

THE PHILIPPIANS STUDY

CHAPTER 2

Leader's Guide

The purpose of this discussion is to introduce our Life Group members the book of Philippians. As we go through each chapter, we will learn to discover God's eternal principles, which can be applied to their everyday life's situation.



Discussion Facilitator Tips:

- Ensure that the aim is first to understand the text and then to make it meaningful and relevant. The questions provided are intended to bring out the relevance for today.
- Begin with a prayer for the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit.
- Encourage everyone to participate in the reading or the discussion.
- Begin the study by reading the whole passage
- Discuss the overall meaning of the passage by asking your LifeGroup members of what could be the key focuses/emphases in the particular chapter
- Spend appropriate amount of time on each question with as many members as possible making a contribution. At the end of each discussion the leader should summarise the main points that have arisen and direct the group towards the key contents given in this guide
- A balance must be kept between ascertaining what the Bible teaches and what are the opinions of participants. So the facilitator should make sure that there is an understanding of the passage before questions are raised.

AUTHOR:

The Apostle Paul, along with Timothy (1:1)

DATE:

Probably the early 60s AD

BACKGROUND:

The city of Philippi was named after Philip II of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great. He fortified it and exploited its mineral wealth, having conquered it in 360 B.C. The city became a Roman colony in 167 B.C. Its population was a mixture of indigenous Thracian, Greek and Latin families. Consequently there was a great variety of divinities and religious cults. There was a Jewish community to whom were attached the Gentile "Godfearers", who worshipped the God of the Jews.

A description of the foundation of the church at Philippi is found in Acts 16:9-40. Here we learn that Paul was specifically instructed to go into Macedonia region to preach the gospel there. When he preached in Philippi and founded a church there he was accused of introducing an alien cult. This was because Christianity, unlike Judaism and other religions, did not have the sanction of the state as a religion and was thus technically unlawful.

Having founded the church Paul kept in touch with it and, as this letter reveals, received various gifts from the members. The letter has been dated around 62 A.D while Paul was imprisoned in Rome (Acts 28:16). When he was in prison there, His imprisonment was more like what is called today "house arrest" and so he was free to

employ a scribe and obtain papyrus to write his letters.

The obvious reason for his writing this letter was to thank the Philippians and the church for various aids given to Paul through Epaphroditus when he was in need. It is also a very personal letter sent to his first converts on European soil.

The book of Philippians is known as a letter of joy or friendship between the apostle Paul and a beloved church in the Philippi. It is impregnated with the themes of joy, confidence in God, Christ-centred Humility, Security in Christ, Purpose of Gospel-driven living, our Faithfulness to God's work, Unity in Christ and Perseverance in the Christian life and faith as Paul urges the Christians to live humbly and worthy of their calling as disciples of Christ.

READ: Philippians Chapter TWO

EXAMINE:

As we have seen in Chapter ONE, Paul the Apostle was a single minded man. Paul had his priorities in order in his life. Although the circumstances in which Paul writes this book are certainly not ideal, we see a man who put Jesus Christ and the Gospel of Grace, first; others, second; and himself, last. Paul is a great example to us all!

In Chapter Two, Paul presents to us "The Attitude Of Christ" as he uses four examples: Jesus, Himself, Timothy and Epaphroditus to show us different aspects of what our attitude should be to the work of God. Paul continues with the call for unity, providing reasons why we should desire unity, the nature of our unity, and attitudes necessary to maintain unity (1-4). Stressing the need for humility and sacrificial service towards others, Paul appeals to the example of Christ and expounds upon how far Christ was willing to go to save us (5-11).

He continues with another exhortation to "shine as lights in the world" as they work out their own salvation with fear and trembling. Doing all things without complaining and arguing, while holding fast the word of life, they will prove themselves to be children of God in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. This will also prove to Paul that his labours have not been in vain, and any persecution he endures is viewed as a sacrifice in the service of their faith and a cause for mutual rejoicing (12-18). He then writes of his plans pertaining to Timothy and Epaphroditus. He will send Timothy shortly, that he might know of their condition. But Epaphroditus is coming at once in order to set their hearts at ease about Epaphroditus' brush with death due to a recent illness. (19-30)

In this chapter, we will learn to appreciate the importance of unity, and how it can be maintained by following Jesus' example of humility and to understand what is involved in "shining as lights in the world".

