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

**PHILIPPIANS-012**. **PAUL AND TIMOTHY by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"19. But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy shortly unto you, that I also may be of good comfort, when I know your state. 20. For I have no man like-minded, who will care truly for your state. 21. For they all seek their own, not the things of Jesus Christ. 22. But ye know the proof of him, that, as a child serveth a father, so he served with me in furtherance of the gospel. 23. Him therefore I hope to send forthwith, so soon as I shall see how it will go with me: 24. But I trust in the Lord that I myself also shall come shortly."*

*Philippians 2:19-24 (R.V.)*

Like all great men Paul had a wonderful power of attaching followers to himself. The mass of the planet draws in small aerolites which catch fire as they pass through its atmosphere. There is no more beautiful page in the history of the early Church than the story of Paul and his companions. They gathered round him with such devotion, and followed him with such love. They were not small men. Luke and Aquila were among them, and they would have been prominent in most companies, but gladly took a place second to Paul. He impressed his own personality and his type of teaching on his followers as Luther did on his, and as many another great teacher has done.

Among all these Timothy seems to have held a special place. Paul first found him on his second journey either at Derbe or Lystra. His mother, Eunice, was already a believer, his father a Greek. Timothy seems to have been converted on Paul's first visit, for on his second he was already a disciple well reported of, and Paul more than once calls him his son in the faith. He seems to have come in to take John Mark's place as the Apostle's minister, and from that time to have been usually Paul's trusted attendant. We hear of him as with the Apostle on his first visit to Philippi, and to have gone with him to Thessalonica and Beroea, but then to have been parted until Corinth. Thence Paul went quickly up to Jerusalem and back to Antioch, from which he set out again to visit the churches, and made a special stay in Ephesus. While there he planned a visit to Macedonia and Achaia, in preparation for one to Jerusalem, and finally to Rome. So he sent Timothy and Erastus on ahead to Macedonia, which would of course include Philippi. After that visit to Macedonia and Greece Paul returned to Philippi, from which he sailed with Timothy in his company. He was probably with him all the way to Rome, and we find him mentioned as sharer in the imprisonment both here and in Colossians.

The references made to him point to a very sweet, good, pure and gracious character without much strength, needing to be stayed and stiffened by the stronger character, but full of sympathy, unselfish disregard of self, and consecrated love to Christ. He had been surrounded with a hallowed atmosphere from his youth, and from a child had known the holy Scriptures, and prophecies like fluttering doves had gone before on him. He had often infirmities and tears. He needed to be roused to stir up the gift that was in him, and braced up not to be ashamed, but to fight against the disabling spirit of fear, and to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

The bond between these two was evidently very close, and the Apostle felt something of a paternal interest in the very weakness of character which was in such contrast to his own strength, and which obviously dreaded the discouragement which was likely to be produced by his own martyrdom. This favourite companion he will now send to his favourite church. The verses of our text express that intention, and give us a glimpse into the Apostle's thoughts and feelings in his imprisonment.

**I. The prisoner's longing and hope.**

The first point which strikes us in this self-revelation of Paul's is his conscious uncertainty as to his future. In the previous chapter (ver. 25) he is confident that he will live. In the verses immediately preceding our text he faces the possibility of death. Here he recognises the uncertainty but still trusts that he will be liberated, but yet he does not know how it may go with him. We think of him in his lodging sometimes hoping and sometimes doubting. He had a tyrant's caprice to depend on, and knew how a moment's whim might end all. Surely his way of bearing that suspense was very noteworthy and noble. It is difficult to keep a calm heart, and still more difficult to keep on steadily at work, when any moment might bring the victor's axe. Suspense almost enforces idleness, but Paul crowded these moments of his prison time with letters, and Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon are the fruits for which we are indebted to a period which would have been to many men a reason for throwing aside all work.

How calmly too he speaks of the uncertain issue! Surely never was the possibility of death more quietly spoken of than in so soon as I shall see how it will go with me. That means--as soon as my fate is decided, be it what it may, I will send Timothy to tell you. What a calm pulse he must have had! There is no attitudinising here, all is perfectly simple and natural. Can we look, do we habitually look, into the uncertain future with such a temper--accepting all that may be in its grey mists, and feeling that our task is to fill the present with strenuous loving service, leaving tomorrow with all its alternatives, even that tremendous one of life and death, to Him who will shape it to a perfect end?

