

Three Things That Occupy A Christian's Mind.

Text: Phil 1:3-11

Suggested Hymns:

504, 256, 617, 368, 367

1) His fellowship in the Gospel

2) His Perseverance In The Faith

3) His Growth In sanctification

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Philippians 1:3–11, ³ *I thank my God upon every remembrance of you,* ⁴ *always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy,* ⁵ *for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now,* ⁶ *being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ;* ⁷ *just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace.*

⁸ *For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ.* ⁹ *And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment,* ¹⁰ *that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ,* ¹¹ *being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

In this Epistle St. Paul exposes his whole soul to the Philippians, and reveals what kind of thoughts occupied his mind as he was held a prisoner in Rome.

He thanks God for the Philippians' fellowship in the Gospel. He trusts that they will persevere in the faith unto the end. And he prays for them that they might grow in sanctification.

No such thoughts come to the minds of unbelievers. The unbelieving children of this world have their thoughts fixed on nothing but the things of this world. Their one and only desire is to enjoy this life, to have a good time upon

this earth, to eat, drink and be merry, to obtain wealth and acquire an abundance of earthly possessions, to be honoured among men, and to have a great name.

These are the things which occupy their minds day and night. And how restless they are in the chase after riches, how they scheme and rack their brains that they might obtain this world's goods and enjoy them! How easily are they led by their impulsiveness and by their craving for wealth and pleasure to deviate from the path of honesty, to resort to unlawful means, to trickery and fraud, to burden their own conscience, and to make themselves miserable!

Surely, true happiness cannot dwell in the hearts of those who have no higher aim and desire than to receive their good things in their lifetime, and who occupy their minds with nothing but earthly things.

Happy are those people who are in the world, but not of the world! Happy are the faithful Christians! They also occupy their minds with earthly things to a certain extent, inasmuch as they must live and get along in the world, but their citizenship is in heaven,¹ they have set their affection on the things that are above.

There are things of much higher importance to them than the things of this present life. In our Epistle the Apostle mentions three things that occupy a Christian's mind. Let us consider these. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Three Things That Occupy A Christian's Mind

First - His Fellowship In The Gospel

Our text begins, “³ *I thank my God upon every remembrance of you,* ⁴ *always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy,* ⁵ *for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now.*” From these words of the Apostle we see that our fellowship in the Gospel is both an unmerited blessing and an inestimable blessing.

This is an unmerited blessing. Why does St. Paul thank God for the fellowship of the Philippians in the Gospel from the first day until now?

Why does he praise God for the blessing, that certain people in the town of Philippi had come to the knowledge of the truth, had received the Gospel of Christ, had banded together and united to form a Christian congregation, and

were now walking the narrow way that leads to heaven as brothers and sisters in the Lord?

Why does he not praise the Philippians for that? Why does he not give them the credit for severing their connection with the heathen and with the Jewish synagogue, and fellowshiping together in the Gospel, for rallying together under the banner of the Gospel as brothers and sisters in Christ?

He does that because our fellowship in the Gospel is an unmerited blessing. God alone deserves the praise when any person joins the Christian ranks.

Now let me ask you, my friends, is your fellowship in the Gospel one of the things that occupy your mind? Do you know that it is God's command that a Christian should not separate himself from the other Christians and walk his way alone, but that he should be united with other Christians in a Christian congregation and fellowship with them?

Do you know that we are exhorted in the Bible not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together,² as the manner of some is? And if you are in fellowship with other Christians, do you praise and thank God for it and not take the credit for yourself? Do you consider it an unmerited blessing?

In there any reason in yourselves that God has so led and governed you in life that you became a member of a Christian congregation? Are you any better than others who plod along the broad way that leads to destruction? Are you not just as damnable a sinner as all the rest of men, and must you not admire and extol the grace of God who has called you out of darkness into His marvellous light?

And what an inestimable blessing is your fellowship in the Gospel! The Apostle says that with joy he makes request and thanks to God for the Philippians' fellowship in the Gospel. Your heart should be filled with joy because you have been called into fellowship in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Can you estimate, can you sufficiently value, the blessing which you receive in a Christian congregation in which you are privileged to take a part in the great work for your Lord and Master, in which others help and assist you to remain true to God, in which you are comforted when afflicted, in which the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity and the holy Sacraments are administered according to Christ's institution?

Shame on those Christians who draw back from a Christian congregation for all sorts of petty reasons! The inestimable spiritual blessings which they receive as members should induce them to remain with the congregation, in the fellowship in the Gospel, in spite of all their little troubles.

2. Three Things That Occupy A Christian's Mind

Second - His Perseverance In The Faith

The second thing that occupies a Christian's mind, next to his fellowship in the Gospel, is his perseverance in the faith. The Apostle says: *⁶ being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ; ⁷ just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace.*

⁸ For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ.

