

The Gospel in
Philippians

Displaying God in godless times



Field  *Notes*

Survey the Land

Philippians

Displaying God in godless times brings tension

Field Study 1

Previewing Philippians

- 1:1–11 Opening, Thanks, Prayer
- 1:12–26 Paul's Situation
- 1:27–4:1 Central Appeal & Examples
- 4:2–9 Philippian Situation
- 4:10–23 Thanksgiving & Closing

Introduction

FIELD STUDY 1

Why should we study Philippians?

Like walking against a raging wind, living for God on Satan's turf is a treacherous endeavor. While Christians have the privilege of representing God on earth, they live in secular societies, which seek to conform them. Western cultures have become proud of *evolving* past *God* and no longer needing him. The pressure to accept the self-seeking values of a secular society and turn away from God are powerful and enticing everywhere we turn. We are fearful of being different and standing alone. We are lured into a self-fulfilling life of comfort, promotion, and pleasure without restraint or accountability. The ongoing secular sermon rings in our ears, preached aggressively across the media, the music industry, and social platforms. It's a message that says, "Truth and morality don't really matter after all, so live anyway you like. Just do it!" The pressures to embrace the worldview, values, practices, ambitions, hopes, and dreams of society and assimilate into a godless culture are many, varied, and sensually tempting. Life is much easier when giving in to fierce wind rather than trying to stand against it. Counter-cultural living is hard and deliberate. Living for God in Satan's domain inevitably brings tension.

Christians who cease to stand out begin to blend into their surrounding culture. When the mindset and values of secular society concerning lifestyles, faith, morality, responsibility, conduct, marriage, sexuality, and truth influence one's mind and take hold of one's heart they inevitably affect one's attitude and behavior. Society begins to influence the life and mission of the church rather than the

The World as Satan's Turf

Satan was defeated by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ but still awaits destruction according to Revelation 20:10. Until then, God permits him to operate with a restricted rule over the world. For this reason, Satan is referred to as the *god of this world* in 2 Corinthians 4:4, and the *ruler of the kingdom of the air* in Ephesians 2:2.

The Christian Martyrs' Last Prayer

Christians have always faced fierce opposition from the culture around them. Many in the early church suffered despicable martyrdom, often in front of thousands, merely for the entertainment of the Roman elites.



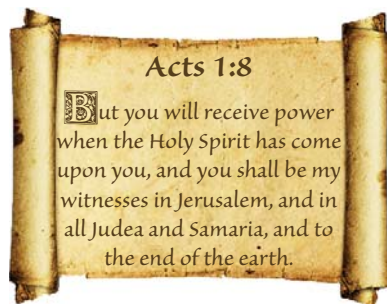
Jean-Leon Gérome, *Acquired by William T. Walters, 1883*



absorbed into the nations of the earth.¹ When a remnant returned, it was not long before they conformed to the world again. The lesson of idolatry had not been fully learned.²

The New Testament record that precedes Philippians also bears testimony to the pressure experienced by followers of Jesus. His own disciples were easily attracted to the self-seeking values of the world.³ Likewise, believers in Rome and Corinth had already been instructed concerning their conformity to worldly standards.⁴

The pressure of living for God within a pagan world is not new. This fact makes the divine message of Philippians particularly imperative for us today. We also face the same challenge between representing God on earth and being absorbed into society's way of life. We are just a little further along in human history. Let's explore what God says in this great book.



Acts 1:8

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

The Apostle Paul

Paul wrote the letter to the church at Philippi from prison. It seems most likely that it was written around A.D. 62 while the apostle was under house arrest in Rome as recorded in Acts 28:16, 30–31.

Who wrote this book?

The apostle Paul wrote the letter of Philippians and played a major role in the early church. He was God's chosen servant to spread the gospel to Gentile lands in accordance with the commission of Jesus in Acts 1:8. Paul was also God's instrument to write the explanation of the fulfillment of God's promised plan through Jesus Christ. Paul's writings in the New Testament are crucial to our understanding of how God's plan in history, expressed in the Old Testament, centers around Jesus.

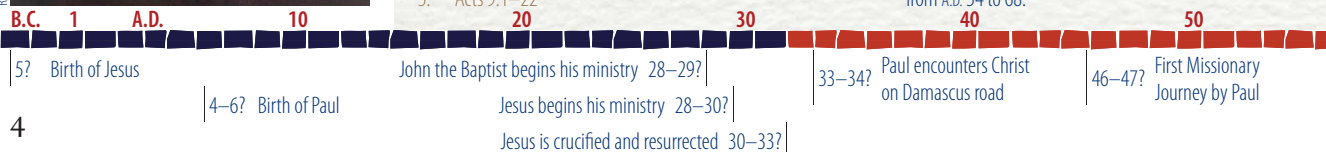
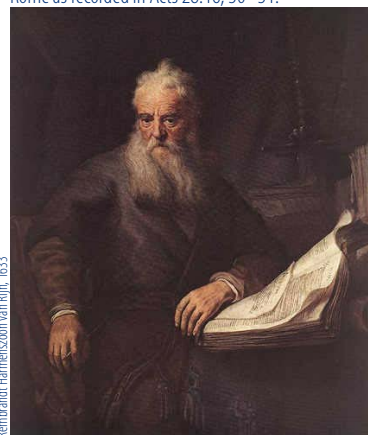
Paul was a Jew born as *Saul* in the city of Tarsus and had the rare privilege of being both a Jew and a Roman citizen. Paul was skilled in tent-making and trained as a biblical scholar in Jerusalem under a famous Jewish intellectual named Gamaliel. He was also a zealous follower and guardian of the traditions of Judaism. However, God called him to serve Jesus Christ while on route to destroy Christianity in Damascus.⁵ Through divine intervention, the most infamous persecutor of the Christian church became its most passionate preacher. By the time Philippians was written in the first century, Paul also

1. 2 Kings 17:7–41; 25
2. Ezra 10:1–44; Nehemiah 13:1–31
3. Mark 10:35–45
4. Romans 12:2; 1 Corinthians 3:1
5. Acts 9:1–22



The Emperor Nero

Nero Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus was the Roman Emperor from A.D. 54 to 68.





became Christianity's most prolific scholar and spokesperson.

What was going on at the time?

When Paul wrote the letter to the Philippians, he was under house arrest in Rome. Paul was awaiting a hearing before the ruler of the Roman Empire—a Caesar named Nero. The Roman state was struggling to understand and deal with Christianity. Judaism was a legal religion under Rome, or a *religio licita*, and Christianity seemed to be a type of Judaism to the Roman authorities.⁶ The confusing issue for the Romans was that Judaism adamantly opposed Christianity. Why were Jews so outraged at the Christian teachings of a Jewish scholar called Paul? Perhaps more importantly, was it true that Christians worshipped a human-god other than the Roman Caesar? That was treason!

