

PHILIPPIANS - A TEACHER'S GUIDE

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this story/book say to you about God?

This question can be broken down further as follows:

- a. Why did God do/allow it?
- b. Why did He record it for our study?

“To be permitted to have a view of God is the highest privilege accorded to man. This privilege should be prized above all earthly distinction or honor.” *ST, June 16, 1898*

1. What does the book of Philippians tell us about God? Why do you suppose Paul wrote it? How much experience had Paul had with the church at Philippi? What led Paul to go to Philippi? What happened to him there? Where was Paul when he wrote this book? What other books were written about the same time? What was unique about the relationship between Paul and the Philippians? How was Philippi different from other places where Paul had worked? Was it a mistake for Paul to cast out the devil from the slave girl at Philippi? (See Acts 16:8-40; 20:1-6; Philippians 2:25,28; 1:13; 4:14-17)

What do we know about Philippi?

Its Location—The ancient city of Philippi was located in the Roman province of Macedonia nine miles inland from the Aegean Sea. It was said to be founded in the sixth century B.C. by the Thracians. Diodorus of Sicily (1st c. B.C.) and Strabo (63 B.C. to A.D. 24) tell us that its original name was *Crenides*, which means “springs,” because of the springs that watered this marshy lowland. Afterwards it took the name *Dathos*, or *Datos*, from its gold and silver mines. Ancient historians tell us that the city was later reconstructed by Philip II, king of Macedonia (359–336 B.C.) and father of Alexander the Great, in 356 B.C. and renamed after him. It appears that Philip II was attracted to this well-watered and fertile plain because its strategic location could serve to fortify the natural land-route from Europe to Asia and protect the eastern frontier of Macedonia against Thracian inroads. In addition, the gold mines in this area supplied a large amount of gold per year for revenue to the kingdom. Thus, Philip II took the city by force and drove out its inhabitants during his rule.

Its History—The city of Philippi came under Roman rule in the second century B.C. During these Roman times, the entire region of Macedonia was formed into a single Roman province (146 B.C.). In the autumn of 42 B.C., two years after the assassination of Julius Caesar, the famous Battle of Philippi was fought just west of this city in which Brutus and Cassius, the conspirators who had assassinated Julius Caesar, battled with Octavian and Antony. After a number of encounters of victories and defeats, Octavian’s army eventually won. In 31 B.C. Octavian defeated Antony in the Battle of Actium, which led to the city of Philippi becoming a Roman colony and it held this status throughout the New Testament period. Octavian rewarded his soldiers by giving them cities and land, which included Philippi. In 27 B.C., Caius Octavius Caepias was titled “Augustus” by the Roman senate and became the person we recognize in Luke 2:1 as Caesar Augustus, the first emperor of Roman (31 B.C. to A.D. 14).

Luke 2:1, “And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree

from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed.”

The city of Philippi became an important city during the time of Paul the apostle. This is why Acts 16:12 calls it a “chief city” and a colony.

Acts 16:12, “And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days.”

Its geographical advantage is that it stood along the Via Egnatia, the main Roman highway that connected Asia to the western Empire. This highway brought much commerce and activity to the city. In addition, near the city was the river Gangites (modern Angitis), which river is referred to in Acts 16:13 where Paul met a group of women who gathered for prayer. This river also served as an avenue of transport.

As a Roman colony, it held a political advantage to its neighboring cities. A Roman colony was simply a military outpost used to protect the Empire as well as “Romanize” the region in which it was located. It was the only Roman colony in the province of Macedonia. In return for this service from the citizens of this colony, its inhabitants held special privileges, such as immunity from taxes, an autonomous government, and Roman citizenship.

Philippi In the Time of Paul—When Paul visited this city, he found that the majority of inhabitants were Greek, with a second large group of Roman colonists and magistrates who dominated the city and a third, much smaller group of Jews who apparently gained little voice in this community. Ancient inscriptions have been found in both Latin and Greek in the ancient ruins of Philippi, testifying to the fact that both cultures and languages cohabited together here. **Latin was the official language spoken in the government functions of the Empire, but Greek was the common language of the people.** Paul first visited Philippi during his second missionary journey about A.D. 50/51 after receiving in a vision what we have labeled as the “Macedonian Call.” After receiving a vision from the Lord in Asia Paul immediately departed and sailed some sixty miles from Troas to Macedonia in Europe. He and his companions landed on the island of Samothracia, then sailed the rest of the way to the port city of Neapolis, from where they embarked upon the famous Egnatian Way that connected the western Empire to the East. From Neapolis they headed ten miles inland over the coastal range to the city of Philippi. In the account of Paul’s first visit to Philippi in Acts 16:6-40 we learn that there was no synagogue in this Greek city. We therefore conclude that this city did not have a large number of Jews. Paul did however find a group of women, some Jews and some proselytes, who met regularly by the river for prayer. There he made his first convert, a woman named Lydia, a Greek proselyte from Thyatira, a city of Lydia in Asia Minor, who opened her home to Paul and his companions, which consisted of Silas, Timothy, and Luke. This makes the church at Philippi the first one to be established in Europe. From Philippi Paul headed to Thessalonica where he established the second church in Europe. Some scholars suggest that Paul left Luke in Philippi until his return because the “we” passages stop after his departure from Philippi and are not found until Acts 20:5-6 when Paul returns to Philippi. Luke would have naturally been chosen out of

