



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 third study in the series will explore Paul's concept of "**Belonging to the Lord.**"

Paul says, "Finally, my dear friends, be glad that you belong to the Lord. " (Phil. 3:1)

"Changing our Patterns"

It isn't easy to change the patterns of how we live.

If we take on new responsibilities that bring changes to our daily schedules we soon feel it. It takes time before our new schedule becomes second nature to us.

If we realize that we need to make a change in our diet or our daily exercise regimen, we don't expect it to be easy. In fact people often fail to implement changes that they know are essential to their good health simply because they are unable to stick with the necessary changes.

A new pattern in our life may make us self conscious or defensive. We may feel that we need to explain or defend it even when no one is hassling us.

The same is true, of course, about changes in our living patterns that emerge from the spiritual side of our lives. In fact, these are often complicated by the added fear that others will begin to label us as people who have somehow "got religion." Many Christians know that the time has come for a change in the way that they live out their faith. Yet still they hesitate because of the possible responses of family, friends and the community around them.

A good prayer for us to offer for one another is that we will always find in Christ the courage and the wisdom to live what we believe.

"Belonging to the Lord"

This seems to be a generation in which people resist "joining" or "belonging." For instance, many people today will attend a church but when you speak to them about "joining" they are immediately cautious.

Joining involves not only participating but accepting a commitment to something. We don't easily accept new obligations. To belong is to no longer be a spectator but to become one who can reasonably be expected to accept certain duties and responsibilities.

For many today the concept of belonging to someone else - even to God - is almost equated with slavery. For many the whole concept is suspect and demeaning.

However, without apology or even limitation, Paul describes our relationship with God as "belonging to the Lord". In fact, Paul says, "All I want is Christ, and to know that I belong to him."

Paul even takes it a step further and is anxious to point out that there is no way to enjoy the blessings of God without also accepting the commitment that inescapably goes with them.

Philippians, Chapter three

Take the time while reading the text to listen carefully. It is often useful 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 3: A simple Outline

Vss. 1-11 The perils of humanity

Vss. 12-21 Moving towards our goal

Notice how Paul distinguishes between the act of circumcision and what he calls being "truly circumcised." (vss. 2&3)

In verses 5 & 6 Paul sets out his spiritual credentials - the good and the bad.

In verses 12-14 Paul uses the image of the athlete to make his point.

In vs. 18 & 19 Paul speaks bluntly about the fate of those who despise or ignore God , but he finds no satisfaction in their fate.

Vss. 20 & 21 speak of the future hope of believers.

Again in this chapter there is a repeated association of the Christian life with suffering and hardship.

Although this chapter still has references to gladness and joy it is emphasized less here than in chapters 1 & 2.

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.

Twice in this third chapter Paul refers to "belonging" to God. (vs. 1 & vs.9)

Is this a way that you commonly think of your relationship with God?

Paul perceives this relationship to entail both blessings and responsibilities. Do you think that he balances them well in this passage?

What are some of the ways that we can express this aspect of our relationship with God in our daily lives?

Paul sets out something of his life experience in the faith.

How crucial do you think Paul's life experiences were to the things he achieved as a Christian missionary?

How important were actions and attitudes that he now regretted to that experience?

Do you think that his past experiences changed Paul's attitude towards those who were resisting coming to faith in Christ?

Paul uses the image of the athlete (both here and elsewhere in his writings) to convey a picture of faith.

How central is this image to the point that Paul is making?

Do you find it a helpful image?

Do you think that the image is about winning or about achieving excellence.

When is the race complete?

How is the prize associated with Jesus Christ?

For Paul it is not just the Christians who are in a race. He also pictures the "enemies of the cross" as being on route to a destination also.

What are the differences between their destination and that of the believer?

As time permits you may want to consider:

Did you find that this chapter of Philippians helped you to understand Paul and his ministry with more clarity?

Is there anything in this chapter that surprises you or challenges you?

REFLECT
RENEW
REJOICE