

Philippians Study Notes

By James West

Introduction and background information:

Paul wrote this letter (probably around AD 61) from Rome, probably during his first imprisonment there. It is believed that Paul was released after this imprisonment, and arrested again at a later time.

Although Philippi was a 'chief city' in Macedonia (Acts 16), Thessalonica was actually the capital. But it was in this city that God began Paul's Macedonian mission, after Paul received a vision of a man in Macedonia saying, 'Come over into Macedonia, and help us.' When Paul planted the church in Philippi with Silas on his second missionary journey, it was probably around the same time that Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome in AD 49. This would have compounded the problem Paul faced in the Roman colony of Philippi. We read what was said against Paul and Silas in Acts 16:20, 21 '...These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans.' Paul and Silas were consequently beaten and thrown into prison. The authorities were later embarrassed to find out that these two men were actually Roman citizens, around the time of their release. Timothy was possibly in the city at the same time (Acts 16:1-3; see also Philip 2:22), but we do not actually see his name mentioned until 17:14.

In Acts 16, we read that Philippi was the city where Lydia (the seller of purple) was saved. It was here that Paul cast a demon out of a girl who was enslaved as a soothsayer. And it was here that an earthquake took place, and the jailer turned to Christ with the question, 'What shall I do to be saved?'

Paul affectionately uses the term 'beloved' throughout the book. He wanted to thank the Philippians for the financial help they had sent. The Philippians may have been discouraged by the persecution they themselves were facing, as well as hearing of the difficulties of Paul and his associates. Although they were a good example of a selfless church, there is always the temptation to turn inward when hard times and pressures come upon the Christian. The remedy he prescribed was serving others and rejoicing in the Lord. Key words in the epistle are 'joy' and 'rejoice.' These words appear prominently at least 17 times. Paul himself had displayed a triumphant example of joy through suffering while imprisoned in Philippi (16:25). We can find four examples of selfless servant-hood in the book: Christ, Timothy, Epaphroditus, and Paul himself. Twin truths for living the victorious Christian life are taught in the following two verses: (1) 4:19 'But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.' (2) 4:13 'I can do all things through Christ which

strengtheneth me.’ Epaphroditus delivered this epistle to the Philippians, and was no doubt a key man in the work at Philippi.

Chapter 1: Paul’s desire that Christ be magnified in himself and in the Philippian believers

(v. 1) Paul was with Timothy at the time of writing this letter. What a privilege it would have been to work alongside Paul! But how much more of a privilege it is to serve Jesus Christ! Paul identifies himself as a servant. Servanthood will become part of the theme of the book.

(vv. 2-5) Paul was so thankful for these believers. Are we thankful for the believers that surround us, and for those we have ministered to, or do we rather think negatively towards them? Do we concentrate on the blessing that they are to us, or do we focus on their shortfalls, failures, and sins? Surely here is one of the secrets of Paul’s joy. Yes, it is necessary to rebuke sin from time to time, but let us remain thankful for our fellow believers in Christ! In his prayers for them, Paul gave thanks. He was so grateful for their fellowship (partnership) with him in the propagation of the Gospel. They had helped by giving funds, as well as sending Epaphroditus. They themselves had suffered for Christ (vv. 28-30), and Paul encouraged them to continue to strive together for the sake of the Gospel (v. 27). Paul’s whole acquaintance with them from the very first had brought him great joy. May God grant us the same desire – that we would be only a blessing and a refreshment to the hearts of those who are over us in the Lord, by our obedience to the truth!

(v. 6) Paul could not have carried the burden of praying for these believers if he was not confident in God’s ability to perfect His work in their lives until they stood before the judgment seat of Christ for rewards. His prayers would also have been ineffective for them if he had not this faith.

(vv. 7-8) Lest the readers should fail to understand the depths of Paul’s warmth toward his readers, he gives a reason for why he continues to think about them, pray for them, and rejoice in them: It is because they occupy a special place in his heart. In regards to fellowship (partnership), the Philippians were willing to stand by Paul and the same Gospel that he preached, and so they had earned a very special place in his heart. Before God, Paul could testify that he greatly longed for their company with the heart-felt affection of Christ Himself.

(vv. 9-11) Paul prayed that the Philippians’ love (agape) toward each other would grow continually, guided by knowledge and judgment. He desired that they should differentiate carefully between right and wrong, resulting in excellent choices. In order that they not be a stumbling block to themselves or others, there was to be no hypocrisy in their lives. (1 John 2:10). A Christian who is filled with the righteous fruit

of the Spirit is walking in Christ, resting in Christ, trusting in Christ, etc. His life will not be a slur on Christianity, but will result in glory to God.