We note, further, the purpose of Paul's love. It is beautiful to see how he yearns over these Philippians and feels that his joy will be increased when he hears from them. He is sure, as he believes, to hear good, and news which will be a comfort. Among the souls whom he bore on his heart were many in the Macedonian city, and a word from them would be like cold water to a thirsty soul.

What a noble suppression of self; how deep and strong the tie that bound him to them must have been! Is there not a lesson here for all Christian workers, for all teachers, preachers, parents, that no good is to be done without loving sympathy? Unless our hearts go out to people we shall never reach their hearts. We may talk to them for ever, but unless we have this loving sympathy we might as well be silent. It is possible to pelt people with the Gospel, and to produce the effect of flinging stones at them. Much Christian work comes to nothing mainly for that reason.

And how deep a love does he show in his depriving himself of Timothy for their sakes, and in his reason for sending him! Those reasons would have been for most of us the strongest reason for keeping him. It is not everybody who will denude himself of the help of one who serves him as a child serveth a father, and will part with the only like-minded friend he has, because his loving eye will clearly see the state of others.

Paul's expression of his purpose to send Timothy is very much more than a piece of emotional piety. He hopes in the Lord to accomplish his design, and that hope so rooted and conditioned is but one instance of the all-comprehending law of his life, that, to him, to live is Christ. His whole being was so interpenetrated with Christ's that all his thoughts and feelings were in the Lord Jesus. So should our purposes be. Our hopes should be derived from union with Him. They should not be the play of our own fancy or imagination. They should be held in submission to him, and ever with the limitation, Not as I will, but as Thou wilt. We should be trusting to Him to fulfil them. If thus we hope, our hopes may lead us nearer to Jesus instead of tempting us away from Him by delusive brightnesses. There is a religious use of hope not only when it is directed to heavenly certainties, and enters within the veil, but even when occupied about earthly things. Spenser twice paints for us the figure of Hope, one has always something of dread in her blue eyes, the other, and the other only, leans on the anchor, and maketh not ashamed; and her name is Hope in the Lord.

**II. The prisoner solitary among self-seeking men.**

With wonderful self-surrender the Apostle thinks of his lack of like-minded companions as being a reason for depriving himself of the only like-minded one who was left with him. He felt that Timothy's sympathetic soul would truly care for the Philippians condition, and would minister to it lovingly. He could rely that Timothy would have no selfish by-ends to serve, but would seek the things of Jesus Christ. We know too little of the circumstances of Paul's imprisonment to know how he came to be thus lonely. In the other Epistles of the Captivity we have mention of a considerable group of friends, many of whom would certainly have been included in a list of the like-minded. We hear, for example, of Tychicus, Onesimus, Aristarchus, John Mark, Epaphras, and Luke. What had become of them all we do not know. They were evidently away on Christian service, somewhere or other, or some of them perhaps had not yet arrived. At all events for some reason Paul was for the time left alone but for Timothy. Not that there were no Christian men in Rome, but of those who could have been sent on such an errand there were none in whom love to Christ and care for His cause and flock were strong enough to mark them as fit for it.

So then we have to take account of Paul's loneliness in addition to his other sorrows, and we may well mark how calmly and uncomplainingly he bears it. We are perpetually hearing complaints of isolation and the difficulty of finding sympathy, or people who understand me. That is often the complaint of a morbid nature, or of one which has never given itself the trouble of trying to understand others, or of showing the sympathy for which it says that it thirsts. And many of these complaining spirits might take a lesson from the lonely Apostle. There never was a man, except Paul's Master and ours, who cared more for human sympathy, had his own heart fuller of it, and received less of it from others than Paul. But he had discovered what it would be blessedness for us all to lay to heart, that a man who has Christ for his companion can do without others, and that a heart in which there whispers, Lo, I am with you always, can never be utterly solitary.

May we not take the further lesson that the sympathy which we should chiefly desire is sympathy and fellow-service in Christian work? Paul did not want like-minded people in order that he might have the luxury of enjoying their sympathy, but what he wanted was allies in his work for Christ. It was sympathy in his care for the Philippians that he sought for in his messenger. And that is the noblest form of like-mindedness that we can desire--some one to hold the ropes for us.

Note, too, that Paul does not weakly complain because he had no helpers. Good and earnest men are very apt to say much about the half-hearted way in which their brethren take up some cause in which they are eagerly interested, and sometimes to abandon it altogether for that reason. May not such faint hearts learn a lesson from him who had no man like-minded, and yet never dreamt of whimpering because of it, or of flinging down his tools because of the indolence of his fellow-workers?

