Philippians - Commentaries by Henry Allan Ironside

Daily Sacrifice, September 23

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“Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God”— Philippians 4:6.

WE would receive more from God if we were more grateful for what He has bestowed His us already.

Everything we have is the expression of His Fatherly care and the evidence of His love. Therefore we are exhorted to give thanks always for all things (Eph. 5:20), knowing that “all things work together for good to them that love God” (Rom. 8:28). And as we recognize His faithfulness in the past, we can pray with confidence, counting upon His loving care for the present and the future. If we fail to avail ourselves of the high privilege of bringing our petitions to Him in faith, we both wrong our own souls and dishonor His holy name, who bids us thus to ask and receive according to His royal bounty.

—Barbara C. Ryberg.

Daily Sacrifice, September 24

“I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content”— Philippians 4:11.

THIS is the language of one who knew God as a loving and wise Father who ever has in mind the best interests of His children—those who have been born into the family of the redeemed through faith in that gospel which is the power of God unto salvation to all who believe. Since God has given His Son for our salvation, how can we doubt His goodness and so fret against circumstances which He has ordained for our blessing. We are to give thanks always for all things, knowing that all things work together for the good of those who love God.

—K. Cameron Ward.

Continual Burnt Offering: Daily Meditations, October 30

“But my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus” — Philippians 4:19.

SOME one has called this verse a blank check on the Bank of Faith to be filled in by the believer as need arises. The Bank’s credit is infinite. There are assets in abundance, riches of grace, riches of love, riches of mercy, and riches of glory. Whatever the circumstances in which the child of God is found there is sufficient for every need, whether temporal or spiritual. We are to be anxious about nothing, but prayerful for everything as we come to God in a spirit of thanksgiving to appropriate in faith what He delights to give. We are so prone to doubt and worry when we should trust and enjoy the goodness of our Father’s mercies. A motto we have often seen says, “If you worry you do not trust. If you trust you do not worry.” Commit all to Him. Claim His promise and He will meet every need.

Continual Burnt Offering: Daily Meditations, October 29

“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 of God in Christ Jesus” — Philippians 3:13, 14.

PAUL was no “sinless perfectionist.” After he had walked with God and served his Lord for a generation, he did not yet consider that he had laid hold in all its fullness, of that for which God had laid hold of him. One thing only he had laid hold of, and that covered all his experience—namely, that he was ever to press on, forgetting past experiences and reaching forth to new appreciation of what God had for him in Christ. The prize of the high calling was to be fully conformed to his Lord. This would not be until he met Him and stood face to face. Then he would be transformed into His image.

Daily Sacrifice, September 22

“What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ”— Philippians 3:7.

EVERY conversion is a miracle. It is God who produces this inward change through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, who effects it by the Word of Truth. But all conversions exe not accompanied by outward signs. To most, “the kingdom of God cometh not with observation” (Luke 17:20). However, Paul’s conversion is definitely typical, involving a sense of sin, and a recognition of Christ Jesus as the only Saviour.

When the soul is committed to Him, one is saved. This calls for recognition of His authority over the life, and a readiness to be directed by Him as the risen Lord. From the moment Saul's heart was won for that Jesus whose followers he had persecuted and whom he had looked upon as an impostor, his one great yearning desire was to know Him better and to glorify Him in all things. This should be characteristic of those who have yielded their hearts to Him.

—W. M. Czamanske.

Daily Sacrifice, September 21

"We... worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh"—Philippians 3:3.

THE Holy Spirit delights to occupy our hearts and minds with Christ. It is as we are taken up with Him that we bow before God in adoration and thanksgiving for what He is as revealed in Jesus Christ and in His Fatherly care. This is worship in the highest sense. It is a great and holy spiritual frame, far above forms and ceremonies, whether found in the Old Testament Scriptures or invented by men in the Christian era. In fact, such carnal rites are rather hindrances than helps, for they tend to occupy us with things seen and heard, rather than with the Lord Himself.

—Mary Bowley.

Continual Burnt Offering: Daily Meditations, October 28

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" —Philippians 2:5-8.

THE mind that was in Christ Jesus is the lowly mind. He ever sought the glory of His Father and the blessing of others. In His gracious condescension He who had every right to command became servant of all. Though in the form of God from Eternity He did not consider equality with God the Father something to be retained, but He divested Himself of the outward semblance of Deity, the glory that He had with the Father before the world was, and took a bondman's form. Having become Man He humbled Himself yet farther, stooping to death, and such a death, that of the cross. This is the One whose example the Spirit brings before us, that our ways may be conformed to His.

