

Malcolm's Monday Musings: 18 September 2023

Philippians 4. 1-9.

SCRIPTURE

The scripture reading for this evening comes from Philippians chapter 4, commencing at verse 1.

Therefore, my brethren, beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, thus stand firm in the Lord, beloved.

I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, I ask you also, true yoke-fellow, help these women,¹ who have contended alongside me in the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, Rejoice.

Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is near.

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are commendable, if anything is excellent, if anything is praiseworthy, consider these things.

Whatever you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, do these things. And the God of peace shall be with you.

EXPOSITION

Introduction

The first word of our reading for this evening, '**Therefore**', alerts us to the fact that our passage is connected to (indeed, in no small part, rests upon) the section which went before:

'Our citizenship is in heaven, from where we eagerly await the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body and conform it to be like His glorious body, according to the working of His power whereby He is able even to subject all things to Himself'.²

Given, Paul is saying, that:

- (i) you enjoy such a citizenship³ (that, in effect, you form a colony of heaven),
 - (ii) you await such a Saviour, and
 - (iii) you entertain such a hope,
- then 'stand firm in the Lord'.

And we can hardly miss the threefold expression, '*in the Lord*', which is sprinkled through verses 1 to 4:

'Therefore, my brethren, beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, thus stand firm **in the Lord**, beloved. I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to be of the same mind **in the Lord** ... Rejoice **in the Lord** always; again I will say, Rejoice'.⁴

And, in one sense, the three expressions, '**stand firm** in the Lord', 'be **of the same mind** in the Lord', and '**rejoice** in the Lord', summarise and pull together the teaching of the previous three chapters:

chapter 1 more or less closing with the words, 'that you **stand firm** in one spirit',⁵

chapter 2 more or less opening with the words, '*being* ... **of the same mind**',⁶ and

chapter 3 commencing with the words, '**rejoice in the Lord**'.⁷

But our reading for this evening draws attention very much to the believer's mind, referring, as it does, to **a united mind** in verse 2, **a guarded mind** in verse 7, and **a focused mind** in verse 8.

Verse 1. Therefore, my brethren, beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, thus stand firm in the Lord, beloved.

In the opening section of his letter, Paul had assured the Philippian Christians, before God, of his warm feelings for them, telling them that he ‘had them in his heart’, and that he ‘longed (he ‘yearned’) for them’ with the very ‘affection of Christ Jesus’.⁸ Now, as he draws near to the close of his letter, he again stresses the intensity of his love for them.

Indeed, it seems that he is scarcely able to find words adequate to express his feelings⁹ for those he regards as his joy and as his garland of victory at the Lord’s return¹⁰ ... whom he wants to see, **not standing still** (perish the thought!¹¹) **but standing firm** ... holding their ground in the face of the fierce opposition which they had been and were still encountering.¹²

But the special and tender place which the Philippians had in Paul’s heart must have made what he needs to say next all the more painful to him.

Verse 2. I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.

That the apostle regards it necessary to name both Euodia and Syntyche in a letter which is clearly meant to be read, not only by the overseers and deacons, but also to the whole assembly,¹³ conveys some idea of how seriously he regards their disagreement.¹⁴

He had previously made it clear to ‘the saints ... at Philippi’ that, such was his love for them, that, on the one hand, he was willing, to go on **living for them**, even if that meant his foregoing heaven for a time,¹⁵ and that, on the other hand, he was willing to **die for them**, if that might advantage them in any way.¹⁶

How horrified the apostle must have been, therefore, to learn that the spiritual harmony and wellbeing of the assembly was being threatened and endangered by the way in which these two dear and highly valued sisters were now at loggerheads with each other.¹⁷ Hence, his very public appeal to them. And it is hard to imagine the metaphorical bombshell which exploded in the meeting when this part of his letter was read out!

Throughout the earlier part of the letter, there had been a veritable rash of such expressions as: ‘all the saints’,¹⁸ ‘you all’,¹⁹ ‘of one accord’,²⁰ ‘of one mind’,²¹ ‘being like-minded’,²² and so on ... expressions which occur some 20 times in all. Perhaps hearing such phrases had made these sisters feel rather uncomfortable. Perhaps they had even come to suspect that somehow Paul had got wind of their personal differences. If so, **now they knew!**²³

And we do well to note that the apostle not only:

- (i) scrupulously avoids taking sides, or
 - (ii) further embarrasses the sisters by mentioning any details of what had put their noses out of joint,
- but also that:
- (i) he pleads with each separately and personally (as if he said, ‘please, Euodia ... please, Syntyche’), and
 - (ii) he is quick to recall the way in which (in all likelihood, borrowing language taken from the Greek games²⁴) they had both previously **‘contended’** (‘striven’) together, **not against each other but with him and his co-workers** in the cause of the gospel²⁵—battling, then, side by side against a common foe.

Verse 3a. Yes, I ask you also, true yoke-fellow, help these women, who have contended alongside me in the gospel ...

How sad that these two sisters who had once been **such a help** to Paul should now **need ‘help’** to sort out their own differences.²⁶

But the apostle could foresee that this would prove to be the case—that the trouble between them was so serious that he must enlist the aid of a third party to lend a hand in resolving it. And I use the expression, **‘lend a hand’**, deliberately, because the word translated ‘help’ here is the same as that used by Luke to describe the ‘help’ which Peter and Andrew called for from their partners James and John when they were unable to cope alone with a miraculous catch of fish.²⁷

Clearly, the identity of the brother now ‘asked’ to lend a hand was known: (i) to Paul, (ii) to the man himself, (iii) to Euodia and Syntyche and (iv) to the whole assembly.