As Paul was undergoing the hardship of imprisonment in Rome, he received a financial gift from believers in the Roman city of Philippi who were also undergoing difficulties. The Philippians lived in a Roman culture, saturated with Roman values and religious beliefs. Paul wrote this letter, to thank the Philippians for their gift, but also to provide these Christians with much needed encouragement and direction regarding their Christian living in an anti-Christian environment. These Christians were struggling to live boldly for the Lord Jesus Christ in a society ruled by *lord Caesar*—the same ruler Paul was waiting to boldly preach Christ to in Rome.

The Philippian believers felt the pressure of a society that flagrantly rejected Jesus Christ. Blending in or being a secret Christian was a more enticing option than being socially ridiculed, marginalized, imprisoned or even killed. However, their problems were also self-inflicted by their adoption of the customs of the culture. Some Philippians lived without restraint and came to embrace the

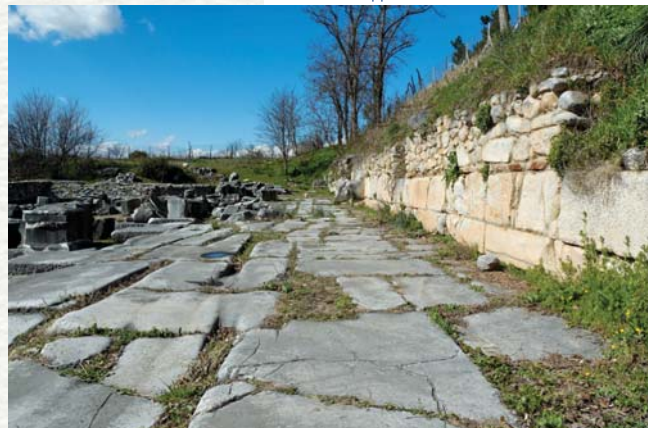


The Mamertine Prison

According to tradition, the Mamertine Prison in Rome is where Paul was incarcerated. This probably was the case later on in Paul's life but not during Paul's first confinement in Rome when he wrote Philippians. According to Acts 28:30, Paul was in a rented house, and most likely endured two separate imprisonments in Rome in the A.D. 60's.

Via Egnatia through Philippi

The Egnatian Way or *Via Egnatia* was the main Roman road running east-west across the empire. You can still see the remains of the road amongst the ruins of Philippi.



6. Acts 25:19, 27

50 60 70 80 90 100 A.D.

49? Jerusalem Council

50–52? Second Missionary Journey by Paul

60–62?

Paul arrives in Rome under house arrest

64 Fire in Rome

70 Temple is destroyed

John writes Revelation 95–96?

79

Pompeii and Herculaneum are destroyed by Vesuvius eruption



The Egnatian Way

The Egnatian Way or *Via Egnatia* was the main Roman road heading east-west across the southern part of Europe between the Adriatic Sea and the Black Sea. It was built by the Romans in the second century B.C. upon an ancient existing path.

Controlling Philippi

Military leaders, kings, and would-be kings long recognized the value of controlling Philippi.

- King Philip II of Macedon, father of Alexander the Great, conquered Krenides, renaming it Philippi, in 356 B.C. Its location formed a natural defense against invasions into Greece.
- Roman generals Octavian and Mark Antony defeated the assassins of Julius Caesar and generals Brutus and Cassius, in the Battle of Philippi in 42 B.C. They allowed Roman soldiers to retire and colonize Philippi.
- After Octavian defeated Mark Antony he sent more Roman soldiers to colonize Philippi. In 30 B.C., Octavian wanted to dilute any potential allegiance the veterans of the Battle of Philippi may have had to Mark Antony.
- Octavian became Caesar Augustus, the founder of the Roman Empire and first emperor until his death in A.D. 14.

values, ambitions, wants, and desires of their godless society. These Philippians were true Christians, but they were also becoming self-centered among one another despite their generous giving to ministry. Selfishness and self-promotion were acceptable attitudes in a culture whose ruler had an inflated sense of self, but not in the eyes of God. Self-centered living was causing disunity among God's people in Philippi and that was not befitting of God's representatives.

Who was the audience?

The letter of Philippians was written to Christians in the Roman city of Philippi in the Roman province of Macedonia. The geographical location of Philippi had long been recognized as of strategic military and economic importance. It was situated close to gold mines and guarded an important ancient roadway, which the Romans had built into their famous Egnatian Way. The mountains to the north and sea to the south funneled travelers, traders, and armies through the plains just below Philippi.

By the middle of the first century, Philippi was fully recognized as a Roman city. This means that it had the rare privilege of being a Roman colony city—a sort of Rome away from Rome. Thus, it was treated as if it was located on Italian soil. In fact, it had been colonized over the last century by retired Roman army soldiers and had a Roman garrison watching over it. There were no doubts in Philippi as to whom their allegiance belonged.

Acts 16:6–40 records God's concern for the people of Philippi. Therefore, he directed Paul to the province of Macedonia during his second missionary journey so that this region would hear the gospel.¹ After a few days in Philippi, Paul and his companions Timothy, Silas, and probably Luke, proclaimed the good news of Christ by the river to a God-fearing lady named Lydia. She became a Christian along

1. Acts 15:41–18:22



with her household.² Sometime later, the city's jailer together with his household also became Christians. This was the beginning of the Philippian church. The apostle wrote the letter of Philippians to address the beloved church he had founded some ten years earlier.

When did this happen?

The evidence suggests that Philippians was likely written around A.D. 62 while Paul was imprisoned.³ The most prolonged and best known of his many imprisonments were in Caesarea Maritima and Rome.⁴ However, in this letter, Paul mentions both Caesar's elite troops hearing the gospel and the Emperor's personal staff sending greetings.⁵ He also speaks as if he has reached the last phase of the legal process that Roman citizens like him were entitled to; a hearing before Caesar in Rome, which could result in his death.⁶ Therefore, Rome is the most probable location from which Paul writes this letter. He was held captive there for two years from A.D. 60–62.⁷ Since Paul speaks confidently that he will be released soon, it is likely Philippians was written at the end of this two-year period.⁸



Roman Theater

Philippi contained all of the typical features of a Roman city including a Roman Theatre. One of the support pillars of this theatre contains the "Victoria Augusta" which commemorates the victory of Octavian and Mark Antony over the assassins of Julius Caesar in 42 B.C.

How should we read this type of book?

