

THE PHILIPPIANS STUDY

CHAPTER 3

Leader's Guide

The purpose of this discussion is to introduce our Life Group members the book of Philippians. As we go through each chapter, we will learn to discover God's eternal principles, which can be applied to their everyday life's situation.



Discussion Facilitator Tips:

- Ensure that the aim is first to understand the text and then to make it meaningful and relevant. The questions provided are intended to bring out the relevance for today.
- Begin with a prayer for the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit.
- Encourage everyone to participate in the reading or the discussion.
- Begin the study by reading the whole passage
- Discuss the overall meaning of the passage by asking your LifeGroup members of what could be the key focuses/emphases in the particular chapter
- Spend appropriate amount of time on each question with as many members as possible making a contribution. At the end of each discussion the leader should summarise the main points that have arisen and direct the group towards the key contents given in this guide
- A balance must be kept between ascertaining what the Bible teaches and what are the opinions of participants. So the facilitator should make sure that there is an understanding of the passage before questions are raised.

AUTHOR:

The Apostle Paul, along with Timothy (1:1)

DATE:

Probably the early 60s AD

BACKGROUND:

The city of Philippi was named after Philip II of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great. He fortified it and exploited its mineral wealth, having conquered it in 360 B.C. The city became a Roman colony in 167 B.C. Its population was a mixture of indigenous Thracian, Greek and Latin families. Consequently there was a great variety of divinities and religious cults. There was a Jewish community to whom were attached the Gentile "Godfearers", who worshipped the God of the Jews.

A description of the foundation of the church at Philippi is found in Acts 16:9-40. Here we learn that Paul was specifically instructed to go into Macedonia region to preach the gospel there. When he preached in Philippi and founded a church there he was accused of introducing an alien cult. This was because Christianity, unlike Judaism and other religions, did not have the sanction of the state as a religion and was thus technically unlawful.

Having founded the church Paul kept in touch with it and, as this letter reveals, received various gifts from the members. The letter has been dated around 62 A.D while Paul was imprisoned in Rome (Acts 28:16). When he was in prison there, His imprisonment was more like what is called today "house arrest" and so he was free to

employ a scribe and obtain papyrus to write his letters.

The obvious reason for his writing this letter was to thank the Philippians and the church for various aids given to Paul through Epaphroditus when he was in need. It is also a very personal letter sent to his first converts on European soil.

The book of Philippians is known as a letter of joy or friendship between the apostle Paul and a beloved church in the Philippi. It is impregnated with the themes of joy, confidence in God, Christ-centred Humility, Security in Christ, Purpose of Gospel-driven living, our Faithfulness to God's work, Unity in Christ and Perseverance in the Christian life and faith as Paul urges the Christians to live humbly and worthy of their calling as disciples of Christ.

READ: Philippians Chapter THREE

EXAMINE:

In the previous of chapters of the Philippians, the Apostle Paul urged the believers at the Philippi to remain steadfast (1:27-30) and joyful (1:19, 28-30; 2:17-18) in the face of opposition to the Gospel.

In the Philippians Chapter 3, he began with a charge for Christians to rejoice in the Lord and urged them to press on towards the heavenward prize and calling in Christ Jesus. He ended the section by reminding the believers to hold fast to the heavenly citizenship as well as to eagerly await for Christ's return.

DISCUSS: PHILIPPIANS THREE can be broken into 4 sections

I. Philippians 3:1-2 A Warning Against 'Religion' (Judaism VS Christianity)

SCRIPTURES EXPLAINED:

Having created joy in his readers by referring to the sterling examples of Timothy and Epaphroditus (2:19-30), Paul warned them about certain people who professed to be servants of God.

He introduced this section of his epistle with a transitional statement, "Finally" which usually does not mark a conclusion so much as a transition on the way to a conclusion. It introduces what remains to be said (Anyone who has listened to much preaching knows that Christian communicators still often say "finally" long before the message ends).

