

Philippians: Discipleship Lessons

Inductive Bible Study Questions

These lessons are from one of my first online Bible studies, conducted in 1997 via e-mail discussion list. These questions may be used profitably in small groups and adult classes that want to get at the meaning of the text by means of questions. This study is designed for 10 lessons rather than the 9 lessons outlined in my book, *Philippians: Discipleship Lessons* (JesusWalk, 2005, 2012).

There is no charge to reprint these questions. They are available online at www.jesuswalk.com/philippians/philippians-inductive-questions.pdf

1. Approve What Is Excellent (Philippians 1:1-11)
2. In Every Way Christ Is Proclaimed (Philippians 1:12-21)
3. For Me to Live Is Christ (Philippians 1:18-30)
4. He Emptied Himself: Humility and Exaltation (Philippians 2:1-11)
5. God Is at Work in You (Philippians 2:12-18)
6. Christian Character: Timothy and Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:19-30)
7. That I May Know Him (Philippians 3:1-11)
8. Pressing Toward the Goal (Philippians 3:12-4:1)
9. Rejoice in the Lord Always (Philippians 4:2-9)
10. A Partnership in Giving and Receiving (Philippians 4:10-23)

1. Approve What Is Excellent (Philippians 1:1-11)

Level 1: What Does the Text Say

- 1.1 What do you learn about Paul from vss. 1-11? Read between the lines a bit here. For example, Paul prays often for the Philippians. What else?
- 1.2 What do you learn about the Philippian church members from vss. 1-11? (Hint: read between the lines.)

Level 2: What Does the Text Mean?

- 2.1 Why are the Philippian church members called “saints” (1:1). Were they all perfect? Were they all holy?
- 2.2 Paul speaks of a “partnership in the gospel” (vs. 5; KJV “fellowship,” Greek *koinonia* - “association, communion, fellowship, close relationship”). In what ways do you think the Philippians acted out this partnership while Paul was on his missionary journeys? (see 4:10, 15). What are the benefits which “partners” receive? (see 1:7b)
- 2.3 What confidence does vs. 1:6 inspire in us? Let’s stick to the text, and not expound doctrines here.
- 2.4 What words or phrases in vss. 1-11 indicate the mutual affection between Paul and the Philippian believers?
- 2.5 If you were to divide Paul’s prayer for the Philippians (9-11) into four parts, what would those parts be?
- 2.6 How are “knowledge and depth of insight” (KJV “knowledge and in all judgment”) important to love? (vs. 9)
- 2.8 How is the ability “to discern what is best” (KJV “approve things that are excellent”) vital to Christian growth? (vs. 10) What happens when one fails to discern what is best?
- 2.9 How is discernment related to purity (KJV “sincere”)? (vs. 10) Gk. *eilikrines* - “unmixed,” then “pure” in a moral sense. “sincere”. (BDB 222d)

Level 3: What Does the Text Mean to Me?

- 3.1 In what ways in your life do you act out your “partnership” in the gospel? How can you improve in this?
- 3.2 In which areas do you need better discernment of what is “best” or “excellent,” from what is merely “good”?

2. In Every Way Christ Is Proclaimed (Philippians 1:12-21)

PROJECT: Letter an 8-1/2 x 11 inch poster for your study area which contains the text of Philippians 1:21.

BACKGROUND: Paul is apparently under house arrest in Rome (Acts 28:16, 30-31). FF Bruce explains:

“Of all the possible meanings of praetorium, the most appropriate in this context is ‘praetorian guard.’ The praetorian guard was the emperor’s personal bodyguard, and since Paul by his appeal had placed himself at the emperor’s disposal, it was natural that the soldiers who had charge of him in his lodgings, relieving one another in succession, should be drawn from the praetorian guard. Few of those soldiers had ever come across a man like Paul before, and each of them would quickly learn what had brought him to Rome.”¹

Level 1: What Does the Text Say

- 1.1 The Romans didn’t look at imprisonment as punishment, but as confinement awaiting trial. How imminent does Paul’s trial seem here?
- 1.2 What two groups seem to be preaching the gospel during Paul’s imprisonment?
- 1.3 What is Paul’s chief purpose for living? (vss. 20-21)

Level 2: What Does the Text Mean?

