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LEARNING FOR LIFE



The
High Calling of God
to the
Present Church

CLELAND B. McAFEE

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FOREWORD



Fine money

The 155th General Assembly, meeting in May, 1943, issued the following call to spiritual advance:

“The time has come in the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. for an ‘all out’ effort on the part of its leaders and members, under the guidance of the Spirit of God, to fit the Church to meet the spiritual needs of a world at war, and to prepare it to minister in the Spirit of Christ to mankind everywhere in the future day of reconstruction and peace.”

The Church secured Dr. Cleland B. McAfee to write especially for our use this year a Bible study on Philippians, **THE HIGH CALLING OF GOD TO THE PRESENT CHURCH**. Use of this material should draw many of our people back to the study of the Word which, with prayer, must undergird our efforts to answer this call of the General Assembly.

The High Calling of God to the Present Church

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“LEARNING FOR LIFE”

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FIRST STUDY

The High Calling of God to Closer Fellowship

Phil. 1:1-26

In preparation, read the entire assigned section straight through as it stands. Then read it again with the point of view of its revelation of the call of God to the Church.

The Philippian Church was especially dear to the Apostle Paul. Philippi, named for the great Philip of Macedon, was his first point of contact with Europe, Acts 16:12, where he had his first European convert and one of his worst physical experiences, out of which came the converted jailer. These converts afterward expressed their loyalty with devotion and frequent aid.

The Epistle to the Philippians is an intimate letter, but it is addressed, ch. 1:1, to “the saints” (those who are set apart to God—not perfect people, as the word popularly suggests) and to their “bishops” (elders) and “deacons.” The elders maintained the spiritual aspect of the fellowship in the Church and the deacons maintained the co-operative, helpful element. Remember how the deacons started, Acts 6:1-6. The letter is, then, to a Church—to an organized, integrated group. The call of God was not to Paul alone, nor to the individual saints, but to the Church, as it is to the present Church. We will keep this point of view in these six Studies.

As to the “calling of God in Christ Jesus,” which we take as the theme of the letter, look up these striking phrases about it:

A high calling, Phil. 3:14—the margin and the Greek read, “The upward calling,” not to a position, but to advance;

A holy calling, II Tim. 1:9—a life of holiness, devotion to God;

A heavenly calling, Heb. 3:1—toward heavenly ideals here on earth;

A hopeful calling, Eph. 1:18—a calling in which the hopes of God and the believer unite in assured outcome.

What does each of these mean for a Church, your Church? A father’s call to his son is an invitation if the son comes willingly; it is a command if he needs to be commanded. How do you feel about the call of God? Is it disloyalty to refuse it or to chafe under it? There is a call of God in the terrific demands of the present day: What does your Church plan to do about it? Is your outlook shot through with hope?

1. The closer fellowship will appear in richer living. Ch. 1:1-11.

Is there any fellowship closer than that among believers in the one Christ? In his *Flight to Arras*, Saint-Exupéry speaks of the ties that bind men: “One can be a brother only *in* something. When there is no tie that binds men, men are not united but merely lined up. One cannot be a brother to nobody. The pilots of Group 2-33 are brothers in the Group. Frenchmen are brothers in France. . . . So I understand the origin of brotherhood among men. Men are brothers in God.” The Church is one in Christ. A hand can move only as it

is part of a body, and a body can grasp only by a hand. The two work together—the believer and the Church.

The purpose of fellowship is the “furtherance of the gospel,” v. 5, but never alone, for God began the good work among us and will see it through, v. 6. Our problem now is not whether to push the Gospel farther on its way, but where and how to do it. All earnest men share the apostle’s wish to keep better posted about good people everywhere, knowing that they share hardships and difficulties and receive the same generous gifts of God’s grace, v. 7. There is comfort in many a concentration camp and in many a Chinese village in the assurance that Christian people in other lands are sharing their distress and are assured of the outcome in the advancement of the Gospel. How do you keep informed about your wide Christian brotherhood? Perhaps your pastor can tell you how to do it.

And when we pray for others, what shall we ask? Note the wealth of the petition in vs. 9-11—love, knowledge, discernment (insight). The outcome is to be: (a) such insight that only the right things are approved; (b) a true sincerity, “perfect openness with God”; (c) a clearing of all offensive elements from life; (d) a rich fruitage in righteousness. Do you pray as richly as this for your friends? Many proposals are made for the new world order: Which of them shall we approve? Which are “excellent” and which are defective? We might say here again: Now abideth love, knowledge, insight, but the greatest of these in a stricken world is love.

Dr. Rufus Jones says that “essential Christianity is above everything else a skyward lift.” God’s calling is an upward calling, to richer fellowship. After the serious check of war, when so much of the life of the Church is interfered with, we have a right to look for the uplift of the power of God, preparing the Church for a larger and higher service. Where shall the uplift be seen? Surely in the life of believers—in your life first of all. Professor Palmer’s word is often quoted: “The most consummately beautiful thing in the universe is the rightly fashioned life of a good person.” And Studdert-Kennedy told a group of young people that he was not the least bit afraid of hell, but was terribly afraid that someone someday would look him in the eye and ask, What did you make of your life? We are in the fellowship of Christ; how rich do we make it?

2. *The closer friendship will appear in dealing with divergences. Ch. 1:12-18.*

Read the verses again. This is a difficult passage, but it brings us squarely up to the fact of divergences among Christians. In those divergences are elements which sincere men cannot approve. They may arise out of difficulties such as the imprisonment of Paul here. Such difficulties are often overruled to the advantage of the Gospel in that they have to be talked about. But, even so, the talking may be inconsistent, some doing it in one way and some in another. If only all ministers and laymen could speak the same thing, or were equally sincere and unselfish! But what are we to do when some Church leaders appear to be seeking their own advantage, acting on mixed motives, stirring up strife by their messages.

Paul came to high ground in viewing all this—anyway, Christ is preached in this very divergence, v. 18. It is sometimes difficult to see that! But it does emerge sometimes. The Gospel may be brought to minds that had not thought of it before. The severity of enemies with Pastor Niemoeller, Bishop Berggrav, Heinrich Kraemer, has given some men thoughts of the Gospel which they had not had. Paul himself never forgot his sight of the martyr-

dom of Stephen. The cases are not parallel, to be sure, for the "enemies" in Rome were supposed to be advocates of Christ.

The main thing is not that others do it in my way. Some may even have poor motives, use mistaken terms. But do they really turn people's minds toward Christ? These odd groups which form always in connection with a war—how are we to feel about them? They multiply faster than normal Christian Churches. Can we rejoice in them in spite of disapproving much that they do and say? Can we catch a note of Christ even in their oddity?

Here is no note of pessimism. "Most of the brethren" are right, v. 14; it is only "some" who are on the wrong track, vs. 15, 17. Never forget that. Disturbed people sometimes think that pretty much everybody is wrong except their own small group. Remember "most" and "some." Calvin said about this passage, "Paul says nothing here that I have not experienced." This would also be true of most leaders of the Church. It takes a keen ear to catch the authentic note in some preaching, but one may be grateful if he has a keen ear.

The Westminster Confession of Faith gives fair warning of the need for discrimination even in official actions. "All synods or councils since the apostles' times, whether general or particular, may err, and many have erred; therefore they are not to be made the rule of faith or practice, but to be used as a help in both." Ch. XXXI, Sec. iii. But two further warnings are needed: (a) Though Church bodies *may* err, we are not to argue that when we differ from an action, it is necessarily wrong. Though they *may* err, they may also *not* err! And (b) the Form of Government says frankly that "there are truths and forms, with respect to which men of good characters and principles may differ. And in all these they think it the duty both of private Christians and societies, to exercise mutual forbearance towards each other," Ch. I, Sec. v.

