

Small Group Study Guide

Appreciate What He's Doing

Philippians 2:1-11

February 28, 2010

Leader's Notes

PLEASE NOTE: These "Leader's Notes" are a resource to the Small Group Leader to help you in preparing for this study. They are meant to be supplemental. You do not need to cover all the information in these notes with your group. They are simply provided as a resource to you.

Welcome and Introduction:

- Encourage group members to bring their study guide with them that they use on Sunday to take notes on the sermon, but also have extra copies available in case they forget.
- Open with prayer.

A Closer Look:

Take some time to read back through the first chapter of Philippians. It is important to bring in the context of verses 1-26 when it comes to your study of these last few verses in the chapter.

The following notes are to help you better understand the passages you will be looking at in this study.

Notes from ESV Study Bible on Philippians 2:1-11:

Phil. 2:1–30 Exhortation to Humble Service. Paul calls the Philippians to unite in love and humility (vv. 1–4), as exemplified by Christ's humble service (vv. 5–11). They are to live as lights in the world (vv. 12–18), just like Christ's faithful servants Timothy (vv. 19–24) and Epaphroditus (vv. 25–30).

Phil. 2:1–4 Encouragement to Unity in the Faith and Service of One Another. The Philippians are encouraged to live out their life in Christ and in the Spirit by living in unity.

Phil. 2:1–2 Paul is not *doubting* that **encouragement, participation in the Spirit, affection, and sympathy** are realities **in Christ** and are present in the congregation at Philippi. He uses a conditional sentence (**if**) to provoke the Philippians so that they will reflect on whether these qualities are evident in their lives. The Philippian believers must make sure they continue to progress in the absolutely critical area of love for one another. As Paul emphasizes, they must be **of the same mind**. This does not imply a drab intellectual uniformity; rather, the Philippians are to use their diverse gifts (cf. 1 Corinthians 12) in an agreeable, cooperative spirit, with a focus on the glory of God.

Phil. 2:3–4 There is always a temptation to be like Paul's opponents in 1:17 and operate in a spirit of **rivalry**, looking to advance one's own agenda. Such **conceit** (lit., “vainglory”) is countered by counting others **more significant than yourselves**. Paul realizes that everyone naturally looks out for his or her **own interests**. The key is to take that same level of concern and apply it **also** to the **interests of others**. Such radical love is rare, so Paul proceeds to show its supreme reality in the life of Christ (2:5–11).

Phil. 2:5–11 Christ's Example of Humble Service. This passage is often referred to as the “hymn of Christ.” Paul depicts Christ's example of service in a stirring poem that traces his preexistence, incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension to the right hand of God. Paul wrote this magnificent theology to encourage the Philippians to consider other people's interests first (see v. 4). Jesus is the paradigm of genuine spiritual progress: not a self-aggrandizing struggle for supremacy, but a deep love for God and neighbor shown in deeds of service. Verses 6–11 have some clear indications of poetic structure, leading some to believe that this is a pre-Pauline hymn adapted by Paul. It is just as likely, however, that Paul composed the hymn for this setting. In view of the myriad theological questions that arise in these verses, it is critical to keep two things in mind: (1) these verses were written not to spur Christians to theological debate but to encourage greater humility and love; and (2) the summary of Christ's life and ministry found here is not unique: the same themes are evident throughout the NT.

Phil. 2:5 The believer's **mind** needs to reflect on the proper model, if life is to be lived for God. There is some debate as to whether this mind-set is something Christians receive by virtue of being *united to Christ* (**which is yours in Christ Jesus**), or whether it is to be based on *the model of Christ* (esv footnote: “which was also in Christ Jesus”). (The Gk. has no verb; either “is” or “was” has to be supplied.) In light of the consistent theme of behavior modeling in this letter (Jesus, Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus are all held out as examples), many interpreters have adopted the latter meaning. Both ideas are theologically true. In either case, the central theme of vv. 1–5 is the same—that the Philippian church would be of one mind (v. 2), united by love (v. 2) and humility (v. 3), and looking out for the interests of others (v. 4).