The apostle's primary exhortation here was that his readers should rejoice in the Lord. Paul, a prisoner, urged free people to be joyful. We might have expected it to be the other way around. They might rejoice in Epaphroditus' return, or in his recovery, or in Paul's prospect of release and return to Philippi.

All of these were legitimate though less important reasons for rejoicing. We have noticed the consistent emphasis on joy and rejoicing that has marked this letter so far (1:3, 4, 18, 25; 2:1, 2, 17, 18, 19, 28, 29; 4:1, 4, 10, 18). Joy is the prevailing mood of Philippians, but it is not its major theme. Paul gave the importance of rejoicing special emphasis here. Regardless of circumstances the Christian can and should always rejoice in the person and work of Jesus Christ. He is the basis of true joy and the sphere in which it thrives.

False teachers can rob Christians of joy. Paul proceeded to deal with this threat in the following verses.

The dogs or evil workers are Jews, or Jewish Christians, who are seeking to win Gentile converts to Christianity for Judaism. Jews often spoke of Gentiles as "dogs" which were for them ritually unclean animals.

Here Paul transfers the description to the Jews themselves because of the chaos they were causing in predominantly Gentile-Christian congregations. Their work is evil because their insistence on circumcision was undermining and unsettling the faith of Christian Gentiles. This circumcision by which they set so much store was not something to be proud of. It was only the mutilation of the body.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

- What is 'Joy'? What should be our basis of true joy? (v.1)
- Whom do you think 'those dogs' in verse 2 refers to?

II. Philippians 3:3-11 "The Work of the Flesh VS Grace-oriented Salvation"

SCRIPTURES EXPLAINED:

In verse 3, Paul makes four claims for himself and his fellow believers.

- 1) They are the true circumcision. As Paul teaches in Romans 2:28–29 circumcision is in the final analysis a spiritual, not a physical state. All who have been inwardly transformed by divine grace are members of the new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31). They do not need an outward physical sign for they have God's forgiveness and Spirit in their lives.
- 2) They worship God in Spirit, as Jesus told the woman of Samaria (John 4:21–24). This is far superior to the use of rites and animal sacrifices as in the Temple.
- 3) They glory in Christ Jesus. They take pride only in Christ, relying only on him for salvation and life.
- 4) They put no confidence in the flesh: they do not think that their good behaviour can in any way win salvation for them.

In verses 3–6, Paul looks at his own history. It was not because he had no ancestry of which to boast that he made light of his birth, status and human achievement. On the contrary, he had much of which to boast, but this he counted as nothing because of what he had in Christ. His excellent Jewish pedigree faded into insignificance alongside what knowing Christ meant to him.

In verses 7–8, Paul declares that the knowledge he has, is of Christ as Lord. The worth of such knowledge not only goes beyond all his previous knowledge of God, which he had as a Pharisee (one who diligently kept the law of Moses), but also makes it as a worthless liability. He rejects it so that he may wholly gain Christ.

In verses 9–11, Paul acclaims his new ambition, which is to gain (win) Christ and to be found in His fullness. That is, to be in the position of being justified by and reconciled to God. The righteousness is not moral virtue but the state of being right with God, which he now has and was not achieved by his own efforts at keeping the law. It comes from God through Christ and is received by faith. It is a gift the believer cannot earn.

Moving on from this gift Paul wants an intimate relationship with Christ so that he can share in his resurrection power. To share in this divine life he knows that he must be willing to experience the fellowship of sharing in Christ's suffering or suffer just as Christ suffered. At baptism the believer symbolically experiences the death and resurrection of Christ (Romans 6:1–11) and in life he experiences the power of the resurrected life of Christ. The final stage is the actual receiving of the resurrection body and new life, for which Paul also longs (1 Corinthians 15:42).

