
PHILIPPIANS 2

The letter to the Philippians is often referred to as the *Epistle of Joy*, and it is easy to understand why. Paul wrote out of his adversity as a prisoner at a time when he had learned to be joyful and content in his circumstances. Reading the lines of this particular letter, we see it is the power of love displayed through humility that is the clarion call of Philippians 2.

We can assume from Paul's instructions that there was possibly a problem with self-centeredness in the Philippians church, causing him to make his appeal. His repetition of the word "if" (see Philippians 2:1) in the Greek refers, not to uncertainties but rather to realities. The word "since" could easily be inserted in its place, causing it to read much differently: *Since* there is consolation; *since* there is comfort of love; *since* there is fellowship of the Spirit; *since* there is affection and mercy, fulfill my joy...

DAY 1 **Read Philippians 2:1-30 | Unity through Humility.** From your initial reading of Philippians 2, what stands out to you about the nature and example of Jesus Christ?

1. Challenge yourself: Using the four specifics in verse 1, list the ways in which unity is possible by finishing Paul's thought. The first is grouped together for you by way of example. Think about these and the potential harmony brought to the Body of Christ.
 - a. Since there is consolation [encouragement] in Christ, *fulfill my joy by being likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind* (see verse 2).
 - b. Since there is comfort of love... (Finish the thought using verse 3a.)
 - c. Since there is fellowship of the Spirit... (Finish the thought using verse 3b.)
 - d. Since there is affection and mercy... (Finish the thought using verse 4.)

These certainties, coupled with the believer's response, give real evidence of Christian unity at work in the Body of Christ. The world sees us putting the welfare of others above our own!

2. Think about it. Paul stated that his joy was complete when believers looked outward toward one another—being *like-minded*; having the *same love*; being *one in spirit and purpose*. If these responses were repeated often enough to become habitual, we would see areas of disagreement and division lessen and perhaps even disappear. What a powerful witness we would have for Christ!

Which of these realities in verse 1 seems to need your proper response right now? Please explain.

Memory Verse

Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit,
but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.
Philippians 2:3 NKJV

Which part of this verse resonates most with you today? How or in what way?

DAY 2

Read Philippians 2:5-11 | Humbled and Exalted. Our supreme example of humility is, of course, the Lord Jesus Christ. In an almost poetic way, through the next seven verses Paul puts forth Christ’s example as our model to imitate. The certainty that we have the mind and spirit of Christ enables us to demonstrate the actions of Christ. Today we’ll examine the certainty that the way to *up* is *down*.

Trace the steps flowing downward of Christ’s humility on our behalf in verses 5-11. Fill in the blanks below.

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but...”

Made Himself of no reputation (verse 7a).

Taking on the form of a bondservant (verse 7b).

_____ (verse 7c).

_____ (verse 8a).

_____ (verse 8b).

_____ (verse 8c).

Do you get the sense of how long He was willing to humble Himself for your sake? The Amplified Version of verses 6-7 states: “He who, although being essentially one with God and in the form of God [as One with Him, possessing the fullness of all the divine attributes—the entire nature of deity] did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped or asserted, but emptied Himself of all privileges and rightful dignity by assuming the form of a bond-servant.”

Beginning at the bottom (which is done for you) trace the upward steps of Christ’s exaltation in verses 9-11.

_____ (verse 11a).

_____ (verse 10c).

_____ (verse 10b).

_____ (verse 10a).

And given Him the name which is above every name (verse 9).

Therefore God also has highly exalted Him (verse 9).

Think about it. Jesus did not come into existence as a tiny baby in Bethlehem—rather, as God, He always existed! He took on human form and nature being in man’s likeness, but He remained sinless (Hebrews 4:15). He was a person like any other person; had you passed Him on the street, you may not have noticed. Being in the form of a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death. Take a moment to ponder 2 Corinthians 2:9. Record your thoughts.

