms the real nature of salvation, which prompts the one participating it to find their solitary boast in the Lord Jesus Christ.

ATTAINMENTS, ZEAL, AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

“ . . . a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee, concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless” (NKJV). Now we come to attainment—something involving the conscious effort of the person. Remember, he is showing the worthlessness of the flesh—of everything man is or does by nature. We will find that Paul was no ordinary Jew. He excelled in every way, yet saw it now as worthless.

“A Hebrew of Hebrews.” The first reference to a *“Hebrew”* is found in Genesis 14:13: *“Abram the Hebrew.”* This, therefore, is the most ancient term for the favored people of Israel, and is how they came to known by others (Gen 39:14; 41:12; Ex 1:15; Jer 34:9). But Paul was no ordinary Hebrew. He excelled as a member of the chosen race. He stood out among Hebrews as king Saul stood above his peers (1 Sam 9:2). It is one thing to be part of some favored people. It is quite another thing to stand out among them, excelling in the things that identified them as belonging to God.

“A Pharisee.” The Pharisees were a group of people especially zealous for righteousness. They separated themselves for, what they conceived to be, the work of the Lord. Elsewhere Paul said his father was also a Pharisee (Acts 23:6). He said the Pharisees were *“the strictest sect of our religion”* (Acts 26:5). Over twenty years after he was converted, when standing before Ananias the high priest, Paul said, *“I am a Pharisee”* (Acts 23:6). Even in this unique body of people, Paul had excelled.

“Concerning zeal.” When it came to enthusiasm, Paul again surpassed his fellows. Convinced the followers of Jesus were not God’s people, he zealously involved himself in *“persecuting the church.”* To him, it was not simply a matter of a war of ideas. He did everything he could to stop what he thought was an intrusion in the spiritual community. Scripture says of him, *“But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house; and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison”* (Acts 8:3, NASB). With an unrelenting spirit, *“breathing threats and murder against the disciples of Christ,”* he sought letters from the high priest to pursue them in every synagogue (Acts 9:1). Of those terrible days Paul said, *“I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons”* (Acts 22:4). No mediocrity was found in this man.

“Concerning righteousness.” Paul was not only zealous for the nation of Israel, but for personal acceptance with God. He was a Pharisee, and was zealous, but he was not a mere institutional man. From the time he was *“a youth,”* Paul was noted for being committed (Acts 26:4). When it came to *“the righteousness of the Law,”* he was *“blameless.”* By this he means at least two things. First, no one could effectively charge he lived contrary to the Law. Second, his own conscience did no condemn him. Speaking of that period of his life, before the significance of the commandment burst upon him, Paul said, *“I was alive once”* (Rom 7:9). Such righteousness was not recognized by God, but was the very best that was possible apart from Christ.

If confidence in the flesh were possible, these things would justify it. In Christ, however, all such confidence is destroyed. Flesh is to be crucified!

GAIN TO ME, LOSS FOR CHRIST

“But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ” (KJV). It is essential to note the things that were *“gain”* to Paul were not health, wealth, social status, academic achievements, or political successes. Everything he mentions had to do with revealed religion. He was born into a God-chosen nation. From the very first, his parents presented him to the Lord in obedience. His chosen vocation was a spiritual one. He excelled in that pursuit. He personally gave himself to the zealous opposition of those he perceived to be the enemies of God’s chosen people. He also engaged in an unrelenting pursuit of personal righteousness, as defined by God’s Law.

If it were possible for *“flesh”* to be approved by God, surely Paul would have gained such approbation. At once we

see how utterly foolish it is to claim superiority upon the basis of social, political, or philosophical excellence. It is unfortunate that such measures of superiority have penetrated the church. Men are actually held out as possessing “gain” because of achievements wholly unrelated to revealed religion. They are honored for things that have little or nothing to do with obeying God or pursuing righteousness. If flesh cannot boast at the level of Jewish superiority, it certainly cannot be the basis for confidence at even lesser levels.

When Paul says “*WERE gain to me,*” he views himself when apart from Christ. It is another way of saying *self-centered*. Coming into Christ brings a whole new definition of “gain” or benefit. Paul here refers to temporal, NOT eternal, gain. Jesus spoke of this kind of “gain.” “*For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?*” (Matt 16:26). Salvation adjusts our ideas of gain, profit, and advantage.

“*I counted loss for Christ.*” Moses also had the perspective Paul reveals in this text. It is said of him, “*Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt*” (Heb 11:26). By saying “*I counted,*” Paul refers to his personal evaluation of the circumstance. His determination to gain Christ involved judgment and a decision. He was faced with the temporary gains of the flesh, or the gain of eternal life. Once seen, he judged matters relating to the flesh as worthless.

The word “*LOSS*” is an especially strong one. It means Paul let these things go, refusing to allow them to capture his attention. It also means he saw they were competitive, and damaging to the soul. In other words, Christ could not be possessed while retaining a hold on those “things.” To gain Christ, all fleshly emphasis and distinctions must be forfeited. It is only to the degree this takes place that the individual is capable of appropriating Jesus.

This perspective is not common in churches with whom I have been affiliated. I fear the world is courted more than Jesus, and appearance is valued more than spiritual substance. Scarcely can a religious person of renown be found that is not distinguished by the flesh. Such a stance excludes one from Divine fellowship, robbing the soul of gaining Christ Jesus. A fellowship with Christ simply cannot be had while a priority is placed on “*the flesh.*” Confidence in flesh cannot exist simultaneously with faith in Christ. They are opposed to each other, and aggressively so. If a person is to gain Christ, a judgment will have to be made concerning temporary gain.

RELIGIOUS PEDIGREE IS SUPERIOR FLESH

“*Although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin*” (NASB). Here is a spiritual perspective that is clarifying—one that reveals the utter depravity of “*the flesh,*” or everything that springs from Adam. If having confidence in the flesh was right, Paul says he could have boasted more than anyone else. Although doctors of the law have declared Paul was a very educated man (something the Word of God does not affirm), the Apostle makes absolutely no reference to any such distinction. He does not cite his educational credentials, status in Tarsus, or other forms of erudition.

He first mentions fleshly distinctions over which he had no power, concerning which he himself had no input whatsoever. His reference confirms that, from Abraham to Jesus, the Divine focus was on a particular people—the Jews. This time of favor began with Abraham, to whom the promise of blessing was given. It was accented when Israel was delivered from Egypt and became a covenanted people.

“*Circumcised the eighth day.*” This requirement is traced back to God’s promise to Abraham. “*He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised, every male child in your generations*” (Gen 17:12). John the Baptist was circumcised on “*the eighth day*” (Lk 1:59). The Holy Child Jesus was also circumcised when He was eight days old (Lk 2:21). Here is a fleshly distinction that was a requirement, not an attainment! It was a “*sign*” and a “*seal*” of something God accomplished, not man (Rom 4:11). It was a fleshly mark that associated the individual with the Living God. Paul had the mark, yet refused to put confidence in it. It was still “*of the flesh.*”

“*Of the nation of Israel.*” God’s exclusive dealings were with these people. As it is written, “*Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen*” (Rom 9:4-5, NIV). When it comes to “*flesh,*” Israel is this world’s most distinguished people. All other fleshly distinctions rank beneath theirs. Apart from Christ, there is no advantage in being white, American, educated, talented, or otherwise. Being part of a political, social, or scholastic community does not give the individual anything in which to boast—even in the flesh! Paul had the distinction of being “*of Israel,*” yet refused to put trust in it. It was “*flesh.*”

“*Of the tribe of Benjamin.*” Israelites could trace their lineage back to the twelve sons of Jacob. They were the ones who received the blessing (Gen 49). Their progenies are called “*the twelve tribes of Israel*” (Gen 49:28; Ex 24:4; Matt 19:28). As touching the flesh, this was a high honor—to be a member of one of those “*tribes.*” King Saul was from this tribe (1 Sam 9:21). Now Paul reminds us he was also of that tribe. In Romans 11:1, he makes the same statement. To be of one of the “*twelve tribes of Israel*” highlighted ones birth into a favored status. This was a people to whom God revealed Himself.

Yet, in Christ we are elevated out of the flesh, which has been renounced by God. Not even the most elevated fleshly status can be trusted!

LESSON #33

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“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, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith” (Phil 3:4-7, NKJV)

INTRODUCTION

Paul is sharing with the body of Christ his personal approach to life. But it is more than a personal approach. It is actually the manner of the Kingdom. This is how faith affects those possessing it. Any advancement in spiritual life must be preceded by the fervency and determination revealed in these verses. While there will be different measures of this spirit, according to the faith and ministry of the individual, the same disposition must prevail. This frame of spirit separates those who believe from all perfunctory or routine religion. It will not allow for a lifeless assent to the truth, or impersonal theological positions that do not shape how we think and live.

COUNTING TO WIN CHRIST

“ . . . for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ” ^(KJV). Paul now reveals another Kingdom manner. Not only did he “count” or “consider” all other things loss, he actually experienced it: i.e., “*I DO count them . . .*”

As he perused “all things” other than Christ, he considered them to be “dung.” Other versions use the word “rubbish.” This is the only place in the Bible where this particular word is used (sku,bala). It is a strong word meaning “dung, rubbish, garbage, offscouring.” It is something of no value. In fact, it is offensive as well as worthless, and damaging as well as useless. “Dung,” in this case, equates with “abomination,” as explained by Jesus in Luke 16:15: “for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.” It is something detestable and desecrating.

There was a reason why Paul considers “all things” in this manner. It was in order to “win” or appropriate Christ. Other versions use the expression “gain Christ.” The word “win” accents the competitive nature of “all things.” In this world, we are involved in a contest. The appropriation of Christ is the objective, and that cannot take place while maintaining a grasp on the fleeting things of this world.

There is a greater measure of fellowship with Christ to be experienced. This is an area in which growth is expected. As it is written, “*But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*” (2 Pet 3:18). What is more, there is no promise of overcoming the world apart from this knowledge. Jesus stated this same truth yet another way. “*Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it*” (Lk 17:33). Seeking to save our life is clinging to “all things” that are to be counted as “dung.” It is preferring things that are to be “counted loss” for the “excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord.”

The contemporary notion of “receiving Jesus into your heart” is wholly lacking in spiritual substance. It does not take into account the contaminating influences all around us, or the necessity of growth in our apprehension of Christ. At the time Paul wrote this epistle, he had been an Apostle for 26 years. Yet, he knew nothing of coasting, or assuming he had already arrived where he should be. He did not consider himself to have fully won Christ. There was deeper and more extensive fellowship to be realized.

I understand *winning Christ* to refer to a life that is not self-centered, but Christ-centered. It comes when the individual is able to become more fully involved with Christ, as compared with Christ being more fully involved with the individual. While it is true Christ goes with us through our trials, and equips us for our ministry, that is not the acme of spiritual experience. It is one thing for the Lord Jesus to identify with us in our hardships. It is quite another for us to identify with Him in His eternal purpose.

Having “tasted of the Lord” (1 Pet 2:3), Paul found everything else inferior, offensive, and inhibiting. He knew that to “win Christ” such things could not be viewed as preferable. Herein is the secret to spiritual growth, godly zeal, and stability of soul. It reflects a proper assessment of life.

BEING FOUND IN HIM

“ . . . and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ--the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith” ^(NIV).

At once we see that Paul’s attitude is immediately related to salvation. To be “found in Him” refers to the time when we will all appear “before the judgment seat of Christ” (2 Cor 5:10). How we appear, or are “found,” at that time is everything! As you can see, being “found in Him” is not unrelated to effort on our part—hearty effort! Neither, indeed, is it all automatic.

And how is it that Paul wants to be found? **He knows righteousness will be the issue!** Will he be

righteous before God or not? There are only two types of righteousness recognized by God—and both have to do with what He has initiated. The first is a righteousness that “comes from the Law.” It is based upon the doing of the individual. In the energy of the human nature alone, an effort is made to do all the Lord has commanded. Paul has already said he excelled in natural advantage and such personal effort (vs 5-6). It was all futile, every jot and tittle of it! He threw it all overboard in preference of another righteousness—one that “comes from God.”

This is the righteousness announced by the Gospel of Christ. “For in it (the Gospel) the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith” (Rom 1:17). It is a righteousness that is conferred by God “without the law” (Rom 3:21). “This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe” (Rom 3:22, ^{NIV}).

The righteousness of the Law depends upon man, and MUST be given up in order to obtain the righteousness of God (which is the only acceptable righteousness). It is no wonder Jesus said, “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and **His righteousness**” (Matt 6:33). Those without this righteousness are, in fact, “unrighteous,” and can in no way inherit the Kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9). When Jesus comes again, He will find us. How we appear in his eyes will determine our eternal destiny. It is not possible to be more serious.

Our text carefully states this righteousness is realized “through faith.” That is the spiritual hand, as it were, that takes hold of the righteousness announced in the Gospel. Repeatedly, the Spirit underscores this reality. “This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ . . . his faith is counted for righteousness . . . the righteousness that he had by faith . . . the righteousness that comes by faith . . . the righteousness that is by faith” (Rom 3:22; 4:5,11,13; 10:6 ^{NIV}). This is righteousness conferred by God because of faith.

Paul knows this is the ONLY way to be accepted by God. For God to ignore this would invalidate the death of Christ. Not only is the initial belief of the Gospel and trust in Christ required, it must be maintained. There are competing influences—religious influences—that contradict this means of acceptance. They tend to blind the eyes of the heart and cause men to live in delusion. Knowing this, Paul threw them all overboard, considering them worthless and contaminating refuse. He knew it was not possible to be “found” in Christ, NOT having His own righteous, but in possession of God’s righteousness, by having any other frame of mind. Neither, indeed, is it possible for anyone else! The rarity of this view confirms its value.

THE EXCELLENCY OF THE KNOWLEDGE

“What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (^{NIV}). Some things are “lost” because they are taken away by someone else. Scripture calls this “the spoiling of your goods” (Heb 10:34). It is when a person is plundered or robbed—when possessions are forcefully taken from him against his will. But this is NOT the kind of loss to which our text refers. Here, things were “counted” or “considered” A loss. They were actually still available to him, but he forfeited them in preference of something else. He lost them by choice. He chose to take hold of something else.

The word “loss” also carries the thought of disadvantage—something that worsens our situation. In this case Paul takes “everything” apart from Christ, regardless of its seeming value, and considers it a loss, disadvantage, and something potentially damaging.

This is not intended to be an academic definition. Rather, it is a comparison—a judgment made when “everything” is laid along side “the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.” He has already told us this was his manner of thinking in the past (verse 7). Now he tells us it is still the way he thinks. In the world, it is possible to get swept up in momentary pleasures, forgetting essential and profitable things. When we then come to our senses, we regret that we were so distracted as to forget important matters. But this is not the situation in this text. The things counted loss were REALLY inferior and unworthy of being at the center of our thinking. Something better in every sense of the word has been found.

And what is this better thing? It is “the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.” It is “the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord” (^{KJV}). This “knowledge” is not surpassing or more excellent in appearance, but in reality. It is a superior knowledge and experience with which nothing can favorably compare. Here we see a person can be in Christ and acknowledge Him as Lord, yet lacking in personal acquaintance with the Lord Jesus. Redemption has made Jesus more accessible to the saved than ordinarily conceived. Far too much contemporary religion allows the individual to remain at a comfortable distance from Christ, not coming into the greatness of the knowledge available to us.

“The knowledge of Christ Jesus” is not academic knowledge or erudition. Such knowledge does not satiate the soul or gladden the heart. This is fellowship with Christ, into which we have been called (1 Cor 1:9). It speaks of a relationship where Christ “manifests” Himself to the individual (John 14:21). It is where the individual actually “learns” from Christ (Matt 11:29) and is “taught by Him” (Eph 4:21).

There is a satisfaction in this knowledge that brings great peace, joy, and stability to the soul. It equips the person to live triumphantly in this world, serving the Lord with gladness and singleness of heart. This knowledge is, in fact, nothing less than “eternal life” (John 17:3; 1 John 5:20). It is confirmed to be the superior knowledge by experience alone. This is the knowledge referenced in Ephesians 3:19: “And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.” It is the experience of Christ’s love.

LESSON #34

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead”
(Phil 3:10-11, NKJV)

INTRODUCTION

Paul is sharing the motivation of his aggressive and productive life. As he elaborates on these things, you will notice the absence of fear as a primary stimulus. Also, there is a noticeable absence of Law as a principal stimulant. While he was careful to do what he was commanded, being a faithful steward, the command itself was not the primary impetus in his life. Mind you, he did not despise or neglect any commandment. He loved and served the Law, knowing it was good and holy and spiritual. His faith, however, had reached higher than obedience can reach. The promises of God had captured his heart, together with the inheritance prepared for him. What was available to him in Christ became a driving compulsion in his life. In Paul the power of the promises is displayed with refreshing clarity and simplicity.

FELLOWSHIP AND CONFORMITY

“ . . . and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death” (NKJV). The RSV reads, *“share in His sufferings.”* The depth of spiritual experience to which we have been called is marvelous. We will find that the more grievous our experience in the flesh, the more profound will be our experience in the Spirit.

We participate in Christ’s sufferings in two ways. First, by faith, we share in the effects of our Lord’s vicarious, or substitutionary, suffering. That suffering eventuated in Him *“tasting death for every man”* (Heb 2:9). These are the *“sufferings”* foretold by the Prophets, which resulted in *“the glory that should follow”*—the glorious salvation of his people. However, there is another aspect to His sufferings in which we participate.