Paul's group of traveling companions because of his Gentile status. (Everett, G. H. (2011). *The Epistle of Philippians. Study Notes on the Holy Scriptures* (6)

Philippi:

When Paul chose a place wherein to preach the gospel, he always did so with the eye of a strategist. He always chose one which was not only important in itself but was also the key point of a whole area. To this day many of Paul's preaching-centres are still great road centres and railway junctions. Such was Philippi which had at least three great claims to distinction.

(i) In the neighbourhood there were gold and silver mines, which had been worked as far back as the time of the Phoenicians. It is true that by the time of the Christian era they had become exhausted, but they had made Philippi a great commercial centre of the ancient world.

(ii) The city had been founded by Philip, father of Alexander the Great, and it is his name that it bears. It was founded on the site of an ancient city called *Krēidē*, a name which means The Wells or Fountains. Philip had founded Philippi in 368 B.C. because there was no more strategic site in all Europe. There is a range of hills which divides Europe from Asia, east from west and just at Philippi that chain of hills dips into a pass so that the city commanded the road from Europe to Asia, since the road must go through the pass. This was the reason that one of the great battles of history was fought at Philippi; for it was here that Antony defeated Brutus and Cassius, and thereby decided the future of the Roman Empire.

(iii) Not very long after, Philippi attained the dignity of a Roman Colony. The Roman Colonies were amazing institutions. They were not colonies in the sense of being outposts of civilization in unexplored parts of the world. They had begun by having a military significance. It was the custom of Rome to send out parties of veteran soldiers, who had served their time and been granted citizenship, to settle in strategic road centres. Usually these parties consisted of three hundred veterans with their wives and children. These colonies were the focal points of the great Roman road systems which were so engineered that reinforcements could speedily be sent from one colony to another. They were founded to send the peace and to command the strategic centres in Rome's far-flung Empire. At first they had been founded in Italy; but soon they were scattered throughout the whole Empire, as the Empire grew. In later days the title of colony was given by the government to any city which it wished to honour for faithful service.

Wherever they were, these colonies were little fragments of Rome and their pride in their Roman citizenship was their dominating characteristic. The Roman language was spoken; Roman dress was worn; Roman customs were observed; their magistrates had Roman titles, and carried out the same ceremonies as were carried out in Rome itself. They were stubbornly and unalterably Roman and would never have dreamt of becoming assimilated to the people amidst whom they were set. We can

hear the Roman pride breathing through the charge against Paul and Silas in Acts 16:20, 21: “These men are Jews, and they are trying to teach and to introduce laws and customs which it is not right for us to observe—for we are Romans.”

“You are a colony of heaven” (A.V.), Paul wrote to the Philippian Church (Phil. 3:20). Just as the Roman colonist never forgot in any environment that he was a Roman, so they must never forget in any society that they were Christians. Nowhere were men prouder of being Roman citizens than in these colonies; and such was Philippi. (Introduction to Philippians - *Daily Study Bible*)

The area became Roman in the second century B.C. On the plains near Philippi in October 42 B.C., Antony and Octavian decisively defeated the forces of Brutus and Cassius, the slayers of Julius Caesar. Octavian (Augustus) later made Philippi a Roman colony and settled many veterans of the Roman armies there. (*The New American Bible*)

Philippians: The authorship of the epistle of Philippians was uncontested until the rise of higher criticism in the eighteenth century. Even today, those who question Pauline authorship find little support from modern biblical scholarship. Thus, there is strong internal and external evidence to the Pauline authorship of Philippians. (Everett, G. H. (2011). *The Epistle of Philippians. Study Notes on the Holy Scriptures* (8)

Ignatius of Antioch (A.D. 35 to 107) and Polycarp (A.D. 69 to 155) support the authorship of Philippians by Paul.

Philippians

This is Paul’s happiest letter. And the happiness is infectious. Before we read a dozen lines, we began to feel the joy ourselves—the dance of words and the exclamations of delight have a way of getting inside us.

But happiness is not a word we can understand by looking it up in the dictionary. In fact, none of the qualities of the Christian life can be learned out of a book. Something more like apprenticeship is required, being around someone who out of years of devoted discipline shows us, by his or her entire behavior, what it is. Moments of verbal instruction will certainly occur, but mostly an apprentice acquires skill by daily and intimate association with a “master,” picking up subtle but absolutely essential things, such as timing and rhythm and “touch.”