- 2.1 Explain why Paul’s imprisonment has seemed to stimulate his friends to preach the gospel. (1:14-16)
- 2.2 What is the real motive of Paul’s detractors in preaching during his imprisonment? What do they stand to gain from it? (1:15-17) NOTE: The word in vs. 17 translated “selfish ambition” (KJV “contention”, vs. 16) is Gk. *eritheia* “electioneering or intriguing for office,” hence apparently in the NT, “a courting distinction, a desire to put oneself forward, a partisan and factious spirit which does not disdain low arts; partisanship, factiousness” (Thayer, p. 249). Arndt and Gingrich note that before NT times it was only used in Aristotle, where it denotes a self-seeking pursuit of political office by unfair means. They suggest that the meaning “selfishness, selfish ambition” gives good sense. (Greek Lexicon, first edition, p. 309) Politics don’t seem to have changed much over the millennia.
- 2.3 What is Paul’s attitude about his detractors’ preaching? (1:18)
- 2.4 Paul was probably pretty upset when he was first arrested (Acts 21), but he has mellowed. How does he view his imprisonment now? (1:12)
- 2.5 Why is our witness more powerful when we are suffering than when we are not? Why do we resist suffering? NOTE: advance (vs. 12, KJV furtherance) is Gk. *prokope*, “progress, advancement.” Of the derivation, Thayer traces its root to *pro* “forward” and *kopto* “to beat”. Literally, “to beat forward, to lengthen out by hammering (as a smith forges metals), metaphorically to promote, forward, further. (p. 540). Most progress seems like it comes through that painful process.
- 2.6 Paul has determined in himself to rejoice (1.19). What are the two causes of his hope?
- 2.7 Vs. 19 gives intercessory prayer as a cause for Paul’s hope. Do you really think that God will *not* release Paul if believers don’t pray for his release? How is intercessory prayer related to God’s will and plan?

¹ F.F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977, p. 390.

- 2.8 What is it like, this “help given by the Spirit” (KJV “the supply of the Spirit”)? (1:19)
- 2.9 How can Christ be honored in our death? Can death be viewed in any other way than as a defeat? (vss. 20-21)

Level 3: What Does the Text Mean to Me?

- 3.1 What will it take to make you be “encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly”? (1:14) What seems to be holding you back?
- 3.2 Sometimes we are discouraged when high-profile Christians are exposed for less-than-pure motives. Paul might retort: “Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.” (1:18) Why does God use less-than-perfect people in his work?
- 3.3 Let’s say you were on trial to prove if this were presently true about you: “For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.” What kind of present evidence might be brought in your defense? What kind of present evidence might be brought against you? What decisions do you need to make which might alter the outcome of this trial? [Yes, friends, I understand about grace, but I also understand about the judgment seat of Christ.]

3. For Me to Live Is Christ (Philippians 1:18-30)

Level 1: What Does the Text Say

- 1.1 Paul is in chains awaiting trial before the Emperor. What words or phrases do you find in 1:18-30 which are evidence of the seriousness of this impending trial? Examples: courage (vs. 20), contending (vs. 27).
- 1.2 The passage consists of two paragraphs: 1:18b - 1:26 and 1:27-1:30. What would be an appropriate title for each paragraph?
- 1.3 In his exhortation in vss. 27-28, Paul tells the Philippians WHAT action (verb form) they are to do, and HOW (adverbial function) they are to go about doing it. What are these: THE WHAT: THE HOW:

Level 2: What Does the Text Mean?