There are three important issues to understand before we start digging into the meaning of Philippians. Paul mentions these in the letter without explanation since they were part of everyday Roman life. The Philippian believers would have noticed what Paul was expressing, but we on the other hand, live in a different time and age, so we need a little help. Consider the following as a lens through which to see with more clarity the message and significance of the letter. Remember them as you excavate the text in the upcoming *Field Studies*.

2. Acts 16:13–15
3. Philippians 1:7, 13, 17
4. 2 Corinthians 6:5; 11:23; Acts 24:27;
5. Philippians 1:13; 4:22
6. Philippians 1:19–26; 2:17
7. Acts 28:11–31
8. Philippians 2:24



Roman Citizenship

This is a drawing of a bronze plaque recording the grant of Roman citizenship to men from Hispania in reward for their service as Roman cavalry.

Prison Epistles

The word *epistle* is the Greek word for *letter*. The New Testament books of Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon are often referred to as the Prison Epistles. This is because they are traditionally considered to have been written while Paul was under the same imprisonment in Rome.

Jesus is crucified and resurrected 30–33?

Paul encounters Christ on Damascus road 33–34?

Paul's First Missionary Journey 46–47?

Paul's Second Missionary Journey 50–52?

Paul's first Roman imprisonment 60–62?

Paul's Caesarea imprisonment 58–60?

Paul's second Roman imprisonment and death 67?



Roman Citizenship

Roman citizenship was granted on several grounds. The obvious and most respected reason was birth to parents who were citizens. Liberated slaves of citizens, soldiers discharged from the auxiliary Roman army after 25 years of service, the payment of huge sums of money, and actions deemed of special service to the Empire could all lead to citizenship. Given Paul's parents were Jews, it is likely they received citizenship as a reward for special service. In any case, all inhabitants of Tarsus, Paul's hometown, received citizenship in 66 B.C. This is why Paul could say he was born a citizen granting him a very respected type of Roman citizenship in Acts 22:28.

Philo of Alexandria

The first century A.D. Jewish writer Philo refers to Moses as, "a model for all those who were inclined to imitate him. . . for indeed, there is no one who does not know that men in a lowly condition are imitators of men of high reputation, and that what they see, these last chiefly desire, towards that do they also direct their own inclinations and endeavors."

(Philo De Vita Mosi 1.158–160)



André Thevet, 1584

The first concept to understand is the importance of *Roman citizenship*. Philippi was a Roman colony and the members of the church there knew the high value of possessing Roman citizenship. Citizenship signaled status and status was highly valued by all. It could be said that each inhabitant of Philippi was one of two kinds: a citizen or one who wished to be a citizen. However, citizenship in the first century was still an honor bestowed on few. It brought status because it granted standing with privilege and responsibility. A citizen enjoyed tax reliefs, access to recreational events, security, and legal protection. The greatest privilege, which everyone was eager for, was high standing in the social hierarchy. If you were a citizen, you were known in town and noticed on the street.

One of the advantages of granting citizenship was that it created unity and loyalty to Rome across large land areas and diverse people groups. Therefore, Rome was represented and promoted across the Empire by these privileged few. Representing Rome well was the responsibility of Roman citizens. Citizens were to live worthy of their status because the greatness of Rome was on display through them. Paul employs this coveted status in his letter to the Philippians to encourage them to live in light of a much more valuable status: their heavenly citizenship. He wanted Christians to understand that heavenly citizens have many privileges and responsibilities too. They get to display the greatness of their God and his values on earth. So read Philippians with these questions in mind: Whom do I represent? In what or in whom does my sense of value and identity lie? What are the values I get to display?

The second essential issue to understand in studying Philippians concerns *role models*. In the letter, Paul uses a well-known teaching model of imitation to instruct the Philippian Christians. Both the Romans and the Jews used this way of educating others known as *imitatio*. Students or disciples copied the skills, practices, character, and lifestyle of the person they wanted to imitate. After all, the instructor was the embodiment of what he knew and believed. Showing others how to live life in the desired way was more effective than telling them how to do it.

Seneca the Younger, a tutor to the Roman Emperor Nero, made the following statement:

"The living voice and the intimacy of a common life will help you more than the written word. You must go to the scene of the action, first, because men put more faith in their eyes than in their ears, and second, because the way is long if one follows precepts, but short and helpful, if one follows patterns... It was not the classroom of Epicurus, but living together under the same





Gunnar Bach Pedersen, 2007

Lucius Annaeus Seneca

This statue of Seneca is a sculpture by Puerta de Almodóvar in Córdoba, Spain. Often known as Seneca the Younger, he lived from around 4 BC – AD 65 as a Roman philosopher and statesman.

roof, that made great men of Metrodorus, Hermarchus, and Polyaeus."

(Seneca Epistles: On Sharing Knowledge 6.5–7 translated by Richard M. Gummere)

Paul's exhortation to Christians to live worthy of their heavenly citizenship is constructed according to the helpful teaching model of *imitatio*. Paul shows Christians how to live a worthy Christian life by presenting Christ, Timothy, Epaphroditus, and himself as role models to *imitate*. In doing so, the letter of Philippians constitutes an invitation for us to consider whom we should aspire to be like.

The final issue to understand in Philippians is the *worship of the emperor as a human-god*. The Romans understood that masses of people

from many backgrounds could be controlled through religion. Therefore, the Roman Caesar was considered *Lord and Savior* in colonial cities such as Philippi. The Philippians enjoyed leisure at theaters and sporting events, security and justice in the law courts and police stations, basic sanitation in public baths and toilets, as well as access to the gods at temples. This was all because their allegiance was to Rome through submission to Caesar as Lord and Savior. People could have other gods, but Caesar was also to be confessed and worshipped as a son of the gods.

This made life hard for Christians. How could they live daily in a city where their exclusive allegiance to Jesus was put to the test at every turn? What would living counter-culturally involve? What would happen to Christians when the Roman Empire would understand that Christianity worshipped another Son of God as Lord and Savior? This was the God-man

Imitation

In the first century A.D. the historian Dionysius of Halicarnassus wrote a three part work called *De Imitatio*. Only fragments of this work have survived, some of which were quoted within the writings of the ancient writer Syrianus. Fortunately, one of the surviving fragments states: "*Imitation leads to the likeness of the individual desired...*"

(De Imitatio fragment 6.1)

Pantheon in Rome

The Pantheon in Rome was originally built by Marcus Agrippa in 31 B.C. and later rebuilt by Emperor Hadrian around A.D. 126. As a temple to all the gods of ancient Rome, it represented the challenge for believers to exclusively worship Christ.



Giovanni Paolo Panini, 1692–1765

20

30

40

50

60

70

A.D.

Jesus is crucified and resurrected 30–33?

Paul's First Missionary Journey 46–47?

