

**Adult Sunday Bible Study Lesson**  
**Paul's Letter to the Church at Philippi**

**September 19, 2021**

**Imitate Christ**

**Situational Context:** After encouraging these believers, Paul continues to exhort them.

**Philippians 1:27-28 (ESV)** <sup>27</sup> **Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel,** <sup>28</sup> **and not frightened in anything by your opponents.** This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God.

**Lesson Theme: Philippians 2:12-15.** Given the instructions in the previous verses, Paul urges them to work out in their own lives what God is working in them. This is the process of sanctification, the stage in Christian salvation which involves struggle, failure, and continuing struggle. This struggle is God's means on working in us as we work out our salvation with fear and trembling. His encouragement to imitate Christ is the struggle he is talking about. This inner conflict is a sign of our regeneration. We struggle because we try to win on our own strength and works. This results in failure. We learn to lean on Christ and His work in us to proceed to the goal, maturity, or Christlikeness. When we work, we find out that the victory is solely by grace.

**1. In Priorities: Philippians 2:1-4 (ESV)** <sup>1</sup> **So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy,** <sup>2</sup> **complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.** <sup>3</sup> **Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.** <sup>4</sup> **Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.**

**Interpretation:** In their union with the Savior, they find encouragement to pursue unity with each other. To follow Christ's example, they must first be in Christ. Believers are encouraged because Christ loves them (Gal 2:20), and because they love Christ and one another (v. 2). Participation in the Spirit is a phrase that may also be rendered "fellowship produced by the Spirit." Pride is competitive by nature and tries to lift a person above others, so promoting conflicts rather than harmony. By contrast, humility accepts a place of service, with concern for the needs and interests of others (v. 4). Love (v. 2) is essential for humility (Php 1:9; 1Co 13:4, 1Co 13:5). Philippians 2:1-3

### **Supporting Texts:**

**Colossians 3:12 (ESV)** <sup>12</sup> Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience,

**Galatians 5:26 (ESV)** <sup>26</sup> Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

**Romans 15:1 (ESV)** <sup>1</sup> We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves.

### **Discussion Starters:**

**What is the Spirit instructing us to do in verses 1 and 2?**

**What does our willingness to comply say about us?**

**How does verses 3 and 4 affect our flesh?**

**What do we need in order to heed verse 3 and 4?**

**2. By Example: Philippians 2:5-11 (ESV)** <sup>5</sup> Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> And being

**found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.<sup>9</sup> Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,<sup>10</sup> so 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.**

**Interpretation:** This "hymn to Christ", the "Carmen Christi" may be divided into six stanzas. The first three (vv. 6-8) celebrate Christ's humiliation, the last three (vv. 9-11) His exaltation. The word "form" refers to the underlying reality and not to appearance only. Jesus' being in "the form of God" means that He is divine. Grasped, this figure of speech means that His equality with God was already possessed. Jesus was not trying to become God and did not cling to the privileges that were always His.

Made himself nothing. Lit. "emptied Himself." Christ is not said to have removed from Himself His identity as God. The phrase means that He humbled Himself, relinquishing His heavenly status, not His divine being. He emptied Himself of His will being obedient to the Father's will. The nature of His self-emptying is defined in three phrases that follow ("taking . . . being born . . . being found"). the likeness of men. Christ is truly human.

In order to die (v. 8), He had to be completely human. At the same time, Paul makes a distinction between Christ and other human beings. And regarding His divine nature He remains transcendent over created reality; He cannot cease to be a heavenly being even in His humiliation.

Christ's appearance as a man was not an illusion. He revealed Himself through a complete and genuine human nature united with His divine nature in one Person, who is both human and divine. The language here is parallel to the phrase "made himself nothing" in v. 7. Each act occurs by the free exercise of Christ's own will. Paul's words embrace Christ's whole lifetime of obedience, while emphasizing that the supreme expression of obedience was His death.

The accent is on Christ's willingness to suffer the most shameful and painful of deaths, His active obedience, rather than on the atoning significance of the event. The Father's act of exalting Jesus is a direct response to Christ's obedience. Christ is restored to the glorious status He had at the beginning but voluntarily relinquished for a time in order to become a human being.

At the name of Jesus may mean "the name belonging to Jesus," i.e., "Lord" (v. 11). Paul more likely means that the utterance of the name "Jesus" is the signal that "every knee should bow" to offer Him worship and acclaim Him Lord.

Christ's humility is His glory. The "name that is above every name" (v. 9) is "Lord." In the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament), God's name is represented by the title "Lord" (Greek *kyrios*). Christ is now acclaimed to be what He has always been, the true God. The ascription of praise embraces both the humanity ("Jesus") and the deity ("Lord") of Christ; He is worshiped as the God-Man.

Jesus Christ is the Son of the Father. So united are the Persons of the Godhead that the act of worshiping the Son glorifies the Father.

### **Supporting Texts:**

**2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)** <sup>21</sup> For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

**John 16:28 (ESV)** <sup>28</sup> I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father."

**John 5:19 (ESV)** <sup>19</sup> So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.

**1 John 5:20 (ESV)** <sup>20</sup> And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.

## **Discussion Starters:**

**How is humility and obedience connected?**

**What did Christ empty Himself of? See John 5:19**

**When will Christ's exaltation happen?**

**What does Christ's final exaltation mean for us?**

**3. In Maturation: Philippians 2:12-15 (ESV) <sup>12</sup> Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, <sup>13</sup> for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. <sup>14</sup> Do all things without grumbling or disputing, <sup>15</sup> that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,**

**Interpretation:** The use of human effort (v. 12), far from violating God's will, is just what He commands for achieving His saving purpose. Having invoked the example of Christ, Paul reassures the Philippians that they do not will and work on their own, but their wills and their actions are the very arenas where God's own power is working.

The Philippians must not imitate the ancient Israelites. Note also the allusion in v. 15 to Dt 32:5. The Philippians may well have been guilty of grumbling against church leaders, as the Israelites did against Moses. The corporate witness of a united church is in view.

Blameless and innocent: the meanings of these terms overlap considerably. Paul describes the quality of life required of "children of God." Such persons will work out their salvation.

## **Supporting Texts:**

**Ephesians 2:10 (ESV)** <sup>10</sup> For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

**Philippians 4:13 (ESV)** <sup>13</sup> I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

**Deuteronomy 32:5 (ESV)** <sup>5</sup> They have dealt corruptly with him; they are no longer his children because they are blemished; they are a crooked and twisted generation.

**Discussion Starters:**

**How do we work out our salvation?**

**Why with fear and trembling?**

**How does this describe sanctification?**