**Bringing Hope in a Shattered World through the Philippi Charter**

When life is good at home, at work and in our Church we tend to simply settle back and ride along with it. However life has its ups and downs and there are occasions when our personal world is turned upside down. Circumstances and events leave our comfortable world in fragments.

A few years ago Jennifer had a terrible accident that literally shattered her knee cap and tibia in several places. It took almost six hours of surgery to reconstruct her leg. The surgeon inserted half a dozen pins and two long metal plates just below her knee to hold all the bits and pieces in place. She was confined to her bed for the best part of six months and it was almost a year before she ventured out in a wheel chair and eventually took her first steps. Six years on she can now play tennis, take country walks unaided and although she struggles to stand still for any length of time. We thank God that her shattered knee and leg have been healed beyond all expectation.

On a Global scale we live in a world where old values and standards have been left shattered and fragmented by the new easy to use religions of Human Rights, Political Correctness and Health and Safety. Sadly recent events in a number of countries, including the UK, have shown that the Political world is anything but correct! So bringing hope in a shattered world, where Banking officials have bankrupted the world system and paid themselves a bonus for doing it. Where leaders of the “big five” nations cannot agree on climate pollution controls and where the rise in violence, poverty, unemployment, HIV and AIDS is taken as an accepted consequence of a down turn in the global economy and a changing world.

When I first had that nudge from God about the Philippi Trust it was through what is now known as the Philippi Charter. I have enjoyed many uplifting moments and have seen many people and branches in the Philippi Trust blessed by these few verses.

***1****If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion,* ***2****then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.* ***3****Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.* ***4****Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

***5****Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ* Jesus:

Isn’t it odd that in Scripture God never asks us to create unity or even to work towards it, It is one of the many gifts He has given us in our union with Christ Jesus. We are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:28). This basic doctrinal truth is foundational to all of us who follow Christ and enjoy the unity that comes from fellowship in the Holy Spirit. *(Koinonia)*  . So although this young Philippian church, to whom Paul was writing, had already been blessed with spiritual oneness because of their union in Christ, Paul wanted to expand their understanding of how big a blessing it really was.

Let me invite you to go back with me and slowly read the passage once again. Close your eyes and reflect on what it might mean to you. Allow the Holy Spirit to feed your understanding. What does it say to you about unity? About oneness? About togetherness? About care? About fellowship in the spirit? About hope and purpose? Later you may like to take some time to pray and meditate over these words. Allow the Lord to show you just how beautiful and enriching they can be.

Throughout the forty years I have known the Lord, I have met some wonderful people and enjoyed the richest of fellowship. Yet one thing has always puzzled me. If we have such a strong spiritual unity in Christ why is it there so much division among Christians? Why can’t we simply put our differences to one side and just get along together? In the Philippi Trust God has blessed us with individuals from every Christian denomination: Baptist, Roman Catholic, Methodist, Pentecostal, Anglican, Non Conformists, House Group, Lutheran and many other small fellowships of believers. So how do we all get on so well with such a wide spectrum of doctrinal diversity? Perhaps it might have something to do with the foundations that were laid at the very beginning.

St Paul was addressing a potential problem of disunity with the young church at Philippi. His approach on that day provided us with the wisdom and spiritual insights that have been a pillar of strength for many people and churches throughout the following years.

William Barclay In his commentary on Philippians provides some understanding of the real issues affecting the young church at Philippi. He had this to say*. ‘Paul’s concern here is not about doctrines, ideas, or practices that are clearly unbiblical. It is about interpretations, standards, interests, preferences and the like that are largely matters of personal choice.’* So when Paul is talking about disagreements it isn’t about major doctrinal, or theological issues, it is about personal preferences, individual choices and our own likes and dislikes! Problems of disunity and disharmony tend to appear when two conflicting ideas clash. It tends to be more about individual alternatives and personal choice rather than issues of doctrine or Theology. It is not about whether Calvin, Luther, Augustine or Wesley has the correct interpretation. It is differences of opinion that are at the centre of most conflicts. In Philippi I think I have experienced differences of opinion on all the issues, and lots more, and no doubt many of you will have had similar experiences. Should I support,

Counselling or Ministry

Education Validation or Bible College

Charismatic or non-charismatic worship

Directive or non directive counselling

Church based counselling or Independent counselling centres

Lottery funded support or Gifts of faith

Healing Ministry or Pastoral care

Christian Counselling or Secular Counselling

ACC Accreditation or BACP Accreditation

St Paul wasn’t immune from these sort of individual differences as Phil 4:2 shows, ‘I *urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord’*. I wonder what it was that had upset those two young women? Whatever it was, it caused St Paul to write the Philippi Charter and give us some insights into how church (Universal) should be.

