



# THE LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS – STUDY GUIDE

## LESSON 9 GETTING YOUR PRIORITIES RIGHT

## CHAPTER 4:1-9

With the prize of eternal life before you, hold on to your faith. Please, sisters Euodias and Syntyche, agree with one another. Help them to do this. Rejoice in the Lord and bring everything to him in prayer; then you need have no anxieties about anything. Keep uppermost in your minds the wonderful qualities of God's character and try to remember the things I have shown you.

**1: Therefore, my brethren, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.**

Paul's deep feeling for the brethren and sisters in Philippi is emphasised in this verse. "Crown" refers to the leafy wreaths that were placed on the heads of those who were victorious in athletic events like the Olympic Games. Paul's preaching work is rewarded by the successful establishment of such a fine ecclesia. The Philippians are like a victor's crown, or gold medal, to him.

"Stand firm" as in 1:27. Do not dilute or set on one side the essential teachings of the Bible. Let your house be built upon the rock of hearing and doing the words of Christ!

**2,3: I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. And I ask you also, true yoke-fellow, help these women, for they have laboured side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.**

Euodias and Syntyche were two sisters in the ecclesia who obviously were having a disagreement. We know nothing about what it was, but Paul appeals to them to agree "in the Lord". Imagine how embarrassed they must have been to hear themselves referred to like this when the letter was read out in the ecclesia! In chapter 2:1-11 we saw the basis of unity in the ecclesia - a common understanding of the Word of God (such as is enshrined in the Christadelphian Statement of Faith) - and Christ-like attitudes which enable each to submit in love to the other. Human beings very easily fall out with each other, and often the basis of disagreement is pride and jealousy. "In the Lord" there is no room for either of these traits.

We do not know who was the "true yoke-fellow" (someone who shares a burden or task) even though many names have been suggested. There is an emphasis in the verse on fellowship. If we are busy working with others in the ecclesia, we are much less likely to fall out with one another. If we think of all in the ecclesia as people "for whom Christ died", then we shall wish to serve and help them, as Christ has done! If we are aware of disagreements we should try to assist in resolving them, rather than taking sides, or spreading gossip about the problem. Often the best course of action is to keep the matter to yourself and prayerfully try to encourage the right kind of positive atmosphere in which agreement can be reached.

It is comforting to know that even in an ecclesia as spiritually strong as Philippi, there were difficulties. We should try to be mature enough to recognise that such difficulties are not a reflection on the essential truths of the Gospel, but of human nature not yet transformed into the likeness of Christ.

**4: Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.**

This is a recurring theme in the letter. But it does not mean we should go around laughing or joking all the time! Nor does it mean that we have to have repetitive folk music or backslapping heartiness whenever we meet in the ecclesia. It reflects the deeper joy of knowing that in Christ our sins can be forgiven and that beyond the sufferings and trials of the present is the glory of the Kingdom of God (see Romans 5:1-11).

If that is the basis of our happiness, then we shall want to live in harmony with each other, and to find pleasure in the work of the Lord rather than in what passes for entertainment in the world around us.

But at the same time, we will want to express our joy in enthusiastic worship and warmth of fellowship! Remember how Paul and Silas, even after they had been beaten and thrown into prison, "prayed, and sang praises unto God" (Acts 16:25). There was the spirit that enabled them to rejoice in suffering for Christ.

## **5: Let all men know your forbearance. The Lord is at hand.**

Forbearance means consideration (the same Greek word is translated “gentleness” in 2 Corinthians 10:1). We need consideration for one another if we are to agree. What is more, since we are called on to witness for the Lord to all men, we need to set a good example of the loving-kindness of our Heavenly Father.

### **The Lord Is at Hand**

We would think twice about unholy arguments if we remembered that “the Lord is at hand”. This has two meanings:

1. The Lord is close to all those who fear him and call upon his name. “For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20). This reassuring verse is also a warning. It comes in the middle of the Lord’s teaching about forgiveness and settling differences in a brotherly fashion.
2. The return of the Lord to establish God’s kingdom on earth will soon come about. For all who have died in the meantime, their next waking moment will be at that event (see 1:23).

## **6: Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.**

The Lord in the Sermon on the Mount makes exactly the same point (Matthew 6:25-34). Worry and anxiety are hard to avoid but they do not achieve anything except ill-health. If we put our trust in God, and above all, if we demonstrate that trust by belief in the Gospel truths and baptism into the name of Jesus, then as members of God’s family, we have a marvellous privilege.

We can, through Christ, call upon God as our Father. God knows what is best for us. If we lay our problems and worries before Him, then we shall know that whatever happens is for our benefit, though it may be hard to see at the time. “All things work together for good to them that love God” (Romans 8:28); no situation, however desperate, can “separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:35-39).

## **7: And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**

That is how peace of mind is achieved. How reassured a small child is when it can hold on to its father’s hand when there is danger near. The danger remains. But the strength of the father gives confidence and comfort to the child. We must not expect that prayer to God will remove all trials, all suffering, all danger. These things are a part of the present state of affairs in a world struggling under the consequences of sin. God wishes us to learn how to cope with all situations in His strength. It is in the midst of the dark storm that the Lord comes across the rough and dangerous waters to calm our fears and lighten our darkness. “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me” (Psalm 23:4). That is the secret of true happiness, the knowledge that we shall not be left alone in any situation, when we keep our hand in the hand of God.

## **8: Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.**

Here is an inspiring list of Christ-like qualities. “If there is excellence,” which there most certainly is! “If there is anything worthy of praise” - of course there is! Then these are the kinds of qualities we should be looking for and cultivating. When we look around at the opportunities which exist in the world for friendships, for recreation, for activity of all kinds, what are the things which are consistent with honesty, with rightness and justice, with purity, with loveliness, with graciousness? We can see that the world would be transformed into an altogether different place if such qualities could be found in people everywhere. The good news is that one day they will be! Do we test our relationships, our work, and our play against these qualities?

## **9: What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, do; and the God of peace will be with you.**

Paul again reminds them that he has set them an example. His teaching was in word and deed. He had separated himself from worldly pleasures to work for the Lord. We too cannot be friends of the world and friends of God. We must "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness" (see Ephesians 5:7-13; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18). If we pray earnestly for God's help, then through such guidance as is found in these verses and the knowledge that "I can do all things in him (Christ) who strengthens me" (verse 13), we shall be able to avoid the company and activity which will leave us ashamed and degraded. We will be fully occupied with the things which will leave us truly satisfied and fulfilled. Then we shall realise the meaning of Paul's statement: "the God of peace shall be with you."

### **Questions**

1. Why does Paul speak of the Philippians as his 'crown'?
2. Why should it be easier for us to resolve our quarrels when we are 'in the Lord'?
3. Why should believers always rejoice? Paul and Silas rejoiced when they first visited Philippi. Where were they when they did this?
4. What example should we show to those around us? Why should we behave like this?
5. How does prayer help us in our lives?
6. Write out in your own words the list of things we should fill our minds with.