3. *The closer fellowship will appear in mutual service. Ch. 1:19-26.*

Read these verses again. Lay stress on "this shall turn out," v. 19. It is never wise to judge an event all by itself. How will it turn out? God's hand is on life. Things often turn out as we should never have suspected just from looking at them. There is much discussion of the differences among early American leaders—Jefferson, Hamilton, Madison, Adams. Reviewing a recent book about them, a writer says that "this country became great, not in spite of their differences, but because of them." It is so with Christian history. Men who differed were often seeing different aspects of the rich truth which no one saw perfectly. We do not gain by agreements alone; we gain also by differences. As time goes on we find some new aspect of the truth even where men have differed in the past. There is error in the other way of seeing and saying it, but often there is a neglected phase of the truth in it too.

One factor in having hard things turn out well is the prayer of friends, v. 19. Prayer is a good antidote for the malice of enemies or the stupidity of blundering advocates. Your prayer and Christ's supply—that is a strong combination.

What happens to Paul is not a serious matter to him, vs. 20-26. These things really matter: (a) what happens to Christ because of Paul: Can He be magnified? (b) what happens to his own spirit: Will he be shamed or will he still be bold? (c) what happens to his fellow believers: Can he go on helping them, and will they have reason to glorify God because of him? Try these three tests on what is happening in the world to the

Church of Christ. What really matters about it? What really matters about what happens to you personally? or to your Church? Paul knew what he would like to do—he would like to go away and be with Christ, v. 23. But if there was something he could still do to help, he would waive that and stay here as long as he could.

This idea of continuing duty is the note on which the Confession of Faith closes. Its last sentence is: "All believers are, therefore, under obligation to sustain the ordinances of religion where they are already established, and to contribute by their prayers, gifts, and personal efforts, to the extension of the kingdom of Christ throughout the whole earth," Ch. XXXV, Sec. iv. Paul felt that obligation for himself and wanted his friends to feel it.

This is the note that runs through the letter—service. In the Third Study we are called to unselfish service, and in the Sixth to united service. The letter returns frequently to this dominant note, but so does the Gospel of Christ. It is a service Gospel.

As for our divergences, when the strain comes are they of first importance? A Roman Catholic chaplain went to a wounded boy at the front and knelt down beside him. The boy said, "But, Padre, I do not belong to your Church." "No," he replied, "but you belong to my God." In times like that, we do not accent differences which seem large to us at other times. Which are the wisest times? When are we most clear-minded regarding the essence of our faith? More of us belong to the same Christ than we think in times of cool discussion. When times of stress come, we rejoice that it is so. In times of quiet, the differences become clearer and cannot be waived freely, but we can seek to understand those who differ from us. We can count them mistaken in serious matters, but we can retain fellowship in spirit.

FOR DISCUSSION AND ACTION

1. Is the call of God a command, a request, an invitation, or just a suggestion?
2. Prayer for others is intercessory praying. Write out a brief intercessory prayer which will be your prayer for the younger Churches around the world. Now write another intercessory prayer such as a member of a younger Church in China might make for the Church in the United States.
3. Does the incident of the Roman Catholic chaplain seem to you valid for ordinary times or only for emergencies? Are we free to waive differences in faith and practice generally? What effect will it have on our sense "of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus"? Can you frame some rule and quote some Scripture passages which can be used in guiding us in our relationship to Christians who seem to differ rather widely from our beliefs and practices?

SECOND STUDY

To Worthy Christian Living

Phil. 1:27 to 2:11

In preparation, read the passage as it stands. Then read it again from the point of view of the high calling of God to the Church.

The relation of Christ to the Church is a favorite subject with this apostle. Christ is the Head of the Church, which is his body, Eph. 1:22, 23. He is the Head of the Church because he is its Saviour, Eph. 5:23. He is the chief cornerstone of the building into which believers are builded, Eph. 5:20-22. He is the Head of the Church and requires the pre-eminence, Col. 1:18, because he suffered for it, Col. 1:24.

Here the apostle makes the Gospel of Christ the standard for fine living. Whatever other standards there may be, whatever rules of life and conduct, this is the final one, Phil. 1:27. Everything turns on what one thinks of Christ and the Gospel. There are ways of minimizing both, making them easy to follow. Or, there are ways of putting them entirely out of reach and finding excuse for not attempting to be worthy of them because they are impossible. It is difficult to keep them where they belong, as standards of living—not easy living, not living that is readily attained, but challenging the best there is in us all the time.

In discussing postwar plans, we are often warned not to be chimerical and propose impossible lines of human behavior. At the end of the other war, M. Clemenceau said, "The trouble with Woodrow Wilson is that he talks like Jesus Christ." He meant that all such talk is out of the range of human effort. How far is that true? It does collide with much human thinking: Does it violate it or challenge it? Would it make men morbid if they asked whether their daily conduct is Christlike?

What shall be the test of the program of the Church as it faces the demands of this new day? How much of heroism can be expected of young people in the dedication of their lives? How much shall older people be expected to attempt in giving and in service? How much time may be asked of officers in the Church, and of the rank and file? What shall be the attitude of Church people toward proposals for the new world order of service? What plans shall the Church make for carrying the Gospel farther when the doors are open? What will be actual Christlike living?

1. Christian living must be worthy of the Gospel of Christ. Ch. 1:27-30.

That is, it is tested by thought of Christ's presence. Suppose he were there, how would it look to him? How would it look to you, if you saw him standing by? Have you ever been deeply mortified over something you have done or said when you suddenly noticed some special person standing by? He made it seem unworthy. Paul urges that his friends' "manner of life"—their whole way of living—"be worthy," v. 27. The manner of a Christian's life is more important than its details. Some men can do a poorer thing in

so fine a manner that it is better than a good thing done badly. Think of the warning in Rom. 14:16, "Let not then your good be evil spoken of." It is natural for one's evil to be condemned, but it is tragic when one's good is so badly done that it is condemned. Paul said it ought to make no difference to his friends whether he was with them or not, v. 27, but many of us are helped by the presence of a man whom we really honor because he reminds us of Christ and our own best selves.

In v. 28 there is an interesting word—"affrighted." It is the word used in Greek literature of horses, when they run away. Runaways have no sense; we say they are "scared out of their senses," an accurate description. They run from one danger into something worse, often killing themselves by a fall or an accident simply to get away from something that would not have hurt them at all. Paul says there is danger of Christians' doing this. The world did it a while ago. We ran from the League of Nations and landed in a worse war than anything the League at its worst could have demanded of us. We run from Christian fellowship at times and land in sterility and lifelessness, a condition far worse than anything a wider fellowship could have caused us.

Notice in vs. 29, 30 the double honor of a life worthy of Christ—belief and suffering. That was Jesus' own way of living. His sign is a cross. The familiar story of the Roman emperor Constantine and his dream or vision of a flaming cross and the words, "By this sign thou shalt conquer," is historically questioned. But it is certain that all Christian history has taken the cross as its symbol of victory as well as of suffering. Even as a symbol of relief from suffering we have taken the Red Cross. Paul sees in the opportunity for suffering in behalf of Christ one of our great honors. Can you think why that should be so? How is undeserved suffering a link with Christ?

Difficulties have to be taken for granted in a world like this where sin and misery are so common. The term Paul uses in v. 30, "conflict," is a word for a struggle in the arena or the athletic field. It is a conflict seen by a great many, not a mere private struggle in the dark. Epictetus, the slave-philosopher, born about 60 B.C., said, "Life is in reality an Olympic festival; we are God's athletes to whom he has given an opportunity of showing of what stuff we are made." Paul's figure is more tragic, I Cor. 15:32, though he does not imply that he was himself in the arena with the wild beasts. Certainly some early Christians were there. But the implication is that when even such an event transpires, there is honor in demonstrating what Christ can do for and with a believer. Consider the demonstration made by a courageous believer when he endures suffering for Christ: (*a*) to unbelievers; (*b*) to his fellow believers; (*c*) to Christ as his Master and Example. Do not count all this ancient history. Remember how many people in Korea have suffered for Christ and the witness they have borne to him. Think of interned missionaries at this time, whose witness is borne to unbelieving guards and to their fellow Christians. Think of Christians in concentration camps in Europe, among unbelieving compatriots and in presence of unbelieving guards. What demonstrations can they make?