Divine Priorities and Other Messages, 7. The Humiliation of Christ

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."—PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11

THE Epistle to the Philippians is one with which I am sure we are all very familiar. It is the epistle of Christian experience. It does not deal with the great and high doctrines of our Faith, yet there is a wonderful background of doctrine running all the way through as evidenced particularly in the passage I have just read. But in the Epistle to the Philippians the Spirit of God is dealing particularly with Christian experience, and this really consists of three things. First of all, the knowledge of Christ. Until one knows Christ he is not a Christian and until one becomes a Christian he cannot have a Christian experience. So it begins with the knowledge of Christ. Second, the enjoyment of Christ. No one has a true Christian experience who is not enjoying fellowship with the Lord Jesus. We realize at once that if that be true there are a great many experiences Christians have which should never be termed Christian experience. It is quite possible for Christians to be out of fellowship with their Lord and have very grievous experiences as a result, and those experiences should never be designated as Christian experiences. Third, the manifestation of Christ. We have real Christian experience only as Christ. is seen in our lives, and that comes out very beautifully in this letter to the Philippians.

The epistle naturally divides into four parts, according to the chapters. In Chapter 1 the outstanding theme is Christ as the believer's life; in Chapter 2, Christ as the believer's example; in Chapter 3, Christ as the believer's object; in Chapter 4, Christ as the believer's strength and his all-sufficient supply. This letter is, if I may put it so, one of the most psychological of all the New Testament writings. I am using the term psychological as it is ordinarily used today. Psychology is supposed to be the science of the mind. In the Bible, psychology is connected with the soul instead of the mind, but I am using the word as we use it today. We have a great deal about the mind in the letter to the Philippians. Of course, when you consider Christian experience you have to take into account the activity of the mind.

In Chapter 1, where we have already said Christ set forth as the believer's life, we have linked with that the Gospel mind or evangelistic spirit. We who are saved are saved through the Evangel, that is, the Gospel. We believed God's good news about His Son. Many believed intellectually many years before they appropriated it for themselves, but when they risked everything for eternity upon His Word they received divine life. "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever . . . and this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you."

Having been saved through the Gospel, a Christian who is living in fellowship with his Lord must of necessity be concerned about getting that Gospel out to others. So the Apostle Paul wrote, "Only let your behaviour he as it becometh the gospel of Christ. . . that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel." Are you evangelistically minded? Are you really concerned about getting the

Gospel out to other people?

Real Christians are never satisfied with just going to heaven themselves—they want to bring as many with them as they can. That is the evangelistic spirit, the Gospel mind.

In Chapter 2 the apostle brings before us the lowly mind or humble spirit. “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” Pride, vanity, conceit, haughtiness—all that is contrary to the spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ should never be found in Christians. Yet we all have to confess how we fail, how much pride we have hidden away, how much vanity, self-seeking———but all these mar and destroy true Christian experience.

Then we turn to Chapter 3, where we have Christ as the believer’s object, and we have the steadfast mind. Everyone is called on to pursue without deviation the object before us—of someday becoming like Christ in glory. We say with the apostle, “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 of God in Christ Jesus.” And he adds, “Let us therefore, as many as be mature, be thus minded” —a steadfast mind.

Chapter 4, which shows Christ as our strength and all-sufficient supply, stresses the importance of the trustful mind or confident spirit which enables one to say, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”

This is a wonderful letter. Four chapters teeming with precious things which, made your own by the power of the Spirit, will lead you on to a richer, deeper spiritual life.

But now in the verses I have read we have presented the Lord Jesus Christ as our pattern. See the depths of suffering into which He went and the heights of glory to which the Father has raised Him. I want you to consider these things with me, especially in view of the fact that we are going to observe the Lord’s Supper, remembering again our Saviour who took our place on the cross and who said, “This do in remembrance of me.” We not only remember the work He did. We love to dwell on that, but we also seek to be occupied with the Person who did the work. had He been any less than He was He would not have been efficient to atone for our sins. He had to be what He was in order to do what He did.

