

Philippians - Commentaries by James Lampden Harris

Notes from Christian Annotator, Philippians 2:12

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Without attempting an accurate solution of this much-controverted text, I submit to the consideration of others what has appeared to me the line of thought in the Apostle's mind. The Apostle appears to contrast his own personal presence with the constant presence of God: "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye 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 (not Paul) which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." That this is the leading thought will appear more plainly by contrasting the conduct of the Galatians with that of the Philippians: "But it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing, and not only when I am present with you (Gal. 4:18)." The presence of the Apostle prevented the Judaizing teachers from fascinating the Galatian converts; but the moment his back is turned, they listen to them, and give up their zeal for the doctrines of grace.

Not so the Philippians. The Apostle had to thank his God "for their fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now." In his absence they had been cast upon God, and it is this which the Apostle sought to rivet on them -they needed not Paul but God to work in them. It was God "who had begun a good work in them, and would perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6). It was not what Paul, but what God had to do with them and they with God. It was a personal concern between God and themselves -"their own salvation." The Apostle was sensitively jealous of taking the place of a mediating priest. He labored to keep the souls of his converts in close contact with God, so that in his presence they might learn all their need of Christ: this was the object of his ministry. (See Acts 20:32.)

Presbutes The Christian Annotator 3:130 (1856).

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Christian Witness Papers, Philippians 2:12-16

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It is ever profitable to lead the minds of the saints to the scriptures themselves for instruction, so that every truth should have their direct authority. We find ourselves happy in reading the word, when we are able to catch the leading thought of any part of it, so as to carry it along with us. On this account it is hoped, a few remarks on the above passage, simply expository, will not be out of place.

We hardly know how much we are all suffering from the traditional use even of the scriptures themselves. There can be little doubt but that the quotation of isolated texts at first arose from subjection to the scriptures as authoritative, even as we find the Apostles themselves, in their writings, elucidating the principles they were unfolding, by an appeal to the scriptures of the Old Testament in the briefest manner possible. But this appeal was never intended by them, to set aside the legitimate meaning of the words so quoted in the connection in which they stand. Now there are several current texts quoted, either in support of favorite dogmas or used so carelessly as hardly to convey any meaning at all, which when taken in their context have great force. Surely we cannot but detect the wiles of the enemy in this, who knows truth to be our only power against him; and if he can vitiate it, he gains great advantage over us.

The text -"Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling," is one often used to prove man to be a co-worker with God in his salvation, and to nullify the truth that salvation is all of grace and of God. It is asserted from these words, that those who have believed on Christ have after all to fear and tremble, lest he should leave them, or they should lose him, statements entirely subversive of the peace of the gospel. A single glance at the context, at once shows that this is wretched sophistry. It is not addressed to us as an isolated precept, but most remarkably connected with what goes before and what follows it. The sentence begins, "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation, &c." The word "wherefore" throws us back farther, in order to trace the mind of the Spirit in the Apostle, and there is evidently a connection between "my presence" and "my absence," and "work out your own salvation." Then if we look to what follows, we have the reason for the fear and trembling; not lest God should cast them off, but "for it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure." And then follows some special application, and that the great end they ought to keep in view was to manifest the relationship between God and themselves, and in very deed to show forth that they were sons of God, in the eyes of men, by their blamelessness and harmlessness.

But let us, for a little, advert to the general scope of this epistle. Philippi was endeared to the Apostle by many solemn recollections. It was the first European city he visited, after being forbidden by the Holy Ghost to preach in Asia. His visit was signalized by the conversion of Lydia, his own hardships, and the remarkable conversion of the jailer. Paul was now in prison, the Philippians were left to other care; blessed indeed of its kind, but of a lower order than that which was apostolic. This however had its advantage -it should throw them more immediately on God; and this was what the Apostle desired to do. There might have been an undue leaning even on himself, so as to prevent their souls immediately resting on God. We so often put the channels of blessing in the place of the fountain, that God in his wisdom deprives us of the channels, that we may come at once to the fountain-head. Yes, poor wretched creatures of sense, we desire to have something

visible and tangible, and thus keep away our souls from happy dependence on God.

