

PHILIPPIANS

*To follow Jesus in humility and unity*

WRITTEN

60-62 AD

KEY VERSE

*"then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves"*

2:2-3

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PURPOSE

To encourage joy, humility, and unity, and to give thanks for the gift

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## INTRODUCTION

The church in Philippi was the first church in Europe. Acts 16:12 says that Philippi was the foremost city in Macedonia and a Roman colony. The citizens were proud of their Roman citizenship (Acts 16:20-21, 16:37-39), dressed like Romans, and often spoke Latin instead of Greek. They were proud of their ties to Rome and their Roman customs and laws.

The letter seems to have several purposes, for instance, to give thanks for the gift (4:16-18), but probably the main purpose is to encourage unity among them (1:27–2:2, 4:2-3). To help build unity, he emphasizes that humility is very important (2:3-5), and v. 3 can be taken as a definition of humility: Value others above yourself. C.S. Lewis says that *"Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it's thinking of yourself less."*

We find four examples of humble people in the letter: Paul himself (Ch. 1), Jesus (2:6-11), Timothy (2:19-22), and Epaphroditus (2:25-30). Paul sees himself as a servant (1:1), even though he founded the church. He accepted to be in prison and be disliked by people as long as the gospel prospered (1:18). He was willing to die for the gospel (1:20-21), but also willing to stay alive if it was for the good of others (1:23-24). Timothy is mentioned as one of the few who do not look out for their own interests but those of Jesus Christ. He puts the gospel and others before himself. Epaphroditus seems more concerned about the Philippians who heard that he was ill than about himself, even if he almost died. He risked his life to complete the mission and almost died for the work of Christ.

Jesus is, of course, the greatest and best example to follow, and his whole life on earth was a life of humility since he was God. The contrast between heaven and the crucifixion could not have been greater, as the word "cross" was so offensive that it was not even mentioned by the Romans. Because he humbled himself in this way, "God exalted him to the highest place" (2:9).

As I said, Paul is in prison while he writes this letter (1:13-14,17). Like the letter to the Ephesians, it has traditionally been believed that this letter was written from Rome in the year 60-62 AD (Acts 28:16, 30).

### STRUCTURE

The letter has no clear structure, and many suggestions are possible. Here is one of them:

1:1-11: Thanksgiving and prayer for the congregation

1:12-26: Everything that has happened to Paul has served to advance the gospel

1:27-2:30: Fight for the gospel with the same mindset as Christ Jesus

3:1-4:1: To gain Christ

4:2-23: Joy, prayer, and peace

*"Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it is thinking of yourself less."* C.S. Lewis

### PAUL IN PHILIPPI (ACTS 16:11-40)

*"From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day we went on to Neapolis. From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days. On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. “If you consider me a believer in the Lord,” she said, “come and stay at my house.” And she persuaded us. Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.” She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so annoyed that he turned around and said to the spirit, “In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!” At that moment the spirit left her. When her owners realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. They brought them before the magistrates and said, “These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice.” The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods. After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone’s chains came loose. The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted, “Don’t harm yourself! We are all here!” The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.” Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole household. When it was daylight, the magistrates sent their officers to the jailer with the order: “Release those men.” The jailer told Paul, “The magistrates have ordered that you and Silas be released. Now you can leave. Go in peace.” But Paul said to the officers: “They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out.” The officers reported this to the magistrates, and when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed. They came to appease them and escorted them from the prison, requesting them to leave the city. After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia’s house, where they met with the brothers and sisters and encouraged them. Then they left."* Acts 16:11-40

### PHILIPPI

When the Romans beat the Macedonians in 168 BC, Philippi became part of the Roman Empire and belonged to the first of the 4 Macedonian districts (Acts 16:12). Augustus made Philippi a Roman colony (Acts 16:12), where Roman war veterans settled. Therefore, Philippi had Roman law, and the citizens could own property and did not have to pay property tax and customs. They had Roman citizenship, had Latin as their official language, followed Roman customs, and were supposed to exhibit Roman culture and lifestyle in the Roman Empire so that the natives could see how they were expected to live. They were proud of their ties to Rome, proud of their city and of being Romans. (Acts 16:20-21,37-39)

## CHAPTER 1

### GREETINGS (1:1-2)

*“Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus…”* (1:1)

*“…To all God’s holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi…”* (1:2)

*“…In all my prayers for all of you…”* (1:4)

*“…I have you in my heart…”* (1:7)

*"...you share in God’s grace with me..."* (1:7)

*“…God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.”* (1:8)

*“…I am glad and rejoice with all of you.”* (2:17)

*“he longs for all of you…”* (2:26)

### PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING (1:3-11)

Are these the reasons why the letter was written?