These are the sufferings that been left behind for us. As it is written, *“and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church”* (Col 1:24). Other versions read *“what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ . . . what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church”* (NASB, NIV). These are the sufferings through which we are *“conformed to the image of His Son”* (Rom 8:29). In them, we learn the manner of the Kingdom, and qualify, as it were, to receive comfort.

Jesus *“learned obedience by the things that He suffered”* (Heb 5:8). These were not the sufferings of the cross, but those He experienced while living to God in a hostile world. Sufferings were the means through which He was made perfect, becoming the author of eternal salvation (Heb 5:9). When our Lord was tempted, He suffered, coming to the point where He had to be sustained from heaven (Heb 2:18). These are the sufferings Jesus *“left behind”* for us—a sampling, as it were, of Divine life. Peter referred to this when He wrote, *“For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth”* (1 Pet 2:21-22).

There is a closeness to Christ in these sufferings than cannot be realized any other way. It is like the fellowship of the fourth man in the furnace of fire. Sweet succor is ministered that shines heaven and dulls the earth. It causes temptation and sin to be painful. As it is written, *“Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin”* (1 Pet 4:1^{NASB}). Fellowship in these sufferings is obtained when we have His mind.

The objective of this frame of mind is arresting: *“being made conformable unto His death.”* The value of this goal is clearly stated: *“It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with Him, we shall also live with Him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him”* (2 Tim 2:11). Spiritual life, then, depends upon the crucifixion of our members that are upon the earth (Col 3:5). It is only to the degree that natural life is subordinated that spiritual life can dominate. If we are not insensitive to this world, we cannot be sensitive to the world to come. Paul pressed to experience this more fully.

ATTAINING TO THE RESURRECTION

“ . . . if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead” (NKJV). There is an approach to the *Christian life* that leads people to believe no sustained effort is required. That persuasion is what causes people to neglect the Word, prayer, the assembly, etc. It is the result of not knowing where they are at, or where they have been called. You will notice at once how sharply the expression of this verse clashes with that view.

The expression *“by any means”* is unusually strong. It reflects a determination to let nothing—absolutely nothing—stand between the person and the blessing that is sought. Other versions weaken the phrase decidedly. *“If possible I may”* (RVS), *“and so, somehow to”* (NIV). This is not an expression of doubt, but of resolution. *“By any means”* shows that he is not depending on his own efforts, but neither is he excluding them. He will leave no stone unturned in

appropriating the desired objective.

If the resurrection is an appointment for all men, why does Paul say he wants to “*attain*” to it? He is not simply seeking to be included in the resurrection of the dead. Rather, he fervently wants that occasion to be the fulfillment of his basic longings. He does not want to arrive at the resurrection unprepared, with desires and lusts that will have no means of gratification. That will be the case for all who have lived in the lust of the flesh. When they are raised from the dead, they will have all of their corrupt desires, but a body in which not a single one of them will be able to be gratified.

However, those who live by faith have quite another prospect. For them, the resurrection is the fulfillment of their longings. This is the meaning of Romans 8:23. “*We also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.*” Later in this very chapter, another reference will be made to this glorious event. “*For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body*” (Phil 3:20-21^{NKJV}). Our bodies are the fundamental unregenerate part of us. They are the locus of temptation, sorrow, and pain. With great vigor, we must keep under them, and bring them into subjection (1 Cor 9:27).

Thus, to “*attain to the resurrection from the dead*” is to arrive at that point in time prepared to move up higher. Already, that body is reserved for us in heaven. “*For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens*” (2 Cor 5:1). In Christ, our spirits are being cultured for that body. Meanwhile, while we are in this body “*we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven*” (2 Cor 5:2). The Lord makes this matter quite clear. His objective for us is to inhabit that body. That is why He has recreated us in Christ Jesus: to occupy a recreated body. Here is how it is said. “*Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee*” (5:5). Paul has, then, confirmed that he is involved in the Divine agenda. His heart has been captured by the love of God, which is the Kingdom norm.

THAT I MAY KNOW HIM AND THE POWER . . .

“*That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection . . .*” (NKJV). How is it that Paul continued to abandon every competing influence to “*know*” Christ? Was this required for the fulfillment of the Apostolic office? Is this a unique attitude—a sort of superior frame of spirit obtained by a select few in the Kingdom? Indeed, if we allowed our vision to rest upon the professed church, we would be inclined to think so. But this is not at all the case. What we are reading is the Kingdom norm—the standard for believers.

Jesus has come to ensure that we can “*know Him.*” As it is written, “*And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life*” (1 John 5:20). If Jesus came to administer such knowledge, how could anyone failing to pursue it be accepted by Him?

Knowing Him equates to the “*fellowship*” of God’s Son, into which we have been called (1 Cor 1:9). It is involvement with Jesus on a personal basis. This knowledge has glorious results, as described in the 25th Psalm. “*The secret of the LORD is with those who fear Him, And He will show them His covenant*” 25:14). The effects of this knowledge include insight, wisdom, strength, peace, gladness, and joy—to mention a few. Confidence, assurance, and strong hope are also experienced in increasingly large measures. There comes a joyful sufficiency and contentment in all things that no philosopher is capable of imagining. “*That I may know Him!*”

“*The power of HIS resurrection*” is recuperative power with which the devil and his dark hosts cannot contend. It is “*power*” to live unto God in a hostile world (Rom 6:11), and set our affection on things above, and not on things on the earth (Col 3:1-3). When Jesus rose from the dead, He ascended on high, leading captivity captive (Eph 4:8). His foes were impotent to stop his ascent. He passed through hostile forces as though they did not exist.

There is a certain impotency in the nominal church that betrays the absence of this power. Sin enters too easily into the average church, and the world is too closely aligned with it. Professed believers stumble through life, unable to contend with mere footmen, to say nothing of horsemen. Where the “*power of HIS resurrection*” is not appropriated, people give up too quickly and complain too easily. The commandments become too difficult, and the call of the world drowns out the voice of Him who is speaking from heaven.

When we came into Jesus, we were baptized into His death. It was then that God raised us up by his glory, just as He did Jesus. We were placed in the realm of resurrection life, which is the “*newness of life*” of Romans 6:4). It will consummate in our resurrection from the dead, but it begins now as we are raised to walk in newness, living unto God, and bringing forth fruit to Him (Rom 6:11; 7:4). Paul desired to “*KNOW,*” or participate in, this power.

Such marvelous power is not for the lukewarm, indifferent, and casual. Everything that contradicts this power is to be “*counted*” a loss. Things that jeopardize our appropriation of the knowledge of Christ and the power of His resurrection are “*dung,*” and are to be thrust from us with zeal.

LESSON #35

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” (Phil 3:12-14, KJV)

INTRODUCTION

Paul is sharing what motivates his aggressive spiritual life. This is not a perspective of life unique to the Apostle. Rather, it is the appointed means of spiritual advance and safety. Paul is a “*pattern*,” or example, “*to them which should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting*” (1 Tim 1:16). Much like Abraham was an example of true faith, Job an example of perseverance under trial, and David of spiritual sensitivity, Paul is an example of living unto the Lord. Such examples are not to be held forth as heroes, or celebrities, but brethren to be followed. They took advantage of what was available to them. Their faith is what caused them to excel. That is why we can follow their example. That “*like precious faith*” can be obtained by us.

REACHING FORWARD TO WHAT LIES AHEAD

“Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead” (NASB). True spiritual life is characterized by a vigor that is virtually unknown in the contemporary church. Aware of the fact that he had not yet attained unto the resurrection, Paul eagerly engaged in a pursuit for the blessing. His advancement in the faith, as notable as it was, did not allow him to let up in his effort to obtain the prize.

As advanced as the Apostle was in his comprehension of the heart of the Kingdom, he did not “*regard*” himself as having grasped the prize. By this he means he lived with an acute consciousness of this reality. At no point did he consider himself sufficient of himself (2 Cor 3:5). He lived by faith and in anticipation of what was ahead. He did not settle down in this world—not even in his ministry. Like Israel in the wilderness, he continued to move toward the promised land.

I cannot help but observe the near-total absence of this attitude in the churches with whom I have been identified. Although they boast in a great heritage, they are nearly bereft of this frame of mind. They tend to live in the past rather than toward the future. Whatever good things they may have are decidedly neutralized by their apparent disinterest in what lies ahead.

Paul’s focus was single: “*this one thing I do.*” Life in its totality was viewed from this perspective. Every aspect of life was under the control of this quest. Until our objective is single, and our quest aggressive, no spiritual progress will be made, and no acceptable service will be rendered. David had a similar concentration (Psa 27:4). Jesus told Martha, “*One thing is needful,*” and should be given absolute priority (Lk 10:42).

“Forgetting what lies behind.” Just as the pace of a runner is slowed when he looks behind him, so the undue consideration of the past retards spiritual progress. Many a soul, living in the past, has ceased to advance in the faith. Dwelling upon what we have been, and what we have done, is not good. Rather, we must ponder what we **will be**, and what we **will do**. The things to be forgotten are the things that turn our attention from the goal, and retard our progress toward it. Leaving the first principles is involved in this progress (Heb 6:1), as well as ceasing to know men and Christ after the flesh (2 Cor 5:16). This is putting our hand to the plow and not looking back (Lk 9:62).

“Reaching forward to what lies ahead.” The RSV and NIV read “*straining forward*” and “*straining toward.*” The word means to reach out toward, strain forward to, and try hard for ^(Thayer). The posture of life in Christ is a forward stance. The picture is of a runner leaning forward as he approaches the finish line. We are “*looking*” forward and stretching forward. There are realities up ahead that are worthy of our present consideration. This is a view of faith and hope—both of which have a primary regard for the future. This attitude is elsewhere expressed as *looking for a city* (Heb 11:10), *desiring a better country* (Heb 11:16), and *looking unto Jesus* while running (Heb 12:1-2). What is ahead draws those living by faith.

PRESSING TOWARD THE GOAL

“I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (NASB). Pressing “*on toward*” is a picture of continual progress. There is no point in the life of faith where effort may be suspended,

and progress stopped. In spite of this detail, there are myriads of professed believers who have made no noticeable progress in the faith for decades. Many souls, once noted for their fervor, have long since cooled in their efforts to reach the goal. Such are a contradiction of what it means to be in Christ Jesus, and we must overcome them in order to obtain the prize ourselves.

Paul once explained how he kept his body under control, lest he become disqualified in the quest for glory (1 Cor 9:27). Some, who are unlearned in Kingdom matters, have concocted doctrines that affirm men, after coming into Christ, cannot be disqualified, or excluded from the prize. They speak as though the prize was already attained, perfection already reached, and they had “*apprehended.*” None of those suppositions, however, are true.

THE GOAL. The “*goal,*” or “*mark,*” is the hope of our calling—the objective for which Christ laid hold on us. It involves a reign with Jesus, the government of the world to come, and being “*ever with the Lord.*” It consists of getting safely out of this world, and into the one to come. The “*goal*” will be reached when we obtain that for which faith has caused us to long.

THE PRIZE. Faith sees God as “*a Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him*” (Heb 11:6). The “*prize*” is the reward God gives. It is to be earnestly sought by every believer. As it is written, “*Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain*” (1 Cor 9:24). Believers are not simply to live for today, or attempt to just make it through the day. They have been called they they might “*inherit a blessing*” (1 Pet 3:9). In Christ, you are begotten “*again . . . to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you*” (1 Pet 1:4). That is to be seen as a prize to be grasped at all cost. All of salvation is calculated to enable you to obtain it.

THE UPWARD CALL. The KJV reads, “*the high calling.*” The idea is that the goal continually moves forward as we strain toward it, yet it is never out of sight. Faith makes us acutely aware of the present gulf between us and the prize. The “*upward,*” or “*high*” calling is a summons to “*come up higher,*” closer to the prize and further from the world. At no point does the call allow us to settle down in this world—it is upward! There is no place in the life of faith for gathering incentives from the world. We are regularly subjected to a “*high calling,*” and are not to refuse Him who is speaking from heaven (Heb 12:25).

There is no place for slackening our pace in the race to glory, or removing our eyes from the goal. Everything about salvation is calculated to move us toward the goal. Forgetting the things behind us, straining forward to the things ahead of us, and pressing toward the mark, are all requisite for the believer. Where these characteristics are not found, serious spiritual deficiency exists. Where they are found, genuine and pleasing progress is being made. May you be found among those who are stretching toward the mark set before you!

WE ARE NOT THERE YET

“*Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus*” (NASB). Although Paul had made remarkable progress, and was nearing the close of his life, he was not yet “*perfect.*” This expression expands on his abandonment of all competing pursuits to “*win Christ.*” He has just expressed a frame of mind that is exceedingly rare: counting everything loss to know Christ, the fellowship of His sufferings, and the power of His resurrection (3:10). However, as virtuous as that attitude is, it is not the consummate Kingdom experience. It is possible for people to view a sacrificial life and earnest quest for unfettered fellowship with Christ as an end of itself—but it is not. Rather, it is the means to the appointed end.

When Paul says he has not obtained “*IT,*” he means the resurrection of the dead. He views that as the entrance into the heavenly inheritance. Until then, it is not possible to “*obtain*” everything to which we have been appointed. At best, we but touch the border of what God has prepared for them who love Him. Yet, even that cannot be achieved without hearty effort.

The magnitude of salvation is seen in these verses, Even though Paul sought nothing but Christ, engaged in no aggressive pursuit except to know Him, and gave up all hindrances to that pursuit, he had not “*obtained*” or been “*made perfect.*” Those were qualifying frames of mind, and not the attainment itself. They are a necessary prelude to being blessed in this world, and obtaining the world to come. Still, they are exceedingly rare in our time.

To “*apprehend,*” or “*lay hold*” of something is to have a grip upon it that cannot be broken. Until the resurrection,

the blessing can be lost, and the prize forfeited. Even Paul did not have such a firm grasp on eternal life he could relinquish his fervent quest. He “*pressed on,*” aggressively pushing through life, eager to appropriate that to which he had been called. The KJV uses the expression “*follow after,*” which is more precise. It means what was sought was, in a very real sense, yet ahead of him. Like the cloud in the wilderness, the promised inheritance is held before us, and we must pursue it.

This is the same spirit expressed by the sweet Psalmist of Israel. “*As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?*” (Psa 42:1-2).

There is a reason why we are brought into Christ. Notice, Paul refers to Christ “*apprehending,*” or “*laying hold*” of him. Christ “*laid hold*” on Paul on the Damascus road. To be sure, He did it to make him an Apostle (Acts 26:16-18) sending him to the far corners of the earth. But there is more than this! There is the day of judgment in which believers will participate (1 Cor 6:1-2), the world to come which they will govern (Heb 2:5-6), and a reign with Jesus (2 Tim 2:12). Paul knew if he lost sight of that, he would never be able to fulfill his commission in this world. Elsewhere, the Spirit affirms God has “*prepared*” us for a “*purpose*” that will begin at the resurrection (2 Cor 5:5). Until then, we have not obtained, are not perfected, and have not apprehended, or taken hold, of our inheritance.

LESSON #36

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you; however, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained” (Phil 3:15-16, NASB)

INTRODUCTION

Although himself incarcerated and subject to great inconveniences, Paul continued to think of the people of God. He knew they were the sheep of God’s pasture (Psa 100:3), and thus cared for them with consistency and tenderness. This was involved in his expression, *“Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches”* (2 Cor 11:28). Some people cannot live a day without thinking of themselves. Paul could not exist without concern for the people of God. It was in this concern that he enjoyed a rich fellowship with the Lord Jesus, Who is the Good Shepherd. A valuable lesson can be learned here. It is **when** we are consumed with the things of God that we enjoy the fellowship and sustenance of the Lord. Grace is poured out upon those living within the perimeter of grace, who are occupied with matters relating to God’s eternal purpose.

GOD WILL REVEAL IT TO YOU!

“ . . . and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you” (KJV). Without doubt, this is one of the most marvelous promises pertaining to life and godliness. Admittedly, it contradicts much historical and contemporary theologies, but that is its strength. The personal aspect of salvation may be seen in this text, as well as its dependability and certainty. The NIV reads, *“And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you.”* *“Anything,”* or *“some point,”* in this case, means any view of life that conflicts with the frame of mind described in verses 10-14. It would involve **not** considering everything loss, **not** counting them dung, or **not** pressing toward the mark. Perhaps the individual does not see there is infinitely more to be had than what they possess, or that Christ can be more fully known. In other words, spiritual maturity is lacking.

In this expression the Spirit acknowledges there are stages of spiritual life in which a sort of fog hangs over the soul. The condition, while not ideal, is not a hopeless one. Salvation graciously addresses the matter of spiritual infancy and lack of maturity.

Notice the manner of the text. The Spirit does NOT say *“If in anything anyone is mature.”* Rather, the condition is *“IF in anything”* anyone thinks differently. Spiritual immaturity is thus viewed as the exception, and not the rule. Looking at the contemporary church, one would think spiritual juvenileness is the standard and spiritual maturity the exception. But that is not the case at all. A mode of thinking that is not like that expressed in 3:10-14 is variant and unacceptable in every way. Those so described are *“otherwise minded,”* thinking differently than the Kingdom standard or norm.