We find the Apostle led to thanksgiving on their account, for their fellowship in the gospel from the first day even until now. And his confidence for their continuance, was not in his own apostolic authority nor even in the present care of their bishops, valuable as both were, but in God. They might have looked to Paul as having begun the good work in them, but Paul looked higher. He knew, unless God had gone out before him, his ministry would have been in vain. Its fruits might have lasted for a little moment, and then withered. He was confident of this very thing, that he which had begun the good work in them, would perform it until the day of the Lord Jesus Christ. This was the point to bring their souls to, that it was God's work and not Paul's, and therefore not dependent on his personal presence. If they were looking to Paul, there would be no steadfastness in them in the time of trial. Now that this was the leading thought of the Spirit in this epistle, will be more apparent by noticing another portion of the first chapter. The Apostle knew full well the nourishing and cherishing love of the Lord Jesus, in providing for the edifying of His body by means of suitable ministry, until we all come together unto a perfect man. He therefore places ministry in the light of a real blessing, when used as the means of Christ's own providing and not put in the place of Christ himself. The higher the blessing, the greater has been our power of corrupting it. After speaking of his own desire to depart, and be with Christ, he turns himself to their condition and says, "Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you. And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all, for your furtherance and joy of faith; that your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again. Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel." He longed to serve them, -he greatly desired to see holy progress among them, but he did not desire that such progress should be the effect of personal influence, but of the consciousness of God's having begun and still continuing the work in them. There might have been order, or even energy of service, produced by the presence or authority of the Apostle; but the Apostle knew how far more solid that would be which was the result of grace working in them, and therefore he seeks to establish their souls in it, showing them the mind of Christ as that which it was their privilege to have to act on. And it is on this he grounds his exhortation, "Wherefore, my beloved," in Phil. 2:12. He first seeks to associate their souls with Christ:—"If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfill ye my joy." The Apostle uses no personal influence -he leads their thoughts to their permanent blessings in Christ, which did not at all depend on circumstances. Their consolation in Christ did not depend on the Apostle's presence; the very way of putting this with an if, showed that he fully reckoned on their readily acknowledging that there was consolation in Christ. His desire for their being like-minded he knew would only be attained by their having the mind of Christ. There might be, and necessarily would be, much personal attachment to Paul, but they might have the mind of Paul and be outwardly kept together thus by unity of doctrine, but Paul desired that their like-mindedness should be the result of living grace.

And when he had set before them the mind which was in Christ Jesus, to call out the grace of Christ which was in them, then it is that he addresses them in the passage before us: -Wherefore, my beloved, as there is always consolation in Christ -always fellowship of the Spirit, as these essential blessings do not depend on ministry of any kind, but on oneness with Christ, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his own good pleasure. It is man's way always to give the glory to the instrument, it is of the Spirit to lead away from the instrument to God himself. And what true blessedness it is to realize the simple truth, that all things are of God. He may use a hundred channels of blessing, because he delights to make others share in his own blessedness, -that of communicating blessing to others. It is more blessed to give than to receive. And for this reason God puts us, who are properly only receivers, into the place of givers. But he has not left the real and essential blessedness of his saints to any uncertain channel of blessing. He may even in judgment remove all these channels, still he remains himself to work in them, both to will and to do. It was indeed a most happy thing, that the obedience of the Philippians had been more marked in the absence of the Apostle than even in his presence. This had not been the case in the Churches of Galatia. The personal presence of the Apostle had been a healthful check on the entrance of error there. But when he had gone from them, they were not so cast upon God as to be able to know the value of truth, so as really or zealously to contend for it. "Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth? they zealously affect you, but not well; yea, they would exclude us that ye might affect them: but it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing, and not only when I am present with you." This helps us much to estimate the healthy state of the Philippian Church; the presence of the Apostle there, had helped them to make everything a question of obedience to God; at Galatia they had been content to walk before the Apostle. His absence had a very different effect on the two Churches. In the one instance, they became careless about the truth; in the other, more entirely cast upon God, so that their obedience increased. There is a double action as it were, destructive of the sense of individual responsibility; the one arises from the teacher setting himself between the soul and God, and the other from the much greater facility there is in those taught to walk unto well-pleasing before men, rather than before God. How important therefore the words -"your own salvation. " The sense of it leads the soul immediately to God, and keeps it in a healthy state of dependence on him. It leads the soul to a sense of actual power -"God worketh in you to will and to do of his good pleasure, therefore do all things without murmurings and disputings, that ye may be blameless and harmless." Blessed dependence indeed, which leads the soul into consciousness of divine power for action. It does not measure the difficulties then by its own, but by God's strength. And it only presumes to act on the warrant of acceptance, yea that the very action is intended to show it forth, that ye may be (not to make to be surely, but to show that we are) the sons of God in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, holding forth the word of life.