DISCUSS: PHILIPPIANS TWO can be broken into 3 sections

I. Philippians 2:1-11 "THE ATTITUDE OF CHRIST: HUMILITY"

SCRIPTURES EXPLAINED:

Paul continues his words of encouragement by appealing for unity and for submission to the mind of Christ.

I. 2:1-4 An appeal for harmony

Verse 1: To give content to his appeal Paul refers to the realities of the Christian experience which the Philippians have known. They are "in Christ", members of his body; the Lord Jesus has loved them and does love them; the Holy Spirit indwells their church and each member; and they have the love of God in their hearts which should make them love others.

Verse 2: Paul does not hide the joy which the Philippians have brought to him. The only thing which detracts from this is their jealousies and rivalries. He wants them to set these aside and put on love for each other instead.

Verse 3: Paul pinpoints some of the baser motives which were affecting some Christians. They are selfishness and conceit. Concern for self and for self-glorification are root causes of divisions. To think of oneself as better or higher than others is a constant temptation which Christians face. Humility and the willingness to count others as better than oneself must replace selfishness and conceit.

2. 2:5-11 A hymn to Christ

This relates the drama and story of salvation achieved by Jesus Christ. Paul uses it as a basis for urging the Philippians to have the same attitude to one another as Christ has shown to them.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

- What does 'Being united with Christ' mean? And what should the outcomes when we are being united with Christ? (v.1)
- What are some of the factors which cause divisions and rivalries in today's churches?
- How should we act to unite the body of Christ in one spirit? (v.2-3)
- What does the biblical humility look like? How can you know that someone is humble? (v.3)
- Using Jesus as the role model, how are we to live out this attitude of humility? (v.5-11)

Verse 6: Paul here speaks of the pre-existence of Christ. As the eternal Son of God he was with the Father eternally. However, he gladly agreed to become man and in so doing did not cling to the privileges of heaven.

Verse 7: In emptying himself he did not cease to be divine; rather, he ceased to live surrounded with all the glory of heaven. The Incarnation involved the move from the heaven of glory to the earth of suffering and humiliation.

Verse 8: As the Son of God in human form and thus as the Suffering Servant of God (see Isaiah 53) he followed the Father's will and offered himself for the sins of the world.

Verse 9: The name "the LORD" is the name which is above every name. In Jewish thought the name of God – Yahweh or Jehovah, the LORD – was above all names, superior to all names. To give this name to Jesus Christ means that the Father is sharing with the exalted Saviour the sovereign lordship of the universe.

Verse 10: Both human and spiritual beings will acknowledge the lordship of Jesus Christ. Paul pictures them as kneeling down in worship before him

Verse 11: It is the Father who exalts Christ and confers lordship upon him (in his resurrection and ascension). That which Christ had refused to snatch or to grasp before the Incarnation (verses 6–7) is now granted freely to him, but not only to him as the Son of God. It is also given to him as the second Adam, the head of a new humanity (Romans 5:12).

II. Philippians 2:12-18 "LIGHTS OF THE WORLD"

SCRIPTURES EXPLAINED:

The word "therefore" in verse 12 bids the readers bear in mind the argument already presented in the description of the example of humility in Jesus Christ.

I. 2:12–13 Working out your salvation

To work out your own salvation does not mean striving to earn salvation, for that is the gift of God. Rather it means to endure to the end through difficulties. It also means healing the divisions in the church, for while there is a definite personal salvation there is a sense in which the whole church is being saved. Internal rivalries and divisions deny and hinder this corporate activity of God. The Philippians are to endure and work for harmony as people who reverence God, who recognise in him holy love and purity. This very God is the one who is at work in and through them.

