

PHILIPPIANS: THE EPISTLE OF JOY

Introduction

Paul was in prison, almost certainly in Rome rather than Ephesus or Caesarea, when he wrote Philippians. The year was probably about A.D. 62, and Paul was writing to a church which he had founded on his second missionary journey. Philippi was in Macedonia (northern Greece), and Paul's relationship with the Philippian Christians was generally happy - a contrast to his relations with the Corinthians, for example. The word 'joy' in its noun or verb form is found 16 times in the four chapters of Philippians. Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones calls it 'the most lyrical, the happiest, letter which the Apostle ever wrote'.

The Coming of the Gospel to Philippi

The first three converts in Philippi are mentioned in Acts 16.

1. Who was Lydia? How did she come to know the gospel of Christ? How is her conversion described? (Acts 16:12-15) _____

2. Give details about how the gospel of salvation came to the slave girl who practised divination (Acts 16:16-18). _____

3. What did the redemption of the slave girl lead to, and how did this lead to the conversion of the Philippian gaoler? (Acts 16:19-34) Where does the gaoler come to see his life in the light of eternity? What is the essential gospel that Paul and Silas bring to him? What are the indications of a true conversion?

Note: this man was a Gentile, presumably with no background knowledge of the Old Testament.

The Church at Philippi (1:1-2).

1. How are Paul and Timothy described? (1:1) To whom does Paul write? (1:1) What does this imply about church structure? _____

Note: It is not St Paul writing to the servants at Philippi, but the slave Paul writing to the saints at Philippi.

In the New Testament, Christians are only called Christians three times (twice in Acts, once in 1 Peter), but they are called 'saints' over 60 times. Don Carson says that the Roman Empire was characterized by secularization, self-indulgence, and philosophical pluralism - like the Western world today.

2. What does Paul seek for the Philippian Christians? (1:2) _____

Thanksgiving in prayer (1:3-4).

1. Why is Paul thankful? (1:3-4) _____

Peter O'Brien and Don Carson say that Paul is thankful for all the Philippians' remembrance of him, but it is better to take it to refer to his remembrance of them.

Peter Cook and Dudley Moore did a skit where a letter arrives at the house of a family which says: 'Stop enjoying yourselves, God's about the place, signed Paul.' Is that what Paul is saying? (1:4) _____

Fellowship in the Gospel (1:5).

1. What did the Philippians do for Paul? (1:5; see Acts 16:15, 33-34; Phil.1:19, 29-30; 4:10, 14-15) How can we do something similar? _____

The Faithfulness of God (1:6).

1. What is the promise in 1:6? Who begins the work of salvation? (note Acts 16:14; Eph.1:4) What does this mean for us? _____

Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones said that it was one of his favourite verses, if we are allowed to have favourite verses.

Augustus Toplady:

*The work which His goodness began,
The arm of His strength will complete
.....
Things future, nor things that are now,
Nor all things below or above,
Can make Him His purpose forgo,
Or sever my soul from His love.*

Paul's love for the Philippians (1:7-8).

1. Of what does Paul speak of in verse 7-8? Why does he put himself on oath in verse 8? How does Paul avoid self-pity? (remember that he is in prison) _____

The KJV has 'I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ.' From the depth of his being, Paul is moved with affection for the Philippians.

J. A. Bengel: 'Paul is not moved by the bowels of Paul but by the bowels of Jesus Christ.'

Prayer for more love, discernment, and holiness (1:9-11).

1. What does Paul pray for in verses 9-11? What are the sort of things we tend to pray for first? On what should we be focusing? (note Eph.4:15) _____

Alec Motyer: 'the grace which saves also energizes.'

2. What are the goals that Paul seeks? (1:10-11) _____

It is fruit (not 'fruits' as in the NKJV) as in the fruit of the Spirit (Gal.5:22). The two goals are the sanctification of the Christian and the glory of God.

Rejoicing in all circumstances (Phil.1:12-18)

Perspective makes all the difference. Two people can be listening to a string quartet playing Beethoven. One can say: 'That is the most beautiful music' while the other says: 'That is horse hair scraping on cat's gut.'

