

**Philippians 2**  
**July 28, 2024**

**Open with Prayer**

**HOOK:**

Andrew Murray is credited with this definition of humility: “Humility is not thinking less of ourselves, but it’s really not thinking of ourselves at all. Do you agree with this definition of humility? Why or Why not? How would you describe humility? [Let people engage]

**Transition:** We’re getting ready to read a very familiar passage from Phil 2. And Paul will challenge us to have an attitude that should be the same as Jesus. And central to Jesus’s attitude was to humble Himself. But there is so much more! It may feel like we’re drinking out of a fire hose because every verse could be processed for a full hour. So let’s see how far we get, and if we need to come back to this text next week, we can certainly do so. Let’s begin.

**BOOK:**

***Imitating Christ’s Humility***

2 If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, <sup>2</sup> then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. <sup>3</sup> Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. <sup>4</sup> Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

<sup>5</sup> Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

<sup>6</sup> Who, being in very nature God,  
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,  
<sup>7</sup> but made himself nothing,  
taking the very nature of a servant,  
being made in human likeness.  
<sup>8</sup> And being found in appearance as a man,  
he humbled himself  
and became obedient to death—  
even death on a cross!  
<sup>9</sup> Therefore God exalted him to the highest place  
and gave him the name that is above every name,  
<sup>10</sup> that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
<sup>11</sup> and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.

*Shining as Stars*

<sup>12</sup> 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, <sup>13</sup> for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

<sup>14</sup> Do everything without complaining or arguing, <sup>15</sup> so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe <sup>16</sup> as you hold out (or hold onto) the word of life—in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.

### *Timothy and Epaphroditus*

<sup>19</sup> I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. <sup>20</sup> I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. <sup>21</sup> For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. <sup>22</sup> 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. <sup>23</sup> I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. <sup>24</sup> And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon.

<sup>25</sup> But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs. <sup>26</sup> For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. <sup>27</sup> 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. <sup>28</sup> 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. <sup>29</sup> Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor men like him, <sup>30</sup> because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me.

### **Process Observations/Questions:**

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

### **LOOK:**

It takes faith to exercise the submissive mind. We must believe that God's promises are true and that they are going to work in our lives just as they worked in Paul's life. God works *in* us through the Word, prayer, and suffering; and we work *out* in daily living and service. God fulfills His purposes in us as we receive and believe His Word. Life is not a series of disappointing "ups and downs." Rather, it is a sequence of delightful "ins and outs." God works in—we work out! The example comes from Christ, the energy comes from the Holy Spirit, and the result is—JOY!

### **Close in Prayer**

## **Commentaries for Today's Lesson:**

**Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 2, pp. 73-83). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.***

## **THE GREAT EXAMPLE**

*Philippians 2:1–11*

People can rob us of our joy. Paul was facing his problems with people at Rome (Phil. 1:15–18) as well as with people in Philippi, and it was the latter who concerned him the most. When Epaphroditus brought a generous gift from the church in Philippi, and good news of the church's concern for Paul, he also brought the bad news of a possible division in the church family. Apparently, there was a double threat to the unity of the church; false teachers coming in from without (Phil. 3:1–3) and disagreeing members within (Phil. 4:1–3). What Euodia (“fragrance”) and Syntyche (“fortunate”) were debating about, Paul does not state. Perhaps they both wanted to be president of the missionary guild or the choir!

Paul knew what some church workers today do not know, that there is a difference between *unity* and *uniformity*. True spiritual unity comes from within; it is a matter of the heart. Uniformity is the result of pressure from without. This is why Paul opens this section appealing to the highest possible spiritual motives (Phil. 2:1–4). Since the believers at Philippi are “in Christ,” this ought to encourage them to work toward unity and love, not division and rivalry. In a gracious way, Paul is saying to the church, “Your disagreements reveal that there is a spiritual problem in your fellowship. It isn’t going to be solved by rules or threats; it’s going to be solved when your hearts are right with Christ and with each other.” Paul wanted them to see that the basic cause was *selfishness*, and the cause of selfishness is *pride*. There can be no joy in the life of the Christian who puts himself above others.

The secret of joy in spite of circumstances is *the single mind*. The secret of joy in spite of people is *the submissive mind*. The key verse is: “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better [more important] than themselves” (Phil. 2:3). In Philippians 1, it is “Christ first” and in Philippians 2 it is “others next.” Paul the soul winner in Philippians 1 becomes Paul the servant in Philippians 2.

It is important that we understand what the Bible means by “humility.” The humble person is not one who thinks meanly of himself; he simply does not think of himself at all! (I think Andrew Murray said that.) Humility is that grace that, when you know you have it, you have lost it. The truly humble person knows himself and accepts himself (Rom. 12:3). He yields himself to Christ to be a servant, to use what he is and has for the glory of God and the good of others. “Others” is the key idea in this chapter (Phil. 2:3–4); the believer’s eyes are turned away from himself and focused on the needs of others.

The “submissive mind” does not mean that the believer is at the beck and call of everybody else or that he is a “religious doormat” for everybody to use! Some people try to purchase friends and maintain church unity by “giving in” to everybody else’s whims and wishes. This is not what Paul is suggesting at all. The Scripture puts it perfectly: “ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake” (2 Cor. 4:5). If we have the single mind of Philippians 1, then we will have no problem with the submissive mind of Philippians 2.

Paul gives us four examples of the submissive mind: Jesus Christ (Phil. 2:1–11), Paul himself (Phil. 2:12–18), Timothy (Phil. 2:19–24), and Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25–30). Of course, the great

Example is Jesus, and Paul begins with Him. Jesus Christ illustrates the four characteristics of the person with the submissive mind.

### **He Thinks of Others, Not Himself (Phil. 2:5–6)**

The “mind” of Christ means the “attitude” Christ exhibited. “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5, NIV). After all, outlook determines outcome. If the outlook is selfish, the actions will be divisive and destructive. James says the same thing (see James 4:1–10).

These verses in Philippians take us to eternity past. “Form of God” has nothing to do with shape or size. God is Spirit (John 4:24), and as such is not to be thought of in human terms. When the Bible refers to “the eyes of the Lord” or “the hand of the Lord,” it is not claiming that God has a human shape. Rather, it is using human terms to describe divine attributes (the characteristics of God) and activities. The word “form” means “the outward expression of the inward nature.” This means that in eternity past, *Jesus Christ was God*. In fact, Paul states that He was “equal with God.” Other verses such as John 1:1–4; Colossians 1:15; and Hebrews 1:1–3 also state that Jesus Christ is God.

Certainly, as God, Jesus Christ did not need anything! He had all the glory and praise of heaven. With the Father and the Spirit, He reigned over the universe. But Philippians 2:6 states an amazing fact: He did not consider His equality with God as “something selfishly to be held on to.” Jesus did not think of Himself; He thought of others. His outlook (or attitude) was that of unselfish concern for others. This is “the mind of Christ,” an attitude that says, “I cannot keep my privileges for myself, I must use them for others; and to do this, I will gladly lay them aside and pay whatever price is necessary.”

A reporter was interviewing a successful job counselor who had placed hundreds of workers in their vocations quite happily. When asked the secret of his success, the man replied: “If you want to find out what a worker is really like, don’t give him responsibilities—give him *privileges*. Most people can handle responsibilities if you pay them enough, but it takes a real leader to handle privileges. A leader will use his privileges to help others and build the organization; a lesser man will use privileges to promote himself.” Jesus used His heavenly privileges for the sake of others—for *our* sake.

It would be worthwhile to contrast Christ’s attitude with that of Lucifer (Isa. 14:12–15) and Adam (Gen. 3:1–7). Many Bible students believe that the fall of Lucifer is a description of the fall of Satan. He once was the highest of the angelic beings, close to the throne of God (Ezek. 28:11–19), but he desired to be *on* the throne of God! Lucifer said, “I will!” but Jesus said, “*Thy* will.” Lucifer was not satisfied to be a creature; he wanted to be the Creator! Jesus was the Creator, yet He willingly became man. Christ’s humility is a rebuke to Satan’s pride.

Lucifer was not satisfied to be a rebel himself; he invaded Eden and tempted man to be a rebel. Adam had all that he needed; he was actually the “king” of God’s creation (“let them have dominion,” Gen. 1:26). But Satan said, “Ye shall be as God!” Man deliberately grasped after something that was beyond his reach, and as a result plunged the whole human race into sin and death. Adam and Eve thought only of themselves; Jesus Christ thought of others.

