

Gleaners Bible Studies C 7

“ALWAYS REJOICING” STUDIES IN PHILIPPIANS

Study 1

ASSESSMENT OF GAIN

Read

Philippians 3: 1-10

We begin now a new section in this letter. Paul says “finally”. If this is the end, it certainly takes him a long time, for about half the letter is still left! What Paul is really saying here is ‘for the rest’ or ‘for what remains’. He is going to deal with one or two problems. But before he does it he says, **“Rejoice in the Lord”**. (verse 1) What a great man Paul was. I wonder if we had been in his place, experiencing imprisonment and all that that involved, whether we should have encouraged others to rejoice. It just shows how that knowing the Lord can give one a completely different outlook on life.

The verses which we are studying could be called a self-portrait of a dedicated Christian. They are tremendous in their meaning, especially when we consider who has written them. It has been said that there are three parts in every Christian life. These are **HISTORY - EXPERIENCE - DESTINY**. What we were, what we are, and finally what we shall be. When Christ enters into a life the effect is dynamic. We see an example of this in Paul’s life as portrayed in these verses.

In verses 4-6 Paul gives us his **HISTORY** before he met with Christ. He seems to be measuring what was **GAIN** to him naturally, by his birth and pedigree. Look at it carefully, then ask yourself if it had many disadvantages. If you knew Jewish life, you would know that Paul was an aristocrat by even the highest standards. He ‘conformed’ in every sense of the word. His stock, his tribe, his family and religion were beyond reproach. His activities and achievements gave him a sense of having arrived! Yet one event in his history changed everything - he met with the Lord Jesus. In **verse 7** Paul describes how all his ideas of gain were changed: now he counted everything as loss for Christ. The course of his history was literally changed in so many ways. It is also true of us that our contact with Christ becomes a turning point in our life’s history. Life is either gain or loss according to our relationship with Him. To find Christ is indeed life’s greatest gain.

In **verses 7-10** Paul gives us an insight into his **EXPERIENCE** of life with the Lord Jesus. We could call it a self-portrait of a man absorbed with Christ. Everything in life seems fine until we find those things which are better and greater. Yet on a material and human level we can never find the meaning of absolute satisfaction. First of all Paul wants to **KNOW** Christ. Is it for the all-surpassing worth of this knowledge that he is willing to count everything as loss? What does this mean for us if we are to follow Paul’s example in our lives? It means that having found Christ as Saviour we should now count getting to know Him, as Lord and Friend, to be worth more than anything else. He must be dearer to us than even our dearest friends. Is this true in your life? We can call this an experimental knowledge of Christ.

Then Paul spoke of **WINNING**, or **gaining**, Christ. He had suffered the loss of all things. While persecuting the Christians, he had been a popular figure, and a zealous Jew was certainly a person to be reckoned with. But quite suddenly

in his experience there came a change and he began to preach instead of persecute. It was then that his troubles began! Yet as a prize that was tremendously worthwhile, Paul wanted to **WIN** Christ. Everything else was as refuse, to be thrown away. What a challenge this is to us, in our pursuit of all that which is worthwhile.

But Paul spoke of something else. In verse 9 he tells us that he wanted to be FOUND in Christ. You see Paul had found that not only what he **HAD** was worthless, but that what he **WAS**, was worthless as well. He was ready to let go of his own self-righteousness so that he could take shelter in Christ and His righteousness. He found this by faith - by trusting himself to the Lord Jesus Christ. Do you get the message of this? You can read more of what Paul says about righteousness or “rightness with God” in **Romans 6: 9-14**.

We have now looked at Paul’s history and experience in which Christ has become every thing to him. Experience of Christ is, in Paul’s assessment, true gain. We can challenge our lives in the light of this. If Christ were taken from us, how much should we lose? Paul’s answer would be: ‘Everything!’ The ultimate of all his earthly desires is found in the wonderful **verse 10**. Read it carefully as we close our study. One translation of **Philippians 3: 7-8** is well worth noting: **“But all these things that I once thought very worthwhile - now I’ve thrown them all away so that I can put my trust and hope in Christ alone. Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the priceless gain of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. I have put aside all else, counting it worth less than nothing in order that I can have Christ and become one with Him.”**

Study 2

AMBITION FOR GLORY

Read

Philippians 3: 12-21

In the last study we thought of **HISTORY** and **EXPERIENCE** connected with Paul’s revelation of his relationship with Christ. In this study, we are going to look at the **GOAL** and the **GLORY** of a committed Christian life. What we study now has more to do with **DESTINY** - the goal of one’s life. Paul was a man who knew where he was going. If you read the passages in his letters in which he speaks about future things, you will find that he is absolutely certain about all that he says. Read **Romans 8: 31-39** as an example of this. Sometimes, as we walk along a busy street, we perhaps see a man striding along, looking straight in front of him, not even noticing the crowd around him. He obviously knows where he is going - of that, we can be sure. On the same day, we might see another man just aimlessly wandering along, looking in the shops. He is just killing time with no definite purpose or goal before him. In a spiritual sense, either of these men could be a picture of our walk as Christians.