Joy (v. 4) - 1:18, 25; 2:2, 17-18, 28-29; 3:1; 4:1, 4, 10

Their partnership in the gospel, sharing in God’s grace (vv. 5 and 7)

* *"common sharing in the Spirit"* (2:1): Unity
* participation in Christ's sufferings (3:10)
* give thanks for their gifts (4:10-20)
* they shared in Paul's troubles (4:14): Unity

Eschatological worldview (v. 6 and 10) - 2:16, 3:11,14, 20-21

* *"being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."* 1:6
* *"so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ"* 1:10
* *"And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain."* 2:16b
* *"I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead."* 3:10-11
* *"I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."* 3:14
* *"But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body."* 3:20-21

*"feel"* (v. 7)

* *"Being like-minded"*, *"of one mind"* (2:2): Unity
* *“Have the same mindset as Christ Jesus”* (2:5): Humility
* Think eschatologically (3:15,19)
* *"Be of the same mind in the Lord"* (4:2): Unity
* *“You renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned”* (4:10): Humility

The affection of Christ Jesus (v. 8)

* Compassion (2:1)
* The same mindset as Christ Jesus (2:5): Humility

### 1:15-17

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **"Some preach"** | **"Others" preach** |
| out of envy and rivalry | out of goodwill |
| not sincerely | out of love |
| out of selfish ambition | because they know he is put there for the defense of the gospel |
| from false motives, supposing that they can stir up trouble for him while he is in chains | in truth |

*"But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice."* Phil 1:18

### 1:21-26

*"To live is Christ"*. To live means Christ.

То ζην Χριστος - ζην χρηστος

*"To live is Christ"* vs. *"Life is good"*

*"For to me, to live is Christ"* vs. *“Jesus is life”*

*"Everything Paul does - what he trusts, loves, hopes for, obeys, preaches, follows, etc. - is inspired by Christ and done for Christ. Christ, and Christ alone, gives inspiration, direction, meaning, and purpose for life."* Gerald F. Hawthorne (the quote has been translated)

### PAUL AS AN EXAMPLE OF HUMILITY

* Considers himself a servant of the congregation
* Don't care what people think about him as long as Jesus is preached
* Willing to suffer for the gospel
* Willing to die for the gospel
* Willing to stay alive for the sake of others
* Does not put his interests first but asks: What will serve the kingdom of God? What will serve others?

### A LIFE WORTHY OF THE GOSPEL (1:27-30)

*politevomai*: Originally living as a citizen of a free state (*"But our citizenship is in heaven."* 3:20)

A dignified life (a life in line with your true citizenship): Standing firm in the one Spirit, striving (together) as one for the faith of the gospel, without being frightened in any way by those who oppose them.

Humility → unity → strength in persecution

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS RELATED TO CHAPTER 1

**What about us?**

When can our differences become more important than Jesus?

Could it be that we are sometimes a little envious of the progress of other Christians?

What if they have also behaved arrogantly or annoyingly toward us? Are we still able to rejoice that the gospel is being preached?

What if the motivation of these annoying fellow Christians is also to harm us or our congregation? Do we manage to call them siblings and enjoy the positives?

What if we have left a congregation because something negative happened - what kind of attitude do we have towards that congregation afterward? Are we able to rejoice in the good things that are happening there?

## CHAPTER 2

### PHIL 2:1-5

*"Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus"*

### HUMILITY

Humility was considered a flaw, not a virtue, in Greco-Roman culture. The word is found neither in the OT nor in secular Greek texts. Humility is a characteristic of the Christian faith.

* The message of a crucified Messiah stood in complete contrast to the values of society at the time.
* Christ was humble, and his followers are called to follow him in humility.