Paul's first Roman imprisonment 60–62?

Paul encounters Christ on Damascus road 33–34?

Paul's Caesarea imprisonment 58–60?

Paul's Second Missionary Journey 50–52?

Paul's second Roman imprisonment and death 67?



Notes, Observations & Questions

After you have read

1. Go back to your *reading knowledge chart* on page 62 and fill in anything that you have learned while reading this section of Philippians. Compare it with what you already knew to see what the text has revealed so far.
2. Write Philippians 2:5–11 from the previous page or your own Bible into a journal word for word. This practice will help you to remember and understand what you have just read. This week, journal your thoughts as you consider what it means to live worthy of the gospel and its impact relating to your own family, community, nation, and church.
3. Now read Philippians 2:5–11 in your own Bible. Continue to reread it each day until you get to *Field Study 5*. This will reinforce the learning of Scripture and help you to better retain its message.

Pray

As we learn the Word of God, it is essential that we communicate with him through prayer. Commit to praying throughout the week alone or with others, asking God to help you live as a citizen of the kingdom of heaven this week. Write your own prayer or use this as a sample prayer:

Almighty God,

May your great name be exalted among the nations today and always for you are Creator of all people and gracious to all your creation. Thank you that you are a loving God who cares for me so deeply. I know I am privileged to be the recipient of your offer of salvation in Christ. Thank you. Thank you for opening my eyes to the truth of the gospel. Forgive me for taking so lightly my heavenly status. I love you God and yet I do find it hard so many times to live in a manner that reflects your values. It is somewhat frightening to think that I am responsible for representing you in the world. Help me to do so in a way that honors you and brings all glory to you alone. Help me combat living for myself. Help me treat other believers, like those in my church, as the allies that they are. I want to stand strong for you whatever the cost. Have mercy on me Lord and help me become the person you want me to be. I commit myself to living for you because you are worthy. Amen.



Excavate the Site

Philippians 2:5–11

Jesus Christ is our greatest role model

Field Study 5

1:1–11 Opening, Thanks, Prayer

1:12–26 Paul's Situation

1:27–4:1 Central Appeal & Examples

2:5–11 Example 1: Jesus

4:2–9 Philippian Situation

4:10–23 Thanksgiving & Closing

Philippians 2:5–11

FIELD STUDY 5

How is the text arranged?

In Philippians 1:27–2:4, we learned that Christians are called to live as citizens worthy of the gospel of Christ. Our heavenly identity demands a certain kind of earthly living. But what does this look like? How can we know we are living as the heavenly citizens God desires us to be? Paul continues to answer these questions as he introduces the first of several living examples for Christians to imitate. Let's explore this passage together. Read the biblical text several times. Allow the outline below to direct your reading:

Philippians 2:5–11

Section	Bible Text
Example 1 to Imitate: Jesus Christ	⁵ You should have this attitude among yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus:
Humility to the extent of public humiliation	⁶ Who, though he existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself by taking the form of a slave, by being made in the likeness of men, and by being found in appearance as a man. ⁸ He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross!
Vindication through exaltation before all	⁹ Therefore, God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow—in heaven and on earth and under the earth— ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.



As you can see from the text, the first model Paul presents to help Christians understand how to live as godly citizens is the Lord Jesus Christ himself. What a standard! Note the general outline that emerges. A short verse introduces a poetic section, which is divided into humility and exaltation.

What is this passage saying?

What are some key terms and phrases?

The following table includes a couple of key terms or phrases useful to understanding this passage. They will prepare us for grasping the explanation section that follows. Take some time to understand their meaning and significance.

Christology

This is the area of study within Christian teaching that focuses on the person and work of Jesus Christ. It deals with questions such as:

- Who was Jesus?
- In what sense was Jesus God and man?
- What did Jesus' death accomplish?

Polemical Paul?

Paul is encouraging the Philippian believers to take bold stands for Christ, the supreme *Lord and Savior*. He encourages believers in Rome to do the same:

...because if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Romans 10:9

Paul calls the Roman Christians to be bold in proclaiming Christ as Lord and Savior in the city where lord Caesar lives.

Meaning of Key Terms

Key word or phrase	Meaning and significance
Emptied himself (2:7)	The declaration that Christ "emptied himself" has been cause of much discussion, confusion, and speculation. It has become one of the most debated issues regarding the person of Christ. What did Christ, being God, empty himself of? Was it of his deity? Was it of some of his divine attributes? As interesting as some of these questions are, most of them ignore the answer given in how the phrase is used within the hymn itself. It is important to know that the self-emptying of Christ does not mean that he <i>exchanged</i> being God to become man. In becoming man, the Son of God did not cease being God at all. His deity was veiled but not diminished. If God ceased to be God, he never could have actually been God. Self-emptying has to do with Christ humbly embracing the form and status of a human even though he had the rights, privileges, and status of God. This is important. Many ancient false teachings within the Christian church that are present today in some Christian cults, owe their existence to a misunderstanding of phrases such as this concerning Christ.
Jesus Christ is Lord (2:11)	We have seen that in the first century, the Roman emperor was worshiped as a sort of human god. The average person in the Roman empire worshipped many other gods but the Roman Caesar alone, being a human deity, was considered "lord and savior" Paul and the Philippian believers knew this. The believers were experiencing trials in Philippi because they would not acknowledge Caesar as lord even though Philippi was a Roman colony. Remarkably, Paul is flagrantly bold right under Caesar's nose; in Rome, under Roman arrest, and awaiting trial before the Roman Caesar himself, he reminds the Philippians of the truth that all will one day affirm that Jesus Christ alone, not Caesar, is truly <i>Lord</i> .

B.C. 1 A.D. 10 20 30 40 50

5? Birth of Jesus

John the Baptist begins his ministry 28–29?

33–34? Paul encounters Christ on Damascus road

46–47? First Missionary Journey by Paul

4–6? Birth of Paul

Jesus begins his ministry 28–30?

Jesus is crucified and resurrected 30–33?



Meaning of Key Terms

Key word or phrase	Meaning and significance
Jesus Christ is Lord (continued)	All people will one day affirm this truth, but Paul wanted the Philippians to stand strong with him in affirming it in the present, despite the difficulty this would surely bring.

What about the culture?

There are a few cultural issues we must examine in order to understand this passage better. The first concerns the text as an ancient hymn while the second revisits the issue of Christian imitation. We also need to explore the significance of *death by crucifixion* in the Philippian society. Paul's use of this imagery would no doubt have shocked a first century reader.