2. 2:14–18 Shining in a dark world

Those who have been forgiven and reconciled to God through Christ are the adopted children of God (cf. Romans 8:12–16). This new privilege and status requires that Christians live in such a manner that they are seen to be God's children. They live in a world which is alienated from God, a society organised and ordered in hostility to God's law and love. This means there is moral and spiritual darkness, and so the children of God, in whom there is the light of the gospel, are to shine as lights. Jesus himself described the disciples of the kingdom as the light of the world (Matthew 5:14).

Verse 16: The "word of life" is the good news of God's love for men in Jesus Christ and his gift of eternal life to repentant believers. The "day of Christ" is the time of the second coming of Christ when all will confess to God's glory that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Verse 17: The libation was an offering to God made in liquid form – e.g. wine, the fruit of the vine. Thus it was poured over the altar. Paul was willing to offer his life as a libation to God. He was ready for the sake of all Christians who were committed to the Lord to add to their sacrificial living (Romans 12:1–2) his own sacrifice, a libation, a pouring out of his life as a martyr of Christ.

Verse 18: To be able to serve Christ the Lord in the difficulties of life, or in the act of martyrdom, is a cause not for sadness but for joy. This is the message of Christ himself in the sermon on the mount – see Matthew 5:11–12.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

- What does 'Work Out Your Salvation' mean? What can we do now to work out our salvation with fear and trembling? (v.12)
- What are the results of living a life of obedience and following God with such a reverence attitude? (v.15-16)
- What does it mean to be the light of the world today? What should be the main features of Christian living and witness today which function as light in the moral and spiritual darkness?
- What does it mean when Paul said of his life "being poured out like a drink of offering"? (v.17)

III. Philippians 2:19-30 - "Timothy And Epaphroditus: Living Examples"

SCRIPTURES EXPLAINED:

Paul cannot visit this church for which he has such concern and love, so he is to send his assistants instead.

1. 2:19-24 Timothy

Timothy had a Jewish mother and a Greek father. His mother became a Christian and so did her son. Timothy was well thought of by fellow believers in Lystra, and so Paul invited him to be his companion and fellow worker. Before they set off Paul had Timothy circumcised so as not to offend the Jewish people of Lystra (Acts 16:1-3).

Paul was obviously concerned about the problems at Philippi and he wanted to send to the church a man whom both they and he trusted. Timothy, who had already visited them with Paul, was the right man for the job.

(For Paul's advice to Timothy on a later occasion see his two letters to Timothy in the New Testament.) We do not know whether in fact Paul himself ever visited Philippi again.

2. 2:25-30 Epaphroditus

Epaphroditus was a Macedonian Christian from Philippi. He is not the same man as the Epaphras mentioned in Colossians 1:7 and 4:12, or in Philemon 23. His name means "comely" or "charming". He was probably the bearer of Paul's letter to the Philippians.

Verse 25: He is the brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier of Paul in the service of Jesus Christ. As adopted sons of God they were brothers in Christ. As two servants of the Lord Jesus they were fellow-workers, even though Paul was an apostle and Epaphroditus his assistant. In their fight against Satan, sin and darkness they were active soldiers in the Lord's army (Ephesians 6:10ff.).

From the standpoint of the Philippians Epaphroditus was their messenger and minister (servant) to Paul. Through him they could render service to Paul.

Verse 27: Paul does not attribute Epaphroditus' recovery to natural means but to a definite act of God's mercy. This mercy was also a mercy to Paul, for the recovery of Epaphroditus saved Paul from suffering further hardship.

Verses 28-30: The Philippians are to receive him not merely with the ordinary Christian courtesies but as one who is an honoured servant of the Lord and who has helped Paul in an important way.

"To complete your service to me. . . ." Paul means that by taking a hazardous journey and exposing himself to illness and death, Epaphroditus was able to complete the service to Paul which the Philippians were not in a position to do.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

- What are the key qualities of *Timothy* described by Paul? What can we learn from the way he lives out his life? (v.19-24)
- What are the key qualities of *Epaphroditus* described by Paul? What can we learn from the way he lives out his life? (v.25-30)