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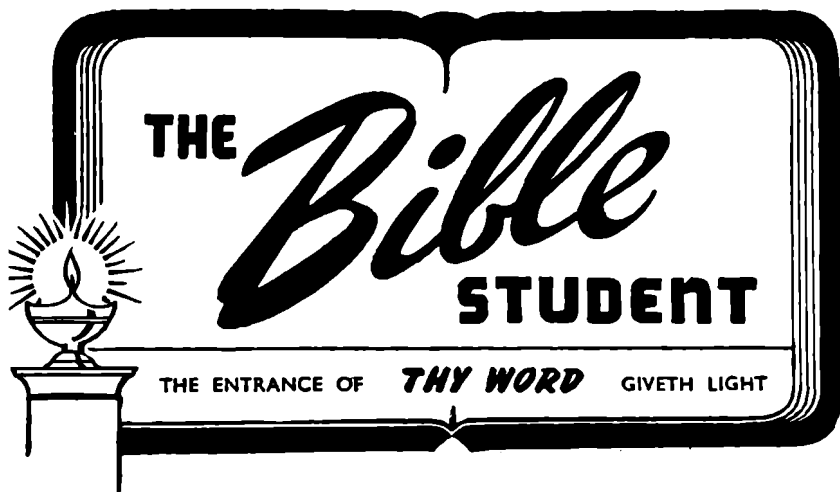
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CONTENTS

THE PROPHECY OF EZEKIEL	103
'TILL I COME'	110
WHO ARE THE OVERCOMERS?	117
AN EXPOSITORY STUDY OF ST JOHN'S GOSPEL	...	...	...	...	122
BIBLICAL HEBREW WORDS	...	...	...	...	129
'THE MYSTERY OF GOD, EVEN CHRIST'	132
NEW TESTAMENT WORD STUDIES	140
SEVEN O.T. FEASTS	143

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NEW TESTAMENT WORD STUDIES

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'Striving together with' (**sunathleo**)

One of the great blessings of the Gospel is the happy fellowship into which we are brought, being joined together in love, striving together in service, and being bound together in hope. That this fellowship is real is witnessed to in the large number of words in the New Testament, beginning with *sūn*—meaning, 'together with'.

In Philippians 4:3, three such words are found, 'fellow-yoked one', 'fellow-labourers', 'fellow-workers'. Here is a sweetness of fellowship which the Apostle desires shall remain unmarred by any disharmony, such as may easily occur in any corporate body where differences of social status, of educational attainments, or of personal outlook are found among the individual members. To secure this end he writes these words of exhortation, calling for oneness of mind and a desire to assist others on the part of such as are of the believing company.

The second of these three words will engage our attention here, viz., *sunathleo*. It is composed of the verb *athleo*—'to contend for', coupled with the preposition *sun* 'with', or 'together with'. Commenting on Phil. 4:3, Wuest says, 'the word "laboured" is the translation of a Greek word used of a group of athletes who play in a team together, co-operating with one another in perfect harmony to attain a certain end, the word having in it also the ideas of strenuous and agonizing effort'.

First in *Phil.* 4:3. Paul speaks of 'those women who *laboured* with me in the Gospel'. We may note:

A. *Their Service*. We are not told what was the nature of their service, and it is idle for us to conjecture as to what it was. Suffice it to say that it was something which was helpful to the Apostle in his work of furthering the Gospel. But in the word itself certain suggestions may be found, viz:

(i) *It was ardent*—being entered into with zeal and an enthusiasm equal to his own. Had it not been so they would never have kept pace with him. There could be no lagging in their efforts if they co-operated with Paul in his task of making Christ known.

(ii) *It was arduous.* In the words quoted above it entailed 'strenuous and agonizing effort'. In a colony whose people enjoyed such privileges, powers, and protection as were enjoyed by the citizens of Rome, to proclaim the Gospel of a crucified Christ was found to be no light task but one calling forth all the powers of those who had assayed it. They who undertake the continuance of this service today, must be prepared to *work*, to *strive*, to *contend*.

(iii) *It was apt.* Apparently it was help such as was suited to the then need of the Apostle and so earned his commendation and this earnest recommendation that his yoke-fellow should assist them at their time of need. It is in the aptitude to render appropriate help that its special merit lies. No unwarranted intrusion, no attempt at alteration of plan or purpose, and no seeking of personal advantage, but a sincere desire and determined effort to be of help.

B. *Their Succour*—'with me'. Their help was—

(i) *Co-operative.* Here were no free-lance methods, or individualistic efforts. All was done in happy fellowship with the Apostle. How much work for God is spoiled through a lack of this co-operative spirit! We should be workers *together*, pursuing a common aim, and pleasing a common Lord.

(ii) *Co-ordinative.* Evidently Paul was the moving spirit, the master worker. They were willing to work with him, be his understudies, and do according to his plan. Theirs was the glory of the second place, the greatness of being willing to submit to the direction of another, the goodness of being 'helps' to a man with a mission from God.

(iii) *Co-extensive* with all his work of the Gospel—not in the nature of usurping position that properly belonged only to him, but in ever being there with their help, wherever and whenever needed.

C. *Their Sphere*—'In the Gospel', in its proclamation, in the pursuance of its ideals and in the promotion of its purposes these godly women worked in conjunction with the Apostle. Happy is the preacher who has the help of such as these, who do not waste their own time, nor impede the labours of others by carping critic-

ism and the spread of unfounded rumours. 'The furtherance of the Gospel and its consequent efforts should occupy all their thoughts and activities, leaving no room for less fruitful endeavours.

Second in *Phil.* 1:27. Paul exhorts the saints to 'stand fast in one spirit with one soul *striving* for the faith of the Gospel.'

A. There is to be a *Unified Purpose*. The Assembly was to stand together in the pursuance of one aim, viz., to further the Gospel. Frequently in the corporate life of a company of believers efforts are so divided in purpose that power is dissipated and there is no real end achieved. Let there be united purpose and then activity will move in a clearly defined direction and reach its goal. Let there be conviction that the way sought is of God, then it will be pursued with all zeal and vigour. Perhaps this lack of conviction is the cause for so much deviation from Scriptural teaching in these days.

B. There is to be *Untiring Endeavour*—they '*strove*' together. Any service for God will call for the utilization of all one's powers. The Lord ever called for labourers and workers but never for idlers. Similarly Paul could not brook the taking of John Mark with them a second time, because on a former occasion 'he withdrew . . . and went not with them to the work' (Acts 15:38). Further, Paul's favourite name for himself was, 'bondslave of Jesus Christ', a term which carries with it ideas of unceasing and unrelaxing endeavour when engaged in the affairs of his Master.

Have we so learned to be unsparing in our efforts to further the Lord's work?

C. There is to be the *Unspoiled Faith*—it was the Faith of the Gospel—the whole content of the Message as delivered by the Apostle, and received by the Philippians. Nothing was to be added to it, or taken from it. It was God's Good News, not something capable of development by the genius of men. It was *the* Faith, a term which both indicated its content and the way by which it was received.