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for the perfection of its execution, gratitude for the multiplicity of its benefits, worship for the Person of its manifestation.

The Father appreciated His obedience, highly exalted Him and gave Him a name above every name. One day every knee will bow before Him in worship, and every tongue will confess that Jesus, the obedient Servant, is worthy to be Lord of all.

STUDIES IN PHILIPPIANS

R. NORTH

CHAPTER 3

Christ the believer's Object

Warnings against Judaism (v. 1-3)

By his use of the word 'Finally' at the beginning of ch. 3 we may either conclude that Paul was bringing his letter to a close at this point, but the Spirit of God constrained him to continue, or that he used the word to mark a transition to another subject. In either view his exhortation 'Rejoice in the Lord', repeated and amplified in ch. 4:4, where the actual conclusion begins, is particularly inspiring in a prison epistle; and no one would appreciate or respond to this animating appeal more than the saints in Philippi where Paul had suffered and had been shamefully treated before.

In his desire to safeguard the saints from the ravages of Judaizing teachers he calls upon them three times in v. 2 to 'Beware'. 'Dogs' is a term which the Jews applied to the Gentiles. The prominent idea in Mt. 7:6 and in 2 Pet. 2:22, where the same word occurs, is that of uncleanness. 'Evil workers' are not simply evil doers, but workmen who do not handle aright the Word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15), deceitful workers whose end shall be according to their works (2 Cor. 11:13, 14). 'The concision' is a term of reproach, indicating that which was partial in contrast to 'circumcision' which was a total cutting off of the flesh. By an ironical play upon words Paul refused to call 'circumcision' that which had lost its spiritual significance, and was merely outward

in the flesh (cp. Rom. 2:28, 29). Emphasizing the pronoun 'we' he says '*We* are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God, and glory in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh' (v. 3 R.V.). Instead of glorying in external ceremonies and ritual observances, we recognise that the only power for true worship is the Spirit of God, we make our boast in Christ Jesus, and have accepted the end of all flesh in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Warning against confidence in the flesh (v. 4-9)

Paul appeals to his own remarkable history to show that, if flesh counted for anything before God, no one had a greater claim for boasting than himself. First he enumerates his inherited privileges. 'Circumcised the eighth day' in contrast to proselytes; 'of the stock of Israel', i.e. both his parents were descended from the original stock; 'of the tribe of Benjamin', the tribe that produced Israel's first king, and remained loyal to the tribe of Judah when the ten tribes revolted and turned away from the house of David. Then he relates his own personal choice and conduct. 'A Hebrew of the Hebrews', fluent in the Hebrew dialect, brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law (Acts 22:3); 'as touching the law a Pharisee' (Acts 26:5); 'concerning zeal, persecuting the church' (Acts 8:3; Gal. 1:13; cp. John 16:2); 'touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless', no fault could be laid to his charge.

It was all 'I', a recounting of the things that had been 'gains' to him as a man in the flesh, and had commended him in the eyes of his fellow-countrymen, which now he follows by one of the grand 'Buts' of the bible. 'But what things were gains to me, those I counted loss for Christ' (v. 7). Saul the Benjamite, the man who stood head and shoulders above all the people, who outstripped his contemporaries in the Jews' religion, became Paul the little, less than the least of all saints. What was it that poured contempt on all his pride? What was it that made him willing to throw overboard every natural and every religious advantage in which flesh could boast? Not a change of religion; not a change from one system of rites and ceremonies to another; but a PERSON:

One Object and one Object alone filled the vision of his soul: CHRIST. He didn't renounce Judaism for Christianity, but for Christ.

It may have seemed comparatively easy for him on the Damascus road, in the fresh sense of the overwhelming mercy shown to him; but 30 years have passed by since then, years of hardship and suffering, and he is now in prison. His experiences had been enough to damp the ardour and enthusiasm of any man, but his heart is more engrossed with Christ than ever before. Listen to what he says in v. 8: 'Yea doubtless, and I count all things 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' (that I may have Christ for my gain).