1. Where is Paul when he writes verse 12? How is God at work in this situation? What is God doing? _____

2. In what two ways has the gospel been advanced by Paul's imprisonment? (1:13-14) What dominates Paul's thinking? How would this change our outlook on life? _____

If Paul was in Rome, the full imperial bodyguard consisted of nine cohorts of 1,000 men each, so Paul was referring to 9,000 men. They were the elite imperial troops, on double pay.

The Italians, under Fascism, invaded Ethiopia in the middle of the 1930s, and expelled all the Protestant missionaries. When they returned after the war, they found that the church had grown. Something similar has happened in China since the Communist revolution of 1949.

John Bunyan wrote his masterpiece *The Pilgrim's Progress* while he was in prison for refusing not to preach.

3. What distinguishes the two groups of preachers mentioned in verses 15-17?

Paul may be referring to some who are mentioned in verse 14.

4. What is Paul's surprising response to this? (1:18) Is Paul referring here to preachers who preach an unbiblical Christ? _____

There is a difference between preaching which is true but performed with mixed motives (e.g. Jonah's preaching at Nineveh when he did not want the Ninevites to repent) and preaching which is false (2 Cor.11:4, 13-14; Gal.1:8-9).

Sinclair Ferguson: 'Motives matter; but we must never allow the motives of others to devour us. We must reserve in our hearts a sanctuary of love for Jesus Christ - a sanctuary from which everything but trust in him and love for him is barred.'

Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones asks: 'Have you become lost in Christ, which is the secret of it all?'

To live is Christ, to die is gain (Phil.1:19-26)

Dr Johnson once commented that when a man knows that he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully.

1. What does Paul know? What are the two sources of help for Paul in prison? (1:19; the RSV & NIV have 'deliverance'; GNB - 'I shall be set free'; surely here he means 'vindication' because he is uncertain about whether he will live or die) _____

2. What is Paul's goal in verse 20? Does Paul focus on his own circumstances? _____

3. What is Paul's view of life and death? (1:21) How is death gain? _____

William Hendriksen: 'Death is gain because it brings more of Christ to Paul, and more of Paul to Christ.'

When Edward Payson was dying in 1827, he saw that he still had work to do: 'All I want is to be a mirror, to reflect some of those rays to those around me.'

Count von Zinzendorf: 'I have one passion, it is he and he alone.'

4. What are the two loves that constrain Paul? (1:22-24) Which one is more desirable and which one is more necessary? _____

It is important to recognise that Paul is not filled with a death wish. He is not like Keats: 'half in love with easeful Death'. I have met people in hospital who did not seem to have faith in Christ at all but they were tired of life and wanted to die. That is not Paul.

'What benefits do believers receive from Christ at death?' asks Shorter Catechism Question 37. The answer is: 'The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory; and their bodies, being still united to Christ, do rest in their graves till the resurrection.'

Compare that to Alfred Lord Tennyson's poem:

*Behold, we know not anything;
I can but trust that good shall fall
At last - far off - at last, to all
And every winter change to spring.*

5. What will happen to Paul? (1:25-26) What will be the result of this? _____

William Morrice has analysed all the words concerned with 'joy' in the New Testament, and has found they occur 326 times. Francis of Assisi said: 'Let us leave sadness to the devil and his angels. As for us, what can we be but rejoicing and glad?'

Be Steadfast and United (Phil.1:27-30)

1. Whether Paul is released or not, what is the key thing for the Philippian congregation? (1:27) What does this mean for us? (see Eph.4:1; Col.1:10; 1 Thess.2:12; Tit.2:10) _____

Paul says 'Only' or 'Whatever happens' (NIV) or 'Above all' or 'Just one thing' (Karl Barth).

Literally, Paul says: 'Exercise your citizenship worthily of the gospel of Christ' (Alec Motyer).

2. How does Paul apply this general principle in 1:27-28? _____

Do not be frightened, do not be intimidated, or stampeded as if by horses (Alec Motyer). Note 1 Corinthians 16:13. Dom Gregory Dix was once at the consecration of a bishop, and was asked what the various bishops were doing. He replied: 'They are conducting an operation to remove his backbone.' I suppose he was joking.

