**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**PHILIPPIANS-001**. **LOVING GREETINGS by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"1. Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: 2. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 3. I thank my God upon all my remembrance of you, 4. Always in every supplication of mine on behalf of you all making my supplication with joy, 5. For your fellowship in furtherance of the gospel from the first day until now; 6. Being confident of this very thing that He which began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ: 7. Even as it is right for me to be thus minded on behalf of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as, both in my bonds and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers with me of grace. 8. For God is my witness, how I long after you all in the tender mercies of Christ Jesus."*

*Philippians 1:1-8 (R.V.)*

The bond between Paul and the church at Philippi was peculiarly close. It had been founded by himself, as is narrated at unusual length in the book of Acts. It was the first church established in Europe. Ten years had elapsed since then, possibly more. Paul is now a prisoner in Rome, not suffering the extremest rigour of imprisonment, but still a prisoner in his own hired house, accessible to his friends and able to do work for God, but still in the custody of soldiers, chained and waiting till the tardy steps of Roman law should come up to him, or perhaps till the caprice of Nero should deign to hear his cause. In that imprisonment we have his letters to the Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon, which latter three are closely connected in time, the two former in subject, and the two latter in destination. This letter stands apart from those to the great Asiatic churches.

Its tone and general cast are unlike those of most of his letters. It contains no doctrinal discussions and no rebukes of evil, but is an outpouring of happy love and confidence. Like all Paul's epistles it begins with salutations, and like most of them with prayer, but from the very beginning is a long gush of love. These early verses seem to me very beautiful if we regard them either as a revelation of the personal character of the Apostle, or as a picture of the relation between teacher and taught in its most blessed and undisturbed form, or as a lovely ideal of friendship and love in any relation, hallowed and solemnised by Christian feeling.

Verses one and two contain the apostolic greeting. In it we note the senders. Timothy is associated with Paul, according to his custom in all his letters even when he goes on immediately to speak in the singular. He ever sought to hide his own supremacy and to bring his friends into prominence. He was a great, lowly soul, who had no pride in the dignity of his position but felt the weight of its responsibility and would fain have had it shared. He calls Timothy and himself the slaves of Christ. He regarded it as his highest honour to be Christ's born servant, bound to absolute submission to the all-worthy Lord who had died to win him. It is to be noted that there is no reference here to apostolic authority, and the contrast is very remarkable in this respect with the Epistle to the Galatians, where with scornful emphasis he asserts it as bestowed not from men, neither through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father. In this designation of himself, we have already the first trace of the intimate and loving relationship in which Paul stood to the Philippians. There was no need for him to assert what was not denied, and he did not wish to deal with them officially, but rather personally. There is a similar omission in Philemon and a pathetic substitution there of the prisoner of Jesus Christ for the slave of Christ Jesus.

The persons addressed are all the saints in Christ Jesus. As he had not called himself an apostle, so he does not call them a church. He will not lose in an abstraction the personal bond which unites them. They are saints, which is not primarily a designation of moral purity, but of consecration to God, from whom indeed purity flows. The primitive meaning of the word is separation; the secondary meaning is holiness, and the connection between these two meanings contains a whole ethical philosophy. They are saints in Christ Jesus; union with Him is the condition both of consecration and of purity.

The Philippian community had an organisation primitive but sufficient. We do not enter on the discussion of its two offices further than to note that the bishops are evidently identical with the elders, in the account in Acts xx. of Paul's parting with the Ephesian Christians, where the same persons are designated by both titles, as is also the case in Titus i. 5 and 7; the one name (elder) coming from the Hebrew and designating the office on the side of dignity, the other (bishop) being of Greek origin and representing it in terms of function. We note that there were several elders then in the Philippian church, and that their place in the salutation negatives the idea of hierarchical supremacy.

The benediction or prayer for grace and peace is couched in the form which it assumes in all Paul's letters. It blends Eastern and Western forms of greeting. Grace being the Greek and Peace the Hebrew form of salutation. So Christ fuses and fulfils the world's desires. The grace which He gives is the self-imparting love of God, the peace which He gives is its consequence, and the salutation is an unmistakable evidence of Paul's belief in Christ's divinity.

