

Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes

First Quarter 2026: *Uniting Heaven and Earth: Christ in Philippians and Colossians*

Lesson 7 “A Heavenly Citizenship”

Read for this week’s study

Philippians 3:17–4:23; 1 Corinthians 15:42–44; John 14:27; Psalm 119:165; Job 1:21; 1 Timothy 6:7.

Memory Text

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God” (Philippians 4:6, NKJV).

Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide

- I. Introduction
- II. Role Models
- III. “Stand Fast in the Lord”
- IV. Rejoice in the Lord—Always
- V. Think on These Things . . .
- VI. Keys for Contentment
- VII. Further Study

Questions and Notes for Consideration

Facilitator: Daniel Duda

1. “This week’s lesson concludes our study of Philippians, and it is packed with valuable lessons and maxims for daily living. [...] As Christians, we are citizens of God’s heavenly kingdom. And with that citizenship comes privileges, wonderful privileges. And responsibilities, too.” (Sabbath Afternoon)
2. Sunday’s lesson discusses role models, based on Philippians 3:17-19. Why are the believers in Philippi invited to copy Paul (3:17)? He has described how he cast aside his Jewish privileges in order to gain Christ (3:4-11 cf. Acts 16:35-39). They could not copy him exactly, few of them were Jewish or Roman citizens. They (and we too) must reflect what this allegiance to Jesus means in terms of other claims to allegiance which are pressed upon them (and us). People whose behavior is conditioned by their senses are not their role models (3:18-19).
3. How is the phrase “our citizenship is in heaven” misunderstood in classical Christianity? What is Paul actually talking about in this text (3:20)? Most

contemporary Christians think Paul means, “we are waiting until we can go and live in heaven where we belong”, but this is a complete misunderstanding of how Roman citizenship functioned in an outpost, or in a Roman colony like Philippi.

4. The text is not talking about going to heaven (though the believers will go there just for 1000 years; cf. Revelation 20:1-10), but rather about the source of our confidence to live on earth in a manner different from (and in tension with) the present fallen world. How are we to bring the life and values of heaven (=God’s kingdom) to bear on earth? Christians, whose citizenship is in heaven, are expected to live out their citizenship wherever they are, as representatives of the values of the kingdom of God on earth.
5. “Stand firm/fast in the Lord” (4:1; Monday’s lesson) does not just mean remaining constant in faith. It means giving allegiance to Jesus, rather than Caesar, as the true Lord. Paul is thus designating Jesus as the true “Lord” and “Savior” in contrast to Caesar (who was often described by these titles). One day the true Lord will return from heaven (the mother city) to liberate all from their enemy and fully establish his rule in the colonies. To put it in terms of the Lord’s Prayer, when God’s kingdom comes, then God’s will will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
6. What is the context and meaning of “celebrate joyfully in the Lord, all the time” (4:4-7)? (Tuesday’s lesson)? In Paul’s world and culture, the word meant (besides what happens inside people, a sense of joy welling up and making them happy from within) a public celebration. Their world in Philippi, Ephesus and Corinth used to organize great festivals, games and shows to celebrate their gods and their cities, not the least their new ‘god’, Caesar himself. Why should the followers of King Jesus celebrate less exuberantly? Exuberance alone must not turn into mere extrovert enthusiasm which squashes sensitive souls and offends those who are by nature quiet and reserved.
7. The command in 4:8 to think about all the wonderful and lovely things runs directly opposite to the habits of mind instilled by the modern media. (Wednesday’s lesson)
8. What is the immediate context for the oft-quoted text: “I can do all things through him who gives me strength” (4:13)? (Thursday’s lesson) Is Paul applying for a job vacancy here in chapter 4? Is Paul preparing to take part in the long jump or run a marathon at the Olympics? Is he interested in starting a business? Is Paul writing this in a context of achievement and motivation to strive towards our goals and success, and promising us we can achieve any goal we set our mind to?
9. Here we gain a window on Paul as a very human Christian, facing difficulties and troubles, and having to learn the hard way how to cope with them. Paul has learned to be content in the highs and the lows, in the good times and the bad. He can experience contentment and joy whether he has plenty or whether he has nothing. In other words, his contentment is not tied to or restricted by his circumstances.
10. How can we have the same kind of contentment that Paul had while writing from a prison cell to those who were free? Such contentment does not come automatically

to anybody. It does not come naturally or without effort on our part, no instant or easy solutions. It cannot be forced or faked. But we can learn to be content in every situation by always remembering that contentment is not tied to or restricted by our circumstances. In fact, circumstances do not even affect Paul's contentment and joy. True contentment is found only in Christ, in believing and trusting in Him and holding firmly to the promise of the gospel, which is eternal life to all who trust in Him. And the same promise for help from outside is for everyone who is prepared to go to the same school and learn the same lessons as Paul (4:13).

Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

Through the years, I've asked many Christians what they consider to be the essence of the good news. I wish there was time to go around our group tonight and have everyone say, "I believe the good news is this:" Through the years, I think the replies have included almost every part of the Christian faith. But most particularly subjects like the atonement, the Second Coming, or eternal life. Although, if God is as His enemies have made Him out to be, eternal life would be misery, would it not? So whether these doctrines, even the Second Coming, are good news depends on the kind of person we believe our God to be. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Conversations About God, #16, "God's last pleading with His Children" recorded May 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link:* <http://pkp.cc/16MMCAG>

But then, when a person is converted and reborn, and sees how gracious God is, and what respect He has for our freedom, then one delights in the tenth commandment. Because since the Ten Commandments describe the kind of people who can be trusted with eternal life, we know that our next-door neighbors in the hereafter will not only not openly do what's wrong, they aren't even going to want to. And that makes for great security. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Faith, Righteousness and Salvation, #4, "What is Christian Perfection? How Perfect Can One Be In This Life?", part 1, recorded February 27, 1975, Lynwood, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:* <http://pkp.cc/7MMFRS>

Lou: All right, we'll look forward to that. There are two here that we just must not pass up any longer, because they speak so poignantly of where many of us hurt and wonder. "'The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life.' I have a cousin, age thirty years, who has a malignant brain tumor; and he is awaiting death. There is nothing medically that can be done for him. Everyone tells him, 'God's will be done.' Now the question is, does God will for one to

die?” This person just can’t stand that, and they go on to say, “I don’t think so. I believe that sin has contaminated the world and as a result we have disease and death. So please elaborate on this concept, and what’s more, what do you say to such a person? How do you talk about God’s will?”

Graham: That’s too sad to give a snap answer to. I think at times like that we draw from everything we’ve learned and experienced through the years about God in our study of Scripture, and one needs to fall back on the things we are sure of. What God wants for us: He wants us to be well. He created us perfect. Disorder, disease—these are not of His doing. These are all part of being caught up in the consequences of this revolt. But then we do know that God could heal, that’s true. And if He doesn’t seem to be doing it at this time, we might wonder why. But if you should say, “God, I wonder why,” would He be offended? Not for a moment! On the authority of so many cases in Scripture.

But that God would be willing that this person should die? Is He a destructive God? An experience like this really tests the kind of person we believe our God to be. But even if one is not too clear on this, if one has learned that prayer is conversation with God as with a friend, then the one who is wondering would feel perfectly free to kneel down and really talk to God about this, and say, “God, this is not clear. It looks as if You are like this, and that’s the Devil’s picture.” Or, “It looks as if You are like that. You couldn’t be, could You? Or are You?” He would not be offended. He honors our questions. And there is great peace that comes from realizing we have a God toward whom we can direct such questions, even in agony at the time. So I think the answer is a long one in a way. Learn the good news about God. But one thing sure, if the Lord were here, how sympathetic He would be! But He would want to clear up the thought “I’m doing this to you.”

Lou: One of our congregation went out of her way to type up the question that she has had for a number of years. She says this, “Can you give a reason why a loving God would allow a good Christian woman to be murdered? She was a good help in her small church. She was the treasurer of her church. The last Sabbath of her life they had a consecration service at the church. She dedicated herself anew to God, and she was murdered that afternoon at her house. She was the treasurer, and she had money at her house, and apparently that was the reason that someone broke in and she was killed.” And this individual says, “The reason I know about this is that she was my sister.”

Graham: Again, happy the person who knows God very well at a time like this. It doesn’t mean that we would know the answer. I don’t think Job ever found out why those things happened to him that did. But all he knew was that those theologians were wrong. And those theologians came to Job and said, “You cannot be asking God about this.” I mean, Job was crying to God with intense feeling and saying, “God, how can You do this to me? I’ve been Your good friend all this time, and now You won’t even speak to me. You won’t explain this.” And the theologians

were going on with their very legalistic explanation. Finally he said, “I wish you brethren would be quiet. I appreciate your coming, but you’re not helping me at all.” None of their explanations were good. He said, “If only I could talk to God, I’m sure I could clear this up.” And eventually the boldness of his inquires of God reached such a level that those three men were worried for their friend that God would surely zap him on the spot for daring to inquire. And God broke in and said, “Job, you have said of Me what is right.”

So if a person is wrestling with this, we may not find out. I’m sure we won’t find out the answer to every such absolutely unfair thing that happens on this planet during this emergency. But some things we know for sure; the kind of person God is, and that He welcomes us to lodge our inquires with feeling, and hopefully we will trust Him enough to wait for the answer.

Lou: Acquainted well enough to trust when we don’t know how to answer all these things.