3. What does Paul say about Christian unity? (1:27) How are we to achieve this? _____

Paul tells the Philippians to stand as one man, in one spirit or common purpose (J. J. Müller, Peter O'Brien) or even one Spirit (H. C. G. Moule, Ralph Martin, Alec Motyer).

4. Of what two things is this a sign? (1:28) _____

The miracles in Exodus operated like that (Ex.10:1-2; Deut.4:34-35).

This sign or omen may lead to their conviction of sin (Alec Motyer) or it may stand whether or not there is any effect on the opponents (Peter O'Brien).

5. What two things does God grant to His people? (1:29-30) _____

Unity and Lowliness (Phil.2:1-4)

Calvin points out with regard to Paul concerning 'how little anxiety he had as to himself, provided only it went well with the church.'

1. What is Paul's fourfold appeal in 2:1? _____

The opening can be translated as 'Since' or 'If, as is indeed the case', which means that the results of vv.2-4 will follow from this.

2. How would Paul's joy be completed? (2:2) _____

Charles Spurgeon: 'I am quite sure that the best way to promote union is to

promote truth.'

3. How are we to walk in humility? (2:3) How do we naturally think? How did Paul regard himself after his conversion? (1 Cor.15:9; Eph.3:8; 1 Tim.1:15)

'Selfish ambition' was found in some of the preachers who stepped into the breach when Paul was arrested (cf. 1:16 NKJV; 1:17 NIV).

A woman once rang me, asking me to fill in some form about stress in the ministry. I should never have agreed to do it. When the form arrived, I found myself wading through wretched question after wretched question about whether I regarded myself as a sinner and a guilty failure or whether my self-esteem was intact.

Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones: 'Nothing but the cross of Christ can give us this spirit of humility.'

4. What does Paul tell us about consideration of others? (2:4; see 2:19-21 for Timothy) _____

We are naturally wrapped up in our own little world. If you have stubbed your toe, and you hear of a plane crash in Siberia, you tend to be more concerned about your toe than about the plane crash.

Christ the Lord and servant (Phil.2:5-11)

It is not unusual for Anthony Mundine to shoot his mouth off about his athleticism. But in 2000, after doing so, he played a poor game as Melbourne thrashed St George. He received the expected criticism, but wrote that week in *The Australian* (13 March, 2000) that 'adversity is the breakfast of champions'. In replying to his media critics, he quoted Albert Einstein: 'Great spirits have always encountered violent opposition from mediocre minds.' Then he added: 'So I guess I'm in good company.'

1. What does Paul call upon Christians to do? (2:5) _____

Ralph Martin emphasises deed rather than attitude: 'Act as befits those who are in Christ Jesus.'

2. Go through the main points of the humiliation of Christ (2:6-8) In what form did Christ exist in glory before He came to earth? (note John 17:5) What did Christ do in coming to earth? _____

The word in verse 6b can be translated as 'robbery' - Christ did not consider

that He was robbing God of anything in being equal with God. Or it can be translated as 'something to be held onto to be equal'. William Hendriksen has 'something to cling to' or 'something that must not slip from his grasp'. Ralph Martin has 'something to use for one's own advantage'. J. B. Phillips says He 'stripped himself of every advantage'.

Kenneth Wuest comments: 'The only person in the world who had the right to assert his rights waived them'.

Cicero called crucifixion the 'most cruel and hideous of punishments'. Origen referred to 'the utterly vile death of the cross'. F. F. Bruce says that in 'polite Roman society the word "cross" was an obscenity, not to be uttered in conversation'.

3. Contrast Christ with Adam (see Gen.3:2-5). _____

Adam was in the form of man, subject to God, but tried to be like God, so his death is a result of his disobedience. We are in Adam or in Christ, in the one who tried to raise himself and so died or in the one who humbled himself and so lived. Adam was disobedient to death; Christ was obedient to death. Adam grasped at a status to which he had no right; Christ renounced a status to which He had every right.

Christ is 'Adam in reverse' (Sinclair Ferguson).

4. Go through the points of Christ's exaltation in verses 9-11. When will the world recognise Christ's exaltation as Lord? Does this mean that all the world will be saved? What does Paul do with Isaiah 45:23 in Philippians 2:10-11 and Romans 14:10-12? What does this show us? _____

We could say that 'God hyper-exalted Him' or 'super-exalted Him'.