We expect unsaved people to be selfish and grasping, but we do not expect this of Christians, who have experienced the love of Christ and the fellowship of the Spirit (Phil. 2:1–2). More than twenty times in the New Testament, God instructs us how to live with “one another.” We are to prefer one another (Rom. 12:10), edify one another (1 Thes. 5:11), and bear each other’s burdens (Gal. 6:2). We should not judge one another (Rom. 14:13) but rather admonish one another

(Rom. 15:14). *Others* is the key word in the vocabulary of the Christian who exercises the submissive mind.

### **He Serves (Phil. 2:7)**

Thinking of “others” in an abstract sense only is insufficient; we must get down to the nitty-gritty of true service. A famous philosopher wrote glowing words about educating children but abandoned his own. It was easy for him to love children in the abstract, but when it came down to practice, that was something else. Jesus thought of others *and became a servant!* Paul traces the steps in the humiliation of Christ: (1) He emptied Himself, laying aside the independent use of His own attributes as God; (2) He permanently became a human, in a sinless physical body; (3) He used that body to be a servant; (4) He took that body to the cross and willingly died.

What grace! From heaven to earth, from glory to shame, from Master to servant, from life to death, “even the death of the cross!” In the Old Testament Age, Christ had visited earth on occasion for some special ministry (Gen. 18 is a case in point), but these visits were temporary. When Christ was born at Bethlehem, He entered into a *permanent* union with humanity from which there could be no escape. He willingly humbled Himself that He might lift us up! Note that Paul uses the word “form” again in Philippians 2:7, “the outward expression of the inward nature.” Jesus did not pretend to be a servant; He was not an actor playing a role. *He actually was a servant!* This was the true expression of His innermost nature. He was the God-Man, Deity and humanity united in one, and He came as a servant.

Have you noticed as you read the four Gospels that it is Jesus who serves others, not others who serve Jesus? He is at the beck and call of all kinds of people—fishermen, harlots, tax collectors, the sick, the sorrowing. “Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28). In the Upper Room, when His disciples apparently refused to minister, Jesus arose, laid aside His outer garments, put on the long linen towel, and *washed their feet!* (John 13) He took the place of a menial slave! This was the submissive mind in action—and no wonder Jesus experienced such joy!

During the American Civil War, Gen. George B. McClellan was put in charge of the great Army of the Potomac, mainly because public opinion was on his side. He fancied himself to be a great military leader and enjoyed hearing the people call him “a young Napoleon.” However, his performance was less than sensational. President Lincoln commissioned him General-in-Chief, hoping this would get some action; but still he procrastinated. One evening, Lincoln and two of his staff members went to visit McClellan, only to learn that he was at a wedding. The three men sat down to wait, and an hour later the general arrived home. Without paying any attention to the President, McClellan went upstairs and did not return. Half an hour later, Lincoln sent the servant to tell McClellan that the men were waiting. The servant came back to report McClellan had gone to bed!

His associates angry, Lincoln merely got up and led the way home. “This is no time to be making points of etiquette and personal dignity,” the President explained. “I would hold McClellan’s horse if he will only bring us success.” This attitude of humility was what helped to make Lincoln a great man and a great President. He was not thinking of himself; he was thinking of serving others. Service is the second mark of the submissive mind.

### **He Sacrifices (Phil. 2:8)**

Many people are willing to serve others *if* it does not cost them anything. But if there is a price to pay, they suddenly lose interest. Jesus “became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:8). His was not the death of a martyr but the death of a Saviour. He willingly laid down His life for the sins of the world.

Dr. J.H. Jowett has said, “Ministry that costs nothing accomplishes nothing.” If there is to be any blessing, there must be some “bleeding.” At a religious festival in Brazil, a missionary was going from booth to booth, examining the wares. He saw a sign above one booth: “Cheap Crosses.” He thought to himself, “That’s what many Christians are looking for these days—cheap crosses. My Lord’s cross was not cheap. Why should mine be?”

The person with the submissive mind does not avoid sacrifice. He lives for the glory of God and the good of others; and if paying a price will honor Christ and help others, he is willing to do it. This was Paul’s attitude (Phil. 2:17), Timothy’s (Phil. 2:20), and also Epaphroditus’ (Phil. 2:30). Sacrifice and service go together if service is to be true Christian ministry.

In his book *Dedication and Leadership*, Douglas Hyde explains how the Communists succeed in their program. A member of the Communist Party himself for twenty years, Hyde understands their philosophy. He points out that the Communists never ask a man to do a “mean, little job.” They always ask him boldly to undertake something that will cost him. They make big demands, and they get a ready response. Mr. Hyde calls “the willingness to sacrifice” one of the most important factors in the success of the Communist program. Even the youths in the movement are expected to study, serve, give, and obey, and this is what attracts and holds them.

A church council was planning the annual “Youth Sunday” program, and one of the members suggested that the teenagers serve as ushers, lead in prayer, bring special music. One of the teens stood up and said, “Quite frankly, we’re tired of being asked to do little things. We’d like to do something difficult this year, and maybe keep it going all year long. The kids have talked and prayed about this, and we’d like to work with our trustees in remodeling that basement room so it can be used for a classroom. And we’d like to start visiting our elderly members each week and taking them cassettes of the services. And, if it’s OK, we’d like to have a weekly witness on Sunday afternoons in the park. We hope this is OK with you.”

He sat down, and the new youth pastor smiled to himself. He had privately challenged the teens to do something that would cost them—and they enthusiastically responded to the challenge. He knew that sacrifice is necessary if there is going to be true growth and ministry.

The test of the submissive mind is not just how much we are willing to take in terms of suffering, but how much we are willing to give in terms of sacrifice. One pastor complained that his men were changing the words of the hymn from “Take my life and let it be” to “Take my wife and let me be!” They were willing for others to make the sacrifices, but they were unwilling to sacrifice for others.

It is one of the paradoxes of the Christian life that the more we give, the more we receive; the more we sacrifice, the more God blesses. This is why the submissive mind leads to joy; it makes us more like Christ. This means sharing His joy as we also share in His sufferings. Of course, when love is the motive (Phil. 2:1), sacrifice is never measured or mentioned. The person who constantly talks about his sacrifices does not have the submissive mind.

Is it costing *you* anything to be a Christian?

### **He Glorifies God (Phil. 2:9–11)**

This, of course, is the great goal of all that we do—to glorify God. Paul warns us against “vainglory” in Philippians 2:3. The kind of rivalry that pits Christian against Christian and

ministry against ministry is not spiritual, nor is it satisfying. It is vain, empty. Jesus humbled Himself for others, and God highly exalted Him; and the result of this exaltation is glory to God.

Our Lord's exaltation began with His resurrection. When men buried the body of Jesus, that was the last thing any human hands did to Him. From that point on, it was God who worked. Men had done their worst to the Saviour, but God exalted Him and honored Him. Men gave Him names of ridicule and slander, but the Father gave Him a glorious name! Just as in His humiliation He was given the name "Jesus" (Matt. 1:21), so in His exaltation He was given the name "Lord" (Phil. 2:11; see Acts 2:32–36). He arose from the dead and then returned in victory to heaven, ascending to the Father's throne.

His exaltation included sovereign authority over all creatures in heaven, on earth, and under the earth. All will bow to Him (see Isa. 45:23). It is likely that "under the earth" refers to the lost, since God's family is either in heaven or on earth (Eph. 3:14–15). One day all will bow before Him and confess that He is Lord. Of course, it is possible for people to bow and confess *today*, and receive His gift of salvation (Rom. 10:9–10). To bow before Him now means salvation; to bow before Him at the judgment means condemnation.

The whole purpose of Christ's humiliation and exaltation is the glory of God (Phil. 2:11). As Jesus faced the cross, the glory of the Father was uppermost in His mind, "Father, the hour is come; glorify Thy Son, that Thy Son also may glorify Thee" (John 17:1). In fact, He has given this glory to us (John 17:22), and one day we shall share it with Him in heaven (John 17:24; see Rom. 8:28–30). The work of salvation is much greater and grander than simply the salvation of a lost soul, as wonderful as that is. Our salvation has as its ultimate purpose the glory of God (Eph. 1:6, 12, 14).