When we read what Paul wrote to the Christian believers in the city of Philippi, we find ourselves in the company of just such a master. Paul doesn’t tell us that we can be happy, or how to be happy, he simply and unmistakably *is* happy. None of his circumstances contribute to his joy: he wrote from a jail cell, his work was under attack by competitors, and after 20 years or so of hard traveling in the service of Jesus, he was tired and would have welcomed some relief.

But circumstances are incidental compared to the life of Jesus, the Messiah, that Paul experiences from the inside. For it is a life that not only happened at a certain point in history, but continues to happen, spilling out

into the lives of those who received him, and then continues to spill out all over the place. Christ is, among much else, the revelation that God cannot be contained or hoarded. It is this “spilling out” quality of Christ’s life that accounts for the happiness of Christians, for joy is life in excess, the overflow of what cannot be contained within any one person. (*The Message*, introduction to Philippians)

2. Paul wrote to the Philippians because:

- He was in prison and they had sent him money. The Philippians were the only ones from whom Paul had accepted money during his ministry. (Philippians 1:5; 4:10-19)
- Paul may have passed through Philippi on his way from Ephesus to Greece, (Act 20:1-2) and he definitely stopped there on his fateful trip to Jerusalem. (Act 20:6)
- Paul wanted them to understand that he was okay even in prison although he recognized that he could be put to death at any time. (Philippians 1:20-23; 2:17; 3:10)
- Epaphroditus, from Philippi, had been very ill but was now returning to Philippi with Paul’s letter.
- False doctrine was being taught in Philippi.
- Other so-called Christian workers were working hard against Paul’s teachings.
- He wanted to remind the Philippians that salvation comes through Jesus Christ and not through practicing Jewish ceremonies.

3. How do you suppose Paul, a prisoner, managed to convert some of Caesar’s workers? (Philippians 1:12-14; 4:22) How would you witness to your jailer?

First of all, notice that “the Praetorian Guard” or “Caesar’s household” or “the emperor’s palace” does not mean Nero’s own immediate family or any of his relatives. This was the expression used to imply all of those who worked directly for the emperor. Although living in his own hired house, Paul was almost certainly chained—maybe even night and day—to a Roman soldier from “the elite guard” who were the emperor’s private army. Thus, as Paul spoke to his friends and even directly to these soldiers as they rotated through his “home,” he had opportunity to speak to many of them and to witness in his most convincing manner. Thus, a number of these elect soldiers became members of the Christian church.

Nowhere could there exist an atmosphere more uncongenial to Christianity than in the Roman court. Nero seemed to have obliterated from his soul the last trace of the divine, and even of the human, and to bear the impress [BEGIN P.463] of Satan. His attendants and courtiers were in general of the same character as himself—fierce, debased, and corrupt. To all appearance it would be impossible for Christianity to gain a foothold in the court and palace of Nero.

Yet in this case, as in so many others, was proved the truth of Paul’s assertion that the weapons of his warfare were “mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds,” 2 Corinthians 10:4. Even in Nero’s household, trophies of the cross were won. From the vile attendants of a viler king were gained converts who became sons of God. These were not

Christians secretly, but openly. They were not ashamed of their faith.

And by what means was an entrance achieved and a firm footing gained for Christianity where even its admission seemed impossible? In his epistle to the Philippians, Paul ascribed to his own imprisonment his success in winning converts to the faith from Nero's household. Fearful lest it might be thought that his afflictions had impeded the progress of the gospel, he assured them: "I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel." Philippians 1:12.—*Acts of the Apostles*, by Ellen G. White: pp. 462.3-463.2.

4. What is the meaning of "some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry"? (Philippians 1:15)

No doubt, there were some who had observed Paul and his work and wished that they could have the influence that Paul had on his hearers. They were "envious" of his influence. While Paul was in prison, such persons may have believed that they had an opportunity to "preach Christ" and claim that they were on the same page as Paul. But, such persons were almost certainly not committed and dedicated to the work in the same way that Paul was. Almost certainly, they had differences of opinion about certain points of the gospel and thus were actually "rivals" of Paul in preaching the "truth."

5. What did Paul mean by Philippians 1:23,24, *NRSV*: "I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; but to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account." Did he plan to go directly to heaven when he died?

Paul was wishing that He could be with the Christ whom he had never actually met except in vision. This is not a statement of what happens at the point of death. Many other verses in Scripture would contradict such an understanding. (1 Corinthians 15:51-52; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17; see also Mark 5:39; John 11:11)

6. Why would the Sovereign God of the universe step down and "empty Himself"—even dying "the death of a common criminal" (Philippians 2:5-8, *Phillips*)—while Lucifer, a created being, was so determined to exalt himself above the throne of God? (Isaiah 14:12-14; Matthew 4:8,9) What does this imply to us about the nature of the great controversy between these two? Which of those attitudes seems to be more like ours? Does this have anything to do with the "mystery of godliness" (1 Timothy 3:16) and the "mystery of iniquity"? (2 Thessalonians 2:7) Where else in the Bible would you look for major statements about the nature of Christ?