Thou didst leave Thy throne

And Thy kingly crown

When Thou camest to earth for me.

Working it out (Phil.2:12-18)

1. What does the word 'therefore' in verse 12 tell us about how Paul deals with the Christian life? What are we told to do? How are we to do this? What is the motive? Why is the Jerusalem Bible (a Roman Catholic translation) so wrong in having 'work for your own salvation'? _____

We talk of 'working at' a marriage. We only say that to people who are married. It is the same here.

2. What is the other side of this truth? (2:13) _____

The Christian is to 'work out' what God has 'worked in'. God does not leave it up to us, nor does He do everything in sanctification. The Keswick Conventions used to teach that sanctification is by faith, so they had consecration meetings. Hence Frances Ridley Havergal's hymn:

*Holiness by faith in Jesus,
Not by effort of thine own.*

Jonathan Edwards used to say that God does everything and we do everything.

3. In what practical way does Paul apply this in verse 14? _____

Remember what Israel was constantly doing in the wilderness.

4. What does Paul tell us to be in verse 15? (note Acts 2:40) _____

*Jesus bids us shine,
With a pure, clear light,
Like a little candle
Burning in the night.
In this world is darkness;
So let us shine,
You in your small corner,
And I in mine.*

5. What is the application in verse 16? To what day is Paul looking forward? What is his hope for that day? _____

It can be read as 'holding out' (NIV) or 'holding fast' the word of life (NKJV).

6. What do verses 17-18 tell Christians to do, even in the face of death? _____

A drink offering was one additional to other offerings (Num.15:8-10).

Servants who forget self (Phil.2:19-30)

Paul was in prison, the Philippian church sent Epaphroditus to him, but Epaphroditus fell very sick and nearly died. When he recovered, he was sent back to Philippi. Paul hoped to send Timothy later, then come himself. So the order of returning to Philippi would be Epaphroditus, Timothy, and Paul. Alec Motyer says: 'These verses are a veritable window into the heart of Paul.'

1. What did Paul hope to do soon? (2:19) How does Paul himself hope to benefit from this? _____

2. How does Paul describe Timothy? (2:20) _____

Paul says literally that he has no one who is 'equal in soul' as Timothy.

3. How does he compare to others? (2:21) _____

There was more than a touch of selfishness at Rome (1:15-18; 2 Tim.4:16).

4. Again, how does Paul describe Timothy? (2:22) _____

In himself, Timothy was a timid and somewhat sickly man, but as Calvin said; 'forget yourself, if you would serve God.'

5. When does Paul hope to send Timothy? (2:23) What does he hope will happen after that? (2:24) _____

6. What had Paul done with Epaphroditus, and how does he describe him? (2:25) _____

Epaphroditus' name means 'lovely' or 'amiable' - perhaps his family worshipped the goddess Aphrodite.

7. For whom had Epaphroditus been concerned? (2:26) _____

8. How serious was this? (2:27) Is the Christian meant to be a Stoic who rides through all adversity, showing no emotion? _____

Epaphroditus had been very sick, perhaps with Roman fever. Paul apparently did not heal him (note 1 Tim.5:23). We do not know how Epaphroditus recovered - through prayer, the laying on of hands, oil (James 5), or medicine.

9. Why does Paul send Epaphroditus? (2:28) For whom is he concerned? _____

10. How should the Philippians receive Epaphroditus? (2:29) Why? (2:30)

J. B. Phillips paraphrases it: 'he risked his life to do for me in person what distance prevents you from doing.'

F. B. Meyer once said: 'I have only one ambition: to be God's errand boy.' Epaphroditus had the same ambition.

11. How are we to be governed less by our circumstances and more by the concerns of the kingdom? _____

C. S. Lewis: 'Look for yourself, and in that long run you will find only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage, ruin and decay. But look for Christ and you will find him, and with him everything else thrown in.'

True believers (Phil.3:1-3)

1. What does Paul say in 3:1? (note 2:18) How can God command joy? What are the benefits of repetition? (see 2 Peter 1:13; 3:1) _____

The word is not 'Finally' (as in NIV, NKJV, ESV) or 'In conclusion' (as in the GNB), nor does he say 'farewell' as in the NEB. Paul is saying 'And so' (Peter O'Brien) or 'To proceed, then' (Alec Motyer).