On this whole matter of bearing something for Christ look up I Peter 3:14-18, where Peter is writing about the "manner of life" of believers and sees the element of suffering in it. In the Confession of Faith, Ch. XVI is "Of Good Works." It is well worth study just now. It says that when believers do good works which God commands they (*a*) "manifest their thankfulness," (*b*) "strengthen their assurance," (*c*) "edify their brethren," (*d*) "adorn the profession of the gospel," (*e*) "stop the mouths of the adversaries," (*f*) and

“glorify God”—a rather fine opportunity taken all together! The chapter adds that the “ability to do good works is not at all of themselves, but wholly from the Spirit of Christ.”

2. Worthy Christian living involves unselfish judgment of others and of oneself. Ch. 2:1-4.

The implication of v. 1 is that retaining full agreement with others requires strong drafts of help from one’s thought of God and his supply. It might be read this way: If you have found any encouragement or stimulus in Christ, if you have found any consolation in the reality of love, if you feel any fellowship with the Spirit of God, if you can realize the value of mercy and compassion—then let this help you to maintain unity with your fellows, even though it may be difficult!

There is a constant tension between our duty to others and our duty to ourselves. The Christian virtue of humility is not an easy one for most of us. Notice the warning in v. 3 against faction and vainglory. Put in those words all of us can see what is wrong with it. But when the verse goes on to say that each of us ought to rate other people better than himself, that makes the rub! It requires, as v. 4 suggests, that each of us ought to be blind to his own advantage and open-eyed to the advantage of others. How far can that be carried without becoming impossible?

Can our country apply it in thinking of needier lands, hungry after the war, unhoused, unclothed? Shall we say, “America first, then other lands as we can reasonably provide for them”? One speaker said recently, “So long as any man in America is poorly housed or hungry, we owe nothing to other people.” What is the truth of that, and what is its limitation? Is this one of the personal possibilities of the Christian life which cannot be expanded into national and international relations? Will we, when the din of war ends, continue to accept limitation and rationing for the sake of sending food and other supplies to needier people? What ought the Church to say or do about it?

How far can the Church, or one section of the Church, properly go in this exhortation to “the same mind” and “one accord”? Every earnest Christian rejoices in Christian unity, but he is concerned that the unity be real, and not mechanical or manufactured. Any Church has its own “mind,” and measures others by it. There is always danger of becoming a “faction” instead of a fraction of the one Church of Christ. The danger of “vainglory” is always with us—taking such pride in what our own Church has achieved, or in its present program, that other Churches seem unworthy to become part with us. The lowly mind of v. 3 is not natural to some of us and we do not easily think of others as better than ourselves. Indeed, there is a serious problem in the duty of thinking humbly of ourselves, for when we give glory to God we are forced to think of the things he has enabled us to do, and that easily becomes pride in ourselves.

But note in v. 4 that we are not estopped from thinking duly of our own things, but that we are to think *also* of others, never allowing our own concerns to absorb us so that others have no part in our thinking.

3. Worthy Christian living requires seeking the mind of Christ for one’s own life. Ch. 2:5-11.

This is one of the great passages of the letter, dealing with one of the greatest Christian ideas—how Christ came into human life. Read it very carefully. The idea is used here to make us conscious of what Christ thought of himself and his work in the world. Look up

the use of "mind" in I Cor. 2:16; Rom. 11:34; 8:27. It is His way of looking at everything. Here Paul is urging that believers have the same mind as Christ, and then he shows how utterly unselfish, how utterly self-forgetful, that mind is. It led Him to the most amazing sacrifice of honors and dignities, the deepest descent from the highest heights to save and help and serve men. Philippians 2:6-8 is a great staircase of descent down which our Lord came for our redemption. It runs from "existing in the form of God" to "the death of the cross." In presence of that stairway and the Figure coming down it, any arrogance or self-importance is unthinkable. What do we have to give up compared with his giving up? How much can the Church afford to sacrifice to have his mind? Where will his Gospel carry his followers?

But be sure to notice in v. 9 that it was God who exalted him after this descent. He did not claim it as his reward. He was not climbing upward while He seemed to be descending. Exaltation is God's doing, not ours. Only God can exalt the Church; it cannot exalt itself by any measure of sacrifice. Indeed, sacrifice that is practiced with one eye on subsequent advantage is not real sacrifice at all; it is simply advance payment for reward. The truth is that in the economy of God, which we do not control, the spirit of unselfish, unseeking service puts one in the way of God's honoring. When the Church forgets honors and position and simply sets out to serve at any cost to itself, having the mind of Christ in doing so, the result is in the hands of God.

See the universals in vs. 10, 11—above every name, every knee, all things in heaven, earth, under the earth, every tongue. Christ's lordship is not to his own glory, but to the glory of God the Father. Can the Church ask higher glory?

FOR DISCUSSION AND ACTION

1. What mistakes of the last war and postwar conference are we trying to avoid in the present war and the coming postwar conference? Start discussion with M. Clemenceau's remark about President Wilson quoted in the early part of the chapter.

2. One of our magazines printed an article entitled "Must America Play Atlas to the World?" Does the question seem to you fair with regard to our postwar plans? What ought to be the attitude of the American Church after this war toward the Churches in the less Christian lands?

3. A German scholar before the war said, "The Kingdom of God is wherever Jesus would feel at home." Is that a sound measure of the Kingdom? Make a list of the ways in which the present social order in the United States, as you know it, offends against it.

THIRD STUDY

The High Calling of God to Unselfish Service

Phil. 2:12-30

In this Study we come again to the idea of service, which recurs here and so often in Scripture. It is a word which can become smooth and meaningless through careless or too frequent use, like a coin handled often. But, also like the coin, its substance and force remain. We cannot escape the clear word of our Lord about himself—that he came, not to be served, but to serve, Mark 10:45. That is why the Church is left here in the world. Our problem is not to gain advantages for the Church, but to gain opportunities for it—a chance to undertake something more for those for whom Christ died. These lines were written for a minister in a very difficult place in a large city:

*It is great to be out where the fight is strong,
To be where the heaviest troops belong,
And to fight there for man and God!
O it sears the face and it tires the brain,
And it strains the arm till one's friend is pain,
In the fight for man and God.
But it's great to be out where the fight is strong,
To be where the heaviest troops belong,
And to fight there for man and God!*

Paul has two favorite titles for himself—"servant," or "bondservant," and "apostle." They are together in Titus 1:1, but in one form or another Paul uses them often. It seems more dignified to be an apostle, but after all an apostle is a man sent by somebody. He is not his own man; he belongs to the sender. A hired man in the most humble toil is no more a servant than a minister or a Christian worker in the highest place. The Bible concordance requires fifteen columns just to list the occurrences of terms of service. As the account goes on, the use of the term for God's people grows more common. That is their distinctive mark—they serve. Writing to the Galatians and urging them to use their freedom, Paul tells them that they are made free in order to serve others, Gal. 5:13. Peter tells his readers to gird themselves with humility so that they can serve one another, I Peter 5:5. Paul indicates that this is not to be done irksomely or with resentment but with good will, Eph. 6:7.

In a New England village cemetery is a notable stone marking the grave of an early resident. The inscription reads:

"Sacred to the memory of Amos Fortune, who was born free in Africa, a slave in America. He purchased his freedom, professed Christianity, lived respectably, died hopefully, November 17, 1801, aged 91."