- 2.1 Comment: The Greek word is *parresia*, "1. Outspokenness, frankness, plainness of speech, that conceals nothing and passes over nothing. 2. Openness to the public. 3. Courage, confidence, boldness, fearlessness, especially in the presence of persons of high rank." (BADG630) Question: Why is "courage" (KJV "boldness") necessary in Paul's situation so that Christ will be exalted? What would happen if Paul were silent at his trial?
- 2.2 Paul looks at life and death as two very real, very imminent possibilities in 1:20-26. Each can spell victory for him. What is the "fruitful labor" that continuing to live would offer him?
- 2.3 What is the "gain" that death offers him?
- 2.4 This verse speaks to a common teaching in our time of "soul sleep." If Paul were to be executed at the Emperor's command, does it look like he expects to sleep until the resurrection of the dead, or immediately be in heaven? (1:23) See also 2 Corinthians 5:8. If your answer is to "sleep until the resurrection," how would this be "better by far"?
- 2.5 Does God really give Paul an opportunity to "choose" for himself either life or death in this situation (1:22), or is he speaking hypothetically AS IF he were able to choose?
- 2.6 What convinces Paul that he will be allowed to go on living? (1:15)
- 2.7 Comment: In 1:27 Paul moves from his own situation to an exhortation to the Philippians about their situation. The verse begins with the Greek word *monos*, "only", which the NIV translates "Whatever happens..." which suggests that Paul isn't sure whether he will live or die. Comment: "Contend as one man" (NIV) or "striving together" (KJV) is a compound word in Greek: *sunathleo*. If you look carefully you can see two words: *sun*, which means "together with" and *athleo* from which we get the English word "athlete." Greek *athleo* means "to engage in competition or conflict," and was used of athletic games as well as other conflicts. (Ethelbert Stauffer, TDNT 1:167-168)
Question: How do you "contend ... for the faith of the gospel" (vs. 27) without being contentious?
- 2.8 What words does Paul use in vs. 27 to stress unity between the believers? Why do you think he does this? (Hint: see 2:1-4; 4:2; etc.)
- 2.9 Comment: 1:29-30 also speaks of contending and struggle. The word "struggle" (KJV "conflict") in vs. 30 is Greek *agon* from which we get our word "agony." It means "struggle, fight" and is sometimes used of athletic contests, as in Hebrews 12:1. Comment: vs. 29 uses the phrase "it has been granted to you" (KJV "unto you it is given"). The verb is *charizomai*

(from which we get our word “charisma”) which means to “give freely or graciously as a favor.” (BADG876c) Question: In what way can suffering and struggling on Christ’s behalf be considered a gift?

Level 3: What Does the Text Mean to Me?

- 3.1 Sometimes when a loved one dies we have this same struggle: what would be better for us, or what would be better for our loved one? Have you ever faced this? How can this text help you face it better?
- 3.2 What can you do to better contend along with others in your church for the faith of the gospel in your community?
- 3.3 How does it change your attitude when you look at your Christian struggles and sufferings a gift rather than a burden (“my cross to bear....”)?

4. He Emptied Himself: Humility and Exaltation (Philippians 2:1-11)

A study in who Jesus is, and the nature of the incarnation

This week we are studying one of the most important passages about Jesus in the entire Bible. It gives us insight into who Jesus actually is, and Jesus' approach to self-promotion.

Level 1: What Does the Text Say

1.1 This passage consists of an exhortation to righteous living and an example. Which verses contain the exhortation? Which contain the example?

Level 2: What Does the Text Mean?

2.1 Sometimes we can discover what a church's problems were by reading between the lines. What problem did the Philippian church have? What admonishment did Paul give them?

Comment: Vs. 1:6 says of Jesus that he is "in very nature God" (NIV) or "in the form of God" (KJV). The word "nature" or "form" is Greek *morphe*, "form, outward appearance, shape" (BAG, p. 528) FW Beare says, "Yet *morphe* does, or at least can, retain in the usage of the NT its proper sense of 'form which corresponds to the underlying reality'" (Philippians, p. 78f)

2.2 Vs. 6: "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped..." If Jesus is by very nature God, why does vs. 6 talk about grasping at equality with God? (This is difficult, but worth your meditation. KJV's "thought it not robbery to be equal with God" tends to obscure the idea here.)