Faith, however small it may be, puts us within the circumference of Divine influence! Knowing this, the Apostle has great confidence in what will happen. Those who do not yet see the real objective of life have this promise, *“God shall reveal even this unto you.”* Those who deny God reveals things to people can derive no comfort from this promise. Paul does not say **he** would make the matter known to the struggling believer, but that God Himself would. The Lord would clarify the matter for them. This is the same procedure Paul mentioned to the Ephesians. *“But ye have not so learned Christ; if so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus”* (Eph 4:20-21).

Paul had confidence in this Divine provision, and often expressed the same to the churches (2 Cor 2:3; 7:16; Gal 5:10; 2 Thess 3:4; Phile 21). He knew a person living by faith, no matter how young and immature, will be directed by the Lord. Even though their spiritual lives may appear erratic and inconsistent, yet in those loftier times, when their spirits are wafted into the heavenlies, remarkable insights can be bestowed upon them. How we must learn to count on this—to believe God reveals the truth of what we teach to young and unstable souls. Our gatherings must be tailored for this to happen, providing spiritual heights and perspectives within which the Lord can work. Is not this a marvelous promise? *“God will make [it] clear to you.”* Every child of God can rest his soul on that promise, believing it will come to pass.

LIVING UP TO WHAT WE HAVE

“Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing” (KJV). Here is a marvelous Kingdom standard! **“Only let us live up to what we have already attained”** (NIV). The Lord does not expect us to live beyond what we have seen. However, we are expected to live up to what we have grasped, all the while seeking to lay hold of the fulness of the blessing.

Wherever genuine affection for the things of God exists, the happy prospect of attainment can be realized. Put another way, as we **walk** upon the highway to glory, we will not blunder or come short of the intended blessing. This truth was revealed through Isaiah. **“A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way; the unclean shall not travel on it, but it shall be for God's people; no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray”** (Isa 35:8, ^{NRSV}). The Apostle reckoned on this reality, and so must we.

Living up to what we have attained is translating the truth we have perceived into living. It is adjusting our lives to our vision, and not allowing anything to enter that obscures the vision. Thus, what we have **“attained”** or realized becomes **“the same rule”** or measure of life. This is the exact opposite of being a **“forgetful hearer”** (James 1:24).

We see here that spiritual attainment is not merely expanding our thinking, or becoming acquainted with additional Kingdom facts. That is involved, but it is a **means** to an end, and not the end itself. Spiritual life is not scholastic or academic, but dynamic and energetic. We can bend our lives around what we have been given to see. To put it another way, God has made no provision whatsoever for living in contradiction of what faith has beheld.

In this text we have an elaboration of what it means to draw back or backslide. Such wretched movement is not simply again doing the things grace taught us to deny. Drawing back occurs when we see some precious facet of the truth, yet run back into the darkness, forgetting what was seen. Many a soul has had a flash of spiritual insight that faded from view. They saw that they stood in need of the Savior, and realized they were on the wrong course. Yet, they intentionally turned from the vision, refusing to allow it to do its work upon their souls. **They did not adjust their course.** Like a ship in a storm, tossed by the raging waves, they were headed for the rocky coasts, about to be dashed upon its immovable ridges of stone. The lighthouse flashed its lights, warning them of impending doom, but they did not adjust their course. Such are those who do not **“walk by the same rule.”**

This is what it means to **“walk in the light”** (1 John 1:7), **“walk by faith”** (2 Cor 5:7), and **“walk in the Spirit”** (Gal 5:25). It is living up to what we have received. It is also the means through which more will be given to us. As we do this, God will make known to us what we are lacking. He will unfold the truth to our hearts, enabling us to see what must surely be seen if we are to land safely on that heavenly shore.

The exceeding rarity of this perception in the church is staggering—yet the condition is inexcusable. Spiritual growth consists of living up to what we have attained, and seeking to attain even more. Where this way of thinking is stifled or not even found, the person is on the very edge of condemnation.

AN ATTITUDE FOR THE PERFECT

“Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded . . .” (KJV). There is a precious thing to note here. The man of God speaks as one of the members of Christ's body, not as a lord over it: **“Let US . . .”** Thirteen times in the book of Hebrews, this expression is used (4:1,11,14,16; 6:1; 10:22,23,24; 12:1,28; 13:13,15), as well as twenty six times in other letters to believers. It is the language of the kindred spirit—of one who is engaged in the good fight of faith, pressing toward the mark for the prize of the high calling.

“As many as be perfect.” Paul has just acknowledged he does NOT speak as one who is **“already perfect”** (3:12), yet now he speaks as though the state has already been attained. Perfection, in this case, is not a single point in time, but a process. Those who **“are perfect”** are spiritually mature. While they have not yet reached the goal, they are aware of it. They know where they are headed and have adjusted life's compass to reach that goal. They are **“no more children, tossed to and fro,”** jostled by the delusionary and moved from here and there by the subtle (Eph 4:14). They have not reached the stage of the **“full kernel in the head,”** but have become the **“head”** that will yet be ripened (Mark 4:28, NIV).

Spiritual maturity, or being **“perfect,”** is not a state of moral attainment but a condition of heart and mind. Elsewhere, the Spirit reminds us such perfection involves the cleansing of the conscience—a condition in which the heart is assured of Divine acceptance (Heb 9:9; 10:1-2). Such souls are able to discern the **“wisdom of God”** in the preaching of the cross (1 Cor 2:6). Paul reminded Timothy that a **“perfect”** person was knowledgeably **“equipped for every good work”** (2 Tim 3:17). This is the person who does not require continual guidance in the details of life. Being mature, such can **“walk in the Spirit,”** abstaining from fleshly lusts that war against the soul. The appetite for the things of God is developed, longings for heaven intense, and one's discontent with this present evil world profound. Such souls are blessed indeed, and are growing up into Christ **“in all things”** (Eph 4:15). Their religion is not a routine or a series of procedures. Rather, the Lord Jesus is the Source of their delight and the Object of their most devoted attention.

And what are such people to do—those **“who are perfect”**? They are NOT to rely upon their perfection as though it were complete, for it is not. In the fullest sense, they are not yet perfect. They are young adults, and not yet of full age. Because spiritual maturity is neither initiated nor consummated without effort, they are to be **“thus minded.”** Other versions say **“have this mind”** (NKJV), **“have this attitude”** (NASB), **“take this view of things”** (NIV), and **“be of the same mind”** (NRSV). What mind, attitude, or view is meant?

It is the frame of mind Paul has just affirmed he possessed (3:10-14). It is counting every loss for

Christ, counting them but dung, and seeking to know the Lord more fully. It is acknowledging the prize has not yet been gained, but pushing toward it with unrelenting zeal and fervor. It is being determined to take hold on that for which Christ took hold of us.

That is the only acceptable mind for the people of God! Such a mind can be possessed, dominating those who have it. Yea, it **MUST** be possessed if we are to safely reach the appointed goal. O, that more exhibited this mind!

LESSON #37

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.¹⁸ For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction,¹⁹ whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame; who set their mind on earthly things.” (Phil 3:15-16, NKJV)

INTRODUCTION

There is an element of sobriety missing in contemporary Western religion. Somehow the nature of spiritual life has eluded the religious masses. This condition conflicts sharply with the words of this Epistle. You will notice the total absence of humor, light-heartedness, and casualness in this letter (as well as all of Scripture). Believers are to take note of this difference, and follow those whose lives are in keeping with the very nature of salvation. The Spirit will now tell us of those whose base of operation and focus of life is this world. He will speak candidly about them, telling us what motivates them. He will even declare their destiny. He does not use polite and tolerable words because the situation He is describing is one of great gravity.

THE ENEMIES OF THE CROSS OF CHRIST

“For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ.” (NIV). Would to God we were only around people who were counting everything loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus. But that is not the case, and we dare not approach life as though it were. It is the role of the man and woman of God to apprise the saints of those who wear Jesus’ name, but do not have His life. Just as during the time Philippians was written, such people are all about us. The Spirit is not speaking of idolators, drunkards, and murderers—that unreligious multitude that admit they have no part in Christ. No! These are people who say they are Christians, and want to be known as such.

Jesus called such people ***“false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves”*** (Matt 7:15). While they bring a false message, they themselves are to be avoided. They are destructive, robbing the saints, and pulling them down into the very realm from which they were once delivered. Of them, Peter said, ***“For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage”*** (2 Pet 2:18-19, NKJV).

The presence of such people were a source of sorrow to the Apostle. When he spoke of them, he did so ***“with tears.”*** This was not because he felt sorry for them, but because they caused great damage to ***“the house of God.”*** You will not find a syllable of sympathy in Scripture for those who contaminate the temple of God. Remember that false teachers like Hymenaeus and Philetus ***“overthrow the faith of some”*** (2 Tim 2:17). There are religious men who ***“shut up the kingdom of heaven against men,”*** and ***“have taken away the key of knowledge”*** (Matt 23:13; Lk 11:52). These have adopted, and perpetrate, a ***“form of godliness that denies the power thereof”*** (2 Tim 3:5).

The seriousness of the condition of such ignoble religious leaders is found in the words, ***“they are the enemies of the cross of Christ.”*** They stumble at the cross, which demands the mortification of the deeds of the body (Col 3:5). Not content to stumble at it themselves, they aggressively promote a *cross-less* religion. Their message does not have the cross of Christ as its center. Gospel preaching, after all, is nothing less than ***“the preaching of the cross”*** (1 Cor 1:18). Those who are ***“enemies of the cross of Christ”*** do not hold forth reconciliation to God, the removal of sin, the destruction of the devil, and the spoiling of principalities and powers (all of which occurred at the cross, Col 2:13-15; Heb 2:14). Their religion is convenient, and easy on the flesh. Those who follow such oppressors do not feel uncomfortable in their sin. Nor, indeed, do they see any need to ***“abstain from fleshly lusts that war against the soul”*** (1 Pet 2:11). These people are also to be ***“marked,”*** or ***“noted”*** (Rom 16:17; 1 Thess 3:14). As ***“enemies of the cross of Christ,”*** they are also our enemies, even though they may appear harmless. Although difficult for many to hear, this is a message that must be sounded in our day.

THE DESTINY OF EARTHLY THINKERS

“Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their

mind is on earthly things.” (NIV). The spirit is relentless in His attack upon religious pretenders—those who have nothing to offer, yet come in the name of the Lord. These are threats to the people of God, because they are not on the “*highway*” themselves. Now the Spirit will further identify them. His words will jar the complacent, or self-satisfied, soul.

“Their destiny is destruction.” Every major translation uses the same word to describe the destiny of those unwilling to walk “*by the same rule*”—“**DESTRUCTION!**” Synonyms for this word are *damned*, *perish*, and *perdition*. This destiny is appointed to them because they “*defiled the temple of God*” (1 Cor 3:17). This is not speaking of mere chastisement, but of the curse of the Almighty God. The Lord is not amiable toward those who claim identity with Him, yet refuse to have Him rule over them.

“Their god is their belly.” I prefer the word “*belly*” to “*stomach*.” The point in reference is not that of a craving for food. Jesus spoke of “*living waters*” flowing from the “*belly*” of those believing on Him (John 7:38). Paul also referred to those who, in causing divisions among God’s people, were not serving Christ, “*but their own belly*” (Rom 16:18). Thus, both believers and unbelievers are said to have a “*belly*”—an innermost part. For those who are not walking “*according to the pattern*,” the “*belly*” is the heart of the flesh, or sinful nature. They are serving self-interests, as opposed to Divine purpose.

“Their glory is in their shame.” In this case, “*their shame*” is what Christ circumcises from us in regeneration: “*the body of the sins of the flesh*” (Col 2:11-12). It is the part inherited from Adam, who is the first who was “*ashamed*” before God. The boast of such people is found in the realm of nature, not the heavenlies. The appetite is anchored to the flesh, not the Spirit. Their credentials and source of praise are found in the realm of shame. They boast in what God has cursed, and vaunt what is excluded from heaven. There is altogether too much of this sort of thing all around us. It is not confined to Hollywood, the business world, or the realm of entertainment. We expect glorying in shame to be found in those domains. The Spirit is expressing grief that such things are found in the professed church.

“Their mind is on earthly things.” Right here, we come face to face with a most critical issue. You will rarely find a Christian culture where having the mind on earthly things is considered a serious infraction of the will of God. If you are ever privy to the discussions heard in the average congregation, “*earthly things*” are generally dominant. Indeed, it is not uncommon to find such an emphasis spewing from the pulpit and theological classroom. But we must not miss the message of the Spirit. God is pledged to destroy such people! Unless our affection is voluntarily and eagerly placed on things above, there is no hope of being forever with the Lord. Being earthly minded is a condition that leads to damnation. Flesh cannot be cultured, dignified, or in any way made acceptable. Those who see it this way, will receive grace.

What we have just read is a vivid description of **NOT** walking according to the “*rule*” expressed by the Spirit. If a person does not “*press toward the mark*,” this is the only alternative way of life—and it is forthrightly cursed.

NOTE THOSE WHO WALK EXEMPLARY

“Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you” (NIV). The “*example*” of which he speaks has grown out of the frame of mind described in verses 7-14. The heavenly perspective impacts directly upon the lives of those possessing it. Individuals “*pressing toward the mark*” think differently. They see things from a different outlook. Their vision has affected their speech and their manner of life. The lives of such people are bent around their quest for glory and their fervent desire to “*know*” and “*win*” Christ.

There is another aspect of Kingdom life that is revealed in this verse. Contrary to the manner of this world, spiritual life is selfless life. It does not focus on the person, but upon the cause for which the person lives. Although unusually advanced in spiritual understanding, having received uncommon “*revelations*” from the Lord (2 Cor 12:1-7), Paul does not draw attention to who he is, but to how he lives. He is an “*example*”—someone to be *followed*. He is not to be followed because of his Apostolic office, or the authority he has received. Nor, indeed, does he urge men to follow him so that he might gain a great name. Rather, it is because he is on the heavenly course—the only one that is sanctioned by God and leads to ultimate blessing. It is not a way he contrived of himself, but one revealed by God (Isa 35:8).

It is not by coincidence that Jesus used this precise language concerning Himself. “*For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you*” (John 13:15). It is also affirmed that, in suffering for us, our Lord left “*us an example, that we should follow his steps*” (1 Pet 2:21). Earthly dignitaries do not place a high value on being an “*example*.” In our own country, there have been countless leaders who were miserable

examples of how persons ought to live. Yet, they were honored for their political, educational, or entertainment value.

Paul is urging the people to “*follow*” him to glory—not to prison or Ephesus, or even Jerusalem. He is an “*example of believers*,” as he urged Timothy to be (1 Tim 4:12). He is an example of how men ought to live, like Job was “*an example of suffering affliction, and of patience*” (James 5:10).

In this case, an “*example*” is not someone who has mastered life—a sort of self-disciplinarian. Rather, it is someone in whom Jesus has taken up residence. It is the person who has not quenched the Spirit, and therefore, through whom the Spirit is expressing Himself.

Notice how Paul does not allow our vision to remain upon him—even though he is an example. He acknowledges others who also walk in harmony with heaven and Divine purpose. Such individuals are to be “*marked*,” or taken note of. There are people in this world—even around us—who are living unto God. They live and move, and have their being in Him. They are in quest of heaven, and refuse to mesh with this present evil world. They are not noted for occasional jaunts into the religious arena, but dwell in heavenly places. Such people are always about their Father’s business, finding delight in what repulses those of this world. Take due note of such people. Be encouraged to join them in a relentless effort to reach the “*mark of the prize of our high calling in Christ Jesus*.” “*Join*” with them in living according to the pattern.

LESSON #38

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.” (Phil 20-21, NKJV)

INTRODUCTION

Having warned us of those who “*mind earthly things,*” the Spirit now shows us how unreasonable and foolish it is to center our thoughts on this world. He continues to clarify who we are, and what our destiny is. From this perspective, it is clear that all of Satan’s efforts involve turning us from the due consideration of these things. Our adversary knows the effectiveness of a heavenly focus, and therefore labors to neutralize such a stance. In keeping with the heavenly agenda, the Apostle now encourages us to sharpen our spiritual concentration. There are false prophets, to be sure—enemies of the cross of Christ. But we must not allow our attention to remain upon them. Nor, indeed, should we allow our hearts to be pulled down by the thought of them. Rather, pondering who WE are, will bring relief in the battle. As we look to our appointed future, our hearts will be refreshed.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF OUR BODIES

“Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body” (KJV). As we live by faith, we become acutely aware of the inadequacy of our present bodies. They are the weakest part of our person, and the greatest handicap to our walk. Continually we must “*buffet*” them, as they tend to be recalcitrant and wayward (1 Cor 9:27). They are appropriately called “*earthen vessels,*” or frail clay pots (2 Cor 4:7). They are in a state of deterioration, gradually making their way toward the grave. They are the “*outward man,*” and are to be seen in sharp contrast with the “*inward man,*” which has been born again. As it is written, “*but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day*” (2 Cor 4:16).

Indeed, our bodies are, because of this circumstance, “*vile bodies.*” Other versions use more palatable language: “*lowly body*” (NKJV, NIV, RSV), “*body of our humiliation*” (NRSV), “*body of our humble state*” (NASB). The word used here means “*the experience of being abased, a low status, or lowly condition*” ^(Thayer). The idea is that our bodies are a source of shame because of their weakness, inclination to sin, and mortality. Although we presently live in them, they are in stark contrast to the eternal life we have received. We are not at all content with them, and look forward to being delivered from them.