There is another point to be observed in the Apostle's words here. He felt that their attitude to Christ determined his affinities with men. He could have no deep and true fellowship with others, whatever their name to live, who were daily seeking their own, and at the same time leaving unsought the things of Jesus Christ. They who are not alike in their deepest aims can have no real kindred. Must we not say that hosts of so-called Christian people do not seem to feel, if one can judge by the company they affect, that the deepest bond uniting men is that which binds them to Jesus Christ? I would press the question, Do we feel that nothing draws us so close to men as common love to Jesus, and that if we are not alike on that cardinal point there is a deep gulf of separation beneath a deceptive surface of union, an unfathomable gorge marked by a quaking film of earth?

It is a solemn estimate of some professing Christians which the Apostle gives here, if he is including the members of the Roman Church in his judgment that they are not like-minded with him, and are seeking their own, not the things of Jesus Christ. We may rather hope that he is speaking of others around him, and that for some reason unknown to us he was at the time secluded from the Roman Christians. He brings out with unflinching precision the choice which determines a life. There is always that terrible either--or. To live for Christ is the antagonist, and only antagonist of life for self. To live for self is death. To live for Jesus is the only life. There are two centres, heliocentric and geocentric as the scientists say. We can choose round which we shall draw our orbit, and everything depends on the choice which we make. To seek the things of Jesus Christ is sure to lead to, and is the only basis of, care for men. Religion is the parent of compassion, and if we are looking for a man who will care truly for the state of others, we must do as Paul did, look for him among those who seek the things of Jesus Christ.

**III. The prisoner's joy in loving co-operation.**

The Apostle's eulogium on Timothy points to his long and intimate association with Paul and to the Philippians knowledge of him as well as to the Apostle's clinging to him. There is a piece of delicate beauty in the words which we may pause for a moment to point out. Paul writes as a child serveth a father, and the natural sequence would have been so he served me, but he remembers that the service was not to him, Paul, but to another, and so he changes the words and says he served with me in furtherance of the Gospel. We are both servants alike--Christ's servants for the Gospel.

Paul's joy in Timothy's loving co-operation was so deep because Paul's whole heart was set on the furtherance of the Gospel. Help towards that end was help indeed. We may measure the ardour and intensity of Paul's devotion to his apostolic work by the warmth of gratitude which he shows to his helper. They who contribute to our reaching our chief desire win our warmest love, and the catalogue of our helpers follows the order of the list of our aims. Timothy brought to Paul no assistance to procure any of the common objects of human desires. Wealth, reputation, success in any of the pursuits which attract most men might have been held out to the Apostle and not been thought worth stooping to take, nor would the offerer have been thanked, but any proffered service that had the smallest bearing on that great work to which Paul's life was given, and which his conscience told him there would be a curse on himself if he did not fulfil, was welcomed as a priceless gift. Do we arrange the lists of our helpers on the same fashion, and count that they serve us best who help us to serve Christ? It should be as much the purpose of every Christian life as it was that of Paul to spread the salvation and glory of the name that is above every name. If we lived as continually under the influence of that truth as he did, we should construe the circumstances of our lives, whether helpful or hindering, very differently, and we could shake the world.

Christian unity is very good and infinitely to be desired, but the true field on which it should display itself is that of united work for the common Lord. The men who have marched side by side through a campaign are knit together as nothing else would bind them. Even two horses drawing one carriage will have ways and feelings and a common understanding, which they would never have attained in any other way. There is nothing like common work for clearing away mists. Much so-called Christian sympathy and like-mindedness are something like the penal cranks that used to be in jails, which generated immense power on this side of the wall but ground out nothing on the other.

Let us not forget that in the field of Christian service there is room for all manner of workers, and that they are associated, however different their work. Paul often calls Timothy his fellow-labourer, and once gives him the eulogium, he worketh the work of the Lord as I also do. Think of the difference between the two men in age, endowment, and sphere! Apparently Timothy at first had very subordinate work taking John Mark's place, and is described as being one of those who ministered to Paul. It is the cup of cold water over again. All work done for the same Lord, and with the same motive is the same; he that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward. When Paul associates Timothy with himself he is copying from afar off his Lord, who lets us think of even our poor deeds as done by those whom He does not disdain to call His fellow-workers. It would be worth living for if, at the last, He should acknowledge us, and say even of us, he hath served with Me in the Gospel.