(vv. 12-13) At this point, Paul must explain that his seemingly negative circumstances (which the Philippians knew about) were far from being a hindrance to the spread of the Gospel. The banner of truth had not fallen into the dust with Paul's imprisonment, but was rather waving victoriously aloft. His bonds (shackles, chains) for the sake of Christ had now become known throughout the whole of the palace. The word for palace could indicate Nero's place of dwelling. Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown comment on 'palace': '...literally, "Praetorium," that is, the barrack of the Praetorian guards attached to the palace of Nero, on the Palatine hill at Rome...' It may also refer to the judgment hall, and therefore to the dignitaries who gathered there. The point of the passage is that Paul's situation became known to all who were in the place where he was, and in surrounding areas.

(vv. 14-18) Other Christians in Rome were emboldened by Paul's testimony. No doubt these included those who came and visited Paul until his hearing before Caesar (see also Acts 28:30). God's Word was not bound, and Paul's fiery zeal was contagious to the brethren in Rome. There were also some who began preaching with ulterior motives in Rome. Exactly who they were, what they were preaching, and what the circumstances, we do not know. They were jealous of Paul, and contentious. Maybe they were Judaizers, since they actually hoped that their preaching would cause more trouble for Paul. However, there were others who were preaching sincerely, knowing that Paul was 'set for the defence of the Gospel'. 'Set' could figuratively refer to Paul's divine appointment to that task, which they reverently and lovingly acknowledged. Paul was nonetheless grateful that the name of Christ was being proclaimed by friends and enemies. Recognising this, he purposed to rejoice in it.

(vv. 19-26) Maybe God had revealed to Paul that even this antagonistic false preaching by Paul's enemies would be turned around to facilitate the release of Paul. It seems probable that Paul was soon acquitted by Caesar, and was able to continue his missionary work until a second Roman imprisonment. He relied on his readers' prayers for him, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Paul's goal was to magnify Christ in all things, and his Godly conduct in the face of these antagonists seems to be what he was referring to in particular. He would not be ashamed, unless he capitulated to sin under the pressure.

Paul did not mind if he were to die or live, so long as Christ should be magnified. He was torn between a desire to depart from this earth to be with Christ, and his desire to stay and care for the spiritual welfare of the Philippians. Paul seemed to know that he would be released, and would come to visit his readers in Philippi again. It was his

heart's desire that they should be advanced, cheered, and strengthened in their faith. He looked forward to their rejoicing when he should see them again in Philippi.

(vv. 27-28) In the meantime, Paul wanted the Philippian believers' conduct to be worthy of the Gospel; that they would stand united in attitude and purpose, contending or struggling as a team for the sake of the Gospel. They were not to be terrified by their persecutors. Such boldness and calmness would serve as a testimony against their enemies' wilful path to spiritual and eternal ruin. A calm disposition is also testimony to a confident and settled hope in the eternal glory to follow, even if they should lose their lives.

(vv. 29-30) If we believe on Christ, but are not willing to suffer for Him, it points to the shallowness of our profession. Christians will be called upon to suffer for Christ, to one degree or another. The Philippians had not only identified with Paul's Gospel, but now, like him, they were participating in suffering for the sake of the Gospel.

Introduction and Lesson 1 Questions

1. * When, and from where is it likely that Paul wrote this epistle?

2. *Which three people were saved when Paul first visited Philippi in Acts 16?
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____

3. *Key words in the epistle are _____ and _____. These words appear prominently at least _____ times.

4. Four examples of selfless servanthood in the book of Philippians are:
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____

5. Who delivered the epistle to the Philippian believers? _____

6. If believers obey the truth, it is a _____ and a _____ to those who are over them in the Lord.

7. Paul's chains were known in all the _____.

8. Paul rejoiced that the _____ was being proclaimed by friends and enemies.

9. Paul seemed to know that he would _____, and would come to _____ his readers in Philippi again.

10. A calm disposition is testimony to a _____ in the _____ to follow.

Chapter 2: The exemplary servant-mind of Christ

(v. 1) When there are troubles and trials in the Christian life, it is easy for a believer to capitulate to self-centredness and strife (v. 3). He may begin to complain and be argumentative toward the brethren. 'It is the duty of militant unity in a world of unbelief and hostility that Paul has set before the church of Philippi...' (William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary, Philippians*, p. 148). Hassled by persecution from without, and hounded by corruption from within, the Philippian believers are commanded to pursue like-mindedness for the glory of Christ Jesus.

'If' is not to be understood in an ambiguous sense. Because of the context, 'if' states a 'first class condition', meaning that the premise is assumed to be true. In other words, seeing that the readers had indeed received consolation, etc. in Christ (v. 1), they had every reason to be unified (v. 2).