There is one other remark in connection with this, and that is that the Apostle showed them that his service among them had no reference to himself personally. If he had confidence that God who had begun the good work in them, would continue it until the day of Jesus Christ -after Paul's ministry had long been ended -he looked also to his own ministry in reference to that day,—"that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither labored in vain." It was not that they might walk before him, but that they might walk with God. It was for this that the Apostle labored; and he would keep their eye steadily set where his own was set, on the day of Christ -the day of discovery -the day which would prove every man's work of what sort it is. May the Lord deepen in the saints the sense that God worketh in them, that they may act under a more solemn sense of their individual responsibility to him. -Amen.

The Christian Witness 7:327-332 (1840).

Christian Witness Papers, Epaphroditus

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It has been the way of man ever to seek to turn the very blessings of God's grace to self-exaltation. When in the abounding of his grace, he has specially distinguished any from those around them, instead of being humble under the special favor, they have been high and lifted up. Thus it was with Israel, Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked. But even after the favor has visibly been withdrawn, the pride caused by its original reception still remains, and this becomes the worst form of human evil. The Lord Jesus during his ministry, found Israel boastfully confident, even at the time when judicial blindness was taking fast hold on them. The same character of the evil of the flesh has fearfully prevailed in the Church. Great and blessed gifts were given by the ascended Jesus, for the nourishing and cherishing his body the Church. Even these were used for self-exaltation, as we see in the Church of Corinth. The responsibility of having received a gift, was speedily forgotten, at times indeed it may not have been stirred up through slothfulness, but more frequently it was used to set forth the individual. The result has been an undue exaltation of the official character, so as materially to lessen the sense of individual responsibility in those who do not presume to have an official standing. And in the downward progress, all the honor rightfully claimed for the office, where there was real spiritual power, is now asserted for the office itself. The kingdom of God is not in word, but in power; and the assertion of office apart from power, is just the apostasy of the Church. This form of evil we find very extensively showing itself, in the assumption or tenacity of office, so that the responsibility of having received a gift, is virtually forgotten. And it is worthy of notice, that the remedy, in a state of manifest declension, is individual faithfulness, not corporate reform. "He that hath an ear, let him hear." "To him that overcometh."