But, alas, for the more curious among us, it is not obvious to us or, I can assure you, to the commentators—who, among them, have suggested just about every male person in the New Testament except our Lord Jesus, the apostle Paul, and Judas Iscariot!

In that the word translated '**true**' means 'genuine',²⁸ some have suggested that the following word (translated 'yoke-fellow') was in fact a proper name (namely, 'Synzygus', which itself means 'yoke-fellow'²⁹), and that the apostle is making a play on the man's name: 'I ask you also, you who are rightly and properly named, "Yoke-fellow", help these women'.³⁰

And such a word play is certainly not out of the question, coming from the man who, around this very time, wrote to Philemon concerning Onesimus (whose name means 'profitable' or 'useful'): 'Formerly he was *unprofitable* (useless) to you, but now he is profitable (*useful*) to you and to me'.³¹

So, possibly, the name of the brother called on to lend a helping hand to these sisters was 'Synzygus', but, in the end, we simply don't know!³²

Verse 3b. Along with Clement and the rest of my fellow-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Nor, of course, do we know the names of those, who along with Clement (which was a common Roman name³³) and Euodia and Syntyche engaged with Paul in conflict for the gospel.

Quite possibly, if they were (as many in the assembly, no doubt, were) colonists of Rome, their names would have been enrolled in Rome.

But, if so, this is as nothing compared to what Paul says of them; namely, that, although their names are not disclosed in his letter,³⁴ their names are written in 'the book of life'.³⁵ For their names are, as our Lord once phrased it, 'written in heaven',³⁶ an expression which He used when telling His seventy or so disciples that what mattered was **not the power of His name on earth but the presence of their names in heaven**. The names of Paul's fellow-workers were 'written in heaven', where their true citizenship lay.³⁷

In the following verses (verses 4 to 6), Paul expresses his desire that the saints at Philippi be a (i) joyful, (ii) gentle, (iii) care-free, (iv) prayerful and (v) thankful company.

Verse 4. Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, Rejoice.

First, 'rejoice', the apostle says, 'in the Lord always', adding, in effect, 'I have said it once, and I will say it a second time, rejoice'.³⁸ It would, indeed, be very difficult to miss that the whole of this letter very much pulsates with a note of joy, with the words 'joy' and 'rejoice' occurring a total of 16 times among them.³⁹

I note also the addition (in distinction from the first verse of chapter 3) of the word '**always**',⁴⁰ which he adds similarly in the final chapter of his first letter to another persecuted Macedonian church, namely, that of the Thessalonians; 'rejoice always'.⁴¹

Yes, Paul says, 'rejoice', even when all around is, humanly speaking, difficult, dark and dreary.

Truly, the man who, on his first visit to Philippi as an ambassador for Christ, had, along with Silas, been heard 'praying and singing hymns to God', with his feet fastened in the stocks of the inner prison,⁴² was well qualified to call on the believers there to 'rejoice in the Lord always' too—consistent, I note, with his later exhortation that they 'do' that which they had 'seen in' him.⁴³

The apostle could claim elsewhere that, even if 'sorrowful' on account of the bleakest of circumstances,⁴⁴ 'yet', paradoxically, he was 'always rejoicing'.⁴⁵

'**Rejoice**', the apostle exhorts (repeating what he had said back in the first verse in chapter 3), '**in the Lord**'. It has been fitly pointed out that 'He does not say "rejoice in your circumstances always". He says "rejoice in the Lord always"'.⁴⁶

Paul's words remind me of the closing section of the song of Habakkuk:

Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet — **yet I will rejoice in the Lord**.⁴⁷

At this point, Paul switches the spotlight from the joy which the Christian should experience *within* (verse 4), to **two things which he or she should 'make known' to others** (verses 5 and 6): first, **'your gentleness to all men'** – to all around, that is – and, second, **'your requests to God'** ... the one exhortation can be said to focus on that which is horizontal and the other exhortation to focus on that which is vertical.

Verse 5a. Let your gentleness be known to all men.

The word rendered **'gentleness'** is said to be one of the most difficult Greek words to translate.⁴⁸ Among many nuances, it carries, in particular, the idea of something better than strict justice ... of not insisting on the letter of the law ... of being willing to give way graciously and to yield one's rights.⁴⁹

This quality of **'yieldingness'** can be seen in action in the lives of two of the patriarchs; namely, **Abraham** ...

Abram said to Lot, 'Let there be no strife between you and me, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we are brethren. Is not the whole land before you? ... *If you take the left, then I will go to the right; or, if you go to the right, then I will go to the left*'⁵⁰

and **Isaac** ...

Isaac's servants dug in the valley, and found a well of running water there. But the herdsmen of Gerar quarrelled with Isaac's herdsmen, saying, 'The water is ours' ... Then *they dug another well*, and they quarrelled over that one also ... And *he moved from there and dug another well*.⁵¹

But it is also a quality which Paul knows to have marked our Lord Jesus Himself,⁵² and which, without naming the quality itself, the apostle showed earlier in his letter was exemplified supremely in Him.⁵³

'Not insisting on looking after your own interests ... being considerate,⁵⁴ and ever ready to waive your own rights for the sake of others'⁵⁵ ... are you listening, Euodia and Syntyche?

'This is asking a lot of us', they (and, no doubt, others) may well have responded. Ah, but then, Paul adds, 'the Lord is near'.

Verse 5b. The Lord is near.

I have to confess that I am unsure which of two meanings these words were (and are) meant to convey, whether, that is, the 'nearness' has to do (i) with **time** or (ii) with **place**.⁵⁶ In other words, does the expression signify:

(i) the **immjnenence** of our Lord's return **for us**—which, according to the close of the previous chapter, we should be eagerly awaiting,⁵⁷ or

(ii) with the **immanence**⁵⁸ of His presence **with us**—alongside us now, at our elbow, if you like.

