



## CATHOLIC SCRIPTURE STUDY

Catholic Scripture Study Notes written by Sister Marie Therese, are provided for the personal use of students during their active participation and must not be loaned or given to others.

### SERIES V

#### WISDOM LITERATURE AND NEW TESTAMENT LETTERS

Lesson 20 Commentary **Philippians**  
Lesson 21 Questions **Colossians**

#### PHILIPPIANS SPREAD THE GOSPEL **Philippians**

### INTRODUCTION

Philippi was a prominent town north and east of Greece, made famous by Anthony's defeat of Brutus and Cassius there. Around 50 A.D. Paul founded a small mission at Philippi. By the time of this epistle, written during one of his imprisonments, the church at Philippi has "bishops and deacons."

The Philippians were special to Paul, for they had three times sent him an offering for his upkeep, had sent Epaphroditus to help him, and had kept the unity of the faith.

Some believe that this letter, being rambling in its topics, is a combination of seven letters, which might indicate that Paul wrote more than once to these converts who were so dedicated to him.

A much-loved hymn, a favorite passage to Christians, on the humility of Christ, was highly valuable to the early Christians (Philippians 2:5-11). Paul wrote it or included it here.

A strong note of joy and hope fills this letter. It can be a source of inspiration to us in living our faith and in attracting others to it by our own enthusiasm for it. This is Paul's way—he saw it as the great gift of his life, and he eagerly shared his enthusiasm and, with his own deep love of Christ and what He had done for him, he brought nearly all the Roman Empire, the Gentile world, to Christ and His Church.

### I. PAUL AND THE PHILIPPIANS (Philippians 1:3-30)

#### A. Paul's Response (Philippians 1:3-11).

The strong efforts of the Philippians to grow in the faith and to help Paul, bring him to remember them "constantly," rejoicing over them. They have rushed to his help when he is in prison or defending the Gospel as he goes about, preaching. Though he can not be with them, he speaks to God earnestly to bring them to love even more, and to grow, rejoicing in understanding and experience.

His challenge to them is also to us: "learn to value the things that really matter, up to the very

day of Christ.” In these early days after Christ, there was a high expectation of His returning very soon. This resulted in an attitude toward their faith and its practice, that put it first. They wanted to have lived it fully when coming before Christ.

God has left the world awaiting Christ all these centuries, and our generation, like so many before us, think not too much of life ending on earth one day soon as Christ returns in majesty, ready to judge us all. If weekly Sunday Mass is the extent of our spiritual development, perhaps we are not ready for judgment. This is the value of setting aside a yearly retreat, when for three days or a week-end we “face up” to our life and our relationship to God, renewing ourselves in body and soul. Morning Mass or when evening Mass is offered, is an oasis for us, a time of quiet and peace and “refilling” our spiritual life. Another food the Church has for us is the “Prayer of the Church,” with its arrangement of the Psalms for morning or evening, for Advent, Lent or ordinary days. Just ten minutes with this book can be refreshment better than a cold drink!

There are copies of this available in Catholic book stores.

Finally, Paul’s wish is “that you may be found rich in the harvest of justice which Jesus Christ has ripened in you, to the glory and praise of God” (Philippians 1:11). This kind of being rich is the very best kind, this rich harvest of “justice” (meaning the goodness and worth of our life before God) is all that finally will count with us and for us.

**B. Carrying on for Paul (Philippians 1:12-26).** A joy for Paul in prison is that “most of my brothers in Christ” among the Philippians are themselves “speaking the word of God fearlessly” (Philippians 1:14). This is a good result of Paul’s loss; we, too, must realize that it is not up to the bishops and priests to spread the faith; it is we who spread it. Paul is happy that even those who do this in rivalry to him, or in intrigue against

him, preach in his absence. His disregard that some are not pleased with him comes from his gratitude that “Christ is being proclaimed. That is what brings me joy!” (Philippians 1:18). Could we rejoice in that situation?