Is it so with us? In the early days of conversion, in the freshness of early love and enthusiasm for the Lord, we felt He was everything to us. How heartily we could sing: 'All to Thee, my blessed Saviour, I surrender all' Is it so now? Is Christ still the all-sufficient Object for our hearts? Or have other things come in, so that we have reluctantly to confess that whilst once we counted all things less for Christ we no longer count them so? How sad if we have to look back to days when the Saviour was more precious to us than He is today!

Paul didn't renounce these things reluctantly, as though he would have liked to hold on to them, as though he had made a great sacrifice. What he would impress on the minds of the saints was not so much the amount of what he had cast away, but the surpassing excellency of Christ Jesus his Lord. In v. 7 he says 'What things were gain to me' (i.e. the things enumerated in v. 5 and 6) 'those I counted loss for Christ'. 30 years later he says 'Yea verily, and I count all things to be loss' (v. 8 R. V.), not only the things enumerated but everything else besides. Moreover, he had actually suffered the loss of the all things mentioned, and his original estimate which was one of 'loss' now becomes 'dung', vifal, bits of refuse thrown to the dogs. In other words, he sees more clearly than ever before the utter worthlessness of things in which flesh sought glory. There is

no sacrifice in giving up refuse, but the value of Christ must be fresh in the soul to enable us to count all else mere dregs and dross in comparison. All one's own righteousness becomes filthy rags. Hence the contrast between a righteousness which is of the law (however blameless), and the righteousness which is of God through faith in Christ, which was fundamental in Paul's teaching.

Paul's longing (v. 10, 11)

Still with the Object for which he had suffered the loss of all things before his mind, he says 'that I may know Him'. We might well ask 'Who knew Him as Paul knew Him?' Yet after 30 years growing acquaintance of Christ Jesus his Lord he says 'that I may know Him'. The more we know Him the more we long to know Him. It is blessedly true that 'He satisfieth the longing soul', but with each deep Divine satisfying there comes a deeper longing and a still deeper satisfying until its fulness is reached in His presence for ever.

Knowing Him and the power of His resurrection come before 'the fellowship of His sufferings'. His atoning sufferings are not in view, but His sufferings at the hands of men. Peter meant well when he said 'Be it far from Thee, Lord: this shall never be unto Thee' (Mt. 16:22), and when he smote the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear (John 18:10); but when he wrote his first epistle to strengthen his brethren he called upon them to rejoice inasmuch as they were partakers of Christ's sufferings. No such fellowship will be known in the glory, and it is a solemn reflection that if we miss it now, in the day of our Lord's rejection, we shall miss it for ever. Paul was willing to be conformed unto Christ's death, if by any means he might arrive at the resurrection from among the dead. He knew he would arrive there eventually, and longed to be as far as possible now what he knew he would be in the resurrection morning.

Warning against confidence in perfection as already attained (v. 12-16)

Humbly acknowledging that he has not already attained, that he is not already perfect, he presses on 'if so be that I may

apprehend that for which also I was apprehended by Christ Jesus' (R.V.). Why did the Lord lay hold of Paul? Why did He lay hold of you and me? Was it merely to save us from our sins? to deliver us from going down to the pit? to save us from eternal judgment? Many Christians get no farther, and rest content in the knowledge of sins forgiven as though that were all the Lord had in view when He laid hold of them by His grace. We have been apprehended for a far more wonderful purpose: nothing short of being like Himself. This was the prize which Paul had before him, the goal to which he pressed forward with all the energy of his renewed being.

Evidently some of the saints thought they had already attained, or if they didn't think it of themselves they thought it of Paul. Rejecting the idea entirely he says: '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 (the calling on high) of God in Christ Jesus'. Some Christians seem to live on past experiences which they never tire of recounting. Paul turned his back upon the ground he had traversed, 'forgetting' all that might have fed self-complacency and pride, and 'stretching forward to the things that are before', in the attitude of a man with head and neck stretched forward eager to reach the goal; and exhorted the saints to be unanimous in following his example. He is not thinking of sinless perfection, but of spiritual maturity. The 'perfect' in v. 15 are the full-grown, who are likeminded with himself as to the Object before them. If any are otherwise minded he will not lower the standard, or force it upon them, but says 'this also God shall reveal to you'. It is said that in the Athenian military oath the promise given by a soldier was not against desertion, but that he would walk in step with his comrades, and in this passage Paul is anxious that the saints should walk in the same steps.

