

LESSON TEXT: Philippians 1:1-30

Prepared by Paul T. Butler

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS:

Philippi was a first century city in northern Greece in the area called Macedonia. There were gold and silver mines there. The city got its name from Philip of Macedon, father of Alexander the Great. It was the site of a very decisive military battle (42 B.C.) when Mark Antony and Octavian (a.k.a Caesar Augustus) defeated Brutus and Cassius and decided the future history of the Roman empire. The population consisted largely of Roman military personnel, either retired or stationed there. It was granted status as a Roman colony and was a miniature of Rome in laws and customs (Acts 16:20-21) and regarded Jews as outsiders and troublemakers. There were not enough Jews in Philippi to have a synagogue.

Paul first came to Philippi about A.D. 52, during his second missionary trip. He found a female businesswoman, a convert to the Jewish religion, taught her and others the gospel of Christ, and Paul's first European Christian church was begun. Wilbur Fields writes, "A deep and true affection grew up between Paul and the Philippians, closer than that between him and any other church...This church supported Paul financially on numerous occasions. They had a reputation for liberality, even though they and their land were in deep poverty.." (See Phil. 4:1-16; 2 Cor. 8:1-4; 11:9). Ten years later Paul was in prison at Rome (A.D. 62-63) and wrote a letter to the Christians at Philippi telling them of his love for them and of the "joy they had brought to his soul."

The heart of God, through the pen of Paul, is extended to all Christians today in this letter to the Philippians. "Every chapter reflects the unifying topic of RIGHT-MINDEDNESS, the *good* mind...There are several references...to the mind (Phil. 2:2,5; 3:15,19; 4:7-8). Nothing is more important to us than to have the right mind." *op.cit.* pp. 3,13. The key verses of chapter one seem to be 1:27-30. A FIRMNESS OF MIND: **(1)** In Loving Through Knowledge and discernment (1:1-11); **(2)** In Proclaiming Christ Without Fear (1:12-18); **(3)** In Striving Side by Side For the Faith (1:19-30).

QUESTIONS:

1. What is the good work he (Christ) began in them which was yet incomplete? 1:1-6). Do even saints, bishops (i.e., elders) and deacons need growth?
2. How is that growing accomplished? 1:9-10
3. Did **all** the Praetorian Guard become Christians? What is Paul's point?
4. How could Paul's imprisonment make the brethren **bolder** to speak the word? 1:12-13 What about boldness in the 21st century?
5. Was Paul a pragmatic-relativist, glad even when Christ was preached in pretense? 1:18
6. Do you **really** believe, with all your heart, that to *die in Christ* is gain? 1:21-23 Would you **really rather depart** and be with Christ?
7. How does one measure progress and joy in the faith? 1:25-26
8. Who is worthy of the gospel? 1:27
9. For what are we to stand firm? 1:27 How firm? No compromising at all?
10. You mean we have to strive...for the faith? 1:27-30 I thought it was by grace?

Herodotus described the city of Agbatana, capital of Media (modern Iran), as a city surrounded by seven circular walls, one within the other. The battlements were each a different color: white, black, scarlet, blue, orange, silver, and gold. These colors represented the seven great heavenly bodies: Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, the sun, Mercury, the moon, and Venus.

How much is true of what Herodotus wrote? How much is poetic exaggeration? No one knows; but we can firmly rely on the Biblical description of the city of New Jerusalem: no tears, no temptations, no sin, no darkness, no parting.

--1000 Windows

Mind This: "It is only persons of firmness that can have real gentleness. Those who appear gentle are, in general, only weak in character, which easily changes into asperity" (harshness)

---Francois de La Rochefoucauld

LESSON TEXT: Philippians 2:1-30

Prepared by Paul T. Butler

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS:

Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832), author of *Ivanhoe* and countless other works, suffered with polio and other illnesses, was financially deceived by a business partner, and died a pauper *to pay off a friend's debts*, Scott said: "The race of mankind would perish did they cease to aid each other. We cannot exist without mutual help. All therefore that need aid have a right to ask it from their fellow-men; and no one who has the power of granting can refuse it without guilt."

In Phil. 2:10-30, Paul calls Christians to the very top of the mountain in being helpful. RIGHT-MINDEDNESS for the Christian is the *servant-mindedness* exemplified by Jesus Christ! Jesus said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave; even as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Matt. 20:28.