2.3 Vs. 7: "But made himself nothing (KJV, "emptied himself"), taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness." In what sense did Jesus "empty" himself? Why did he need to empty himself in order to become a human?

2.4 Vs. 6 says Jesus was in very nature (Gk. *morphe*) God. Vs. 7 says he took the very nature (Gk. *morphe*) of a servant. Which was he in the flesh: God or man?

2.5 Vs. 8 speaks of obedience. Can you think of incidents in Jesus' life where he was obedient, even though it endangered his life?

2.6 Does Jesus' struggle with obedience in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:39-46) reveal his weakness or his strength? Defend your answer.

2.7 Vs. 9-11 speaks of exaltation. Did God exalt him because he humbled himself? Or because Jesus was divine?

Level 3: What Does the Text Mean to Me?

3.1 Have you ever been motivated by "selfish ambition" or "vain conceit" (vs. 3). Why can that kind of motivation seem so right?

3.3 Why do we find it so hard to consider others better than ourselves? (vs. 3) In what ways is looking beyond your own interests to the interest of others (vs. 4) opposed to the philosophy of the world?

3.3 How does Christ's example of humility and obedience speak to your life circumstances this week?

5. God Is at Work in You (Philippians 2:12-18)

The dynamics of salvation: our part and God's part. There is one difficult scripture: vs. 12 "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." There are two interpretations of what "salvation" refers to here:

Personal Interpretation: "Work out your personal salvation with fear and trembling."

Social Interpretation: "Work out your Christian faith as a congregation with fear and trembling." As you prepare for the lesson, don't begin with vs. 12, but read chapter 2 in its entirety looking for which interpretation seems to fit the context best. Then jump into the questions.

Level 1: What Does the Text Say

- 1.1 What is the context of vss. 12-18? What was the problem in the Philippian church that vss. 1-11 was addressing? What point was Paul trying to make in vss. 1-11?
- 1.2 There are three divisions to our short passage. Give a brief topic phrase for each division:
Vss. 12-13 Vss. 14-16a Vss. 16b-18

Level 2: What Does the Text Mean?

- 2.1 "Obey" is a strong word. In light of the context of vss. 1-11, what is Paul commanding members of this church to do?

Comment: The word "work out" in vs. 12b is Greek *katergazomai*, "1. achieve, accomplish, do something... 2. 'bring about, produce, create ... work out something' (BADG421d). It occurs in the Greek present tense, which has the idea of continuous action. Thus the NIV translation "*continue to work out your salvation...*" is appropriate. Comment: As mentioned above, salvation can have the personal sense ("Continue to work out your own personal salvation so you may have eternal life") or a social sense ("Continue to work out the implications of your salvation together as a church").

- 2.2 Question: From this passage, state the case for either the personal or the social sense of "salvation," and cite your reasons for choosing the interpretation you did. (This is like a college essay, ;-)) but you'll find it very rewarding as you think it through.)
- 2.3 Why is "fear and trembling" appropriate to the sense of salvation you selected in Question 2.2?

Comment: Vs. 13 is one of my favorites, a wonderfully positive verse which puts my obedience to God in perspective! Comment: Vs. 12 has "to work out" (*katergazomai*), while vs. 13 twice uses a similar word "to work" (*energeo*). We get our English word "energize" from *energeo*, which means "1. to work, be at work, operate, be effective, 2. to work, produce, effect something" (BADG465b).

- 2.4 Question: In vs. 13, what are the two things that God works in the believers? What kinds of things do they cover?
- 2.5 There is always a debate raging (in the Church and in us personally) between works and grace. What special message does vss. 12-13 contribute to this question?
- 2.6 How could grumbling and questioning in the Philippian church keep it from shining as God's light to the unbelievers in Philippi?
- 2.7 What is the balance between (1) critical thinking and careful reflection and (2) grumbling and questioning, do you think?