In favour of the first interpretation (that the expression, 'the Lord is near' refers to **our Lord's return**), we might point to the Aramaic equivalent, '*Maran atha*', in all likelihood meaning, 'Our Lord, come'.⁵⁹

Certainly, if Paul's expression does point to the hope of the Christian that the Lord could come at any moment, it would underscore the fact that nothing of earth has any lasting value and that the believer can, therefore, safely waive his or her personal rights down here, knowing 'that the Lord's coming will vindicate' his or her cause.⁶⁰

In favour of the second interpretation (that the expression, 'the Lord is near' refers rather to **His being present with us now**), we might point to several similar expressions in the Book of the Psalms, each of which carries this meaning.⁶¹ For example, Psalm 119 verse 151 reads, 'you are near, O Lord, and all your commandments are true'.

In which case, the apostle's point is that the believer can afford to waive his or her rights and to leave the matter with the Lord because the Lord is nearby and is witness to all that is happening. We can compare the later words of Clement of Rome, 'Let us reflect how near He is, and that none of the thoughts or reasonings in which we engage are hid from Him'.⁶²

As far as I am concerned, both interpretations are wonderfully true. The Lord, who will one day personally⁶³ come again **for us**, is most certainly here and now personally present **with us**. And an appreciation of either of these great truths will motivate me, when it comes to personal matters, to give way graciously and to yield my own rights.⁶⁴

But I am to 'make known', not only my 'yieldingness' to men, but also my 'requests' to God.

'And why, Paul?' Because, the apostle insists, doing so is both (i) the antidote to corroding cares and (ii) the doorway to God's perfect peace.

Verse 6. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

In other words, as is often said, 'The way to be *care-full for nothing* is to be *prayerful for everything*'.

Naturally speaking, both the apostle and the Philippians faced many things to worry them and for them to fret over. *For his part*, Paul was in prison,⁶⁵ with martyrdom (from a human point of view) still a very real prospect and possibility.⁶⁶ *For their part*, they were engaged in the same conflict as he was, facing considerable opposition and suffering 'on behalf of Christ'.⁶⁷

Paul certainly does *not* wish his readers (then or now) to be '*careless*' when serving God.

In that context, we do well to remember the word of 'the Lord of hosts' through Jeremiah, concerning God's judgement on the nation of Moab: 'Cursed be he who does the work of the Lord *negligently* ('carelessly', 'with slackness')'.⁶⁸

In the service of God, proper care and concern is always to be commended.⁶⁹ Yet the apostle would wish them to be '*care-less*' as far as distracting anxiety about the affairs of this present life is concerned.⁷⁰

As is well known, the New Testament prescribes *a threefold antidote to anxious care and worry*.

The *first ingredient* comes from the lips of our Lord Himself in the so-called Sermon on the Mount. "Do not be anxious", the Saviour declared, "saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ... your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things".⁷¹ That God *knows* our needs is, therefore, the *first* ingredient.

The *third ingredient* is supplied by the apostle Peter: 'Casting all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you'.⁷² That God *cares* for us is, therefore, the third ingredient.

Paul supplies the *second ingredient* in our reading: 'Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything ... let your requests be made known to God'. That God *hears* us is, therefore, the second ingredient.⁷³ It has been well said that, 'Care and prayer are more opposed to each other than fire and water'.⁷⁴

And it is hardly surprising that Paul should have so much to say about prayer in his letter to the Philippians. For the church at Philippi had been born in an atmosphere of prayer.

We remember how, in Acts 16, Luke speaks twice of the '*place of prayer*', once in connection with the conversion of Lydia,⁷⁵ and once in connection with the release of the girl fortune-teller from occult powers⁷⁶ ... and then records the jailer's conversion following Paul's and Silas's midnight *prayers* and praises.⁷⁷

And we must not miss Paul's expression, '*with thanksgiving*'. For, sadly, when it comes to anxiety, many of us suffer from short-term memories. We become so concerned with our perceived problems in the present and the future that we lose sight of the countless ways in which God has met our needs in the past.

Although our own *past* experiences of God's *proven* goodness, faithfulness and provision *should* inform and sustain our faith both in *the present* and *for the future*, so often they *don't*, and many of us (if not all of us) need to pray with Louisa Stead:

Jesus, Jesus, how I trust Him!
How I've proved Him o'er and o'er!
Jesus, Jesus, precious Jesus!
O for grace to trust Him more!⁷⁸

Be off with you then, anxiety and worry ... we are assured that the Lord *knows*, the Lord *hears* and the Lord *cares*.

But wait. Surely, our Lord Himself informs us that *God knows the things we need before we ask Him*.⁷⁹ Yet, here we are told plainly to state our needs and our desires to Him (to '*let ... requests be made known to God*') *as if He needed the information*. I think we can safely say that it is for

God, and not for you or me, to reconcile this exhortation with His own omniscience—if, indeed, they need to be reconciled at all. It is certainly not something for *us* to get anxious and worried about! 😊

An earthly father knows well the needs of his children, and yet teaches them to ask him to meet those very needs. He does this that they might develop in them a sense of dependence, confidence and trust. God deals with us, His children, in the same way.⁸⁰

I think of the classic case of King Hezekiah in 2 Kings 19, where he went so far as to plead with God, ‘*open your eyes, O Lord, and see*’, with reference to the outspread provocative letter⁸¹ which he (Hezekiah) had received from Sennacherib,⁸² the so-called ‘great king, the king of Assyria’.⁸³

Verse 7. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

In the second of his earlier letters to the church of God at Corinth, the apostle had recited an incident which took place immediately following his conversion, when (in Paul’s own words):