When our Lord comes, He will change, or transform, these bodies. This is speaking of the resurrection, at which time we will be made complete. Our new bodies are already in place, waiting to be inhabited. As it is written, “*we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens . . . our habitation which is from heaven*” (2 Cor 5:1-3). In regeneration, God has wrought, or prepared, us to move into our new body—“*our house from heaven*” (2 Cor 5:5). The transformation will be instantaneous—in the “*twinkling of an eye*” (1 Cor 15:52). The Spirit does not go into the change from a procedural viewpoint, describing precisely how all of this will take place. Neither should we be distracted by such thoughts.

Our new bodies will be like Christ’s “*glorious body.*” They will be thoroughly adapted to the eternal state, and serve us in every way. Christ’s “*glorious body*” has not yet been seen. When He appeared to His disciples following His resurrection, it is my understanding that He accommodated Himself to their frailty. This was necessary because feeble flesh cannot stand in the presence of Divine glory (Ex 33:20). It is said of the glorified Christ, “*Whom no man hath seen, nor can see*” (1 Tim 6:16). This, however, will not always be the case! We are looking for a better day!

When Jesus appears, we will “*see Him as He is.*” It is *that* vision itself that will “*change our vile bodies.*” As it is written, “*but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is*” (1 John 3:2). How we look forward to that time! It is something about which frequent conversation should be heard. This theme must find its way into preaching and teaching. It must be done with diligence and fervency. Spiritual life cannot be sustained without this knowledge and confidence. This is because believers are **really** citizens of heaven. They are that by nature, and have received the Holy Spirit to confirm their citizenship (2 Cor 5:1).

THE TRANSFORMING POWER

“ . . . by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself” (NASB). The changing of our mortal bodies appears so great a matter that some are tempted to remove it from their thinking. I have frequently heard unbelief surface in discussions about this subject. Many do not speak of it at all, perceiving it to be an unessential subject. All of these tendencies are addressed by the Spirit in this phrase: “*according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself*” ^(KJV).

No believer doubts the fact of Christ’s power. As it is written, “*He hath made the earth by his power*” (Jer 10:12). Presently, our Savior is “*upholding all things by the word of His power*” (Heb 1:3). In redemption, this very power has been channeled, as it was, toward us. Paul once prayed the eyes of our understanding would be opened to see the greatness of this power toward us (Eph 1:20). Now, the Spirit projects us to the end of time, telling us that very

power will be exerted in the changing of our bodies.

One might imagine that transforming our bodies would not require a lot of Divine power—but that is only an imagination. It will require the EXERTION of our Lord's power! In a potent affirmation of this truth, the Spirit says, "*And God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power*" (1 Cor 6:14). Among other things, this reveals the nature of sin and its effects. If men imagine they can overcome sin in their own strength, they will also have to raise their own bodies from the grave by their own power. Is there anyone foolish enough to believe this is possible?

Notice, it is Jesus Himself Who will "*change our vile bodies.*" That change will be an expression of the mighty power He NOW possesses. The same power that changed our nature will change our bodies! The same power that sustains us in grace will change our bodies! Believers are to reason, *If Christ's power can effect the future work, it can surely do the present one!*

At this point, the Spirit associates the mighty power of Jesus with the subduing of things to Himself: "*by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control*" ^(NIV). Believers must not doubt the truth of this statement. Whatever we may think about free will or free moral agency, Christ is able to "*bring everything under His control*"—even our "*vile bodies.*" His control extends from the realm of glory to the cursed realm. It includes angels, men, the devil, and circumstances. Jesus has been given "*to the church*" in the capacity of "*Head over all things*" (Eph 1:22). Eventually, every foe will bow before Him and confess that He is Lord. Every child of God will be brought safely to the portals of glory, triumphant over a fierce and unrelenting foe! All things will be worked together for our good.

Now the Spirit tells us that our bodies will be changed to be like Christ's body, by that very power. Our Lord is fully able to do this, and we have been informed that He will do it. It will all occur when He comes again. Until then, grace has made us citizens of heaven—the very heaven now occupied by the risen and exalted Christ. All of this is telling us salvation is fitting us for the new body—a glorious body. Think of it—we will be fully harmonious with glory! No part of our persons will not fit it. Divine glory will neither blind nor frighten us, for we ourselves will be "*glorified,*" as appointed (Rom 8:30).

OUR REAL CITIZENSHIP

"For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (NKJV). The KJV reads, "*our conversation [manner of life] is in heaven,*" emphasizing the Spirit is not speaking of a mere formality. It is possible to be a citizen without having any real interest in the domain in which we are citizens. However, this is not the case with "*our citizenship.*" The lives of believers are actually lived "*in heavenly places.*" That is where we were placed when we *were "quickened together with Christ"* (Eph 2:5-6). The new birth and remission of sin includes a change in environment as well as a change of nature.

A heavenly citizenship involves being more at home in the presence of the Lord than in the presence of men. It includes a stronger appetite for "*the things of the Spirit of God*" than for the things that are "*in the world.*" Every person "*delivered from the power of darkness*" **is** "*translated into the Kingdom of God's dear Son*"—and He is in heaven (Col 1:13). The new birth places us in that realm, making us compatible and harmonious with it.

Citizenship in heaven is exhibited in the posture of the believer. That confirmation is primarily to the individual himself. It is also displayed to those with eyes to see. This confirmation is found in walking by faith (as distinguished from walking by sight--2 Cor 5:7), walking in the Spirit (as distinguished from walking in the flesh--Gal 5:16,25), and walking in the light (as distinguished from walking in darkness--1 John 1:7).

By making us citizens of heaven, the Lord confirms to our hearts the worthlessness of this world. While we remain in this world, awaiting the possession of our inheritance, we receive life from heaven. Rather than minding "*earthly things,*" heavenly citizens place their affection on things above (Col 3:1-3). Like the patriarchs of old, they are desiring the place of their citizenship. That very desire moves God Himself to be unashamed of them. "*But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city*" (Heb 11:16). There is no place in the Kingdom of God for earthly mindedness, carnality, or living as though this world is central.

To remove all doubt about the nature of our citizenship, the Spirit adds, "*from whence also we look*

for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.” Heaven, after all, is where Jesus is. When He ascended up from this world, it is written, “*He was received up **into heaven**, and sat down at the right hand of God*” (Mk 16:19). He was “*taken up **into heaven***” (Acts 1:11), and is now appearing “*in the presence of God for us*” (Heb 9:24). There, in heaven, “*angels and authorities and powers*” have been “*made subject to **Him***” (1 Pet 3:22). Heavenly citizenship, therefore, does not make people impractical and useless. Believers have been united with Jesus, and are presently workers together with Him. They live in anticipation of His return, at which time they will be rise to meet Him and ever be with Him (1 Thess 4:17).

This “*looking*” is not a casual or periodic glance. It is a fervent longing—a passionate anticipation. Because faith makes us misfits in this world, we long for the realm, and the Lord of the realm, to which we have been joined. Where this looking and longing is not found, there is no vivifying hope.

LESSON #39

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“Therefore, my brethren, dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved. I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord. And I entreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellowlaborers, whose names are in the book of life.” (Philippians 4:1-3, KJV)

INTRODUCTION

Faith is exceedingly practical, touching every aspect of life. In this regard, it competes with *“the law of sin and death”* with which we grapple. While we have been liberated from this inward spiritual law (Rom 8:2), we must be exhorted and admonished to live in the energy of the Spirit. In these verses, the Spirit deals with friction between fellow believers, and assisting one another in the good work of God. The saints must not despise such exhortations. They call us away from self and sin to Christ and righteousness. If heeded, they also move us away from the lures of the evil one, giving us a proper regard of our brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus.

BE OF THE SAME MIND

“I implore Euodia (Euodias^{KJV}, meaning ‘prosperous journey’) ***and I implore Syntyche*** (meaning ‘pleasant acquaintance’) ***to be of the same mind in the Lord”*** (NKJV). These were apparently two women of rank in the Philippian congregation. There was some form of disagreement among them that was disruptive to the congregation, and to Paul as well. We learn from this not to expect all difficulties to be instantly resolved, even in exemplary fellowships.

Notice how the Apostle pleads with these ladies: *“I implore”* (NKJV), *“beseech”* (KJV), *“exhort”* (ASV), *“beg”* (Douay), *“entreat and advise”* (Amplified). This is not *“beg,”* *“like beg for my life.”* Rather, it is *“beg”* or *“implore”* as speaking to your heart—appealing to your basic spiritual constitution. He wants these ladies to see the sharp conflict between their disagreement and the nature of Christ and His Kingdom.

The prominence of women in the Philippian assembly is attested to by the church historians. The first converts in Europe, so far as the record goes, were women, namely Lydia and those with her (Acts 16:13-15). After their experience in the Philippian jail, and the conversion of the jailor there, Paul and Silas immediately went to the house of Lydia (Acts 16:40). All of this highlights the special sensitivity of the occasion.

Two great deficiencies exist in the contemporary church. The first is a near-total disregard for Kingdom matters. That disinterest means that relatively few professed believers have a strong conviction about spiritual matters. The second condition is a lack of focus that allows for a tolerance of varied, and sometimes, serious differences of view. However, where hearts are not united, the work of the Lord is placed in jeopardy.

As it is written, *“the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace”* (James 3:18). No significant work for God will be done where the saints are not in *“one accord.”* That is why Euodia and Syntyche are admonished to *“be of the same mind in the Lord.”* Notice, their oneness is *“in the Lord.”* Their affection was to be set on things above, and their minds renewed in the energy of their faith. The fact that Paul appeals to these ladies in this manner reveals their spirituality, in spite of their differences.

You can detect a sense of urgency in this appeal. It is given against the background of the Lord’s return to change our *“vile bodies.”* In consideration of that appointed return, it is wrong to continue in disagreements that have their locus in the flesh. Just as the Lord Jesus is the center of all heavenly activity, so He is to be the median of the thoughts and lives of His people. God has determined to *“gather together into one”* all things in Christ (Eph 1:10). That gathering begins in Christ Jesus, and among His people, right now. A church at variance with one another is a spiritually ineffective one.

The Spirit has just reminded us of our heavenly citizenship (Phil 3:20). Failing to be of *“one mind in the Lord”* conflicts with that citizenship. It brings us closer to the earth and, consequently, further from heaven. Jesus is coming *“from heaven,”* and thus it behooves us to be looking for Him. It is no wonder the Apostle urges the two Philippian women to be of one mind in the Lord. He does not chide or rebuke them, but entreats them in love.

BE A HELPER

“And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life” (NKJV). We do not know who this *“true companion”* is. Whoever it was, the person must have occupied a place of preeminence. Not only does Paul draw attention to Eudoa and Syntyche in the letter, but also publically pleads for another to assist them in the good work of reconciliation. We should learn from this that a record is kept of our differences in heaven. If they are not resolved in this world, God will make them manifest in the last day.

What is a *“true companion?”* Some have suggested it was Paul’s wife. However, he was not married, having received the gift of continency (1 Cor 7:7-8). This was an individual who had participated in Gospel labors with Paul, Clement, and other *“fellow workers.”* Paul does not think of himself as a tentmaker, which he did for a while (Acts

18:3). Nor, indeed, was this merely someone who traveled with the Apostle for company. This was a Kingdom worker, whose fellowship was in the Gospel (Phil 1:5). It is good for us to regard men in this manner today. There are some people who have distinguished themselves by becoming involved in Gospel labors. Those people can be trusted to assist in matters like reconciling brethren.

The basis of Paul's exhortation is that "*these women*" had labored with him "*in the Gospel*," as well as with Clement and others who worked with the Apostle to the Gentiles. It reminds me of something said of the Apostles while they were waiting for the "*promise of the Spirit*." It is written, "*These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren*" (Acts 1:14).

Mind you, these women, now exhorted to "*be of the same mind in the Lord*," had labored together with Paul and others in activities directly related to the Gospel of Christ Jesus. Their names were "*in the Book of Life*," and thus they were worthy of every effort to bring them to single-mindedness. Whatever their variance, it was inhibiting, and contradicted their heavenly citizenship. Because their names were written in "*Book of life*," Euodia and Syntyche were worthy of a hearty effort to reconcile them to one another.

It is not often that we hear of such noble efforts today. Those engaging in such works are, indeed, "*peacemakers*," and will be called "*the children of God*" (Matt 5:9). There are probably people in our very town who have distinguished themselves as laborers in the Gospel, yet now, like Euodia and Syntyche, have come into debilitating disagreements, or other forms of conduct that are not harmonious with the place of their citizenship—heaven. Such individuals are worthy of every effort to bring them into accord with heaven and their brethren. Surely the cry still comes from heaven, "*Help these*" men and woman!

I must again draw attention to the unacceptability of variances among the saints of God. It is not that we seek perfect accord in unessential matters, or areas of conscience, where Divine directives are not given. Our unity is actually in our focus—the direction of both our thoughts and our lives. As we live as citizens of heaven, we will find ourselves coming closer together.

STAND FAST IN THE LORD

"Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved" (NKJV). "***THEREFORE***"—here is a spiritually reasonable conclusion to the preceding affirmation. This exhortation follows the Spirit's reminder of the coming of the Lord and the changing of our "*vile bodies*." The following reasoning is not based upon mere rules of conduct, but upon the fact of Christ's return and our coming "*change*." These are powerful incentives to sobriety and godliness.

Behold the affection of the Apostle for these brethren! He describes these saints from four different perspectives. First, they are "*beloved*"—preferred in Christ with strong affection. They are also "*longed-for*"—he desired their company and was profited by their presence. This is the only place in the Bible where this phrase is applied to people. Paul longed to be with the Roman brethren to impart some spiritual gift to them (Rom 1:11). His longing for the Philippians, however, was of a more profound order (Phil 1:8). It is marvelous that God's people can so endear themselves to other saints. How fervently we should long to be so described by righteous men and women.

The Apostle also describes them as his "*joy*"—, i.e., the cause of spiritual joy. Again, this is a very rare Apostolic expression. Only the Thessalonians were also so described (1 Thess 2:20). Some believers are the cause of great concern (Gal 4:11; 2 Cor 11:28). The heart of the Apostle was refreshed and his load lightened by a recollection of the Philippians. It is a noble objective for believers to seek to give this kind of advantage to their brethren.

These precious saints were also Paul's "*crown*"—another expression only said of the Thessalonian brethren (1 Thess 2:19). By this, Paul means these brethren were the crowning work of his ministry—a supreme display of the power of the Gospel he preached. If the Gospel laborer will "*suffer loss*" by the failure of his followers to pass the judgment of God (1 Cor 3:15), those who do pass the test will be a shining diadem to those bestowing labor upon them. Such individuals have always been rare. Yet, you can be one of them.

"STAND FAST IN THE LORD!" That is, in anticipation of the coming of the Lord and the changing of our "*vile bodies*." Those who stand fast are like the 50,000 of Zebulun, "*expert in war*," who could "*keep rank*" and were "*not of a double heart*" (1 Chron 12:33). Such hold their ground "*in the evil day*," standing against the wiles of the devil (Eph 6:13). Those who "*stand fast*" bring great encouragement to their brethren (1 Thess 3:8), relieving the fatigue of spiritual battle and strong testing. This exhortation assumes an inclination to defect or draw back. The fierceness of spiritual battle produces this inclination, thus requiring this exhortation.

Notice, the stability is found "*in the Lord*." He is the One in Whom the roots of our faith are found. Spiritual solidity is not found in adopting a right position, or being part of the properly patterned church. It is found in personal affiliation with the Lord Jesus. Christ is not honored by unstable souls, nor are His saints helped by such. Standing fast involves effectively resisting and repulsing the advances of the wicked one. It also includes a more thorough merging of our persons with the Lord Jesus. We are unmoveable (1 Cor 15:58) only to the degree we are consciously connected to Jesus.

LESSON #40

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand” (Philippians 4:4-5)

INTRODUCTION

When the heart is lifted up into heavenly realms, caught up in the Spirit, a remarkable versatility takes place. The individual becomes capable of leaping from mountain top to mountain top, lingering for but a moment on profound utterances. With the *“hinds feet”* of the new creation, remarkable spiritual dexterity is given to the individual. He moves about with liberty in realms inaccessible to those who remain firmly planted in this world. The passage we have been reviewing is a case in point. In a few short verses we have been exposed to a fervent quest for Christ (3:7-17), the identity of the enemies of the cross of Christ (3:18-19), our heavenly citizenship (3:20), the changing of our bodies when Jesus returns (3:21), standing fast in the Lord (4:1), the reconciling of brethren (4:2), and an admonition to help those who have labored in the Gospel (4:3). Our intellects are not capable of moving so quickly in such diverse realms. But our hearts are. Now we will vault from an exhortation to assist two members of the body to be reconciled to always rejoicing in the Lord. Can you see how a remarkable transition is made?