Now one great evil of official assumption, is, that it has gendered a habit in individual saints, of unconsciously relieving themselves from the responsibility of having the whole mind of Christ for them to learn from, and His perfect example to follow. The greater part of saints are quite content to follow along the beaten track, they think it almost presumptuous in them to inquire for themselves. And here it is, I apprehend, that we shall perceive the use and value of the mention of the names of private Christians in the New Testament, I mean of those who did not hold any ostensibly recognized Church place. Such names are recorded by the Holy Ghost even here for our instruction. Blessed be God, we have but few, very few recorded here of those whose names are in the book of life. And it is this which makes the mention of the names of individuals in the epistles, a matter of interest to us. It was not for their sakes that they are mentioned, but for ours. Their joy as ours must have been, that their names were written in heaven. And I doubt not that the Spirit had some special object in mentioning the names of all whom He does mention. In some cases this may be distinctly traced, -a principle is laid down, and most artlessly we find it subsequently embodied in a living person. Such I apprehend to have been the case of him who is mentioned at the head of this paper. There are bishops {overseers} and deacons saluted in the commencement of the epistle to the Philippians, but Epaphroditus does not appear to have held either of these offices. From the evidence of this epistle, he would appear to have been a private Christian. And yet as such, recognized by the Apostle not only as a brother, but a companion in labor and fellow-soldier. Indeed in this epistle, we find the Apostle taking his place by the side of Timothy as the servant, and by grace rising above his own proper official standing in the Church, not thinking of authority, but of serving. And in the same grace placing Epaphroditus beside himself as one engaged in a common service and a common warfare. And how much more blessed would it be for the saints, if their souls were exercised about how best to serve, rather than about questions of authority. The soul of the saint cannot be in a healthy state when he is questioning either what his own authority in the Church is, or that of another. It is not doing what one can, but debating either what we may do, or what we will suffer another to do. Thus the opportunity is lost of serving the Lord, because we are seeking our own, and not the good of others, we have not the mind which was in Christ Jesus in this respect. The relation in which Epaphroditus stood to the Philippians, was that of their messenger. He was their willing servant, to bear not only the message, but the proof of their love to the Apostle in prison at Rome. He was not sent forth by them either as a preacher or teacher, but in a much humbler office in the eyes of men -as their servant. In the subsequent part of the epistle, the Apostle acknowledges that he had received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent by them. And here he speaks of him as the one that ministered to his wants, and he still uses him as the willing servant, sending him back to the Philippians, as one who would comfort them under their present trial. What a band was this willing servant, between the Apostle at Rome and the Philippians, -the channel of supply from the Philippians to the Apostle, and again the same from him to the Philippians. It seems to me that we have almost lost the sense of the existence of such bands in the Church now. We have little thought of being stewards of the manifold grace of God, by expecting only to receive blessing from certain recognized organs. Epaphroditus filled up a place in the Church, which neither Paul nor the bishops or deacons could supply. While the Church is divided into ministers and people, the filling up of such a place as Epaphroditus held, can hardly be expected to be thought of. It is indeed a humble and unostentatious sphere of service, yet one which peculiarly marks the presence of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now I believe the blessed doctrine laid down by the Apostle, in the beginning of this chapter, to have been livingly portrayed by him in the character of Epaphroditus. "Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves." There were some who preached Christ of strife (Phil. 1:16), that is always the principle of the flesh (Rom. 2:8), man's doing in self-will what he only ought to do in subjection to the Spirit, and thus adding, or supposing to add, affliction even to the bonds of the Apostle. Not so Epaphroditus, he esteemed Paul better than himself, and took the humble place of ministering to his wants. Kindness to himself while in prison, the Apostle seemed specially to have regarded. His imprisonment was indeed the occasion for the flesh to assert its liberty in many cases; those who had been repressed by his presence in putting themselves forward, now did so. But in many cases, also, his imprisonment called out the gifts of individuals into healthful exercise (Phil. 1:17), and likewise the love of the saints. And in the one case as well as the other, the soul of the Apostle received much refreshment. He could rejoice that Christ was preached. And he says, speaking of another, "The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus; for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain: but when he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently, and found me." If Christ was preached, and the gifts and graces of the Church were drawn out, Paul was content to be prisoner. A single eye is the real power against our hateful selfishness. "Look not every man on his own things, but every man on the things of others also. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." His was truly unselfish love. He had all to surrender, and nothing to gain for himself personally, unless the gratifying his own heart's love in blessing others could be said to be gain to him. "Hereby know we love, because he laid down his life for us." We should not have known love in its very essence, love as it is in God, unless we had seen the surrender of everything for us, and the only return the satisfying that love. This was the mind which was in Christ Jesus, he did not look to his own, for "love seeketh not its own," but he looked to the blessing of others. I would notice the expression -"the mind which was in Christ Jesus": it differs from one apparently similar, -"we have the mind of Christ." The spiritual man is able to enter into the thoughts and intelligence of Christ, so as to speak to God intelligently, as one who understands His purpose and intention. But the mind which was in Christ Jesus, shows us what was the deep purpose of his heart, even humbling himself. It would perhaps be difficult to render the expression literally. There is at least, a strong moral contrast between this passage and another, where the same word occurs as used by our Lord