In the town history he is named, "Amos Fortune, Citizen," the only one given the title. Here was a man who turned slavery into service, gaining an honorable name and leaving behind him memorials which serve humanity to this day. According to the tradition, the key to his record is in the clause, "professed Christianity." He became Christ's man, and therefore the servant of his fellows. The will of God was the law of his life.

The Great War involves all this. Are nations to think of themselves as being served or as serving? Is one nation in Europe to be dominant, the other peoples serving its needs and getting for themselves whatever of good they may in the process? Is one nation in Asia to be the head of a co-prosperity order in which other nations draw their own good from their relations to it? Is it chimerical to ask nations to find their strength in serving others? Is it "sentimental philanthropy which we must outgrow," as one senator urges?

And as to the Church, does it lay its plans today for larger things in any tomorrow that comes, responding to the high calling of God in Christ? Is it to be ready for new days, lengthening its cords and strengthening its stakes, Isa. 54:2?

1. The call to unselfish service requires the working out of the salvation which God works in us. Ch. 2:12-18.

Notice the phrase, "Your own salvation." No one can do it for you—not your best friend on earth, not a group of which you are part. Your Church cannot reach its full salvation by reason of its alliance with a great denomination. Recall the Negro spiritual "It's me, O Lord, standing in the need of prayer." In some things we stand stark and alone before God.

But no other is needed to help in that working, because God is always helping. He is working in us "both to will and to work, for his good pleasure," v. 13. A very wise Bible teacher, when he came to vs. 12 and 13, used to say, "What . . . God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." If we had only v. 12, charging us to work out our own salvation, we might despair. Verse 13 reassures us. We do not work alone. God began the work, as we noted in ch. 1:6. The Church is the body of Christ, who is its Head, and he is at work within it. What we are doing is working out what he has worked in. He inspires the will; he gives strength to do what is willed.

There is an important sense in which the purpose of God is not endangered by any human failure. But there is also a sense in which its progress and present efficiency do depend on what believers in Christ are willing to be and do in their own day. Believers are workers together with God, I Cor. 6:9, and their part in the enterprise is vital. Only God can make it successful, but we can make it a failure on our own part.

Verse 14 is vital to fine Christian living. Whatever we agree to do, we are to do without murmurings and questionings. This would remind the first readers of the letter of the Exodus from Egypt, with its repeated failures because of the murmuring of the people. Look it up in Ex. 15:24; 16:2; 17:3; Num. 14:2; Deut. 1:27. It almost wrecked the enterprise. But bring it nearer home. Some very good people find it hard to fall in with plans with which they do not wholly agree. They do their part, but with murmuring and questioning, not accepting them or throwing themselves into them. Many good plans fail because Christian people will not make a sincere attempt at them, but murmur and question because of elements in them which they do not like. They think it is noble to stand on one side, saying, "All right, it is your idea; go ahead and make it work; I will not hinder you," whereas they know the plan needs their co-operation. They find it difficult to say, "This

is not what I wanted, but this is what has been decided and I will do my part in it heartily because it has been decided.”

Then follows in vs. 15-17 an eightfold outcome for earnest and devoted believers. Read those verses again just now. Then notice the qualities:

Blameless.	Straight in a crooked world.
Harmless.	Obedient in a perverse world.
Children of God.	Shining in a dark world.
Unblemished.	Living in a dying world.

We do not yet have these eight qualities, but we are to “become” such. Do not be discouraged, says the apostle; that lies ahead of you. The word “lights” in v. 15 is “luminaries,” light givers, shining by an inner light. And v. 16 has the figure of “thrusting forward” the word of life, bringing it to the sight of others who would not see it if their attention were not arrested.

When those verses are lifted out of the purely personal field into that of the Church, they have double force. After all, it is only the Church which can be all those things in the whole world. No one believer can be so widely impressive as that list requires, but the Church can be everywhere. There is danger of our feeling that we do enough when we welcome others who may come to the light. We call our Church “the friendly Church,” or we say, “Once, and only once, a stranger,” and feel that this is our full word. But our part is to thrust the light out where people are. Some will not come to the Church; it is the Church’s part to go to those people. The light is here, but that is not enough; it must be put over there where they are. The last man, the last family, the last social group—these are the Church’s concern.

Paul goes on to say, vs. 17, 18, that it is worth anybody’s life to help in such a development. If it costs him his life, he can rejoice that he has had the chance, and anybody else ought to rejoice with him. When a missionary loses his life at some critical point in the world work, what shall be our attitude toward him? Shall we bemoan him, or shall we rejoice with him? A friend of one such missionary said, “It is exactly what he would have chosen if he had had the choice.” Is not that what Paul means here? Suppose your son or daughter wants to go to the place “where the fight is strong” and to join “the heaviest troops,” what will you say about it?

2. *Unselfish service involves caring truly for others. Ch. 2:19-24.*

This is a passage about young Timothy, whom Paul had found after John Mark had deserted Paul and Barnabas. The statement in v. 20 has a note of discouragement about others which is not familiar in Paul’s writings. How few people prove to be available in an emergency! There are plenty of people around, but no one is ready to do the particular thing that needs to be done. Many make excuses: some interest must be protected; already this man has more than he can do; the other man cannot give his time to it or his strength. Some might do it, but not cordially, not caring truly or genuinely about it. Is there any pastor or society leader who does not recognize the situation?

But here is Timothy: he is just the man and he will do it, v. 23!

A perennial Church problem, but also a perennial world problem. In the reconstruction days after the fighting ends, hundreds of men will be needed for specific work. The Government is trying to train them in large numbers. The right people with the right

spirit do not abound. They must not seek anything for themselves, but must think of the groups they are serving. How many such people do you know?

But the Church must keep seeking for such men as Timothy. Shall missionary candidates be sought and urged to go out, or shall they be left to volunteer? Would you have a Student Volunteer Movement, all volunteering, or a Missionary Recruiting Movement, the officers of the Boards seeking prospective workers? Will an unstirred Church raise up such volunteers? If we do not heed the high calling of God in Christ Jesus, what is the prospect of finding enough Timothys to do the work of the Gospel? Must not the Church itself learn the secret of caring truly for others, seeking nothing for itself but putting need first?

3. Unselfish service involves paying the price of helpfulness. Ch. 2:25-30.

This section tells of Epaphroditus, mentioned only here in the Bible. He had been sent from Philippi to carry some gifts to Paul at Rome. There he was taken very ill, and nearly died. This worried the friends at Philippi, as Paul knew it would do. He decided to send him back with this letter as soon as he was able to travel, and did so. That is the whole story that has come down to us.

But one cannot miss the deeper fact that here was a man who did not think of himself, but took any kind of physical risk necessary to do his work as a service of Christ, v. 30. He hazarded his life for Christian service. The same words are used about Barnabas and Paul in Acts 15:26. Travel for Christ was no easy journey as it can often be now. It involved perils by land and by sea, as Paul says in II Cor. 11:26. There is no merit in hazard for the sake of hazard or for the sake of adventure. No soldier has a right to risk his life foolishly, but neither has he a right to protect his life when duty demands risk. Missionaries have no right to run foolish risks, but neither do they claim the right to refuse the risks of their work. There is a price for the highest helpfulness and this must be paid when unselfish service requires it at home or abroad, on the battlefield or in the familiar places.

FOR DISCUSSION AND ACTION

1. If nations are to practice Christian relationship among themselves, what are some of the concrete issues that we shall need to solve about trade, education, citizenship, and race?
2. How far can one rightly go in supporting a program agreed upon by the majority or the responsible authority, when one's personal judgment has not been satisfied? Can you think out a principle for decision of duty here?
3. The Church is supposed to welcome all who will come into its membership. What is the Church's obligation to its members after they have joined? What is its obligation to nonmembers?