What we need is **AMBITION!** Lewis Carroll makes this point in ‘Alice in Wonderland’, ‘What does it matter which road you take, if you don’t know where you are going?’ Life has to have direction or we drift. Someone else once said, ‘The trouble with not having a goal, is that you spend your life running up and down the field and never scoring.’— It is here that we need Christ, not only as life’s

greatest GAIN, but, as life's finest GOAL, Just look at the words in this passage which speak of Paul striving after something more than what he already had. In **verse 11** he wants to **"attain to the resurrection of the dead."** In **verse 12** he is **"pressing on"** unto the things which are before. In **verse 14** he is **"pressing towards the goal."** Then in **verse 20** he is **"eagerly waiting for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ."** All these 'action phrases' tell us there is something more, something which lies before. There is true Christian ambition here, with Christ Himself as the goal and the glory of life.

Paul took into account three things as he moved on towards the destiny of his life in Christ: (verse 12)

1.He had not fully attained, nor was he perfect in, his condition as a Christian.

There was always something better to be grasped. Before him was the hope of resurrection - all that it meant for him to be alive in a risen Saviour. Yet, he wanted to be worthy of this hope right then. He wanted to know the POWER of Christ's resurrection as a residing factor in his life. He was not 'perfect' or 'complete'. **Verse 12** is interesting, for here Paul says that the Lord Jesus has **"apprehended"** or **"laid hold of me"**. It is just like someone putting their hand upon your shoulder and saying, 'You belong to me!' Jesus has said this to us just as He did to Paul. Now, says Paul, 'I want to fully grasp hold of all that the Lord Jesus intended for me when he laid hold of me.' What a wonderful ambition this was! We might sometimes be tempted to become self-satisfied with our lives as Christians. But be warned: never become complacent in any way with your attainments as a Christian, for there is always something more to grasp. Although we are not perfect, perfection is our goal. AIM HIGH!

2.Paul was determined to forget the past things - those that were behind. (verse 13)

"Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forward to those things which are ahead". (verse 13) Like the true athlete running in the race, he was not going to look over his shoulder. He strains every nerve and concentrates every effort to cross the line or pass the winning post. It could well be that the **"things which are behind"** as far as Paul was concerned, were the attainments of his life before he met with Christ. These may also have included his failures and shortcomings, but whatever they were they were behind his back. He was after the prize in the finest goal of life, **"the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus". (verse 14)** Paul wanted to be sure that when he met his Saviour he would receive the highest commendation for the way he had used his life. **Verses 15-19** tell us of those who had a very low standard in life. They were completely unworthy and caused him great sadness. Remember, we have only one life to live and it is soon over. The finest ambition we can have is to please Christ and to serve Him with all the powers we have. Anything less is not worthy of Him.

3.Lastly, Paul knew that his citizenship ('conversation') was really centred in Heaven. (verse 20)

He did not 'belong' to the world in which he lived: he was only passing through it. Perhaps, you have never looked at **verses 20-21** carefully. They tell us three things about the DESTINY & GLORY of a Christian:

(a) CITIZENSHIP - Heaven is the 'home-town' of all those who make the Lord Jesus their gain and their goal. This fact has to be taken into account in all that we do in our lives, in the world as we find it today.

(b) CLIMAX - **"We wait for the Saviour"** (verse 20). This is the great event for which all believers in the Lord Jesus look. The knowledge that Jesus is coming soon should affect the way we live our lives. It should certainly make us happy in this sad world. But it should also help to keep us pure in a sinful world.

(c) CHANGE - Christ is going to do wonderful things for us when He comes. All the weakness and imperfections of our human bodies and natures will be exchanged for perfection and glory. So, when the Lord Jesus comes again, 'history' and 'experience'

will come to an end and give place to a DESTINY of GLORY with Christ.

Study 3

MAKING FOR PEACE

Read

Philippians 4: 1-9

Some Bible students have suggested that in **chapter 4: 2**, we have the real reason for Paul's letter to the Philippians. Here are two Christian women who cannot agree. Judging by some of the requests he makes for Christian behaviour, it could well have been that the difference between these two was affecting the whole life of the church. It is perhaps worth saying here, that trouble among Christians is like a disease: it spreads. If you fall out with your Christian friend; if you are unkind or critical, or maybe lacking in understanding; your problem will in all probability affect others. So, it is essential that we seek to be peace-loving in our relationships.