Ephesians 5:18–19

And do not get drunk with wine, which is debauchery, but be filled by the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music in your hearts to the Lord,

Does Paul invoke an early Christian hymn in 2:6–11? Researchers, based on the style and language of the text, have suggested that verses 6–11 may have been a hymn sung by early Christians as part of their corporate worship. There appears to be

traces of structural rhythm or meter and many other poetic literary devices. In addition, the vocabulary stands out from the surrounding letter as though it was a separate writing that was inserted in. If it is a hymn, Paul introduces it here to encourage the Philippian believers to live in accordance to what they sing in this praise song. Christian hymns have always functioned as expressions of praise as well as ways of teaching Christian truths. They are a form of catechism, so that believers know how to live the Christian life.

In the ancient world, learning by example or *imitatio* was an established way of education. Imitating a role model was how people learned their trade or even their way of life. The assumption was that this would improve the student's life in some manner and may even elevate one's social status. Yet, Paul puts a different and important spin on *imitatio*.

Hymns in the Early Church

Singing hymns was popular in the early Christian church. We see evidence of this both in and outside of the New Testament. In Colossians 3:16, Paul exhorts the believers to encourage one another "with all wisdom, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs..."

Christian Catechism

Catechism is the word used to describe the instruction of the truths of Christianity. According to Luke 1:4, Theophilus had been catechized as had Apollos (Acts 18:25). The teaching often took a question/answer format, as well as the singing of hymns or chanting truths to commit them to memory.

Jesus as a boy in the Temple

Luke 2:42–50 records the story of Jesus at age 12, in the temple courts with the teachers of the law. Jesus listened, asked questions, and gave explanations to the teachers of the law. This is an analogy of what a catechism is.



William Holman Hunt, 1860

50 60 70 80 90 100 A.D.

49? Jerusalem Council

50–52? Second Missionary Journey by Paul

60–62?

Paul arrives in Rome under house arrest

64 Fire in Rome

70 Temple is destroyed

John writes Revelation 95–96?

79

Pompeii and Herculaneum are destroyed by Vesuvius eruption



Sang Hymns to Christ

They [Christians] were accustomed to meet on a fixed day before dawn and sing responsively a hymn to Christ as to a god, and bind themselves to a solemn oath, not to do any wicked deeds, but never to commit any fraud, theft, adultery, never to falsify their word, nor to deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up. When this was over, then it was their custom to depart and to reassemble again to partake of a meal together—just ordinary and innocent food.

(Pliny the Younger, Epistulae, 10.96)

Cicero on Imitatio

In the first century B.C. the Roman writer Cicero wrote about the value of *imitatio*. In his most famous work he states:

Let this, then, be the first of my counsels, that we show the student whom he should imitate, and in such a way that he may copy with most care the chief qualities of his model. Let practice then follow, whereby in his imitation he may represent the exact resemblance of him whom he chose as his pattern... But he who shall proceed right, must first of all be very careful in making his choice, and must use the greatest diligence to attain the chief qualities of him whom he has approved.

(De Oratore 2.22)

Christian imitation called for a downward movement in social status. The imitation of Christ was in service to others. Such a counter-cultural move was an expression of a lifestyle worthy of the gospel.

In a society that praised upward movement and had clear levels of social status, Paul calls all Christians to commit to serve and honor others before themselves. In ancient society, it would be inconceivable for a Roman citizen who owned slaves to consider his slaves' interests above his own. Yet, this is precisely what the apostle calls all Christians to do, including slave-owners. The first role model Paul provides for Christians to imitate is Jesus Christ himself.

In its first section, the hymn ends with an emphasis on the type of death Christ embraced: death on a cross. This type of death was considered an act of public humiliation. It was so shameful that Roman citizens were not to mention or even think of it. Look at what the ancient Roman writer Cicero says concerning the cross:

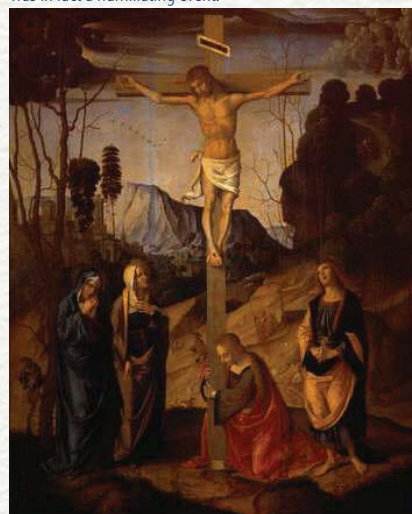
"... the very word 'cross' let it be far removed from not only the bodies of Roman citizens but even their thoughts, their eyes, and their ears... the mere mention is unworthy of a Roman citizen and a free man."

(Cicero, Pro Rabirius, 16).

To sing in praise to one who died on a cross would have shocked the Roman society. To declare him "lord" would have added insult to injury. As a result, Romans and Greeks would have viewed the worship of a crucified person as foolish. Jews also considered their Messiah dying by crucifixion to be very insulting.

The Crucifixion of Christ

While some artwork presents Christ's crucifixion as noble, it was in fact a humiliating event.



Marco Palmezzano, 1480–1500

What is the explanation?

Let's examine in detail what God is saying in Philippians 2:5–11. It is easy to look solely at issues related to the person of Christ, but remember that the point of this passage is practical. Paul's purpose is not merely to teach us about who Christ is. It is to show us Christ's example so that we may imitate him.

Philippians 2:5 functions as both a transition and a summary. It transitions us from

B.C. 1 A.D. 50 100 150 200 250

30–33? Jesus is crucified and resurrected

155 Martyrdom of Polycarp

67? Death of Paul



the request that believers live as citizens worthy of the gospel of Christ into the first practical illustration that models how this is done.

The verse also introduces Jesus Christ, the role model believers are to imitate.

If you are to live as God desires you to live, then

you must cultivate a certain

mindset in life, rather than be conformed to the culture around you.

The attitude believers are to nurture within and among themselves is modeled after Jesus Christ, the highest of standards. Only in

exhibiting a Christ-like attitude toward one another can the self-centeredness described in verses 3 and 4 be removed.

- (5) So what is the mindset Christ models for believers? What is the attitude we are to develop and exhibit toward one another? The

1 Corinthians 1:22–24

For Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks ask for wisdom, but we preach about a crucified Christ, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles. But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Philippians 2:3–4

Instead of being motivated by selfish ambition or vain conceit, each of you in humility should consider others more significant than yourselves. Each of you should look out not only for your own interests, but also for the interests of others.