LET YOUR MODERATION BE KNOWN

“Let your moderation be known unto all men.” Here is an admonition that shows the absolute superiority of life in Christ Jesus. Other translations use the following words for *“moderation.”* “Gentleness” (NKJV), “forbearance” (RSV), “forbearing spirit” (NASB), “gentle behavior” (BBE). The text is addressing the matter of their response to difficulties—how they reacted under the assault of the enemy, persecution, and hardship. The word *“gentleness”* describes the full scope of *“moderation”* very well. It is a quality ascribed to Jesus—called *“the gentleness of Christ”* (2 Cor 10:1). David confessed, *“Thy gentleness hath made me great”* (Psa 18:35). James uses exactly the same word in his description of the wisdom that comes from above (James 3:17). *“Moderation”* is remaining meek under provocation, and ready to forgive injuries. It involves sweetness of disposition, and the ability to govern our passions ^(Macknight).

This is a matter Jesus Himself expounded. *“But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away”* (Matt 5:39-42). The Thessalonians were admonished, *“See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men”* (1 Thess 5:15). Peter also spoke of this moderation. *“Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing”* (1 Pet 3:8-9). Flesh will remonstrate when hearing these words, declaring it puts the person at a great disadvantage to do this. But this is not so.

We have the example of our Lord Jesus Himself, *“Who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously”* (1 Pet 2:23). Isaiah foretold this aspect of our blessed Lord’s character. *“He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth: He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth”* (Isa 53:7). When we are tempted to be overcome by the assaults of our enemies, we must consider our Lord. As it is written, *“For consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds”* (Heb 12:3).

This is the *“moderation”* of which the Spirit is speaking. It is conducting ourselves with spiritual poise and calmness before those who would abuse and oppose us. Our flesh is not capable of doing this, but our new nature is. Further, the presence of the Lord Himself with us assures that we can be victorious in this matter. A retaliatory spirit robs the soul of joy, and causes one to plot and plan as though this world were the only one. But it is not! Further, we are citizens of heaven, and have received the gift of the Spirit from heaven. Our moderation, gentleness and fairness, can be experienced by our enemies, bringing great glory to God (1 Pet 4:14).

THE LORD IS AT HAND

“The Lord is at hand.” Here is the reason we are to allow our *“moderation”* to be apparent to everyone: *“The Lord is at hand,”* or *“near”* ^(NASB, NIV). Flesh will conjecture that being gentle and non-retaliatory in the face of our enemies will only provoke them to more ferocity. And, indeed, this appears to be good reasoning in the flesh—but it is *“in the flesh.”* Thus, this single rebuttal is given: *“The Lord is at hand.”* He is closer to us than our enemies. His intentions are more firm than those of our enemies. Because we can see them more readily does not mean they are preeminent, and because we cannot see the Lord does not mean His presence is less sure. This is the fact of the case, appearance notwithstanding: *“The Lord is near.”*

Someone has well said, *An ignorance of the providence of God is the cause of all impatience.* Conversely, the awareness of this reality, brought to us by faith, calms the soul, convincing us that our enemies are not

as free to do what they want as they suppose. Believing God puts everything in a different light. If oppressed, we can soundly sleep “*between two soldiers*,” even when we are in prison, so to speak (Acts 12:6-7).

The point of the Lord being “*at hand*,” or “*near*,” is that He will both deliver us and deal with our enemies. He takes quite personally what men dare to do to us out of hatred and contempt. Jesus said God would “*avenge His own elect*,” and avenge them He will (Lk 18:7). In fact, “*it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you*” (2 Thess 1:6). It is not righteous for us to undertake such vengeance. Such attempts are a flagrant denial that “*the Lord is at hand*.”

There are two senses in which “*the Lord is at hand*.” The first is that He is “*a very present Help in the time of trouble*” (Psa 46:1). In this sense, “*The LORD is near to all who call upon Him, To all who call upon Him in truth*” (Psa 145:18^{NKJV}). We do not walk alone, whether in the valley or on the mountain, whether in soul-debilitating trouble or exhilarating joys. The persuasion of this will keep us from being disconcerted by the opposition of the ungodly. Their aggression is duly noted by Jesus. “*The Lord is near*,” and

“*If God be for us, who can be against us*” (Rom 8:31). Persuaded of this, “*we may boldly say, The Lord is my Helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me*” (Heb 13:6). As James would say, “*Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!*” (James 5:9).

There is another sense in which “*The Lord is at hand*.” His second coming is drawing closer. “*You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand*” (James 5:8). We can ill afford to become involved in ungodly retaliation or weakening fear. Both of them cause us to forget “*the end of all things is at hand*” (1 Pet 4:7). When our enemies seem to get the best of us, we must remember “*the end is not yet*” (Matt 24:6). The time has been appointed, and will surely come, “*when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (2 Thess 1:7). Until that time, our circumstances must not be allowed to overcome us, or cause us to conduct ourselves out of harmony with the Spirit of Christ. Your salvation brings all that is required to do this.

REJOICE IN THE LORD ALWAYS!

“*Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice.*” Only faith can empower a person to press toward the mark, weep over enemies of the cross, anticipate deliverance from this vile body, assist reconciling brethren, and rejoice in the Lord AT THE SAME TIME. Our spiritual natures are much more versatile than our bodies. Paul could gather with the Corinthians in his spirit, though his body was separate from them (1 Cor 5:4). Our affection can be set on things above while we remain in this world (Col 3:1). Thus when it comes to the matter of rejoicing, the Spirit can admonish us to do it “*always*.”

The exhortation is particularly meaningful in view of the times. There had been an environment of grief and trial at Philippi. They stood in danger of being “*terrified by their adversaries*” (1:28). Not only had they been given to “*believe*,” but also “*to suffer for His sake*” (1:29). They were engaged in “*conflict*” (1:30). They were surrounded by professed Christian leaders who were “*seeking their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ’s*” (2:21). They had heard of the sickness of their beloved Epaphroditus (2:26-27), and were concerned for him. Now the Spirit uses Paul to make them equal to the circumstances that are challenging their faith.

He does not provide a lengthy explanation of the temporal circumstances, but at once elevates their thinking to higher conditions—very real conditions. He fairly shouts, “**REJOICE IN THE LORD ALWAYS!**” Look up! Look up from the circumstances! Faith can look up in a lion’s den or a furnace of fire. This word does not come from a man in pleasant surroundings. He is in prison, chained, and facing imminent death. He is in the very heat of persecution and trial. Yet, he not only rejoices himself, but calls upon his spiritual comrades to do the same.

The sum of the matter is this: the believer has a REASON to rejoice! This is no mechanical or perfunctory rejoicing that he prescribes. **In our trials, the Lord is with us!** When the disciples were in a destructive storm at sea, the Lord was with them (Matt 8:24-26). His Presence is what saved them! We must not allow what is seen to divert us from this consideration. The Lord has promised His perpetual presence with us. “*I am with you always, even unto the end of the world*” (Matt 28:20). And again, “*I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee*” (Heb 13:5). Every believer is an ambulatory temple in which Jesus resides. Their faith is the means through which that residence is accomplished (Eph 3:16-17).

Through Isaiah, the Lord revealed this aspect of His nature—that He dwells with the struggling believer who needs help: “*I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones*” (Isa 57:15). It is this prevailing circumstance that empowers the child of God to “*rejoice in the Lord always*.” Earthly circumstances do not affect the Lord’s Presence.

By repeating the exhortation, the Spirit emphasizes it is not merely for the moment. Rejoicing in the

Lord is continual because His Presence is continual. See how different this joy is from the joy of the world, which is fragile and fading. It cannot sustain the soul because it is not founded upon reality. But rejoicing in the Lord stabilizes the soul because the person is “*in the Lord.*”

LESSON #41

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:6-7, ^{KJV})

INTRODUCTION

While I have made this point before, it is necessary to make it again. Life in Christ Jesus touches every aspect of life—both inward and outward. The Spirit, therefore, speaks to us of “*everything*,” “*all things*,” “*whatsoever ye do*,” “*in nothing*,” etc. He is teaching us to relate everything to our new life in the Son, and separate nothing from it. Strictly speaking, for the believer there is no “secular and spiritual,” as ordinarily perceived. There is no aspect of life that may be lived in disassociation from God, to whom we have been reconciled. At no time is it appropriate to step out of the role of a believer—a trusting one—and live as though we were on our own. As simplistic as that may appear, Satan is diligent to tempt us to do precisely that. Thus we have this exhortation, one of great power and spiritual stimulus.

IN EVERYTHING—MAKE YOUR REQUESTS KNOWN

“ . . . but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.” The Spirit is mindful to point out that worry is to be supplanted by a loftier exercise of mind and soul. Rather than letting “*care*” dominate us, we take the matter to the Lord. This is not a procedure for crises, but a gracious provision for “*everything*.” Well did the Spirit speak through Peter on this matter. “*Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you*” (1 Pet 5:7-8). He teaches us that our lives are, in every sense of the word, “*under the mighty hand of God*.” It is He Who sifts and tries us, testing our faith, and showing angelic hosts the effectiveness of His wisdom in dealing with us. Thus, with the heave of faith, we throw our cares and anxieties upon the Lord. We do this because He has invited us to expectantly do so. He has a heart for us. He has confirmed it in the sending, death, resurrection, exaltation, and intercession of Jesus. Why should we carry the load of care, when He has said He will carry it for us?

Our text says we resort to prayer and supplication when “*care*” takes hold on us. We flee to Him Who cares for us. The word “*prayer*” emphasizes the ARTICULATION of the matter, while “*supplication*” underscores the MANNER of the prayer. In the prayer we are asking, petitioning, requesting, or pleading. “*Prayer and supplication*” are part of “*the whole armor of God*,” given to protect us from “*the wiles of the devil*” (Eph 6:11,18).

Notice, the prayer and supplication is made “***IN everything***”—**when** we are struggling with undue concern and anxiety. When we live by faith, even when weakening care comes upon us, faith will be able to raise a fervent prayer and supplication to God. Nevertheless, we are **exhorted** to do this.

But this is no mere formal prayer that will work some heavenly magic for us. It is to be accompanied with the sweet incense of “*thanksgiving*.” Elsewhere, we are admonished “*Giving thanks always for all things*,” and, “*In every thing give thanks*” (Eph 5:20; 1 Thess 5:18). We thank Him for salvation, His keeping power, Christ’s intercession, and our abundant access to Him. Our circumstances have not altered our redeemed status, removed our names from the book of life, or withheld the blessings of God from us. Even in the worse of circumstances, when cares looms large like Goliath, we are not at their mercy. It is God with Whom we have to do. Give thanks!

What a mercy is found in this exhortation! We are invited make our “*requests known unto God*.” The mind will reply, *Why do such a thing? God knows already. Why should I tell Him what He already knows?* Ah, poor soul, it is not for God’s benefit that you are making your request known, but for yours. It makes no difference how trite the request may seem, make it known! When care besets you, be bold to tell the Lord what you want. He invites you to do so. Speak your case out with words in prayer. Order your cause and present it skillfully with supplication. Flavor it with hearty thanksgiving for the Lord Himself and the good things He has given to you. Do not think your case is too small, or that the Lord does not care for you. He has told you to come with your request. Let His Word dwell richly in you by doing so.

THE PEACE OF GOD WILL KEEP YOUR HEART

“And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” The Spirit is careful to anchor our faith in God Himself, and not in our prayers. Nor, indeed, does He allow us to imagine that prayer will instantly dissipate the circumstances causing us to worry or be anxious. It is not that immediate resolutions are not possible, or that God is not disposed to do this at times. That, however, is something that

will be governed by His wisdom, not our desires.

Actually, the promise given to us is better than the removal of the trouble itself. It is possible for “*care*” to linger after the cause of it has been removed. Thus, the rich young ruler who sought for eternal life “*went away sorrowful,*” even after he had received the answer from Jesus Himself (Matt 19:16-23).

When, in faith and with thanksgiving, we let our requests be known to God, we have this unequivocal promise: “*And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*” The promised peace is not a euphoric state of mind—a sort of mind-over-matter, or psychological experience. We are granted “*the peace of God*”—God’s own view of the matter. You may rest assured your trouble causes no anxiety in heaven. This is a peace that “*surpasses all understanding*” (NKJV). The NASB says “*all comprehension.*” This is a peace that cannot be explained or accounted for by human wisdom. It defies all mortal insight for an individual, in the midst of troubling circumstances, to be dominated by a sense of well being and favor. This is a peace that effectively says “*Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid*” (John 14:27). The believer is thus enabled to sleep with lions and walk in fire.

There is a remarkable precision in this promise. Both heart and mind are kept by the peace of God. Other versions read “*guard your hearts and your minds.*” The idea is that of a faithful sentinel or watchman protecting the heart and mind from intrusive imaginations. Both the “*heart*” and the “*mind*” must be so protected. The “*heart*” is the inmost part of the individual from which the issues of life flow (Prov 4:23; Matt 12:35). The “*mind*” is the part of us that processes the things embraced by the heart (Rom 7:25; Col 1:21). Apart from the keeping power of God’s peace, the heart can be ravished by unlawful preferences, and the mind can be occupied with evil imaginations. Both heart and mind can be corrupted by the defiling flow of care.

The “*peace of God,*” however, does not work effectively merely because we made our requests known unto God. Faithfully it guards our “*hearts and minds*” warding off distracting intruders, “*through our Lord Jesus Christ.*” Thus the Spirit faithfully reminds us that Jesus Himself is the Cause for God’s faithfulness toward us. While the Father loves us, He must bless us through the Son, Who alone is worthy of such gracious reciprocation to our prayers. These words speak to our faith, and cause hope to revive and bring good cheer to us, even when we are “*troubled on every side*” (2 Cor 4:8; 7:5).

Our Lord does not promise us calmness of sea and pleasant circumstances in this world, and we should not approach life as though He did. He does, however, promise to make us equal to any of life’s episodes. This is one of the appointed means of bringing God glory, and making us stronger in the faith.

BE CAREFUL FOR NOTHING! NOTHING!

“*Be careful for nothing*” (KJV) . . . *Be anxious for nothing* (NKJV, NASB) . . . *Have no anxiety about anything* (RSV) . . . *Do not worry about anything* (NRSV).” The practicality of spiritual life is a continual source of challenge to us. When we are tempted to imagine we are on our own in ANYTHING, this word comes to us: “*Be careful for NOTHING!*”—and it means precisely that: NOTHING! The word “*careful*” is a large word, meaning to *be anxious in a bad sense—overly concerned about a matter*. It is, in fact, thinking as though there were no God, no grace, and no hope. It is the same word our blessed Lord used when He said, “*Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on*” (Matt 6:25, NKJV). And again, “*Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble*” (Matt 6:34, NKJV). You cannot get any more practical than that: your life, food, drink, clothing, tomorrow—none of them is worthy of fret and care!

This is also the same word Jesus used when He spoke to Martha when she was distraught. “*Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things*” (Lk 10:41). Oh, how the words of the Spirit speak to our hearts! They are so appropriate for every one of us.

Care, worry, or undue concern, cannot change any circumstance. It is like a poison injected into the soul that hurts the one possessing it, but has no effect whatsoever on the matter of concern. We have the three Hebrew children as a notable example of not being dominated by such “*care.*” When confronting the monarch of the land, who had the authority to even kill them, they spoke in faith to him. “*O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter*” (Dan 3:16). They saw no need to occupy themselves with concern and lengthy speech preparation, even though, from an earthly view, their lives were in the balance.

When Jesus told His disciples they would be called before Gentile kings to speak, He said, “*But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak*” (Matt 10:19).

The “*care,*” or undue concern, of which the Spirit speaks is a snare of the devil. It is one of his ploys to debilitate and weaken the saints, causing the Word of God to lose its power in their lives. Of this type of “*care,*” Jesus said: “*Now*

he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world . . . choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful” Matt 13:22, ^{NKJV}). What we have here, therefore, is not a mere guideline for life. This involves the maintenance of your spiritual life which is accomplished through the Word of God.

Our souls are not capable of trusting and caring, or fretting, at the same time. In order to have undue concern about your life—any facet of it—you must thrust the Word of God from you. His promises wither in the mind when worry rises. Worry thrusts us upon the steam of life as though there were no Divine guidance, no pitying eye beholding us from the Throne, and no Intercessor at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens. Take seriously, then, this precious word. *“Be careful for NOTHING.”* By faith, let no circumstance of life loom larger than the God Who redeemed and keeps you!

LESSON #42

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.” (Philippians 4:8, KJV)

INTRODUCTION

The nature of spiritual life is challenging. It does not allow for casualness or a lack of involvement. The whole person is embraced by faith—particularly the heart and mind. This text will summon us to the holy work of thinking, contemplation, and meditation. What we think about actually determines what we will be, as well as identifying what we really are. Thinking is the process whereby honey is drawn out of the rock (Deut 32:13). It is what converts the truth into life, and makes sound doctrine profitable. Since men think with the mind (Ezek 38:10) and with the heart (Prov 23:7), both are to be sanctified to the Lord—given to the contemplation of things acceptable to God. Other words for thinking are meditation, consider, cogitations, and ponder.

THINGS THAT ARE TRUE, HONEST, AND JUST

“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just . . .” The word *“finally”* means more than simply a conclusion, or the last thing said. It carries the idea of building upon what is declared, as though he said, “In view of what I have written, from now on do this.” These are matters in which faith can work, and love can express itself. They provide a sort of spiritual environment in which the soul can be nurtured and prepared for the glory to come. We must not view them as simply areas of obligation—things that must be done if we are to be accepted. Rather, they are outlets for spiritual life—things for which regeneration prepares us. The Spirit will not approach them philosophically, but will urge us to become involved with the *“things”* He will mention.

