

Philippians 2 • When Theology Intersects with Relationships

Introduction

In this section of Scripture we deal with a wonderful blend of theology and practical, everyday application. Passages like this form the basis for the concept that Christ truly is our example.

¹Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, ²make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. ³Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; ⁴do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. ⁵Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. ⁸Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

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[Read v.1-11]

Q: What are the 4 “ifs” mentioned by the apostle Paul in v.1? Define each one. What do they mean?

1. “...if there is any encouragement in Christ...” (What does it mean to encourage someone?)
2. “...if there is any consolation of love...” (or, “comfort from His love”); (What does it mean to comfort?)
3. “...if there is any fellowship of the Spirit...” (or, “with the Spirit,” or “in the Spirit”); (Meaning?)
4. “...if there is any affection and compassion...” (Meaning?)

Q: To whom or for whom are these “ifs” directed? That is, “...if there is any encouragement in Christ for...,” to whom would this condition be directed? Who is the intended recipient?

A: The obvious recipient of these “if” clauses is the apostle Paul. It could read, “Therefore, if there is any encouragement in Christ for me,” and so on.

Application: Reread each if-clause with Paul as the recipient, and then reread them changing the subject to yourself or a member of your study group.. For example, if “John” is in the group, have the person next to him read it as, “If there is any encouragement for John,” and so on. Practice doing the same thing for ourselves, our spouses, our children, and for the pastoral staff.

FYI: These “if” clauses, in the Greek, are called first-class conditions (first class out of a possible four classes). The importance of this is that in first-class conditions, the statement is assumed as true; that is, it is very close to reality. Therefore, these verses could also be translated, “If there is any encouragement in Christ for me, and there is....” They could also be translated, “Since there is encouragement in Christ for me....” The importance here is that Paul is affirming the love, encouragement, et cetera, of the Philippian church for him.

Q: Any conditional statement begins with an “if” and ends with a “then.” In the NIV, the “then” is inserted by the translators. What is the significance of verse 2, the “then” part of the statement?

A: What follows are the things that will make Paul’s joy complete.

[Read v.2]

Q: What are the 4 general things listed in verse 2 that will make Paul’s joy complete?

1. Be of the same mind;
2. Maintain the same love;
3. (Be) united in spirit;
4. (Be) intent on one purpose.

¹²So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

¹⁴Do all things without grumbling or disputing; ¹⁵so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, ¹⁶holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain. ¹⁷But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all. ¹⁸You too, I urge you, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me.

³Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; ⁴do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

⁵Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. ⁸Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Q: Now, a very important question. Answer each of the following questions. (The answer is the same for all.)

1. **Be of the same mind...about what?**
2. **Maintain the same love...concerning what?**
3. **(Be) united in spirit...over what issue?**
4. **(Be) intent on one purpose. What purpose?**

Paul is urging the Philippians to be united. What are they to be united about? Is it unity for the sake of unity?

A: The answer is found in 1:12-18.

[Read v.12-18 listed on the left.]

A: Paul is urging unity in regards to the progress of the gospel, what he terms in v.12 as, “work out your salvation” and then follows with many specific examples which identify how this is accomplished.

Point: Consider that at this time Paul is in prison and his life is in the balance; he could be executed at any moment. But the greatest passion of his life is the Gospel, and he wants there to be no division concerning it, whether it's working in the life of believers or for every opportunity to be presented to non-believers.

[Read v.3-4]

Q: What is the greatest threat to the progress of the gospel, as stated in verses 3-4? Is it Satan?

A: No, it's self-interests, especially as it involves relationships within the body of Christ.

Application: Make application to the local church. What kind of issues do people argue over, and in so doing hinder the progress of the gospel?

Application: What self-interests are you, personally, struggling with now in regards to other members of the church?

[Read v.5-11]

Q: Paul begins verses 5-11 by the words “Have this attitude in yourselves....” Have what attitude?

A: The attitude is that Christ, for the sake of bringing the good news, left His position in glory to become a bond-servant.

Q: This begs the question, a bond-servant to whom?

A: To the Father, of course.

Application: What is the application of this voluntary putting aside of glory for the sake of the Gospel, as it applies to members of the church?

Q: Do verses 6-7 teach that Jesus voluntarily laid aside His deity, or that existing “in the form of God,” He really wasn't equal to God in the first place?

A: Not at all. First of all, it is impossible for God to cease being God. Second, changing “forms” does not imply changing natures or essential qualities. Emptying Himself, therefore, was not an emptying of divine nature—or even attributes—but privileged position. Mark Twain's novel *The Prince and the Pauper*, describes the son of Henry VIII who, for a

while, changed positions with a poor boy in London. That illustrates the thought here.

Q: As a result of Christ's willful humiliation, what did the Father do for Him?

A: The Father "highly exalted" Him. The sense here is "super-exalted" Him. The result is that all authority in heaven and on earth is given to Him.

"And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.'"

—Matthew 28:18

Application: *What is the implication for the believer who has a need for recognition by others? What is the need, therefore, to exalt ourselves? How will exalting ourselves interfere with the progress of the gospel?*

Application: *When did Christ's exaltation take place? (After death.) Do we see the need to first die to our self for the sake of others?*

[Read v.12-18]

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Q: Why does verse 12 NOT teach salvation by works?

A: Because it says "work out your salvation," not "work **for** your salvation." The thought is this: Because we have been saved, let that salvation be worked out in the way we live and relate to one another.

Q: In verse 18 we see the word "joy." Where did we see it before? What's the conclusion?

A: Verse 2. The conclusion is that the Christians in Philippi—or anywhere else for that matter—could bring no greater joy to Paul than to be putting aside their own needs in favor of doing whatever it takes to involve themselves in the progress of the Gospel. He is warning against **anything** in the body that might cause disunity, which is always based on pride and self-interests.

[Note: *Biblical unity is always based on the Truth, on God's Word. Jesus prayed for us in John 17:17, "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth." We never ignore doctrinal error for the sake of unity. This is not an excuse to short-circuit a relationship in the name of doctrine; it's one of the things we're to strive together to work out.]*