

philippians : putting the gospel first philippians 2v1-30

Philippians is all about putting the gospel – the good news of Jesus Christ and all that means – first in your life. At the end of chapter 1, Paul begins to talk about living in a manner “worthy of the gospel of Christ” – a life rooted in the gospel. One of the outworkings he mentions is *unity*. In chapter 2, he explores this idea more and links it to the good news of Jesus...

verses 1-11

Verse 1 begins with “therefore.” What Paul has to say in this chapter flows from what he has just been saying about unity at the end of chapter 1. He told them that if they live lives worthy of the gospel of Christ, they will have unity and they will stand firm. And their firmness will be a warning for non-Christians and an encouragement for Christians.

Paul moves on to how this will work. First he reminds them of the blessings they have personally received. If they have received these blessings, Paul says, then they are to act in the same way towards each other. The forgiveness and love they have experienced in the gospel should affect the way they now relate to each other. Paul sums it up in v3: “in humility value others above yourselves.” This sounds simple, but imagine what a CU or church would be like where everyone really practised this...

The Philippians have a perfect model to follow in living like this: the Lord Jesus himself. But he is more than a model - Paul tells them their attitude should be *like Christ's*. Then he reminds them just what his attitude is. Instead of holding on to his position of glory, Jesus willingly lowered himself from heaven to earth to become one of us. And he humbled himself further by becoming the lowest human he could, a servant. For our sake he humbled himself and willingly died. But he didn't just die – he died the most excruciating, humiliating death possible, for us.

In verse 9, the tone changes completely, as Paul describes how Jesus was exalted by God to His rightful place. His name is more important than any other, and one day every single person will acknowledge his Lordship.

The contrast between Jesus' glory and humility should challenge the Philippians, and us, in the way we treat others. In the light of Jesus' sacrifice, anything we have to deal with pales in comparison.

verses 12-18

Again, the section starts with “therefore.” Based on what Paul has already said, they need to carry on obeying and “work out their salvation with fear and trembling.” But Paul is not saying they need to earn their salvation or repay a debt to God. Notice that both the Philippians and God are at work – there is a combination of God at work in the Philippians, and their obedient response.

Having the attitude of Christ should change the way they react to their circumstances too. They are to do everything without grumbling or arguing. This will be a witness to those around them. Their purity will be in contrast to the world around them, like stars against a dark sky. And this will happen as they hold firmly to the word of life, the message of the gospel of Jesus which has changed them and continues to change them.

Paul briefly mentions his difficult situation again. He is suffering partly for their sake – he is being “poured out” like a drink offering (see Numbers 15v8-12). But his small sacrifice is part of the larger offering of obedience and faith in the lives of the Philippians. And so Paul rejoices, and urges the Philippians to rejoice along with him.

verses 19-30

In the third section, Paul mentions two co-workers, Timothy and Epaphroditus as examples of what he has been talking about.

Paul says he has no-one like Timothy, who serves faithfully and puts Jesus first. While many are opposing Paul, Timothy serves faithfully “as a son with his father.” Paul and Timothy obviously shared a close relationship, which we see more of in 1 & 2 Timothy, written to Timothy by Paul. And so Paul wants to send Timothy to the Philippians to find out how they are and to bring a report back.

Epaphroditus had originally come from Philippi, and Paul has decided to send him back. Epaphroditus has been seriously ill, the Philippians are concerned about him, and so Epaphroditus is concerned about what they must be thinking.

Paul commends both men for their attitude to the gospel and the sacrifices they were prepared to make for it, and particularly as they did the work of the gospel alongside him. Timothy and Epaphroditus are real-life examples of the kind of gospel-focussed, Christ-like attitude he wants the Philippians to display.

philippians : putting the gospel first

philippians 2v1-30

questions

Remember, these are **suggestions** – feel free to add, remove or change them!

This is a much longer section than the previous two. You may need to look at some parts in less detail than you would like. Think about concentrating on one section and then looking at the others more briefly.

for starters - a discussion question to get you going.

Think of a group situation you've been in. How did the group members get on with each other? What made the group work well/badly? Should things be different depending on whether the group are Christians or not?

discover

v1-11

What is the "therefore" pointing back to?

What blessing from being Christians does Paul remind the Philippians of?

Verses 6 to 11 are like a series of steps – what are these steps, and do they go up or down?

v12-18

What do the Philippians need to do in response (notice the "therefore" again)?

What does God do?

How else does Paul want them to live (v14), and what will the effects be?

V19-30

Imagine you are writing references for Timothy and Epaphroditus. What would you write?

understand

v1-11

How should the blessings the Philippians have in Christ motivate them to treat each other properly?

How do you feel after reading v6-11?

How should Christ's example affect the way they treat each other?

v12-18

What is the link between the Philippians working out their salvation, and what God does in them?

Why can Paul rejoice, even though he's being "poured out" like a drink offering? What does he mean by this?

V19-30

Why does Paul want to send Timothy and Epaphroditus to the Philippians?

How are the principles Paul has been describing visible in the lives of these two men?

respond

v1-11

Is your attitude like that of Christ Jesus? What do you need to change? How do we go about developing his attitude?

What would it mean for you to put others before yourself?

v12-18

Do you "do everything without grumbling or arguing"? When is this hardest? What will you do about it?

How should your life look different to those of the non-Christians around you? Why is this important?

V19-30

Can you think of examples of people who live with the "attitude of Christ" that Paul is describing?

Could Paul mention you at this point in his letter?

things to ponder

Do you treat each other like this within your small group?

How would it change your small group if you treated each other like this? What about the CU as a whole? What about your church?

How does living for Jesus in this way link with speaking for Jesus?