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What are the distinctive marks of spiritual worship? (v.3)
2. What did Paul mean when he said that Christians shouldn't put our confidence in 'Flesh'? What does 'Flesh' refer to? (v. 3-6)
3. What is now the most valuable thing in the Apostle Paul's life? (v.7-8)
4. In verse 9-11, Paul acclaims his new life ambition in Christ, what would that be?
5. What does mean to 'KNOW' Jesus Christ as Lord? (v.10)

III. Philippians 3:12-16 "Pressing On Towards the Goal"

SCRIPTURES EXPLAINED:

Having related his own desire to know Christ intimately, Paul now shows that he, like the Philippians, is not a perfect Christian but has much progress to make. It seems that there were Christians who believed that they had already attained perfection. Possibly they argued that at their baptism they had been identified with the death and resurrection of Christ (Romans 6:1-11). Thus, when they came out of the water baptism, they also rose up into the resurrection life and attained perfection. Paul insists that perfection is still in the future and will come when Christ returns. Therefore, Christians must strive towards it (Matthew 5:48).

In verse 13, making use of the metaphor of the race in a sporting contest, Paul makes clear the necessity for keeping the winning post in view and striving with all your might to get to it. The Christian should not be passive, nor must he keep looking back to everything he has given up or to all his past achievements. The prize for which the Christian runs is Christ himself and his gift of grace and salvation. The "upward call - v.14" (ESV) is either the high vocation, which Paul shares with all believers or the heavenly call which comes to believers at the end of the age to share in the life of God's kingdom.

In verse 15-16 Paul recognises that not all his readers will agree with what he is saying but he is confident that God will reveal the truth as he has stated it to those who disagree with him. The main thing is that everyone needs to hold fast to that truth which they understand and have begun to obey.

IV. Philippians 3:17-21 "Awaiting for Christ's Return"

SCRIPTURES EXPLAINED:

Paul sets himself forward as an example of the way Christians ought to live. The goals, which he has set for himself, should also be the goals, which all Christians should set for themselves.

In verses 18-19, the enemies of the cross of Christ could refer to both the unbelievers and pagans who do not accept the gospel or live by the law and self-righteousness, and also Christians who are complacent about their Christianity. These were those who believed they had attained perfection and had no more to do. They could fill their lives with the pleasures of this world but in so doing were inviting God's judgement.

In verses 20-21, Paul turns to the positive benefits of being in Christ. The true destiny of Christians is life in the presence of God and so on earth they are as strangers and pilgrims. As Christians we have a citizenship in heaven as well as one on earth. Our heavenly citizenship and destiny are far more important than our brief earthly 'stopover' (Gal. 4:26; Heb. 11:10). The Roman citizenship that the Philippians enjoyed meant a great deal to them (Acts 16:12, 21). However, Paul emphasises all believers need to learn to live as foreigners and pilgrims on this earth. (Heb. 11:13; 1 Pet. 2:11)

One day, from the presence of God, Christ shall return to earth as 'Saviour' which has a distinct purpose from His first coming. It is from our heavenly kingdom that the Saviour will come to deliver us out of this present evil world and take us to our home with Him above (John 14:1-2). The prospect of our Lord's return should motivate us to live as citizens of heaven even while we are still on earth (1 John 3:2-3). His saving work will include giving to justified believers a spiritual, resurrection body, a process he describes more fully in 1 Corinthians 15. Paul insists that this transformation of believers is effected by the same divine power as that by which Christ will subject all his enemies to himself at the final judgement of the world.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What should we as Christians press on to take hold of? (v.12-14)
2. What does 'the prize' refer to? (v.14)
3. What is the mark of maturity? (v.15-16)

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Who would be considered as "enemies of the cross of Christ"? (v.18)
2. What are things that Christians can get side tracked with and our focus is being taken away from God as a result? (v.19)
3. What does it mean by 'our citizenship is in heaven'? (v.20)
4. How can we live our lives as though we are eagerly awaiting for Christ's return? (v. 20-21)