

November 2, 2025 (Lesson 9)

SERVE WITH HUMILITY AND LOVE

1. **Be “Others-Focused”** (Philippians 2:1-4)
2. **Follow Christ’s Example** (Philippians 2:5-11)
3. **Be an Example to Others** (Philippians 2:12-16)

Central Truth: Christians follow Christ by serving others with humility and love.

Focus: Explore Christ’s humility and love, and serve others as He did.

Evangelism Emphasis: Christ humbly sacrificed Himself to save sinners.

Golden Text: “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5).

In Philippians 1, Paul discussed his imprisonment and the spiritual implications involved, especially as it related to this church’s persecution and spiritual oppression. Chapter 2 addresses the Philippians’ situation and their proper response. It appears there were some issues concerning unity (or lack thereof; also see 4:1-3). Paul addressed the issue of proper harmony in the church and laid the proper foundation for our motivation and response.

Scripture is clear that we are our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers (Rom. 14:13; 15:7). We need to teach one another (Heb. 3:13), lead one another by providing a positive example (Rom. 12:10), comfort one another (1 Thess. 4:18), and build up one another (1 Thess. 5:11). We must forgive one another (Eph. 4:32) and even put up with one another (“forbearing,” Col. 3:13), always seeking to understand one another. We are to “provoke” or intentionally stir up or pointedly confront one another to live out the proper attributes of the Christian life (Heb. 10:24). However, we must always love one another (John 13:34), and love must be the motivating factor in our humble dealings with others (Rom. 12:10).

When difficulties arise and answers are not easily visible, the best method of resolution is to look at Christ’s example and embrace the solutions He provides. That is what Paul does in this epistle, pointing his readers to Christ!

1. BE “OTHERS-FOCUSED”

A. Be Like-Minded (Philippians 2:1-2)

¹ If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, ² Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.

Paul gently but decisively called the Philippian church to a state of unity. “If there be” is better understood as “therefore, since you have” (v. 1). The “ifs” in the KJV are conditional, but do not express doubt. The idea is these provisions are found in Christ and made accessible to us. We must make sure they are embraced and incorporated in our lives and churches.

He then delineates four attributes believers are to incorporate (v. 1). First, “consolation in Christ” serves as the foundation for the remaining attributes. *Consolation* is literally “called alongside someone to assist them” and carries the sense of walking beside a person to encourage, teach, and persuade them “in Christ.” It is what Christ does for us and what He expects from us in our fellowship with other believers. Second, “comfort of love” addresses the encouragement we find in the love of God, who gave His one and only Son for us. We receive love from Him and can extend that love to others. Interestingly, there is an element of “gently cheering” others on because of the encouragement we have received from God. Freely we have received and freely we must give (Matt. 10:8).

Third, “fellowship of the Spirit” can mean “fellowship from the Spirit” or “fellowship dedicated to the Spirit.” Given the context, it here incorporates both aspects. We have (or should have!) continual communion with the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9-16; 2 Cor. 13:14). This vibrant and life-giving participation with His gifts and power enable us to come alongside those who are weak or struggling and serve as an example and resource for them. Fourth, “bowels and mercies” refer to the tender, affectionate emotions and godly passions that emanate from the innermost depths of our being. These, in turn, result in compassion or love in action (“mercies,” Col. 3:12; 2 Cor. 1:3).

Paul fully expected the Philippians to heed his admonition. Doing so would be a source of overflowing delight for him, resulting in complete contentment (“fulfil ye my joy,” 2:2a). True pastors do not minister for money (though providing for pastors is necessary and commanded; see 1 Tim. 5:17-18), but to see those in their charge embrace and incorporate the teaching, personal example, and provision found in Christ. Like Paul, this makes their times of opposition, struggle, and suffering worthwhile.

There were four other interdependent characteristics Paul said they must incorporate that would increase his joy (v. 2b). First, they must “be likeminded,” or think and operate in a wise, mature, and united manner. Second, they must have the “same love,” or continually embrace and share the love they have received from God. Third, they must be “of one accord” (literally, “same soul”), which emphasizes a collective mindset that has the same goal—to lift up Christ. Fourth, they must be “of one mind,” which echoes and emphasizes the first characteristic and the need for unity in thought and activity.

These characteristics are *qualitative* (relating to the quality of our character) and not *quantitative* (something that can be counted); this is true of all spiritual attributes. They cannot be metered, but are spiritual elements essential for the maturing follower of Christ. Thus, we cannot pick and choose which spiritual aspects (or the amount) we want to embrace.