The Apostle Peter says he was a witness of the suffering of Christ and a partaker of the glory to follow, We were not permitted. to stand by the cross and see what our Saviour underwent, but we may in faith through the aid of the Holy Spirit stand by that cross and contemplate Him hanging there and dwell upon His suffering and sorrow, and it is good for our own souls that we do this. It was for our guilt that He was there upon that tree. Oh, surely, in view of Calvary we might well banish every hateful proud thought, everything like vanity or self-conceit! Surely these should have no place at His table!

Let us look at this passage. “Let this mind” —that is the lowly mind, the humble mind—it is distinctly called the mind of Christ. In the earlier part of the chapter the apostle besought the Philippians to be of one mind. How is it possible for people to be of one mind? Take a throng in a great church. They represent so many different nationalities; if you go back far enough, possibly even different races, different heredity; environment and cultural opportunities have been so different. How is it possible, then, for people who have had all these varied connections in the past and present to be of one mind? Of course, we will never look at everything the same way. We do not look at political problems or national problems the same way, much less all our spiritual problems. Nevertheless, if we all show forth the wind of Christ—all manifest that lowliness and grace seen in Him—we shall be of one mind. “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” —that mind that led Him to come to earth for our redemption, to leave heaven’s glory— “who subsisting in the form of God . . .” You could not find any stronger term. No angel subsisted in the form of God. No created being subsisted in the form of God. But Jesus, from all eternity, subsisted in the form of God. He was one with God the Father. He thought it not robbery to be equal with God. It was robbery on the part of our first parents when they heeded the tempter, who told them, “Ye shall be as gods.” They reached out to become as gods, and it was robbery—it was theft. But He thought it not robbery to be equal with God. When He said, “I and my Father are one” He was not vaingloriously aspiring to a place that did not belong to Him. He was declaring a self-evident truth. It might be translated differently. “He counted not equality with God a thing to be retained.” He was always one with God but stooped to become a servant. He might have said, “There is no occasion for me to leave the place I have had with my Father from eternity, no occasion to go down and take the burden of guilty man’s sin.” But no, that would not be Jesus! He counted not equality with God a thing to be retained. He said, “I will give it all up—the glory I had with the Father before the world was—and I will go down to the lost world to settle the sin question for guilty men.” “He made himself of no reputation!” How truly these words were fulfilled in the place He took on earth. Men treated Him. with contumely. They said He was a devil and a Samaritan. There was nothing you could say of another that conveyed greater contempt. He took the, lowest place. “The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.” I was reading a book some time ago in which the writer used an expression I did not like, yet I realized how naturally one might use it if one did not know the full glory of Christ, It was, “Jesus, that marvelous tramp, who has given the world such high ethical standards.” Jesus a tramp! That is what He seemed like to the men of His day. He had no home— He was glad to receive a drink of water at the hand of a Samaritan woman.

—PAUL GERHARDT.

Thus wrote one of the great German pietists in the seventeenth century. This wonderful Jesus, this homeless Stranger, made Himself of no reputation. But here another rendering might be suggested. He emptied Himself or divested Himself. That is, He who was God from eternity threw aside His glory, the insignia of His rank, and came to this world and became poorer than the poorest in order that we might share His riches. There are those who have misunderstood this and said that He emptied Himself of His true deity, of His omnipotence, omnipresence and omniscience, and therefore when He was here on earth He was just a man like other men and so limited that when He spoke of the Old Testament as the Word of God He was just expressing the opinion if the people of His day. He did not know any better; He did not know it was not inspired by God. So they tell us, but Scripture tells us though He humbled Himself, divested Himself, He did not cease to be for one moment true God, and He could say, “The words I speak. are not mine but the Father’s that sent me.” Whenever He referred to Scripture it was the Father putting His seal upon the Old Testament. His voice was the voice of God.

As a king might lay aside his gorgeous robes, stoop down to take the place and clothing of a workman, so our Lord Jesus laid His glory by and came in the world to die for us. He emptied Himself and took upon Himself the form of a servant. The world came into existence at His command; it was He who created the universe—but now He chose to become a servant. The word for servant here is really slave or bondman.

