

LIVING FOR CHRIST

Philippians 2:14-30

God is not an absentee. He is watching over and longing to work through us. He wants to work through us as channels of His purpose. He wants a channel unchoked by the obstructions of self to fulfil His purpose. No higher service is possible; no greater purpose is found than to be the instruments of God to do His good pleasure. He purposes something grand and glorious through us. Are we letting Him accomplish it?

True confidence in God results in humble, active obedience. It enables one to "do all things without murmurings and questionings." One whose faith in God is weak soon falls before the temptations of questioning the will and providence of God and of finding grounds for contention with his neighbors. "Murmuring" was a continual and serious defect in the conduct of Israel during the wilderness journey; it too often is heard among the people of God today. Paul had learned, "in whatsoever state" he was, "therein to be content." He could "rejoice in the Lord" under all circumstances. Even in prison he could write this epistle of joy. His example is one that all should seek to follow.

Having committed our lives to the control of God's will, we are under orders. It is unmilitary and peevish to fret at God's commands. As good soldiers, Christians are to carry out the orders of the Captain of their salvation. Explanations, if they come at all, come after obedience, not before. Into the Valley of Death rode the Six Hundred:

"Theirs not to make reply,
Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do and die."

Cheerfully and cooperatively, we are to do God's service. "Do all things without murmurings and disputings: That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world." No murmurings or disputings are permitted. The word of "murmuring" is expressive; it means "the cooing of a dove". In it we catch the suggested strain of its monotony--that undertone of grumbling. Sooner or later, if permitted to persist, murmurings break out into disputings. The subdued growl of discontent loses its restraint and causes disputes and divisions.

The disgruntled and disappointed complain about or criticize nearly everything that is done for God. If asked to do anything, they consider that it does not give them enough prominence or it puts too heavy a load upon them. Nothing is so unlike Christ. Certainly God is not having His way in the heart of a chronic complainer. One may engage his energies in fault-finding and disputing, but one thing is certain he cannot shine while he is murmuring. When people do things without murmuring and disputing their lives are radiant. Such lives reflect the spirit of Jesus, the mind of the Master, and the church collectively shines. Christ is always grieved by murmuring, complaining, and disputing. When people pout, they don't shine.

The end to which God is working in believers is clearly shown. Instead of murmurings and disputings, they are to manifest and to demonstrate their true character as sons of God. "That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world. Verse 15. They are not to be whining; they are to be shining as lights in the world. Every phase of their lives is to commend the grace of God. No injury is to proceed to someone else from their actions. Even in the most unfavorable circumstances, their lives are to be undamaged and their lights undimmed. They are to show forth His life and to shine forth His light in a dark world.

Are you shining or whining? Are you a shiner or a whiner? It takes more power to give light than to make sound. It takes a lot more grace to manifest Christ than to murmur

about things; it takes a lot more Christianity to shine than to whine. Be shiners instead of whiners!

Not only are we to be a beneficent influence, shining "as lights in the world," but we are to be positive and effective witnesses. "Holding forth the word of life." When we "shine as lights" we are passively Christian. When we "hold forth the Word" we are actively Christian. In one case we are character witnesses. In the other case we are articulate witnesses. We are to be both lights and voices. We are to shine and to speak. We are to be felt and to be heard.

In verses fifteen and sixteen, Paul expresses his purpose for the Philippians. It is a double purpose, their own highest development and the greatest service to others. If Paul's followers will continue by their unblemished character to hold "forth the word of life," he is willing to die for them. As the moon and the stars "appear" in the night, so the Christians come out to give light in the darkness. Every church is a lighthouse in a dark place. The darker the place the more the light is needed. Thank God for the men and women who do take the light into the dark places.

Paul was face to face with death. One cannot fail to note the courage of the old hero. He was absolutely unafraid. He was willing either to die or to live. He was ready for service or sacrifice, whichever might lie in the way of God's choosing. He was willing to spend and to be spent in the service of the Philippians. One thinks of David Livingstone who gave his life gladly for the healing of the open sore of the world in Africa.

I. His Plans For Timothy. 2:19-23.

He writes as the Master about the disciple. Timothy has evidently placed himself wholly at Paul's service in the matter of going or not going to Philippi.

1. Timothy's interest in the Philippians. 2:19-21.

The possibility of Paul's martyrdom did not interfere with his plans for sending word to Philippi. Paul had a very definite hope of sending Timothy "shortly" to them, though how soon he could not tell. This hope centered "in the Lord Jesus." He wanted to send Timothy because he had no other who was so genuinely anxious about the Philippians. He had the shepherd heart. No other preacher is really worth while.

Many a pastor is dreary and despondent as he faces progressive enterprises in the church work because so many ask to be excused. They say that they do not have time.

2. Timothy's devotion to Paul. 2:22.

When put to the test in Philippi, Timothy proved true. His love and loyalty they well knew and they needed only a reminder to bring it all back to them. The Philippians were fully acquainted with his approved worth and sterling character. His loyalty was unimpeachable. He stood ready to serve Christ anywhere.

3. Paul's need of Timothy. 2:23.

Meanwhile Paul needed Timothy by his side and could only cherish the hope of sending him soon. Calmly, Paul awaited the decision. Fearlessly he looked into the unknown future. Busy with his task, interested in the welfare of his fellow Christians, he awaited the voice of God which would announce to him either deliverance or death.

II. Paul's Trust About Himself. 2:24

Ever before Paul is the nearness of his departure. He has no hesitation about it. He waited in an attitude of hope. He had no weak longing to die, no cowardly desire to escape from the ills of life. He recognized the fact that his continued activity might mean much of blessing to others. For their sakes He wanted to live. With con-

fidence in Christ, and with a recognition of the importance of his service, he believed that he could not only soon send the joyful news of his acquittal, but could come in person to bring comfort and gladness to the hearts of his friends. Paul was well content whether he continued to live or he must die. He was ready to die and willing to wait.

III. The Return Of Epaphroditus. 2:25-30.

So Epaphroditus is to go at once as the bearer of this epistle and of Paul's love and blessing.

1. His return necessary. 2:25-26.

Paul describes him as his brother, as his fellow-worker in the cause of Christ, as his fellow-soldier in the conflict with Christ's enemies. He was Paul's comrade in love, in work, and in peril. They had a common sympathy, common work, and common danger. But Paul had a specific reason for sending Epaphroditus at that time. He was intensely homesick.

2. His recent peril. 2:27.

His physical illness, which may have contributed to his homesickness, had been critical in the extreme. Paul regarded his recovery as an interposition of divine providence and a special manifestation of grace.

3. His royal welcome. 2:28-29.

Paul was anxious for the Philippians to recover their cheerfulness which had been clouded by the sickness of Epaphroditus. Paul would do without his presence and fellowship if it would make their hearts glad. What beautiful self-denial! Their joy would react on Paul and make him happy. The best way to be happy is to make others happy. Paul wanted them to receive him as one whom the Lord was restoring to them. He told them to welcome him as their brother in Christ, and show him the honor that was his just due.

4. He risked all for the work of Christ. 2:30.

He had staked his life in the service of Christ. Thus Paul compliments the Philippians upon their generosity and commends Epaphroditus for his unselfish devotion.