Notice that 'consolation in Christ' stands at the top of the list in verse 1. This shows that Christ is the One who has laid the groundwork for unity among the saints, and that spiritual blessings can only come to us through Christ. Christ's *provision* for us prepares the way for what Paul is going to say a little further on concerning the very *mind* of Christ (v. 5). William Hendriksen rightly observes: 'In the present section (2:1-11) [Paul] re-emphasizes the necessity of *oneness* among the brothers, a quality that is possible only when there is true *lowliness* of mind and *helpfulness* of disposition.'

In Christ, the believer has received great *consolation*: the full forgiveness of his sins. In Christ, we find the *comfort* of God's love toward us, though so unworthy. In Christ's Spirit, we all fellowship (participate) in spiritual blessings from above. We have understood something of the bowels (signifying tender affection – see 1:8; Matt 9:36) and mercies of Jesus Christ.

(v. 2) Since the above is all true for the Christian (1 John 4:8), then it would be Paul's exceeding joy to see the Philippian saints put it all to good use. What they have received in Christ, they must demonstrate to one another. I would comment at this point, that any man who seeks to preach should have given himself completely to the contemplation of these thoughts.

The preacher must impersonate the gospel. Its divine, most distinctive features must be embodied in him. The constraining power of love must be in the preacher as a projecting, eccentric, an all-commanding, self-oblivious force. The energy of self-denial must be his being, his heart and blood and bones. He must go forth as a man among men, clothed with humility, abiding in meekness, wise as a serpent, harmless as a dove; the bonds of a servant with the spirit of a king, a king in high, royal, independent bearing, with the simplicity and sweetness of a child. The preacher must throw himself, with all the abandon of a perfect, self-emptying faith and a self-consuming zeal, into his work for the salvation of men. (Bounds, *The Complete Works of E. M. Bounds on Prayer*, pp. 448-449)

Since believers have all received the same blessings in Christ, they should therefore treat one another as equally beloved children of God (Eph 5:1-2; 1 John 3:14). We ought to seek to be of one mind in attitude and thought. This does not mean that we will bend the truth, but rather that we will not allow selfishness to control our thinking.

(v. 3) How often are believers tempted to interact and work together with disharmonious attitudes! Strife (contention) and vainglory (empty pride) too often characterise the relationships of those who call themselves Christians. The opposite of this is lowliness of mind (humility). We do not need to pretend that the actions of others are right when they are not, or that their actions are even better than ours, when clearly they may not be. We are, however, to esteem (count) them as better than ourselves. What does this mean? Does it mean that we are somehow to believe that they are better or more important than us? No, but it means that we are going to treat them with honour, preferring them before ourselves (Romans 12:10). We will choose to hold their needs and desires in priority over our own (wherever it is right and possible to do so).

(vv. 4-5) Most people are interested in what will please and gratify themselves. It is a sign of great maturity to consider first and foremost the genuine needs of others. Timothy was an example of such a man (vv. 19-22). Christ, however, is the greatest example of one who looked on the things of others, as Paul begins to explain (Romans 15:3).

(v. 6) Christ was 'in the form of God'. 'Form' means shape, showing that God had come in the flesh. The idea Paul means to convey must be this: Even though Christ was God in the flesh, He did not seek to grasp what was rightfully His. Concerning the Greek word for 'robbery': 'The word has either an active sense "robbing" or a pass. sense "prize gained through robbery."' (Rienecker & Rogers, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*). The humility of Christ is the whole context of the passage, and so we may observe that Christ did not see power and honour as a thing to be snatched or grasped at. Christ was willing to become poor, in order that we might be rich. He was willing to experience the cross, so that we might receive the crown. He was going to humble Himself under the Father's will, so that the Father could exalt Him in due time (v. 9; 1 Peter 5:6).

(v. 7) '...Made himself of no reputation'. This could also be literally translated: 'emptied Himself'.

[This] does not mean He emptied Himself of His deity, but rather He emptied Himself of the display of His deity for personal gain. 'The word [kenow] is a graphic expression of the completeness of His self-renunciation and His refusal to use what He had to His own advantage (Rienecker & Rogers, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*).

Here we see the emptying process begin. By stages, Paul now traces (vv. 6-8) how low Christ was willing to humble Himself, for the sake of others.

Christ first of all presented Himself as a servant or slave. The text then says: 'In the likeness of men', which signifies that Christ had a mortal human body, and was fully man, but was also different in that He was fully God. These two aspects of Christ do not necessitate mutual exclusivity from one another, for if we understand that the glorified Christ is the prototype or firstfruits of the new creation, then we understand that we are created after His image, and not the other way around.

(v. 8) '...Being found in fashion as a man'. This means that being now clothed in human flesh, He humbled Himself. He actively accepted the Father's will, and obeyed, by submitting to death – and not just any kind of death. It says: 'even the death of the cross' – the most hideous death imaginable. Why? It was for our sakes, that we might be saved (Mark 10:45).

