

## **Ninth New Testament Summary on Philippians Luke and Acts**

There are two things I want to highlight for Philippians. First is the concept that whereas Colossians emphasized Christ's divinity in respect to His person, Philippians is powerful in describing His humanity. Recall that the "PERSON" of Christ = 100% true God and 100% true Man. Philippians emphasizes the HUMANITY of His person. Note Philippians 2:5-8: "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." Now, what does "made himself nothing" mean? The word is actually that he "emptied" himself (the Greek word is *kenōō*). This does NOT mean that Jesus ceased being God, but rather points to the fact that Jesus (as true God) willed Himself to be weak as a man. He willed Himself to be limited; He willed Himself to suffer; and He willed Himself to die. This was not a sham, but He truly emptied or willed Himself to know the humble state of a human being. This is why as our God, He can completely relate to us (see Hebrews 4:15). Jesus can relate to us! Second, is the tremendous PRACTICAL import of Philippians 4. In summary, we are COMMANDED (the imperative is used) to "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice." (vs. 4) The text, however, does not leave us with this command, but explains WHY we are able to rejoice: 1) The Lord is at hand; 2) We may counteract anxiety with prayer, supplication and thanksgiving; and 3) We can know the peace of God which surpasses all understanding (vss. 5-7). In addition, St. Paul gives us a wonderful approach to our thought life in verse 8. It is worth reading several times. Think about literally writing down examples in your life of what is honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, anything worthy of praise...what would happen if we followed this command ("think" = is also in the imperative) and actually thought of these things on a continual basis?! No wonder St. Paul writes in this chapter, "I can do all things through [Christ] who strengthens me." (vs. 13) That is, this chapter is a chapter on the Christian's attitude and thought life. It is an invaluable guide!

I'm going to reduce Luke/Acts to this (in terms of our discussion highlight): Both the inclusivity and the exclusivity of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Christian faith is put forth. First of all, we cannot miss the universality of God's grace in the Gospel of St. Luke. Remember the symbolism I mentioned before? Luke is symbolized by the Ox. This is an animal used for sacrifice. Who was Jesus sacrificed FOR? Answer: EVERYONE. Not just people throughout the world, but for every, single person who has ever lived, is living and will live! Luke brings this out by depicting the universality and thus inclusivity of the Gospel by showing Jesus for women, men, children, Gentiles, Jews, sick people, outsiders, etc. etc. To highlight this I want to put forth that which might be the single most popular parable in the Bible: The Parable of the Prodigal Son. I want you to be

aware of this word "prodigal." It is a word that stands for excessive liberality. The traditional assumption is that it points to the son who was totally wasteful; he blew everything he had! However, he is also the recipient of tremendous grace that was overflowing; that is, some might say that the father's love and mercy was "prodigal" towards the son! The parable is absolutely fantastic in showing just how INCLUSIVE the Gospel is: there is no sin too great for Christ. The son's sin is described in great detail: 1) He insults his father by coming to him asking for his inheritance (in effect, he is telling his dad to hurry up and die); 2) The original wording is that he asks for half of the inheritance, but as the younger son, he is not entitled to this amount; 3) By going to a "far country" he disgraces his Hebrew family, because the "far country" appears to represent an unclean place with an unclean people; 4) He then squanders his inheritance in reckless living (immoral living); 5) He works for foreigners further aggravating the disgrace on his family, but does so by taking on a despicable job: feeding pigs...extremely unclean animals from a Jewish perspective; 6) He is so hungry that he starts eating pig pods that are mixed with, well you-know-what (yeah, disgusting); 7) Even when he comes to his senses, he plans a big speech for his dad...it is a "prepared speech" so to speak and he is trying to figure out a way to get back "in" his dad's good graces...some might say that this presentation was manipulative. So, at this point (and if you were the dad), how motivated would you be to help out this son? Then the rest of the story: the dad sees the son coming, and he RUNS to His Son (something which in that culture was indignant, but the dad didn't care)! When he reaches his son, he embraces him and won't even allow him to finish his speech. He praised God for his son, he gives him "the best robe," "a ring on his hand," and "shoes on his feet." These symbolize that the son is not only received back in forgiveness, but he is assured that everything that belongs to the dad also belongs to the son! He's given the kingdom! Then, on top of all of this, the dad throws a BIG celebration for the son. Do you see? We sin, but God in Christ showers us with grace upon grace upon grace...this is God's "math"...we sin and sin and sin; and in Christ, He forgives, restores and heals...this is the God we have! Again, the inclusivity and universality is amazing.

At the same time, Acts is also written by Luke and as he told the story of Christ in the Gospel, he then tells the story of how the risen Christ continued to lead His Church by the Holy Spirit. In doing so, however, the apostles and disciples continue to show that Christ is superior to all false gods. God will not allow any false god to compete; God is God, the true God and Christ is the only Savior. Acts

4:12 depicts the EXCLUSIVITY of the Gospel: "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." Over and over again in Acts, we see the word of the Lord advancing because of the Lord Jesus Christ, the only true God. Obviously, many people in our pluralistic society are offended by the exclusivistic nature of the Christian faith. We must point out, however, that this is the only major religion that shows God coming to us; while all other major religions present what man must do to come to God. There are literally thousands of religions, but in truth, there are really only two. Under one heading is: God coming to you to save by grace; the other heading is: your coming to God by what you must do. If it is true that Christianity is exclusive (and it is), it is also one-of-a-kind in the best sense of the concept: it is truly based on the free gift of love and mercy in Christ. That is, once a person realizes who and what Jesus Christ is all about, who wouldn't want to run to Him?! Thus, the exclusivity is not a matter of harsh legalism, but rather the quality of truth, light and an attraction that inspires peace and joy...and relief that the way to God is not encumbered by what a person must do (an approach that is doomed to failure, because we are quite simply fallible to say the least). The Christian faith, indeed Christ Himself, is marvelously inclusive...Christ lived, died and rose for the WORLD! At the same time, because there is no other Savior, Christ is -- according to the light of truth -- the ONLY Savior and therefore the saving faith is exclusive. This is the exclusivity that rescues from the tremendous religious confusion that is in the world; it is an exclusivity that reveals God's exclusive love for you! In Christ, Dr. Espinosa