Comment: “Crooked” is Greek *skolios* “crooked, 1. Literally, 2. Figuratively: crooked, unscrupulous, dishonest” (BADG756c). The disease “scoliosis” comes from this root. “Perverse” is Greek *diastrepho* “1. to make crooked, pervert,” 2. figuratively, here “perverted” in the moral sense, “depraved” (BADG189a).

2.8 Society is described in vs. 15 as “crooked and perverse”. Without parroting Sunday school phrases, how specifically have you seen this to be true in your own experience? Let’s not have generalizations here but specifics. How can we resist this depravity instead of cave in to it? Comment: In vs. 17 Paul uses terminology and imagery from the Jewish sacrificial system. Priests would daily offer animal sacrifices to the Lord and pour out “drinking offerings” of wine before the Lord (Numbers 28:7).

2.9 In vss. 16b-18 Paul is rejoicing again, this time about the possibility of his death as “a drink offering”. (See also 2 Timothy 4:6, some of Paul’s final words.) What is there for Paul to rejoice about? (Look back to the immediate context for your answer.)

Level 3: What Does the Text Mean to Me?

3.1 If churches do NOT heed Paul’s command and exhortation in this passage (vs. 14), why are they prevented from effective outreach to non-Christians? How can we make our churches friendlier places to be?

3.2 What kind of balance are you trying to come to in your own personal life between “working out” your Christian life (vs. 12), and allowing God “to will and to work” (RSV) in you? (vs. 13)

3.3 How can we “shine like stars” in the dark, crooked, and morally depraved universe (vs. 15) without coming across as “holier than thou” to those who aren’t disciples of Jesus?

3.4 What are some ways you have tried to make a difference in your community or workplace (not your church now), as you have attempted to “shine like a star” in a dark place? How specifically are you “holding forth the word of life” (vs. 16a) in your community without being annoying? We’re not bragging here, but providing some ideas – and some accountability to one another.

6. Christian Character: Timothy and Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:19-30)

Pronunciation: "Epaphroditus" is pronounced like eel-PAF-ro-DI-tus

Level 1: What Does the Text Say?

- 1.1 What do we know about the Philippian church so far?
- 1.2 What characteristics about Timothy does Paul write about?
- 1.3 What characteristics about Epaphroditus does he mention?

Level 2: What Does the Text Mean?

- 2.1 What problems do we know that the Philippian church was facing? See especially 2:1-5a.
- 2.2 How does Timothy's character speak to the Philippian church's chief problem?
- 2.3 How does Epaphroditus' ministry to Paul relate to the problems in the Philippian church?
- 2.4 What kind of reception is Paul trying to set up for Timothy when he comes? How does this compare with some previous problems Timothy has experienced? (See 1 Timothy 4:12)
- 2.5 How much esteem do you think Epaphroditus was held in before his journey to see Paul? (4:18) What kind of reception is Paul trying to set up for him? What do you think Paul hopes Epaphroditus will do when he returns?

Level 3: What Does the Text Mean to Me?

- 3.1 How often do you take a "genuine interest" (2:20) in the welfare of others? In what ways does this "genuine interest" manifest itself in deeds?
- 3.2 What changes would need to be made in your life if you looked after Jesus Christ's interests before your own? (2:21)

7. That I May Know Him (Philippians 3:1-11)

What it means to “know” God

Level 1: What Does the Text Say?

Comment: There is another threat to the Church at Philippi which is revealed in this passage.

You have to read between the lines a bit, but not much.

1.1 Paul warns the church in vss. 2-3 against what group of people?

1.2 What group of people would be most impressed by Paul’s spiritual pedigree in vss. 5-6?

Level 2: What Does the Text Mean?