(vv. 9-10) Because Christ has so willingly humbled Himself before the Father, in preference to others, therefore God has now highly exalted and honoured Him. One day all created beings everywhere will confess (some willingly, but most unwillingly) that Jesus is Lord. This will please the Father.

(vv. 12-15) On the basis of the voluntary humility and sufferings of Christ for us, the Philippian believers were to look for the fruit and evidence of salvation in their own lives. One who professes to be a Christian, but who flippantly complains and argues about everything in life, ought to stand back and think about his spiritual condition, and maybe even question his salvation. Does he really serve the One Who opened not His mouth when led to the slaughter? The issue of salvation is mentioned, not because it can be earned by what one does or does not do, but rather because a Christian's works and will are the outflow of God's work of grace in the heart. If there is no fruit, then there is probably no salvation. Were some in Philippi pretending to be nice and religious while Paul was around, and then murmuring and disputing while he was absent? Such religion is vain (James 1:26). If the Christians among them would restrain their tongues, then they would bear a pure testimony for Christ among the warped and distorted nation (or generation) in which they lived. Their lives would be innocent and above reproach, shining like lights in the darkness.

(vv. 16-18) Paul's great desire and joy in the day of Christ (the bema seat of Christ, in which believers will appear – not for punishment – but for gain or loss of Heavenly rewards; 1 Cor 3:14-15) would be to know that the Philippians had proclaimed and displayed the great truths of the Gospel, both in speech and conduct. Paul wanted his readers to know that it was a joy for him to suffer for their sakes, and that he wanted them to rejoice with him in that.

(vv. 19-23) Although Epaphroditus was the one delivering this very epistle to the Philippian brethren, Paul still thought it necessary to make plans for sending Timothy, in order that he might report back to Paul on how they fared. No doubt, he knew that Timothy would be able to minister to them at the same time. Here we gain insight into a character quality of Timothy: He had a deep desire to know the true state of the brethren, in order that he might minister effectively to them. Jim Berg has pointed out that discovering a person's true condition is the first duty of compassion (Jim Berg, *Essential Virtues*, p. 183), and Timothy was the man that Paul felt had the mindset for the job. It seems that there was nobody else (at least nobody at Paul's immediate disposal) who shared Paul's heart and mind for the Philippians as much as Timothy did. Any other candidates that Paul may have been able to send were too self-absorbed. Timothy would be a wonderful example to the brethren in Philippi of what Paul wished for them to learn (verse 4). He had served so closely with Paul, and had been with Paul to Philippi on Paul's second and third missionary journeys.

(vv. 24-30) After reiterating that he planned to come shortly himself, Paul explained Epaphroditus' home-coming. Epaphroditus had ministered faithfully to Paul in Rome, and is described as 'your messenger'. This probably implies that he been acting in a pastoral capacity towards those in Philippi, even if it was only a temporary arrangement. Epaphroditus had longed for his brethren back in Philippi, and had been very troubled to know that they had received word concerning the poor health he had contracted while in Rome. This faithful man had laboured so hard to minister to Paul's every need, and it had told on his health to such an extent that he almost died. However, God had raised him up again. Paul sent him back to Philippi the more carefully (speedily), for the sake of consoling the Philippians, and also for Paul's peace of mind concerning them. He wanted them to hold Epaphroditus in high esteem (see also verse 25 – had they subtly taken Epaphroditus for granted?). The term 'lack of service' does not imply slackness on their part, but rather that Epaphroditus was the means by which the church at Philippi extended its care to the apostle.

Lesson 2 Questions

1. *'It is *the _____ of _____ in a world of unbelief and hostility* that Paul has set before the church of Philippi...' (William Hendriksen)
2. 'Consolation in Christ' stands at the top of the list in verse 1, showing that Christ is the One who has
_____.
3. 'The preacher must _____ the gospel. Its divine, most distinctive _____ must be _____ in him.' (Bounds)
4. Esteeming others better than ourselves means that we will choose to _____ in priority over our own, wherever it is _____.
5. *Even though Christ was God in the flesh, He did not _____.
6. 'The word [kenow] is a graphic expression of the _____ and _____ to His own advantage' (Rienecker & Rogers)
7. One who professes to be a Christian, but who flippantly _____ and _____ about everything in life, ought to stand back and think about his _____, and maybe even _____.

Chapter 3: Christ Jesus, the hope of the believer

(v. 1) The instruction to rejoice loomed large in Paul's mind. He had first commanded it in 2:18, and now again. He does not repeat the instruction out of some kind of frustration towards them. It is rather because of his deep concern for their spiritual welfare. An attitude of rejoicing will enable them to stand fast in one spirit and one mind, earnestly striving together for the faith of the Gospel, despite the troubling presence of the Judaizers. Rejoicing in the Lord keeps a Christian from disintegrating when he is hard pressed by tribulation. The Judaizers gloried in themselves, but the Philippians were to continue to rejoice in Jesus Christ and what He had accomplished on their behalf (verse 3).