“Things that are true.” Truth is the first matter we are called to consider. This is more than doctrinal statements that are supported with Scripture—although they are surely included. *“Things that are true”* are objects characterized by reality—that is, they are substantive or genuine. Intellectually, they are “facts.” Spiritually, they are matters that are trustworthy, and upon which character and hope can be built. Truth is the opposite of delusion, or imagination. It is the antithesis of the lie and misrepresentation. In this case, the Spirit is speaking of things that have been revealed from heaven. They are *“The things that are not seen”* (2 Cor 4:17-18). These are realities that are unchangeable and dependable. They include *“the world to come”* Heb 2:5; 6:5), your *“inheritance”* (1 Pet 1:4), and your *“house from heaven,”* or resurrection body (2 Cor 5:1-2).

“Things that are honest.” As it is used here, the word *“honest”* means venerable or honorable—worth pondering. It means *of good character and worthy of respect*. Other versions use the word *“noble”* or *“honorable.”* The idea of sanctity and excellence are also found in this expression. This is the same word translated *“grave,” “reverent,”* or *“serious”* in 1 Timothy 3:8 and 11, and Titus 2:2. *“Things that are honest”* are the opposite of *“filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting”* (Eph 5:4). There are thoughts that are unworthy to be entertained by the people of God—thoughts that tend to degeneration and separation from God. We are living in a period of time when such things have been exalted and given undue prominence. While it is not in order to made unreasonable demands of people, our thoughts should tend toward serious matters rather than levity and humor.

“Things that are just.” These are matters that are righteous, faithful, and befitting of contemplation. They include the idea of fairness and equity, together with what promotes goodness and fellowship with God. *“Things that are just”* are not injurious to others, offensive to God, or harmful to our faith. They include consideration of others, the glory of God, and the edifying of the body of Christ. Such thoughts will provoke us to *“do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith”* (Gal 6:10). The Law spoke of *“just”* balances, weights, and measures (Lev 19:36). *“Just”* includes the idea of **no** deception or inconsideration. There is no conniving or plotting in *“things that are just”*—no seeking for self-glory. The character of God Himself is reflected in *“things that are just.”*

THINGS PURE, LOVELY, AND OF GOOD REPORT

“. . . whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report . . .” The Spirit is focusing our attention on realities which are profitable for contemplation. There is a sharp contrast between these *“things”* and those the world emphasizes.

“Things that are pure.” These are things that are clean, holy, and innocent. No defilement or contamination results from being exposed to them, or thinking upon them. Like Jesus, they are free from sin, blameless, and harmless (Heb 7:26). This is the word used to describe the church to be presented to Christ—*“a chaste virgin,”* or *“pure bride”* (2 Cor 11:2). The wisdom that comes *“from above is FIRST pure”* (James 3:17). There is nothing about it that contributes to weakness, defilement, or transgression. In view of the fact that we are admonished to keep ourselves *“pure”* (1 Tim 5:22), it is imperative that we master the art of pondering and meditating upon *“pure”* things. There

are thoughts that elevate themselves above God—imagination that must be “*cast down*” rather than entertained (2 Cor 10:4-5). While thinking of pure things is necessary for all believers, it is particularly required of our younger brothers and sisters. The world inundates, or engulfs, them with impure considerations. When these things are thought upon, they introduce moral and spiritual poison into the soul, provoking them to wrong choices. For this reason, it is imperative that we develop an appetite for “*things that are pure.*” One of the strongest motivations for purity of thought is anticipating the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 John 3:3).

“*Things that are lovely.*” These are things that are pleasing and acceptable to the “*new man.*” The “*new creation*” (2 Cor 5:17) is attracted to such things. Like the Lord Himself, they are “*altogether lovely*” (Song of Sol 5:16). There is nothing about them that is loathsome or repulsive. They are gratifying to the soul, bringing joy and relief to the human spirit. “*Lovely*” things are warmhearted and useful to us. They are not the objects of sinful lust, but of holy satisfaction. Like Mount Zion, they are “*beautiful for situation*” (Psa 48:1). That is, their loveliness is the reflection of the Lord Himself. It is their association with Him that makes them beautiful. A picture of this kind of loveliness is given by Isaiah. He describes the Savior Himself and His glorious reign. “*In that day the Branch of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious; And the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and appealing . . .*” (Isa 4:2^{NKJV}). Thank God for an appealing Savior!

“*Things that are of good report.*” Things that are of “*good report*” are well spoken of, having a good reputation among the godly. They are uncontaminated with a sordid past or a questionable future. These are realities held in high regard by the godly. They are the opposite of evil reports, which are spread by the ungodly (2 Cor 6:8). A “*good report*” not only contains a message that is good, but produces good results in those who receive it. As Solomon said, “*a good report makes the bones healthy*” (Prov 15:30). The Gospel is the preeminent “*good report*” (Rom 10:16). Ultimately, all other good accounts have resulted, in some form, from the embrace of that glorious Gospel. How we must covet to hear good messages.

VIRTUE, PRAISE, AND THOUGHT

“ . . . if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.” This verse is one of the most extensive of all practical exhortations.

It summons the believer into the arena of judgment, requiring discernment and decision. The Spirit is challenging us to the proper use of our minds and hearts. It is ever true of man, and we do well to consider it, “*For as he thinks in his heart, so is he*” (Prov 23:7). Couple that with an awareness that the Lord knows our thoughts (Matt 9:3-4; Lk 5:22), and you have a strong incentive to think upon proper and profitable things.

“*If there be any virtue.*” “*Virtue*” speaks of intrinsic excellence, goodness, and uprightness. This is not mere human goodness, but moral superiority. It has to do with the choice of right and the rejection of wrong. There are matters highly regarded by men that are not virtuous—not good, excellent, or worthy of acceptance. Jesus said such things are “*abomination in the sight of God*” (Lk 16:15). “*Virtue*” is the very first quality that is to be added to our faith (2 Pet 1:5). It is a moral excellence made known in holding fast what is good, and abstaining from all appearance of evil (1 Thess 5:21). By saying “*IF there is any virtue,*” the Spirit is calling us to survey the things about us, deliberately choosing what is acceptable to God.

“*If there be any praise.*” This is something commendable, worthy of the praise of God Himself. It is possible to so live as to be praised by God (Rom 2:29; 1 Cor 4:5). They are also things for which God is praised (Eph 1:6,12; Phil 1:11). There are things that cause men to think favorably and with thanksgiving of God and Christ. They provoke praise to God. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “*the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God*” (2 Cor 4:15^{NASB}). He also mentioned the impact of using our resources for the work of God. “*Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness, while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God*” (2 Cor 9:10-11). As we ponder such marvelous things, we ourselves will be provoked to give praise to our God.

“*Think on these things.*” Institutionalized religion speaks more of doing than of thinking. In fact, it cares very little how its constituents think—just as long as they contribute measurably to the organization. In the Kingdom of God, however, thought plays a central role. Thoughts are the substance from which character is formed. They shape a person for either earth or heaven. The word “*think*” does not refer to fleeting reflections, but to meditation and rumination. This is nearly a lost art among professed believers, and needs to be revived. Meditation, or thinking, involves extended pondering and musing. It is a process whereby the truth gets into our hearts and becomes a part of our persons. The word “*think*” literally means “take an inventory of, estimate, and conclude.” It is the same word from which “*numbered,*” “*counted,*” and “*concluded*” are taken (Mk 15:28; Rom 2:26; 3:28). Such thinking brings us to valid conclusions and provokes holy determination. Thanksgiving and praise spring from these thoughts, moving us closer to the Throne. This is a large exhortation, indeed: “*Think on these things.*”

LESSON #43

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you” (Philippians 4:9, ^{KJV})

INTRODUCTION

Our text will show us the wonderful correlation between receiving the truth and our daily lives. While religious men can spend a great deal of time ordering their views, and constructing neatly packaged theologies, we are here told to live in harmony with the truth. This is done by allowing the truth to dwell in us. This occurs when we concentrate on the truth, refusing to be distracted from it. There is no place in the Kingdom of God for living in contradiction of the truth. Because we are regularly subjected to influences that suggest otherwise, we must be continually apprized of this fact. As soon as the truth of the Gospel is not given the dominant place in our hearts, the benefits of that Gospel are also forfeited. It is staggering to consider how successful Satan has been in convincing religious people that this is not the case. However, the truth of God and the peace of God cannot be possessed unless the God of truth and peace is resident within.

THINGS HEARD AND SEEN

“ . . . and heard and seen in me . . . ” (NASB). There is a very wonderful truth seen here. Remember, we are speaking of *“the things”* that belong to another sphere. They are heavenly realities that are eternal, and can only be appropriated in Christ Jesus and by faith. They are both real and accessible.

Now we see that these *“things”* were both heard and seen in a mortal man! Thus, the realm of heaven was made known through one of its citizens. This is nothing less than *“the life of Jesus”* being made known *“in our mortal flesh”* (2 Cor 4:11). That life was not only revealed in the experience of and response to suffering, but in the words and deportment of the Apostle. There was only one way to account for the manner in which he spoke, and the custom in which he lived—*“the things which are Jesus Christ’s”* (2:21). His education did not make him what he was. Nor, indeed, were his Jewish culture and personal discipline responsible for his distinction among men.

When the Holy Spirit dwells within a person, a spiritual resurrection, or quickening takes place. The Scriptures affirm this in these words. *“But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you”* (Rom 8:11^{NKJV}). Thus, heavenly realities that become the object of our attention (as in 2 Corinthians 4:17-18), are actually tasted, or experienced, by the believer. The extent of this participation is referred to in the sixth chapter of Hebrews. The regenerative life is thus explained: *“who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come”* (Verses 4-5). This involves a transformation by which we are made more and more like Christ—i.e., conformed to His image. As it is written, *“And all of us . . . are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit”* (2 Cor 3:18, ^{NASB}).

What Paul is saying in our text is this: **my participation in the heavenly life has affected the way I speak and live.** He did not speak of earthly things because they were not the focus of his attention. He spoke of *“heavenly things”* (John 3:12; Heb 8:5; 9:23), because they WERE the objects of his concentration. He was not merely spouting a sectarian creed, or mimicking something he had learned in the rabbinical schools. His heart had been captivated by the things that were *“true,” “honest,” “just,” “pure,” “lovely,”* and of *“good report.”* This was seen in what he said and how he lived.

Those who speak for Christ *“adorn the doctrine”* with their conduct (Tit 2:10). I do not speak of mere morality, although that is involved. This is a manner of life in which the whole reason for living is Christ. He is the solitary focus of the individual, and receiving what He administers the sole quest of life. Truth is to be SEEN in the individual as well as heard from him! That means heavenly life can be lived out before the eyes of our peers. Jesus, who was *“full of grace and truth”* (John 1:14), is the fulness of this truth. There was never a conflict between His life and His message, or His manner and His words. Through Him, heavenly things were both heard and seen.

PRACTICE AND PEACE

“ . . . practice these things; and the God of peace shall be with you” (NASB). It is not enough to hear the truth, or even to see it lived out before our very eyes. The truth of God obtains power in us when it is DONE. Just as surely as some *“DO NOT the truth”* (1 John 1:6), those who know the Lord **DO** it! I fear that we are living in a time when philosophy and theological position have been elevated above faith. There is far too much talk about what men believe, and far too little emphasis on the truth working in us (1 Thess 2:13). Paul does not admonish the Philippians to codify what he has taught, neatly outlining it and developing an official creed for their fellowship. Rather, he admonishes them to *“DO,”* or *“practice these things.”*

The spirit now associates the peace of God with DOING the truth: the revelation of the life of Christ

in our lives. Prior to this, the peace of God is promised to keep our hearts and minds if we will but make our requests known to the Lord with thanksgiving. Now the matter is taken even further. The Spirit will not allow us to think of God's peace only in association with trouble and personal needs. To be effective, the peace of God must find a permanent residence in our hearts. Like all Divine gifts, what is granted is to be retained at all cost. Throughout Scripture, the necessity of maintaining what God has given to us is emphasized. This includes Christ Himself, the Holy Spirit, faith, hope, etc. Although men have done their best to distort this vein of teaching, it remains a powerful emphasis of the Spirit.

Notice that the peace of God remaining with us depends upon us DOING what we have learned, received, heard, and seen. Let it be clear in your mind, peace will not remain in the one whose life contradicts heaven and salvation. If there is no basic harmony between the individual and the truth of the Gospel, there will be no experience of Divine peace.

But let us get more to the heart of the text. It is not peace itself that will remain with us, but the "**GOD of peace!**" Before, the Spirit spoke of "*the peace of God.*" Now He speaks of "*the God of peace.*" This description of God is used five times in Scripture (Rom 15:33; 16:20; Phil 4:9; 1 Thess 5:23; Heb 13:20). We are thus taught to associate this peace with its Source rather than its effects. This peace will not be found where God is not present, and it will not be lacking where He resides.

While the peace of God is given to us, keeps our hearts and minds, and rules over adversity, **it** is not the real point. The real need is to have God Himself "*with us.*" If we will separate ourselves from defiling influences, and heartily embrace the things He gives to us, God promises, "*I will dwell in them and walk among them . . . I will be a Father to you*" (2 Cor 6:16-18).

The Apostle was not ashamed or hesitant to speak in this manner, and neither should we be vacillating in so speaking. When the truth of the Gospel is brought into the heart, preferred above all other things, and lived out, the presence of God will be realized. In the awareness of this marvelous dwelling, "*we may boldly say: 'The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?'*" (Heb 13:6). Then let us heed the words of our text, taking hold on the truth we have learned, received, heard, and seen. God has told us what He will do for us, when we will do this for Him.

THINGS LEARNED AND RECEIVED

"The things you have learned and received . . ." (NASB). In Christ, there is a whole world of new realities. Everything has not only become "*new*" (2 Cor 5:17), we have come into a realm of additional realities. In this single book, the word "**THINGS**" is mentioned at least 28 times in our English Bibles. This is actually a very general word. It does not have reference to a particular reality, but to the whole of what is being addressed. Thus, in this book, the Spirit refers to "*excellent*" things, "*things in heaven,*" "*things in earth,*" and "*things under the earth*" (1:10; 2:10). There are also "*the things which are Jesus' Christ's*" and "*earthly things*" (2:21; 3:19).

In each of these instances, reference is made to a whole category of realities. There is a realm in which **EVERYTHING** is "*excellent.*" They are "*excellent*" because of the domain in which they are found. The "things" from one realm cannot be transferred to another: they are adapted for a specific domain and cannot be mixed with another. Thus "*the things which are Jesus' Christ's*" cannot be mingled with "*earthly things.*" This is why Paul counted "*all things*" from the cursed realm "*loss*" that he might "*win Christ*" (3:8). He knew you cannot handle heavenly things while embracing this world.

When Paul refers to "*those things*" the people had "*learned*" and "*received*" from him, he was emphasizing the thrust and substance of his message. He consistently spoke of matters from a heavenly perspective, never becoming fascinated with the affairs of "*this present evil world.*" He did not speak about the government or social issues of Philippi. He provided no diagnosis of the political environment, or the imminence of national conflicts. Instead, he invariably spoke of heavenly realities. He trafficked in subjects that found their relevance in Jesus Christ and His great redemption.

When you heard or read the Apostle Paul, you "*learned*" of things "*pertaining to life and godliness.*" He was never diverted from that emphasis. Everything was viewed from the standpoint of "*the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory*" (2 Tim 2:10). You "*learned*" about God, Christ, justification, glorification, and the ministry of God and Christ to the redeemed. You "*learned*" about the transitory nature of this world, and the necessity of refusing it dominance. These were "*the things*" that became clear through his writing and preaching. Any of his letters will confirm this.

It is one thing to "*learn,*" it is another to "*receive.*" To "*receive*" something is to embrace it—to shape our lives around it, and adjust our thinking to it. *Receiving* is no mere formality—not just subscribing to a creed. When the truth is "*received*" it becomes effective in the individual. For example, those who "*receive*" Christ Jesus are given "*power to become the sons of God*" (John 1:12). In the Kingdom of God, receiving equals blessing.

Learning about and *receiving* heavenly realities involves an upward look and a forward stance. When we learn and receive, we embrace a whole new order of things—heavenly goods. Our hearts and minds move out of the defiled realm into a new domain. The Philippians were being oriented for heaven because they accepted what God had sent them through the Apostle Paul. Their minds were being cultured to think the thoughts of God, and they themselves were being brought into participation with the reign of Jesus.

LESSON #44

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity. Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.” (Philippians 4:10-12 ^{NKJV})

INTRODUCTION

Those who have been born again obtain a genuine concern for other members of the body of Christ. This is because we are actually *“members of one another”* (Rom 12:5). This is not something that is taught by the precept of men, but is evidence of the Divine nature within. This text finds Paul commending the Philippians for their concern for him. It reveals the tenderness of this marvelous Epistle. It is profoundly instructive, and yet unusually personal. If you have ever been involved in teaching the things of God, you know how difficult it is to join these two things. It is only possible when both parties are seated in heavenly places. There, new and life-giving insights can be communicated, while coupled with very personal words.

CONTENT IN EVERY CONDITION

“Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content” (^{NKJV}). Paul has not been languishing in prison, wondering why everyone has forgotten him. His faith does not rise and fall in proportion to the way his peers respond to his need. He is not the center of his thinking. In Christ, God has set his feet *“in a large room”* (Psa 31:8), where more is at stake than his present condition. Therefore, he provides a spiritual perspective of being in need, or suffering want. The Israelites *“murmured”* when they were in need (Ex 15:24; 16:2; 17:3; Num 14:2). When they were cut off from resources, and their own strength could not provide their needs, it brought out the corruption that was in their hearts. They *“murmured against Moses.”* How differently grace teaches us to respond to need!