‘At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas was guarding the city of the Damascenes in order to seize me. But I was let down in a basket through a window by the wall and escaped his hands’.⁸⁴

The word translated ‘*guarding*’ there is the very same word as that translated ‘*guard*’ in our verse. It is a military term, used of a garrison of soldiers whose business it was both to protect a city from an enemy and to block up every way of escape.⁸⁵

Interestingly, *Paul uses a military metaphor to talk about God’s peace!* It has been well said that, ‘Weapons of war guard the world; God’s peace guards the church’.⁸⁶

Whether or not our supplications receive a favourable response,⁸⁷ the automatic consequence, Paul says, of our making known our requests to God, is our enjoyment of God’s own peace. This peace mounts ‘*guard*’ on our hearts and minds, to repel and fend off all attacks from crippling anxieties and distressing fears. Following our making known our requests to God, that is, we enjoy the luxury of the unruffled and untroubled calm and tranquillity⁸⁸ which surrounds the very ‘throne of the Majesty in the heavens’.⁸⁹

I understand that, in Paul’s time, the city of Philippi housed a Roman garrison.⁹⁰ The saints there would, therefore, have readily appreciated the verbal picture which Paul is painting of the seat of their thoughts and feelings as a place so defended that no anxious cares could ever *sneak in*—as, on separate occasions, (i) two Israelite spies,⁹¹ (ii) young David⁹² and (iii) himself, Saul of Tarsus,⁹³ *sneaked out* of guarded places.

Many are the times that we have found our worries and problems suddenly shrink when dragged before the throne of God and of grace.⁹⁴ And that throne is a truly wonderful place for it is the place where our burdens are lifted from our shoulders on to God’s!

But when will we learn (i) that we can make known our requests to God ‘*in everything*’ ... (ii) that there is *nothing too great* for God’s power to accomplish,⁹⁵ and *nothing too small* for His fatherly heart to care about ... (iii) that, frankly, *if a problem isn’t worth praying about, it isn’t worth worrying about?*

*O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer!*⁹⁶

Such undisturbed peace (i) ‘*surpasses*’ (‘transcends’⁹⁷) our highest thoughts,⁹⁸ or (ii), as the word can be translated, is ‘*better than*’⁹⁹ all understanding ... ‘better’ even than understanding the reason for our trials or knowing what will befall us in the future.¹⁰⁰

Verses 8-9. Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are commendable, if anything is excellent, if anything is praiseworthy, consider these things.

Whatever you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, do these things. And the God of peace shall be with you.

I have seen ‘an optimist’ defined as ‘a woman who slips her shoes back on when the preacher says, “**Finally**”’. But I suspect that Paul’s expression (literally, ‘**for the rest**’) indicates that he is now moving on to a fresh point.

As we all know, *our minds suffer attack from more than one direction*. They are often bombarded, not only by *anxious* thoughts, but also by *sinful and worldly* thoughts. The apostle provides us, therefore, in verse 8 with what we might well label, ‘**Food for thought**’ ... with an extensive menu of wholesome and nourishing mental and spiritual food for the Christian mind. No junk food here!

The promise in verse 9 centres, not now in ‘**the peace of God**’, as in verse 7, but in ‘**the God of peace**’,¹⁰¹ directing our attention from *the gift* to *the Giver*.

But, as was the case with the **enjoyment of the peace of God** in verses 6 and 7, so here in verses 8 and 9 the **enjoyment of the presence of God** is **conditional**.

In verses 6 and 7, the apostle exhorts his readers ‘in everything’ to make known their requests to God, and promised that then, but only then, ‘**the peace of God ... shall** guard your hearts and minds’.

Now in verses 8 and 9, he exhorts his readers to *ponder*¹⁰² certain ‘things’ and to *practise* certain ‘things’, and promises that then, but only then, ‘**the God of peace shall** be with you’.¹⁰³

May God help you and me to meet the conditions and, thereby, to enjoy the fulfilment of His promises.

Notes

¹ Literally, 'help *them*'; that is, the apostle is definitely speaking of Euodia and Syntyche.

² Phil. 3. 20-21.

³ Paul himself enjoyed no less than four citizenships in all: Acts 21. 39; 22. 28; Eph. 2. 12; Phil. 3. 20.

⁴ This expression is found nine times in Philippians and 43 times in all of Paul's letters.

⁵ Phil. 1. 27.

⁶ Phil. 2. 2.

⁷ Phil. 3. 1.

⁸ Phil. 1. 7-8.

⁹ (i) 'In a way not quite paralleled elsewhere, the apostle here piles up five distinct terms of endearment—my brothers, beloved, longed-for, my joy, my crown—before uttering the command. And after the command, he repeats the term "beloved" so as to leave no doubt regarding his attitude toward them', Moisés Silva, *Philippians: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, comment on Phil. 4. 1.

(ii) 'Paul commends them in some of the most affectionate and endearing language he ever uses in his letters', P. T. O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians (New International Greek Testament Commentary)*, comment on Phil. 4. 1.

¹⁰ Compare 1 Thess. 2. 19.

(i) 'Because *στέφανος* often refers to the 'crown' that is given to the believer on the final day and since the parallel passage (1 Thess. 2. 19) speaks of the Thessalonian Christians being Paul's joy or crown in which he will glory at the parousia of the Lord Jesus, both *χαρά* and *στέφανος* in this context have been taken by many as referring to the future ... when it will be evident that he has not run in vain or laboured in vain (Phil. 2. 16)', P. T. O'Brien, *op. cit.*, comment on Phil. 4. 1.

(ii) 'In this context he is pointing to the time when, along with the Thessalonians and others of his converts and friends, they will stand together with him in the presence of Christ', G. D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians: The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, page 388.

¹¹ See Phil. 3. 13-14.