The person with the submissive mind, as he lives for others, must expect sacrifice and service; but in the end, it is going to lead to glory. "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time" (1 Peter 5:6). Joseph suffered and served for thirteen years; but then God exalted him and made him the second ruler of Egypt. David was anointed king when he was but a youth. He experienced years of hardship and suffering, but at the right time, God exalted him as king of Israel.

The joy of the submissive mind comes not only from helping others, and sharing in the fellowship of Christ's sufferings (Phil. 3:10), but primarily from the knowledge that we are glorifying God. We are letting our light shine through our good works, and this glorifies the Father in heaven (Matt. 5:16). We may not see the glory today, but we shall see it when Jesus comes and rewards His faithful servants.

## **THE INS AND OUTS OF CHRISTIAN LIVING**

### *Philippians 2:12–18*

Few things are harder to put up with," wrote Mark Twain, "than the annoyance of a good example." Perhaps the thing most annoying about a good example is its inability to accomplish the same achievements in our own lives. Admiration for a great person can inspire us, but it cannot enable us. Unless the person can enter into our own lives and share his skills, we cannot attain to his heights of accomplishment. It takes more than an example on the outside; it takes power on the inside.

Paul has just presented Jesus Christ as our great Example in the exercise of the submissive mind. We read it, and we agree with it, *but how do we go about practicing it?* How could any mortal man ever hope to achieve what Jesus Christ achieved? It seems almost presumptuous to

even try! Here we are, trying to develop humility, and we are exercising pride by daring to imitate the Lord Jesus Christ!

The problem is really not that difficult. Paul is not asking us to “reach for the stars,” though the higher the goal the more we ought to achieve. Rather, he is setting before us the divine *pattern* for the submissive mind and the divine *power* to accomplish what God has commanded. “It is God which worketh in you” (Phil. 2:13). It is not by imitation, but by incarnation—“Christ liveth in me” (Gal. 2:20). The Christian life is not a series of ups and downs. It is rather a process of “ins and outs.” God works *in*, and we work *out*. We cultivate the submissive mind by responding to the divine provisions God makes available to us.

### **There Is a Purpose to Achieve (Phil. 2:12, 14–16)**

“Work out your own salvation” (Phil. 2:12) does not suggest, “Work *for* your own salvation.” To begin with, Paul is writing to people who are already “saints” (Phil. 1:1), which means they have trusted Christ and have been set apart for Him. The verb “work out” carries the meaning of “work to full completion,” such as working out a problem in mathematics. In Paul’s day it was also used for “working a mine,” that is, getting out of the mine all the valuable ore possible; or “working a field” so as to get the greatest harvest possible. The purpose God wants us to achieve is Christlikeness, “to be conformed to the image of His Son” (Rom. 8:29). There are problems in life, but God will help us to “work them out.” Our lives have tremendous potential, like a mine or a field, and He wants to help us fulfill that potential.

Cindy did not seem very happy when she arrived home from college to spend the holiday with her family. Her parents noticed her unusual behavior but were wise enough to wait until she was ready to share her problem with them. It happened after dinner.

“Mother, Dad, I have something to tell you, and I’m afraid it’s going to hurt you.”

“Just tell us what’s on your heart,” her father said, “and we’ll understand. We want to pray with you about it—whatever it is.”

“Well, you know that all during high school I talked about becoming a nurse, mainly because Mom is a nurse and I guess you expected me to follow in her footsteps. But I can’t go on. The Lord just doesn’t want me to be a nurse!”

Her mother smiled and took Cindy’s hand. “Dear, your father and I want God’s will for your life. If you do anything else, we’ll *all* be unhappy!”

Cindy had done the courageous thing; she had faced God’s will and decided that she wanted to work out *her own salvation*—her own Christian life—and not what somebody else wanted her to do. One of the wonderful things about being a Christian is the knowledge that God has a plan for our lives (Eph. 2:10) and will help us to work it out for His glory. Our God is a God of infinite variety! No two flowers are the same, no two snowflakes are the same; why should two Christians be the same? All of us must be like Christ, *but we must also be ourselves*.

The phrase “work out your own salvation” probably has reference particularly to the special problems in the church at Philippi; but the statement also applies to the individual Christian. We are not to be “cheap imitations” of other people, especially “great Christians.” We are to follow only what we see of Christ in their lives. “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1). Every “great saint” has feet of clay and ultimately may disappoint you, but Jesus Christ can never fail you.

In Philippians 2:14–15, Paul contrasts the life of the believer with the lives of those who live in the world. Unsaved people complain and find fault, but Christians rejoice. Society around us is “twisted and distorted,” but the Christian stands straight because he measures his life by God’s



Word, the perfect standard. The world is dark, but Christians shine as bright lights. The world has nothing to offer, but the Christian holds out the Word of life, the message of salvation through faith in Christ. In other words, as we allow God to achieve this purpose in our lives, we become better witnesses in a world that desperately needs Christ. Apply these characteristics to Jesus and you will see that He lived a perfect life in an imperfect world.

It is important to note that this purpose is achieved “in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation” (Phil. 2:15). Paul does not admonish us to retreat from the world and go into a spiritual isolation ward. It is only as we are confronted with the needs and problems of real life that we can begin to become more like Christ. The Pharisees were so isolated and insulated from reality that they developed an artificial kind of self-righteousness that was totally unlike the righteousness God wanted them to have. Consequently, the Pharisees forced a religion of fear and bondage on the people (read Matt. 23), and they crucified Christ because He dared to oppose that kind of religion. It is not by leaving the world but by ministering to it that we see God’s purpose fulfilled in our lives.

### **There Is a Power to Receive (Phil. 2:13)**

The principle Paul lays down is this: God must work *in* us before He can work *through* us. This principle is seen at work throughout the Bible in the lives of men like Moses, David, the Apostles, and others. God had a special purpose for each man to fulfill, and each man was unique and not an imitation of somebody else. For example, it took God forty years to bring Moses to the place where He could use him to lead the people of Israel. As Moses tended sheep during those forty years, God was working in him so that one day He might work through him. *God is more interested in the workman than in the work.* If the workman is what he ought to be, the work will be what it ought to be.

Too many Christians obey God only because of pressure on the outside, and not power on the inside. Paul warned the Philippians that not his presence with them but their desire to obey God and please Him was the important thing (Phil. 1:27; 2:12). They could not build their lives on Paul because he might not be with them very long. It is sad to see the way some ministries in the church weaken or fall apart because of a change in leadership. We have a tendency to please men, and to obey God only when others are watching. But when you surrender to the power of God within you, then obedience becomes a delight and not a battle.

The power that works in us is the power of the Holy Spirit of God (John 14:16–17, 26; Acts 1:8; 1 Cor. 6:19–20). Our English word *energy* comes from the word translated “worketh” in Philippians 2:13. It is God’s divine energy at work in us and through us! The same Holy Spirit who empowered Christ when He was ministering on earth can empower us as well. But we must recognize the fact that the energy of the flesh (Rom. 7:5) and of the devil (Eph. 2:2; 2 Thes. 2:7) are also at work. Because of the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, God’s divine energy is available to us (Eph. 1:18–23). The power is here, but how do we use it? What “tools” does God use, by His Spirit, to work in our lives? There are three “tools”: the Word of God, prayer, and suffering.

***The Word of God.*** “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the Word of God, which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe” (1 Thes. 2:13). God’s divine energy is released in our lives through His inspired Word. The same Word that spoke the universe into being can release divine power in our lives! But we have a responsibility to *appreciate* the Word, and not treat it the way we treat the words of men. The Word of God is

unique: it is inspired, authoritative, and infallible. If we do not appreciate the Word, then God's power cannot energize our lives.

But we must also *appropriate* the Word—"receive it." This means much more than listening to it, or even reading and studying it. To "receive" God's Word means to welcome it and make it a part of our inner being. God's truth is to the spiritual man what food is to the physical man.

Finally, we must *apply* the Word; it works only in those "that believe." When we trust God's Word and act on it, then God's power is released in our lives. The angel's promise to Mary in Luke 1:37—"For with God nothing shall be impossible"—is translated "For no word from God shall be void of power" in the *American Standard Version* (1901). God's Word has the power of accomplishment in it, and faith releases that power.