Preacher John Henry Jowett told of a little grave-yard beside a church in a small village. There the memory of a devoted soul, who had spent herself freely and untiringly in the service of that small community, is enshrined in a brief and touching epitaph, "She has done what she *couldn't*." Dwight L. Moody tells of a wealthy young London banker who considered himself unfitted to be a soul winner, yet wanted to do something for his Master. He hired an aged "cabby" paying the cabby his usual fare and minding his *own horse* while the cabby went to hear Moody preach. For two hours the Christian gave a silent testimony outside, while the cabby heard the glad tidings inside. If you cannot do great things, you can at least "mind a horse." "Humility," said Andrew Murray, "is a perfect quietness of heart. It is to expect nothing, to wonder at nothing that is done to me, to feel nothing done against me. It is to be at rest when nobody praises me, and when I am blamed or despised." Philippians 2: SERVANT-MINDEDNESS: (1) Motives, 2:1-2; (2) Mentality, 2:3-4; (3) Model (Christ), 2:5-11; (4) Ministering, 2:12-30.

QUESTIONS:

1. Why does Paul say, "If" there is any....? Doesn't he know there is? 2:1-2
2. Are we actually supposed to count *others better* than ourselves? 2:3
3. If we actually looked...to the interest of others wouldn't we become "butt-inskys" contradicting 1 Thess. 4:11? 2:4
4. If Jesus emptied himself of equality with God, how could the same apostle write, "...in him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell"? (Col. 1:19 & 2:9) Do we have to understand this? 2:5-7
5. If Jesus obeyed for us, must we obey? Why? How much? What? 2:8
6. Does work out your own salvation, 2:12, contradict Rom. 3:27-28 and Gal. 2:15-16? Have you worked this out so you could explain it to others?
7. Should we quit grumbling about our own crooked and perverse generation? 2:14-18 How then shall we live? Didn't Jesus grumble about his? Mt. 23
8. How much was Timothy worth to Paul? Are we worth anything to anyone?
9. Why didn't Paul work a miracle and heal Epaphroditus when he first became ill? 2:25-29
10. Is it right to risk one's life in the gospel ministry? 2:29-30

The Mennonite Credo of Helpfulness: "I will charge thee nothing but the promise that thou wilt help the next man thou findest in trouble."

Mind This: "It is simply service that measures success."
---George Washington Carver

LESSON TEXT: Philippians 3:1-21

Prepared by Paul T. Butler

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS:

On a tablet in a church in Algiers is the name: "Devereaux Spratt, 1641."

Devereaux Spratt was an Englishman captured along with 120 other passengers by Algerian pirates in 1641. He was put to work with the other captured slaves on the military fortifications around the city of Algiers. Finding his fellow-captives full of despair, he began to cheer them with words of faith and hope from the Gospels; soon he had gathered about him, through his teaching and cheerful life, a little band of praying and worshipping Christians. Through the influence of his brother in England, after several years, Devereaux Spratt was ransomed, and the order for his release was brought to the slave camp. His fellow-captives rejoiced with tears at his good fortune, but expressed despair that their leader was to leave them. Devereaux Spratt refused to accept the ransom and remained until he died, a slave among slaves, that he might continue to comfort those whom God had brought to Christ through him.

Some 1580 years before Devereaux Spratt, Paul of Tarsus wrote: "For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him.." Phil. 3:8ff. The same Paul wrote, "...though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more.." 1 Cor. 9:19, and, "I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls.." 2 Cor. 12:15.

Commitment to suffer the loss of all things, to make oneself a slave to all, glad to spend and be spent for the souls of others *is the Christian's calling* (see Acts 14:22; 1 Pet. 2:21). "So therefore, whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple" Luke 14:33. **There it is! Blunt, unequivocal, inescapable, uncompromising! Pay the price or don't sign up!**

QUESTIONS:

1. Are there people one may evaluate as dogs? Is it proper to do so? 3:2
2. Who are the true circumcision? 3:3 (cf. Rom 9:6-8; Gal. 3:27-29; 6:14-16)
3. When Paul suffered the loss of all things, just what did he lose? 3:7-8
4. Can't a person know Jesus without losing everything? 3:10 How does one know a person who is invisible, who doesn't talk, who lived 2000 yrs ago?
5. How did Paul expect to become like Jesus in Jesus's death? 3:10
6. Did Paul lose *expecting* to gain? Isn't that venal and selfish? 3:10-11
7. If Jesus had made Paul his own, why did Paul have to press on? 3:12-14
8. What do you think of Paul's categorization of the perfect or mature Christian 3:15. Do you estimate your maturity by Paul's standard?
9. Does just having your mind set on earthly things make you an *enemy* of Christ's cross? 3:17-18
10. What kind of citizen do you expect to be in heaven? 3:20
11. Is the human body vile 3:21 (KJV)? What kind of heavenly body do you anticipate? Will we know one another in heaven?