¹² Phil. 1. 27-29.

¹³ 'To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi', Phil. 1. 1.

¹⁴ Phil. 1. 1.

¹⁵ Phil. 1. 23-24.

¹⁶ Phil. 2. 17.

¹⁷ Paul exhorted the church to 'strive together for the faith of the gospel', Phil. 1. 27, but, sadly, these two women (who had once set an example of just that, Phil. 4. 3) were now striving with each other.

¹⁸ Phil. 1. 1.

¹⁹ Phil. 1. 4, 7, 8, 25; 2. 17, 26.

²⁰ Phil. 2. 2.

²¹ Phil. 1. 27; 2. 2.

²² Phil. 2. 2.

²³ (i) It may well be that 'Paul carefully and covertly wove his argument to lead up to the impassioned summons in Phil. 4. 2. He wrote primarily to defuse the dispute between these two women that was having disastrous repercussions for the unity of the church', David E. Garland, '*The Composition and Unity of Philippians: Some Neglected Literary Factors*', *Novum Testamentum*, Volume 27 (1985), page 173.

(ii) 'Here we may see the significance of the repeated 'all' of the earlier chapters. Paul makes it clear that he makes no distinction in his affection and in his prayers for them: he prays for them all (Phil. 1. 3), he longs for them all (Phil. 1. 8), he hopes to continue with them all (Phil. 1. 25), he rejoices with them all (Phil. 2. 17) and he assures them that Epaphroditus is longing for them all (Phil. 2. 26)', F. W. Beare, *ibid.*, pages 143-144.

(iii) Speaking personally, I would not go so far as to say that 'the root of the disharmony in the church of Philippi is the rivalry of two outstanding women', F. W. Beare, 'A Commentary on the Epistle to the Philippians', pages 142-143.

²⁴ '*Athleo*, "to contend in games, wrestle"', W. E. Vine, '*Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*', article 'Strive', 8 and Note 1.

²⁵ Possibly, they had assisted the apostle with material help as Lydia had done, Acts 16. 15, 40.

²⁶ Paul's use of the verb 'help' may suggest that the two women were themselves already attempting to deal with their discord and to restore harmony between themselves.

²⁷ Luke 5. 1-11, with Matt. 4. 18; Mark 1. 16.

²⁸ 'Primarily "lawfully begotten" ... hence, "true, genuine, sincere", W. E. Vine, *op.cit.*, article 'True, Truly, Truth', Adjectives 3.

²⁹ 'A joiner together'.

³⁰ 'The work of peacemaker has a high reward (Matt. 5. 9)', A. T. Robertson, '*Paul's Joy in Christ: Studies in Philippians*', page 229.

³¹ Philemon 10-11.

³² 'Clearly, it was unnecessary to name the person (unless *Σύζυγος* ['Yokefellow'] is itself a proper name), since everyone at Philippi, including the one so addressed, would know who was intended ... If *Σύζυγος* is a proper name, then the adjective *γνήσε* [true] indicates that the colleague is rightly named; Paul is punning, as he does with Onesimus (Phm. 11), and in effect saying: 'You who are *Σύζυγος* are a comrade not in name only but also in deed', P. T. O'Brien, *ibid.*, comment on Phil. 4. 3.

³³ 'Lipsius enumerates five Clements mentioned by Tacitus alone: and extant inscriptions would supply still more convincing proofs of its frequency. Though common enough before, its popularity was doubtless much increased under the Flavian dynasty, when it was borne by members of the reigning house', J. B. Lightfoot, '*Saint Paul's Epistle to the Philippians*', page 169.

³⁴ Phil. 4. 3.

³⁵ (i) 'They are not forgotten, for their names are written by no human hand in the register of that blessed assemblage which shall inherit eternal life—a *greater honour by far than being mentioned even in the list of an apostle's eulogy*', J. Eadie, '*A Commentary on the Greek text of the Epistle of Paul to the Philippians*', page 242.

(ii) 'Although this unknown number ('the rest') of Paul's coworkers is not singled out by name as were others, these, along with the three already mentioned in verses 2 and 3, find a place in God's record, the book of life', P. T. O'Brien, *ibid.*, comment on Phil. 4. 3.

³⁶ Luke 10. 20. (We may note in passing that Paul quotes (in 1 Tim. 5. 18) the words of the Lord Jesus recorded in Luke 10. 7.)

³⁷ Phil. 3. 20.

³⁸ 'He doubles it to take away the scruple of those that might say, "What, shall we rejoice in afflictions?" "Yes, I say again, rejoice"; so that it is not left to us to rejoice or not rejoice: but, whatsoever befalls us, we must always, at all times, rejoice in the Lord, who taketh care for us', George Herbert, '*Herbert: Poems and Prose; Selected by W. H. Auden*', page 134.

³⁹ Phil. 1. 4, 18(2), 25; 2. 2, 17(2), 18(2), 28, 29; 3. 1; 4. 1, 4(2), 10.

⁴⁰ (i) 'The addition of "always" [cf. Phil. 3. 1] prepares for the prohibition, "Don't be worrying about anything". *For constant joy drives out every worry*', R. H. Gundry, 'Commentary on the New Testament: Verse-by-Verse Explanations with a Literal Translation', page 794.

(ii) Phil. 4. 4 provides one of seven key 'always' expressions in the epistles of Paul:

(a) 'Always *abounding* in the work of the Lord', 1 Cor. 15. 58.

(b) '*Giving thanks* always for all things to God and the Father', Eph. 5. 20.

(c) '*Praying* always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit', Eph. 6. 18.

(d) 'Always ... *Christ* shall be *magnified* in my body', Phil. 1. 20.

(e) '*Rejoice* in the Lord always', Phil. 4. 4.