We see this truth operating in the life of Jesus. He commanded the crippled man to stretch out his hand, and the very command gave him the power to obey and be healed (Matt. 12:13). He commanded Peter to walk to Him on the water, and the command enabled Peter to do so, as long as he exercised faith (Matt. 14:22–33). It is faith in God's promises that releases God's power. His commandments are His enablements. The Holy Spirit wrote down the promises for us in the Word, and He gives us the faith to lay hold of these promises. "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ. And so through Him the 'Amen' is spoken by us to the glory of God" (2 Cor. 1:20, NIV).

**Prayer.** So, if we want God's power working in us, we must spend time daily with the Word of God. But we must also pray, because *prayer* is the second "tool" God uses to work in the lives of His children. "Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us" (Eph. 3:20). The Holy Spirit is closely related to the practice of prayer in our lives (Rom. 8:26–27; Zech. 12:10). The Book of Acts makes it clear that prayer is a divinely ordained source of spiritual power (Acts 1:14; 4:23–31; 12:5, 12), and the Word of God and prayer go together (Acts 6:4). Unless the Christian takes time for prayer, God cannot work in him and through him. In the Bible and in church history, the people God used were people who prayed.

**Suffering.** God's third "tool" is *suffering*. The Spirit of God works in a special way in the lives of those who suffer for the glory of Christ (1 Peter 4:12–19). The "fiery trial" has a way of burning away the dross and empowering the believer to serve Christ. Paul himself had experienced God's power in that Philippian jail when he was beaten and thrust into the stocks in the inner prison; for he was able to sing and praise God in spite of his suffering (Acts 16:19–33). His "fiery trial" also enabled him to forgive the jailer. It was not the earthquake that brought conviction to the man; the earthquake almost led him to suicide! It was Paul's encouraging word, "Don't do it! We are all here!" (TLB) This kind of love broke the man's heart, and he fell before Paul asking how to be saved.

The Word of God, prayer, and suffering are the three "tools" that God uses in our lives. Just as electricity must run through a conductor, so the Holy Spirit must work through the means God has provided. As the Christian reads the Word and prays, he becomes more like Christ; and the more he becomes like Christ, the more the unsaved world opposes him. This daily "fellowship of His sufferings" (Phil. 3:10) drives the believer back to the Word and prayer, so that all three "tools" work together to provide the spiritual power he needs to glorify Christ.

If we are to have the submissive mind, and the joy that goes with it, we must recognize that there is a purpose to achieve (God's plan for our lives), a power to receive (the Holy Spirit), and a promise to believe.

## **There Is a Promise to Believe (Phil. 2:16–18)**

What is this promise? *That joy comes from submission.* The world's philosophy is that joy comes from aggression: fight everybody to get what you want, and you will get it and be happy. The example of Jesus is proof enough that the world's philosophy is wrong. He never used a sword or any other weapon; yet He won the greatest battle in history—the battle against sin and death and hell. He defeated hatred by manifesting love; He overcame lies with truth. *Because He surrendered He was victorious!* And you and I must dare to believe His promise, “For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted” (Luke 14:11). “How happy are the humble-minded, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs” (Matt. 5:3, PHILLIPS).

There is a twofold joy that comes to the person who possesses and practices the submissive mind: a joy hereafter (Phil. 2:16) and a joy here and now (Phil. 2:17–18). In the day of Christ (see Phil. 1:6, 10), God is going to reward those who have been faithful to Him. “The joy of thy Lord” is going to be a part of that reward (Matt. 25:21). The faithful Christian will discover that his sufferings on earth have been transformed into glory in heaven! He will see that his work was not in vain (1 Cor. 15:58). It was this same kind of promise of future joy that helped our Savior in His sufferings on the cross (Heb. 12:1–2).

But we do not have to wait for the return of Christ to start experiencing the joy of the submissive mind. That joy is a present reality (Phil. 2:17–18), and it comes through sacrifice and service. It is remarkable that in two verses that discuss sacrifice, Paul uses the words *joy* and *rejoice*—and repeats them! Most people would associate sorrow with suffering, but Paul sees suffering and sacrifice as doorways to a deeper joy in Christ.

In Philippians 2:17, Paul is comparing his experience of sacrifice to that of the priest pouring out the drink offering (Num. 15:1–10). It was possible that Paul's trial would go against him and he would be executed. But this did not rob Paul of his joy. His death would be a willing sacrifice, a priestly ministry, on behalf of Christ and His church; and this would give him joy. “Sacrifice and service” are marks of the submissive mind (Phil. 2:7–8, 21–22, 30), and the submissive mind experiences joy even in the midst of suffering.

It takes faith to exercise the submissive mind. We must believe that God's promises are true and that they are going to work in our lives just as they worked in Paul's life. God works *in* us through the Word, prayer, and suffering; and we work *out* in daily living and service. God fulfills His purposes in us as we receive and believe His Word. Life is not a series of disappointing “ups and downs.” Rather, it is a sequence of delightful “ins and outs.” God works *in*—we work *out*! The example comes from Christ, the energy comes from the Holy Spirit, and the result is—JOY!

## **A PRICELESS PAIR**

*Philippians 2:19–30*

A reporter in San Bernardino, California arranged for a man to lie in the gutter on a busy street. Hundreds of people passed the man but not one stopped to help him or even show sympathy!

Newspapers across the country a few years ago told how thirty-eight people watched a man stalk a young lady and finally attack her—and none of the spectators even picked up a phone to call the police!

A couple of teenagers in Detroit discovered a woman in a telephone booth who had suffered a heart attack. They carried her to a nearby house and rang the bell, asking for help. The only reply they received was, “Get off my porch—and take her with you!”

A Kentucky doctor was driving down the highway to visit a patient when he saw an accident take place. He stopped and gave aid to the injured and then made his visit. One of the drivers he helped sued him!

Is it possible to be a “Good Samaritan” today? Must everybody harden his heart in order to protect himself? Perhaps “sacrifice and service” are ancient virtues that somehow do not fit into our so-called modern civilization. It is worth noting that even in Paul’s day mutual concern was not a popular virtue. The Christians at Rome were not too interested in the problems at Philippi; Paul could not find *one person* among them willing to go to Philippi (Phil. 2:19–21). Times have not changed too much.

In this paragraph, Paul is still discussing the submissive mind. He has given us a *description* of the submissive mind in the example of Jesus Christ (Phil. 2:1–11). He has explained the *dynamics* of the submissive mind in his own experience (Phil. 2:12–18). Now he introduces us to two of his helpers in the ministry, Timothy and Epaphroditus, and he does this for a reason. He knows that his readers will be prone to say, “It is impossible for us to follow such examples as Christ and Paul! After all, Jesus is the very Son of God, and Paul is a chosen apostle who has had great spiritual experiences!” For this reason, Paul introduces us to two “ordinary saints,” men who were not apostles or spectacular miracle workers. He wants us to know that the submissive mind is not a luxury enjoyed by a chosen few; it is a necessity for Christian joy, and an opportunity for *all* believers.

### **Timothy (Phil. 2:19–24)**

Paul probably met Timothy on his first missionary journey (Acts 14:6ff), at which time, perhaps, the youth was converted (1 Cor. 4:17). Apparently, Timothy’s mother and grandmother had been converted first (2 Tim. 1:3–5). He was the son of a Jewish mother and Gentile father, but Paul always considered the young man his own “dearly beloved son” in the faith (2 Tim. 1:2). When Paul returned to Derbe and Lystra while on his second journey, he enlisted young Timothy as one of his fellow laborers (Acts 16:1–4). In one sense, Timothy replaced John Mark, whom Paul had refused to take along on the journey because of Mark’s previous abandonment of the cause (Acts 13:13; 15:36–41).

In Timothy’s experience, we learn that the submissive mind is not something that suddenly, automatically appears in the life of the believer. Timothy had to develop and cultivate the “mind of Christ.” It was not natural for him to be a servant; but, as he walked with the Lord and worked with Paul, he became the kind of servant that Paul could trust and God could bless. Notice the characteristics of this young man.

