

## **Philippians Chapter 2**

### **Fulfill my joy (Philippians 2:1-4)**

The second chapter begins with, "Therefore", referring us back to what Paul just wrote in the closing verses of chapter 1. In that section he discussed what it meant for the Philippians to live in such a way that their conduct would be "worthy of the gospel".

In the first part of chapter 2, Paul instructs the Philippians on what this kind of living looks like. A series of "if" statements follows providing us with characteristics of a faithful church. The reason Paul prefaces this list with "if" is because some churches would not be faithful in this regard.

The items Paul includes are: consolation in Christ, comfort of love, fellowship of the Spirit, and affection and mercy. Each of these attributes must be present for a church to manifest faithfulness. A similar thought occurs in Colossians 3:12-17.

Paul writes that he wants the Philippians to "fulfill my joy". The only way this can be accomplished is for the members of the church to be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, and of one mind. These characteristics seem very similar. The first characteristic, "like minded", does not appear in the original text, but was added by translators to emphasize the concept. The phrase "one accord" comes from a Greek word meaning "similar in spirit, like minded". We should also have the "same love" and be of "one mind". The same Greek word is used for "one mind" in verse 2 as in Philippians 2:5 and 4:2, providing

additional context for understanding its meaning. Paul urged the same type of characteristics in the Epistle to the Romans (12:16); and has already provided such instruction to the Philippians (Philippians 1:27).

Having urged the Philippians in a positive way, Paul then shows what the opposite lifestyle looks like. In verse 3 he pleads that nothing be done "through selfish ambition or conceit". This type of behavior is a guaranteed way to wreck any congregation of God's people (Galatians 5:26).

Rather, Paul urges in verse 3 that with "lowliness of mind" (Romans 12:10) each Christian should "esteem others better than himself". We need to put the needs of others ahead of our own needs. If this is done then love and unity will be present in a congregation. Paul commands that we not only look out for our own interests (which could result in selfishness) but also for the interests of others (which will prevent selfishness). This is a concept repeated by Paul in other Epistles (1 Corinthians 13:4-5; Romans 15:1-2).

### **The example of Jesus (Philippians 2:5-11)**

Having commanded the Philippians how to live in verses 1-4, Paul uses the example of Jesus to bolster his argument in verses 5-11. We are to have the mind of Christ. Christ's mind was always to submit to the will of His Father (Matthew 11:29).

Paul knew that Jesus was God. But, while Jesus was in every sense God (John 1:1; 2 Corinthians 4:4), He submitted to a change in status in order to provide the world with salvation. The latter part of verse 6 is translated in the

New King James Version (NKJV) as, "did not consider it robbery to be equal with God". This is a very unclear translation. In the NIV, as in the margin notes for the New King James Version (NKJV), the passage is translated as, "did not consider equality with God something to be grasped". This makes the verse more clear. What Paul is arguing is that Jesus, although He was truly God, did not hold onto that divinity as a drowning man might grasp a rope thrown to him. Rather, Jesus willingly gave up His honor, power and glory to be made like a man. He willingly came to this world and lived among us to provide us a way of salvation.

As Paul states Jesus, "made Himself of no reputation" (NKJV), "made Himself nothing" (NIV). Jesus took the form of a bondservant (Psalm 22:6; Isaiah 42:1), and came in "the likeness of man" (John 14:1). He was found in appearance "as a man" and humbled Himself (Matthew 26:39). Jesus "became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross" (Hebrews 5:7-9).

Therefore, (that is because of all Paul has written about Jesus), God "has highly exalted Him" (Hebrews 2:9; Acts 2:32-33, 36). God has also given Jesus a name "which is above every name" (Ephesians 1:20-21). The reason for this is that at the name of Jesus, "every knee should bow". Paul states that those in heaven, those on earth, and those under the earth would all bow before Jesus (Revelation 20:12-13; Revelation 5:8-14). In addition, every tongue will confess "that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of the Father" which is part of the exaltation God has

given to Jesus. It is no wonder that confessing the name of Jesus is such an integral part of the way of salvation (Matthew 10:32).

### **Becoming blameless and harmless (Philippians 2:12-18)**

Verse 12 begins with "Therefore" (a favorite word for Paul) which refers us back to what he just got through teaching in verses 5-11 concerning Jesus, our example, and describing His majesty. Paul then calls the Philippians, "my beloved" and commends them on their obedience not only in his presence but especially in his absence. This is a reference to Paul's ministry at the beginning of the Philippian church and to his continued influence on them even though he wasn't there personally.