§ *How does a proper relationship with Christ enable us to have proper relationships with fellow Christians?*

B. Esteem Others (Philippians 2:3-4)

³ Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. ⁴ Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

After laying out the foundational attributes, Paul addresses prohibited activity. Absolutely “nothing” is to be done in cheap, empty pride for selfish ambition (“strife”) or vain conceit

(“vainglory,” v. 3a; see 1:15-17). He contrasts this with the proper activity motivated by a proper mindset—operate in humility with no hint of arrogance or narcissism (“lowliness of mind”), which will result in considering others before we consider our own desires (“value others,” v. 3b NIV).

Verse 4 reemphasizes this attitude and admonishes us to continually and carefully be aware (“look”) that we do not focus on our needs, ambitions, goals, or desires (“own things”), but rather, we must be mindful of the needs and concerns of “others” (see 1 Cor. 12:25-27). The language and repetition reveal the Philippian church was experiencing some discord, and Paul wisely wanted to correct it before it became a problem. Some of the worst church disagreements and splits are motivated by selfishness and pride, rather than the apparent issue. We must constantly check our motivations and consideration of others. This does not mean we bend on everything, especially foundational issues, but we must first examine ourselves for godly motivation, and examine the issue from others’ perspectives. Indeed, we can do this in Christ (Phil. 2:13). We must, for it has eternal consequences.

Talents and Demons

I was discussing with a person the talent of a certain singer, whose life is antithetical to Christianity. The person wondered how someone with such talent could be so deceived. I stated, “The greater the talent, the bigger the demons.” This is true of performers and believers! We should not ignore our God-given talents, abilities, and ministries, but we must be prayerfully vigilant, obedient, and walk in love and sanctifying grace in everything we do.

2. FOLLOW CHRIST’S EXAMPLE

A. The Mind of Jesus (Philippians 2:5-8)

⁵ Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: ⁶ Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: ⁷ But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: ⁸ And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

Paul provided the powerful and perfect example of what he wanted the Philippians to comprehend and incorporate in their personal lives and congregational culture. They were interconnected! This section is known as the Christ Hymn and was probably one of the earliest creeds, teaching material, or hymns embraced by the early church. Everything in the epistle rises and falls on this passage. For the third time, Paul called them to have the proper mindset and attitude presented by “Christ Jesus” (v. 5). The repetition should not be overlooked. It was an immediate and definitive call to correct their current attitudes. The epistle reveals they were a very good church. Paul wanted them to be an excellent Christ-centered church—still applicable today.

The two aspects of Christ’s life addressed here are His preexistence (v. 6) and His life on earth (vv. 7-8). There has never been a time Christ did not exist; He is eternal (“being,” v. 6). He has always been God and thus has rightfully possessed the nature or “form of God.” He has always, by His essence, contained all the divine attributes inwardly and expressed those divine attributes outwardly (see John 1:1-5). Who He is cannot be separated from what He does. Thus, it is not inappropriate, blasphemous, or a violation of deity (“thought it not robbery,” Phil. 2:6) to assume what is rightfully His as Second Person of the Godhead. He is “equal with God” because He *is* God.

So, the Son in all His splendor, glory, and power willingly laid down those divine attributes (“made himself of no reputation,” v. 7). Some Bible translations render this as “emptied Himself,” but this misconstrues the meaning. Jesus did not empty or eliminate His deity. He chose to not exercise His divinity without ceasing to be God, so that He might experience what we experience. He became a “bond-servant” (NASB). He freely chose to come as one of us (“likeness” or form of humanity).

In the Old Testament, a slave could choose to become a bond-servant in the household of the master (see Ex. 21:5-6). The slave came before the judge and expressed his desire to become part of

the household. The slave's ear was placed against the doorpost of the home and pierced with a sharp metal object, signifying the permanent "bonding" of the servant to the household. The parallel is stunning. Jesus, the God of glory, in cooperation with the Father and Spirit, chose to become a servant and had not His ear, but His whole, incarnate body pierced and joined to the household of humanity through the cross of Calvary!

From the manger to the grave, Christ experienced the fullness of humanity with its pains, disappointments, temptations, and persecution, as well as its triumphs (Phil. 2:8a). As omniscient God, He knew what He would experience, including the agony of death on a cross (v. 8b). Nonetheless, He obediently and submissively chose (attentively listening and making a conscious decision to follow God's will) to come for our sakes. Only in Christianity is the Greater sacrificed for the lesser. This is the humility Paul sought for the Philippians. It is a sobering reminder that we need to embrace Christ's example and attitude. Through sanctification, daily we lay down our ambitions and incorporate *holiness* (perfect or complete love for God that surpasses and curtails all other desires), so we might be like Him (see 1 Thess. 4:3; Gal. 5:22-24).

