

THE LETTER OF PAUL TO THE PHILIPPIANS

- NOTES FOR PRIVATE OR GROUP STUDY – PART FOUR

Joy is the experience of knowing God's grace, all we have in Christ, beginning with His mind, emotion, and will which He wants to put within us. Humility which chooses His mind, not my own, is the simple secret of joy. Paul did not care how many times he had to repeat himself until the Philippians understood.(3:1)

But to make his point he used the strongest terms of abuse possible to describe the work of those who opposed his teaching. 'Dogs' in their culture were not friendly, pampered pets but wild, scavenging wolves. What were the 'pit-bulls' of the first century up to? Very simply they were teaching that men could be saved by keeping the Law of Moses, including circumcision, by their own effort. Paul had previously defined 'spiritual worship' as presenting our bodies to God so that our minds could be renewed by His perfect will.(Rom.12:1,2) Paul looked back on his days of 'confidence in the flesh' when he relied on his Hebrew heritage, particularly as a Benjamite, the tribe of the first king, Saul, his impeccable education as a Pharisee,(Acts 22:3) his outstanding record as a persecutor of heretics,(Acts 22:4; 26:10,11) and his acknowledged record as a keeper of the Law.(Gal.1:14) All this he now regarded as a load of rubbish, having discovered something so much better. He now knew that he was a citizen of heaven, qualified by Christ's righteousness, received by faith, and empowered by Christ's resurrection energy. It was no longer a matter of what he knew but Whom he knew – Jesus. The better he knew Him, the better equipped he was not for fame and fortune, but to suffer as Jesus had done.(3:3-11)

We will be robbed of our joy if we look at our own ability and if we look back on our own achievements. We were rescued by Someone who reached out and laid hold of us as we were drowning in self-effort, but for this to happen we had to look to Him and take hold of His outstretched hand.(I Tim.6:12,19) Which attitude we are showing at any moment, faith in ourselves or faith in Christ, (John 16:8,9; Rom.14:23), God will show us. Paul pictured the Christian life as on other occasions as a journey or a race in which what matters is not how far we have come but where we are heading. 'Perfect' means 'reached the end'(1:6; 4:12,15) and reminds us that we are all still a work in progress until we reach heaven, so we are to look ahead and keep moving.(3:12-16)

Paul wanted to be an example, not in his behaviour as he once had, but of faith in Christ. There is, he reminded them again, a simple choice, be an enemy of Christ or a friend. An enemy follows his own desires, seeks his own reputation and sets his own priorities. A friend knows to whom he belongs, what the future holds and what God wants to do in him. The invitation to be a 'citizen of heaven' provides the simple answer to all racism and nationalism. Yes, we were born into different cultures which we should respect in each other, but our heavenly passport should lift us above these petty concerns.(3:17-21)

So far Paul has shown us the prospect of joy,(chapter 1) the secret of joy,(chapter 2) and hindrances to joy.(chapter 3) In the final chapter his theme is maintaining joy.

4:1 Q.1 How did Paul regard the Philippian Christians? What was his great desire for them? How could they be his crown?(II Tim.4:8; Rev.4:4,10)

4:2,3 Q.2 Why did Paul 'sidetrack' on to a problem between two ladies? What do we know about their past record? What did Paul desire for them? What did he expect of the rest of the fellowship? Why was the church's role so important? What is the book of life?(Ps.69:28; Isa.4:3; Dan.12:1; Mal.3:16,17;Rev.3:5; 21:27)

4:4-7 Q.3 How much time are we to spend rejoicing? With which people are we to be forbearing? What are we to worry about? What is the alternative to worry? What four words for prayer did Paul use? What four distinct ideas do they convey? How does one idea follow on to the next? To what consequence will this kind of prayer lead? How will this maintain our joy in Christ?

4:8,9 Q.4 Having emptied our hearts and minds of anxiety, what eight characteristics of our new way of thinking did Paul list? Picture a situation you have worried about and consider how thinking in this new way would have changed the experience. What did Paul now urge them to do about what he had taught them?

4:10-12 Q.5 Paul turned next to the very practical example of his personal needs and the Philippian Christians part in meeting these. What had they done to help him now and in the past? In what way had their involvement been outstanding? What had Paul's circumstances been like over recent times? What had joy in Christ led him to discover about how to handle good times and bad? Again recall good and bad times in your own life and what difference knowing Jesus did make or could have made. Do Christians have hard times because of a lack of faith?

4:13 Q.6 Paul made an extraordinary statement in this verse. What did he mean? What are the 'all things'? What are the conditions behind this promise? How does the context of the rest of this book help to explain Paul's words here?

4:14-18 Q.7 What had been exceptional about the Philippian church? How had they helped Paul? What from his point of view was the best thing about their gift? Just how was sending this gift going to profit the Philippian Christians? What do we know about Epaphroditus' part in the story?(2:25-30) How had Paul explained the 'fragrant aroma' on a previous occasion.(II Cor.2:14-16) What does this passage teach us about when, why and how to give?

4:19-20 Q.8 The Philippian Christians had just met some of Paul's needs. What did he now promise them about their needs? What is the danger in receiving gifts from other Christians? If God is going to supply all our needs how could it be that Paul had gone hungry at times? When other people make gifts to us, who should be glorified? Why?

4:21-22 Q.9 Who was greeting whom in Paul's closing words? What conclusion can we draw from the reference to Caesar's household?(1:13) What clue does this give us as to why Paul appealed to the Emperor?(Acts 25:8-12) What should be so special about

Christians greeting each other? What final reminder did Paul give of the secret of having and maintaining Christian joy?