He commands the Philippians to "work out your own salvation". This phrase is not popular with many Christians. Paul seems to be stating that we can earn our salvation, which is a contradiction of many other verses of scripture. Some Christians are so adamantly opposed to anything that seems to deemphasize grace that they refuse to acknowledge any place for works in salvation. The real question is, do we work in order to be saved, or because we are saved?

Paul explains in verse 13 that it is God who works in us. Other passages (Hebrews 13:20-21; Ephesians 2:10; Titus 2:14) also show God at work in us. It seems clear from this passage in Philippians as well as others that God expects Christians to work in some fashion. This does not diminish in the least our

salvation by grace through faith, it enhances it. According to Paul this is for the "good pleasure" of God.

Next Paul commands the Philippians to do all things "without complaining and disputing" (verse 14). Complaining can also be translated as "grumbling" (see 1 Peter 4:9) and disputing can be translated as "arguing" (see Romans 14:1). Any church that allows complaining and disputing is in serious trouble. If we wish to be "blameless and harmless" we must avoid complaining and disputing.

Christians are supposed to be known as people who are blameless and harmless. If they are, Paul says that they are "children of God" and "without fault". Since we live in what Paul describes as "a crooked and perverse generation", our only hope is to live like "lights in the world" (Matthew 5:14-16). How much easier it will be for the church to impact the world if we follow these commands!

Paul then states that the Philippians must always be "holding fast the word of life" (verse 16) which is a clear reference to the gospel of Jesus Christ. If they remain faithful to the gospel then Paul will be able to rejoice in the day of Jesus (a reference to the second coming of Christ). If the Philippians (or any other group of Christians) do not remain faithful to the gospel then Paul would have "run in vain" or "labored in vain".

To supplement this command, Paul points to his situation. He says that he is "being poured out as a drink offering" which would have brought to any

Jewish mind the pouring of wine upon the sacrificial altar under the Law of Moses. The first mention of a drink offering in the Bible occurs in Genesis 35:14 and it was incorporated into the Law of Moses in Exodus 29:40. Since many of the Philippians would not have been familiar with the customs of the Law of Moses it seems strange that Paul would have included this here. However, Paul used similar words in 2 Timothy 4:6 and in this passage links the drink offering to the sacrificial service of the Philippian Christians. In verse 17 he states that he is "glad and will rejoice with you all" followed in verse 18 with the admonition of reciprocal gladness and rejoicing for Paul on the part of the Philippians.

#### **Sending Timothy (Philippians 2:19-24)**

In this section Paul speaks of his desire to send Timothy to the Philippians in order that he (that is Paul) can be encouraged when Timothy returns and makes a report. Timothy is described as being "like-minded" with Paul and one who "will sincerely care for your souls". It seems that some of those with Paul were more concerned about their own agendas than with what was best for the Apostle (verse 21; see also Philippians 2:4). But Timothy was different. He was like a son to the Apostle Paul. So, Paul has decided to send Timothy to the Philippians as soon as he sees what will happen to himself. In verse 24 Paul also mentions that he hopes to come to Philippi soon in person.

#### **Sending Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:25-30)**

Immediately following his stated intention to send Timothy to the Philippians, Paul writes concerning another Christian, Epaphroditus. This man

had been sent by the Philippians to minister to Paul in his distress (Philippians 4:8) and was now being sent back by Paul since the Philippians had heard that Epaphroditus had almost died. Epaphroditus had been distressed because the Philippians had heard about his sickness, and the Philippians were concerned about him as well, since he was probably a Philippian (he is described as "your messenger" in verse 25). Paul also describes him as "my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier".

After coming to minister to Paul, Epaphroditus had become sick and almost died. God had mercy on him and he recovered to the great relief of Paul. Because of the distress of Epaphroditus and the Philippian church, Paul decided to send him back. This would undoubtedly result in rejoicing in Philippi and relieve Paul's sorrow.

The Philippians are to receive him "in the Lord" with gladness and to hold him "in esteem" because of the sacrifice he had made for Paul and for them. Epaphroditus and Timothy are excellent examples for Christians in the 21st Century to pattern themselves after.