"The Bible says that our dear ones in Paradise are alive---that their life is a full, conscious life, with full consciousness of personal identity, that they know one another, remember the things of the old earth life, that they love and have communication together as in the story of Dives and Lazarus. So far as we can judge the inner life of the 'I', there seems a very natural continuation of his life here."---J. Paterson Smyth

"What do you think of Heaven? Is heaven a subtraction, or is it an addition? Do you think we shall know less in Heaven than we do here?"
---Dewitt Talmage

Mind This: "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose." ---Jim Elliot, 20th century Christian martyr in Ecuador.

LESSON TEXT: Philippians 4:1-23

Prepared by Paul T. Butler

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS:

The Greek word *arete* in Phil. 4:8 is translated “virtue” (KJV) and “excellent” (NIV). *Arete* is the word Peter uses in 2 Pet. 1:3,5, as “virtue” which the Christian is to add to his life. English synonyms for virtue are “essential, fundamental, having merit, having quality, having efficacy or power, having priority.”

Mahatma Gandhi once said, “It is the quality of our work which will please God not the quantity.” Isn’t that what Paul means in Phil. 4:8 when he says, “Finally...think about these things”? Paul is saying, “The bottom line is this... justice.. purity...loveableness...reputableness...essentiality...praise-worthiness...THESE ARE THE LOGICAL PRIORITIES FOR A CHRISTIAN...THE CHRISTIAN IS TO THINK IN TERMS OF VIRTUE, OF QUALITY.”

But transforming the mind toward these priorities (Rom. 12:1-2) requires a gut-wrenching, traumatic involvement called CONVERSION. It means we must “put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires” (Rom. 13:14). It will hurt like trying to put a camel through the eye of a sewing needle (Matt. 19:24). But conversion to the mind of Christ is no hurt at all when compared with the alternative! Benjamin Franklin wrote: “I conceive that the great part of the miseries of mankind are brought upon them by false estimates they have made of the value of things.” **Virtue** (“excellence”) is not attained by merely abstaining from the false and frivolous---*it comes from diligent struggle for the highest and holiest.*

Material blessings are not usually the rewards of **virtue**. “The only reward of virtue is virtue,” said Emerson. “If you can be well without health, you may be happy without virtue,” said Edmund Burke. Paul promised contentment in all circumstances--“the peace of God which passes understanding”---as the reward of Christian **virtue**. There is no greater reward in this world!

QUESTIONS:

1. What is the virtue in standing firm? (cf. 1 Cor. 16:13; Eph. 6:12-14; Col. 4:12; 1 Thess. 3:8; 2 Thess. 2:15; 1 Pet. 5:12). How does it relate to contentment? 4:1
2. Do Christians need *help* to agree in the Lord? Who is to help? 4:2-3
3. How are rejoicing and forbearance (lit. “gentle reasonableness” and “moderation” KJV) virtues? Are they *innate* or are they *learned*? 4:4-5
4. Is freedom from anxiety about **everything** a realistic possibility? 4:6 What if you lived in China now? No anxieties? Do you have any as an American?
5. Does the peace of God which passes understanding 4:7 make Bible-believing Christians a bunch of naive, illiterate, bigoted, fundamentalist-nitwits? Why?
6. What is virtuous in thinking about honorable (Lit. “venerable, dignified”) things? 4:8 Do you make venerable & dignified things priorities in your thinking?
7. How much of a virtue is contentment? 4:11-13 What is it? Are you born with it? How do you get it?
8. Are we *really* partners with missionaries (and others) to whom we give? 4:16
9. Does the fruit of the labors of supported missionaries *really* increase to our credit? 4:17 Do you know about their fruit?

Mind This: “To be *proud* of *Knowledge*, is to be *blind* with *Light*; to be *proud* of *Virtue*, is to *poison* yourself with the *Antidote*.”
Benjamin Franklin

“Few men have virtue to withstand the highest bidder...I hope I shall always possess firmness and virtue enough to maintain (what I consider the most enviable of all titles) the character of an “Honest Man.” ----George Washington