Phil. 2:6 Prior to the incarnation, Christ was in the **form of God** (Gk. *morphē theou*). Despite the assertions of some scholars to the contrary, this most naturally refers to the “preexistence” of Christ—he, the eternal Son, was there with the Father (John 1:1; 17:5, 24) before he was born in Bethlehem. “Form” here means the true and exact nature of something, possessing all the characteristics and qualities of something. Therefore having the “form of God” is roughly equivalent to having **equality with God** (Gk. *isa theō*), and it is directly contrasted with having the “form of a servant” (Phil. 2:7). The Son of God is and always has been God. “Form” could also be a reference to Christ being the ultimate image of God, “the exact imprint of his nature” (Heb. 1:3). It might also refer to the fact that he is the visible expression of God's invisible glory (Col. 1:15). Remarkably, Christ did not imagine that having “equality with God” (which he already possessed) should lead him to hold onto his privileges at all costs. It was not something to be **grasped**, to be kept and exploited for his own benefit or advantage. Instead, he had a mind-set of service. “Christ did not please himself” (Rom. 15:3). In humility, he counted the interests of others as more significant than his own (Phil. 2:3–4).

Phil. 2:7 Made himself nothing has occasioned much controversy. Greek *kenōō* can mean “empty, pour out” or also (metaphorically) “give up status and privilege.” Does this mean that Christ temporarily relinquished his divine attributes during his earthly ministry? This theory of Christ's *kenosis* or “self-emptying” is not in accord with the context of Philippians or with early Christian theology (see the article on The Person of Christ). Paul is not saying that Christ became less than God or “gave up” some divine attributes; he is not even commenting directly on the question of whether Jesus was fully omnipotent or omniscient during his time on earth. Nor is he saying that Christ ever gave up being “in the form of God.” Rather, Paul is stressing that Christ, who had all the privileges that were rightly his as king of the universe, gave them up to become an ordinary Jewish baby bound for the cross. Christ “made himself nothing” by **taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men** (roughly equivalent phrases). While he had every right to stay comfortably where he was, in a position of power, his love drove him to a position of weakness for the sake of sinful mankind (cf. 2 Cor. 8:9, “though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich”). The “emptying” consisted of his becoming human, not of his giving up any part of his true deity.

Phil. 2:8 It is remarkable enough that God the Son would take on **human form** (Gk. *schēma*, “outward appearance, form, shape,” a different term from *morphē*, used in vv. 6–7 for “form of God” and “form of a servant”) and thus enter into all the vicissitudes of a broken world. But Jesus went much farther, **becoming obedient** (cf. Rom. 5:19) **to the point of death, even death on a cross**. Crucifixion was not simply a convenient way of executing prisoners. It was the ultimate indignity, a public statement by Rome that the crucified one was beyond contempt. The excruciating physical pain was magnified by the degradation and humiliation. No other form of death, no matter how prolonged or physically

agonizing, could match crucifixion as an absolute destruction of the person (see note on [Matt. 27:35](#)). It was the ultimate counterpoint to the divine majesty of the preexistent Christ, and thus was the ultimate expression of Christ's obedience to the Father.

Phil. 2:9 Therefore. It was precisely Jesus' humiliation that became the grounds for his exaltation. By humbling himself on the cross out of love, he demonstrated that he truly shared the divine nature of God, who is love ([1 John 4:8](#)). *For this reason* (“therefore”) God raised him to life and **highly exalted him**, entrusting him with the rule of the cosmos and giving him **the name that is above every name**. This name is not specified here, but many think it refers to the name Yahweh (Hb. *YHWH*), God's personal name, which in the Septuagint is regularly translated as Greek *Kyrios*, “Lord,” the name specified in [Phil. 2:11](#). In any case, Paul means that the eternal Son of God received a status and authority (cf. [Matt. 28:18](#) and note on [Acts 2:33](#)) that had not been his before he became incarnate as both God and man. Jesus' being given this name is a sign that he exercises his messianic authority in the name of Yahweh.

Phil. 2:10–11 While Christ now bears the divine name Yahweh (“Lord”), he is still worshiped with his human name, **Jesus**, since it was in the flesh that he most clearly displayed his divine glory to the world. This astounding union of Jesus' divine and human natures is reinforced by the allusion to [Isa. 45:23](#) in the words **every knee should bow . . . and every tongue confess**, which in Isaiah refer exclusively to Yahweh (cf. [Isa. 45:24](#): “Only in the Lord . . . are righteousness and strength”). The fact that these words can now be applied to God's messianic agent—**Jesus Christ is Lord**—shows that Jesus is fully divine. But the worship of Jesus as Lord is not the final word of the hymn. Jesus' exaltation also results in **the glory of God the Father**. This identical pattern is found in [1 Cor. 15:23–28](#): God gives Jesus messianic dominion over all creation, and everyone will one day rightly give praise to him as their Lord. But when his kingdom reaches its fullness, Jesus does not keep the glory for himself. Instead, “the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all” ([1 Cor. 15:28](#)). Even in his exaltation, Jesus remains the model of loving service to God.