himself in reference to Peter, when Peter took him and began to rebuke him, saying, "be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee." Jesus said unto him, "thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." Here was the mind which was in Peter "the mind of the flesh" (Rom. 8:6). The uppermost thought in his heart was that one that should keep his own dignity, -the Son of the living God must not suffer. Jesus who stood in conscious equality with God, had nothing to aspire to; he could bless others by humbling himself: he spared not himself, he sought not his own. This was savoring the things that were of God. And it is in this respect, especially, that the Apostle holds up Jesus to us for an example. "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." It is by humbling ourselves that we are really able to minister to the wants of others. And did we ever think of what humbling ourselves really implied? Jesus humbled himself. But we are told to do the same. As sinners we cannot go lower, for we are lost and ruined: it is indeed a humbling of one's pride as man, to come to this confession, but it is as saints that we are to humble ourselves; and our God has called us with so high a calling, that in relation to it we can do so. For the saint is a sinner sanctified in Jesus, -made one with him -loved with the same love -dignified with the same name, even that of son, and heir of the same glory. He (Jesus) is not ashamed to call us brethren. It is by looking therefore to our real dignity as sons of God, that we shall understand how to humble ourselves. The flesh is always aspiring, always seeking some pre. eminence above others; but God has given to us union with him, who is above all, and therefore we have nothing to aspire to; for all things are ours, because we are Christ's, and Christ is God's. What a marvelous thing is redemption in Christ Jesus, -surely no other could have plotted or planned it but the only wise God. It never would have entered into the heart of man, to conceive the possibility of a sinner being by grace so exalted, as to be enabled to come down from his present dignity of his own accord, into a lower condition. Truly it is the consciousness of our real and proper exaltation which is the real ground of Christian humility. The Son of God as the Son, was incapable of exaltation, but He made himself of no reputation and took upon him the Form of a servant. From the Son to descend to the servant, and that too the servant of the necessities of man, here was humiliation indeed. Here he is to be followed by us. But he went lower, another step in descending, from a servant he humbled himself to the cross; and from thence was most highly exalted. This is perfect. And now let us see how far grace has carried one of like passions with ourselves, to follow these steps of our most blessed Master. Epaphroditus, owned by Paul as a brother, and thus standing in perfect equality with himself, knew the joy of being the servant of others for Jesus' sake. His value of the common brotherhood, did not make him lose the privilege of humbling himself to be their servant. Here was the mind which was in Christ Jesus in him. But we shall see it more fully if we go on.

"For he longed after you all, and was full of heaviness, because that ye had heard that he had been sick." Surely here we have the living exhibition, of that which is pressed on us as the mind which was in Christ. "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." This was only truly perfect in the perfect one, -only fully seen in Jesus. Surely he longs after all the saints, and his only sorrow is that which befalls them, -"in all their afflictions he is afflicted." It was deep instruction in Christ, that led Epaphroditus into such unselfish love. He desired to see the Philippians not so much for his own as for their comfort. He was full of heaviness, not because of his sickness in a strange city, but because they had heard that he had been sick. How like the unselfish, thoughtful love of Jesus, when He so greatly desired to eat the last supper with His disciples, and to forget as it were His own sorrow and suffering, in ministering to their grieving hearts comfort at the thought of parting from him. "Because I have said these things, sorrow hath filled your hearts." But he looked through the whole scene of his deep humiliation, and says, "Be of good cheer."

The next two verses appear to me to open to us deep instruction. The Lord had left mighty power to his Apostles, so as to lay their hands on the sick and to raise them up. The very shadow of Peter, passing over the sick laid in the streets of Jerusalem, healed them (Acts 5:15). And at Ephesus, from the body of Paul, were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them (Acts 19:12). There was no want of power for healing any kind of sickness, but we do not find it the power which was used for the Church. The Church was to know something deeper than signs and wonders: they might astonish and yet not lead the soul into communion with God. The Church is set in life; and it pleases the Lord to give it the power to endure under the pressure of disease, or else to make disease the occasion of manifesting his own sympathy and calling out the love of his saints. It is a much higher, as well as more blessed lesson, to learn the sympathy of God, than even to see His power. And God delights that His children should find His own heart their home and dwelling-place. Sorrow appeared to come upon sorrow to the anxious and affectionate heart of the Apostle. Surely as man it would have been most pleasing to have restored Epaphroditus by miraculous power, but Paul and Epaphroditus were learners in the same school, and they were both to learn the rich mercy of God: he does regard the sorrows of His saints, He has mercy on them, and not only makes His power known, but His love also. It pleased God by the sickness of Epaphroditus, to exercise the sympathy of his servant Paul, and then to show Himself in full sympathy both with Paul and Epaphroditus. What little faith have we to bring in the sympathy of God: little do we know how to make Him a party to our sorrows; our thoughts of Him are often hard as though He desired that we should have sorrow upon sorrow. How refreshing to hear one, who had seen the wise band of God in all his trial, saying, "For indeed he was sick and nigh unto death; but God had mercy on him and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow."