The passage we study now is one of the loveliest in the New Testament. We are going to look at it with the thought of PEACE in mind. **Verse 1** leads us into the chapter with Paul's love for these Christians breaking through again. In **chapter 1** we noticed the deep feelings he had towards them - **"I have you in my heart... I long for you all". (1: 8)** Now he says they are **"my beloved and longed for brethren", "my joy and crown"**. It is good to enjoy the feeling of affection in these things.

When he is thinking about their work in the gospel in **1: 27-30**, he calls upon them to **"stand fast in one spirit"**. It was essential to present a united front in their testimony for the Lord. But now you notice in **verse 1** he calls upon them to **"stand fast in the Lord."** He is again considering the need of unity and oneness of mind. Right here we can learn that we need to **'stand fast'**, both in our witness to the unsaved and in our walk together with other Christians. It is easy to give ground when the enemy attacks, but good soldiers 'dig in' and 'stand firm'.

In this study, we can also learn three simple lessons connected with peace:

1. PEACE in our PARTNERSHIPS with other Christians. (verses 2-3)

We have already mentioned these two ladies who are out of harmony with each other. Paul wants them to be of **"the same mind"**. As he speaks of this, it seems to make him think of those who worked with him, for he speaks of a **"yoke-fellow"** (Some translations put **"true companion"**). Just as two beasts are yoked together in field work, the yoke keeping them moving as one, so he remembers someone who was a true yoke-fellow with him in the gospel. Paul asks this person to help those others who had worked with him in the work of the Lord. All of them together have their names written in the Book of Life. God keeps a record of all who are His true workers. It pleases Him when they are all of the same mind in His service. Remember if you share the Lord's work with others, then when there is PEACE there is PROGRESS. If a machine is well oiled it will run smoothly and give the best results: in like manner Christians who work together in peace produce the best results for the Lord.

2.PEACE in our PRAYER life. (verses 4-7)

These verses are of great importance to us if we want to have peace in our minds. In **verse 4** Paul says: **"REJOICE in the Lord always"**. You will probably say that this is impossible. But remember this advice comes from a man in prison, facing death, a man who had been stoned and beaten and hounded by the mob. These experiences may leave others sour and bitter, but they leave Paul over-flowing with joy, for Paul knew the secret of a continuous source of happiness, even in times of trouble. When difficulties come, it is good if we too can have a joyful approach to them.

In **verse 5** Paul says that we should be known for our moderation (gentleness) in all things. Every part of our lives should be controlled, or disciplined and not given to excesses in any way. RESTRAINT is necessary. If we are going to enjoy this peace, then we must not be erratic or changeable in our ways. Keep a steady course! But, most important of all, we must RELATE all our needs to God in prayer. Notice, EVERYTHING - all the small things of life as well as the great things - we are to bring thankfully to God in prayer. Everyday needs are God's concern. In the pathway of finding peace it is essential to learn this, for no Christian can afford to live life without constant PRAYER. The secret here is in **verses 6-7**. Learn how to off-load all our cares onto the One who cares for us, (**1 Peter 5: 7**) for nothing is beyond His capabilities. Having emptied our minds of worry, the next step is to fill them with the sort of things that will shape a truly Christian character. (**verse 8**) This is how Paul arrives at the point of REST. With prayer comes the PEACE of God beyond all understanding. It is wonderful to have within us the secret of true peace. Learn this lesson - THROUGH PRAYER to PEACE.

3. PEACE through PURITY, in our thoughts. (verses 8-9)

Here we come to another 'finally'. Paul gives a list of the sort of things, which should be the subject of our thoughts. Do you have problem with wrong thinking? It is interesting that this follows on from praying. There is no greater enemy to effective 'prayer-times' than wandering thoughts. If these qualities, here in **verse 8**, could fill our minds, what a difference it would make! We might think of them as flowers blooming in a well-kept garden. No weeds are there to spoil the beauty. Paul is really working up to the great idea that just as a gardener enjoys his garden most when all is in good order, so the God of peace is able to dwell in a mind that is pure and clean. It is God who plants the good things in our minds as we allow His word to guide our thoughts and actions.

We can end our study with two main thoughts.

1. Through PRAYER we can experience the PEACE of GOD.
2. Through PURITY of mind we can enjoy the presence of the GOD OF PEACE.

