

Philippians Chapter 2

www.thepriscillainitiative.com

Genre:

- **Letter:** sometimes referred to as Epistles
 - Written in response to a specific need or circumstance.

Context:

- **Author:** Written by Paul (with Timothy- his disciple)
 - Around 61 AD; about 30 years after Christ's death; original generation still alive
 - One of 4 letters written while Paul is in prison in Rome
- **Original audience:**
 - The Christians in Philippi;
 - not one church; lots of small churches within the city
- **What was going on?**
 - They had sent their member, Epaphroditus, with a gift to deliver to Paul. Paul wrote the letter to thank them for their support/encouragement while he's imprisoned.
 - Paul was also concerned about coming persecutions and the members not all getting along→ written to instruct them to work together
- **Bonus:** Read Acts, chapter 16, for some of the historical accounts in the Epistles

Observe: What's Happening?- *What is the text saying?*

- Paul invites them to live in unity
 - Vs 2- "make my joy complete by being like-minded, one in spirit"
 - Vs 3- Do nothing out of selfish ambition; value others above yourself; look to the interests of others
 - Roman culture, it was all about reputation, position, honor
 - Vs 4- think of the larger good over yourself
- Imitate Christ's humility
 - Paul's use of poetry highlights its significance; being the heart of the letter
- Vs 9-10 THEREFORE
 - Because of Christ's humbling himself, God exalted him; was able to accomplish his work

- Vs 12/13- Again, this idea of growing, sanctification
 - “Continue to work out your salvation,”
 - “God who works in you”
- Vs 14/15- Idea of standing out in a dark world
 - Deut 32:5- Jewish literature often compared the righteous with light
- Sending Timothy and Epaphroditus
 - Vs 22- teachers often viewed close disciples as sons; wants to send Timothy to encourage them
 - Epaphroditus- messenger who almost died on the long journey. It wasn’t safe to send money with just anyone. It would have been a trusted person to carry the gift from Philippians all the way to Paul in Rome

Interpret: What does it mean? *What is the central lesson the author wanted to communicate? What does it teach us about God?*

- **The Church as a Unified Community:**
 - If we really love Christ and are allowing him to change us from the inside out, we should be able to live in loving community with each other.
 - When we see each other as fellow “spirit-carriers”/ambassadors/family members, we should have a sense that we need to work in one direction
 - All of that should produce affection and empathy for one another
 - There are SO many clashes in the modern-day church
 - Music, buildings, theology, culture, politics, moral behavior, etc
 - SO HOW DO WE DO THIS?!
- **The Answer: Think of yourself the way Jesus did!**
 - “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ”
 - **In your relationships with one another, have the mindset of Christ**
 - Not self-focused; not bringing our thinking in line with each other, but in line with Christ’s thinking!
- **What was the mindset of Christ?**
 - Verse 6- Jesus didn’t use his position to his advantage
 - the NT culture was all about using your status to your advantage; completely counter-cultural
 - Rulers like Alexander the Great and Augustus were domineering, military conquerors.
 - Paul’s message would have seemed absurd!
 - Vs 7: God as servant:

- It was unusual for people of status to even eat with a servant, much less act like one
 - Vs 7: “made himself nothing” can also mean “emptied himself”
 - This does not mean he emptied himself of divinity; it was about being truly divine; emptied himself of his rights
 - Word picture from Isaiah 53:12- the servant who poured out his life in death
- Vs 8- humbled himself and became obedient to death on a cross
 - the cross was the epitome of a shameful death
 - about his obedience to go all the way to the cross;
 - NT Wright: he is the God of self-giving love
- Vs 9-11: Paul showing the victory in it all
 - Paul references Isaiah 45:23 to show Christ is equal to God- “to me and me alone, every knee shall bow and every tongue shall swear”
 - Christ is the Messiah
- Paul building a proof: point A → point B → point C
- **Live in unity by living like Christ**
- **THEN We’ll be a witness!**
 - Remember how the church is to live in a way that exemplified the final restoration/kingdom living; we are God’s ambassadors
 - Vs 14- without grumbling and complaining; shine like stars
 - Point C → Live in unity by living like Christ and you will be a shining example to the world around you

“As you look at the incarnate son of God dying on the cross, the most powerful thought you should think is this: this is the true meaning of who God is. He is the God of self-giving love.”
-NT Wright, Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters

Application: What does it mean for you? *Personal application*

- Our God is known most clearly when he abandons his rights for the sake of the world. Can you think of ways you still think of yourself before “the sake of the world”?
- How can we bring a sense of unity to our lives-- our families, churches, communities, world?
- Did anything else speak to you from the reading?