

Bible Study December 21, 2022

PHILIPPIANS 2 (NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION)

¹ Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves,

Selfishness can ruin a church, but genuine humility can build it. Being humble involves having a true perspective about ourselves (see Romans 12:3). It does not mean that we should put ourselves down. Before God, we are sinners, saved only by God's grace, but we are saved and therefore have great worth in God's Kingdom. We are to lay aside selfishness and treat others with respect and common courtesy. Considering others' interests as more important than our own links us with Christ, who was a true example of humility.

⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

Philippi was a cosmopolitan city. The composition of the church reflected its great diversity, with people from a variety of backgrounds and walks of life. Acts 16 gives us some indication of the diverse makeup of this church. The church included Lydia, a Jewish convert from Asia and a wealthy businesswoman (Acts 16:14); the slave girl (Acts 16:16-17), probably a native Greek; and the jailer serving this colony of the empire, probably a Roman (Acts 16:25-36). With so many different backgrounds among the members, unity must have been difficult to maintain. Although we find no evidence of division in this church, Paul needed to safeguard its unity as a shining light for the whole world (see Philippians 3:2; 4:2). Paul encourages us to guard against any selfishness, prejudice, or jealousy that might lead to dissension. Showing genuine interest in others is a positive step forward in maintaining unity among believers.

⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

Many people—even Christians—live only to make a good impression on others or to please themselves. But selfishness brings discord. Paul therefore stressed spiritual unity, asking the Philippians to love one another and to be one in spirit and purpose. When we work together, caring for the problems of others as if their problems were ours, we demonstrate Christ's example of putting others first, and we experience unity. Don't be so concerned about making a good impression or meeting your own needs that you strain relationships in God's family.

Jesus Christ was humble, willing to give up his rights in order to obey God and serve people. Like Christ, we should have a servant's attitude, serving out of love for God and for others, not out of guilt or fear. Remember, you can choose your attitude: You can approach life expecting to be served, or you can look for opportunities to serve others. (For more on Christ's attitude of servanthood, see Mark 10:45.)

**⁶ Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
⁷ rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.**

The Incarnation was the act of the preexistent Son of God voluntarily assuming a human body and human nature. Without ceasing to be God, he became a human being, the man called Jesus. He did not give up his deity to become human, but he set aside the right to his glory and power. In submission to the Father's will, Christ limited his power and knowledge. Jesus of Nazareth was subject to place, time, and many other human limitations. What made his humanity unique was his freedom from sin. In his full humanity, Jesus showed us everything about God's character that can be conveyed in human terms. (The Incarnation is explained further in these passages: John 1:1-14; Romans 1:2-5; 2 Corinthians 8:9; 1 Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 2:14; 1 John 1:1-3.)

**⁸ And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!**

Death on a cross (crucifixion) was the form of capital punishment that Romans used for notorious criminals. It was excruciatingly painful and humiliating. Prisoners were nailed or tied to a cross and left to die. Death might not come for several days, and it usually came by suffocation when the weight of the weakened body made breathing more and more difficult. Jesus died as one who was cursed (Galatians 3:13). How amazing that the perfect man should die this most horrible and shameful death so that we would not have to face eternal punishment!

**⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.**

These verses probably come from a hymn sung by the early Christian church, and they form the central focus of sacrificial love and humility for Paul's entire letter. This passage holds many parallels to the prophecy of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53. As a hymn, it was not meant to be a complete statement about the nature and work of Christ. Several key characteristics of Jesus Christ, however, are praised in this passage: (1) Christ has always existed with God; (2) Christ is equal to God because he is God (John 1:1-51; Colossians 1:15-19); (3) though Christ is God, he became a man in order to fulfill God's plan of salvation for all people; (4) Christ did not just have the appearance of being a man—he actually became human in order to identify with us in our humanity; (5) Christ voluntarily laid aside his divine rights and privileges out of love for his Father; (6) Christ also loved us so much that he died on the cross for our sins so we wouldn't have to face eternal death; (7) God glorified Christ because of his obedience; and (8) God raised Christ to his

original position at the Father's right hand, where he will reign forever as our Lord and judge. How can we do anything less than praise Jesus Christ as our Lord and dedicate ourselves to his service?

People often excuse selfishness, pride, or evil by claiming their rights. They think, I can cheat on this test; after all, I deserve to pass this class. Or I can spend all this money on myself—I worked hard for it. Or My weekend belongs to me; I just don't have time to help others. But as believers, we should have a different attitude, one that enables us to lay aside our rights in order to serve others. If we say we follow Christ, we must also say we want to live as he lived. We should develop his attitude of humility as we serve, even when we are not likely to get recognition for our efforts. Are you selfishly clinging to your rights, or are you willing to serve?

At the Last Judgment, even those who are condemned will recognize Jesus' authority and right to rule. People can voluntarily choose now to commit their lives to Jesus as Lord, or they will be forced to acknowledge him as Lord when he returns. Christ may return at any moment. Are you prepared to meet him?

- ⇒ Encouragement comes from being united (one) in Christ
- ⇒ We need to be like-minded with Christ – by:
 - Loving one another.
 - Being selfless by valuing one another
 - Walking in a state of humility

Question: Why is humility a challenge for us to master?

- ⇒ Jesus Christ was humble, willing to give up his rights in order to obey God and serve people.
- ⇒ Like Christ, we should have a servant's attitude, serving out of love for God and for others, not out of guilt or fear.

Mark 10:43-45 (NIV)

⁴³ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Do Everything Without Grumbling

¹² Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling,

“Work hard to show the results of your salvation,” in light of the preceding exhortation to unity, may mean that the entire church was to work together to rid themselves of divisions and discord. The Philippian Christians needed to be especially careful to obey Christ now that Paul wasn't there to continually remind them about what was right. We, too, must be careful about what we believe and how we live, especially when we are on our own. In the absence of

Christian mentors who hold us accountable, we must focus our attention and devotion even more on Christ so that we won't be sidetracked.