Study 4

MY GOD - MY CONTENTMENT



Philippians 4: 10-23

We come now to our final study in this letter, and I hope that you have enjoyed this series. Have you noticed the wonderful atmosphere about this letter? The sense of quiet joy is there all the time. We said earlier that there is not one complaint from the Apostle Paul throughout. This is true, and the reason is that Paul was a contented man who was willing to accept his lot, even in the darkest times of suffering. Only a man who was constantly experiencing the joy of his Lord as Paul was, could possibly write as he did about his circumstances.

Verse 10 leads us into this passage. The apostle is rejoicing in the Lord because of the kindness of his Philippian friends. They had "**at last**" shown their care for him by sending financial help when he needed it most. As soon as Paul had written "**at last**" he must have realised what this could imply. Was it that his dear friends had neglected him? No, he qualifies this by showing that it was not neglect, but lack of opportunity that held them back. Possibly, it was because there was no one to carry the gift to Paul. We can learn here that kindness to others is best shown when the opportunity presents itself. Too often through our selfishness, laziness, or lack of thought we miss golden opportunities of bringing help and comfort to Christians and others in need. Notice that Paul not only expresses his gratitude to those who gave, but he also rejoices in the Lord.

Verses 12-14 are perhaps the most wonderful to read in the whole

letter. This great servant of the Lord Jesus gives the SECRET of his contentment. It is vital for us to notice that a contented life is not built through the satisfying of our WANTS. **Affliction or distress (verse 14), necessity (verse 16), and need (verse 19)**, are all mentioned, but he does not speak in respect of wants. (**verse 11**) As Christians, we can sometimes behave like spoilt children, expecting God to supply all our wants. We are perhaps upset when things do not go right for us.

But notice the three steps in Paul's recipe for contentment:

1. **I HAVE LEARNED** - this means learned through experience - "**in whatever state I am, to be content**". (**verse 11**) It could almost seem from this that life is like a school. Contentment is the subject of the lessons. There is a varied syllabus of subjects, all designed to give an overall understanding of the main subject. When Paul thinks of the syllabus which governed the lesson material of his life, he could think of many different 'states' he had been in. Some of them, such as his imprisonment now, had been very hard to bear. Many material benefits had been taken from him, and even life itself at times was threatened, yet, like a good scholar, he had learned his lessons well. He was content with all states and conditions of life. Having the Lord Jesus in control will make this possible for us too.

2. **I KNOW** - knowledge gained from learning - both how to be **abased** and how to **abound**. (**verse 12**) There is something very telling about this verse. Paul is saying that it was all the same to him, whether everything belonged to him, or whether everything had been taken away. Fullness or hunger made no difference to the quality of his basic contentment. He fully knew how to enjoy life, no matter what the conditions were under which he experienced it. How good it is to have a life with such a level even flow about it! Compare **Hebrews 13: 5**.

3. **I CAN DO** - I have the ability to do "**all things through Christ, who strengthens me**." (**verse 13**) These are fine words and give us the sight we need into the real secret of Christian power. The vital truth is that through Christ's power in me I am master of every situation. No wonder Paul was a contented man. Shall we just stop and check our lives against these words? It could help us to share the blessing which Paul enjoyed!

Verses 15-19 give Paul's ASSESSMENT of the generosity of the Philippian Christians. For their part, they did well. (**verse 14**) They were the only ones who had so consistently remembered Paul's need: No other Church had sent gifts to Paul, so they were a great encouragement to him. It is always good to be ready to give to others, for it may be that we are the only ones whom God uses to meet a certain need. Then, from Paul's point of view, it was very satisfying evidence that these much-loved converts were going on well. His needs were secondary to the evidence of fruit in their lives for God. (**verse 17**) He knew that God's work in them was producing something worth while. But from God's point of view there was something even more important. Their gift was to God "**a sweet smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God**." (**verse 18**) Think about this. The most vital test of our service as Christians is that it is pleasing to God.

Verse 19 is worth a study all on its own. "**My God**," says Paul - "the God I know and love" - this God is going to supply every need you have "**according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus**". (**verse 19**) God gives, but He gives so that we might give to others. Here is a lesson to learn!

Has God touched your heart about 'giving' yet? In the Old Testament the Jews were commanded under the law to give at least one-tenth of their income back to God - their tithe. There are many references to this in the Old Testament. (see, for example, **Leviticus 27: 30-32, Malachi 3: 8-10**) We are no longer under such a law, but under grace: but certainly, we should not be satisfied to give less through love than was required through law.

In your own private study read what the New Testament has to say about Christian giving. Here are some guidelines that might help you:

(a) When should I give? - Regularly, as seen, for example, in **1 Corinthians 16: 2**.