FOURTH STUDY

The High Calling of God to Greater Advancement

Phil. 3:1-16

The idea of going on in Christian graces, growing in the knowledge of Christ, developing the Christian life, is a familiar one in Scripture. There are calls to stand firm, to hold our ground, to abide in the things we have learned. But such calls never bid us to be stagnant or static. The Prophet Hosea, Hos. 6:3, tells us to “follow on to know the Lord,” and Peter tells us to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,” II Peter 3:18. Any religion that is all finished, fully understood, tucked in and completed, is not the real Christian faith.

President Mackay, of Princeton Seminary, has just given us an important book, *Heritage and Destiny*, in which he makes a strong point in favor of the value of memory. He argues that the heritage of any nation or Church is its determining influence. To be sure, there are several lines of heritage for any nation and the Church, and there is a certain choice among them. There is high inspiration in memory and much to shame us for our present position and to drive us on to something better. The past can be a drag or a drive. We can decide to preserve it, or we can decide to be true to its logic and go on to better things. God calls to greater advancement, inspired by the past.

At the close of the former World War, Benjamin Kidd, in his *Science of Power* (1918), declared that there is not an existing institution in the world of civilized humanity that cannot be profoundly modified or altered or abolished in a generation. Conditions are much more plastic than they seem at first sight. We can be lifted out of our grooves or ruts. We can go on in knowledge, in conduct, in spiritual appreciation, in worthy obedience. One of the psalmists faced difficulties around and within himself, so that he had to say, “My flesh and my heart faileth,” but he went on to say, “But God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever,” Ps. 73:26. That gives courage even when conditions seem against growth or advancement. It provides for cheer in facing the future, whatever has been the past. A quotation from Izaak Walton is going the rounds: “If thou be a sour-complexioned man, I disallow thee to be a judge of the matter,” that is, of the purpose of God for Christian advancement.

1. The advancement is to be in spiritual appreciation. Ch. 3:1-11.

Notice the opening words of v. 1: “Rejoice in the Lord.” Any outlook on the present world could reveal a multitude of reasons for depression and disheartenment. Some people think it “realistic” to see the adverse reasons everywhere and to pass over encouragements. Paul is in prison, word has come that good Epaphroditus is ill, only a few men are really unselfish, all sorts of things are going wrong—why should we not be depressed? Well, Paul says, because of the Lord! He is not in prison, He is not ill, He is not selfish, He is not going wrong. The late Bishop Quayle, of the Methodist Church, told that one night he

was so depressed about things in his area that he could not sleep, and at midnight he seemed to hear the Lord saying to him, "Now, Quayle, you go to bed; I'll sit up the rest of the night!" So he went to bed and slept peacefully. God is always sitting up when there is trouble in the world or in personal life. Depression does not fit us for the tasks God sets for us. We lack appreciation of what God means when we are depressed.

The apostle says it does not trouble him to write familiar things often because he knows it is good for his friends to hear them, v. 1. A minister once preached a sermon on "Love One Another." The next Sunday he preached it again, and the next. When a committee called on him to say that another sermon might be wise, he asked: "Why another? You haven't done that one yet!" A real sermon does not have to say something new each time. The old things may need to be said again and again. When a mother was asked why she told a child something twenty times, she replied, "Because nineteen times were not enough!"

But none of this call to "rejoice in the Lord" clouds a believer's mind to the evils that exist all around him, v. 2. There are snarling, biting men, "dogs." There are men who will do evil and harm to others when they have the chance. There are men more concerned for a ceremony or a form than for its real inner meaning. Believers cannot rejoice in these men, but they can rejoice in the Lord who prevents their injury to his people. The Church is constantly liable to danger from such men. They arise whenever a piece of work is planned—hinderers, objectors, complainers, who are not willing to go beyond the form to the substance. The illustration used here, circumcision, was the test ceremony in the discussion about the Gentiles, Acts, ch. 15. It is never discussed now, but other things take its place.

Verses 4-6 are only one instance of the ability of Paul to assert himself if he chooses to do so. He is not ashamed of his record, but it is unimportant in his mind. Christ has made all the things of which he might be proud look petty. His disregard of the ceremonies is not for lack of experience with them; he has run the whole gamut. He has done all the things that the most zealous devotee of the Jewish customs could wish. This is the kind of man who has a right to an opinion, not the unobserving Gentiles.

That is one reason why national converts in any land prove to be such excellent advocates of the Christian faith. Missionaries may know more about the faith than the nationals, but they do not know so much about the life one must leave in order to be a Christian believer. More and more they listen to intelligent believers in the guidance of the Church. They have been "through the mill," and know what it means to leave existing religious practices and adopt the Christian life. They are apt to be more severe than the missionaries in their demands upon their national brethren. It was not Gentiles who insisted in coming into the Church without the ceremonies; it was a Pharisee, Paul, who insisted upon their coming so. The same thing happens in mission lands. Indeed, in the home Church sometimes a newly converted worldlying is sharpest in his condemnation of practices that have been condoned by older Christians. He knows that they will not do.

Notice in vs. 8-11 the tangle of terms to express the value of Christ to a believer. Knowledge, power, righteousness, fellowship, suffering, even death and resurrection—all are allied to Christ. "Conformed unto his death" is an interesting phrase. It is quite an elaborate Greek word which implies shaping one's whole course to the death of Christ in order to be in the line of his resurrection. Remember that Paul, unlike the other apostles, first knew Christ *after* the resurrection. That is the way the Church knows him, and it

needs to think back to the fact that the death of Christ came before his resurrection, and that it must be ready to suffer as he did in order to enter fully into the meaning of rising into new life with him.

Suffering does bring fellowship, v. 10. Witness the feeling our Church has for the Church in Korea, in Japan, in Germany, in Poland, wherever believers have suffered for Christ. Refusing suffering is refusing fellowship both with Christ and with fellow believers.

2. *The advancement is to be in spiritual ambition. Ch. 3:12-14.*

Read these verses carefully again and note the line between true and false humility. We are faulty, defective, we have not attained; we are far from full-grown or "perfect." What then? Is that ground for discouragement, or is it reason for added effort to grasp for ourselves what Christ may mean for us? The Church belongs to Christ; he has laid hold on it for something. Let the Church set out to lay hold on the purpose of Christ. There is danger of being satisfied with what the Church is and has done. There is much to say for it: See how it has spread over the earth! What multitudes it has gathered into its fold! What power it has in many places! But such words die on our tongues. We know how far it is from being all that Christ wants it to be. There is no institution in human society which is and ought to be more self-critical than the Church.

If the Church were what it ought to be and might be under Christ, it would be influencing the world vastly more than it does now. But what then? Is that disheartening? Shall we spend our strength bemoaning it? Let the Church forget the things that are behind and stretch toward the things that are before, v. 13. There are greater things ahead for a spiritually ambitious Church—more worlds to conquer, more lands to win, more men to be brought to Christ, more evils to be corrected. When a runner is on the track he does not turn back to see how far he has gone; he looks forward to see the goal to which he is running. That is the figure of v. 14, which we are using as the key verse of the letter in these Studies. At the goal is a prize. The call of God is upward, as the Greek word for "high" implies.

Dr. Rufus Jones tells of a group of students who were discussing most important matters with a professor. As the discussion was breaking up, the professor said, "Anyway, you men must play the game of life." One of the men said, "But, professor, how are we to play the game of life when we do not know where the goal posts are?" That is a poser. If the Church loses clear sight of what it is meant to be in the world, where its goal posts are, how shall it know when the game is being lost or won? Under whose orders is it living? Who sets the goal? What determines the ambition of the present Church, of its ministers, of its agencies? Dr. Robert E. Speer quotes from Tennyson's "The Lotus-Eaters":

"Let us alone. What pleasure can we have
To war with evil? Is there any peace
In ever climbing up the climbing wave?"

Well, that is the only "way" Christ has left His Church. An article in the little magazine *Britain* has the heading, "Facing Huge Odds with High Courage." That sounds like matching a high calling with a high courage! The calling is God's; the courage has to be the Church's. Only a spiritually ambitious Church will have such courage. How much

ambition does your own Church display in its plans to meet the needs of its community and the new world?