***He had a servant’s mind (vv. 19–21).*** To begin with, Timothy naturally cared for people and was concerned about their needs. He was not interested in “winning friends and influencing people”; he was genuinely interested in their physical and spiritual welfare. Paul was concerned about the church at Philippi and wanted to send someone to convey his concern and get the facts. There were certainly hundreds of Christians in Rome (Paul greets twenty-six of them by name in Rom. 16); yet not one of them was available to make the trip! “All seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ’s” (Phil. 2:21). In a very real sense, all of us live either in Philippians 1:21 or Philippians 2:21!

But Timothy had a natural concern for the welfare of others; he had a servant's mind. It is too bad that the believers in Rome were so engrossed in themselves and their own internal wranglings (Phil. 1:15–16) that they had no time for the important work of the Lord. This is one of the tragedies of church problems; they divert time, energy, and concern away from the things that matter most. Timothy was not interested in promoting any party or supporting any divisive cause. He was interested only in the spiritual condition of God's people, and this concern was *natural* to him. How did this concern develop? The answer is in the next characteristic of this remarkable young man.

***He had a servant's training (v. 22).*** Paul did not add Timothy to his "team" the very day the boy was saved. Paul was too wise to make an error like that. He left him behind to become a part of the church fellowship in Derbe and Lystra, and it was in that fellowship that Timothy grew in spiritual matters and learned how to serve the Lord. When Paul returned to that area a few years later, he was happy to discover that young Timothy "was well reported of the brethren" (Acts 16:2). Years later, Paul would write to Timothy about the importance of permitting new converts to grow before thrusting them into important places of ministry (1 Tim. 3:6–7).

A popular local nightclub performer visited a pastor and announced that he had been saved and wanted to serve the Lord. "What should I do next?" he asked.

"Well, I'd suggest you unite with a good church and start growing," the pastor replied. "Is your wife a Christian?"

"No, she isn't," the musician replied. "I hope to win her. But, do I have to wait? I mean, I'd like to do something for God right now."

"No, you don't have to wait to witness for the Lord," explained the pastor. "Get busy in a church, and use your talents for Christ."

"But you don't know who I am!" the man protested. "I'm a big performer—everybody knows me. I want to start my own organization, make records, and appear before big crowds!"

"If you go too far too fast," warned the pastor, "you may hurt yourself and your testimony. And the place to start winning people is right at home. God will open up places of service for you as He sees you are ready. Meanwhile, study the Bible and give yourself a chance to grow."

The man did not take the pastor's counsel. Instead, he set up a big organization and started out on his own. His "success" lasted less than a year. Not only did he lose his testimony because he was not strong enough to carry the heavy burdens, but his constant traveling alienated him from his wife and family. He drifted into a "fringe group" and disappeared from public ministry, a broken and bankrupt man.

"His branches went out farther than his roots went deep," the pastor said. "When that happens, you eventually topple."

Paul did not make this mistake with Timothy. He gave him time to get his roots down, and then he enlisted the young man to work with him on his missionary tours. He taught Timothy the Word and permitted him to watch the apostle in his ministry (2 Tim. 3:10–17). This was the way Jesus trained His disciples. He gave personal instruction balanced by on-the-job experience. Experience without teaching can lead to discouragement, and teaching without experience can lead to spiritual deadness. It takes both.

***He had a servant's reward (vv. 23–24).*** Timothy knew the meaning of "sacrifice and service" (Phil. 2:17), but God rewarded him for his faithfulness. To begin with, Timothy had the joy of helping others. To be sure, there were hardships and difficulties, but there were also victories and blessings. Because Timothy was a "good and faithful servant," faithful over a few things, God rewarded him with "many things," and he entered into the joy of the submissive

mind (Matt. 25:21). He had the joy of serving with the great Apostle Paul and assisting him in some of his most difficult assignments (1 Cor. 4:17ff; Timothy is mentioned at least twenty-four times in Paul's letters).

But perhaps the greatest reward God gave to Timothy was to choose him to be Paul's replacement when the great apostle was called home (see 2 Tim. 4:1–11). Paul himself wanted to go to Philippi, but had to send Timothy in his place. But, what an honor! Timothy was not only Paul's son, and Paul's servant, but he became Paul's substitute! His name is held in high regard by Christians today, something that young Timothy never dreamed of when he was busy serving Christ.

The submissive mind is not the product of an hour's sermon, or a week's seminar, or even a year's service. The submissive mind grows in us as, like Timothy, we yield to the Lord and seek to serve others.

### **Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25–30)**

Paul was a "Hebrew of the Hebrews"; Timothy was part Jew and part Gentile (Acts 16:1); and Epaphroditus was a full Gentile as far as we know. He was the member of the Philippian church who risked his health and life to carry their missionary offering to the apostle in Rome (Phil. 4:18). His name means "charming" and a charming Christian he is!

*He was a balanced Christian (v. 25).* Paul could not say enough about this man—"My brother, and companion in labor, and fellow-soldier." These three descriptions parallel what Paul wrote about the Gospel in the first chapter of this letter:

"my brother"—

"the "fellowship in the Gospel" (Phil. 1:5)

"my companion in labor"—

"the furtherance of the Gospel" (Phil. 1:12)

"my fellow soldier"—

"the faith of the Gospel" (Phil. 1:27)

Epaphroditus was a balanced Christian!

Balance is important in the Christian life. Some people emphasize "fellowship" so much that they forget the furtherance of the Gospel. Others are so involved in defending the "faith of the Gospel" that they neglect building fellowship with other believers. Epaphroditus did not fall into either of these traps. He was like Nehemiah, the man who rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem with his sword in one hand and his trowel in the other (Neh. 4:17). You cannot build with a sword nor battle with a trowel! It takes both to get the Lord's work accomplished.

Dr. H.A. Ironside used to tell about a group of believers who thought only of "fellowship." They had little concern for reaching the lost or for defending the faith against its enemies. In front of their meeting place they hung a sign: JESUS ONLY. But the wind blew away some of the letters, and the sign read—US ONLY. It was a perfect description of a group of people who were not balanced Christians.

*He was a burdened Christian (vv. 26–27, 30).* Like Timothy, Epaphroditus was concerned about others. To begin with, he was concerned about *Paul*. When he heard in Philippi that Paul was a prisoner in Rome, he volunteered to make that long, dangerous trip to Rome to stand at Paul's side and assist him. He carried the church's love gift with him, protecting it with his own life.

Our churches today need men and women who are burdened for missions and for those in difficult places of Christian service. “The problem in our churches,” states one missionary leader, “is that we have too many spectators and not enough participants.” Epaphroditus was not content simply to contribute to the offering. He gave *himself* to help carry the offering!

But this man was also burdened for *his own home church*. After arriving in Rome, he became very ill. In fact, he almost died. This delayed his return to Philippi, and the people there became concerned about him. But Epaphroditus was not burdened about himself; he was burdened over the people in Philippi *because they were worried about him!* This man lived in Philippians 1:21, not Philippians 2:21. Like Timothy, he had a natural concern for others. The phrase “full of heaviness” in Philippians 2:26 is the same description used of Christ in Gethsemane (Matt. 26:37). Like Christ, Epaphroditus knew the meaning of sacrifice and service (Phil. 2:30), which are two of the marks of the submissive mind.

***He was a blessed Christian (vv. 28–30).*** What a tragedy it would be to go through life and not be a blessing to anyone! Epaphroditus was a blessing to Paul. He stood with him in his prison experience and did not permit even his own sickness to hinder his service. What times he and Paul must have had together! But he was also a blessing to his own church. Paul admonishes the church to honor him because of his sacrifice and service. (Christ gets the glory, but there is nothing wrong with the servant receiving honor. Read 1 Thes. 5:12–13.) There is no contradiction between Philippians 2:7 (“made Himself of no reputation”) and Philippians 2:29 (“hold such in reputation”). Christ “emptied Himself” in His gracious act of humiliation, and God exalted Him. Epaphroditus sacrificed himself with no thought of reward, and Paul encouraged the church to hold him in honor to the glory of God.

He was a blessing to Paul and to his own church, and he is also a blessing to *us today!* He proves to us that the joyful life is the life of sacrifice and service, that the submissive mind really does work. He and Timothy together encourage us to submit ourselves to the Lord, and to one another, in the Spirit of Christ. Christ is the Pattern we follow. Paul shows us the power (Phil. 4:12–19); and Timothy and Epaphroditus are the proof that this mind really works.