Comment: The word “flesh” (Greek *sarx*) can be used in several senses: “1. Literally, of the material that covers the bones of a body. 6. The external or outward side of life, as it appears to the eye of an unregenerate person, that which is natural or earthly. 7. In Paul’s thought especially, the flesh is the willing instrument of sin, and is subject to sin to such a degree that wherever flesh is, all forms of sin are likewise present, and no good thing can live in the flesh.” (BADG743-744)

2.1 (vs. 2) What did he mean by “those mutilators of the flesh”? (KJV “the concision”; Gk. *katatome* “mutilation, cutting in pieces”, BADG419) In what sense is “flesh” used in vs. 2? In what sense is it used in vs. 3?

2.2 (vs. 3) Paul contrasts Christians as the “true circumcision” (RSV). What three characteristics set them off from Paul’s opponents?

2.3 (vs. 4-6) Why do you think Paul cites his religious pedigree? Isn’t this being boastful? With whom does it give him credibility?

2.4 (vss. 7-8) He calls these elements of his religious pedigree “loss” and “rubbish”. How can his righteous upbringing be considered “loss” rather than just “rubbish”? How did it hinder him?

2.5 (vs. 9) Paul is stirred up as he writes this part of the letter. We are at the very core of his belief system. Paul contrasts two kinds of righteousness. Describe how each type of righteousness is obtained.

2.6 (vss. 10-11) Paul lists four intense desires in vss. 10-11. What are they? How are they obtained?

2.7 Paul desired to become like Jesus in his death (vs. 10). How does this desire affect his obedience to Christ regarding what he is facing in prison at Rome?

Level 3: What Does the Text Mean to Me?

3.1 How can legalists in your congregation have the same deadly effect on the Christian faith as the “circumcision party” threatened to have at the Church in Philippi? Why are these kind of people such difficult opponents?

3.2 Paul speaks of “the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things” (vs. 8) What had Paul lost? What have you lost in order to follow Christ?

3.3 What might you have to leave behind in order to love Jesus and desire him with the same intensity as Paul? What keeps you from full obedience?

8. Pressing Toward the Goal (Philippians 3:12-4:1)

The urgency of God's call, citizenship in heaven. This passage flows directly from last week's strong desire to know Christ intimately and passionately, and to share in his sufferings and resurrection.

Level 1: What Does the Text Say

- 1.1 Paul is using the language of athletic games in vss. 13-14. What words do you see which may have their origin in athletics?
- 1.2 Which words in our passage do you find which express urgency within Paul? (Cite word and verse in which you find it.)

Level 2: What Does the Text Mean?

2.1 What hasn't Paul attained to or obtained as yet? (Find your answer in vss. 9-11.) Comment: Vss. 12 and 13 use the Greek word *katalambano* three times. NIV translates it "take hold of", KJV uses "apprehended". *Katalambano* means "seize, win, attain, make one's own" (BADG412d) Comment: In vss. 12 and 14 we also see the Greek word *dioko* repeated: NIV "press on," KJV "follow after" (vs. 12), "press" (vs. 14). It means "hasten, run, press on" (BADG201b). This is the same word which elsewhere is translated "persecute, run after, pursue." It has a kind of dogged persistent and urgent flavor to it. Comment: The word "goal" or KJV "mark" is Greek *skopos*, from which we get our word "scope". It derives from the verb "to look at, observe, contemplate", and eventually comes to mean the distant "mark" looked at, the "goal" or "end one has in view" (Thayer, p. 579).

- 2.2 (Vs. 14) What is the "goal" (Greek *skopos*) for which Paul is striving? Okay, if that is the goal, what is the "prize"?
- 2.3 (Vss. 13-14) Why is it necessary to go all out to obtain this prize? Why is "forgetting" just as important as "straining toward"?