When Paul says their care for him had again awakened, he was not saying he had been deprived of Divine consideration in the past—when the Philippians had no opportunity. He was not writing about himself, but about their liberality. When it came to *“need,”* or being without the amenities and conveniences of life, he had found a higher experience—something that made the *“need”* appear small and inconsequential.

There is a constant *“learning”* associated with life in Christ Jesus. Because this learning process is so broad, the Apostle speaks of a particular facet of it. The *“learning”* in reference is the result of Divine tutelage—when men are *“taught by God”* (Isa 54:13; John 6:45). Every circumstance of life is converted into a spiritual classroom. Take the matter of suffering need—of being deprived of the necessities of life. Some, as Job’s friends, view this as a curse. Others, like Job’s wife, see such occasions as utterly intolerable. Paul saw them as an opportunity to learn from God—and learn, he did! This should not surprise us, for Paul has already said he had counted everything but *“dung”* in order to *“win Christ”* (Phil 3:8). Now he will elaborate.

Paul had *“learned”* how to be *“content with whatever”* he had ^{NRSV}. His circumstances were not his master. He did not bow to them, but to the Lord. We learn from this what a rare jewel contentment is. It is not built into the new creation, but must be *“learned.”* Those who are born again are not automatically content, they must LEARN to be content. We are admonished, *“be content with what you have”* (Heb 13:5 ^{NIV}). Yet, only the Lord can teach contentment to you. Further, He WILL do so if we have an ear to hear.

Christ is quite willing to teach us to be content, if we will allow Him to do so. However, He does not do it in a quiet classroom when everything is going well, and we have no needs or challenges to our faith. When *“need”* arises, the Lord will teach us that what we HAVE in Him is infinitely better than what we do NOT have in the world. Under all circumstances, contentment can say, *“The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places; Yes, I have a good inheritance. I will bless the LORD who has given me counsel”* (Psa 16:6-7 ^{NKJV}). Circumstance cannot take what God has given us. That is why we can be *“content”* in every episode of life. I suggest this is an excellent objective—**to learn to be content IN every condition**. It is possible to *“be still and know”* God is God while tumult is all around us (Psa 46:10).

LEARNING IN EVERY CIRCUMSTANCE

“I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.” (^{NKJV}) The versatility of the human spirit is staggering. In Christ Jesus we can become superior to circumstance, a fact that is little known or experienced among professed believers. If one has ears to hear, there is a phenomenal amount of complaining that goes on among those who bear the name of Jesus. It is a most serious condition.

Here the Apostle speaks not only for himself, as though setting himself over others, but for all who, like Mary, sit at the feet of Jesus. It is taken for granted that God’s people WILL be **abased**. To be *“abased,”* in this case, means to be **openly** deprived of life’s needs. Normally, this word is used to describe what God will do to those who exalt themselves (Dan 4:37; Lk 14:11; 18:14). Here, however, it refers to a circumstance of life when

God's people are *"made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations"* (Heb 10:33). Paul could be content even with a *"thorn in the flesh."* In such times, the outward particulars of the believer's life seem to contradict the profession of sufficiency in Christ. Thus Job's friends concluded that his adversity was Divine retribution for some secret sin. It is a marvelous work of grace when we are taught to be content IN those times. There are also times of **spiritual** poverty, when we are *"poor in spirit,"* and the things of God do not shine with the glory we desire. It is also possible to be *"content"* in times like this, believing the Shepherd will carry us through.

But there are also times when God's people *"abound"*—when there is no lack, and all is well. Some have found that it is even more difficult to be content during those times. It is then that a quest for riches, and a lust for other things, invade the soul, seeking to drag us from the sanctuary. Those who yield to such impulses *"fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition"* (1 Tim 6:9). To learn contentment when we *"abound"* is no small thing. There are also times when the glory of truth is bright, heaven is near, and the promises shine with glory. Were it not for contentment in such times, the desire to be with the Lord would overwhelm us.

The extensiveness of Divine tutelage is staggering: *"every where and in all things I am instructed."* There is a kingdom way to be *"full"*—to have everything you need and more. There is also a way to be *"hungry,"* not having your daily needs. The Lord can teach us HOW to *"abound and to suffer need"*—and how sorely we need to learn what He teaches!

Solomon once prayed, *"Give me neither poverty nor riches; Feed me with the food allotted to me; Lest I be full and deny You, And say, 'Who is the LORD?' Or lest I be poor and steal, And profane the name of my God"* (Prov 30:8). Now that *"a greater than Solomon is here,"* there is grace to respond to both of those extremities of life that will glorify God and satisfy the heart as well. Neither of these conditions are to be sought, but both of them will come to us in measure. It is good to know that we can *"learn"* to be content in them both, as well as in the normal circumstances of life. May the Lord give us grace and sensitivity to *"learn to be content"* in everything.

YOUR CARE HAS FLOURISHED AGAIN

"But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity" ^(NKJV). The church at Philippi was close to Paul, yet they had not built their lives around him. As great as the Apostle was, he was not allowed to take the place of Christ. However, when a need arose for Paul, this church also rose to the occasion. That is the picture we have here. When he says *"now at last,"* he does not mean they have been negligent. They had not forgotten about him. He will mention later that these brethren had sent gifts to him through Epaphroditus (4:18). This is the occasion to which he is referring now.

The consideration of the Philippians caused Paul to *"rejoice in the Lord"*—something he had also admonished them to do (3:1; 4:4). That is, He associated their deed with the grace of God. He knew the Head was working through them, bringing to him what he needed. Their love for him was personal, but it was more than that. It was spiritual—it was a mutual concern resulting from their union with Christ. O, the blessedness of correlating temporal provisions with the hand of the Lord! It is something that brings great glory to God and refreshment to the soul. As is taught elsewhere, generosity *"causes thanksgiving through us to God"* (2 Cor 4:15; 9:11).

Even though the Philippians themselves had been undergoing trial (1:28-29), yet in the midst of it all, their concern for Paul had revived, or *"flourished again."* They rose above their circumstances, exhibiting the unusual measure of grace they had received. This means they had not sent a meager gift to Paul—a sort of token of their concern. Their *"care,"* or high regard for him, had abounded. It was like a large flower blooming in the springtime. Here we see a trait of spiritual life. **At the appropriate time, it rises to meet the need.** You have no doubt experienced a seeming lack of concern from professed believers when you felt you sorely needed it. Paul also had this experience (2 Tim 4:16). David had the same experience (Psa 31:11-12), as well as our blessed Lord the night He was betrayed (Mk 14:50). But it was not so with the Philippians. In the time of Paul's need, when they themselves were being sorely oppressed, their concern for him awoke and flourished again. The expression *"at last"* indicates this was not the case with others. This church distinguished itself in their response to Paul's need.

Lest the Tempter cause Paul's words to be taken wrongly, he quickly adds, *"indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity."* It was not that they had ceased to think about the Apostle, or stopped being thankful God had sent him to them. There simply had not been an opportunity for them to express their hearts toward him as they desired. Thus we see it is possible for our love for one another to remain strong, even though the circumstances do not afford an opportunity to express it as we would like.

From a higher point of view, the lack of opportunity is like a test, to see how deeply our concern for one another is rooted. If we *"love in the Spirit"* (Col 1:8), that love will awaken in thoughtful expressions as soon as an opportunity arises to do so. However, if we do not *"walk in the Spirit,"* the lack of opportunity will cause the love to wane. Then, when a genuine need arises, the person will be unable to respond appropriately.

LESSON #45

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. Notwithstanding ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction.” (Philippians 4:13-14)

INTRODUCTION

There is a certain *manner* to the Kingdom of God. Divine life, when possessed by an individual, exhibits itself in consistent and God-glorifying ways. As we might expect, these ways are not the ways of the world. Those possessing the spirit of this world are self-centered, with little or no concern for the affairs of others. But this is not the manner of the Kingdom. Those possessing the Divine nature conduct themselves in harmony with the Lord. Just as salvation itself is a display of Divine concern for humanity, so those who receive that salvation also display a concern for others. Our text is a classic example of that type of interest. Because it is evidence of the life of God, those exhibiting it are commended as doing *“a good thing.”* Such concern is not to be taken for granted, as those in distress know very well. There is a tenderness in this text that will, when perceived, awaken good thoughts and intentions in the hearts of the elect.

I CAN DO ALL THINGS

“I can do all things . . .”^{KJV}. Here is an expression that reveals the greatness of salvation. It unveils to our hearts the extent of our involvement with the Living God through Jesus Christ. It speaks of the effectiveness of our fellowship with Christ, and its impact upon us in the extremities of human experience. Here is where the practicality of justification is brought into a sharp focus. This is where real *application* becomes apparent to us.

The ***“I”*** to which Paul refers is not the totality of his being, but his *“new man,”* or spiritual self. It is the supervising ***“I”*** to which he refers in the seventh chapter of Romans. ***“I allow not . . . I hate . . . I would not . . . it is no more I . . . I know . . . I would . . . it is no more I . . . I find a law . . . I would do good . . . I delight in the law of God I see another law in my members . . . I thank God . . . I myself serve the law of God.”*** There is another ***“I”*** mentioned in this passage that is to be rejected. ***“What I hate, that do not I . . . the good that I would, I do not . . .”*** (Rom 7:15-25) It represents the old man or nature, and is separate from the new creature.

This is a critical distinction that must be seen. The ability to which he refers is not that of controlling the circumstances. His personal condition and the former condition of Ephroditus confirm that. He is speaking of his ability to adapt to circumstances, not manage them. He has already mentioned four of the *“all things”* to which he refers: abasement, abounding, being full, and being hungry (v 12). Each of these circumstances is capable of overthrowing the faith and hope of a person. Yet, Paul mastered them. He did *“all things.”*

But let us look more deeply into this expression. What does Paul mean by *“DO”*? Actually, he is speaking of indirect activity. He means he can cling to and trust the Lord under favorable and unfavorable conditions. His peace and hope are not interrupted by the changing episodes of life. He could continue function as an Apostle in prison or in the synagogue, on a barbaric island, or in the city of Athens. He could continue running the race in the storms of life, and fighting the good fight of faith when it seemed he was down. He could do *“all things.”* He knew his role in the work of the Lord would not come to a grinding halt because of personal difficulty, or sudden prosperity.

Paul could labor with a thorn (2 Cor 2:12) and preach to the Galatians when he was infirm (Gal 4:13), experiencing Divine strength in personal weakness (2 Cor 12:10). Living by faith (Gal 2:20), there was no hardship of life that could thrust him out of the race. He could do *“all things!”*

This remarkable ability is not restricted to Apostles and Prophets. It is a characteristic of the *“common salvation”* enjoyed by all who are in Christ Jesus. When it comes to even the weakest and most spiritually unlearned believer, ***“God is able to make him stand”*** (Rom 14:4). Jesus once said, ***“without me ye can do nothing”*** (John 15:5). There are times when circumstances push us beyond natural ability. These are occasions when the world’s wisdom withers and dies, and human strength dries up. It is then that faith takes hold of the promise, ***“With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible”*** (Matt 19:26). Survival becomes possible! Drawing near to God becomes possible! Continuing faithful and persevering become possible. It is true for you, as it was with Paul, ***“I can do all things.”***

THROUGH CHRIST WHO STRENGTHENS ME

“ . . . through Christ Who strengthens me”^{NKJV}. Because of his faith and spiritual understanding, Paul is careful to leave a proper impression of the case. His ability to *“do all things”* was not owing to personal discipline, or a secret method of survival learned from men. While discipline is unquestionably involved in the life of faith, it is more a **result** than it is a cause. Now the Spirit enables Paul to state a profound truth in a few words.

First, there is a transmittal of strength from Christ to the person. That in itself is remarkable. We already know there is nothing that can exhaust the power of God. As it is written, ***“For nothing is impossible with God”***^{NIV} (Lk 1:37). There is nothing *“too hard”* for Him (Gen 18:14; Jer 32:17). However,

perceiving that this omnipotence can be brought to bear upon the individual believer is quite another thing. Faith can clarify this to our hearts, showing us that Christ Himself will cause us to be equal to any occasion.

Notice, he does not say “it is Christ who strengthens the church . . . or us . . . or the leaders,” but “**ME.**” One of the many things that distinguishes the salvation of God is its personal application. Few men can benefit from institutional objectives. That is because they are impersonal. Yet, in redemption, the individual members of the body are made strong in the salvation that is common to all. Do not take this benefit for granted!

The extent of this strength is most challenging. Elsewhere it is stated this way: “*Strengthened with **all might**, according to His glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness*” (Col 1:11). We are even challenged to appropriate this “*all might*” in order to stand against Satan’s wiles. “*Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might*” (Eph 6:10). Thus, when our souls are agitated by the disruptions of this world and the attacks of the wicked one, we can rely upon the Invincible One. The devil NEVER overcame Him! Jesus was triumphant in His youth. He overcame the devil in the wilderness after He has been reduced to hunger. He conquered the adversary in the synagogue, Gethsemane, and finally in death itself. He did, indeed, “*destroy him who had the power of death*” (Heb 2:14), and “*spoiled principalities and powers*” (Col 2:15).

Conscious of our weakness, we place our reliance upon Christ. Just as surely as He was able to do “*all things*,” so He makes His brethren competent to “*do all things*.” Whether it is facing a giant, a furnace of fire, or a lion’s den, He will enable them to “*do all things*.” If it is something that must, in God’s assessment, be done, He will empower the believer to do it. If it is a stoning, imprisonment, shipwreck, or a beating, it will not disqualify them from the prize! Christ will “*strengthen*” them for the occasion. If it is isolation in a prison, speaking to a king, or contending with Grecian philosophers, He will strengthen them to “*do all things*.”

There are some burdens that must be borne alone, while others may be shared. In both cases, Christ “*strengthens*” believers to “*do all things*.” There is a personal aspect to salvation that is most precious. Christ not only “*loved ME and gave Himself for ME*” (Gal 2:20), He also “*strengthens ME.*” God be praised for such a “*so great a salvation*” (Heb 2:3).

YOU HELPED ME ANYWAY

“*Nevertheless you have done well that you shared in my distress.*”^(NKJV) There is a profound truth to be seen here—a further unveiling of the nature of the Kingdom. It was said of Samuel, he “*told the people the manner of the kingdom*” (1 Sam 10:25). Paul is doing that in this text. He is showing us the nature of life in Christ Jesus—something common to all believers in all times.

The gifts brought to Paul by Epaphroditus were not requested because of Paul’s “*need.*” He has already said, “*Not that I speak in regard to need*” (v 11). Even though his circumstances were something less than desirable, yet he was “*content*” in them, having learned HOW to be “*abased*” and suffer “*hunger.*” Now we see the tenderness of the Apostle. Faith does cause the heart to be sensitive to Christ’s brethren. Paul does not want his own sufficiency in all things to diminish the greatness of the gifts sent to him.

The sustaining power of Christ did not mean the Philippians could close their eyes to Paul’s condition, viewing him as he viewed himself. Faith does not move us to thus reason, *Our brother is equal to the occasion, so we will focus our attention on others who are not so blessed.* When the woman anointed Jesus’ head and feet, it was not because He required such an anointing (Lk 7:37-48). Yet, what she did was “*a good work*” (Matt 26:10). So it was with the Philippians. They had “*done well*” in getting under the burden with Paul, communicating with his affliction.

The phrase “*communicate with my afflictions*” is a weighty one, again describing the manner of the kingdom. As used here, the word “*communicate*” means to “take part in,” share, or fellowship in. It is used three other times in Scripture, in each instance carrying this meaning. “*Let him that is taught in the word **communicate** unto him that teacheth in all good things . . . That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to **communicate** . . . But to do good and to **communicate** forget not*” (Gal 6:6; 1 Tim 6:18; Heb 13:16). Other versions use the word “*share.*” In a sense, “*communicate*” is an archaic word, although it still is used in the sense of our text. In modern usage, it still means “to cause to pass from one to another,” as in a disease that is easily communicated.

Communicating, in the sense of our text, is taking what has been given to us, and giving it to another. It is actually another view of stewardship. Even though the Philippians were themselves enduring

trial, yet they took what God had placed in their hands, and gave it to God's servant. In so doing, they "*did well.*" Note, they did not do this in a time when all was going unusually well for the Apostle, but in his "*affliction,*" or distress. Those who only support flourishing and seemingly successful ministries and people, do not come up to the measure of the Philippians!

Sharing successes is certainly good, but sharing burdens is better. It is more a test of one's faith than the former. It brings more glory to God also. If it is true that trials are designed to perfect our faith (1 Pet 1:7), then those who support the believers in trial are supporting their faith also, causing thanksgiving in them, and showing themselves to be kindred spirits. I myself have tasted of this grace, and know the effect it has upon the soul. God be praised for those with Philippian-like faith, who share in the time of distress.