Adam (and Satan?)	Christ
Made in the divine image.	Is the form and very essence of God.
Thought that to be as God was a prize at which to grasp.	Thought that to be as God was not a prize at which to grasp.
Aspired to a reputation.	Made himself of no reputation.
Spurned the role of God's servant.	Took upon Himself the form of a bondservant or slave.
Seeking to be like God.	Coming in the likeness of men.

And being made a man (of dust, now doomed).	And being found in appearance as a man. (Romans 8:3)
He exalted himself.	He humbled Himself.
And became disobedient unto death.	And became obedient to the point of death.
He was condemned and disgraced.	God highly exalted Him and gave Him the name and position of Lord.

Adapted from *Believer's Study Bible*

7. There are four major passages in Scripture discussing the nature of Christ: John 1:1-18; Philippians 2:5-11; Colossians 1:15-23; 2:9,10, and Hebrews 1:1-13. One is from John, and three are from Paul. What are the major points that they make?
1. Christ is, has always been, and always will be, fully God.
 2. Father and Son and Holy Spirit are always in full harmony.
 3. Christ is the Agent through whom all things were created. So, He is superior to all created things.
 4. We are made in Their image.
 5. Christ set aside His divinity and became a Human Being to reach us.
 6. Christ had earlier become an Angel to reach angels.
 7. As sinners, we cannot see God. So, Christ came and made Himself visible to us to demonstrate the truth about God.
 8. From the beginning, Christ voluntarily agreed to take on the role of representing God to His creatures. While doing this, He was still fully God.
 9. When He returned to heaven after His time on earth, He again assumed His position at the right hand of God; and the entire universe worshiped Him for what He had done.
 10. When the truth of what Christ accomplished is seen by all, the truth of it will be so compelling that everyone—even Satan temporarily—will bow down and worship Christ once again. (Compare Isaiah 45:23; Romans 14:11)
 11. Christ is the Head of the church and the Source of its power and life.
 12. By His life and His death, Christ answered all of Satan's questions and accusations and won the great controversy, sealing Satan's doom.
 13. What Christ has done for us wins us back to even greater loyalty and love than we had at the beginning.
 14. Christ offers us full union with Him if we will agree to live as He lived.
 15. As God, Christ deserves our worship now and forever.
 16. God the Father places Christ in the highest position available because of what He has done.
8. After Christ completed His work here on this earth, did the Father give Him a name just below the Father's name? (Philippians 2:9-11) Does that sound like Someone whose job is to constantly plead with the Father?

The three Members of the Godhead are always giving honor and praise to each

Other. That is what truly loving Beings do. The Father gives the Son “the name which is above every name.” (Philippians 2:9; compare Ephesians 1:21) The Father would never do such a thing if the Son’s correct position were an inferior one and His job was to spend the rest of this earth’s history trying to beg the Father to do something that the Father did not want to do! We must never place such a barrier between the Members of the Godhead. They are all omniscient and completely in harmony at all times. There is never any reason for One Member of the Trio to have to plead with any Other Member of the Group.

9. What does it mean to “work out your own salvation”? (See Philippians 2:12)

Paul’s appeal to the Philippians is more than an appeal to live in unity in a given situation; it is an appeal to live a life which will lead to the salvation of God in time and in eternity.

Nowhere in the New Testament is the work of salvation more succinctly stated. As the *Revised Standard Version* has it in Philippians 2:12,13: “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God’s at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” As always with Paul, the words are meticulously chosen.

Work out your own salvation; the word he uses for *work out* is *katergazesthai*, which always has the idea of bringing to completion. It is as if Paul says: “Don’t stop halfway; go on until the work of salvation is fully wrought out in you.” No Christian should be satisfied with anything less than the total benefits of the gospel.

“For God is at *work* in you both to will and *to do* of his good pleasure.” The word Paul uses for *work* and *do* is the same, the verb *energein*. There are two significant things about it; it is always used of *the action of God*, and it is always used of *effective action*. God’s action cannot be frustrated, nor can it remain half-finished; it must be fully effective.

As we have said, this passage gives a perfect statement of the work of salvation.

(i) Salvation is of God. (a) It is God that works in us the desire to be saved. It is true that “our hearts are restless till they rest in him,” and it is also true that “we could not even begin to seek him unless he had already found us.” The desire for the salvation of God is not kindled by any human emotion but by God himself. The beginning of the process of salvation is awakened by God. (b) The continuance of that process is dependent on God. Without his help there can be no progress in goodness; without his help no sin can be conquered and no virtue achieved. (c) The end of the process of salvation is with God, for its end is friendship with God, in which we are his and he is ours. The work of salvation is begun, continued and ended in God.