*"A crucified Lord forms disciples who themselves take up a cross as they follow him. We are called to live on behalf of Christ in the same way that he lived - and died - on behalf of this fallen, broken world."* Gordon Fee (the quote has been translated)

### THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST

*"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer."* 2 Corinthians 1:3-6

*"Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church."* Col 1:24

*"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."* Matthew 5:11-12

*"Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name."* 1 Peter 4:12-16

*"They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name."* Acts 5:40-41

### PHIL 2:6-11

*"Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."* 2:6-11

*"consider"* (v. 6) ***heg****esato* ***heg****oumenoi* → *"value others above yourselves"* (v. 3)

*"nature"* (*morphé*) (vv. 6 and 7): External form, appearance, characteristics, essential qualities. God's essential nature and character.

*"nature of a servant"* (v. 7) vs. *"selfish ambition"* (v. 3)

*"something to be used to his own advantage"* (v. 7): He didn't take advantage of it; he wasn't selfish.

*"made himself nothing"* (v .7): *e****ken****osen* ***ken****odoxia* “empty”, become powerless, lose importance. He humbled himself by changing status, not nature or essence.

*"humbled"* (v. 8) *e****tapeino****sen* ***tapeino****phrosyne* → *“in humility”* (v. 3)

### GOD ON A CROSS (2:8)

Before the cross became a Christian symbol in the fourth century:

* Jews: dying on a tree/cross was a curse (Deuteronomy 21:23, Gal 3:13).
* Romans: the word *"cross"* (*crux*) was offensive and should not be mentioned in a conversation, not even when someone was sentenced to death by crucifixion. *"The cross must never come near the body of a Roman citizen, it must never appear in their thoughts, eyes, or ears."* Cicero
* The Church Fathers forbade the depiction of the cross in art.

Jesus was killed by people he had created, in weakness and humility. It was the greatest imaginable contrast.

*"Through 'death on a cross' he not only 'saved us' but modeled for us God's way of dealing with the opposition - loving them to death."* Gordon Fee (the quote has been translated)

### TIMOTHY AS AN EXAMPLE OF HUMILITY (2:19-24)

* Thinks of others: Shows genuine concern for their welfare.
* Does not look out for his own interests, but those of Jesus Christ.
* Puts the gospel and others before himself.

Why send Timothy when Epaphroditus is already there, and Paul hopes to come himself soon? And why recommend these two when they already knew them?

* The situation in Philippi is probably serious. The unity must be rescued quickly.
* Paul commends Timothy when Epaphroditus to draw attention to them so that they will be examples of humility until he can come himself.

### EPAPHRODITUS AS AN EXAMPLE OF HUMILITY (2:25-30)

* Was more concerned for the Philippians, who heard that Epaphroditus was ill and almost died, than for himself, who was sick as well.
* Risked his life to complete his mission and almost died for the work of Christ.
* Cared more about the gospel and others than himself.

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS RELATED TO CHAPTER 2

**How to follow Jesus?**

* Are we willing to give up status and a good reputation and instead be discriminated against?
* Are we willing to be considered less intellectual and ridiculed for Jesus' sake? To lose importance in this world?
* In what situations can we overcome evil in the world by loving and suffering as Jesus did?
* How do we follow Jesus' example in situations with difficult colleagues?
* What might we have to give up to improve unity in both the local and the global church?

## CHAPTER 3

### PHIL 3:1-3

*"Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh. For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh"*

### KEEP AN EYE ON THE DOGS! (3:2)

Dogs are always negative in the Bible.

*"Dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircles me"* Psalm 22:16

*"Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood."* Revelation 22:15

*"No Israelite man or woman is to become a shrine prostitute. You must not bring the earnings of a female prostitute or of a male prostitute into the house of the Lord your God to pay any vow, because the Lord your God detests them both."* Deuteronomy 23:17-18

"It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs." (Matthew 15:26-27)

**Watch out for those dogs**

* Violent men (Psalm 22:17)
* Male prostitutes (Deut 23:17-18, Rev 22:15)
* Gentiles (Matthew 15:26-27)

**Watch out for those evildoers**

OT: *"those who do evil"* are God's enemies

**Watch out for those mutilators of the flesh**

Galatians 5:12: "*As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!"*

*peritomé* → *katatomé*

To emasculate oneself was forbidden in the law (Leviticus 19:28, 21:5, Deuteronomy 14:1, 1 Kings 18:28)