Graham: That’s the thing. And I’d like to think that that sister was such a saint; don’t worry about her. She will arise in the resurrection and say, “What am I doing here?” She will have no complaints. She’ll be looking for her sister. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Conversations About God, #6 with Lou Venden, “Evaluating the Evidence” recorded February 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/6MMCAG>*

Further Study with Ellen White

Righteous words and deeds have a more powerful influence for good than all the sermons that can be preached.—ML 114. {VSS 52.1}

Some are seen to come forth from their daily communion with God clothed with the meekness of Christ. Their words are not like a desolating hail, crushing everything before it; they come forth sweetly from their lips. They scatter seeds of love and kindness all along their path, and that all unconsciously, because Christ lives in their heart. Their influence is felt more than it is seen. {SD 180.6}

Kind, tender, compassionate words will flow from sanctified hearts and lips. {SD 180.7}

When the grace of God reigns within, the soul will be surrounded with an atmosphere of faith and courage and Christlike love, an atmosphere invigorating to the spiritual life of all who inhale it. . . . Those who are humble in heart the Lord will use to reach souls whom the ordained ministers cannot approach. They will be moved to speak words which reveal the saving grace of Christ. {AG 238.5}

And in blessing others they will themselves be blessed. God gives us the opportunity to impart grace, that He may refill us with increased grace. Hope and faith will strengthen as the agent for

God works with the talents and facilities that God has provided. He will have a divine agency to work with him. {AG 238.6}

The resurrection of Jesus was a sample of the final resurrection of all who sleep in Him. The risen body of the Saviour, His deportment, the accents of His speech, were all familiar to His followers. In like manner will those who sleep in Jesus rise again. We shall know our friends even as the disciples knew Jesus. Though they may have been deformed, diseased, or disfigured in this mortal life, yet in their resurrected and glorified body their individual identity will be perfectly preserved, and we shall recognize, in the face radiant with the light shining from the face of Jesus, the lineaments of those we love (3SP 219). {6BC 1092.6}

Our personal identity is preserved in the resurrection, though not the same particles of matter or material substance as went into the grave. The wondrous works of God are a mystery to man. The spirit, the character of man, is returned to God, there to be preserved. In the resurrection every man will have his own character. God in His own time will call forth the dead, giving again the breath of life, and bidding the dry bones live. The same form will come forth, but it will be free from disease and every defect. It lives again bearing the same individuality of features, so that friend will recognize friend. There is no law of God in nature which shows that God gives back the same identical particles of matter which composed the body before death. God shall give the righteous dead a body that will please Him. {6BC 1093.2}

Fallen humans, by laying hold of the divine power brought within their reach, can become one with God. Everlasting life is the blessing that Christ came to give to the world. {CTr 32.3}

When Christ comes to gather to Himself those who have been faithful, the last trump will sound, and the whole earth, from the summits of the loftiest mountains to the lowest recesses of the deepest mines, will hear. The righteous dead will hear the sound of the last trump, and will come forth from their graves, to be clothed with immortality, and to meet their Lord (SpT Series B, No. 2, p. 24). {7BC 909.2}

It is not the will of God that His people should be weighed down with care. But our Lord does not deceive us. He does not say to us, "Do not fear; there are no dangers in your path." He knows there are trials and dangers, and He deals with us plainly. He does not propose to take His people out of a world of sin and evil, but He points them to a never-failing refuge. . . . {TMK 225.2}

Happiness drawn from earthly sources is as changeable as varying circumstances can make it; but the peace of Christ is a constant and abiding peace. It does not depend upon any circumstances in life, on the amount of worldly goods or the number of earthly friends. Christ is the fountain of living water, and happiness drawn from Him can never fail. {MB 16.2}

When we receive Christ as an abiding guest in the soul, the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. {MB 15.2}

In the Teacher sent from God, heaven gave to men its best and greatest. He who had stood in the councils of the Most High, who had dwelt in the innermost sanctuary of the Eternal, was the One chosen to reveal in person to humanity the knowledge of God. {Ed 73.2}

The Lord did not lock the reservoir of heaven after pouring His Spirit upon the early disciples. We, also, may receive of the fullness of His blessing. Heaven is full of the treasures of His grace, and those who come to God in faith may claim all that He has promised. {3BC 1152.4}

Each law of God is an enactment of mercy, love, and saving power. These laws, obeyed, are our life, our salvation, our happiness, our peace [Psalm 119:165 quoted] (Letter 112, 1902). {3BC 1153.6}

Our Lord adapts Himself to our special needs. He is a shade on our right hand. He walks close by our side, ready to supply all our necessities. He comes very near to those who are engaged in willing service for Him. He knows every one by name. O what assurances we have of the tender love of Christ (MS 51, 1903). {3BC 1153.8}

The omnipotent power of the Holy Spirit is the defense of every contrite soul. Not one that in penitence and faith has claimed His protection will Christ permit to pass under the enemy's power. The Saviour is by the side of His tempted and tried ones. With Him there can be no such thing as failure, loss, impossibility, or defeat; we can do all things through Him who strengthens us. When temptations and trials come, do not wait to adjust all the difficulties, but look to Jesus, your helper. {DA 490.5}

Let us trust Him. Worry is blind and cannot discern the future. But Jesus sees the end from the beginning, and in every difficulty He has His way prepared to bring relief. Abiding in Christ, we can do all things through Him who strengthens us. {AG 113.6}