The Declaration of Chalcedon A.D. 451

THEREFORE, FOLLOWING THE HOLY FATHERS, WE ALL WITH ONE ACCORD TEACH MEN TO ACKNOWLEDGE ONE AND THE SAME SON, OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, AT ONCE COMPLETE IN GODHEAD AND COMPLETE IN MANHOOD, TRULY GOD AND TRULY MAN, CONSISTING ALSO OF A REASONABLE SOUL AND BODY; OF ONE SUBSTANCE WITH THE FATHER AS REGARDS HIS GODHEAD, AND AT THE SAME TIME OF ONE SUBSTANCE WITH US AS REGARDS HIS MANHOOD; LIKE US IN ALL REGARDS APART FROM SIN... RECOGNIZED IN TWO NATURES, WITHOUT CONFUSION, WITHOUT CHANGE, WITHOUT DIVISION, WITHOUT SEPARATION; THE DISTINCTION OF NATURES BEING IN NO WAY ANNULLED BY THE UNION, BUT RATHER THE CHARACTERISTICS OF EACH NATURE BEING PRESERVED AND COMING TOGETHER TO FORM ONE PERSON AND SUBSISTENCE, NOT AS PARTED OR SEPARATED INTO TWO PERSONS...

Son of God, Jesus Christ

This early Christian hymn used by Paul in 2:5–11 demonstrates Jesus as an example for Christians. It also teaches much about the person of Jesus. This Christology affirms Jesus as God the Son who became a man. The incarnation of the eternal Son of God was not an exchange of a divine nature for a human nature, nor was it the mixture of the two, but rather the union of two distinct, unmixed natures in the one person.

The Council of Chalcedon

The church Council of Chalcedon in A.D. 451 expressed this truth of Christ's full deity and full humanity long ago to remove a growing false teaching within the church.



Vasily Surikov, 1876

300

350

400

450

500

550 A.D.

Council of Nicaea 325

Council of Constantinople 381

Council of Ephesus 431

451 Council of Chalcedon



Arianism

In the fourth century A.D., Arius from Alexandria taught that Jesus was a created being who is similar to, but not the same as God. This is contrary to the teaching of the Scriptures, including Philippians 2:6. Arius' teaching was condemned as heresy yet continues to plague the church even today. Jehovah's Witnesses are a contemporary group regarded as holding Arian views.

Docetism

Since the first century A.D. some have advocated that Jesus only looked like a human when in fact was not. Docetists believed the physical world was evil and so God could not have taken on a physical form. His physical body and death by crucifixion was all an illusion. Among other reasons for believing this, was a misunderstanding of the phrase in Philippians 2:7, "by looking like other men." They argued that Christ *looked* like men but was not really a man. The context of our passage teaches against this. The phrase that follows, "by sharing in human nature" leaves no doubt that Jesus was fully human. Christ looked like any other man but without sin. Even today there are strains of what is known as the *Christ Myth Theory* which resembles docetism.

hymn from verses 6–11 captures the essence of Paul's call to the Philippians. Let's examine it according to its two main parts: humility in verses 6–8 and exaltation in 9–11.

The first part of the hymn highlights the humility of Christ Jesus who, being God, chose to become man. The hymn leaves no doubt that Christ Jesus is God. Before his birth on earth, he "existed in the form of God."

The word translated as *form* does not suggest that Christ merely looked like or resembled God, in the way Adam did when he was created in the image of God.¹ Instead, *form* stresses that his inner essence, substance, or essential nature, is divine. Christ's outward *form* was that of God because inwardly he *was* God. If the choice of the term *form* is not enough to teach Christ's deity, the next phrase in verse 6 settles the matter. By indicating that Christ did not consider his "equality with God as something to be grasped," the hymn implies the deity of Christ since only God is an equal with God.

Christ, however, did not hold on to his status as God. He did not use the rights and privileges of his divine nature for his own advantage. Rather, he "emptied himself." What does this mean? Does it suggest that Christ set aside all or some of his divine attributes? The broader context in which *emptied himself* is used qualifies and defines what this self-imposed emptying is. Christ Jesus emptied himself *by taking on the form of a slave* by looking like other men, and by sharing in human nature. The self-emptying is to be understood in terms of the nature and role Jesus chose to embrace even though he was God. Christ took on a human nature. He looked like a man because he became a man. He also took on the lowly, humble position of a servant-slave. He was one with no honor, no privileges, no rights, and no status. Therefore, the act of self-emptying is simply the fact that God humbled himself in becoming not just a man but also one at the bottom of the human social ladder.

This downward movement in social status is shocking in a world where everyone desired to improve their status. A God

Hebrews 4:15

For we do not have a high priest incapable of sympathizing with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way just as we are, yet without sin.

(6–8)

Romans 5:19

For just as through the disobedience of the one man many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of one man many will be made righteous.

1. Genesis 1:27

B.C. 40

30

20

10

B.C. 1 A.D.

10

42 Battle of Philippi

30 Soldiers colonize Philippi

27 Caesar Augustus begins rule

Birth of Paul 4–6?



who does not grasp the rights and privileges that belong to his divine status is a God who humbles himself. Moreover, the extent of this self-imposed humility is seen not just in the fact that he chose to submit to death but in the very type of death he obediently embraced. God chose to die as a criminal. Death on a cross to a Jew was a sign of God's rejection and punishment. To a Roman, it was the height of public humiliation. God *humbled himself* to the extreme of a humiliating death.



Disputation of Holy Sacrament

While the subject of this painting is the Lord's supper, Christ is depicted as enthroned above the earth.

(9–11) The second part of the hymn highlights the exaltation of Christ Jesus by God the Father. Though mankind rejected the Son of God, he is highly exalted by God the Father. This exaltation is not to be understood as a promotion in heavenly position as if there was something lacking in Christ's status. Jesus is God and God cannot be promoted above his divine perfection. Rather, it is a way of emphasizing the extent and recognition of the exaltation—Christ is super-exalted. How is this so?

Christ Jesus is recognized as having a name that is above every name. It is a name that in the future, every knee will bow to and every tongue will confess. Therefore, the exaltation vindicates a rejected Christ before all creation.



Isaiah 45:22–24

Turn to me so you can be delivered, all you who live in the earth's remote regions! For I am God, and I have no peer. I solemnly make this oath—what I say is true and reliable: 'Surely every knee will bow to me, every tongue will solemnly affirm; they will say about me, "Yes, the Lord is a powerful deliverer."' All who are angry at him will cower before him.

Will all people be saved?

The homage rendered to Christ by all one day does not teach that all will be saved. There will come a time when all will acknowledge, whether they like it or not, that Jesus is God. For believers this will be a day of praise. For those who reject Christ it will be a day of confessing to their shame that they rejected God.

20

30

40

50

60

70 A.D.

Jesus is crucified and resurrected 30–33?

Paul's First Missionary Journey 46–47?

Paul's first Roman imprisonment 60–62?

Paul encounters Christ on Damascus road 33–34?

