

Philippians—A Doctrine of Experience  
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From Philippians 1:12-20. A DOCTRINE OF EXPERIENCE.

ARTICLE 1: HUMAN EXPERIENCE, VEHICLE FOR REVEALED TRUTH v.12-14.

#1. Human experience, all through Scripture, proves to be a persistent point of tension between God and man. The apostle Paul, writing to us all, resolves into revealed terms the doctrine of personal experience.

#2. "Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel" v.12.

#3. Human beings strive vigorously, persistently and sometimes violently, to secure for themselves the most desired personal experience possible.

#4. But the follower of Christ pursues another and much more difficult path. Such a one offers his/her personal sacrifices of time and personal experience on an unseen altar, to the service of Christ.

#5. "...so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else" v.13.

#6. The revealed doctrine of experience is, in fact, a spiritual evaluation of personal experience. How does a believer understand the importance (or "value") of his/her personal experience?

#7. The gauge of measurement is the consequence to the gospel. Our personal experience is overtaken by the purpose of God. Our experience is lost to us.

#8. Sobering. Much melancholia comes from thinking what *should or should not happen* in our experience. Forget that. We are servants of the Almighty. "and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear" v.14.

#9. We must steel our hearts for service!

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ARTICLE 2: THE SHIFT IN THE AXIS OF JOY v. 15-18.

#1. "What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice" v.18.

#2. That apostolic statement shows that Paul's axis of joy had been shifted. It was the revealed truth that had caused such a strategic change.

#3. This man did not find the axis of rejoicing in his experience. He found it at the heart of gospel preaching and the furtherance of saving truth.

#4. There were some, preachers even, who had not made that shift. Such men took pleasure in the urges of "envy" and "strife" and the foment of "distress" v.15, 17.

#5. Those preachers, in spite of the tenor of the gospel truth, were fired by the energy of "selfish ambition" in their pursuit of personal experience v.17.

#6. Paul's life was "appointed for the defense of the gospel" v.16. His experience, of whatever kind, was incidental to that eternal purpose.

#7. The doctrine of experience displaces the pursuit of personal experience in favor of the pursuit of the will of God. Having experiences is unavoidable, but it is subject to a biblical doctrine. "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" v.21.

#8. To the world such things are absurd. To them, life is set in the context of personal experience and life is determined by that. Life is nothing more than the sum of experience.

#9. Yet, observing a biblical doctrine of experience, puts life in the context of eternal purpose. Our control of experience is forfeited to the King of Kings.

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ARTICLE 3: RELINQUISH EXPERIENCE TO TWO ETERNAL DYNAMIC FORCES v.19.

#1. Experience is not causal; it is a result. This text instructs the believer to relinquish his/her attempt to control the future experience to "prayer and to the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ" v.19.

#2. Without a revealed doctrine of experience to guide us, one cannot perceive prayer and the Holy Spirit as *causal agents* of the future. But that is what it means to "trust(ing) in the Lord" v.14.

3#. "...for I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ" v.19.

#4. Quite amazing. Prayer has no direct effect upon situation nor experience. It has a direct effect only upon the Lord. But, our prayers begin to set in place a spiritual context around future experience.

#5. This is why prayer is so important. It is prelude to change. This is why we pray so fervently for others.

#6. ..."the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ" is the *direct force upon future experience*. No experience in which we are living is beyond the reach of prayer and the Holy Spirit! No experience!

#7. We do not need to pursue different experience; we need to pursue the doctrine of experience.

#8. The apostolic counsel is to face the present circumstances with "courage" (v.14) and to do our duty. But we can look beyond them. Only a revealed doctrine of experience can enable us to do that by faith.

#9. We are not alone, unaided, helpless in our sea of troubled experience. Keep your nerve up!

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ARTICLE 4: THE VESSEL OF EXPERIENCE v.20.

#1. The physical body is the vessel of personal experience. "...according to my earnest expectations and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death" v.20.

#2. Personal experience necessarily involves the body. Hardly incidental to experience, the body is not permitted to make unchallenged demands regarding its experience.

#3. The biblical doctrine of experience sets the priority. That priority is unequivocal. It is the *exaltation of Christ* regardless of whatever the experience may be.

#4. The doctrine of experience, therefore, drives a wedge of separation between the body and potential experience.

#5. The apostle means that we are going to force this doctrine not on experience itself, but, upon the body. "Boldness" is a fundamental in all of this, because the body much prefers experience selected for its own parameters of comfort. Faith has to become stronger than the body.

#6. This doctrine of experience is also a doctrine of the physical body. The revealed teaching mandates the place of the body in time, life, history and events. The human body in its experience becomes the means to spiritual ends.

#7. ..."my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame...". The Christian's great shame is that his/her faith falls prey to the physical body.

#8. Paul's "expectation" was that he would see it through to the end.

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ARTICLE 5: EXTREMIST EXPERIENCE.

#1. People routinely try to avoid extreme experiences. Extremes can be disquieting.

#2. The apostle might not have thought that his personal experience had been enhanced by the doctrine of experience. He had been imprisoned (v.13.) And he suffered accordingly.

#3. But there can be no doubt that his experience had been intensified. A believer's temporal life is not destined to be enhanced; it is destined to be intensified.

#4. To submit one's experience to the service of the gospel truth, can possibly assure that one's experience will be extreme.

#5. The world of unbelief uses extremist experience as intimidation. Pressure tactics might very well dissuade some believers from "unreasonable" consequences. Unsettling intensification of experience ought to be expected. Many believers are convinced that the Lord would never put an individual in "unreasonable" intensification.

#6. That is not true, He does. "...and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear" v.13.

#7. The biblical doctrine of experience is evidenced everywhere in Scripture (Book of Job). Enhanced experience is not always a friend of the faith. But enhanced faith usually tilts toward intensified experience.

#8. "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" v.21. Faith is measured by its behavior in intensified experience.