

## THE LETTER OF PAUL TO THE PHILIPPIANS

### - NOTES FOR PRIVATE OR GROUP STUDY – PART THREE

The simple secret of joy according to Paul is to share the very heart of Christ Himself. In Christ we can find encouragement – ‘paraklesis’ means ‘called alongside to help’, like a search and rescue operation in the bush or at sea. Consolation – ‘paramuthion’ means ‘coming alongside to tell a story’. He helps us by telling us the stories of the Old and New Testament to change our thinking. Fellowship – ‘koinonia’ means ‘sharing’ or ‘contributing’ and tells what He does for us, often through others. Affection – ‘splachnon’ describes ‘the inward parts’ and compassion – ‘oiktirmos’ is ‘pity’, our gut feelings which can come from Him. Notice that sharing the heart of Christ is about mind, will and emotion. Paul confirmed this in verse 2 in urging us to be of the same mind, love and purpose with Christ and each other because the Spirit in us will make us one.(2:1,2)

One word sums up the attitude which describes this, humility, which wants the best for others. Esteeming others more highly than ourselves is an attitude which is directly in conflict with the modern explanation for many social ills, that our problem is ‘low self-esteem’. If we esteem Jesus Christ highly we can forget our own needs and be concerned only with the needs of others.(2:3,4)

Jesus demonstrated how this could work when He willingly put aside His right and power as God to be born as a man of very humble circumstances, who was willing even to die for the rest of humanity on the cross. As God He became man dependent on God, trusting the Father to raise Him from the dead and ultimately to put Him again in charge of a world which at the end of history would have to acknowledge Him. It would be all God’s doing.(2:5-11)

So, if we are willing to share the heart of Christ, we are to let ‘work out’(v.12) the salvation which God has ‘worked in’ us, enabling us to ‘work for’ His purpose. The words fear and trembling seem extreme but the point is simply our reaction to the absolutely awesome privilege of the Creator of the universe putting His Spirit inside us. ‘Trembling’ is the word ‘tromos’ meaning an earthquake!(2:12-13)

How will this show? ‘Do all things without grumbling or disputing.’ Grumbling and disputing are about my will, my reputation, and my interests not those of others. The absence of these will be such remarkable behaviour that it will be dazzlingly different from the world we live in. It will be marvellous evidence that the word of God has not been preached in vain. Paul’s sacrifice of his life for which he was now in jail had not been wasted. Together they could rejoice because grace, expressed through God’s word, changed lives.(2:14-18)

Two of Paul’s friends beautifully illustrated this principle in action. Timothy, of all Paul’s fellow workers, was the one who readily responded to Paul’s suggestions as to how and where he could be useful.(I Cor.4:17; 16:10; II Tim.4:9-13) He would not just come to Philippi out of duty but with a genuine concern and an encouraging attitude

because he was looking out for the interest of others, not himself.(2:3,4) To Timothy, serving like a child might serve his father, was normal. Perhaps encouraged by Timothy's example, because such an attitude is catching, Paul could not help but say how he would love to come himself, although as far as we know he never made it.(2:19-24)

Epaphroditus had already been an instrument of God's grace, coming from Philippi to Rome with a gift from the Philippian Christians.(4:18) Now he was using his return ticket back to Philippi carrying love and news from Paul, and presumably this letter. He had been seriously sick and although close to death, his concern had not been for himself but for his Philippian brothers who would be grieving as they anticipated losing him. He had known God's grace in sickness and together they could enjoy what God had done. For Epaphroditus, serving others was more important than his own life.(2:25-30)

If the secret of having Christ's joy in us is so simple, what stops us? Chapter three explains.

3:1 Q.1 Why did Paul say 'finally',(3:1: 4:8) when he was only half way through the letter? What theme had he returned to yet again? As Christian preachers and teachers should we apologise for repeating ourselves?

3:2 Q.2 What three images has Paul used to warn them of danger? Was he talking about four legged dogs?(Ps.22:16,20; Gal.5:15) Why was he so tough on religious teachers?

3:3,4 Q.3 What by contrast is 'the true circumcision'? What are its characteristics? What does it mean to 'put confidence in the flesh'?

3:5,6 Q.4 What did Paul say might have been his grounds for trusting in his identity, his qualifications, his achievements and his reputation? How might we have similar grounds for self-confidence? Why would they rob us of joy?

3:7,8 Q.5 What conclusion did he eventually come to about his own record? What replaced his self-confidence? What discovery had he made which caused him to be so certain that what he had before was just 'rubbish'?

3:9-11 Q.6 What new reputation had Paul found to replace the old one he had worked so hard for? What did he have to do to enjoy such a reputation? What new resource did he now have to face life? What did he have to do to explore this resource? What two expectations did he have about the future for which this resource was the secret?

3:12-16 Q.7 What further reason did Paul now give as to why we are so often not enjoying God's grace? What should we be focussed on, the achievements of the past, or the promises of the present and the future? How will we come to realise which we are doing?

3:17-21 Q.8 In what sense are we to copy Paul? What two alternative ways of life did Paul set out? What are the characteristics of the enemies of the cross? Give everyday examples of how we might at times slip into this way of looking at life. By contrast what is the destination, attitude and expectation of Christ of His friends?