Paul's Caesarea imprisonment 58–60?

Paul's second Roman imprisonment and death 67?

Paul's Second Missionary Journey 50–52?



God's Glory

The exaltation of Christ before all in no way diminishes the glory of God the Father. It actually increases it. The Godhead being Father, Son, and Spirit do not compete for praise but receive praise as each member of the Trinity is worshipped.

The entire realm of humanity will one day recognize that Jesus Christ holds this *name*. So what name is this? The description in verses 10–11 regarding the bowing of knees and confession of tongues expands on what Isaiah 45:23 ascribes alone to the Lord God, or *Yahweh*. *Lord* is God's personal name in the Old Testament. Jesus Christ will be seen by all and will receive the recognition due to the Lord, that is, *Yahweh* or God. The reason is that Jesus Christ is Lord-Yahweh-God.

What is God saying?

After digging through Philippians 2:5–11 we are now ready to summarize its meaning and significance. On a general level, the passage adds to our understanding of the story of Scripture. The hymn contained in this text directs our thoughts from eternity past, through history, and into eternity future. It does so by focusing on God rather than ourselves. This broad sweep through history is about God bringing glory to himself. It is about the willingness of the Son of God

Romans 8:29

Because those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

Where else is this taught in Scripture?

It is God's will that believers in Jesus Christ live to become like Jesus Christ. His own public example accompanied by an inner circle of disciples was certainly a form of *imitatio*—learning through living with the master. So too Christian discipleship is about forming Christ-likeness in Jesus' followers. In Romans 8, Paul states that we are called to become like the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

But becoming like our chief role model involves walking the path he walked.

Men like the Apostles John and Peter, who were original disciples, reminded their Christian readers that walking in Jesus' path is not only God's expectation for every believer but that it is also a hard trek and it leads to glory (1 John 2:6; 1 Peter 4:12–13). Another Christian hymn that Paul records in 2 Timothy 2:11–13 says it well. *"If we died with him, we will also live*

1 Peter 4:12–13

Dear friends, do not be astonished that a trial by fire is occurring among you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice in the degree that you have shared in the sufferings of Christ, so that when his glory is revealed you may also rejoice and be glad.

with him. If we endure, we will also reign with him." Vindication will come but only by God's aid and in God's time.



James Jacques Joseph Tissot, 1886–1894

Jesus with His Disciples

Jesus' disciples spent about three years following their Rabbi around so that they could be like him and imitate him.



to self-sacrifice and obey in order to bring glory to God the Father. We are reminded in the hymn that God and not man, is the focus of attention. The salvation of man is a means of bringing glory to God; a glory that all will one day acknowledge.

On a more specific level, the passage presents Christ's attitude and behavior as the pattern for Christian living. The hymn is not simply words to sing but an attitude to embrace. It is a mindset that goes against what society exhorts us to believe. Those who trust in Christ are to adopt a Christ-like attitude in being willing to embrace humility before others and leave the rest up to God. Citizens worthy of the gospel of Jesus follow him down man's social ladder of status. Consider Joseph who was a favored son and became a slave in Egypt before rising to rule the land,¹ or Moses moving from prince to shepherd to leader.² God's people are to embrace their lowly consideration in the eyes of the world and wait on God for their reward.

Yahweh

In the Old Testament God revealed his personal name to Moses as *I am* in Exodus 3:14. The book of Exodus was originally written in Hebrew where *I am* was rendered. *Yahweh*. English translations of the Scriptures often render this name with the capitalised *LORD*.

Where else does this happen in history?

Athanasius, a short, dark-skinned Egyptian bishop has been called *the Doctor of Orthodoxy*. He participated in the Council of Nicaea, one of the most important epochs in the history of the Christian church. While Athanasius was chief assistant deacon to bishop Alexander of Alexandria, a presbyter from Libya named Arius began to proclaim that if the Father had a Son, then "there was a time when the Son was not." This meant that Christ had a beginning and if he was divine, his divinity was inferior to that of the Father. This doctrine began to spread, but Athanasius and Alexander fought against Arius arguing that his teaching denied the biblical doctrine of the Trinity. The strife was so severe that Emperor Constantine feared the division of the Empire. He sent more than 300 bishops throughout the Empire to a council at Nicaea. The council concluded that Athanasius' view was the biblical position and Arianism had to be rejected, giving thus rise to the Nicene Creed. However, this did not end the dispute, and Arians began a long battle against Athanasius. Athanasius modeled perseverance and long-suffering for the sake of the truth of the gospel. His resilience and zeal for the purity of the gospel caused him to be exiled at least five different times. Four different emperors exiled Athanasius for seventeen out of his forty-five years as a bishop. Among other things, he was falsely accused of murder, illegal taxation, sorcery, and treason. Yet, in spite of the curse implied by his banishment and the dangers, defeats, temptations and hardships he faced, his courage did not fail and orthodoxy was preserved.



Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325

This icon shows Emperor Constantine in the center and some of the bishops from the Council of Nicaea holding the Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople (381).

1. Genesis 37–50
2. Numbers 12:3



What does God want?

Now that we have explored this portion of Scripture, we are ready to think through how we can live out God's will as expressed through the truth we have uncovered. Remember, Paul is now giving you practical "how to" examples of living worthy lives. Here are two main applicational points that emerge from our passage. Think about how real they are in your life now.

Humble yourself before others for the sake of Christ your Lord

Society expects you to want to rise to the top no matter the cost. This is true even if it is through dishonest gain or at someone else's expense. We have our own social ladders that we yearn to keep moving up, rather than down. We dislike public self-promotion and self-praise for it is arrogant, but we want to be promoted and praised and served. Yet our Lord Jesus Christ, the greatest role model on how to live the Christian life, shows us the very opposite. He calls us to reverse rather than embrace society's values at home, at work, and in church. He asks us to look for opportunities to self-sacrifice rather than self-serve. How can we do this? For the sake of following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, what would a life of humility look like if it were yours? Who can you serve and seek to advance even at your own expense? How can you be a servant-husband, a servant-sister, a servant-employee, or a servant-boss? Is it time to stop thinking about yourself and spare a thought for others? This week, shock those around you by going against the flow. Turn society's values upside down, so that they become the right way up. Imitate Christ.

Allow God to vindicate and promote you in his time

Challenging what society values certainly will not help to advance you socially. You may not get a promotion in work or be recognized for your selfless efforts before others. Expect difficulty to come your way. Jesus did not conform to society's system and was publicly humiliated. His vindication and exaltation came from God but only after his death and resurrection. It is up to God to decide when and how to vindicate and promote you. Remember that as you go about your day today. God alone determines the timing of vindication. Take comfort in the truth that he is just. Appropriate vindication and exaltation will come in the Lord's time, but remember it might not be here and now. Christ is not just your greatest example on how to live life in the world but also a forerunner of your hope to come.