(ii) There is another side to this. Salvation is of man. “Work out your own salvation,” Paul demands. Without man’s co-operation, even God is helpless. The fact is that any gift or any benefit has to be received. A man may be ill and the doctor able to prescribe the drugs that will cure him; but the man will not be cured until he takes them and he may stubbornly refuse all persuasion to take them. It is so with salvation. The offer of God

is there; without it there can be no such thing as salvation. But no man can ever receive salvation unless he answers God's appeal and takes what he offers.

There can be no salvation without God, but what God offers man must take. It is never God who withholds salvation; it is always man who deprives himself of it. (*Daily Study Bible*, comment on Philippians 2:12-18)

10. Why did God inspire Paul to write Philippians 2:25-30? Or, is this inspired? Would you need to be inspired to make such a statement? Doesn't this show a lovely spirit and attitude? What is theology about if it is not about a nice spirit? Would God take time out of His busy schedule to be concerned about the illness of a friend?

Once again, we see that Paul and God were working together in the production of this letter. It did not require some special gift to utter these words; they could have been stated by almost anyone. But, they show that both Paul and God care about their friends, about their health, and about their work. God cares about us in the same way. Epaphroditus was an excellent example from and to the Philippian church.

11. What moved Paul to use such strong language as he did in Philippians 3:2-10? What issues had previously led Paul to use such strong language? (Galatians 1:8,9)

Paul recognized that Jewish legalists were following him everywhere and trying to pervert the truth of the gospel. So, he turned some of their own words back on them:

In the Bible the dog always stands for that than which nothing can be lower. When Saul is seeking to take his life, David's demand is: "After whom do you pursue? After a dead dog! after a flea!" (1 Samuel 24:14, cp. 2 Kings 8:13; Psalm 22:16,20). In the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, part of the torture of Lazarus is that the street dogs annoy him by licking his sores (Luke 16:21). In *Deuteronomy* the Law brings together the price of a dog and the hire of a whore, and declares that neither must be offered to God (Deuteronomy 23:18). In *Revelation* the word *dog* stands for those who are so impure that they are debarred from the Holy City (Revelation 22:15). That which is holy must never be given to dogs (Matthew 7:6). It is the same in Greek thought; the dog stands for everything that is shamelessly unclean.

It was by this name that the Jews called the Gentiles. There is a Rabbinic saying, "The nations of the world are like dogs." So this is Paul's answer to the Jewish teachers. He says to them, "In your proud self-righteousness, you call other men dogs; but it is you who are dogs, because you shamelessly pervert the gospel of Jesus Christ." He takes the very name the Jewish teachers would have applied to the impure and to the Gentiles and flings it back at themselves. A man must always have a care that he is not himself guilty of the sins of which he accuses others. . . .

Lastly, he calls them, *the party of mutilation*. There is a pun in the Greek which is not transferable to English. There are two Greek verbs which are very like each other. *Peritemnein* means *to circumcise*; *katatemnein* means *to mutilate*, as in Leviticus 21:5, which describes forbidden self-mutilation, such as castration. Paul says, "You Jews think that you are circumcised; in point of fact, you are only mutilated."

What is the point of this? According to Jewish belief, circumcision was ordained upon Israel as sign and symbol that they were the people with whom God had entered into a special relationship. The story of the beginning of that sign is in Genesis 17:9,10. When God entered into his special covenant with Abraham, circumcision was laid down as its eternal sign. Now, circumcision is only a sign in the flesh, something done to a man's body. But if a man is to be in special relationship with God, something far more is needed than a mark in his body. He must have a certain kind of mind and heart and character. This is where at least some of the Jews made the mistake. They regarded circumcision *in itself* as being enough to set them apart specially for God. Long, long before this, the great teachers and the great prophets had seen that circumcision of the flesh is by itself not nearly enough and that there was needed a spiritual circumcision. In *Leviticus* the sacred law-giver says that the *uncircumcised hearts* of Israel must be humbled to accept the punishment of God (Leviticus 26:41). The summons of the writer of *Deuteronomy* is: "Circumcise the foreskin of your heart and be no longer stubborn" (Deuteronomy 10:16). He says that the Lord will circumcise their hearts to make them love him (Deuteronomy 30:6). Jeremiah speaks of the uncircumcised ear, the ear that will not hear the word of God (Jeremiah 6:10). The writer of *Exodus* speaks of uncircumcised lips (Exodus 6:12).

So what Paul says is, "If you have nothing to show but circumcision of the flesh, you are not really circumcised—you are only mutilated. Real circumcision is devotion of heart and mind and life to God."

Therefore, says Paul, it is the Christians who are the truly circumcised. They are circumcised, not with the outward mark in the flesh, but with that inner circumcision of which the great law-givers and teachers and prophets spoke. What then are the signs of that real circumcision? Paul sets out three.

(i) We worship in the Spirit of God; or, we worship God in the Spirit. Christian worship is not a thing of ritual or of the observation of details of the Law; it is a thing of the heart. It is perfectly possible for a man to go through an elaborate liturgy and yet have a heart that is far away from God. It is perfectly possible for him to observe all the outward observances of religion and yet have hatred and bitterness and pride in his heart. The true Christian worships God, not with outward forms and observances, but with the true devotion and the real sincerity of his heart. His worship is love of God and service of men.