(v. 2) The believers were to be on guard against the threat of false doctrine, and specifically against the Judaizers, who taught works and Jewish traditions for salvation. Paul characterised them as:

- Dogs: 'The Jews considered dogs to be the most despised and miserable of all creatures and used this to describe Gentiles. Perhaps it was because of the herds of dogs which prowled about eastern cities, without a home and without an owner, feeding on the [refuse] and filth of the streets, quarrelling among themselves and attacking the passerby, that the Jews used this designation.' (*Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, Rienecker & Rogers)
- Evil workers
- Concision: This word refers to mutilation or cutting. It is not the proper word of circumcision, but is deliberately used to replace it. Maybe Paul used this word to show that circumcision devoid of any true regeneration was no better than a mutilation of the flesh. The word could also point to the division and trouble that these people caused in the body of Christ.

(v. 3) All believers in Christ are the true circumcision (Romans 2:29; Deut 10:16; Jer 4:4; Gal 6:15). 'In the spirit' (maybe regenerated spirit or Holy Spirit) stands in contrast to 'in the flesh', and shows that worship is a reality for the believer in Christ (John 4:24). See also comments on verse 1.

(v. 4) If there was anyone that could have trusted in human attainments for eternal salvation and acceptance with God, it would have been Paul, in that he excelled all, howbeit in false religion. He had been circumcised on the eighth day, according to the law. He was of the stock (kin, generation) of Israel. He was from one of the faithful tribes: Benjamin. He was 'an Hebrew of the Hebrews' – an Hebrew of Hebrew parents. 'The expression implies characteristics of language and manners. He might be an Israelite and yet a child of Greek-speaking Jews: but his parents had retained their native tongue and customs, and he himself, while understanding and speaking Greek, also spoke in Hebrew on occasion' (*Vincent's Word Studies*). He had been a Pharisee, which was the strictest sect of religious Jews.

(vv. 5-8) For Paul's persecution of the church, all zealous Pharisees would have looked up to him in deep respect. And as far as a human could go in keeping the law, Paul had exemplified perfection. In reality, however, he was desperately wicked in heart, and was without the true righteousness of Christ. His fleshly attainments then became a loss (or detriment) to him. Instead of bringing him closer to Christ, they became his objects of glory and satisfaction, and were consequently a liability to him. To the proportion that these things stole the glory from Christ, they would sink him very low in the day of judgment. In coming to Christ, Paul realised these things, and now he sets them in stark contrast with the excellency that he finds in Christ Jesus. All the prestige, respect, and honour he had gained as a Pharisee were now abandoned in his pursuit of Christ. The Greek word translated 'dung' can also refer to food that is thrown away from the table (to the dogs). Either way, whatever stands in the way of knowing Christ is to be counted as worthless.

(v. 9) Even as a Christian, Paul did not want self-willed attainments to have any part of his religion. This does mean there was any possibility of Paul's losing his salvation, but it does point to a common problem among Christians. They convert to Christ by faith, and then, losing sight of Christ, they focus on what they can accomplish by self-effort. The righteousness of Christ is imputed to my account at the point of salvation by faith, but for sanctification (becoming like Christ in my daily walk) I must continue to walk by faith.

(v. 10) Walking in the righteousness of Christ day by day involves *knowing* Christ. I must grow to understand what He is like, what He loves, what He hates, what grieves Him, etc. These things can only be found if I am saturating my mind in the Word of God (Romans 12:1-2). God will bring His Word to bear on various circumstances that I am going through, and different decisions that I will need to make. I am to participate in three things, and I can only cooperate with these three things by exercising faith in the One who loved me and gave Himself for me (Gal 2:20):

- The power of Christ's resurrection: There will be areas of obedience, which I will think impossible. His resurrection power will help me to live a new life (Romans 6:4).
- The fellowship of Christ's sufferings (Col 1:24): When we suffer direct persecution, or general hardships such as all experience, it is for Christ's sake, because we now belong to Him. We are in fact fellow-participants with Christ in suffering, and Christians who are walking with God will experience a depth and sweetness of communion with Christ when going through sufferings. Through suffering we understand more of what He experienced for us, as well as His amazing love, care, and comfort toward us.
- Conformity to Christ's death: This is dealt with in many of Paul's writings, the most obvious being Romans 6. This conformity is not salvation – it is sanctification. Paul said, 'I die daily'. Jesus spoke about the need for a kernel

of wheat to fall into the ground and die, if it is to be fruitful. Christ has made this possible through His work on the cross, and His death to sin and to the law on our behalf – a spiritual reality with powerful out-workings. The believer must cooperate with what Christ has done at the cross, and learn to die more and more to sin and self, and to surrender to God’s painful and humbling work in his life through various circumstances, if he is to bring forth much fruit (John 12:24).