Martyn Lloyd-Jones says that rejoicing in the Lord is 'one of the greatest safeguards against most of the dangers that confront us'.

2. Against whom does Paul warn? (3:2) How are the Judaizers distorting the gospel? Why does Paul speak so strongly? _____

The NIV leaves out the repetition of the verb, but Paul says 'Watch out' or 'Beware' three times.

3. Who are the true people of God? (3:3) How does Paul describe them? Analyse each of the four descriptions. _____

Paul says: 'We are the circumcision,' not the 'true circumcision' (RSV, NASB) or the NLT's 'we are the truly circumcised'.

As Edward Mote put it:

*My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust my sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.*

On what do I rest for my standing before God? (Phil.3:4-7)

Max Lucado was sitting in a plane next to a woman, and he asked her what was her hope of heaven. Her list was: I'm basically a decent person, I only smoke a pack a day, I work out, and I got my boyfriend to have an AIDS test. But the reality is, as Augustus Toplady put it:

*Not the labours of my hands
Can fulfil Thy law's demands;
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears for ever flow,
All for sin could not atone;
Thou must save, and Thou alone.*

1. List the seven things that Paul might have boasted in (3:4-6)

- (a) Lev.12:3 _____
- (b) _____
- (c) _____
- (d) _____

These first four privileges were Paul's by birth, and he had regarded them as crucial. Josephus begins his autobiography with a presentation of his ancestry, and Paul obviously had thought the same way. The next three privileges were Paul's by conviction.

- (e) Acts 26:5 _____
- (f) _____

Zeal can be good or bad, but in Paul's case it was real, deeply held, and misguided (see Acts 9:1-2; John 16:2).

- (g) _____

In the outward observance of the law, Paul did well, like the rich young ruler (Mark 10:20). The New Perspective thinks that Paul was literally blameless before the law.

2. Paul is not despising these things (Rom.3:1-2; Ps.147:19-20). What, then, is he saying? How can we turn things that look like credits into debits? (3:7-8; a good illustration might be found in 2 Kings 18:4) _____

The only other place where that word is used in the New Testament is in Acts 27:21.

Back in the sixteenth century, Martin Luther tried to save his soul by joining a monastery. He recalled: 'I was a good monk, and I kept the rule of my order so strictly that I might say that if ever a monk got to heaven by his monkery it was I. All my brothers in the monastery who knew me will bear me out. If I had kept on any longer, I should have killed myself with vigils, prayers, reading, and other work.' Luther rebelled against Catholicism not as a bad Catholic but as a good Catholic. Paul reacted to his Pharisaism, not as a bad Pharisee but a good Pharisee.

3. How does a non-Christian think of salvation? Contrast that with the Christian view. _____

Christ is all (Phil.3:8-11).

1. How does Christ compare to everything else? (3:8) What did Paul lose in becoming a Christian? (see Gal.1:14) _____

It can be translated as 'mere garbage' as J. B. Phillips does, or as 'dung' (as in the KJV).

There is loss in the Christian life. Augustine was professor of rhetoric at Milan University but left that when he was converted in 386; Martin Luther was a professor at Wittenberg University but discovered the gospel some time before 1517 and was excommunicated, then declared an outlaw in 1521; George Whitefield had church after church close its doors to him in the 18th century; J. Gresham Machen was defrocked from the American Presbyterian Church in 1935 for believing the gospel; while Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones left a promising career as a Harley Street specialist to preach the gospel in Wales, then London.

2. What is the negative side of faith? (3:9a) How popular is this today? What is the problem with trusting in yourself? (Isa.64:6) _____

I dare not trust my sweetest frame (Edward Mote). The first person to hear that hymn *On Christ the solid rock I stand* was a woman who was dying and she was so taken by it that she asked for a copy of it, dying soon after.

3. What is the positive side of faith? (3:9b) How does Romans 10:3-4 help us to understand what Paul is saying? _____

Shirley MacLaine once stood on the mountains of the west coast of California, facing the Pacific Ocean, and cried out: 'I am god, I am god, I am god.'
Alec Motyer: 'We reach the goal not by the stairs but by the lift.'

