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Study Questions for the *Ignatius Catholic Study Bible*

The Letters of St. Paul to the Philippians,
Colossians, and Philemon

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THE LETTER OF SAINT PAUL TO THE PHILIPPIANS

Chapter 1

For understanding

1. **1:1.** How were the titles bishop, presbyter, and deacon understood when *Philippians* was written? Who were the Philippian bishops, and what did they do? What was the role of the deacons?
2. **1:19.** What scriptural references indicate that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son? What names does Paul use for the Holy Spirit?
3. **1:23.** Why does Paul not hide his preference for martyrdom? What is the Catholic tradition regarding what happens to the souls of the blessed at death?
4. **1:29.** What are some of the benefits for ourselves and others of our suffering? How does Scripture depict suffering, and what is its challenge for us?

For application

1. **1:9–11.** Read the note for v. 9. In the context of your Christian relationships (such as family, neighbors, or parish), what does it mean to love “with knowledge and all discernment”? What are some of the “fruits of righteousness” you can expect to experience? (Hint: Look up Gal 5:22–23.)
2. **1:15–18.** What are some of the wrong motives you have had for sharing your Christian faith? When have you shared it with the right motives? How did your motives affect the outcome (if at all)? What difference does Paul see in motive, here?
3. **1:20.** How do you live so as to honor Christ in your body? What are the challenges you face? How might honoring him in your body take courage in your circumstances?
4. **1:27–28.** How does the life of your parish community reflect credit on the gospel of Christ? As a group, how firm are you in your unity and striving for the faith? How does your corporate behavior demonstrate that unity?

Chapter 2

For understanding

1. **Word Study: A Thing to Be Grasped (2:6).** What interpretations of the Greek term *harpagmos* have been suggested for this verse? What seems to be the best interpretation? What does it indicate about Jesus?
2. **2:10.** To what OT verse does this verse allude? What does the divine oath proclaim? What reasoning does Paul use to insert Jesus into this prophecy?
3. **2:12.** What does it mean to “work out your own salvation”? What does “fear and trembling” have to do with it? What encouragement does Paul offer?
4. **2:15.** Why does Paul excerpt a saying from Deut 32:5? What is the lesson to be learned from the Exodus generation of Israel?

For application

1. **2:3.** How has the course of your life reflected this verse—or stood in contrast to it? What kinds of people do you tend to look down upon? How can you “count others as

better than yourself” and maintain self-respect at the same time?

2. **2:6–7.** What is the one thing you most want to “hang onto” in life—the one thing of which you would be most afraid to “empty yourself”? Why might God ask this of you? If he has asked it, what has your response been?
3. **2:13.** Have you noticed God at work in you, bringing you to the point of willing his good pleasure and working for it? To what incidents, trends, or circumstances can you point that illustrate his work in you?
4. **2:17–18.** Do you know anyone who has “poured himself out” so that you might come to faith or remain in it? What did this person do for you, and what kind of sacrifice do you think it entailed? How can you repay such a sacrifice?

Chapter 3

For understanding

1. **3:4–6.** What credentials does Paul present to the Philippians in the face of the Judaizing missionaries, who demanded circumcision?
2. **3:6.** How was religious zeal sometimes expressed under the Old Covenant? How did Paul once emulate that type of zeal? What did he realize about it after his conversion?
3. **3:14.** To what does Paul compare the Christian life? What does this analogy imply about our salvation? What is Paul, like a sideline coach, urging his readers to do?
4. **3:20.** To what civic experience is Paul alluding in this verse? To what does he compare it?

For application

1. **3:3–7.** What are your “Christian credentials”? That is, what accomplishments, degrees, contacts, memberships, efforts, and so on, could you list that might convince people or God that you are a person of note? Whether you have anything to list or not, how would you echo Paul’s sentiment in v. 7?
2. **3:8.** How do you know Christ Jesus as your Lord? Do you know him or only know about him? How would anyone else but you know whether your assessment is reliable? What is that relationship worth to you?
3. **3:12–16.** What is your attitude toward the call you have from God to be holy? What does it mean for you to be holy? (Hint: Review the chapter thus far.) How are you “straining forward” (v. 13) for it? Paul looks on a desire for holiness as a mark of maturity; what do you think of it (especially in the light of your own circumstances)?
4. **3:17–19.** How comfortable would you feel asking someone else to imitate your Christian commitment? If you feel uncomfortable, how would you speak to those to whom Paul refers in vv. 18–19?