(v. 11) Newness of life is available to the believer, and Paul’s deep desire was to attain to this more and more. This newness of life is inseparably linked to the resurrection which is to come, however, the change begins in the here and now. It seems that Paul is expressing his desire to live as far above sin and corruption as is possible for a mortal soul.

(vv. 12-15) Unlike the Judaizers, Paul doesn’t believe he has arrived at any kind of perfection. On the contrary, the Christian life, from beginning to end, ought to be one of continual pursuit – pursuing Christ, and desiring to be like Him. Christ had apprehended (seized) Paul on the Damascus road, because He had a special purpose for Paul’s life. Paul desperately wanted to seize upon that purpose, becoming all that Christ intended him to become, and doing all that Christ had prepared for him to do. This would all lead Paul into deeper and deeper fellowship with Christ. Past attainments meant nothing to Paul, especially if they caused Him to stop short of his pursuit, and to recline in a self-satisfied, self-righteous kind of way. Pharisaism found an end in itself, but Paul’s deepest desires could only be met in whole-heartedly pursuing his relationship with Christ Jesus. ‘Reaching forth’: ‘...The word pictures the body of the racer bent forward, his hand outstretched toward the goal, and his eye fastened upon it’ (*Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, Rienecker & Rogers). He refers to this deeper relationship with Christ as a ‘prize’. Paul pressed ‘toward’ the mark. ‘The preposition [‘toward’] has the sense of “down,” i.e., “bearing down upon” ...Paul’s picture is of a runner who has just turned the curve or gone around the post and is now in the home stretch where he can see the goal’ (*Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, Rienecker & Rogers). It is the high (literally, ‘upward’) calling that Paul is responding to.

(v. 16) Those who have attained to a degree of spiritual maturity in the Christian life are now instructed to have the same mind-set as Paul, and to walk by the same rule. That rule or principle is laid out quite clearly in verses 13-14 – namely, that we are not to become self-satisfied, resting on our past accomplishments, but we are rather to press toward Christ. As we do this, God will reveal the areas wherein we have become complacent and self-righteous, and will guide us into a humble-minded pursuit of Christ in all areas.

(vv. 17-19) The Philippians were not to slip into proud self-righteousness, and it was possibly the Judaizers who endangered them in this way. Immature believers can easily be led astray by carnal and legalistic persons who seek pre-eminence and a following, simply because such people tend to be forceful, overbearing, or charismatic in personality. Similar exhortations appear in the following Scriptures: Galatians 5:7; 2 John 8; Col 2:18; 2 Cor 11:3. Paul wanted them to follow the example of those who walked according to the rule laid down (see verses 13-14), and to view himself and Timothy as examples. He warned them that there are many who should not be followed, but are rather the enemies of the cross of Christ. Such are headed for destruction. They are characterised by gluttony (one example of their self-seeking mindset), and they delight in what they ought to be ashamed of: sin, selfishness, and pride. Their minds are entirely focused on earthly things.

(v. 20) Our citizenship is above, in the Heavenly city. We therefore have no business following the example of carnally minded persons. Our hopes are bound up in the person of Jesus Christ, who will appear at any moment to take us home. Our sights are not set upon this life, for here our bodies are 'vile' (lowly and humbled – not sinful, for sin characterises our spiritual condition, and not our physical bodies) affected by the curse of sin, being subject to pain, sickness, and many afflictions. Our hope and confidence (v. 3) are in the One who 'is able even to subdue all things unto himself.'

Lesson 3 Questions

1. Rejoicing in the Lord keeps a Christian from _____ when he is hard pressed by _____.
2. All believers in Christ are the true _____.
3. Paul had been a _____, which was the _____ sect of religious Jews.
4. Without the righteousness of Christ, Paul gloried in his fleshly _____, so that they became a _____ to him. They would sink him very low in the day of _____. Paul realised that these things were nothing compared to the _____ that he found in Christ. All earthly honour was _____ in his pursuit of Christ.
5. *A common problem among Christians is that they lose sight of _____ and focus on simply what they can accomplish simply by _____. After salvation, they fail to walk by _____.
6. *Paul was eager to experience what 3 things?
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
7. Newness of life is inseparably linked to the _____ which is to come, however, the change begins in the _____.
8. Pharisaism found an end in _____, but Paul's deepest desires could only be met in whole-heartedly _____ his relationship with Christ Jesus.
9. Paul responded to the high or _____ calling.
10. Immature believers can easily be led astray by _____ and _____ persons who seek _____ and a following, simply because such people tend to be _____, overbearing, or _____ in personality.