(b) How much should I give? - As the Lord has prospered me (**1 Corinthians 16: 2**): bountifully (**2 Corinthians 9: 6**): sacrificially (**2 Corinthians 8: 1-5**): as the Lord did (**2 Corinthians 8: 9**): proportionately (see Old Testament references to tithes).

(c) In what spirit should I give? - Giving is a Christian's privilege and a pleasure. **2 Corinthians, 9: 7** shows that we should give purposefully: willingly and cheerfully (or, as the word really means, hilariously!); and honestly (see **Acts 5: 4**). Read also **Proverbs 3: 9-10**.

(d) To whom should I give? - It is well to remember that all giving should be done as if we were actually giving to the Lord. We ARE really giving to Him when we give to His work and His workers. So we should give to the local church or fellowship with which we are associated. This is part of our responsibility as a member. Then there are the poor (**Galatians 2: 10**): widows in need (**1 Timothy 5: 3-4**): preachers and teachers of God's word (**1 Timothy 5: 17-18**): and Christian activities which are sound in doctrine and carried on in accordance with divine standards and New Testament teaching (e.g. honestly, morally, not involved in court cases or other such scandals). It was the Lord Jesus who said: **"It is more blessed to give than to receive"**. (**Acts 20: 35**)

Doubtless every Christian has proved this to be true; and you will too if you obey the Word of God. Obedience always brings blessing. You will also be laying up for yourself **"treasure in Heaven"**. (**Luke 18: 22**) For not even a cup of cold water given in His Name will fail to receive its reward! (**Mark 9: 41**)

So ends a lovely letter. Paul gives his salutation and greetings to all his Christian friends in Philippi then adds this wonderful touch to round off his letter: **"Christians in Caesar's household send their greetings."** (**4: 22**) Paul had just reason to be thankful that the gospel was preached. He continuously saw miracles taking place in the lives of many whom he knew. Our prayer is that God will work just as effectively in your life.

Some outlines of Paul's letter to the Philippians.

Chapter 1. A study in CONDUCT. See **verse 27**.

Chapter 2. A study in CONCERN AND CARE. Three examples.

Chapter 3. A study in COMMITMENT. Notice the goal in **verse 14**.

Chapter 4. A study in CONTENTMENT. See **verse 11**.

ENERGY

Chapter 1. CHRIST and LIFE'S SECRET (**verse 21**)

EXAMPLE

Chapter 2. CHRIST and LIFE'S SACRIFICE (**verse 5-8**)

ENJOYMENT

Chapter 3. CHRIST and LIFE'S SURRENDER (**verses 7-10**)

ENABLING

Chapter 4. CHRIST and LIFE'S SATISFACTION (**verses 11-13**)

Chapter 1 THE HAPPY MIND (**verses 3, 4, 18, 25, 26**)

Chapter 2 THE HUMBLE MIND (**verses 5, 8, 20, 25**)

Chapter 3 THE HEAVENLY MIND (**verses 12-14, 20,21**)

Chapter 4 THE HOLY MIND (**verses 7,8**)

Questions

Study 1

ASSESSMENT OF GAIN

1. What was remarkable about Paul's exhortation to the Philippians to **"rejoice in the Lord"**?
2. Give three of those things which Paul counted gain before he met with Christ.
3. a) What was Paul willing to do so that he could KNOW the Lord Jesus Christ?
b) How can we follow Paul's example?
4. What did Paul mean when he said **"that I may gain Christ"**?
5. In your own words explain what you think it means **"to be found in Christ."** See **verse 9**.

Study 2

AMBITION FOR GLORY

1. Why do Christians need to be ambitious?
2. Give three of Paul's statements which show that he was striving after more than he already had.
3. What sort of things are we exhorted to **"forget"** in our lives?
4. What effect should the fact that **"our citizenship is in Heaven"** have on our lives?
5. When and why will the Lord Jesus **"change"** our bodies?

Study 3

MAKING FOR PEACE

1. What is trouble among Christians likened to in this lesson, and why?
2. What did Paul mean when he described someone as a **"yoke-fellow"** or true companion?
3. Why is it that we can find the peace of God through prayer?
4. a) What enemy to an effective prayer-time have we noticed in this lesson?
b) What others have you noticed from your own experience?
5. How can we keep our minds pure and clean?

Study 4

MY GOD MY CONTENTMENT

1. What was the secret of Paul's contentment?
2. In what ways can life be likened to a school?
3. What was the key to Paul's confidence in his ability to meet any situation?
4. In what way did the gifts from the Philippians give Paul much joy?
5. What have you learned about Christian giving from this lesson?