3. *The advancement is to be manifested in consistent obedience. Ch. 3:15, 16.*

The word "perfect" in v. 15 is our word "full-grown," "not being immature." The Greek word does not mean flawless or perfect in our common use of the word, but coming toward completion, reaching a position beyond what we once had. The apostle says that full-grown believers will agree to the point he has made. If others do not see it, let there be no complaint about it, but let there be a constant looking to God for more guidance. There are some who must have weaker food, I Cor. 3:1-3, but they ought to be growing into stronger food, and they will grow if they will let God reveal the truth to them.

The main thing, v. 16, is for Christian believers to hold together, to be true to what they do know and can agree upon. Some people spend much time on the things in which they differ from their brethren. They might well be thinking far more of the things in which they agree with them. Nobody knows so much that he can claim finality in any matters. Sir James Jeans closes his book on *Physics and Philosophy* (1943) with the statement that our race has not thus far solved any large part of its most difficult problems. He thinks it makes life more interesting because the quest for knowledge is even more interesting than the knowledge itself: "To travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive." Of course there is something to be said on both sides of that idea.

The great issues of human relation to God are constantly unfolding. The upward calling is still ahead of us. Let us rejoice in the amount of agreement among us, the amount of unity now in the Church, rather than mourn over the differences that trouble us. We are pressing *toward* the mark, in its direction. We have not reached it, any of us.

FOR DISCUSSION AND ACTION

1. It is sometimes said that "you cannot change human nature." Discuss Benjamin Kidd's statement in the notes. What is the Church trying to do with human nature through its program of worship, education, service, and study?

2. Explain the difference between kindness in judging other people and refusal to admit the reality of evil in them. Can we believe atrocity stories and still be kindly in judgment?

3. How can we rejoice in the Lord, having peace in our hearts, and yet be deeply unsatisfied with ourselves in the work of Christ?

FIFTH STUDY

The High Calling of God to Nobler Citizenship

Phil. 3:17 to 4:7

The King James Version uses the word "conversation" in v. 20, but the Greek word is the one for "commonwealth" or "citizenship"—our citizenship is in heaven. In this form it occurs only here in the New Testament, though it is common in Greek writers elsewhere. The verb occurs several times, suggesting how believers ought to act because of their relation to this heavenly commonwealth. Christians are to live as its citizens. They cannot accept the lower standards of worldly political life; their standard is higher. But this is not mere "other-worldliness," as is sometimes charged against Christians. It is worldliness in the finest and most effective sense, for it is not localism or narrow racialism, but a sincere desire to see conditions worthy of heaven produced and maintained on earth. The will of God is to be done on earth as it is in heaven—fully, freely, happily.

This holds believers steady in upheavals of the world order. When the Roman Empire was falling and the most permanent conditions of the world seemed to be passing away, Augustine sat in his home near Carthage, exactly where the Tunisian battles were recently fought, and wrote his book on *The City of God*, arguing that in the midst of all earthly turmoil and destruction the commonwealth of heaven remains unshaken. The "Eternal City Rome" might fall, but the City of God would not fall, and Christians are citizens of that City. In 1839, Bishop Coxe wrote his hymn "O Where Are Kings and Empires Now?" He saw the Church unshaken as the eternal hills go, immovable as a mountain, a house not made with hands. Wars come and go, nations rise and fall, but whatever is allied to that heavenly commonwealth remains.

Of course this raises the question of the relation of believers to the earthly commonwealths of which also they are part. How far shall the Church try to determine political actions or take part in political movements? Obviously, while the Church is here in the midst of civil government, its members must "render . . . unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's." The constant problem is to know just what things they are and where the limits are. There is no easy, clear-cut rule about it. Certainly there are times when political issues run over into the field of morals and religion and cannot be neglected. The Church must then take action for the guidance of Christians. This runs the risk of committing them to courses which some of them do not approve because of political elements that remain in such issues. At any rate, it is clear that Christians live in two commonwealths, one of earth, the other of heaven. They are to make the heavenly commonwealth the law of their lives and to do nothing in the earthly one which contradicts the heavenly.

1. This nobler citizenship appears in loyalty to Christ. Ch. 3:17-21.

Verses 17-19 suggest that we are not left to some vague idea of what Christ requires. His requirements can be seen in action. There are standard men who are nearer what

Christians ought to be than other men are. Christ himself is the only standard, of course. But there are men who show in their lives how the Christian order works, and there are other men who show what it is not. There is always danger of taking these better men as final, as of course they are not. In another place, where Paul calls men to be "imitators of me," he adds, "Even as I also am of Christ," I Cor. 11:1. Only so far as he imitated Christ could he be a model for others. This is not a boastful word; vs. 13, 14 forbid any such thought. Paul knows he is not all he ought to be, but he is pressing on. It is not arrogance to say that much.

Do not try to get away from the place of good men as examples to be followed. They are especially useful when the new faith is being formed. A Chinese university leader explained the need for further missionaries on the ground that new believers have to be "calculating Christians," while experienced believers are "instinctive Christians." He said that while he himself always wanted to do the Christian thing, he often had to stop and think out what that would be, whereas matured believers seemed to know at once what Christian principle was involved and how it applied to the case. The two letters to the Corinthians are a clear instance of this. The Corinthian believers were new, and not always clear about what the new faith involved. Some of them had fallen into bad ways without realizing that they were bad. So Paul, as a more mature because more thoughtful believer, had to set them right. The believers in Philippi wanted to know their duty and were helped by seeing someone who acted as a Christian ought to act, and by a warning about others who were not acting so.

Any honest man knows that there are people who are wrong, from whom he ought to differ and wants others to differ. He takes no joy in knowing this. He speaks of them with sorrow, v. 18. The test is a word of our Lord: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me," Matt. 16:24. These wrong men are "enemies of the cross of Christ," for they live for themselves, they magnify earthly pleasures, they gratify their appetites, they glory in things that ought to make them ashamed. But we are not prepared to point out the evils among our fellow believers until we feel real pain in the fact of their evil. When an earnest man was speaking bitterly of others who were manifestly wrong, a good woman noted the lack of tears in his eyes and voice. Sweeping condemnations are not according to the spirit of Christ. He wept over Jerusalem.

2. *The call to nobler citizenship involves fellowship with others. Ch. 4:1-3.*

Verse 1 is one of those enthusiastic expressions which any pastor is apt to use when he considers the many fine people who make up a working Church. When we look around the world and see how many of the younger Churches are standing fast in difficult times, we want those words ourselves. Our Western Churches have been the founders and helpers of these Churches and they are our "joy and crown" as truly as the Philippian Church was that of Paul.

Read vs. 2 and 3 again and note the record of an early Church quarrel! There seems no escape from difficulties of this sort. Here were two excellent women, workers in the Church, whose names were undoubtedly in the book of life, but who could not get along with each other over some point of program or duty. Principal Rainy, commenting on this passage, says, "The very energy of the Christian faith tended to produce energetic personalities." A Christian blends a sense of importance, because Christ loves him, with a

sense of fraternity, because Christ loves other men also. If either of those ideas gets out of proportion, there is trouble. Sometimes the very impulse to help leads to a dominating spirit. Someone else appears who does not like to be dominated, or who has the same impulse to dominate, and there is often no room for two such leaders in one society.

Such difficulties are often most serious in Church life. That is because the people concerned want above all things to do right. Their real motives may confuse conscience with personal ambition. But they do not know this, and when conscience is involved Christians are pretty hard to change. Good people have to learn to differ without division. Paul knew the need for this. He and Barnabas had such a difference that they could not work together for a while, Acts 15:36-40. It was not a mild disagreement; it was a sharp difference which led them to pull apart. They came together again, to be sure; but for a time they could not work together! Yet they were both good men. And the fact that two women could not get along together did not prove that they were not good women, v. 3, but it did give a chance for some better balanced people to "help" them. There is a good chapter in the Confession of Faith (Ch. XX, "Of Christian Liberty, and Liberty of Conscience") which might well be studied here. It contains the famous expression, "God alone is lord of the conscience." Being sure of this makes it hard to surrender anything that one thinks is right.