Chapter 4: Paul's example of joy, peace, and contentment

(v.1) 'Therefore': The believer's citizenship is in Heaven and not on earth. His is a high (upward) calling, and he is not to mind earthly things (such as the false teachers minded). On the basis of these facts, Paul exhorts the Philippian believers to stand fast in the faith in Christ Jesus, and not to be swayed by the afflictions or false doctrines presented to them. How endearing is his address to them! '...My brethren, dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown'; Truly, Paul had them in his heart (1:7). Twice he uses the affectionate term 'dearly beloved'.

(v. 2) Paul beseeches (exhorts, or entreats) two women who were at odds within the membership of the church at Philippi, in order that they might be like-minded toward one another (2:2). These were no doubt a source of agitation within the body, and were grieving the life of the Spirit within the congregation.

(v. 3) 'Yoke-fellow' could actually be a translation of a proper name. In other words, the Greek word 'Synzygos' (meaning 'colleague' or yoke-fellow) may have actually been the name of an spiritually mature man within the membership at Philippi, who was well-equipped to act as a peace-maker between these two women. Paul used the word 'true', possibly to show that he counted Synzygos as a likeminded man, who would take the duty seriously. The word 'help' includes the idea of clasping or arresting, which shows us that restoring a fallen believer is like pulling him out of a snare, or holding him so that he slips no further. Euodias and Syntyche had previously served (striven together – same word as 1:27) with Paul in the ministry of the Gospel. They had also served in a similar way under the ministry of one, Clement, as well as with other fellow-labourers of Paul, 'whose names are in the book of life'. This final description demonstrates how Paul viewed the brethren, i.e. in light of their position in Christ (2 Cor 5:16; Romans 16).

(vv. 4-5) For the spiritual health of the believers in general, Paul gives instruction to rejoice in the Lord at all times, and repeats it. He hopes that all men will be able to observe the good testimony of these believers under pressure. 'Moderation': 'reasonableness in judging. The word signifies a humble, patient steadfastness, which is able to submit to injustice, disgrace, and maltreatment without hatred and malice, trusting in God in spite of all of it...' (*Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, Rienecker & Rogers). Paul hopes that if the rapture of the saints should take place soon, the good testimony of these believers might enable them to stand before Christ with a good conscience.

(vv. 6-7) Peace in the church will arise from God's peace in the hearts of its individuals (James 4:1), and so Paul counsels the believers to 'be careful for nothing' – that is, do not be anxious about anything. All mental agitations are to be immediately cast upon God in prayer (signified by the general word for prayer in the

Greek) and supplication (specific requests). However, prayers without thankfulness do not honour God, and neither do they serve to sanctify the mind. So, with thankfulness, we are to bring our requests to God. He already knows our needs, but we cannot expect to receive if we do not ask in faith. If we deal with our cares in this manner, the way will be made clear for God's peace to flow into our souls. Yes, it is God's own quiet work, but we must meet the conditions. The peace that He will grant will strangely override our emotional ('hearts') and intellectual ('minds') turmoils, in a way that we ourselves will not be able to understand. This all takes place 'through' or 'in' Christ Jesus. It happens in the hearts of those who are in Christ Jesus, and who focus their minds upon His wonderful character and promises while passing through afflictions (Isa 26:3; 2 Peter 1:2).

(v. 8) 'Finally' signifies an important instruction that Paul hopes will linger in the believers' minds, namely, what they should think about. If our minds are feeding on unhealthy themes, then we will fail to enjoy the peace God intends for us (see last part of verse 9). In a day of technologically advanced media, we have to be especially guarded about what we take in through our eyes and ears. Now for a clarification of those things that a believer ought to think on:

True: That which upholds the integrity of the Christian soldier is the girdle of truth (Eph 6:14). Once he begins to allow lies to influence his thinking, he has punctured a vital artery, and his calamity is inevitable, unless his thinking gets straightened out.

Honest: Noble, dignified, honourable.

Just: Equitable, righteous. Prov 12:5: 'The thoughts of the righteous *are* right: *but* the counsels of the wicked *are* deceit.'

Pure: Morally pure, undefiled, innocent, chaste. Psalm 119:9: 'Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed *thereto* according to thy word.'

Lovely: The best way to illustrate this Greek word is to consider something which we know to be acceptable or pleasing: A deep red rose, a pink and orange sunset, a person giving money to help the poor, a gentle smile, etc. If a Christian reflects on all the blessings of God, he will count up many instances of 'loveliness'. Even our common usage of the word 'lovely' serves to illustrate its meaning well.

Of good report: That which is well-sounding. This would exclude a lot of the atrocities (although true) one may learn about in the news reports, whether it be in the paper or on the television. 'That is, whatsoever is truly reputable in the world at large. There are actions which all people agree in commending, and which in all ages and countries are regarded as virtues. Courtesy, urbanity, kindness, respect for parents, purity between brothers and sisters, are among those virtues...' (Albert Barnes).

