



## Philippians for Today

Welcome to a new study series that is intended to help you take a fresh look at the letters of the Apostle Paul.

To emphasize the contemporary tone of Paul's letters our recommended text is the Contemporary English Version (CEV). For your convenience the CEV text of Philippians is being provided in a separate booklet. You will also need access to a complete Bible of whatever translation you ordinarily use.

**Philippians is all about our human quest for joy and peace.**

This second study in Philippians will explore what Paul has to say about **"Discovering the Meaning of Salvation."** Paul says, "So, work with fear and trembling to discover what it really means to be saved." (Phil. 2:12)

## *A Theological Vocabulary*

Every field of study has its own specialized terminology. This special vocabulary is a convenient way for insiders to communicate with each other without needing to provide a lot of definitions. Perhaps a good example of this is in the medical field. Unless a doctor makes a conscious effort to explain medical terms, a person not trained in medicine may understand very little of what they are being told about their medical condition.

Christianity also has its own terminology. However, for the most part these faith terms do not come from outside our ordinary vocabulary. Instead, religion tends to use words from our ordinary everyday vocabulary, but then applies them in a specialized way.

A Christian talking about "grace" is referring to a specifically religious concept. This is a different concept than a lawyer or a banker may have in mind when they use the same term. And someone describing the movement of a dancer or an athlete means something completely different again when they use the word "grace".

It is good for us to remember that the Bible often uses ordinary words in a specialized way. Also, we must realize that non-Christians may not really understand what we are saying when we talk about our faith - even when the words we use seem very familiar.

## "The Meaning of Salvation"

Although Paul was one of the leading religious scholars of his generation, it was not his primary objective just to teach theology. He always focused on the practical implications of being a believer.

Although Paul wanted people to come to a deep understanding about God, he desired even more that what they believed about God should have a conspicuous impact on the life that they were living.

For Paul, the objective of correct theological thinking is that it will inevitably lead us towards the living of a God centered life. If it does not then it is worse than useless.

Paul did not want his fellow believers talking about "salvation" as though it was some secret or specialized knowledge about God. While salvation was based upon knowing God - it must also lead to a life that reflected changed attitudes and transformed conduct.

So, when Paul talks about "salvation" he was not just interested in shaping what people believe, he is eagerly concerned to help them reshape how they are living.

For Paul, claiming to have "salvation" without desiring to live a transformed life was an act of arrogance. In contrast, as Paul declares so eloquently, "salvation" is not a reason for arrogance but rather a call to humility.

### *Philippians, Chapter two*

Don't rush through the reading of the text. It is a good practise to read a passage twice before trying to interpret it.

The following notes may help you divide up the passage and understand some of the details of the text.

#### Philippians 2: A simple Outline

Vss. 1-11 Christ represents humility.

Vss. 12-18 Living out what we profess

Vss. 19-24 Paul's care and Timothy

Vss. 25-30 Epaphroditus, one of their own

Vss. 6-11 This may have been used as a hymn in the early church. These verses also emphasize the uniqueness and the divinity of Christ.

Vss. 14-18. This is not about being sinless but Paul urges them to be faithful and growing in faithfulness.

vs. 24. Suggests that Paul has some expectation of a release from jail in the near future.

vss. 25-27 Note that Epaphroditus was originally from Philippi and that he has rendered a great and much appreciated service to Paul.

Throughout this chapter, as in chapter one, there is a repeated association of the Christian life with suffering and hardship.

Note also the repeated references to joy and happiness in this letter.

## **For Reflection and Discussion**

Approach these topics on two levels. First, you are encouraged to make them a matter of some searching personal reflection. They are also intended to spark group discussion.

### **Paul 's understanding of humility is based on Jesus Christ.**

Does this passage encourage you?

Does it comfort you?

List some of the consequences that Paul associates with humility.

### **In verses 12 and 13 Paul writes about discovering what it means to be saved.**

Why do you think that Paul links fear and trembling with that process?

Does Paul suggest that this exercise will have a negative or a positive outcome?

### **Paul warns against grumbling and arguing. (vs.14)**

Do you think that these are significant perils in our personal faith?

What consequence does Paul suggest may be produced in the lives of believers if they follow his advice?

### **Paul talks about sending Timothy to Philippi. (Vss. 19-24)**

From Paul's description of him, what do you think Timothy would be able to achieve in Philippi?

### **Paul speaks very appreciatively about Epaphroditus. (vss.25-30)**

How does his life appear to demonstrate what it means to be saved?

**Here, as elsewhere, Paul uses the image of a soldier as an example for believers. Some people today react very negatively to Paul's use of this image. However, the emphasis is really on the believer's need for discipline and commitment.**

How do you respond to this image?

Do you think that it offers us a useful example for the disciplined Christian life?

What do you think this choice of imagery has to do with understanding our salvation?

### **As time permits you may want to consider:**

Was there anything in this chapter of Philippians that has struck you as being a new thought or a new idea?

Is there anything in this chapter that you have trouble accepting or applying in your life?