Every single verse brings a treasure chest of blessings.

Vs 1 *If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ.* Stop and consider he says. Reflect on what you already have in the Lord Jesus Christ. Enjoy the fellowship of His presence. Enjoy the fruit of His spirit. Enjoy a unity with Him that allows you to embrace every other brother and sister in Christ, wherever they may be. Rejoice and be thankful because you belong, not only to Him but also to each other!

The second jewel is about love. ‘*if any comfort from his love’* When we know without doubt that we are loved, whether it be by the Lord, a spouse, a child or a friend then it builds within our soul a sense of security. Is there any better feeling than receiving a great big comfy hug from someone close to you? A hug that conveys safety, security, a deep level of care and with a great big slice of love. Or as Psalm 119 puts it, *‘May your unfailing love be my comfort’*. It is a good exercise in discipleship to find time, now and again, to embrace ourselves in the comfort of God’s love and allow Him the freedom to simply hold us in the comfort of His divine love. I wonder if this was how St Paul understood it when he wrote, *(Jesus) who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we too can comfort those in trouble. 2 Cor 1:4*

The third jewel is no less enriching*. if any tenderness and compassion.* And this is perhaps where the key lies to open the box to all the other treasures. This isn’t about me, me, me. It’s about developing an understanding of others to such an extent that the level of empathy goes way over the Richter Scale! This is about St Paul’s understanding of fellowship in the spirit, ***‘****Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love’*. (Eph 4:2)When I came out of prison after Jesus totally changed my life I went to live as part of a Christian Community. It proved to be a rich and rewarding experience yet not without its difficulties. This was a community of about twenty Christians living together frugally. The aim of our community was to live out our Christian life through our deeds rather than through our words. I had so much to learn from these dedicated disciples of Jesus. Tender, compassionate, humble, gentle, patient and yet with a Godly love strong enough to carry others when the need arose.

Paul then shows us the jewel in the crown of the Philippi Charter, *having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.* Over the years I have found that the Philippi Trust has been a wonderful place to experience *Koinonia.*  Of course there have been differences of opinion and personal conflicts, that is the nature of sin, yet overall I have enjoyed many hours of true Christian Fellowship with devout and dedicated people. We have prayed, we have worshipped, we have laughed we have cried, we have argued and made up – but always in sharing the same love, and being one in spirit and purpose!

As I come to the conclusion, let me remind you again of the treasure chest of jewels we have in the Philippi Charter.

We are Encouraged

We are united with Christ

We have comfort from his love

We have fellowship with the Spirit

We have tenderness and compassion

We share the same love

We are one in spirit and purpose

Our attitude can be the same as that of Christ Jesus

God has given us a treasure chest of spiritual riches to share with each other in order that we can enjoy fellowship together. I know that some find it easier to share than others and some feel their spiritual treasure chest can seem small and impoverished at times. Let me end by sharing a simple story with you.

Two children were playing on the beach at the seaside. One was about eight years old and the other about five. They both had a bucket and spade that represented the differences in their ages. ‘Your bucket can’t hold anything’, said the bigger child with a smug!. ‘Perhaps it doesn’t hold much’, said the smaller child, ‘but it can overflow lots!’

Sometimes we wish our spiritual buckets were bigger and sometimes we wish we could overflow more than we do. Our opportunities in life may have been restricted in one way or another, our minds may be short on capacity to take on board all the facts, but all of us, in our day to day lives can, ‘overflow lots’ with what we have got!

And out of this I offer you a new Philippi Beatitude,

*Blessed are those whose overall desire is unity in the spirit, forgiving one another in love, and sharing their gifts according to faith and ability.*

It is when we all unite as one body that we have the capacity to overflow with the love that God has given us, and bring hope and healing to a broken and shattered world.

Malcolm Worsley

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