§ *How can we cultivate Christlike thinking and actions?*

B. The Exaltation of Jesus (Philippians 2:9-11)

⁹ Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: ¹⁰ That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; ¹¹ And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Having addressed the preexistence and incarnation of Christ, Paul shifts to His exaltation, resulting from His humility and obedience. "Wherefore" is grammatically emphatic to highlight the shift from Christ's efforts to what the Father has done on His behalf (v. 9). Five aspects are detailed.

First, the Father "hath highly exalted him" (v. 9a). Paul uses an exclusive word to describe the exaltation (used here and John 12:32). The emphasis is on an exceptionally high honor that places

Christ in a unique category. No one else has or will ever receive this honor of recognition by the Father for what Christ has accomplished—providing the supreme example to be emulated and the provision of salvation from sin for those who accept Him (Rom. 1:16). This exaltation was initiated in the Resurrection and Ascension (see Eph. 1:20) and will find its completion in the throne room of God (see Rev. 5:1-14; 7:9-10).

Second, He was given a name above every other name (Phil. 2:9b), amplifying His uniqueness. In Hebrew history and culture, names carried great importance. They reflected the hopes of the parents, the character of the person, or a message from God (see 1 Sam. 1:20; Gen. 17:5; Hos. 1:6). This originated in the names God used to reveal His nature (Ex. 6:3; Matt. 1:23). Revelation 19:12, 16 reveals Christ is given a name that He alone knows.

Third, “at the name of Jesus” every aspect of creation and the Kingdom “shall bow” before Him (Phil. 2:10a). The name *Jesus* means “Savior,” or the One who came to “save His people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21). Therefore, every realm of creation (Phil. 2:10b) shall bow in deep submission and adoration to Christ and recognition of who He is. A literal rendering of this verse suggests “every knee” includes those who rejected His salvation, the demons who opposed Him, and Satan himself shall bow before Him!

Fourth, “every tongue [shall] confess” His lordship (v. 11a). God will not force everyone to confess His lordship. Instead, everyone will be confronted with the truth and admit who He is. Isaiah 45:23 foretells this event in the context of moving from the way things are because of sin and rebellion to what God fully intended for His people. Paul is noted for his “already/not yet” theology. That is, he reminds us God has already implemented His plan and His will, even though we have not yet experienced the completion thereof. We live in the expectation that what God has begun in us, He will bring to completion (Phil. 1:6). Our faith is not based on fantasy, but fact.

Fifth, this will be done “to the glory of God the Father” (2:11b). From the foundation of creation, God had a plan for the redemption of humanity (Rev. 5:6; 13:8). His desire for free and complete fellowship necessitated a plan to bring us unto Himself (2 Cor. 5:19). Everything Christ does (His preexistence, incarnation, and exaltation), brings “glory” to God. Christ’s work emphasizes the excellence, magnificence, and preeminence of God. As stated in Jesus’ model prayer, we are to make God’s name “hallowed” by our own actions and attitudes (Matt. 6:9).

Christ’s Exaltation

Past, present, and future find their meaning . . . in light of Christ’s victory over sin, death, and the grave—and in His exalted state that will be fully realized in His victorious return in kingly glory.—Albert Mohler

3. BE AN EXAMPLE TO OTHERS

A. God’s Good Purpose (Philippians 2:12-13)

¹² Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. ¹³ For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

“Wherefore” points back to the previous section and admonished the church to keep in mind the example and attitude of Christ (2:5-11), as well as Paul’s admonition concerning care for one another (1:27—2:4), as he shifted to an interconnected topic (2:12a). He reminded the Philippians of the nature of their relationship (“my beloved”) and their obedience whether he was present or absent. The next phrase (“work out your own salvation,” v. 12b) has often been misunderstood. Some wrongly see this as a suggestion of works righteousness, adding the requirement of works to make our salvation complete and acceptable before God.

Proper understanding of the phrase is based on five aspects. First, Paul had highlighted the believers’ willful obedience, which is foundational to salvation. Second, he was addressing the entire

church, composed of many individuals, who were to build up one another and work together as a unified body (see vv. 3-4). This care is the natural response for those who are saved.