(ii) Our only boast is in Jesus Christ. The only boast of the Christian is not in what he has done for himself but in what Christ has done for him. His only pride is that he is a man for whom Christ died. . .

(iii) We place no confidence in merely human things. The Jew placed his confidence in the physical badge of circumcision and in the performance of the duties of the Law. The Christian places his confidence only in the mercy of God and in the love of Jesus Christ. The Jew in essence trusted himself; the Christian in essence trusts God.

The real circumcision is not a mark in the flesh; it is that true worship, that

true glory, and that true confidence in the grace of God in Jesus Christ.
(*Daily Study Bible* for Philippians 3:2,3)

12. What would you think if your pastor said, “Keep on imitating me, my brothers and sisters.” (Philippians 3:17, *GNB*, compare Philippians 4:9; 1 Corinthians 4:16; 11:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:6; 2 Thessalonians 3:9)

Few leaders, even pastors, would dare to say, “Follow my example.” Most often, we hear Christian leaders say, “I am a sinner just like the rest of you.” (Compare Paul in 1 Timothy 1:15) But, Paul was suggesting that the best example he could point to with which his converts were familiar and which it was safe to follow was his own example. Of course, he always suggested that Christ was his example, and he constantly tried to follow Him. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if more of our Christian leaders and fellow church members could speak as Paul spoke. Jesus certainly recommended it. “In the same way your light must shine before people, so that they will see the good things you do and praise your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16, *GNB*)

13. What would it mean to say, “Their god is the belly”? (Philippians 3:19, *NRSV*) How could you be sure that this is not your case? Would such a person have to be a glutton? Or, could he be someone who is extremely concerned about what he eats? But it says, “They glory in their shame.” Are these the kind of people who got circumcised?

There were in the Church at Philippi men whose conduct was an open scandal and who, by their lives, showed themselves to be the enemies of the Cross of Christ. Who they were is not certain. But it is quite certain that they lived gluttonous and immoral lives and used their so-called Christianity to justify themselves. We can only guess who they may have been.

They may have been Gnostic. The Gnostics were heretics who tried to intellectualize Christianity and make a kind of philosophy out of it. They began with the principle that from the beginning of time there had always been two realities—spirit and matter. Spirit, they said, is altogether good; and matter is altogether evil. It is because the world was created out of this flawed matter that sin and evil are in it. If then, matter is essentially evil, the body is essentially evil and will remain evil whatever you do with it. Therefore, do what you like with it; since it is evil anyhow it makes no difference what you do with it. So these Gnostics taught that gluttony and adultery and homosexuality and drunkenness were of no importance because they affect only the body which is of no importance.

There was another party of Gnostics who held a different kind of doctrine. They argued that a man could not be called complete until he had experienced everything that life had to offer, both good and bad. Therefore, they said, it was a man’s duty to plumb the depths of sin just as much as to scale the heights of virtue. (*Daily Study Bible* for Philippians 3:17-21)

14. What is the meaning of “our conversation (citizenship) is in heaven”? (Philippians 3:20)

“Our citizenship,” he says, “is in heaven.” Here was a picture the Philippians could understand. Philippi was a Roman colony. Here and there at strategic military centres the Romans set down their colonies. In such places the citizens were mostly soldiers who had served their

time—twenty-one years—and who had been rewarded with full citizenship. The great characteristic of these colonies was that, wherever they were, they remained fragments of Rome. Roman dress was worn; Roman magistrates governed; the Latin tongue was spoken; Roman justice was administered; Roman morals were observed. Even in the ends of the earth they remained unshakeably Roman. Paul says to the Philippians, “Just as the Roman colonists never forget that they belonged to Rome, you must never forget that you are citizens of heaven; and your conduct must match your citizenship.” (*Daily Study Bible* for Philippians 3:17-21)

Notice how Ellen White understood this even though she did not know any Greek.

Let us remember that our citizenship is in heaven. Here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come. (*RH*, May 16, 1899 par. 13)

Remembering that our citizenship is in heaven, let us lay hold on the hope set before us in the Gospel. (*ST*, January 28, 1903 par. 7)

Let us not be content to be numbered among the “kindreds of the earth.” Our citizenship is in heaven, and we are to lay hold on the hope set before us in the gospel. (*MS* 155, 1902; *2SAT* 213.5)

15. Who was Paul’s coworker, Clement?

Clement, a fellow laborer of Paul (Phil. 4:3), probably the same person who was afterward bishop of Rome and wrote two Corinthian epistles, which are still extant and were once read in some churches. (*The Complete Word Study Dictionary, New Testament*)

A fellow-worker with Paul at Philippi, mentioned with especial commendation in Philippians 4:3. The name being common, no inference can be drawn from this statement as to any identity with the author of the Epistle to the Corinthians published under this name, who was also the third bishop of Rome. The truth of this supposition (“it cannot be called a tradition,” Donaldson, *The Apostolical Fathers*, 120), although found in Origen, Eusebius, Epiphanius and Jerome, can neither be proved nor disproved. Even Roman Catholic authorities dispute it (article “Clement,” *Catholic Cyclopaedia*, IV, 13). The remoteness between the two in time and place is against it; “a wholly uncritical view” (Cruttwell, *Literary History of Early Christianity*, 31).—Orr, J., M.A., D.D. (1999). *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*: 1915 edition (J. Orr, Ed.). Albany, OR: Ages Software.