Comment: Paul talks a lot about God's "calling" him and others for divine purposes. Vs. 14 is unique, however, in the adverb which modifies it: Greek *ano*, "upward". Translators render it variously: NIV "called me heavenward", RSV "the upward call of God", KJV "the high calling of God". Whatever the exact translation, it speaks of the continuing beckoning of God beyond where we are to where he calls us to be. God's call is never static, but dynamic, and ever upward.

- 2.4 It sounds in vs. 15 that some in Philippi may not agree with Paul about pressing toward the heavenly prize. What view do you think they might have held?
- 2.5 In vss. 16-19 Paul makes it a point to differentiate some pseudo-believers from the true followers of Christ. What are the characteristics of these pseudo-believers?
- 2.6 (Vs. 18-19) What do these phrases mean: a) enemies of the cross, b) their god is their stomach, c) glory in their shame. What kind of lifestyles do you think he is referring to here?

Comment: Vs. 20 uses a concept fostered in the ancient Greek city-state: "citizenship" (KJV uses "conversation"). The Greek word is *politeuma* "commonwealth, state" (BADG686). You see the root word *polis* "city", from which we get our words "polity," "political," "policy". The verb from which this is derived, *politeuomai*, means "to be a citizen, to behave as a citizen" (Thayer 528).

- 2.7 (Vs. 20) What difference is it likely to make in our present conduct if we see ourselves as citizens of heaven, in the Greek city-state sense?
- 2.8 (Vs. 21) What is the theological word for this transformation of our bodies? How do you think this was encouraging to Paul in his situation?

Level 3: What Does the Text Mean to Me?

- 3.1 (Vs. 13-14) What do you need to “forget” so you may go on? What do you need to push aside so you may “strain forward”?
- 3.2 Paul talks about stretching forward in 3:13 and “standing firm” in 4:1. In what areas do you need to “stand firm” and “live up to what you have already attained” (3:16)?

9. Rejoice in the Lord Always (Philippians 4:2-9)

Dealing with worry and stress

Vss. 2-3 are poignant: Paul pleads with two women who he names to “agree with each other in the Lord,” to end their long-running animosity or rivalry, and he calls on his “true yokefellow” (some think this might be Luke), to assist them in reconciliation. Sometimes just a pair of leaders at odds can cause all sorts of disquiet, and an undercurrent of unrest which can keep a church from healthy growth. We will concentrate, however, on vss. 4-9, a wonderful exhortation on how to have inner peace. Paul is expounding a way to help people deal constructively with stress, anxiety, and trouble. Considering what he had been through, and was currently going through, he spoke from some experience with stress.

Level 1: What Does the Text Say

1.1 What are the verbs in vss. 4-9 which are used in the imperative or command mood?

Level 2: What Does the Text Mean?

- 2.1 (vs. 4) “Rejoice” is Greek *chairō*, “rejoice, be glad” (BADG873b). Is Paul asking stressed-out people to fake gladness? What is the *manner* Paul suggests people should rejoice? What effect does true rejoicing have on a person?
- 2.2 (vs. 5) Why should Paul mention “gentleness” (KJV “moderation”) in the context of stress? What temptation do stressed out people sometimes succumb to?
- 2.3 (vs. 6) “Do not be anxious about anything” (KJV uses an obsolete sense of the word “careful”). In vs. 6, what are the elements Paul would have believers substitute for anxiety? How would you distinguish between the first two elements?
- 2.4 (vs. 6) What are the things that can prevent us from presenting our requests to God? Why does anxiety tend to breed prayer paralysis?
- 2.5 (vs. 6) How does the element of thanksgiving transform the other two elements? What is the relationship between thanksgiving and faith?
- 2.6 Verse 7 is a promise to “guard” (KJV “keep”) our minds. The Greek word *phroureo* is used in two senses “to hold in custody, confine” as well as “guard, protect, keep”. Why do our hearts and minds need protection?
- 2.7 What is the identity of the “guard” mentioned in vs. 7? How can a non-rational element protect a rational function?
- 2.8 Why is Paul’s mind-food menu in vs. 8 especially nutritious in times of stress?
- 2.9 Does Paul’s prescription for anxiety and stress in vss. 4-9 differ materially from a secular “positive mental attitude” or “science of the mind”? If so, in what ways does it differ?
- 2.10 Vs. 9 It is extremely difficult to become a mature Christian without being part of a Christian community. Why is it so important to see and observe living examples of the Christian way of life?