Will you permit the Spirit to reproduce “the mind of Christ” in you?

***Lightner, R. P. (1985). Philippians. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 2, pp. 652-658) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books***

II. Examples for Living the Christian Life (2:1–30).

A. *The Son of God whose attitude the believer is to share (2:1–18)*

This passage is a continuation of the exhortation begun in 1:27–30. The entire section (1:27–2:18) states what Paul called the saints at Philippi to do. It includes the famous *kenōsis* or self-emptying passage (2:5–11), in which the Son of God Himself is set forth as the One whose attitude the believer should share.

1. THE DECLARATION (2:1)

2:1. In 1:27 Paul had written about living the Christian life in harmony with the message on which it is based. He followed that message with a call to show forth spiritual unity. This unity is possible because of the reality of the four qualities mentioned in 2:1. The “if” clauses, being

translations of first-class conditions in Greek, speak of certainties. So in this passage “if” may be translated “since.” Paul wrote here about realities, not questionable things. Paul appealed on the basis of (a) **encouragement from being united with Christ ...** (b) **comfort from His love ...** (c) **fellowship with the Spirit ...** (d) **tenderness and compassion.**

“Encouragement” is from a Greek word related to the one Christ used in referring to the Holy Spirit as “the Counselor” (John 14:16; “Comforter,” KJV). It may also be translated “exhortation” in the sense of either rebuke or comfort. Since each believer had received this work of the Spirit, Paul used it as a basis to appeal for their spiritual unity.

Also they each had “comfort from His [God’s] love.” God’s love in people’s hearts produces spiritual unity in their lives.

“Fellowship with the Spirit” is a result of the Spirit’s permanent indwelling ministry (cf. 1 Cor. 6:19). This may refer, however, to fellowship that comes *from* the Holy Spirit, just as encouragement comes *from* Christ and comfort comes *from* love.

Paul also spoke of “tenderness (*splanchna*; cf. Phile. 7, 20) and compassion.” One of the Spirit’s ministries is to produce within each believer a concern and love for other members of God’s family. This may be received or rejected by a believer, but the Spirit’s work is a reality and is a basis for spiritual unity.

## 2. THE EXHORTATIONS (2:2–4)

2:2. On the basis of what was presented in verse 1, Paul exhorted his readers to show in practical ways the unity which was theirs in Christ. Their expression of that spiritual unity would make his joy complete. Corresponding to the four realities in verse 1 are four specific ways in which their spiritual unity would be realized. They would be **like-minded**, have **the same love**, be **one in spirit** (*sympsychoi*), and be one in **purpose**.

2:3–4. Paul gave further exhortations, also based on the declaration of the fourfold reality expressed in verse 1. The terms the apostle used reveal an underlying problem in the church at Philippi. The situation Paul addressed evidently was prompted by self-centeredness among certain Christians.

**Nothing** was to be done **out of selfish ambition** (v. 3). The same word (*eritheian*) appears in 1:17 to describe the attitude of those who opposed Paul. Without question such behavior is of the flesh and not the Spirit (cf. Gal. 5:20, which uses the same word). **Vain conceit**, meaning “empty glory,” was probably the root cause of their selfish ambition.

The two negatives are followed by a positive exhortation: **in humility consider others better than yourselves**. **But**, a word of contrast, introduces these words. Humility before God and man is a virtue every child of God needs to strive for. A spirit of pride in human relations indicates a lack of humility before God. Paul exhorted the Philippians to consider others before themselves (cf. 1 Peter 5:5–6). “This will go far toward removing disharmony” (Homer A. Kent, Jr., “Philippians,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 11: 122).

Paul explained how humility can be expressed (Phil. 2:4). Instead of concentrating on self, each believer should be concerned for **the interests of others** in the household of faith (cf. Rom. 12:10). Preoccupation with oneself is sin.

## 3. THE HUMILIATION OF CHRIST (2:5–8)

Christ is the supreme example of humility and selfless concern for others (vv. 5–8). These verses, along with verses 9–11, constitute a grand statement on Christology.



2:5. Believers are exhorted to have the same attitude—selfless humility—**Christ** exhibited in His humiliation and condescension. The word here translated **attitude** is translated “like-minded” in verse 2.

2:6–8. The word translated **nature** (*morphē*) in verses 6 and 7 is a crucial term in this passage. This word (translated “form” in the KJV and NASB) stresses the inner essence or reality of that with which it is associated (cf. Mark 16:12). Christ Jesus, Paul said, is of the very essence (*morphē*) of God, and in His incarnation, He embraced perfect humanity. His complete and absolute deity is here carefully stressed by the apostle. The Savior’s claim to deity infuriated the Jewish leaders (John 5:18) and caused them to accuse Him of blasphemy (John 10:33).

Though possessing full deity (John 1:14; Col. 2:9), Christ did not consider His **equality with God** (Phil. 2:6) as **something to be grasped** or held onto. In other words Christ did not hesitate to set aside His self-willed use of deity when He became a man. As God He had all the rights of deity, and yet during His incarnate state He surrendered His right to manifest Himself visibly as the God of all splendor and glory.

Christ’s humiliation included His making **Himself nothing**, taking the **very nature** (*morphē*) **of a servant**, and **being made in human likeness** (v. 7). These statements indicate that Christ became a man, a true human being. The words “made Himself nothing” are, literally, “He emptied Himself.” “Emptied,” from the Greek *kenoō*, points to the divesting of His self-interests, but not of His deity. “The very nature of a servant” certainly points to His lowly and humble position, His willingness to obey the Father, and serve others. He became a man, a true human being. “Likeness” suggests similarity but difference. Though His humanity was genuine, He was different from all other humans in that He was sinless (Heb. 4:15).

Thus it is seen that Christ, while retaining the essence of God, was also human. In His incarnation He was *fully* God and *fully* man at the same time. He was God manifest in human flesh (John 1:14).

Some have wrongly taught that the phrase, **being found in appearance as a man** (Phil. 2:8), means that He only *looked* human. But this contradicts verse 7. “Appearance” is the Greek *schēmati*, meaning an outer appearance which may be temporary. This contrasts with *morphē* (“very nature”) in verses 6 and 7, which speaks of an outer appearance that reveals permanent inner quality.

The condescension of Christ included not only His birth—the Incarnation in which He became the God-Man—but also His **death**. And it was the most cruel and despicable form of death—**even death on a cross!** (v. 8) This form of capital punishment was limited to non-Romans and the worst criminals.

No better example of humiliation and a selfless attitude for believers to follow could possibly be given than that of Christ. With this example before them, the saints at Philippi should be “like-minded” (v. 2) and live humbly before their God and each other.

#### 4. THE EXALTATION OF CHRIST (2:9–11)

God the Father is the subject in these verses, whereas in verses 6–8 God the Son was the subject. Christ’s obedience was followed by the Father’s exaltation of Him to the place of highest honor. God exalted and honored the One men despised and rejected.

2:9. Christ’s exaltation and His receiving a **name that is above every name** was the answer to His high-priestly prayer (John 17:5). The exaltation refers to His resurrection, ascension, and glorification at the Father’s right hand (Acts 2:33; Heb. 1:3). His “name” is not merely a title; it refers to His person and to His position of dignity and honor.

2:10. In keeping with Christ's exaltation and high **name ... every knee** will one day **bow** and acknowledge Him for who He really is. Paul stressed the same truth in his letter to the Romans (Rom. 14:11). Both instances reflect Isaiah's prophecy (Isa. 45:23) of the singular greatness of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The extent of Christ's sovereign authority is delineated in the threefold phrase, **in heaven and on earth and under the earth**. No intelligent being—whether angels and saints in heaven; people living on the earth; or Satan, demons, and the unsaved in hell—in all of God's universe will escape. All will bow either willingly or they will be made to do so.

2:11. What all will **confess** is that **Jesus Christ is Lord**. This, the earliest Christian creed, meant that Jesus Christ is Yahweh-God. One day all will be made to acknowledge that Jesus Christ is all He claimed to be—very God of very God. Unfortunately, for many it will be too late for the salvation of their souls. The exalted place the Savior now occupies and the universal bowing in the future in acknowledgement of His lordship is all **to the glory of God the Father**.

## 5. THE EXHORTATIONS CONTINUED (2:12–18)

In these verses Paul returned to the exhortations which he began earlier in verses 2–4.