Chapter 4

For understanding

1. **4:7.** What is “the peace of God” to which Paul refers? What does Paul insist we do to obtain it?

2. **Word Study: Excellence (4:8).** What does the Greek word *aretē* mean? Although the word was common in ancient Greek, how does Peter use it? How does Paul use the term in Philippians?
3. **4:13.** What does Paul mean by saying he can “do all things” in Christ?
4. **4:22.** What indication is there in this verse that the letter to the Philippians was written from Rome?

For application

1. **4:2–3.** What has been your involvement in disagreements in your parish or faith community? How have you tried to resolve them?
2. **4:4–7.** Why does Paul—and Jesus, for that matter (read Mt 6:25–34; Lk 10:41; 12:25–29)—forbid anxiety? What kinds of anxiety do you experience in everyday life? How might you do more to follow Paul’s advice in v. 4?
3. **4:8.** Have you tried to practice what Paul recommends in this verse? What effect has it had on your prayer? If you have not tried to practice it, why not? What makes Paul’s recommendation more than mere “positive thinking”?
4. **4:11–13.** What is your “style” of complaining? What do you complain about? Though Paul does not say that he *feels* content, he indicates that he knows how to *be* content. What would you say is his secret?

THE LETTER OF SAINT PAUL TO THE COLOSSIANS

Chapter 1

For understanding

1. **1:13.** From what and to what does Christ “transfer us”? What did the Council of Trent declare in A.D. 1547 about the effects of justification in Christ?
2. **1:15–20.** What does the hymn quoted in these verses extol? What does the hymn say Christ’s redeeming work transforms? What Old Testament personification does Christ’s preexistence and role as Creator recall? Where else does Paul make this association?
3. **1:15.** Although Adam was created *in* God’s image, what does it mean to say that Christ *is* the image of God? If Adam was the first to bear the image of God, what happened because of his rebellion against God? What is the role of Christ, then? To what does the term “first-born” refer in this verse? What is Paul’s point in using the term?
4. **1:18.** To what does the analogy of Christ as “the head” point? What can it be used to stress? How is the Resurrection of Christ reproduced in the lives of believers?

For application

1. **1:3–5a.** How grateful are you for the faith that you have? How often do you give thanks for the faith of others when you pray for them?
2. **1:9–10.** Read Is 11:2. What is the relationship between **wisdom** and **understanding** (two spiritual gifts you received at Confirmation)? How can you use them to grow in the knowledge of God and of his will?
3. **1:21–23.** Locate the “if-clause” in these verses. What is the condition on which the

salvation Jesus won for you will be realized? To what two theological virtues does Paul encourage continuing fidelity?

4. **1:24.** What could possibly be “lacking” in the sufferings of Christ for the Church? How might you make up in your own life for what is lacking in them, as Paul did in his time?

Chapter 2

For understanding

1. **2:8.** How was the term “philosophy” understood when Paul was writing? What meaning does Paul probably have in mind here? Of what “human traditions” is Paul thinking? Which traditions would Paul consider worth obeying?
2. **Word Study: Elemental Spirits (2:8).** To what can the Greek term *stoicheia* refer? How are these ideas associated with worship among both Gentiles and Israelites? Why does Paul group the worship of both peoples together? How does he contrast the Christian approach to the old order?
3. **2:16.** To what do the listed items “food . . . drink . . . festival . . . new moon . . . sabbath” refer in this verse? Why does Paul look on them as “only a shadow” in v. 17?
4. **2:21.** Why does Paul strike out sarcastically at the Jewish agitators in Colossae in this verse? What does he imply, by contrast?

For application

1. **2:8.** Since God gave you a mind, how does he want you to use it to increase your understanding? How well do you know your faith? If not well, how can you defend your faith against relatives, friends, or teachers who challenge it with apparently rational arguments? What are you doing to increase your understanding of the faith?
2. **2:18–19.** What do you think a “good Catholic” is? How would you compare Paul’s warning here with what you hear—or for that matter with what you say—about spiritual practices or experiences? Based on these verses, how do you think Paul would describe a “good Catholic”?
3. **2:20–23.** In view of these verses, why does the Church insist on the need for personal penance and mortification? If Paul dismisses practices that “are of no value in checking the indulgence of the flesh”, what would he promote? How do you try to tame your self-indulgence into submission?