Horatius Bonar put it like this:

*Not what these hands have done
 Can save this guilty soul;
 Not what this toiling flesh has borne
 Can make my spirit whole.
 Not what I feel or do
 Can give me peace with God;
 Not all my prayers, and sighs, and tears
 Can bear my awful load.
 Thy work alone, O Christ,
 Can ease this weight of sin;
 Thy blood alone, O Lamb of God,
 Can give me peace within.*

4. Having come to faith in Christ, what does the Christian seek to do next? (3:10-11) How is this true in the life of the Christian? What is the goal? _____

Joni Eareckson-Tada read verse 10 at a meeting here in Sydney in 2000. The impact was devastating. Here was a woman in a wheelchair who had experienced both power and suffering in the here and now. In *A Step Further* she writes: 'I really don't mind the inconvenience of being paralyzed if my faithfulness to God while in this wheelchair will bring glory to Him.'

Pressing toward the goal (Phil.3:12-16)

Justification is all of God's free grace, not our works (3:8-9). But with sanctification, we grow into Christ's likeness. The Christian lives in a certain tension - resting on Christ but striving to be like Him. He seeks to apprehend what is already his. Paul compares it all to a race.

1. Can we attain perfection in this life? (3:12-13a) How does Paul describe his Christian life? (3:12) _____

Richard Baxter: 'This life was not intended to be the place of our perfection, but the preparation for it.'

2. But what is the counterbalance to Paul's realism? (3:12) _____

Paul is 'trying to grasp that purpose for which Christ Jesus grasped me' (J. B. Phillips).

3. What does Paul mean by being single-minded? (3:13-14) _____

4. What does Paul mean by putting his past behind him? (3:13; note 1 Cor.15:9 so that we do not interpret it in a silly way) _____

We are not to be weighed down by past failures nor are we to live off past successes and experiences.

5. What does it mean to be 'eagerly straining forward' (Hendriksen)? (3:13-14; see Heb.12:1-2) _____

6. Does Paul expect every Christian to be at the same stage of maturity at the one time? (3:15-16) What does this have to say to us in how we relate to other Christians? _____

Martin Bucer in the 16th century: 'While all faith is placed in Christ, the thing is safe. It is not given for all to see the same thing at the same time.' When the immature and awkward Charles Simeon first visited the home of Henry Venn, the three Venn daughters could only laugh at his looks and manners. Henry Venn decided to teach them a lesson. He took them out into the garden and told them to bring him a peach. As it was still early summer, they had to make do with an unripe one. 'Well, my dears, it is green now,' said the kindly old man, 'and we must wait; but a little more sun and a few more showers, and the peach will be ripe and sweet. So it is with Mr Simeon.'

Good and bad examples (Phil.3:17-19)

From the Greek word used here, we get our English word 'mimic'.

1. Whom does Paul tell the Philippians to imitate? (3:17) _____

Note Timothy (2:19-24), Epaphroditus (2:25-30), and, for that matter, Christ (2:5). More examples can be found in the list of Old Testament saints (Hebrews 11), Job (James 5:11), and Elijah (James 5:17-18). See too 1 Thess.1:6 and 1 Tim.4:12.

2. But who is causing Paul grief? (3:18-19) _____

Peter O'Brien says that these enemies of the cross were Judaizers - the same group as in 3:2. J. B. Lightfoot, Handley Moule and F. F. Bruce thought that there were two groups - Judaizers in v.2 and libertines in vv.18-19.

3. What four short sharp things does Paul say about these people in v.19? _____

4. How does Paul respond to these enemies of the cross? (3:18) What does

this say to us? _____

Note Rom.9:1-3; 10:1; Acts 20:31; 2 Cor.2:4; Luke 19:41-44.

Andrew Bonar once told Robert Murray M'Cheyne that he had preached the previous Sunday on 'The wicked shall be turned into hell', and on hearing that, M'Cheyne asked Bonar: 'Were you able to preach it with tenderness?'