16. Do you think Paul, while in prison, was able to follow his own advice in Philippians 4:8,9? Would this be a safe guide for all of life? What was Paul actually saying?

The human mind will always set itself on something and Paul wished to be quite sure that the Philippians would set their minds on the right things. This is something of the utmost importance, because **it is a law of life that, if a man thinks of something often enough, he will come to the stage when he cannot stop thinking about it.** His thoughts will be quite literally in a groove out of which he cannot jerk them. It is, therefore, of the first importance that a man should set his thoughts upon the fine things and here Paul makes a list of them.

There are the things which are **true**. Many things in this world are deceptive and illusory, promising what they can never perform, offering a specious peace and happiness which they can never supply. A man should always set his thoughts on the things which will not let him down.

There are the things which are, as the *Authorized Version* has it, **honest**. This is an archaic use of *honest* in the sense of *honourable*, as the *Revised Standard Version* translates it. The *Authorized Version* suggests in the margin *venerable*. The *Revised Version* has *honourable* and suggests in the margin *reverend*. Moffatt has *worthy*.

It can be seen from all this that the Greek (*semnos*) is difficult to translate. It is the word which is characteristically used of the gods and of the temples of the gods. When used to describe a man, it describes a person who, as it has been said, moves throughout the world as if it were the temple of God. Matthew Arnold suggested the translation *nobly serious*. But the word really describes *that which has the dignity of holiness upon it*. There are things in this world which are flippant and cheap and attractive to the light-minded; but it is on the things which are serious and dignified that the Christian will set his mind.

There are the things which are **just**. The word is *dikaios*, and the Greeks defined the man who is *dikaios* as he who gives to gods and men what is their due. In other words, *dikaios* is the word of *duty faced and duty done*. There are those who set their minds on pleasure, comfort and easy ways. The Christian's thoughts are on duty to man and duty to God.

There are the things which are **pure**. The word is *hagnos* and describes what is morally undefiled. When it is used ceremonially, it describes that which has been so cleansed that it is fit to be brought into the presence of God and used in his service. This world is full of things which are sordid and shabby and soiled and smutty. Many a man gets his mind into such a state that it soils everything of which it thinks. The Christian's mind is set on the things which are pure; his thoughts are so clean that they can stand even the scrutiny of God.

There are the things which the *Authorized Version* and the *Revised Standard* call **lovely**. Moffatt translates *attractive*. *Winsome* is the best translation of all. The Greek is *prospiles*, and it might be paraphrased as *that which calls forth love*. There are those whose minds are so set on vengeance and punishment that they call forth bitterness and fear in others. There are those whose minds are so set on criticism and rebuke that they call forth resentment in others. The mind of the Christian is set on the lovely things—kindness, sympathy, forbearance—so he is a winsome person, whom to see is to love.

There are the things which are, as the *Authorized Version* has it, **of good report**. In the margin the *Revised Version* suggests *gracious*. Moffatt has *high-toned*. The *Revised Standard Version* has *gracious*. C. Kingsley Williams has *whatever has a good name*. It is not easy to get at the meaning of this word (*eophema*). It literally means *fair-speaking*, but it was specially connected with the holy silence at the beginning of a sacrifice in

the presence of the gods. It might not be going too far to say that it describes *the things which are fit for God to hear*. There are far too many ugly words and false words and impure words in this world. On the lips and in the mind of the Christian there should be only words which are fit for God to hear.

Paul goes on, ***if there be any virtue***. Both Moffatt and the Revised Standard Version use *excellence* instead of *virtue*. The word is *aretē*. The odd fact is that, although *aretē* was one of the great classical words, Paul usually seems deliberately to avoid it and this is the only time it occurs in his writings. In classical thought it described every kind of excellence. It could describe the excellence of the ground in a field, the excellence of a tool for its purpose, the physical excellence of an animal, the excellence of the courage of a soldier, and the virtue of a man. Lightfoot suggests that with this word Paul calls in as an ally all that was excellent in the pagan background of his friends. It is as if he were saying, “If the old pagan idea of excellence, in which you were brought up, has any influence over you—think of that. Think of your past life at its very highest, to spur you on to the new heights of the Christian way.” The world has its impurities and its degradations but it has also its nobilities and its chivalries, and it is of the high things that the Christian must think.