Third, the aforementioned already/not yet aspect is found here. As believers, we are already saved, but our salvation (being made completely whole) is a process. We have been justified (Rom. 3:24-25) and our sins have been forgiven (Eph. 1:7)—these things are complete and secure. However, we are to continually live out and conform to what has been accomplished through sanctification (Rom. 15:16; 1 Thess. 4:3). This process starts at salvation, but continues throughout our lives. Some have illustrated the process like this: Salvation cuts the tree down (God’s part); sanctification addresses the roots that remain (our part with the Spirit’s help).

Fourth, this process is not to be taken lightly, but approached with reverence (“fear”) for God’s presence and provision and a continual understanding of the eternal consequences of success or failure (“trembling”). Fifth, the process is not undertaken unaccompanied (Phil. 2:13), for God loves us and is very active in our lives to help us in the process (see Deut. 7:7-9). Thankfully, God is able to effectively bring the process to full fruition—if we do not frustrate it through disobedience.

God’s Agents

We, Jesus’ followers, are the agents assigned to carry out God’s will on earth. Too easily we expect God to do something for us when instead God wants to do it through us.—Philip Yancey

B. Lights in a Dark World (Philippians 2:14-16)

¹⁴ Do all things without murmurings and disputings: ¹⁵ That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; ¹⁶ Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain.

The Apostle Paul further highlighted the interconnectedness of God’s expectations and our obedience (a conscious decision of the will, resulting in implementation, v. 14). It is a partnership. We must do what is expected and Biblical without grumbling (“murmurings”) and/or thinking we

know better (“disputings”). The language brings to mind an insolent child—whose view and experience are limited—fussing with a parent who has the child’s best interests at heart.

Paul did not specify “the what,” but rather “the how.” As noted, sanctification is a lifelong process and is deeply personal. While there are certain Word-centered parameters of expectation for every disciple of Christ (John 17:17), each person has a different personality, dreams, and desires (both good and bad). We all have distinct aspects of our hearts and minds that need to be addressed and sanctified. Thus, the Spirit deals with us on an individual basis, as well as corporately (Rom. 15:16; 1 Cor. 6:11; 1 Peter 3:15). This may mean an activity one believer can engage in without sin may open the door of temptation for another. The activity may be harmless itself, but create desires or responses that lead others into dangerous territory and/or hurt our testimonies. Therefore, the Spirit will protect and check us; that is, implement a personal conviction (John 16:13). We must embrace these without hesitation.

The goal is to be “blameless” (without defect) and “harmless” (innocent or unmixed with evil), worthy to be called the sons and daughters of God (Phil. 2:15a). Paul further emphasized this with the phrase “without rebuke.” This can also be translated “spotless,” thus requiring no reprimand from God or our spiritual leaders. We are then reminded of the sinful nature of the society in which we live and the need for us to serve as beacons of light shining in the darkness, illuminating the way for others (v. 15b). This imagery is consistent with the teaching of Jesus (Matt. 5:14-16) and His personal example (Matt. 4:16-17; John 1:4-5). Our inner spiritual conditions are outwardly evident to others through our attitudes and actions. How bright are our lights?

Verse 16 of the text continues Paul’s admonition to the Philippians to be Word-centered so they may receive the provision found in “the word of life.” Scripture is living (John 6:63), speaks to first-century and twenty-first century believers (Heb. 4:12), and can impart life (Prov. 4:4).

Paul shifted the focus to his personal desire (Phil. 2:16b). If the Philippians were obedient to his instruction, he would be able to boast with godly and spiritual pride (“rejoice”) at the appearing of Christ, knowing his ministry was not empty and worthless (“in vain”). Those who minister to us carry a heavy load. We need to pray for them and let them know how much we appreciate their labor in the Lord.

§ *How can we, and why must we, as Christians “shine like stars” (v. 15 CSB)?*

A LIFELONG, SPIRIT-DEPENDENT PROCESS

The Christian experience can be divided into two aspects: what God has done for us and what He expects of us because of what He has done. These two aspects are clearly visible in this lesson. We do not earn salvation; it is a gift from God. However, to whom much is given, much is required (Luke 12:48). Obedience and the working out of the gift of salvation we have received is a lifelong, Spirit-dependent process. It may be difficult and frustrating at times, but the process is clearly worth the effort and goal—to be like Christ!

Daily Devotions

- M. Recognizing a Dangerous Situation (Genesis 44:18-34)
- T. Taking a Life-Threatening Risk (Esther 4:1-17)
- W. Standing With God (Jeremiah 26:8-15)
- T. Christlike Service (Mark 10:35-45)
- F. Humble Service (Acts 20:17-24)
- S. Reward for Service (Galatians 6:4-9)