Citizens of heaven (Phil.3:20-21)

1. Where is the Christian's citizenship located? (3:20) _____

The KJV has 'conversation', but it is 'citizenship' (Barth), 'colony' (R. P. Martin) or 'commonwealth' (Peter O'Brien).

The Roman citizen had a number of privileges. In fact, from 42 B.C. Philippi was governed as if it were on Italian soil. Citizens could vote if they were in Rome, were free from degrading forms of punishment (cf. Acts 16:22ff; 22:25-29), and could appeal to Rome (Acts 25:10-12).

See Heb.11:16; Col.3:1-3. Christians belong to a greater commonwealth, a greater empire:

*So be it, Lord! Thy throne shall never,
Like earth's proud empires, pass away.*

2. What will Christ do for the Christian? (3:20-21) _____

In 48 B.C. Julius Caesar claimed to be the general saviour of mankind, and the emperors soon referred to themselves as 'Lord' and 'Saviour' - hence Acts 17:6-7.

The KJV overdoes it with 'vile body' as does the Jerusalem Bible with 'these wretched bodies of ours'. It is literally 'the body of our humiliation'.

See 1 Cor.15:42-44.

A caterpillar is just a grub, but it is transformed into a beautiful butterfly.

R. A. Torrey called the resurrection of Jesus 'the Gibraltar of Christian evidences, the Waterloo of infidelity'.

3. How can this promise be fulfilled? (3:21; note Matt.28:18) _____

Go through the Gospels, and you see His power:

- (a) power over sickness (Mark 1:29-31);
- (b) power over demons (Mark 5:1-13);
- (c) power over nature (Mark 4:39-41);
- (d) power over death (Luke 8:49, 54-55; John 10:17-18);
- (e) power over sin (Mark 2:5, 10).

Be firm and be united (Phil.4:1-3)

Here we find a series of exhortations - be firm (4:1), be united (4:2-3), rejoice (4:4), be gentle (4:5), do not be anxious but pray (4:6), and meditate on what is good (4:8).

1. Why does Paul begin with 'therefore'? (4:1; see Rom.12:1; Eph.4:1) How does Paul address his readers? What does this reveal about him? _____

The NIV's 'dear friends' should be 'my beloved'.

Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones speaks of 'this burning, blazing love' of Paul for his people.

2. In what ways should a church stand firm? (4:1) _____

The Scottish evangelist Henry Drummond fell in love with the theory of evolution and wrote: 'There is no more unfortunate word in our Church's vocabulary than "Standard." A Standard is a thing that stands. Theology is a thing that moves.'

3. What do we know about Eudoia and Syntyche? (4:2-3) How does Paul describe them, and what does he say to them? What does this tell us about how to correct others? How are we meant to stand firm and united? _____

'True companion' may have been Timothy, Epaphroditus, Silas, or Luke. Clement of Alexandria actually thought it was Paul's wife, but 1 Corinthians 7:7-8 says that Paul was not married and had no intention of getting married. It is possible that the person's name was 'Syzygus', which is how the Jerusalem Bible understands it.

It is only fair to mention that the apostle Paul himself was involved in a protracted dispute with Barnabas, a fellow Christian (Acts 15:36-41).

Joy and gentleness (Phil.4:4-5)

1. What does Paul command in verse 4? (note Gal.5:22; 1 Pet.1:8) Why does he repeat it? Why should a Christian rejoice? (note Luke 10:20; Habakkuk 3:17-18) _____

In one of his short stories, Norman Lindsay says that the profession of a parson is to obliterate joy.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones: 'The only way to be happy in Christ is to be desperately unhappy without him.'

J. A. Bengel says that joy is 'the sum total of this epistle'.

Franz Josef Haydn: 'When I think of God, my heart is so full of joy that the notes leap and dance as they leave my pen.'

C. S. Lewis: 'Joy is the serious business of Heaven.'

2. How should the Christian respond to all others? (4:5) What can this mean for us? _____

The word is 'moderation' (KJV), 'forbearance', 'big-heartedness' (William Hendriksen), 'sweet reasonableness', 'gentleness' (NIV, NKJV), or 'consideration'. Bishop Handley Moule translated it as 'yieldingness'.