LESSON #46

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account. Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God.” ^{NKJV} (Philippians 4:15-18)

INTRODUCTION

Members of the body of Christ are interdependent, not independent. The various ministries found in the individuals are supported and complemented by others in the body. This is God’s manner, and the way in which the Lord Jesus ministers to His people. This arrangement guarantees the nourishment of each member. It also knits them together, and produces spiritual increase (Col 2:19; Eph 4:15-16). The Philippians excelled in this matter, and thus receive a commendation that is immortalized in Scripture.

YOU WERE THE ONLY ONES

“⁴⁵Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. ¹⁶For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities.” ^{NKJV}. “The beginning of the Gospel,” refers to when it was first preached in Macedonia (about ten years ago). This was not when the Gospel began, but when it began to be made known in that area. It was in Troas, in the night, when Paul was called to go to Macedonia (Acts 16:8-10). This was a fruitful ministry, and is mentioned twenty-six times in Scripture. Philippi was the “chief city” in the Northwestern part of Macedonia (Acts 16:12). Lydia and her household were among the very first believing the Gospel in that region (Acts 16:13-15). It was also the place where Paul confronted a woman with the spirit of divination, who “brought her masters much gain by soothsaying” (Acts 16:16-18). That incident occasioned the well-known imprisonment of Paul and Silas in Philippi, where the jailer was converted (Acts 16:19-31). Thus, “the beginning of the Gospel” for that region was occasioned by great victory, and great trial as well. Paul told the Thessalonians (where he went after Philippi), that he and his colleagues were “shamefully treated” in Philippi (1 Thess 2:2).

“No church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only.” Here are some heart-breaking words. “Giving and receiving” refers to the exchange of earthly things for the ministry of spiritual things. The Spirit refers to this exchange in 1 Corinthians 9:11 and Romans 15:27. In this case, the Philippians received the Gospel and its benefits, then communicated, or shared, their earthly provisions with Paul. When Jesus first sent out the twelve, He told them to take no provisions “for the workman is worthy of his meat” (Matt 10:5-10). This casts a different light upon giving. It shows that God provides for the proclaimer of the Gospel through those who profit from his ministry—a principle inculcated under the Law, and confirmed under the New Covenant. As it is written, “Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings of the altar? Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel” (1 Cor 9:13-14).

The Gospel can produce a liberal spirit in the believer in those who joyfully receive it, and such was the case with the brethren in Philippi. However, this also distinguished them from other churches. They were the ONLY ones who faithfully ministered to Paul’s needs. Paul refers to their liberality in his letter to the Corinthians. “I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to minister to you . . . for what I lacked the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied” (2 Cor 11:8-9). These precious brethren were consistent. “Even in Thessalonica,” where Paul went after being in Philippi, they sent him “aid again and again” when he was in “need” ^{NIV}.

I cannot help but note the spiritual sensitivity of Paul to the liberality of the Philippians. Having experienced a similar outpouring of generosity, I know the ministry it has to the human spirit. Such gifts buoy up the spirit, and impart strength to the inner man. They also are a means of distinguishing churches--brethren that excel in “the grace of giving” ^{NIV} (2 Cor 8:7).

FRUIT THAT ABOUNDS TO YOUR ACCOUNT

“⁴⁷Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account.” ^{NKJV}. The covetous spirit is a most dangerous one. It moved Gehazi, Elisha’s servant, to request a talent of silver and two changes of garments from Naaman (2 Kgs 5:21-22). Peter says that “false prophets” are driven by “coveteousness” (2 Pet 2:3). Paul reminded the Thessalonians he had not come to them with “a cloak for coveteousness,” using flattering speech and subtle means to obtain their resources (1 Thess 2:5). Grace had effectively taught him to “deny ungodliness and worldly lusts” (Tit 2:11-12).

Even though he was “*in need*” and “*distressed*,” he did not “*seek a gift*.” To “*seek*” a gift means to search for, demand, and apply energy toward receiving one. Here is an extraordinary spirit—yet, it is a Kingdom standard. Love, we are apprized, “*does not seek its own*”^{NKJV} (1 Cor 13:5). There is no question about the legitimacy of Paul’s work. He was “*called to be an Apostle*,” and “*separated unto the Gospel of God*” (Rom 1:1). If anyone could make demands for gifts, it would be Paul. He had a “*right*” to do so, yet made no such demands. He confessed to the Corinthians, “*Nevertheless we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ*” (1 Cor 9:12). It was not that Paul coveted gifts and suppressed the desire. He did NOT seek them. Grace had so affected his heart that he thought of himself last of all. In “*lowliness of mind*,” he did “*esteem others better than himself*” (Phil 2:3). In this regard, he reflected “*the mind of Christ*.”

While not seeking his own interests, however, Paul did seek the welfare of his brethren. He sought for “*fruit*” that would “*abound*,” or superabound, to the “*account*” of the Philippians. He carefully informs them he is not hinting for another gift. Just as when he first preached the Gospel to them, he was still seeking their welfare. In this case, it was the enlargement of their “*account*.” Behind this term is the knowledge of a heavenly record of the deeds of men. We are told men will be “*judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books*” (Rev 20:12). Approximately 550 years before Jesus, Daniel wrote, “*the judgment was set, and the books were opened*” (Dan 7:10). Almost a thousand years before Christ Solomon wrote, “*He who has pity on the poor lends to the LORD, And He will pay back what he has given*” (Prov 19:17). Jesus said, “*He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet’s reward. And he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man’s reward*” (Matt 10:41). Paul recognized this vital aspect of the Kingdom.

Meticulous accounts are maintained in heaven. No good work goes unnoticed. Godly preachers and teachers, like Paul, take that into consideration. They desire a productive account for those who bear the name of Jesus. They are not content for believers to have meager records in heaven. Jesus revealed the high regard of heaven for sacrificial giving when he observed a widow putting “*all her living*” into the Temple treasury (Mark 12:42-44). In her gift, she revealed her high estimation of the Lord and His service. That is the way it was with the Philippians. Their response to Paul revealed their high regard for the Gospel, and thus was duly noted in heaven.

A SWEET AROMA AND ACCEPTABLE SACRIFICE

“⁴⁸Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God.”^{NKJV} The marvelous impact of grace upon the heart is seen in these words. Although he was in prison, facing death itself, he confesses “*I am filled*”^{RSV}. When he says, “*I have all*,” he refers to the loving compensation the Gospel has produced. The NIV reads, “*I have received full payment and even more*,” and the RSV “*I have received full payment, and more*.” The idea is that their gift matched the magnitude of the ministry they received from Paul. His bread had returned on the waters of Philippian liberality (Eccl 11:1).

We do not know the substance or size of the “*things sent from*” these brethren to Paul. The size of a gift is really determined by what is left, not what is given. Indicating the sacrificial nature of this giving, Paul told the Corinthians he had “*robbed other churches, taking wages from them to minister*” to them (2 Cor 11:8). It was the NATURE of their gift that brought such rich satisfaction to Paul. His labors has not been in vain, as was confirmed by their liberality. How different from the concerns he had for the brethren in Galatia (Gal 4:11). There are people upon whom Kingdom labors are wasted, or “*in vain*.” Once Paul sent to learn about the faith of the Thessalonians, “*lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain*” (1 Thess 3:5). I fear there is not much of this type of concern among the churches of our time.

The gifts brought to Paul were actually sacrifices to God, “*a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God*.” Contrast this with the sacrifices offered by some hard-hearted Israelites (Amos 5:21-23). It is the altar of the heart that “*sanctifies the gift*” (Matt 23:19). The thought of a gift bringing sweetness and satisfaction to the Almighty God is arresting. The sacrifice of Christ had this affect upon God (Eph 5:2). Those who labor for Christ also are so characterized (2 Cor 2:15). The Spirit testifies to us about communicating, or sharing, with the people of God. “*But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased*”^{NKJV} (Heb 13:16). Again, it is written, “*Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches*” (Gal 6:6). Those who respond like the Philippians are “*rich in good works*” (1 Tim 6:18). They have come close enough to the Lord to be used by Him to sustain His workers.

The thought of something being “*well pleasing to God*” must not escape us. Paul told the Corinthians, “*Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him*” (2 Cor 5:9). Even children are told that obeying their parents “*is well pleasing to the Lord*” (Col 3:20). Such works are actually wrought by God Himself in sensitive souls. As it is written, “*Now may the God of peace . . . make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus*” (Heb 13:20-21). This is precisely what happened in the Philippians. Paul saw it, and it brought great satisfaction to his heart. His labor was not in vain among them, and their account was abounding in heaven. Like the Philippians, may you never squander your resources, but invest them in the glory of God.

LESSON #47

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus. Now unto God and our Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen. Salute every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren which are with me greet you. All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Caesar's household.” (Philippians 4:19-22)

INTRODUCTION

There is a uniqueness in spiritual life that is both refreshing and edifying. This is particularly true in the area of human relationships. In the flesh, there is a marked tendency to restrict our relationships with others. This is due to the conflict that often exists in the area of interests, preferences, etc. In Jesus, however, we are brought into the body of Christ where spirits are kindred, and interests are the same. Wherever the saints are found, they are united together by virtue of their union with Christ. They are drawn to each other, and realize great mutual benefits. This reality is confirmed in our text.

GOD SUPPLIES ALL OF OUR NEED

“But my God shall supply all your need.” ^(KJV) Here is one of the great statements of Scripture. Throughout the centuries it has nourished believers, clarifying God's love for them. Notice the personal nature of the text: ***“MY God . . . YOUR need.”*** At first, the reading may seem peculiar. Why not say, “Your God will supply your need?” First, Paul is speaking from his own experience, as well as from inspiration. It is as though he said, “God has supplied all of my need, and He will also supply all of yours.” In other words, this is the manner of the Kingdom, for God to provide what we need. He does **not** say “My God CAN supply all of your need,” but that He ***“shall.”***

This is language addressed to faith. Paul is in prison, Epaphroditus has been sick, and the Philippians were opposed by adversaries (Phil 1:28-29). From a fleshly viewpoint, it appeared as though resources were drying up, and **NEED** was growing in an exponential way. However, the child of God does not entertain such a view of things, even though tempted to do so. That is why Paul speaks to their faith, confirming that earthly circumstances have had no effect whatsoever on the great salvation they are enjoying.

Notice, ***“need”*** is in the singular, not the plural. Although the NASB and NIV translate this “needs,” it is actually in the singular. The word ***“need”*** refers more to a **condition** than to specific requirements or needs; i.e., ***they are in need***. The words “lack” and “want” describe what is meant—without the necessities of life. For example, Paul has already testified that he had learned HOW to ***“suffer need”*** (Phil 4:12). There are times when, according to appearance, the necessities of life run out, and no hope or supply is evident.

Such occasions are seen in the accounts of Elijah in the time of famine, and Jacob and his sons during grievous famine (1 Kings 17:1-6; Gen 42:1-5). Our fathers Abraham and Isaac also endured in the time of famine (Gen 12:10; 26:1). In these cases, the people of God experienced ***“need,”*** a lack of life's necessities. It is God's manner to provide for His people ***in*** such times.

When the Spirit says ***“God shall SUPPLY,”*** He does not speak of meager provision. The text itself confirms this, for the supply comes from ***“His RICHES.”*** The word “supply” means ***to make replete, to cram, level up a hollow, or satisfy, and fill up*** ^{Strong's}. It is pictured in words of our Lord Jesus to those who expended their resources for Him. ***“Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom”*** (Lk 6:38). This is exactly the sense in which our text is written. The Philippians had ***“given”*** to Paul, and now God would give back to them in abundant measure. Paul had given to them, and God had supplied his need through the Philippians. This is the manner of the Kingdom!

Our text confirms this is not something exceptional, intended only for Apostles or certain churches. Sometimes God allows His people to be reduced to a state of ***“need,”*** in order that He might lavish an abundance upon them. It is no wonder Jesus said, ***“And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things”*** (Lk 12:29-30). Let us frequently remind one another of the goodness of our God—that he WILL supply ALL of our need!

ACCORDING TO HIS RICHES IN GLORY

“ . . . according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus” ^{KJV}. From the dawn of human history, Satan has sought to convince men God is withholding from them. To Eve he said, ***“For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil”*** (Gen 3:5), as though God was taking something precious from her. To this very day, there are those who imagine coming into Christ begins a life of restriction, where enjoyable things are withheld, and we must live in misery. But this is a gross misrepresentation of the case. In Christ, we come into the realm of ***“riches,” “abundance,”*** and exceeding greatness.

“His riches in glory” refer to the Divine repository from which the supplies are dispensed. Romans 9:23 affirms that

“the riches of His glory” are reserved for the *“vessels of mercy.”* Ephesians 3:16 reminds us we are strengthened within by those very *“riches.”* **The idea is that when the Living God fastens His attention upon an individual, it is not possible for that person to suffer need.** Just as it is not possible for the sun to rise to its zenith and darkness still prevail, so it is not possible for God to surround us with His Presence and need remain. That is why the Psalmist cried, *“Look upon mine affliction and my pain”* (Psa 25:18), and *“Look Thou upon me, and be merciful unto me, as Thou usest to do unto those that love Thy name”* (Psa 119:132). A penitent Israel cried, *“Return, we beseech Thee, O God of hosts: look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine”* (Psa 80:14).

While there is a sense in which the eyes of the Lord are always upon His people (Psa 45:15; 1 Pet 3:12), there is also a sense in which He focuses upon them, to do them good. There is a time when, as John, we are brought even higher into the presence of the Lord—a time when the Lord is so dominant nothing else matters. David called it *“a day in Thy courts”* (Psa 84:10). John referred to it as being *“in the Spirit on the Lord’s day”* (Rev 1:10). It is out of the glory of such times that God richly supplies our need. As He is seen more clearly, the need experienced in this world is gloriously met. There will be no sense of lack or want during such occasions.

But these riches are not simply conferred upon us. They are *“by (or in^{NASB.NIV}) Christ Jesus.”* The word *“by”* means they are administered by Jesus. The word *“in”* emphasizes that Jesus is the Environment in which they are supplied. The point is that God always deals with His people *“by Christ Jesus.”* The more extensive our fellowship with Christ (1 Cor 1:9), the more abundant is God’s supply. In my judgment, the persuasion of this is what taught Paul to be content in any condition, be it one of abundance or of need. Once our hearts are persuaded that we are *“complete in Him”* (Col 2:10), we will look for supplies ONLY from our God.

In teaching us to pray, Jesus expressed our reliance upon the Lord for daily need. *“Give us this day our daily bread”* (Matt 6:11). And how will He do this? Not infrequently, it will be when there appears there is no bread at all. Yet, in such times, if the heart still seeks first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, the need will be met. Thus Paul has shared with the Philippians the complete adequacy of salvation at all times and under all circumstances.

GLORY TO GOD, SALUTATIONS TO SAINTS

“²⁰Now unto God and our Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen. ²¹Salute every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren which are with me greet you. ²²All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Caesar’s household. ²³The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.” In this benediction, the Apostle joins heaven and earth. How appropriate, since that is God’s revealed objective (Eph 1:10). Paul has written in such a manner as glorified God and edified His people. He brought attention to both the Lord and to His saints. Such versatility is not always apparent in the professed church. Without laboring the point, the Spirit consistently moved believers to focus their attention on the Lord and His brethren, God and the flock of God, Christ and His body.

The perspective of these words is marvelous! *“NOW unto God be glory for ever and ever.”* It is refreshing to contemplate something that brings glory to God now and throughout eternity. Suffice it to say, things that are said and done with eternity in view, will bring glory to Him even **now**. Conversely, we should not expect anything that will be forgotten in eternity, to bring glory to the Lord now. Paul began this Epistle referring to *“fruits of righteousness which are by Christ Jesus, unto the glory and praise of God”* (1:11). God was being glorified by the responses and initiatives of the Philippians, and Paul was not hesitant to affirm it! He knew that God is receiving *“glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end”* (Eph 3:21), and thus adds his *“AMEN,”* thereby confirming his hearty agreement with that arrangement. Although not generally known, the primary role of the church is not to influence the world, but to bring glory to God. In meeting that objective, its influence will be blessed by God, and thereby effective for Him.

The imprisoned Apostle does not close by drawing attention to himself. He rather mentions *“every saint”* and *“all the saints.”* He is *family-oriented*—acutely conscious of *“the whole family in heaven and earth”* (Eph 3:15). He does not say, *“Greet the strong saints,”* or *“Greet the saints who know me well,”* but *“Salute EVERY saint.”* The word *“salute”* means *enfold in the arms, embrace, welcome, and greet*. It is more than a verbal salutation, it is personal and spiritually affectionate. The brethren with him greeted them. All the saints in that area greeted them. There were even saints in *“Caesar’s (Nero’s) household”* who sent their greetings. No division, but perfect unity and harmony in the body—from the palace to the dungeon! Such marvelous unity and preferences are only realized in Christ Jesus.

“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.” This phrase is mentioned 10 times in Scripture, also being in the very last words of the Bible (Rom 16:20,24; 1 Cor 16:23; 2 Cor 8:9; Gal 6:18; Phil 4:23; 1 Thess 5:28; Phile 25; Rev 22:21). Faith will never take us where grace becomes obscure. The grace of Christ involves His desire to lavish goodness upon His people, caring for, leading, and feeding them as a *“Good Shepherd.”* All of the saints need this, so the Apostle bequeaths it to them all. He knows Christ’s grace is for all the saints. It is called His because He is the One through Whom it comes—He is the appointed Administrator of grace, and His throne is a *“throne of grace”* (Heb 4:16). To this we also say, *“AMEN!”*