This intrepid apostle of the Redeemer declares: “To me, life means Christ.” Living or dying, this is his only joy; though he admits that to be with Christ is infinitely better, his love for Him is such that he wants to remain alive for the sake of those who do not know Christ (Philippians 1:21).

## **II. CHRISTIAN HEROISM (Philippians 1:27 - 2:18)**

**A. Unity and Effort.** Christians, to be worthy of Christ, need unity in spirit while exerting themselves for the faith. Our own thirteen colonies came to understand the importance of unity in their belief and hopes; “Together we stand; divided we fall,” they decided.

What about opposition? It only means downfall for the opponents of Christ and His Christians, and salvation for them, not only salvation, but growth resulting in a more glorious heaven.

It is a special privilege, teaches Paul, not only to “take Christ’s part but to suffer for him.” Don’t fear suffering for Christ, it is powerful for your future and for the Church. God’s intentions for you are full of grace.

**B. Our Attitude (Philippians 2:1-18).** To the Christian community at Philippi Paul asks for unanimity in the one love, in spirit and ideals. To achieve that, we must not “act out of rivalry, or pride, but let all look upon others as superior, looking to others’ interests rather than to our own.” We need what is called humility, a giving up of an attitude of self first, of having our way, as though we are more important than the other, of setting self and our interests above others in the human community.

To teach his Philippians this, Paul includes the poem or hymn that follows. Here was a person who was God Himself who “emptied Himself and took the form of a slave, being born in the likeness of men... obediently accepting even death, death on a cross! Because of this...” As Man, this opposite attitude to Adam’s, to Eve’s, attitude, the first creatures made to the image and likeness of God, won for Jesus, and will for us, that God “highly exalted him” (Philippians 2:7-9).

**C. Christian Love in Practice (Philippians 2:12-18).** Put an end to grumbling and arguing (“Self” asserting itself!), but be a “child of God without reproach, in the midst of a twisted and depraved generation.” Then how does “Self” appear? “Shining like stars in the sky” (Philippians 2:15).

Paul adds what can bring this about for us, “while holding fast to the word of life.” We must learn this strongly and hold on to it for all the days of our life: the word of life is in the Scriptures for us, for it is the word of God and the Divine Word of God, Christ who fills us with His Holy Spirit. It is in this way that God speaks directly to each one of us, for the Spirit inspires us with the meaning He gives us.

#### D. Church Leadership

**1. Timothy (Philippians 2:19-23).** Besides the joy that Paul finds in the development of his evidently loved foundation at Philippi, is his joy in a trusted young convert who has become, like Paul, a “servant of the Gospel” (Philippians 2:19-22). He brings the two together during his imprisonment by sending Timothy to the Philippians “to learn how things go” with the Church there. When he is released he plans a visit himself. Already we see the growth of leaders, an apostle appoints another to represent him, one who Paul “laid hands on” and put in charge of the Church at Ephesus. There is a letter to Timothy for us to study this year.

#### 2. Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:25-30).

This “co-worker” was sent by the Philippians to help Paul in his stress and needs as a prisoner. Paul also calls him a “comrade in arms.” While on this mission to Paul, Epaphroditus became deathly ill, and Paul feared that he would die before returning to Philippi. Paul also sees him as a co-worker as he mentions that this journey was “for the sake of Christ’s work” (Philippians 2:30).

### III. INSTRUCTIONS FOR THEIR LIVES (Philippians 3:1 - 4:23)

#### A. Breaking with the Past

**1. Judaizers (Philippians 3:1-3).** The harsh term, “Unbelieving dogs” shows how serious Paul is about Jewish Christians who insisted on keeping Judaism while becoming Christians, by being circumcised, etc. The term he uses was used by Jews for Gentiles.

**2. Paul’s Judean Past (Philippians 3:4-6).** All of the Jewish religious faith, Paul had embraced: circumcision on the eighth day, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew from a long line, a Pharisee who insisted on legal observance of the Law, and a persecutor of the Church.