The next two items in Paul's list encompass all the rest, and indeed any good thought conceivable:

'If there be any virtue': '...The most comprehensive Greek term for moral excellence and the central theme of Greek ethics...' (*Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, Rienecker & Rogers)

'If there be any praise': This refers to thoughts which are commendable, and revolve around commendable themes. Such thoughts might include what we can do to be a blessing, or to be useful, or to encourage someone, or to live in a more godly way (Prov 21:5).

After studying this list, there is no reason for a Christian to wonder what kinds of thoughts are acceptable and worthwhile! Paul has spelled it out right here.

(v. 9) Paul's own life – both his teaching and his conduct – demonstrated a mind thoroughly exercised according to the guidelines laid down in verse 8. Having spent much time with Paul, they were to reflect upon his life, in order that they might follow his Christ-like example. If they would do this, the promise was: 'the God of peace shall be with you.' Many of us desire the peace of God, but how many of us desire to be on the side of the God of peace in all matters of life? Do we not understand that God only gives His peace to those who will live godly?

(v. 10) Always eager to give praise and encouragement where it was warranted, Paul quickly turns to reflect upon the Philippians' care for him. How often do we rejoice in the benevolence of other Christians? To Paul, it meant a great deal. He recognises that these believers had been considering him all along, but the opportunity had not presented itself to do something for him until recently.

(v. 11) Paul does not mention this matter out of some sense of financial need. He was rather rejoicing in the Philippian believers' generosity toward him. As for any financial need, Paul had learned (it has to be learned) to be content in every circumstance. 'Content': 'A stoic word, expressing the favorite doctrine of the sect, that man should be sufficient to himself for all things...' (*Vincent's Word Studies*). Paul fills the word with new meaning by showing that it is Christ who enables him to be content.

(vv. 12-13) Paul knew how to be abased (brought low), as well as how to abound (to have abundance, or to overflow), because in all situations he had been instructed (initiated) by the Holy Spirit into the great lesson of contentment in Christ. Whether he abounded, or whether he was in great need, he had learned that it was possible

to be content. What a testimony to these believers to hear Paul speak from experience: 'I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.'

(vv. 14-17) Lest his readers should think him indifferent toward their gift, Paul commends them for helping him in his affliction. He greatly valued their generous habit (something rare among the churches), which had long been established, ever since he first planted the church in Philippi. No sooner had he departed to Thessalonica (also in Macedonia), than they sent him some financial aid. So grateful were they for Paul, and the help he had given them! Truly, we can see that these believers held a special place in Paul's heart, and he deeply desired that they should not lose their sweetness in the midst of their necessary troubles, but rather increase in Christ-likeness. He made it clear that he was not discussing monetary matters out of self-interest, but because he desired them to be blessed in the grace of giving.

(vv. 18-20) Paul assures the believers that the gift they had sent by the hand of Epaphroditus more than sufficed for his physical needs. More importantly, though, he knew that it was an offering that pleased God. Having sacrificed to give to Paul's needs, he assured them that his God would take care of their needs, according to His boundless resources. God honours those that look on the needs of others. He is able to bless indeed, whether materially or spiritually, and we must remember that He is the one who has the power to bless, or to withhold blessings. Paul praised the Father for His great provision towards His children.

(vv. 21-23) Final greetings are given from Paul and the brethren with him in Rome to all in the church at Philippi. There were apparently some from Caesar's household who had converted – maybe family members, slaves, servants, soldiers, or various officials at the palace – we don't know; but it was evident that the Word of God was not bound, and Paul wrote with the joy of a freeman, although bound with a chain. He closes, expressing his sincere desire that the grace (undeserved favour) of our Lord Jesus Christ might be upon his dearly beloved those many miles away in Philippi.

Lesson 4 Questions

1. _____ and _____ had previously served with Paul in the ministry of the Gospel.
2. *Peace in the _____ will arise from God's peace in the hearts of its _____.
3. God's peace will strangely override our _____ and _____ turmoils, in a way that we ourselves will not be able to _____. It happens in the hearts of Christians who focus their minds upon His _____ and _____ while passing through afflictions.
4. If our minds are feeding on _____, then we will fail to enjoy the peace God _____ for us.
5. _____ translates the most comprehensive Greek term for moral _____.
6. *Paul's own life – both his _____ and his _____ – demonstrated a mind thoroughly _____ according to the guidelines laid down in Philippians _____.
7. Contentment was a _____ word, expressing the idea that a man should be sufficient to _____ for all things. Paul filled the word with new meaning, showing that it was _____ who enabled him to be content.
8. Paul wrote with the joy of a _____, although bound with a _____.



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