All this applies in larger form to differences between Churches as a whole. How much change can a Church agree to as a means of uniting with another Church? Things cannot be exactly the same after a union as before it. But no union or reunion of Churches can be proposed which does not arouse some brethren to dissent because it seems to involve a denial of history and the solemn obligation to maintain the faith "once for all delivered unto the saints" who founded the Church or took it out of fellowship with other Churches. This is not their "notion"; it is a matter of principle, a matter of conscience. Here they stand; they can do no other!

We all need to come back to the fundamental issue of loyalty to Christ as well as of fellowship with others. Followers of the one Christ ought to stand together in testimony to him before an unbelieving world. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another," John 13:35. We cannot argue that we really do love each other underneath our differences, if those differences are still so deep that we cannot come together and work and worship as one. So long as the celebration of our one great sacrament of the body and blood of our one Lord cannot be celebrated together by all of us, we limit or deny our witness of love both for our Lord and for each other. If conscience seems to interfere, a closer look into the issue will find conscience driving us together for Christ's sake. He is our best conscience at all times. No one questions that those from whom we differ are good people, trying to do the will of our one Lord, that their names are written in the book of life, and that they need our fellowship and we need theirs in order to let all men know that we are disciples of Christ.

3. *The call to nobler citizenship involves trust in God. Ch. 4:4-7.*

Here we are back again at the call to "rejoice in the Lord," v. 4. Paul adds, "Always." In spite of differences among good people, in spite of defective witness to our unity in Christ, in spite of anything among ourselves, rejoice in the Lord! With mind still on the trouble in vs. 2, 3, Paul urges that "forbearance," "moderation," or, best of all, "gentleness," should be so manifested that anybody can see it, v. 5. Keep in mind that "the Lord is at hand." That can mean that he is soon to appear, or it may mean that he is always

beside us, which seems nearer the Greek here—not that he will be here presently, but that he is here now. Keep in mind that whatever happens happens in the presence of the Lord. Whatever is said, whatever differences there are among us, he is there all the time. How does it look in his presence? Does not his very presence suggest gentleness, moderation, forbearance?

Verses 6 and 7 bring the Christian cure for anxiety. The best cure is prayer! In prayer the trouble that causes anxiety is frankly turned over to God. Notice how rich the idea is—prayer, supplication, thanksgiving, requests. We sometimes say that prayer is not “asking for something,” but we must not leave that out of our prayer. We are needy people, and our Father calls us to make our requests known to him. Then he gives us—not always what we asked, for he is wiser than we are—but peace beyond any we have expected, v. 7. Our hearts and our thoughts need guarding against failure and wrong direction. There is a striking word in Eph. 1:18—“having the eyes of your heart enlightened.” Some things we can see best with our hearts, our affections, our central life, and we need enlightenment there. And certainly our thoughts need to be guarded against taking the wrong turn and following the wrong course. Anxiety, worry, fretting, bring us no reward except more anxiety and worry. Our cure is a fuller trust in God. He can see the errand through. He can protect our efforts against error and failure. Our citizenship has God for its Head, its Commander in Chief, its victorious Leader.

FOR DISCUSSION AND ACTION

1. Chapter XX of the Confession of Faith is on this subject: “Of Christian Liberty, and Liberty of Conscience.” Have this chapter read in class and then discuss how the Church can make its best contributions to the peace discussions and postwar plans.
2. Can you name some “political” question with which the Church must not “meddle”?
3. “God alone is Lord of the conscience.” Explain how a Christian can interpret that statement so as to be guided in war and postwar duties as a citizen.

SIXTH STUDY

The High Calling of God to United Service

Phil. 4:8-23

In this sixth Study we have come for the third time to the service idea, as the climax of the letter. The idea is rich enough for the various aspects that have appeared. After all, the Church is a working body with something to do, and its people have joint obligations. First, the field of service is varied. (*a*) There are things to do for the world outside of the Church, witness to bear, help to give, pressure to exert on existing social agencies to do their work. (*b*) There is service for other Churches within the one world Church of which we are only a part—Churches in lands not widely evangelized, weaker than our own, but all in our own great brotherhood around Christ. (*c*) There is service for fellow members with our own body. One of our writers notes that two weaknesses leaning together make up one strength. That is often true, and many a man grows strong to do and bear because of his fellowship with others who stand by him in his hour of need. (*d*) There are things to do for our own inner lives, service to ourselves as believers in Christ. Some of our work has its finest result in our own spiritual life and strength. Service, in short, is at the very heart of Christian living. No Church could live without people who carry its load of official life and daily need.

In the second place, some tasks are much too great for any one of us or for any one Church to perform alone. The command of Christ ordering us to world service is in the plural. No one Christian could possibly “go . . . into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation.” It takes all of us to do that. The word is, “Go ye”—not, “Go thou.” One of the heaviest arguments for real Church unity is the need of the world for Christ, the one Christ whom we all know. No intelligent man would be willing to set up his own Church as the one agency for serving that need. The whole Church is needed at its best to serve it.

Moreover, in the work of the Gospel one form of service appeals to one group or type and not to another, and yet all kinds of service must be rendered. Some can do one thing well, but would be hopeless bunglers at another thing. There are ways of conducting public worship which would not be helpful to one kind of Christian, but which exactly suit another kind. Some believers like plenty of emotion; some like more staid orders of worship. Which is better? Obviously the one that lifts the heart to Christ, and that means either of them. It is an error to decide that the kind we like and that helps us is the kind everybody ought to like; that the way we do the Lord’s work is the way it ought to be done by other people. If it is service and really helps to make Christ known and loved, we can afford to waive our preferences in judging others. United service is richer in content than purely personal service. Ten men together can pull a heavier load than ten separate men tugging alone.

1. *United service is to be in the nobler things of life. Ch. 4:8, 9.*

These verses have one strange element, uncommon in Scripture. That is the striking repetition of one phrase, "Whatsoever things are." Six times it is repeated, where we would ordinarily use it once. It makes a strong emphasis. Eight elements are named, separately and distinctly, as things that ought to occupy our minds:

Things that are:

"True"—in the midst of much error and untruth,

"Honorable"—that ought to be revered, respected.

"Just"—fair to others, to God, to oneself,

"Pure"—above the level of coarseness and moral dirt,

"Lovely"—lovable, what one likes at one's best,

"Of good report"—gracious, winsome, leaving a good taste in the mouth;

"Virtue"—making character or revealing it;

"Praise"—worthy of being praised by Christians.

Just for a moment realize how easy it is to think of opposite elements instead. Some men brood on them—on the great amount of injustice there is, on impure things, on dishonorable conduct in private and public life, on the prevalence of falsehood, on moral filth, on vice. Indeed, there are some who form this habit so strongly that they do not believe in the reality of the eight fine elements. A well-known writer has so long caricatured various types of man that he seems unable now to write fairly and clearly about really good men in any line. He has caricatured common business men of small towns, scientists, ministers, wives, promoters of charities, and others, so often that none of his figures are accurate—all are overdrawn. Every caricature has elements of truth in it, but one man who draws faces in caricature tells us that he never sees a face without thinking what feature of it could be misdrawn to make it ridiculous.

We can readily form this habit of thinking about other people or other Churches. It is easier to see why we should not unite with other Churches if we keep our minds on their faults or their unusual ways. But if there is in them any one of these finer elements, let us think on that thing.