Finally Paul says, ***if there be any praise***. In one sense it is true that the Christian never thinks of the praise of men, but in another sense it is true that every good man is uplifted by the praise of good men. So Paul says that the Christian will live in such a way that he will neither conceitedly desire nor foolishly despise the praise of men. (*Daily Study Bible*, comment on Philippians 4:8,9)

Note how the adjectives in Philippians 4:8 are similar to those used in Psalms 19:7-10.

Psalms 19:7-10, “The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is ***pure***, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is ***clean***, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are ***true and righteous*** altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.” (Everett, G. H. (2011). *The Epistle of Philippians. Study Notes on the Holy Scriptures* (81)

Was Paul thinking of these words from David as he wrote this passage?

17. What is implied by Philippians 4:10-13? What was Paul talking about when he said he could do “all things through Christ”?

As the letter draws to an end Paul generously expresses his gratitude for the gift which the Philippians had sent to him. He knew that he had always been much in their thoughts, but circumstances had up till now given them no opportunity to show their mindfulness of him.

It was not that he was dissatisfied with his own state, for he had learned the gift of *content*. Paul uses one of the great words of pagan ethics (*autarkē*), which means *entirely self-sufficient*. *Autarkeia*, self-sufficiency,

was the highest aim of Stoic ethics; by it the Stoic meant a state of mind in which a man was absolutely independent of all things and of all people. They proposed to reach that state by a certain pathway of the mind.

(i) They proposed to eliminate all desire. The Stoic rightly believed that contentment did not consist in possessing much but in wanting little, “If you want to make a man happy,” they said, “add not to his possessions, but take away from his desires.” Socrates was once asked who was the wealthiest man. He answered: “He who is content with least, for *autarkeia* is nature’s wealth.” The Stoics believed that the only way to contentment was to abolish all desire until a man had come to a stage when nothing and no one were essential to him.

(ii) They proposed to eliminate all emotion until a man had come to a stage when he did not care what happened either to himself or to anyone else. Epictetus says. “Begin with a cup or a household utensil; if it breaks, say, ‘I don’t care.’ Go on to a horse or pet dog; if anything happens to it, say, ‘I don’t care.’ Go on to yourself, and if you are hurt or injured in any way, say, ‘I don’t care.’ If you go on long enough, and if you try hard enough, you will come to a stage when you can watch your nearest and dearest suffer and die, and say, ‘I don’t care.’” The Stoic aim was to abolish every feeling of the human heart.

(iii) This was to be done by a deliberate act of will which saw in everything the will of God. The Stoic believed that literally nothing could happen which was not the will of God. However painful it might be, however disastrous it might seem, it was God’s will. It was, therefore, useless to struggle against it; a man must steel himself into accepting everything.

In order to achieve content, the Stoics abolished all desires and eliminated all emotions. Love was rooted out of life and caring was forbidden. As T. R. Glover said, “The Stoics made of the heart a desert, and called it a peace.”

We see at once the difference between the Stoics and Paul. The Stoic said, “I will learn content by a deliberate act of my own will.” Paul said, “I can do all things through Christ who infuses his strength into me.” For the Stoic contentment was a human achievement; for Paul it was a divine gift. The Stoic was *self-sufficient*; but Paul was *God-sufficient*. Stoicism failed because it was inhuman; Christianity succeeded because it was rooted in the divine. Paul could face anything, because in every situation he had Christ; the man who walks with Christ can cope with anything. (*Daily Study Bible* on Philippians 4:10-13)

True Contentment—Peace and contentment in the midst of trials are the signs of true Christian maturity. Paul the apostle expresses this contentment in his epistle to the Philippians. Paul is not saying that he has learned to accept the curse, such as sickness and poverty, in his life. But rather, he has learned to put his confidence and faith in God without anxiety, whatever circumstances come his way. This whole chapter is about not being full of doubt and worry, but it is about putting your faith in God to supply every need in life.—Everett, G. H. (2011). *The Epistle of Philippians. Study Notes on the Holy Scriptures* (83).

18. This letter to the Philippians was a letter of thanks from Paul written while he was in prison. He was hoping soon to be released. He was so thankful for the financial support that the Philippians had, from time to time, sent him. But, he could not write a letter to any of his churches without adding some notes of encouragement and instruction.
19. In Philippians 2:10-11, he said something very important about the great controversy. Was he thinking about Isaiah 45:23? He had already said something similar in Romans 14:11. What role did God play in this whole story? Did He inspire the Philippians to send money to Paul? Did Paul's deep appreciation come from God?
20. Did God reveal to Paul what would happen at the end of the third coming of Christ when "every knee would bow"? Did God have anything to do with the illness of Epaphroditus? Why do you think this letter was included in the New Testament Canon? Or, was all of this just happenstance?

These are thought questions, and your answers will depend on your understanding of inspiration and the role God plays in human events. What do you think?

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Info@theox.org

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