Level 3: What Does the Text Mean to Me?

- 3.1 “Joyless” and “Christian” are an oxymoron. If you were counseling a joyless Christian, what would be your step-by-step advice?
- 3.2 How have you been applying these principles to your struggles this week? How can we be praying for you over this coming weekend?

10. A Partnership in Giving and Receiving (Philippians 4:10-23)

Learning contentment stewardship in Christ

Our final lesson in Philippians, strangely enough, focuses on balance concerning material things. If we can get this right – the spiritual and the material – I daresay we can move forward as Christian disciples. Epaphroditus has recently brought a gift from Philippi (4:18), though the Philippian church had had an ongoing relationship with Paul of financial support for some time. Let's explore it together.

Level 1: What Does the Text Say

1.1 If you were to identify only six key words from this passage, what would they be?

Level 2: What Does the Text Mean?

2.1 Read Phil 4:12; 1 Tim 6:5b-10, and Hebrews 13:5. If contentment is a virtue, what is its corresponding sin?

2.2 (Vs. 11-13) What was Paul's secret of contentment? How do vs. 4-9 relate to Paul's contentment? Assignment: Write out Phil 4:13 on a card or small poster and place it where you can see it daily.

EXTENDED COMMENT: Our English translations tend to obscure some important Greek words, technical terms from the world of finance: Vs. 14 "share in my troubles" (KJV "communicate with my affliction"). Greek *sugkoinoneo* – "participate in with someone, be connected with something" (BADG774). The noun form of this verb means "participant, partner" and is used of business partners. Do you see the root word *koinos* hiding here? *Koinos* means "common" as opposed to personal, and is often used to express a legal relationship of common ownership. The noun *koinōnia* means "association, communion, fellowship, close relationship...." (BADG438f). In vs. 15, ("not one church shared with me", KJV "communicated with me") we see the related verb *koinoneo*, "to share with someone in something which he has, to take part". Vs. 17 introduces another financial concept: "credited to your account" (KJV "abound to your account"). The Greek phrase *eyes logon* is a commercial technical term which means "in settlement of an account." (BADG478) Vs. 17 also contains the idea of profit, Greek *karpos*, "fruit, then figuratively, "advantage, gain, profit." (BADG405). NIV obscures it with "what may be credited" (KJV "I desire fruit"). Put all these words together, and you see that Paul is talking about a spiritual "partnership" using financial partnership terminology.

2.3 Vs. 15. Paul describes this partnership in terms of "giving and receiving." What was given? What was received?

2.4 In what sense will the spiritual victories of Paul's ministry be "credited" to his financial-spiritual partners?

2.5 How can the concept of rewards ("credited to your account") co-exist with the concept of grace? Aren't they mutually exclusive?

2.6 (Vs. 18) The phrases "fragrant offering" and "acceptable sacrifice" come from the Jewish sacrificial system. In what sense is financial giving a "fragrant offering" and an "acceptable sacrifice"? What can keep financial giving from being seen in this exalted way?

2.7 Vs. 19 is a wonderful promise which draws on the inexhaustible supply of Christ's "glorious riches". If we haven't been faithful partners in financial giving to God's work like the

Philippians were, are we eligible to claim this promise? In what sense is this promise part of the financial partnership outlined in this passage?

2.8 In what ways does tithing (giving 10% of one's income to the Lord's work) support or undermine the partnership we have with God in "giving and receiving"?

Level 3: What Does the Text Mean to Me?

3.1 In which areas of your life are you praying for the contentment Paul talks about in vss. 11-13?

3.2 What is God showing you about your financial partnership with Him?