¹³ for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

What do we do when we don't feel like obeying God? He has not left us alone in our struggles to do his will. He wants to come alongside us and be within us to provide help. God gives us the desire and the power to do what pleases him. We find the secret to a changed life when we submit to his control and let him work in and through us. In our struggle against temptation, we must ask God to help us both do his will and desire to do his will.

To change our desires to be more like Christ's, we need the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit (1:19), the influence of faithful Christians, obedience to God's Word (not just exposure to it), and sacrificial service. Often it is in doing God's will that we gain the desire to do it (see 4:8-9). Do what he wants and trust him to change your desires.

- ⇒ "Work hard to show the results of your salvation," – Can people see that you know and love Christ.
- ⇒ "The entire church must work together to rid themselves of divisions and discord.
- ⇒ As Christians we need to be especially careful to obey Christ.
- ⇒ We must be careful about what we believe and how we live, especially when we are on our own (My rights).
- ⇒ In the absence of Christian mentors who hold us accountable, we must focus our attention and devotion even more on Christ so that we won't be sidetracked.

- ⇒ He has not left us alone in our struggles to do his will.
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- ⇒ The influence of faithful Christians,
- ⇒ Obedience to God's Word (not just exposure to it),
- ⇒ and Sacrificial Service.

¹⁴ Do everything without grumbling or arguing, ¹⁵ so that you may become blameless and pure, "children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation." Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky ¹⁶ as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain.

Why are complaining and arguing so harmful? If all that people know about a church is that its members frequently argue, complain, and gossip, they get a false impression of Christ and the Good News. Belief in Christ should unite those who trust him. If people in your church often complain and argue, they lack the unifying power of Jesus Christ. Stop arguing with other

Christians and complaining about people and conditions within the church; instead, patiently work on your issues and let the world see Christ.

Our lives should be characterized by moral purity, patience, and peacefulness, so that we will shine “like bright lights” in a dark and depraved world. A transformed life effectively demonstrates the power of God’s Word. Are you shining brightly, or are you clouded by complaining and arguing? Don’t let dissensions snuff out your light. Shine out for God until Jesus returns and bathes the world in his radiant glory.

Our lives should be characterized by the following:

- ⇒ moral purity
- ⇒ patience
- ⇒ peacefulness and the like.

17 But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you.

The drink offering was an important part of the sacrificial system of the Jews (for an explanation, see Numbers 28:7). Because this church had little Jewish background, the liquid offering may refer to the wine poured out to pagan deities prior to important public events. The point is that Paul regarded his life as a sacrifice.

Even if he had to die, Paul was content, knowing that he had helped the Philippians live for Christ. When you’re totally committed to serving Christ, sacrificing to build the faith of others brings a joyous reward.

18 So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.

Timothy and Epaphroditus

19 I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you.

When Paul wrote these words, most vocational training was done by fathers, and sons stayed loyal to their family businesses. Timothy displayed that same loyalty in his spiritual apprenticeship with Paul. Timothy was with Paul in Rome when Paul wrote this letter. He had traveled with Paul on Paul’s second missionary journey when the church in Philippi was begun.

Just as a skilled workman trains an apprentice, Paul was preparing Timothy to carry on the ministry in his absence. Paul encouraged younger Christians to learn, to observe, to help, and then to lead. Paul expected older Christians to teach, to model, to mentor, and then to turn over leadership. The benefits of such a process are new enthusiasm and vision, new methods and energy. Are you a teacher? Whom are you apprenticing for God’s work? Are you a learner? How are you showing your eagerness to fulfill the mission God has for you?

20 I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare. 21 For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.

Paul observed that most believers are too preoccupied with their own needs to spend time working for Christ. Don't let your schedule and concerns crowd out your Christian service to and love for others.

22 But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. 23 I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me.

Paul was in prison (either awaiting his trial or its verdict) for preaching about Christ. He was telling the Philippians that when he learned of the court's decision, he would send Timothy to them with the news. Paul wanted them to know that he was ready to accept whatever came (1:21-26).

24 And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon.

Paul encouraged younger Christians with the following:

- ⇒ To learn
- ⇒ To observe
- ⇒ To help, and then
- ⇒ To lead

Paul expected older Christians to do the following:

- ⇒ To teach
- ⇒ To model
- ⇒ To mentor,
- ⇒ and then to turn over leadership.

The benefits of such a process are new enthusiasm and vision, new methods, and energy.

Question:

- ⇒ Are you a teacher?
- ⇒ Whom are you apprenticing for God's work?
- ⇒ Are you a learner?
- ⇒ How are you showing your eagerness to fulfill the mission God has for you?

25 But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, co-worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs.

Paul first used Timothy and then Epaphroditus as living examples of the selfless life that Jesus lived. Epaphroditus had delivered money from the Philippians to Paul; then he returned with this thank-you letter to Philippi. Epaphroditus may have been an elder in Philippi who, while staying with Paul, became ill (2:25-30; 4:18). After Epaphroditus recovered, he returned home. He is mentioned only in Philippians.

26 For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. 27 Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. 28 Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. 29 So then,

welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor people like him, ³⁰ because he almost died for the work of Christ. He risked his life to make up for the help you yourselves could not give me.

The world honors those who are intelligent, beautiful, rich, and powerful. What kind of people should the church honor? Paul indicates that we should honor those who give their lives for the sake of Christ, going where we cannot go ourselves. Our missionaries do that for us today by serving in places where we are not able to go.

“Joy is not the absence of suffering; it is the presence of God”

Sam Storms