**3. Loss and Gain (Philippians 3:7-16).** They are loss to Paul now “in the light of Christ.” It is amazing to read how deep was Paul’s gain—all else was “rubbish, that Christ may be my wealth.” How deep is our life in Christ? What “rubbish” do we cherish in our lives? This is much like a religious vocation. All other dreams, desires, are let go of, “that Christ may be my wealth” and so we have people, men and women, at the beginning of their adult years, making vows of poverty, chastity (celibacy) and obedience, that their whole selves and future be spent as Paul did his—that others may know the wealth of serving and loving God through Christ, to whatever way of life they are called.

The gain desired is: a) to know Christ, b) and the power of His resurrection, c) to know how to share in His sufferings by being formed into the pattern of His death (Philippians 3:10). And why? “That I may arrive at resurrection from the dead.” That event for all of us will be a life when body and soul are filled with glory, new powers and joy.

**B. Christ Our Goal (Philippians 3:17-21, 1 Corinthians 11:1, 1 Peter 5:3).** As Paul had just described his life, before and after knowing Christ, he now says to us: “Imitate me, and choose your guides from those who follow the example of those who do: What guides did we follow in our lives? Do we put great store in worldly success, styles, etc.? Sometimes putting our money in them, when in our parish are people in real need? Do we sometimes “go about in a way which shows us to be enemies of the cross of Christ? Not enemies of Christ, but Paul says, of His cross? By this the whole world was saved, and by ours, we have a powerful opening for saving others, for bringing good to the world.

Sadly, Paul adds that such who do show enmity to the cross God has asked of us, (and he says it “with tears”): “These will end in disaster!... I am talking about those who are set upon the things of this world.” We must use the things of this world, but not “be set upon them” so that they are all-important or crowd out Christian virtues.

“We have our citizenship in heaven.” We are not in our true country here. And wonder of wonders: Christ will come back to earth to get all those who belong in His “country.” Let us be among them!

**C. Happiness Among Christians (Philippians 4:1-23)**

**1. Personal Relationships.** Probably Evodia and Syntyche were embarrassed when Paul wrote in the letter to their parish community: “Come to show mutual understanding in the Lord” and he mentions how they “have struggled at my side in promoting the gospel.” “I plead with you,” he added, so we see the great importance Paul put in peace and reconciliation in the Christian community. This is the “great commandment” of Christ: “love your enemies.” It is hard to be an enemy to someone who shows you love.

In asking this, Paul mentions others who have helped him spread the gospel; one, Clement, who later in an early Christian writing, is identified as Pope Clement in Rome, the third successor of St. Peter as Pope, who wrote a famous letter to the Corinthians about some of their number who resisted the leaders of their Church. This is considered the first instance of a bishop of Rome extending leadership to authorities in another Christian Church. Because of this letter, Clement is called the first of the Apostolic fathers, those who were taught by an apostle and succeeded them.

**2. A joyous greeting** that opens the Mass on the third Sunday of Advent begins with the next word in this letter of Paul: “Rejoice! Again I say Rejoice!” Encouragement to unselfishness, prayers to God in all needs, with gratitude, bring God’s peace beyond all understanding.

**3. Contentment.** Lastly, Paul expresses satisfaction with whatever he has, “in him who is the source of my strength I have strength for everything.” We want that kind of strength too. Let us remember that it comes from closeness to Christ.

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**QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 21**  
**Colossians**

Day 1     Read the Notes. What stood out for you in the notes?

Day 2     Read Colossians 1:1-8.

- a. What three theological Virtues are named here?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- b. Can what Paul heard about these new Christians be said of you? (Personal) Of one in your parish?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- c. List the good responses needed after hearing the Gospel.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- d. In Verse 7, we hear of a beginning pattern for the church-to-come. What is it?

Day 3     Read Colossians 1:9-14, Philippians 1:9.

- a. Describe what Paul thinks is “a life worthy of the Lord.”
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- b. What does Paul include in his prayer?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- c. What results does he foresee?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- d. Of the four results, which one do you want to improve and how can you do it?

Day 4     Read Colossians 1:15-29, Psalm 89:28.

- a. In the hymn, 1:15-20, what do you learn about Christ?