(f) 'Let your *speech* be always *with grace*', Col. 4. 6.

(g) 'Always seek to *do good* to one another and to everyone', 1 Thess. 5. 15.

⁴¹ 1 Thess. 5. 16. (This is the shortest verse in the Greek New Testament, shorter than John 11. 35).

⁴² Acts 16. 24-25.

⁴³ Phil. 4. 9.

⁴⁴ 'The person whose happiness depends on ideal circumstances is going to be miserable much of the time ... here is the Apostle Paul in the worst of circumstances, writing a *letter saturated with joy*', Warren W. Wiersbe, '*Be Joyful: Philippians*', page 16.

⁴⁵ 2 Cor. 6. 10.

⁴⁶ B. W. Witherington III, '*Paul's Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*', page 245.

⁴⁷ Hab. 3. 17-18. I suppose it would be true to say that the prophet Habakkuk, who started his prophecy/burden in the deep valley ('O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear?' Hab. 1. 2) , ended it on the mountaintop ('I will joy in the God of my salvation', Hab. 3. 18).

We know that the apostle Paul was familiar with Habakkuk's prophecy (Compare Acts 13. 41 with Hab. 1. 5; Rom. 1. 17 and Gal. 3. 11 with Hab. 2. 4).

I have often wondered whether Paul ever pondered the closing section of the prophecy ('Although the fig tree shall not blossom ... yet I will rejoice in the Lord', Hab. 3. 17-18) and realised just how apt a description this contrast provides of not a few of his own experiences. For example, I imagine the apostle saying:

(i) 'Although I have been beaten with rods and am in an inner prison, with my feet fastened in the stocks, yet I will pray and sing hymns to God' (see Acts 16. 22-25);

(ii) 'Although I am in the midst of a violent sea storm aboard a doomed vessel, headed for trial before Emperor Nero (see Acts 25. 11-12; 27. 14, 22), yet 'I believe God' that both I and all with me on board the vessel will be saved (see Acts 27. 24-25, 31);

(iii) 'Although I am afflicted, perplexed, persecuted and cast down, yet I am not crushed, not driven to despair, not forsaken and not destroyed' (see 2 Cor. 4. 8-9);

(iv) 'Although I am as having nothing, yet I am possessing all things' (see 2 Cor. 6. 10);

(v) 'Although I have been given a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, yet, with the Lord's grace and power, I will glory in my weaknesses' (see 2 Cor. 12. 7-9).

'Though never a blossom the fig-tree shall wear,
Though the vines in their season are blasted and bare,
Though the olive-tree only be labour in vain,
And no meat shall be found in the field or the plain,
Though the last of the flocks be cut off from the fold
And there be not a herd in the stalls to behold,
Yet, the prophet declares, I'll rejoice in the Lord;
Yet the God of Salvation can pleasure afford;
Yet my strength in Jehovah my Lord I shall find,
And I'll leap on the mountains of truth like the hind.

*In the day of adversity, never forget
Habakkuk's "Though" and Habakkuk's "Yet".
(I. Y. Ewan, 'The Caravanserai', page 184.)*

⁴⁸ (i) 'One of the most untranslatable of all Greek words', William Barclay, '*The Letters to Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians*', page 92.

(ii) 'One of those terms that is difficult to pin down with precision', G. D. Fee, *ibid.*, page 406.

⁴⁹ The following seven quotations represent attempts to capture the meaning and sense of the Greek word:

(i) 'The mildness of disposition that leads one to be fair and *to go beyond the letter of the law*', A. T. Robertson, *ibid.*, page 233.

(ii) 'It *does not insist on what is its due*', J. Eadie, *ibid.*, page 248.

(iii) 'Unselfish *yieldingness*', H. C. G. Moule, '*Philippian Studies*', page 234.

(iv) 'Aristotle contrasts it with the idea of strict justice [*Nicomachean Ethics*, 5. 10]. It refers to a person who is willing to be magnanimous above and *beyond what is strictly fair*', B. W. Witherington III, *ibid.*, page 246.

(v) 'It expresses exactly that moderation which recognizes the impossibility that cleaves to formal law ... which recognizes the danger that ever waits upon the assertion of legal rights, lest they should be pushed into moral wrongs ... which, therefore, *pushes not its own rights to the uttermost*. ... It is thus more truly just than strict justice would have been', R. C. Trench, '*Synonyms of the New Testament*', 1871, article xliii, pages 145-146.

(vi) 'Perhaps "graciousness" is the best English equivalent; and, in the context here, it is to be the spirit of *willingness to yield* under trial which will show itself in a refusal to retaliate when attacked', R. P. Martin, '*Philippians: Tyndale New Testament Commentary*', comment on Phil. 4. 4.

(vii) 'The man who is *epieikés* knows that there are times when a thing may be legally completely justified and yet morally completely wrong. The man who is *epieikés* ... knows the time when to stand on his rights would unquestionably be legal, and would just as unquestionably be completely unchristian', William Barclay, '*New Testament Words*', page 95.

⁵⁰ Gen. 13. 8-9.

⁵¹ Gen. 26. 17-22.

⁵² 'I, Paul, myself am pleading with you by the meekness and gentleness ('yieldingness') of Christ', 2 Cor. 10. 1. By way of illustration, I note how, when rejected by the residents of a Samaritan village, the Lord Jesus refused to retaliate but 'went to another village', Luke 9. 53-56.

⁵³ Phil. 2. 5-8.

⁵⁴ 'Considerate thoughtfulness', F. W. Beare, *ibid.*, page 146.

