

LESSON 199

Egermeier's Story: None

Memory Verse: Colossians 1:15 "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation."

Scripture: Philippians

Teaching Resource:

Philippians Commentary, Chester McCalley
Bible Study Guide for All Ages Lessons 377-378

Doctrinal Emphasis: Overview of Philippians—Instruction in prayer, humility, and peace brings contentment.

Key Theme: *God's word provides instruction that leads to a happy life.*

Philippians is a very personal and cordial letter from Paul to the church at Philippi. This church had given Paul financial support on at least two previous occasions. The background for this letter is yet another gift they sent to Paul carried by Epaphroditus. He became very ill on the trip to see Paul (2:27). Paul sent this letter, the book of Philippians, with Epaphroditus when he returned to Philippi.

This lesson will focus on three passages in Philippians. These include Paul's example of prayer and concern for believers, the call to humility in chapter 2, and how to achieve peace with oneself and circumstances in chapter 4.

Paul opens Philippians by demonstrating the affection he has for the Philippian believers. The brotherly love they show towards him and their desire to learn and apply Christian truth touch Paul's heart. Note how Paul prays for them. First, his prayers for them are constant (1:4). Second, he is motivated by their choice to support Christ's work (1:7). Finally, his prayer centers on their growth, which leads to God's glory (1:9-11). Note the way believers live a sincere and blameless life is achieved by genuine knowledge and discernment. Growth in the Christian life involves hearing, understanding, believing, and applying God's word.

Paul opens chapter two by encouraging the Philippian believers to be of the same mind and united (2:1-2). Note in all of Paul's letters he never exhorts believers to be unified by forsaking truth, rather to be unified by truth. A root of

discord in this local church was petty dissention (4:2). In 2:3-4, Paul teaches these believers that absence of conceit and an attitude of humility, which considers others first, are foundational to getting along.

Further, Paul points to Christ as the ultimate example we should model (2:5). Paul's logic is this. Christ is God and possesses all the perfect characteristics of God the Father. If Christ, who is the embodiment of perfect man, is not arrogant, then no man has excuse or cause for a conceited attitude. Paul then goes on to point out that Christ humbled Himself to the point of a cross death, which was considered appropriate only for the most lowly of criminals, in order that they (believers) might have eternal life. The ultimate end is Christ's exaltation promised in the last days (2:9-11). This passage challenges man's ego, and Paul reminds us of how our ego and pride get in the way of unity.

Paul closes Philippians with instruction to believers on how to achieve peace with self (4:4-9) and circumstances (4:10-14).

Paul's instruction for peace with oneself breaks down as follows. First, we are to rejoice always in the Lord (4:4). To rejoice in the Lord requires knowledge of the Lord. The more we understand who He is and what He has done for us, the easier it is to fulfill this command. Second, we are to let those we interact with see our gentle spirit, which is driven by our Christ-like behavior. Third and central to Paul's instruction is to recognize that we are not to worry about things; rather we are to go to God in prayer with an attitude of thanks. Our focus is not on secondary causes, rather recognition that God is in control and is our source for spiritual and physical salvation. Indeed, we are to cast our cares upon Him. There is a promise of unfathomable peace when we go to God in prayer about our anxieties (4:7). Fourth, our attitude, or mental focus, is to be on truth and righteousness (4:8). How often does our mind drift to the negative when we are anxious or worried? This, Paul teaches, is not healthy or rational when we are members of God's family.

Paul closes the book with simple instruction on how to be at peace with circumstances. Paul teaches he has learned to be content with a little or a lot (4:12). Why? His contentment is not in events or things, rather in God who enables the believer to do all things through His strength (4:13).