

# Love Letters

## Lesson 12: 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 it 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 may have been a problem with self-centeredness in the Philippian church, causing him to make his appeal. His repetition of the word *if* (verse 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. . .*

Read Philippians 2:1–30.

### Day One: Unity through Humility

1. From your initial reading of Philippians 2, what stands out to you about the nature and example of Jesus Christ?
  
2. 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 like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind (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) \_\_\_\_\_  
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These certainties coupled with the believer's responses give real evidence of Christian unity at work in the body of Christ. The world sees us putting the welfare of others ahead of our own!

*Selah~*

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!

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

*Memory verse:* Philippians 2:3 NKJV

Write the verse out below; repeat it each day to commit it to memory.

*Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind  
let each esteem others better than himself.*

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## Day Two:

## Humbled and Exalted

Reread Philippians 2:5–11.

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 . . ." (Follow the example done for you.)

Made Himself of no reputation (verse 7a)

Taking the form of a bondservant (verse 7b)

\_\_\_\_\_ (verse 7c)

\_\_\_\_\_ (verse 8a)

\_\_\_\_\_ (verse 8b)

\_\_\_\_\_ (verse 8c)

Do you get the sense of how low 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 [possessing the fullness of the attributes which make God God], did not think this equality with God was a thing to be eagerly grasped or retained, but stripped Himself of all privileges and rightful dignity so as to assume the guise of a servant (slave)."

Now, 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)

*Selah* ~

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 made 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 8:9 and record your thoughts.

## Day Three:

## Christlikeness: You Shine!

Reread Philippians 2:12–18.

In verse 12, Paul uses the word *therefore*, connecting what he is about to say with what he 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 in verses 12–13?

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 in 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 body.

2. What is the overriding principle Paul gave them (verse 14)?

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 “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 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 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 dear believers (verses 17–18)?
  - a. What did he expect from them in return?

*Selah*~

Paul used the same word for sacrifice—*thysia*—that we find used in Romans 12:1, referring to the presenting of one’s physical body as a spiritual sacrifice of worship. Think about it: the work Christians performed as an act of worship to God brought joy to this apostle’s heart and gave him reason to rejoice. Can the same be said of *you*? Please share your thoughts.

## Day Four:

## Proven Character

Reread Philippians 2:19–30.

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?

Paul's practical instructions in this chapter have to do with learning to leave behind petty grievances and complaining, and 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:
  - a. His relationship with Paul?
  - b. His personal sacrifice?
  - c. His service to the church?

*Selah* ~

Did you take notice of how dear these two 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? Consider how you are or are not modeling Christlikeness to those around you. Where could you stand to make a little improvement?

Day Five:

*In Touch with Jesus ~*

This section of the lesson 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 Jesus meet *you* in His Word this week? Be specific.

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2. *LEARN*: How can you apply this understanding to your daily Christian walk?

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3. *LIVE*: What step of obedience will you purpose to take in our walk of faith this week?

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*Prayer Requests ~*

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