He came into this world and surrendered His will, for He said, “I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.” He came in the likeness of man, He was a real man, a true man, with all a man’s sensitive nature and with all a man’s interest in things about him, and then having been found in fashion as a man—as though that were not enough and it was not enough for if He would save sinners the incarnation alone would not do, He gave His life on Calvary to redeem sinners. I say it reverently, the Son of God could not save men by His incarnation, His birth at Bethlehem—God made manifest in the flesh—was not enough. He must go deeper yet! Calvary must follow Bethlehem. So “being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” I wish I could read that in the spirit the apostle wrote it. I wish it were possible to put in my voice the pathos and tenderness which I know were welling in his heart. Let me try to read it, changing the translation slightly. “Who, being in the form of God, thought equality with God not something to be grasped, but divested himself and took upon himself the form of a bondman and became in the likeness of man: and having been found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, such a death, that of the cross.” The most degrading form of death to which man could be subjected in that day was crucifixion. Yet He chose that. He went to the cross in order that there He might settle the sin question and redeem our guilty souls. Is it any wonder this same apostle said, “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world”? There upon that cross He was delivered to death for our offenses, and when He had put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, they laid His precious body in the tomb, and three days later He was raised again for on justification. And so we read, “God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and those on earth should those in the infernal regions, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Oh, how God delighted to raise up His Son and give Him the highest place as man in the universe when His work was finished! You see, He always belonged on the Throne of God as the Eternal Son, but now, since He has gone back to heaven as man, there is someone there who was not seen before. There is a man on the throne of God—the man Christ Jesus! We like to speak of Him as the Man in the Glory. He sits exalted there, our great high priest and intercessor. Some day He is coming back. One can understand the joy of Bunyan’s Pilgrim who, when traveling so far with his burdens on his back, came to the cross and there just beyond it the empty tomb. At the sight of that empty cross his burden fell from his back and tumbled into the tomb. He fairly danced with joy as he cried:

For me! Can your heart say that? For me! You say, “I know He died for sinners,” but has He saved you? I was reading only this morning how a gentleman went into the home of a very poor old lady and he saw something on the wall that attracted his attention.

He said, “What is that on the wall?”

“I just don’t know what it be but it is a paper my uncle sent me and I just don’t like to throw it away and I just keep it there in remembrance.”

He exclaimed, “Don’t you see what it is!”

“No, I just don’t understand it.”

“Well, it’s a bank check. Look! There is the name of the bank on which it is drawn and ‘Pay to Jennie Johnson the sum of $500,’ and there is your uncle’s name at the bottom of it.”

“What,” she says, “did he intend me to have that money and I have been living in poverty all these years!” And it wasn’t too late to cash in. How many people are like that. They believe the Word and God’s promise—in a certain sense. They know Jesus died to put away sin. But they have never cashed in, they have never trusted Him for themselves.

Is this true of you? If so, why not put in your claim now? Look up to God in faith. Tell Him you are the sinner for whom Christ died and that now you take Him as your own Saviour. Be assured that if you do this He will receive you, cleanse and pardon you, and make you His own forever.

Continual Burnt Offering: Daily Meditations, November 23

“If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as, myself. If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account; I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it: albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides” — Philemon 17-19.

WE have a lovely gospel medallion in this short letter to Philemon. A poor thieving runaway slave, Onesimus, who had been saved through contact with the Apostle Paul in prison, was going back to his master and this letter was to be his passport to favor, Paul undertook to stand surety for all the wrong done, even as Jesus has made Himself responsible for our sins and iniquities. Then Paul requested that Philemon receive Onesimus as if he were the apostle himself. He was to be accepted according to his master’s estimate of Paul. In this we see how all believers, though once lost sinners, have now been accepted in the Beloved and are treated by the Father according to His thoughts of His own Son.

Continual Burnt Offering: Daily Meditations, October 27

“For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain”—Philippians 1:21.

THESE words express, as none others could, the secret of Paul’s wonderful missionary activity and his deep devotion to the will of the Lord. From the moment when divine grace arrested him on the Damascus turnpike to his last hour on earth, he had yielded his heart wholly to the Blessed One who had saved him. Life meant only one thing for him, and that, the opportunity to become better acquainted with the Lord Jesus Christ and to serve Him wholeheartedly. Nothing else seemed worth while. All that earth could offer was but as filth and dross compared to this (Phil. 3:7-9). He had learned to look at everything below the skies in the light of the cross of Christ (Gal. 6:14). Now he looked forward eagerly to the end of the way, when he should be with Christ and receive at His hand the recognition of His approval of his service.

— Robert R. Pentecost.

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