But how blessedly does the known sympathy of God enlarge the heart. Epaphroditus was anxious because the Philippians had heard of his sickness. Paul too, for the same reason, anxiously sent Epaphroditus to them, that they seeing him might rejoice, might have fellowship with Paul in the joy he had, when through the mercy of God, Epaphroditus was restored. And how would Paul be less sorrowful? by removing the sorrows of others, although to his own deprivation. This truly is divine sympathy: the man of sorrows found his relief in relieving the sorrows of others. Here was the mind which was in Christ Jesus. Paul looked not at his own things, but to the things of others, and thereby found himself less sorrowful. In a world of sorrow, true blessedness does not arise from personal exemption from suffering or sorrow, but in the ability to sympathize with others in them, and to forget our own in ministering to theirs. Jesus seemed to have forgotten his weariness in ministering to the poor sinner in Samaria, and to have overlooked his own deep sufferings in comforting the hearts of his wavering disciples. This was the mind which was in him, and, through his grace, in Paul and Epaphroditus too, and why not in us? Surely because it is so little coveted. The gifts and powers of an Apostle might be an object of ambition, but that which is open to us is little prized. But what says the Spirit by the Apostle, "Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness: and hold such in reputation." There were those in the Church of weighty authority as the Apostles, to whom grace would show all possible honor, -owning the Lord in them, receiving them as the Lord. There were those who were watching over souls, who were to be recognized, and esteemed very highly for their works' sake. But here was a recognition of something far less palpable, of that which the eye of man would have passed over, but where the piercing eye of the Spirit could reach; even the mind which was in Christ Jesus. This mind was hindered doubtless by conscious infirmity, and obscured at times by the outbreaking of the flesh; but still there was unselfish love in a man of like passions with ourselves. "Hold such in reputation," for surely this unobtrusive ministry of patient love is highly esteemed with God. And in that day when ministry shall be recognized and owned by the Lord himself, how many a saint who has held no ostensible place in the Church, will find that owned which he thought worthless, and which no one

ever recognized as ministry at all. May the saints abound more and more in the work of faith and labor of love and patience of hope.

The Lord allows us now to have an earnest of His own joy, the joy his heart is set on, even to receive all His saints to Himself (John 14:3). Into this He allows us in the Spirit, even now to enter, "Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness." This would be a part of that joy in the Holy Ghost which belongs to us, and its distinguishing character is that it connects the subject of joy with the Lord himself. They were to receive him in the Lord, as one in whom they could recognize vital union with Jesus. How constantly is it the point of divine teaching, to turn us away from ourselves, where we should ever find that which would minister to strife and vain-glory, to the Lord. When we receive one in the Lord, there is no room for envy, and no fear that we shall unduly rate the grace which is in him. But to proceed yet farther: "hold such in reputation, because for the works' sake of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me." Let us turn to the mind which was in Christ Jesus. He had a work to do, even the work of Him that sent Him; and in finishing this work, He was not only nigh unto death, but in obedience to the will of him that sent Him, bowed His head under its power, -He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. And why? that he might do us that service which none other could have done; and for this obedience to God and service to us, God has held Him in reputation, yea He has highly exalted him "when he had by himself purged our sins, he sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." "Hereby perceive we love, because he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."

