



# Philippians

## *Living a Happy and Holy Life*

### Week 3

#### The Christian Life – Part I

1:27-30, Stand Fast!

2:1-4, Our Life in Christ

2:5-11, The Mind of Christ & Paul's "master story"

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### *To live or to die? (1:18a-26)*

- ❖ Paul does not know what lies ahead for him. Will he be released or executed?
- ❖ What is Paul's hope?
  - He doesn't pray for safety or release, but only that he "won't be put to shame." He prays that his fears won't cause him to back off from his proclamation of Christ.
  - He hopes that Christ will be exalted in him, whether Paul lives or dies. "Living is Christ and dying is gain."
- ❖ Paul is even torn – stay and work for Christ or depart and be with Christ?
  - Paul believes that he is needed by the Philippians and others and, hence, will be released so he can carry on his missionary work.
- ❖ Compare this to 2 Corinthians 1:8-11
- ❖ The "Spirit of Jesus Christ?" (v. 19): aka the Holy Spirit

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## **Stand Fast! (1:27-30)**

- ❖ “Only” is equivalent to: “There is just one thing!!”
  - Paul would rather go with Christ, but he is staying for the sake of the believers. But there is one thing he asks of them.
- ❖ Live a life worthy of the gospel of Christ!
  - What is “the gospel of Christ?”
  - What sort of life could be worthy of the gospel?
  - For Paul this is a reflection of the believers’ citizenship in the kingdom of God. They are colonists for Christ, not Rome.
- ❖ Paul appeals to the Philippians to be unified, in mind and spirit. Truly, they are one in Christ and the Spirit.

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## **Stand Fast! (1:27-30) continued**

- ❖ Paul desires to know that the Philippians are in this with him, just as he is in it with them.
- ❖ We don’t really know of what opponents Paul is speaking.
  - Their living the Gospel is a demonstration of the future and a sign to their opponents.
- ❖ Suffering for Christ?
  - A very dramatic phrase. Not just suffering with Christ, but *for* him. What do you think this could mean?
  - Could it mean that we share in Jesus’ redemptive work? That he uses our sufferings for his larger purposes?
  - Truly, we are partners in God’s grace see 1:5 & 7.
- ❖ No wonder suffering for Christ is a privilege!

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## ***Our Life in Christ (2:1-4)***

- ❖ “If then” = “If – as is, of course, the case!”
- ❖ “encouragement” refers to both comfort and strength
- ❖ In these verses, Paul continues his appeal for unity – it will make his joy complete.
  - Not just any unity, but unity in Christ – they are to have the same mind that is in Christ Jesus.
    - There is discord in the church. See 4:2-3. Odd isn’t it, that unity is a universal problem.
  - This is the joy that Paul has in Christ and which is shared with the Philippian Christians.
- ❖ What is that mind? Verses 3 & 4 prepare us for Paul’s answer.
  - It is a mind without “selfish ambition or conceit.” A mind that puts the interests of others ahead of its own, regarding others as better.

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## ***Paul’s “master story” (2:5-11)***

- ❖ This is one of the most well-known and influential passages in the New Testament.
- ❖ It may be original with Paul or it may be a “hymn” that he has used here, even something with which the Philippians are already familiar.
  - The majority of scholars believe this to be something that Paul has pulled into the letter.
- ❖ The hymn has three parts: Christ’s pre-existence, his earthly life, and his exaltation.

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## Jesus' Pre-existence

- ❖ By this, we mean that Jesus is reality beyond time or space. He simply always has been.
  - Christians' have always struggled with how to talk about this. It is often easier to know what we don't mean than to articulate what we do.
- ❖ "though he was in the form of God"
  - "though" could be translated as "although" or "because" or even "being"
    - This is a very important question.
    - Did Jesus suffer and die despite being God or because he is God?
    - Paul probably intends that we hold both meanings in view.
  - "form" in v. 6 and "likeness" in v. 8 are vague and the subject of endless debates
- ❖ The "emptying" speaks to becoming "nothing" or becoming "poor."

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## Kenosis

- ❖ Though used to speak of the emptying of Jesus' divine attributes, that is probably not Paul's point.
- ❖ The contrast here is between what Jesus could have claimed and what he did claim; i.e., between his rightful privileges and his abandonment of them.
  - Contrast "form of God" with "form of a slave." Specifically, giving up the status of God and embracing the status of a slave.
- ❖ Hooker writes: "it is in his [Jesus] self-emptying and his humiliation that he reveals what God is like."

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## **Jesus' Earthly Existence**

- ❖ Jesus is the true man – the most human, human.
  - There is nothing here to suggest that Jesus isn't truly human.
- ❖ The obedience of Jesus contrasts sharply with the disobedience of Adam.
  - There is actually a lot in this hymn that can be taken to be contrasting the fallen Adam with the obedient Jesus.
- ❖ Understanding the shock of these verses requires us to understand the importance of status and the humiliation of slavery and of crucifixion.
  - The “punch line” of v. 8 drives this point home. We miss it because we've become used to the cross.

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## **Jesus' Exaltation**

- ❖ To this point, Jesus has been the “doer.” Now, God acts!
  - The giving of a name bestows status and power. The name bestowed here is the name of God.
- ❖ The exaltation of Jesus speaks to what Luke breaks down into his resurrection and ascension.
- ❖ Think of it as the establishment of Jesus as Lord over all the cosmos. There is no place, no thing, no one that is outside Jesus' Lordship.
  - There are political overtones to this. There can be only one Lord and it isn't Caesar!
- ❖ Notice that every knee bows and every tongue confesses.
  - This is taken from Isaiah 45:23.
  - “Under the earth” refers to the dead, part of the three-fold plan of the cosmos for the ancients.

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## ***Why did Paul use this hymn?***

- ❖ We know of no Christological issues in Philippi, nor are there big moral issues that Paul is trying to deal with.
- ❖ The hymn lifts up Jesus' self-denying service and obedience, his faithfulness even unto death, death on a cross.
- ❖ Paul is using a theological cannon over the pettiness and squabbles that undermine the Philippians' unity.
  - This is common in Paul. Theology is not the realm of the scholars, but the life of the church. It goes to an age-old problem: we make our god too small!!