2:12–13. **Therefore** connects these verses with what immediately precedes them. Christ obeyed the Father and carried out His plan even to death on the cross (v. 8). The Philippian Christians needed to obey, to follow Paul's instruction which was drawn from Christ's example.

The exhortation was direct and pointed, but tempered with love, for he called the believers **my dear friends**. This tender expression doubtless reminded them of the experiences they shared with the apostle and Silas when they first came to Christ and established their church (Acts 16:19–40). When Paul was with them, they followed his instructions willingly and quickly. He reminded them of this before he asked them to do the same at the present time, even though he was far from them. He had earlier spoken of his absence (Phil. 1:27).

The special request he had for them, in view of their needs and in view of the example of Christ, is stated forcefully—**continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling**.

It is commonly understood that this exhortation relates to the personal salvation of the saints at Philippi. They were told to “work out,” to put into practice in their daily living, what God had worked in them by His Spirit. They were not told to work *for* their salvation but to work *out* the salvation God had already given them. In view of the apparent problems of disunity and pride among those believers this interpretation seems correct. Some were not doing their work selflessly and with the interests of others ahead of their own (cf. 2:3–4).

Some writers understand Paul's challenge to refer to the corporate life of the whole assembly in Philippi. Those who hold this view find support in the immediate context where Paul argued against their looking exclusively to their own needs (cf. v. 4). In this view “salvation” refers to the whole assembly's deliverance from disunity, pride, and selfishness.

Perhaps it is best to see *both* the outworking of personal salvation and the corporate salvation or deliverance of the whole assembly from whatever held them back from experiencing God's best.

This outworking was to be done “with fear and trembling,” with a complete trust in God and not in themselves.

The only way this could be realized was through **God** who would enable them to do it (v. 13). Paul told the Philippian saints that God worked in them so that they could do His good pleasure and accomplish **His good purpose**. Both divine enablement and human responsibility are involved in getting God's work done. Believers are partners with God, laboring together with

Him. The verb **works** (v. 13) means “energizes” or “provides enablement.” God makes His own both willing and desirous to do His work.

2:14–16. These verses give specific instructions on how to work out God’s “good purpose” (v. 13) in relation to daily Christian living.

**Everything** was to be done **without complaining or arguing** (v. 14). The order of the Greek words here places emphasis on everything a believer does. The present tense of the verb **do** suggests that this was to be done continually. “Complaining” is the translation of a word which reflects a bad attitude expressed in grumbling. The apostle may have had in mind the behavior of the Israelites who often complained to Moses and in turn to God (cf. 1 Cor. 10:10). “Arguing” reflects a legal connotation of disputing and may refer, at least in part, to the practice of going to civil courts to settle their differences (cf. 1 Cor. 6:1–11).

The importance of the kind of behavior called for is set forth in Philippians 2:15–16. Before their testimony for Christ could ever be effective in the community where they lived, the Philippians needed to set some things straight in their own assembly.

Evidently the believers were complaining (to God and each other) and arguing (with each other). As a result they were not **without fault** among the unregenerate; they were not shining **like stars** in their world (2:15). The Philippian assembly needed to show themselves as united and as one in Christ. Non-Christians were not being attracted to Him by the saints’ strifes and contentions.

**Blameless** (*amemptoi*, v. 15) means “above reproach.” This does not mean sinless perfection. The corporate testimony of the church is in view. All believers are called on to live out the salvation God has worked in them—to progress in their spiritual maturity. The people were to live so that those outside of Christ could not rightfully point an accusing finger at them. **Pure** translates *akeraioi*, a word that was used of wine which had not been diluted and of metal which had not been weakened in any way. Jesus also used the word when He told the Twelve to be “innocent” as doves (Matt. 10:16). The Greek words for “blameless” and “pure” here (Phil. 2:15) differ from those translated “blameless” and “pure” in 1:10 (see comments on 1:10).

The Philippians lived **in a crooked and depraved generation** (2:15). Again it seems that Paul had the unbelieving Israelites in mind. Moses had used similar words to describe Israel who had gone astray (cf. Deut. 32:5). Peter used the same terminology (“corrupt generation,” Acts 2:40) that Christ did (“perverse generation,” Matt. 17:17).

The world today, like theirs, is unscrupulous and perverted. Most people have turned their backs on God and truth. In this kind of world God’s people are to “shine like stars” (Phil. 2:15; cf. Matt. 5:14–16). They are to be **children of God without fault**.

A child of God is in God’s family, but the unregenerate are alienated from Him. They are His enemies. God’s sovereign plan is to use His Word, administered by God’s people, to transform His enemies into His friends by the regenerating work of God’s Spirit.

The Greek word *epechontes*, **hold out** (v. 16) means either “hold forth” or “hold firmly.” The former fits better here. It was used in secular Greek of offering wine to a guest at a banquet. As the Philippian saints held out (or offered) **the word of life** to others, Paul would then be able to **boast (glory) on the day of Christ** that he had not labored in vain with them. The “day of Christ” refers to the Rapture when the Savior returns and meets His own in the air (1 Thes. 4:13–18). This boasting was not a selfish ambition of Paul’s; he was concerned with God’s honor.

2:17–18. Paul’s stated desire to be able to rejoice when he would see Christ and to be sure he had not labored in vain for the Philippians is followed by a statement about his joy in the midst of suffering. The apostle knew that death as a martyr was a real possibility for him.

Paul viewed himself as **being poured out like a drink offering** on behalf of the Philippians (v. 17). But instead of sorrowing he rejoiced. “Poured out” is from the Greek word *spendomai*, used of a drink offering given as a sacrifice to God. The possibility of release from prison was not uppermost in Paul’s mind as it had been before (cf. 1:24–26). He now viewed his death as imminent. Later, near the actual time of his death, he used this same language (2 Tim. 4:6).

**The sacrifice and service** (perhaps this could be understood as “sacrificial service”) stemmed from their faith. Paul used the same word for sacrifice (*thysia*) in Romans 12:1. There the sacrifice the believer-priest offers is his body. “Service” (*leitourgia*) is the same word translated “ceremonies” in Hebrews 9:21 (cf. Phil. 2:25, 30). This means that the work the Philippians did for God was considered an act of worship. All of this brought rejoicing to the apostle’s heart even though it resulted in his facing imminent death.

Paul wanted his friends at Philippi to experience the same joy he had (2:18) and to **be glad and rejoice with him**.

### *B. The servants of God whose manner of life the believer is to follow (2:19–30)*

In chapter 2 Paul first discussed the fact that the attitude of Christ, who humbled Himself and became obedient to death, should be shared by believers (vv. 1–18). Then Paul pointed out (vv. 19–30) that choice servants of God also provide examples for others to follow.

#### 1. TIMOTHY AND PAUL (2:19–24)

Paul’s incarceration had made it impossible for him to visit the saints at Philippi. He had referred to this fact earlier (v. 12). His deep and abiding concern for his friends’ spiritual welfare prompted him to send Timothy to visit and to minister in his place. Timothy was at the time Paul’s companion (1:1), though evidently not a prisoner. The letter would be delivered by Epaphroditus and Timothy’s visit would follow.

2:19. The concern Paul demonstrated in sending Timothy was an example for the Philippians and all believers to follow. Not only did Paul give them the gospel and lead them to Christ, but he also wanted to be sure they were growing spiritually. His genuine interest in them continued.

Not certain of his own future, the apostle prefaced his desire with the words **I hope in the Lord Jesus**. This was an unusual way to speak of Timothy’s proposed journey. Paul was especially aware that his release or death could come at any time.

The intent of Timothy’s visit was clearly stated—**that I also may be cheered**. Both Paul’s letter and Timothy’s visit would certainly encourage the believers at Philippi. But the apostle also wanted to be encouraged as Timothy returned with good news from them.

Another lesson to be learned from Paul’s sending Timothy is the need for selflessness. Timothy was close to Paul and dear to his heart. If Paul ever needed Timothy, it was while he was there in Rome under house arrest. Yet he was willing to sacrifice Timothy’s companionship so that others could be helped.