Verse 3 can be interpreted as a criticism of circumcision (emasculation), where they put their trust in the external: *"For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh"* (v. 3)

### PHIL 3:4-10 MY RIGHTEOUSNESS

**Benefits**

(1) Circumcised on the eighth day

(2) Of the people of Israel

(3) Of the tribe of Benjamin

(4) A Hebrew of Hebrews

(5) Pharisee

(6) Zealous

(7) Faultless based on the law

### GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS

**Benefits: Everything!**

Know JESUS!

**Loss and disadvantages: everything!**

(1) Circumcised on the eighth day

(2) Of the people of Israel

(3) Of the tribe of Benjamin

(4) A Hebrew of Hebrews

(5) Pharisee

(6) Zealous

(7) Faultless based on the law

### PHIL 3:8-10

*"For whose [Christ Jesus my Lord] sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may…"*:

**1. *"gain Christ"***

**2. *"be found in him"***

* not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law
* but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.

**3. *"know"*:**

1. Christ
2. the power of his resurrection
3. participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death

### “KNOWING JESUS”?

“A personal relationship with Jesus”?

Trevin Wax: An expression from the last century when many went from "high churches" to evangelical congregations.

* Did they have a religion consisting of a weekly tradition of dry rituals and an empty ceremony?
* Or was it about a living, personal relationship with God through Jesus?

Personal relationship with Jesus = concerns me personally. Jesus is my Lord and Savior.

Is “knowing Jesus” the same thing?

* gnosis: knowledge based on personal experience or perception
* A personal and close relationship (*“my Lord”*)

### PHIL 3:12-14

*"Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."*

* Paul's only goal in life is to press on toward Jesus.
* God is constantly calling us towards the goal.
* The Christian life is to run towards that calling.

### PHIL 3:15-17

*"All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained. Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do."*

* Ironic: Paulus is in prison but has not lost focus.

### PHIL 3:18-21

*"For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body."*

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS RELATED TO CHAPTER 3

1. How can we say we know Jesus?
2. When can traditions, forms, liturgy, and sacraments become "religiosity" and get in the way of knowing Jesus?
3. Jesus is not a means to become better people or to gain eternal life. Jesus is the goal, not the means. Are we pressing on to take hold of Jesus or heaven?
4. If our goal in life is to press on towards Jesus and run towards him who calls us from heaven, how does this impact how we live?

## CHAPTER 4

### 4:1-3

*"Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends! I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life."*

Two prompts towards the end:

1. Stand firm in the Lord! (as in 1:27)
2. Be of the same mind in the Lord! (*“have the same mindset as Christ Jesus”*; 2:2, 5)

### 4:4-7

*"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."*

Paul encourages them to rejoice - no matter the circumstances! (1:13, 18, 1:30, 2:15, 3:2). Joy is a verb! Paul uses it 14 times in this letter. Their gentleness should be evident to all (cf. *"Love your enemies"*).

* Joy in the Lord
* Prayer
* Gratitude

The result of this is peace and unity - God guards their hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

### 4:10-20

He expresses his gratitude 3 times:

1. *"your concern for me"* (v. 10)
2. *"share in my troubles"* (v. 14)
3. *"a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God."* (v. 18)

Much or little is irrelevant because of his relationship with Jesus. Jesus is enough regardless of how Paul is doing financially.

### 4:22

*"All God’s people here send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar’s household."*

* He sends greetings to Roman Christians in the colony of Philippi from believers in Caesar’s household.
* Someone on the inside is on their side. The Gospel has already reached the heart of the Roman Empire.

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS RELATED TO CHAPTER 4

What makes it difficult to rejoice "in the Lord" in all circumstances? What can make this easier?

Paul says "I can do all this through him who gives me strength" in the context of having much or little. Is abundance or need irrelevant to us because of our relationship with Jesus? Is Jesus enough for us when we have a lot?

Does the joy of giving increase when we read what Paul writes about how God viewed the gift from the Philippians?

How would we react if we had been directly addressed as Euodia and Syntyche? Do we have disagreements with someone that would embarrass us if something like this happened?