But moral principles, even these eight beautiful elements, are always clearer and more forceful when they take shape in someone's life. To see a man so true under strain that he will not lie makes truth seem more forceful. To see a man so downright just that he will suffer wrong rather than do it to anyone else makes justice seem more practicable. And so with all the rest. So Paul runs the great risk of naming himself again as one whom his friends may wisely observe, v. 9. Few men would dare to say this, and yet every man is under obligation to make it true in his own life. We have an old jest in which a man says, "Do as I say, not as I do," but we know it is not the right way to speak. A man may be sure enough of himself to speak as Paul does here. We have had illustrations of this in the war days. A man comes home from the front, where he has undergone hardship, and stands before a group of men hesitating about their work, wanting further personal advantage. He tells them what he has been through and says, "Surely I can ask you to do what I have done!" In mission lands a missionary has often to say, "This is the way we Christians must do—the way we are doing it before you." It has its great dangers and its great values.

2. *The call to united service is to mutual aid. Ch. 4:10-18.*

This section tells of help his friends had sent Paul in prison. There is an impulse in

Christian hearts to help, but they are often estopped because there is no opportunity. Paul knew that, and he had not complained of lack of help because no real chance had come to them before, v. 10. It is well to believe in friends as much as that. Pastors know of needy people who do not think so kindly of others and who carry a bitter heart because aid is not given.

The whole story suggests careful thinking on how to help others. Paul says he really did not need the aid. He was getting along, and he had learned how to get along with hunger or plenty, with humiliation or exaltation, vs. 11, 12. All the same, he was glad to have help from his friends. He was sure they had been blessed in giving as he had been in receiving, v. 17. Look up Acts 20:35. We are not to measure our kindness by mere meeting of actual need or want. There are needs that go beyond sheer necessities. People can live on very little, surprisingly little. If they are to have no more than that, they are not to have much. But if they are to live rightly, there will be wider supplies. The line is not easy to draw, but Paul uses it here. He did not have to have this aid to get along; he was getting along before it came. But now he would get along better and was grateful, v. 18.

We need to take this seriously. We are not to skimp our kindness. Small Churches in large cities are often left to struggle along because they can do it, when larger and abler Churches might lift their load by more attention to them. What about Churches on the mission field—how much and how long are they to be aided? Shall they be made to stand on their feet at once, or can they be helped beyond sheer necessities of existence? We are not to choose for our own relief from responsibility, but always for their good.

Of course, we are in the same difficulty as a nation just now. Already we are being warned that we must not expect to go on helping other nations, denying ourselves, when the fighting ceases. We shall want our supplies for ourselves. Let the other nations fend for themselves beyond their absolute necessities. What will the Church do about it? Will its parts hold together to buttress and support the Churches in these stricken lands or will our own delayed needs demand all we can do?

Note the tremendous assertion in v. 13—"all things in him" who enables me—who makes me able to do anything that comes along. This is why Paul has not complained—not because he is so strong, so well-balanced, that he never frets. No, it is because he has a Companion who pours strength into him constantly. Anything he does or may be called to do is possible because of that Companion. This same power is available for all Christians in all lands and Churches. So they can be called to mutual aid as part of their united service.

3. United service is possible through assurance of God. Ch. 4:19-23.

Verses 19, 20 are beautiful verses of assurance. The Confession of Faith has a fine chapter (Ch. XVIII) entitled "Of the Assurance of Grace and Salvation." After saying that sincere Christians may have a settled assurance of God's favor, it goes on: "This certainty is not a bare conjectural and probable persuasion, grounded upon a fallible hope; but an infallible assurance of faith, founded upon the divine truth of the promises of salvation, the inward evidence of those graces unto which these promises are made, the testimony of the Spirit of adoption witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of God." When someone asked a wise man how we can be sure of God, he replied, "By trying him!" Paul was sure that God would supply all these gracious friends who had supplied him, v. 19, every need—perhaps not every desire, but most of these also. Five times in the letter to the Ephesians we are told of some form of "riches" to be found in God—riches

of grace, of mercy, of glory. Our supply comes out of riches, not out of bare shelves or scant provision. He is "our God and Father," v. 20.

His grace and power are such,
None can ever ask too much.

When the Church becomes sure of God, it can dare large things in fellowship with all the saints. Its widest programs will seem small by that measure. Nothing short of a world errand will content it.

Verses 21, 23 are salutations which bind the brotherhood in a wide bond of union. The Church at Philippi may be large or small, but it is part of the Church at Rome, even including some in Caesar's household. All around the world are these "brethren." Their salutation belongs to all of us. If we are discouraged in our small circle, there is inspiration in the great blessing that appears in some other circle, in which are our brethren. If we are greatly blessed, then some weaker group draws cheer from that. Our brethren are in all sorts of positions—heads of governments, rulers of nations, common workers in common tasks, scientists, scholars, laborers, all brethren in one body, working under one Master and pressing on "toward the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

FOR DISCUSSION AND ACTION

1. Study the form of worship used in your own local Church; can you suggest any changes for the better?
2. Study your local Church methods of work for men, women, youth, and children; what changes can you suggest for improvement in any of these areas?
3. What practices of other Churches could be adopted for the deepening of the spiritual life of your local Church?
4. If Afghanistan and Thibet proper should open, would you justify a Mission Board's sending workers there even though it calls for more sacrifice from the home Church?
5. This is the last of the Studies in Philippians. What have you come to think are the elements in "The high calling of God in Christ Jesus" to the present Church, your own Church and personal life? What does God want of you and your Church which he does not now get?

SUGGESTIONS TO LEADERS

For Using These Studies

1. This is a Bible study on Philippians, developing the spiritual emphasis theme for the year, "Our High Calling in Christ." It is written for use in midweek meetings, women's groups, and adult Bible classes, and also for individual study.

2. A copy of The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians should be available at all times for ready reference. The assigned Bible material for each Study should be read before the notes are used. The American Standard Version is used in the notes.

3. If the course has to be shortened to four hours, it can be done in this order:

I. First and Second Studies, Chs. 1:1 to 2:11.

II. Third Study, Ch. 2:12-30.

III. Fourth Study, Ch. 3:1-16.

IV. Fifth and Sixth Studies, Chs. 3:17 to 4:23.

It is to be hoped that this will not need to be done, for the Biblical material is very rich and deserves longer time.

4. The suggestions "For Discussion and Action" may well be assigned before the group meeting, someone being asked to open the discussion on each topic.

5. The pastor is likely to have one or two good commentaries on the Epistle, which may be borrowed by members of the group. The series does not call for professional leadership. It is important to keep in mind the forward-looking phase of the series—a call to the present Church to face and prepare for the future by a deepening of its own spiritual life right now and a renewal of its courage for advance.

6. Someone, or a committee, might be appointed to keep the group informed about printed materials which are constantly becoming available, e.g., the packet discussion guide, "The Christian Church and World Order, Study II: United Nations for Peace," available from any Presbyterian Book Store, price, 50 cents. Write to DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL EDUCATION AND ACTION, 830 Witherspoon Bldg., Philadelphia 7, Pennsylvania, for any other information desired regarding the possible program for the Church or for the nation after the war.

Any of the following recent books may be profitably read in connection with these Studies:

John A. Mackay, *Heritage and Destiny*. The Macmillan Company.

Rufus M. Jones, *New Eyes for Invisibles*. The Macmillan Company.

William Temple, *The Hope of a New World*. The Macmillan Company.

Lynn Harold Hough, *Living Democracy*. Fleming H. Revell Company.

Garfield B. Oxnam, *The Ethical Ideas of Jesus in a Changing World*. Abingdon-Cokesbury Press.

Henry P. Van Dusen, *What Is the Church Doing?* Friendship Press and Charles Scribner's Sons.

Herbert H. Farmer, *Towards Belief in God*. The Macmillan Company.

Charles A. Ellwood, *The World's Need of Christ*. Abingdon-Cokesbury Press.

Bernard Iddings Bell, *Religion for Living*. Harper & Brothers.