2:20. Paul’s young son in the faith had a deep interest and concern for the Philippians. In fact, Paul had **no one else** in Rome who was **like him**. Timothy’s interest in their **welfare** was unexcelled. He was an excellent example of one who was selfless, more concerned about others than himself (cf. 2:3–4). The believers in the Philippian assembly needed to share Timothy’s sincere interest in the welfare of others. The words “no one else like him” are literally “no one of equal soul” (*isopsychon*; cf. “one in spirit,” *sympsychoi*, in 2:2).

2:21. This verse appears to make a rather broad claim. Did Paul mean to include everybody he ever knew? Or did he mean that of all who were near him in Rome, none compared to Timothy? Did Paul mean all others whom he might have contacted to run the errand were more interested in their **own interests** than in those of Christ's? The second suggestion seems correct. Timothy stood out as a rare gem in a world of self-seekers (cf. 1:15, 17).

2:22. The Philippians knew Timothy, so they knew that what the apostle said about him was true. From the start, when he worked with Paul in Philippi, Timothy was faithful (cf. Acts 16). He had been closely associated with Paul since Paul's second missionary journey. The man had often been tested and **proved**. Paul was Timothy's spiritual **father**, and Timothy worked with him as his **son**. Together they both served the Lord as slaves **in the work of the gospel**.

Timothy's qualities were unexcelled. His whole life stands as an example for every child of God. Those in the Philippian assembly who were deficient in any of these qualities must have been pricked in conscience as they read Paul's letter, even as believers are today.

2:23–24. After his grand commendation of Timothy, Paul reaffirmed his intention to send him to them (v. 23). Just as soon as Paul knew how things were going, he would **send him**. Apparently Paul was waiting for some decision in his legal case.

In view of verse 24, Paul must have expected release from his chains. Significantly Paul's confidence was now **in the Lord** (cf. "in the Lord Jesus," v. 19). This phrase may be rendered "if the Lord wills."

Though the Scriptures include no specific statement about Paul's release, it must have occurred since he was imprisoned again in Rome during which time he wrote his last letter, 2 Timothy. Though there is no record of Paul's revisiting Philippi, he may have returned there after his release.

## 2. EPAPHRODITUS AND PAUL (2:25–30)

It is uncertain whether Epaphroditus was still with Paul at Rome when Paul wrote Philippians or whether Epaphroditus had already left to return to Philippi. Traditionally Epaphroditus has been viewed as the bearer of this letter to the Philippians. He is mentioned only here and in 4:18.

2:25. Since the church had sent **Epaphroditus** to bring Paul "the gifts" (of money, 4:18) and to discover how things were going with him, they probably intended for him to stay and assist Paul indefinitely. However, the apostle chose to send him back to them. But Paul wanted to be doubly sure the believers knew how highly he thought of Epaphroditus. He called him **my brother, fellow worker ... fellow soldier**, and **messenger**. He shared Paul's spiritual life, labors, and dangers. He willingly took the role of a servant to assist Paul. What an exemplary lifestyle for every believer to follow. This man, whose name means "charming," served the Lord while he served others. The words **take care** translate the noun *leitourgon* ("serve as a priest"), which is related to the word "service" (*leitourgia*) in verse 17 (cf. v. 30). Epaphroditus' ministry to Paul was a priestly kind of service (cf. 4:18).

2:26–27. Epaphroditus had a deep concern for his friends in Philippi. He longed for all of them. He was **distressed because** he knew they had **heard he was ill**. His longing for the Philippians was exactly like Paul's (1:8). And the distress Epaphroditus experienced was similar to the agony Christ experienced in Gethsemane (Matt. 26:37; Mark 14:33).

Whatever illness Epaphroditus suffered was serious because he **almost died** (Phil. 2:27, 30). There is no indication that Paul had the ability to heal him or that he tried to do so. Neither is there any hint that Epaphroditus was sick because of being out of God's will.

Paul praised God for His **mercy** shown to Epaphroditus in restoring him to health and in sparing Paul **sorrow upon sorrow**. Thankfulness filled the apostle's heart. Paul already had sorrow associated with his imprisonment. He loved and needed Epaphroditus, so Epaphroditus' death would have brought Paul additional heaviness.

2:28–30. Paul was indeed selfless. He had the best interests of the Philippian believers and Epaphroditus at heart. They were sorry because their messenger to Paul had been ill and could not do for the apostle what they had hoped. Anticipating what they might think, Paul took full responsibility for sending Epaphroditus home. With haste he arranged for his trip back to Philippi. He did so for two reasons: He wanted them to **be glad**, and he wanted to be relieved of all **anxiety** himself.

The believers in Philippi were not to think wrongly of Epaphroditus for coming home. They were not to think that he had failed when Paul needed him most. He was to be welcomed **in the Lord** and in fact to be honored.

Paul's desire here illustrates how believers ought to relate toward those who may be misunderstood by others. Genuine Christian love, a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22), is always desirable, for it defends others and overlooks their faults (1 Cor. 13:7).

Paul explained (Phil. 2:30) why the saints should receive Epaphroditus. This messenger from Philippi was so sick he **almost died**. It was while he was serving Christ that he became sick, and if he had died it would also have been for Christ.

The believers from Philippi could not be in Rome helping Paul. Epaphroditus was **risking his life** to do what they **could not** do. He was serving Christ while he served them and Paul. (The word **help** is *leitourgios*, “priestly service,” also used in v. 17; cf. v. 25.) As Christians serve Christ, they also serve others. The apostle reminded his readers of this so that they would receive Epaphroditus as they should.

***Dockery, D. S. (1998). The Pauline Letters In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), Holman Concise Bible Commentary (p. 584). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.***

## **CHRISTIAN UNITY (2:1–2:18)**

In this very significant section of the letter, Paul urged the church members to dismiss their pride and to live and serve together in unity. Anything less falls short of the gospel's standards. True unity will be realized by authentic meekness and selflessness, ultimately exemplified in the earthly life of Jesus. The attitude the church should exhibit was the one Jesus maintained.

Jesus' self-emptying served as the basis for the apostle's exhortation. Philippians 2:5–11, possibly a quotation from an early hymn in praise of Christ, taught that Jesus' self-emptying led to His exaltation by the Father. Jesus existed in the very nature of God and made Himself nothing, not giving up His deity but His heavenly glory and privileges. He lived a life of humble obedience and humbled Himself even to the point of dying for sinners on the cross. He was then gloriously exalted in His resurrection and ascension.

Paul's exhortation to unity involved Christians' working out their salvation with fear and trembling. This action brings about a spiritual community void of complaining and friction. They are encouraged to live as lights in the world, thus holding out the word of life to others and providing joy for the apostle on the day of Christ.

## **HUMILITY (2:19–30)**

Paul was willing to sacrifice himself in service for the church at Philippi and warmly commended his coworkers, Timothy and Epaphroditus, for their humble and sacrificial service as well. He told of his plan to send Timothy to them when there was further news for him to give. Also, he offered an explanation for Epaphroditus's return to them. Paul wanted to be sure the Philippians did not think that Epaphroditus failed in his task to serve Paul.

***Fields, W. C. (1972). Philippians. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), The Teacher's Bible Commentary (pp. 750-751). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.***

### **Humility and Unity (Phil. 2:1–2:18)**

The apostle now addresses himself to the need for humility among the church members as a basis for stronger fellowship. The supreme example for this spirit is Christ himself. The letter reaches a pinnacle in 2:5–11. Christ's humiliation and exaltation are presented as cause and effect. The believers are to remember his example (2:12–16).

*Special points*—"Conversation" in 1:27 should be translated "conduct" or "manner of life." Your entire pattern of living should be appropriate to a follower of Jesus! This may be an indirect reference to the Roman colonist's duty to be an example of the good citizen.

When Paul urges them to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (2:12) he is not suggesting that they could achieve their own salvation through the quantity or quality of their work. Rather, he is suggesting that there should be an out-working, a translation into word and deed, of the inward experience with Christ.

### **Plans (Phil. 2:19–30)**

The subject now turns to Paul's co-workers. Timothy is given a warm tribute (vv. 19–24). Paul hopes to send him to Philippi soon. He has hopes of being freed to make the journey himself (v. 24). In the meantime, Epaphroditus is returning with Paul's letter. Paul recounts Epaphroditus' illness which was almost fatal (v. 30) and commends him for staking his life in the service of Christ.

***The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). Philippians 2. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.***