DAY 3

Read Philippians 2:12-18 | Christlikeness: You Shine! In verse 12, Paul uses the word *therefore*, connecting what he is about to say with what he has previously stated. It seems Paul had a special request for these believers as he kept in mind their needs and the example of Christ they were encouraged to follow.

1. What wake-up call is Paul issuing?

We must understand in context what Paul is *not* saying as well as what he is saying. He is not telling them to work for their salvation—God had already secured it for them; but considering the disunity of the church, they were to work out (put into daily practice) what God had worked into them by His Holy Spirit. There were some working for self rather than putting others first, which had created discord in the church.

2. What is the overriding principle Paul gave them?

The phrase “do all things” in the Greek is speaking of literally everything the believer does. The present tense of the word “do” implies that it is to be done repeatedly or continually.

3. In your own words, detail the picture believers are to present to the rest of the world:
 - a. Verse 15
 - b. Verse 16

The literal translation of the words “hold fast the word of life” means to *hold forth or offer the word of life* to others—both by your mouth and your model of life. The Philippians lived in a crooked and perverse generation, some were living for self and some were turning their backs on God. It was not too unlike our culture today; and it is into this kind of darkness that we Christians are to shine!

Remember that Paul had in view the very real possibility of his own death; he wanted more than anything to rejoice for these believers at Christ’s return, knowing he had done all for them.

4. How did Paul view his service to these believers? What did he expect from them in return?
5. Think about it. Paul used the same word for sacrifice (*thysia*) that is used in Romans 12:1 in reference to presenting one’s physical body as a spiritual sacrifice of worship. The work that Christians performed as an act of worship to God brought joy to this apostle’s heart and gave him a reason to rejoice. Can the same be said of you? Share your thoughts.

DAY **4**

Read Philippians 2:19-30 | Proven Character. Paul uses the term *proven character* in verse 22, speaking of those who remain faithful in the face of great difficulty. It is obvious that both Timothy and Epaphroditus had a proven track record with Paul, who was close enough to view their character in everyday life. They had proven by both their choices and lifestyle what it means to be humble and place others' needs first.

1. Look closely at verses 19-24. What does Paul say about Timothy in the following:
 - a. His relationship with Paul.
 - b. His different lifestyle.
 - c. His service to the church.

Pauls' practical instructions in this chapter have to do with learning to leave behind petty grievances and complaining, and instead following in the footsteps of those modeling a Christ-like example.

2. Now look closely at verses 25-30. What does Paul say about Epaphroditus in the following:
 - a. His relationship with Paul.
 - b. His personal sacrifice.
 - c. His service to the church.
3. Think about it. Did you take notice of how dear these men were to Paul and how much their service meant to him? If Paul were to include a few verses in his letter about *your* proven character, what would he record for future generations to read and learn about?
 - a. Consider how you are—or are *not*—modeling Christlikeness to those around you. Where could you stand to make a little improvement?

DAY 5

In Touch with Jesus. This section is intended to be a review of what you have learned and what God has spoken to you this week. Go back over your lesson with a marking pen or highlighter and mark those places and points that stand out to you. Use the margins to make personal notations. Be sure to indicate which points or questions you'd like to share with your discussion group.

1. **Listen** | In what way did the Lord meet you in His Word this week? Be specific.

2. **Learn** | How can you apply this understanding to your daily Christian walk?

3. **Live** | What step of obedience will you purpose to take in your walk of faith?

Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. —Ephesians 6:18 NIV

Adoration – Giving praise and honor to God for who He is and what He does.

Confession – Honestly deal with sin; acknowledge to God the ways (and whys) you fall short.

Thanksgiving – Verbalize your gratitude; express your praise and a thankful heart.

Supplication – Pray specifically for the needs of others, ourselves, our church, our nation.



Close your discussion time by praying together. Use the A•C•T•S pattern as a group focus and keep it simple. No need to be lengthy or profound, just authentic.