And we ought -yes -we ought to have the mind which was in Christ Jesus, to serve the brethren. We cannot serve them as He has served us, or serve Him as He served God. "None can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him: that he should still live forever and not see corruption." In the mighty work he had to do, in abolishing death and bringing life and incorruptibility to light, He stood alone and has no followers. But we may follow him in the mind which led to this. Here we find one for the work of Christ, disregarding his life; and that too in service to one of those who had been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. This was highly pleasing to God, it was the fragrant grace of his own elect -his own servant, again ascending to him from the earth; and therefore those who had the Spirit would hold such in reputation here. But what was this work of Christ which Epaphroditus did? it was not preaching, or teaching, or anything which would give to an individual publicity. It was ministering to an obscure prisoner in Rome. Jesus himself had visited His poor prisoner in the jail at Philippi, and now the Apostle looks at the kindness of Epaphroditus in coming from Philippi to Rome, as a work done both by and for the Lord. Surely Paul knew the Master's word -"I was in prison and ye visited me." Jesus personally was away and the Philippians at a distance, but here was one who came in to do the work of Christ, and to supply the lack of the service of the Philippians. Now such service is not held in its just reputation among the saints, and more especially in an age of mind like the present. Many would court the ability to teach, when the place assigned them by God in his household, may be to serve their brethren in another way. When we find such injunctions as "distributing to the necessities of saints" -"given to hospitality" -"visiting the fatherless and widows in their affliction," we may be assured God values such services, and surely there would be a place found for each to occupy healthfully to his own soul and to the saints generally. It does not appear that Epaphroditus ministered to Paul's necessity from his own means, -he was the messenger of the Philippians; and in addition to their bounty, he added his own personal services, which are here so highly estimated. Here then is a sphere of Christ's work open to the very poorest; it may be but the one talent, but it is traded with and produces fruit. It was not the supply of money, although his necessities were urgent, which rejoiced the heart of the Apostle; but in seeing fruit abounding to the account of the Philippians, and having one in whom was the mind which was in Christ Jesus in Epaphroditus. It is easy to see why this part of the work of Christ's has fallen into disrepute. The apostasy took the turn of enriching a certain order, and giving it all the trappings of worldly honor, so that the exactions and wealth of the clergy became most onerous and mischievous: and when the blessed doctrine of justification by faith, dawned again at the Reformation, the re-action was so strong, that preaching the word was almost exclusively considered as the work of Christ; and almost all other services which are marked by the Spirit as the work of Christ, were neglected. Satan contrived to have the good set aside with the bad, and thus to give room for strife and vain-glory in so many seeking to serve in the same way, instead of according to their different gifts. I believe there is so little spirituality among us, that few really would consider personal attendance on a saint, and being the channel of communicating to his comfort, could be esteemed the work of Christ. There may be much physical exertion and anxiety of mind in an active evangelist, but the patient ministry of grace, leading even to disregard of health or life, would barely be noticed by any, save by the Lord himself.

There is one thing yet to notice, and that is, that the Lord Jesus delights to connect His saints together by living links. Though absent from them personally, He is livingly united to them by the Spirit. The Philippians could not in person serve Paul at Rome, but Epaphroditus supplied their lack of service. And this too is the mind which was in Christ Jesus to minister unto us by living channels, and to make every member of his body a joint of supply to the other members.

I believe we little estimate how minutely the Lord himself can enter into our wants {needs}. It is to me blessedly interesting, to see the Lord concerning Himself about even the convenience of his disciples. "Come ye, said Jesus to his Apostles, yourselves apart into a desert place and rest awhile: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat." This was the work of Christ then, and He has those in the Church now gifted for this work of His. And surely we ought not to disesteem that in which the Son of God Himself delighted. We need greatly indeed to procure that ointment from Him which will enable us to see what is pleasing to Him, and to know each one our proper place in the household. The work of Christ is very varied, and Epaphroditus was as much engaged in it in ministering to the Apostle, as the Apostle in ministering to the saints by his writings. And that alone will be the work of Christ for us individually in which He has set us by His Spirit. God has set the members in the body as it has pleased Him. And to each is given grace according to the gift of Christ. "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophesy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or, ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; he that exhorteth, on exhortation; he that giveth, with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that showeth mercy, with cheerfulness." And if it be asked, how shall we best ascertain, which department of the work of Christ is ours, the word to us is, "let this mind which was in Christ Jesus, be also in you."

The Christian Witness 7:141-152 (1840).

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