⁵⁵ If verse 1 tells us to *yield nothing* of the gospel (cf. Phil. 1. 27), verse 5 tells us to *yield everything* of self. Yet we need to be wise. There are times when it is necessary to take a stand for the sake of others, as Paul himself did; see Acts 16. 35-39. It is inconceivable that the apostle would write as he now does if this is not perfectly consistent with his action then.

⁵⁶ 'The Greek *ἐγγύς*, like the English 'near', can be used either spatially or temporally.

(i) In the one case, it means 'near, close at hand, in the vicinity' ...

(ii) In the other, *ἐγγύς* denotes 'near' in terms of time, and can refer to proximity ...

'Both interpretations are theologically correct, and it may be unnecessary to choose between them. The apostle may have intended to include both ideas of time and space ...

'For them to know that the Lord is *ἐγγύς*, in the twofold sense suggested (namely, that He is at hand now and will come quickly), would be a powerful incentive for them to respond to the apostolic injunctions and live in this godly way', P. T. O'Brien, *ibid.*, comments on Phil. 4. 5.

⁵⁷ Phil. 3. 20.

⁵⁸ 'To say that God is *immanent* is to say that He is present in time and space, that *He is near us*', J. M. Frame, '*Divine Transcendence and Immanence*', accessed at <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/divine-transcendence-immanence/>.

⁵⁹ 1 Cor. 16. 22.

⁶⁰ 'In their relations with others they are to show a gracious and gentle spirit which does not insist upon its own rights, since they know that *the Lord's coming will vindicate their cause*', Geoffrey B. Wilson, '*Philippians*', page 93.

⁶¹ See Psa. 34. 18; 75. 1; 119. 151; 145. 18.

⁶² Clement, '*Letter to the Corinthians*', circa AD 96, chapter 21. There is no reason to identify the author of this letter as the brother mentioned by Paul in Phil. 4. 3.

⁶³ 'For the Lord *Himself* shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God', 1 Thess. 4. 16.

⁶⁴ 'Because the *κύριος* ['Lord'] is at hand, and the final *δόξα* ['glory'] promised to Christians will soon be a manifest reality, they can be *έπεικείς* ['yielding'] towards all men in spite of every persecution', H. Preisker, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, volume II, page 590.

⁶⁵ 'Both in *my chains* and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace ... it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that *my chains* are in Christ ... most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by *my chains*, are much more bold to speak the word without fear ... the former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to *my chains*', Phil. 1. 7-16.

⁶⁶ Phil. 1. 20-21, 23.

Phil. 1. 28-30.

'From a human point of view, Paul himself had plenty of things to worry about, as a prisoner uncertain whether he would be set free or sentenced to death; and the people to whom he writes had ample cause for worry in the hostility of their neighbours and the constant threat of persecution. He is not speaking of imaginary troubles or unreal anxieties, but of serious threats and difficulties, of imminent and pressing dangers. *If he bids them have no anxiety—never be fretful—it is not because he makes light of the troubles which they face, but because he knows that God is greater than all our troubles*', F. W. Beare, *ibid.*, pages 146-147.

⁶⁷ 'Such a comprehensive admonition does not presuppose a superficial attitude to the Philippians' troubles; Paul's own precarious situation in prison shows once again that *he knew about serious danger only too well and so could write with some feeling on the subject*', P. T. O'Brien, *ibid.*, comments on Phil. 4. 6.

⁶⁸ Jer. 48. 10. See Keil and Delitzsch on Jer. 48. 10-12.

⁶⁹ 2 Cor. 11. 28; Phil. 2. 20.

⁷⁰ 'It is clear that *μεριμνάω* ('be anxious') has a double flavour. The care for our fellow Christians is obviously a different thing from the care for the things of this world ... *what is forbidden is disabling worry and not enabling foresight*', William Barclay, *ibid.*, pages 200, 203.

⁷¹ Matt. 6. 31-32.

'One evening, Luther saw a little bird perching on a tree and taking up its rest for night, and he said: "That little bird has chosen its shelter, and is about to go to sleep in tranquillity: it has no disquietude, neither does it consider where it shall rest to-morrow night, but it sits in peace on that slender branch, leaving it to God to provide for it. Thus, we ourselves ought to trust in God, who so far from willing our condemnation, has given for us His own Son"', W. G. Moorhead, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, page 37.

⁷² 1 Pet. 5. 7.

Earlier in his letter (1 Pet. 2. 25), Peter had quoted from Isaiah 53. 6, 'All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way', which verse continues, as Peter would have known well, 'and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all'. And was He (our Lord Jesus) able to carry (to bear) the weight of all the iniquities which God laid on Him? Oh, yes – most certainly He was! And I note that Peter therefore prefixed his quote from Isaiah 53 with the words, 'who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree', 1 Pet. 2. 24. Now Peter insists that his persecuted and suffering readers cast their anxieties where their iniquities were once laid—'on Him!' And this, Peter says, 'because He cares for you'.

⁷³ In nothing worry; in everything pray! Prayer with thanksgiving 'will cause our fears and worries to melt away', F. W. Beare, *ibid.*, page 147.

⁷⁴ J. A. Bengel, *Gnomon of the New Testament*, comment on Phil. 4. 6.

⁷⁵ Acts 16. 13.

⁷⁶ Acts 16. 16.

⁷⁷ Acts 16. 25, 34.

⁷⁸ The refrain in the hymn, '*Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus*'. For Louisa M. R. Stead's moving story, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gm3WTVdfMe4>.

⁷⁹ Matt. 6. 8.

⁸⁰ 'Though God knows all our needs before we ask Him, He delights to have that expression of our confidence in Him which intelligently utters our needs in detail in communion with Him', W. E. Vine, *Philippians*, page 96.