This salutation is followed by a great burst of thankful love, for the full apprehension of which we must look briefly at the details of these verses. We have first Paul's thankfulness in all his remembrance of the Philippians, then he further defines the times of his thankfulness as always in every supplication of mind on behalf of you all making my supplication with joy. His gratitude for them is expressed in all his prayers which are all thank-offerings. He never thinks of them nor prays for them without thanking God for them. Then comes the reason for his gratitude--their fellowship in furtherance of the gospel, from the first day when Lydia constrained him to come into her house, until this moment when now at the last their care of him had flourished again. The Revised Version's rendering fellowship in furtherance of instead of fellowship in conveys the great lesson which the other rendering obscures--that the true fellowship is not in enjoyment but in service, and refers not so much to a common participation in the blessedness as in the toils and trials of Christian work. This is apparent in an immediately following verse where the Philippians fellowship with Christ is again spoken of as consisting in sharing both in His bonds and in the double work of defending the gospel from gainsayers and in positively proclaiming it. Very beautifully in this connection does he designate that work and toil as my grace.

The fellowship which thus is the basis of his thanksgiving leads on to a confidence which he cherishes for them and which helps to make his prayers joyful thanksgivings. And such confidence becomes him because he has them in his heart, and love hopeth all things and delights to believe in and anticipate all good concerning its object. He has them in his heart because they faithfully share with him his honourable, blessed burdens. But that is not all, it is in the tender mercies of Christ that he loved them. His love is the love of Christ in him; his being is so united to Jesus that his heart beats with the same emotion as throbs in Christ's, and all that is merely natural and of self in his love is changed into a solemn participation in the great love which Christ has to them. This, then, being the general exposition of the words, let us now dwell for a little while on the broad principles suggested by them.

**I. Participation in the work of Christ is the noblest basis for love and friendship.**

Paul had tremendous courage and yet hungered for sympathy. He had no outlets for his love but his fellow Christians. There had, no doubt, been a wrenching of the ties of kindred when he became a Christian, and his love, dammed back and restrained, had to pour itself on his brethren.

The Church is a workshop, not a dormitory, and every Christian man and woman is bound to help in the common cause. These Philippians help Paul by sympathy and gifts, indeed, but by their own direct work as well, and things are not right with us unless leaders can say, Ye all are partakers of my grace. There are other real and sweet bonds of love and friendship, but the most real and sweetest is to be found in our common relation to Jesus Christ and in our co-operation in the work which is ours because it is His and we are His.

**II. Thankful, glad prayer flows from such co-operation.**

The prisoner in his bonds in the alien city had the remembrance of his friends coming into his chamber like fresh, cool air, or fragrance from far-off gardens. A thrill of gladness was in his soul as often as he thought on them. It is blessed if in our experience teacher and taught are knit together thus; without some such bond of union no good will be done. The relation of pastor and people is so delicate and spiritual, the purpose of it so different from that of mere teaching, the laws of it so informal and elastic, the whole power of it, therefore, so dependent on sympathy and mutual kindliness that, unless there be something like the bond which united Paul and the Philippians, there will be no prosperity or blessing. The thinnest film of cloud prevents deposition of dew. If all men in pulpits could say what Paul said of the Philippians, and all men in pews could deserve to have it said of them, the world would feel the power of a quickened Church.

**III. Confidence is born of love and common service.**

Paul delights to think that God will go on because God has already begun a good work in them, and Paul delights to think of their perfection because he loves them. God is not a man that He should lie, or the son of man that He should repent. His past is the guarantee for His future; what He begins He finishes.

**IV. Our love is hallowed and greatened in the love of Christ.**

Paul lived, yet not he, but Christ lived in him. It is but one illustration of the principle of his being that Christ who was the life of his life, is the heart of his love. He longed after his Philippian friends in the tender mercies of Christ Jesus. This and this only is the true consecration of love when we live and love in the Lord; when we will as Christ does, think as He does, love as He does, when the mind that was in Christ Jesus was in us. It is needful to guard against the intrusion of mere human affection and regard into our sacred relations in the Church; it is needful to guard against it in our own personal love and friendship. Let us see that we ourselves know and believe the love wherewith Christ hath loved us, and then let us see that that love dwells in us informing and hallowing our hearts, making them tender with His great tenderness, and turning all the water of our earthly affections into the new wine of His kingdom. Let the law for our hearts, as well as for our minds and wills, be I live, yet not I but Christ liveth in me.