3. Why should we do this? (4:5) Does this motive mean anything to the unbeliever? _____

Paul could mean that the Lord is close and watching us or He could mean as the GNB has it: 'the Lord is coming soon'.

Peace in prayer (Phil.4:6-7)

The poet W. H. Auden described modern society as 'the age of anxiety'. People talk about the rat race.

1. Why is anxiety a sin? (4:6; see Matt.6:25-34) _____

Scripture does not commend a lackadaisical approach to life - 'no worries mate, no matter what'. What Paul has in mind here is a wrong form of concern or anxiety, which J. B. Lightfoot defines as 'anxious harassing care'.

2. What is the remedy to anxiety? (4:6) What is to be a feature of the Christian's prayer life? _____

J. A. Bengel commented that anxiety and prayer are more opposed to each other than fire and water.

3. What is promised as a result? (4:7) _____

John Bunyan has developed this image in *The Holy War* where Mr God's-Peace patrols the town of Mansoul.

William Hendriksen defines peace as 'the smile of God reflected in the soul of the believer.'

Purity, practice and peace (Phil.4:8-9)

Simone Weil: 'The root of evil ... is daydreaming.' See Proverbs 4:23.

1. What six things ought we to meditate on? (4:8) Where does sin begin? (James 1:13-15) _____

In the eastern religions, meditation is associated with emptying one's mind. But in Christian meditation, we fill the mind, not empty it.

Charles Spurgeon: 'God will not live in the parlour of our hearts if we entertain the devil in the cellar of our thoughts.'

R. L. Dabney: 'The men who have changed the face of the world have been the reserved, the meditative; men of profound insight, wont to retire into the depths of their own consciousness; men who receive the beautiful and the good with a poet's intense appreciation, and hold them with unwavering grasp of mind and heart.'

2. What are we to do with these thoughts? (4:9) How is Paul to be a pattern for us? _____

Daydream about Christ, if I can put it like that.

3. What does God promise in verse 9? _____

Christian peace comes from warfare (Rom.16:20).

Charles Wesley's goal was:

*A heart in every thought renewed,
And full of love divine,
Perfect and right and pure and good,
A copy, Lord, of Thine!*

Content in all circumstances (Phil.4:10-23)

1. What two things is Paul saying at once? (4:10, 14, 17) _____

Note 1 Thess.2:9; 2 Thess.3:7-10; 1 Cor.9:15-18; 2 Cor.12:13-15.

2. What has Paul learnt? (4:11-12; note Prov.30:8-9) _____

Dietrich Bonhoeffer: 'Earthly possessions dazzle our eyes and delude us into thinking that they can provide security and freedom from anxiety. Yet all the

time they are the very source of all anxiety.'

3. How do we achieve this kind of contentment? (4:13) _____

This verse meant so much to Oliver Cromwell when his son died, but it is first and foremost referring to the Christian's dependence on Christ in all economic circumstances.

Alec Motyer: 'For Paul, the person who possesses Christ possesses all.'

Sinclair Ferguson: 'For Paul contentment is not found in creating our own security, but by abandoning our security to Jesus Christ!'

'Rabbi' Duncan: 'As long as I am thinking of Christ I'm happy.'

4. Why is it important to express gratitude? (4:14) _____

5. How does Paul praise without flattering? (4:15-16) _____

G. W. Peterman is not quite right in calling this 'a thankless thank-you'.

6. Why is Paul delighted? (4:17-18; see 2 Cor.9:7) _____

*Not what we give but what we share,
For the gift without the giver is bare.*

7. What does Paul say about God? (4:19) How should this make a difference to us? _____

James Montgomery Boice says that 'the best cure for spiritual depression is to feed on the promises of God.'

H. A. Ironside was once preaching in California for two weeks, and he quite literally ran out of money. He was cast down, and complained to God, but was finally moved to pray in a way that he had not prayed for some time. From that time on, the work picked up, and old friends provided food and accommodation for him, and a church took up a collection for him. At the end of the two weeks he received a letter from his father (I don't think he received any money), but in the postscript his father cited Philipians 4:19.

8. What does this lead Paul to do? (4:20) _____

9. How does Paul finish his epistle? (4:21-23) Where are some Christians to be found? _____

10. What have you learnt from the epistle to the Philipians? _____