⁸¹ The fact that Hezekiah ‘spread’ the letter suggests strongly that the letter was in the form of parchment or papyrus, rather than of a wax or clay tablet. As confirmation that Assyrian scribes did write on leather or papyrus see Plates 75 and, especially, 76 on pages 76 and 78 in ‘*Scribes, Script and Books*’, by L Avrin. See also, ‘*The Cambridge Ancient History*’, edited by John Boardman, I. E. S. Edwards, page 184, and ‘*The Book Before Printing: Ancient, Medieval and Oriental*’, by David Diringer, page 174.

⁸² 2 Kings 19. 14-16; Isa. 37. 14-17.

(i) ‘For Hezekiah, this is an Old Testament instance of letting your “requests be made known to God” (Phil. 4. 6)’, D. R. Davis, ‘*2 Kings: The Power and the Fury*’, page 279.

(ii) ‘Hezekiah does not merely wish to tell God about the offending document; he places it before him in its entirety, as if to say, “Surely this cannot be left unanswered”’, J. N. Oswalt, ‘*The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39 (NICOT)*’, comment on Isa. 37. 14.

(iii) Compare, ‘In a call for divine attention, an Aramaic treaty inscription from mid-eighth century Sefire, speaking to all the deities, calls: “*Open your eyes to gaze upon the treaty*”’, D. W. Baker, ‘*Isaiah: Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*’, comment on Isa. 37. 17.

⁸³ 2 Kings 18. 19, 28; Isa. 36. 4; 13.

⁸⁴ 2 Cor. 11. 32-33.

⁸⁵ ‘φρουρέω is a military term, to keep as with a garrison (2 Cor. 11. 32); it is used of the security of the believer till the end (1 Pet. 1. 5)’, W. E. Vine, *ibid.*, page 96.

The mind and heart of the praying believer are *guarded by the peace of God* (Phil. 4. 7), while the believer himself or herself is *guarded by the power of God* (1 Pet. 1. 5).

⁸⁶ C. Wordsworth, ‘*The New Testament in the Original Greek: with Introductions and Notes*’, Volume 2, page 358.

⁸⁷ We rest in the knowledge that God is all-wise and that He answers our prayers as He sees best.

⁸⁸ (i) ‘If we are content to trust God, and to leave our difficulties to His disposing, He imparts to us His peace’, F. W.

Beare, *ibid.*, page 147.

(ii) ‘What is God’s peace? *The unruffled serenity of the infinitely-happy God ... This shall possess your heart and mind*’, C. H. Surgeon, ‘*Prayer, the Cure of Care*’, a sermon preached at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, London on 12 January 1888.

⁸⁹ Heb. 8. 1.

⁹⁰ ‘Paul says this peace will “guard” us. He uses a military term that would have evoked familiar images in the minds of the Philippians. *The city of Philippi housed a Roman garrison ...*’, Sam Storms, ‘*The Spiritual harvest of Justification*’, accessed at <https://www.samstorms.org/all-articles/post/-20-the-spiritual-harvest-of-justification-romans-51-11--1->.

⁹¹ ‘She *let them down* by a rope *through a window*, for her house was on the city wall’, Josh. 2. 15.

⁹² ‘Michal *let David down through a window*. And he went and fled and escaped’, 1 Sam. 19. 12.

⁹³ ‘*I was let down* in a basket *through a window* by the wall and escaped his hands’, 2 Cor. 11. 33.

⁹⁴ ‘As the result of prayer, of the unbosoming of themselves to God about everything, they should enjoy profound tranquillity’, J. Eadie, *ibid.*, page 256.

⁹⁵ God is never at the mercy of circumstances!

⁹⁶ J. M. Scriven, the hymn, ‘*What a friend we have in Jesus*’.

⁹⁷ Greek word: ‘*ὑπερέχω*’.

⁹⁸ God’s peace is beyond the range of our comprehension. Compare, ‘to know the love of Christ that *surpasses* (a different Greek word: ‘*ὑπερβάλλω*’) knowledge’, Eph. 3. 19.

⁹⁹ J. B. Lightfoot, *ibid.*, page 161. Compare, ‘let each esteem other *better* (the same Greek word: ‘*ὑπερέχω*’) than themselves’, Phil. 2. 3.

¹⁰⁰ I have to smile at the following anecdote recorded in the notebook of Archdeacon Thomas Plume (1630-1704): 'King James said that *Dr Donne's verses were like the peace of God: they passed all understanding!*'

[John Donne (1572-1631) is perhaps best known as the author of the following:

*'No man is an island,
Entire of itself,
Every man is a piece of the continent,
A part of the main. . . .
And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls;
It tolls for thee'.]*

¹⁰¹ This divine title occurs no less than seven times in the New Testament; Rom. 15. 33; 16. 20; 1 Cor. 14. 33; 2 Cor. 13. 11; Phil. 4. 9; 1 Thess. 5. 23; Heb. 13. 20.

'The peace of God' is *in* the believer and 'the God of peace' is *with* the believer.

¹⁰² (i) 'The verb signifies not merely "meditate upon", or "think on these things", but "take them into account", "give them weight"', F. W. Beare, *ibid.*, page 148.

(ii) 'High thinking is essential to holy living', A. T. Robertson, *ibid.*, page 242.

(iii) Meditation 'will keep your hearts and souls from sinful thoughts. When the vessel is full you can put no more in it ... If the heart is full of sinful thoughts, there is no room for holy and heavenly thoughts. But if the heart is full of holy and heavenly thoughts by meditation, there is no room for evil and sinful thoughts', William Bridge, '*The Sweetness of Divine Meditation*', page 33.

¹⁰³ And so, if our enjoyment of 'the peace of God' is dependent upon making known our requests to God, our enjoyment of the presence of 'the God of peace' is dependent upon (a) our thinking right thoughts, and (b) our doing right things.