What will your fellowship in the Gospel benefit you if you do not persevere in the faith? The very purpose of the Gospel is to bring us to the faith, and for this very purpose a Christian remains in a Christian congregation and in the fellowship in the Gospel that he might not lose the faith.

Without faith it is impossible to please God,³ and that which makes us acceptable with God and brings us into eternal life is faith in our blessed Redeemer, in the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ who bled and died on the cross for our sins.

It is not our own holiness, our honesty and uprightness in our dealings with others, that saves us. It is faith that saves us, and faith alone. Every true Christian knows that, and, therefore, one of the main things that occupies a Christian's mind is faith. He knows his own sinful heart, that rebellious spirit within himself which does not want to believe the things which God has spoken.

He sees how many Christians walk the narrow way only for a short while, and then enter upon the broad way, how many make a shipwreck concerning faith and are lost in the world. He sees how easily faith is torn out of the heart, and how craftily the devil and the world seek to rob him of the faith.

Will I persevere in the faith unto the end? Will I never stray away from my Good Shepherd into whose care I have entrusted myself? Will I keep the faith? Or will all my work and labour in the Lord's kingdom have been in vain?

Will I forsake my God and Saviour and be eternally lost? Such thoughts may trouble and worry a Christian a great deal. But he soon finds that such thoughts come from the old wicked foe who whispers them into his ears.

How can you entertain the shadow of a doubt as to your final salvation as long as you are in the fellowship of Christ and as long as you are a true believer? Has not God taken the work of your salvation into His own hands? Is not the Lord Jesus the Author and Finisher of your faith?⁴

Is faith your own work? Can you by your own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, our Lord, or come to Him? Is not faith God's work in you, and has not God promised that He will not leave you nor forsake you?⁵

Therefore you should be confident of this very thing, that, as our text says, *He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ*. Away, then, with your doubts and fears as to your perseverance in the faith! See that you always retain fellowship in the Gospel, that you may always hear the voice of the Gospel with its precious promises, and leave all the rest to God.

Then you will be able to exclaim with St. Paul,⁶ ³⁸ *For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

3. Three Things That Occupy A Christian's Mind

Third - His Growth In sanctification.

Still, there is one more thing that occupies a Christian's mind, and that is his growth in sanctification. The Apostle says: *"⁹ And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰ that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, ¹¹ being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God."*

Here the Apostle speaks of the Philippians' growth in sanctification, or in holiness of life. And note the fact that he prays for their sanctification. A true Christian does not rest and stand still on the way to eternal life. He goes forward. He presses onward. He grows in sanctification. He increases in love and in all Christian virtues.

But do you think that of your own natural power you can do better and become a better Christian? No, your sinful flesh clings to you, and the moment you rely on your own natural strength for doing good you will find that the flesh gets the upper hand over the spirit.

You may form all sorts of good resolves, but you will never carry them out. Prayer is needed here. You must pray to God that He would lead you in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.⁷ Without Him you can do nothing.⁸ Every good gift and every perfect gift comes from above, from the Father of lights.⁹ To Him you must pray for growth in sanctification, and He will enable you by the power of His Holy Spirit to abound more and more in knowledge and in all discernment, as the Apostle says.

Here we have the two things in which a Christian must grow as he pursues his course on the way of sanctification. He must grow in knowledge. See that your knowledge of divine things be increased, that more and more you comprehend the plan of salvation as set forth in the Holy Scriptures, so that you may truly say: "***I know whom I have believed.***"¹⁰

Therefore you must be a regular attendant at the Divine Services and a diligent reader of your Bible. And see that you grow in all discernment, in the ability to tell which is the will of God, and what you are to do, or not to do, in doubtful circumstances, ¹⁰ ***that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ.***¹¹

See that you increase in holiness of life, in love to God and to your neighbour, in prayer, in divine worship, and in doing good to all people, especially to those who are of the household of faith.¹²

May the Lord, then, grant us His grace that our minds be occupied with the subjects which have been placed before us today, with our fellowship in the Gospel, with our perseverance in the faith, and with our growth in sanctification.

Then we will show that we belong to those of whom the Word of God says that they set their affection on the things that are above¹³ where Christ sits on the right hand of God. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Phil 3:20

² Heb 10:25

³ Heb 11:6

⁴ Heb 12:2

⁵ Heb 13:5

⁶ Romans 8:38-39

⁷ Psalm 23:3

⁸ John 15:5

⁹ James 1:17

¹⁰ 2 Timothy 1:12

¹¹ Philippians 1:10

¹² Gal 6:10

¹³ Col 3:2