The heavenly citizenship (v. 17-21)

v. 20 follows v. 17: 'Brethren, be ye imitators together of me' (another plea for unity which runs through this epistle),

'and mark them which so walk' (men like Timothy and Silas and Epaphroditus) 'even as ye have us for an ensample . . . For *our* citizenship is in heaven'. v. 18, and 19 are parenthetical, warning against those who walk differently. Paul was not a man to weep lightly; but the sight of men who, while professing allegiance to Christ, were enemies of the cross of Christ, lived for self-indulgence, and gloried in their shame, moved him to tears. He wept for the dishonour to the Name of Christ; he wept for the stumbling stone that might thus be placed in the way of others; and with something of the compassion of Christ, as He wept over Jerusalem, he wept for those whose end he knew was destruction.

In v. 20 he shows, by strong contrast, the state and hope of true believers. One translation reads 'Ye are a colony of heaven', which is most suggestive when we remember that Philippi was a colony of Rome. Mr Darby translates 'For our commonwealth has its existence in the heavens'. It actually exists; it is a present reality. When an aged believer was asked if he was sure of going to heaven, he replied 'I live there'. 'Our citizenship is in heaven, from whence also we wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ; Who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of His glory, according to the working whereby He is able even to subject all things unto Himself' (R.V.). Our Lord Jesus Christ came as Saviour at His first coming. He will come as Saviour when He comes again to transform our body of humiliation into conformity to His body of glory. We are not waiting for signs; we are waiting for a Saviour: a striking expression of concentrated longing and expectancy, found also in Rom. 8:19, 25.

The body of the believer is not 'vile' in the sense in which the word is commonly employed today. Mary made use of this word when she said 'He hath regarded the *low estate* of His handmaiden' (Luke 1:48). In Acts 8:33 it is translated 'humiliation'. So, in keeping with this significance, we read 'Who shall transform the body of our humiliation'. Paul might have dwelt on many blessings to be brought about by the coming of the Saviour, but he fastens on the transformation that will take place in the bodies of believers as affecting our manner of life as

citizens of heaven now. The body of our humiliation, by which we hold converse with the world, which is liable to pain, decay and death, which is subject to much that is humbling and distressing, will be fashioned anew when the Saviour comes. When that moment arrives (perhaps today!), Paul and all the saints in Christ Jesus will have attained the end that God has in view: conformity to the image of His Son.

‘Be this our one desire;
Thyself our Object here;
The goal to which our hearts aspire,
To meet Thee in the air’.

‘FINALLY’

W. FRASER NAISMITH

Paul had been applying truth to the consciences and hearts of the Corinthian saints, and he emphasised the fact of restoring grace despite the manifold wrongs which existed in that assembly of believers. He had to correct three grievous errors. Paul had hardly lifted the quill to communicate with the saints when he found it necessary to trounce them for their sectarian outlook. Such is abhorrent to God: and though this is outwardly manifest today it was working as leaven inside the assembly then. This could only be a barrier to the full enjoyment of the fellowship into which they had been called through the faithfulness of God: 1 Cor. 1:9. The introduction of a party spirit is to bring God’s Christ down to the level of men, and God will never tolerate that! It is noticeable that when Peter on the mount of transfiguration suggested three tabernacles—‘one for Thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias’—the Father’s voice was heard saying ‘This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, hear ye him’. What a rebuke this was to Peter; and he could never forget it, for in his last letter he makes reference to that scene and twice over alludes to the voice which came from the excellent glory. Those in Corinth who said ‘I am of Christ’ were equally sectarian with those who