Chapter 3

For understanding

1. **3:5.** What does Paul urge us to do to the “old man”? What does he want us to do with our lives instead?
2. **3:11.** Into what are believers drawn? Who are the “barbarians” Paul has in mind? Who are the Scythians?
3. **Word Study: Peace (3:15).** To what does the biblical notion of peace apply? In what is the peace of Christ rooted? How are Christians to spread this peace?
4. **3:16.** What is “the word of Christ” in this passage? How did the early Church honor the Lord in song? How is musical praise reflected in the Book of Revelation?

For application

1. **3:1–2.** Make a list of the top ten things in which you are most interested, including the things that most occupy your attention. How many of them have to do with “things that are above, not things on earth”? If you are concerned with practical matters (such as finances or raising children), how can you include them in the “things that are above”?
2. **3:5–11.** Of all the vices listed in these verses, which plagues you the most? How have you tried to “put it to death”? How serious are your efforts in this regard? How can your being a “new man”, with a new nature in Christ, be a help to you?
3. **3:12–17.** How might the practices Paul recommends here help you answer the previous question? Of all these virtues, which are most and least characteristic of you? (How readily would your closest friend agree with your assessment?)
4. **3:18–22.** If you are married, how well do you respect your spouse? In what condition is your relationship with your parents (regardless of how old you are)? What motivates you in the way you do your job at work? How closely do any of your answers match what Paul would expect of you?

Chapter 4

For understanding

1. **4:2.** What kind of prayer does Paul promote here? Why?
2. **4:16.** In what setting were Paul’s letters to the Churches most likely read publicly? What is “the letter from La-odicea”?
3. **4:18.** How did Paul write his letters? What did his own handwritten remarks do for the letters?

For application

1. **4:1.** If you are an employer or a supervisor, how do you treat your subordinates? What does it mean in your circumstances to treat them with justice?
2. **4:2.** How regular are you in your prayer life? If you have not prayed regularly, what are you now doing to establish a habit of prayer? If you do pray regularly, do you include thanksgiving and adoration in your prayer, as well as requests for what you and others need?
3. **4:5–6.** How do you conduct yourself toward persons who are not Christian? What image of Christianity would your friends and acquaintances have based on your behavior in mixed company?
4. **4:17.** How do you encourage bishops, priests, deacons, religious, and others who work for the faith in their apostolates? How often do you pray for them?

THE LETTER OF SAINT PAUL TO PHILEMON

For understanding

1. **v. 9.** Why does Paul refer to himself in this verse as an elderly man? Why is the Greek word for “elderly man” translated “ambassador” here?

2. **v. 11.** What wordplay is Paul making on Onesimus' name? What indicates that Onesimus is ready to live up to his name?
3. **v. 16.** With what kind of dilemma is Philemon faced? In Paul's mind, what is Philemon's recommended option? Why?
4. **vv. 23–24.** What evidence suggests that the letter to Philemon was written at the same time and from the same place as Colossians? What evidence indicates that Paul sent these letters to believers in the same region (Asia Minor)?

For application

1. **vv. 4–7.** How often have you been verbally encouraged by fellow Catholics in the practice of your faith? What has been the effect of being (or not being) so encouraged? How often have you given this sort of encouragement?
2. **vv. 8–9.** In a family or professional relationship, what is the point of saying, "I could tell you to do this, but I'd prefer to ask you to do it"? What does the speaker hope to gain? (Hint: Compare vv. 14 and 21.) How might this approach communicate respect for the one addressed?
3. **vv. 10–13.** What is the risk that Paul and Onesimus are both taking with Philemon? What kind of confidence in God are they showing? What kinds of spiritual risks are you willing to take in situations where the outcome is both unknown and critical?
4. **vv. 18–19.** Think about the saying, "Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me." Keeping in mind what Jesus says about how often we must forgive wrongs (for example, in Mt 18:22 or Lk 17:4), how Christian a saying is this? Would you be willing to vouch for the reformed character of someone who admitted to you that he had wronged the person to whom you are talking?