1 Peter 5:5–7

In the same way, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. And all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. And God will exalt you in due time, if you humble yourselves under his mighty hand by casting all your cares on him because he cares for you.



Discoveries

Now that you have completed your forth excavation into the rich soil of Philippians, it is time again to stop digging and carefully examine what we have learned and what difference it can make in our lives. Choose the questions that are most helpful to you or your group.

Connecting with the community

These group questions are designed to help you apply what God wants from you. When applicable, think of these questions not only as an individual but also in terms of your family, your community, your nation, and your church.

1. What is the meaning and significance of the concept of Christian *imitation*? Why is it important in understanding the meaning of this passage and its application to our lives today?
2. Why was so significant to the culture of the New Testament that Christians proclaimed Christ as the *Lord*? Why is this Christian doctrine equally relevant today? What are the contemporary *lords* that compete with Christ in today's society.
3. Look at how Philippians 2:5–11 is outlined on page 65. Jesus models the path from humility to exaltation. What does it mean for us as believers to live in humility and allow God to exalt us?
4. Read Psalm 148:7–14 and Ephesians 1:20–21. What are the common elements between them and Philippians 2:5–11? What does this teach us about God's exaltation and worthiness to be praised?
5. What is your favorite Christian song or hymn? What does it teach about God? What role does music play in your church with regard to teaching the truths of Scripture?
6. In what way can the message of this passage encourage you to persevere faithfully in your Christian walk even in the midst of hardship or persecution?

Notes, Observations & Questions



Notes, Observations & Questions

7. What is the essential quality that believers must learn from Christ in this passage? In what ways can you apply this Christian virtue in your daily life? Compile a list of potential applications of this truth that apply directly to your family, church, and community.

Probing deeper

These research exercises are for your continued study of Philippians in connecting key ideas with other Scripture. They require you to look at other passages beyond the text of Philippians and need to be thought of in terms of yourself, your family, your community, your nation, and your church.

1. Read the account of the crucifixion in Matthew 27:1–61. What strikes you the most about the events of that day? What do you most admire about Jesus' actions? What can you learn from his example that you can imitate in your daily Christian walk?
2. Read Luke 23:26–46 and meditate in the words of Jesus at the cross. What can you learn from Christ's words? What attitudes and actions can you improve in your life because of Jesus' example?
3. The way Paul speaks of the cross in his writings suggests that he also struggled with the common Jewish objection to a crucified Messiah before he came to believe in Jesus Christ. It was inconceivable to him that the Jewish Messiah would die in a manner that expressed God's disapproval. He came to understand the cross to be the grounds for genuine pride not shame. Read Galatians 3:13 and Galatians 6:14. Describe the shift in emphasis that Paul is making. What is the connection between Galatians 6:14 and Philippians 2:5–11?
4. The relationship between humility and exaltation is a common theme in Scripture. Read the following passages:
 - Matthew 23:12
 - James 4:10
 - 1 Peter 5:5–7
 - Psalm 75:7
 - Jeremiah 9:23–24
 - 2 Corinthians 10:18

What do all these passages teach about God's role and our own role in the relationship between humility and exaltation? How is Christ's example of humility helpful for us today?



Bringing the story to life

Philippians 2:5–11 includes a long poetic section in the form of a hymn. A hymn is a song or poem that speaks of God or to God directly with the lyrics. Two short examples can be found in Revelation 4:8 and 4:11.

Using Paul's Christological hymn as a model, write a hymn of praise to God as a group or by yourself. You can use a popular hymn tune that you already know, and fit your own words into it. Write your hymn as a God-centered poem, based on who he is and what he has done in your life. Keep it focused on him. Make sure your words are rooted in the word of God and that your words have beauty, dignity, reverence, and simplicity. Think of writing words that will benefit believers all over the world, for any generation.

Memorizing the key

Commit to memory the key phrase for Philippians 2:5–11, which is:

Jesus Christ is our greatest role model

Part of learning the Bible is remembering what the Bible is about and where to find things. Memorizing the key phrases will help you to better understand and apply the key points of each book.

Observation journaling

This section will prepare you for *Field Study 6*. You will read Philippians 2:12–30. We have included three types of exercises: some for before you read, some for while you are reading, and some for after you have completed the reading.

Notes, Observations & Questions



Notes, Observations & Questions

Before you read

Review the key terms from *Field Studies* 2 through 5 to insure you remember all of them. This will help you to follow the message that God is communicating through Paul's letter to the Philippian church.

The key terms:

- From *Field Study* 2 are on page 18–20
- From *Field Study* 3 are on page 35–36
- From *Field Study* 4 are on page 50–51
- From *Field Study* 5 are on page 66–67

Which key terms and definitions have been particularly helpful in understanding the message of Philippians? Why?

While you are reading

On the following pages, the biblical text is laid out with a wide margin so you can mark the text with questions, key terms, notes, and structures. The verse markings have been removed so you can read it without distractions and have laid out the text with some spacing to help you see how the lines are related. Review the guidelines on *The art of active learning* section, page xi at the beginning of your *Field Notes* for some suggestions on reading, learning, and marking the text effectively.

Philippians 2:12–30

Therefore, my dear friends, just as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence but even more in my absence—continue working out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may be blameless and pure, children of God without blemish in a crooked and perverse society, among whom you shine as stars in the world, by holding fast to the word of life, so that on the day of Christ I will have a reason to boast that I did not run in vain nor labor in vain. But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.



Now I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be encouraged by news of you. For I have no one like him who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. Others look out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know that Timothy has proved himself, that like a son working with his father he has served with me in the gospel. Therefore, I hope to send him just as soon as I know about my situation, though I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come shortly.

But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, co-worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need. For he greatly missed all of you and was distressed because you heard that he was sick. For indeed he was ill to the point of death. But God showed mercy to him—and not only to him but also to me—so that I would not have sorrow upon sorrow. Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you can rejoice and I be less anxious. So receive him in the Lord with great joy, and honor men like him, since it was because of the work of Christ that he almost died, risking his life so that he could make up for your lack of service to me.

Notes, Observations & Questions

Summarize the text here



Notes, Observations & Questions

After you have read

1. Write out Philippians 2:12–30 from the previous page or your own Bible into a journal word for word. This practice will help you to remember and understand what you have just read. This week, journal your thoughts all that God has done for you in saving you. How has your salvation affected your own family, community, nation, and church?
2. Now read Philippians 2:12–30 in your own Bible. Continue to reread it each day until you get to *Field Study* 6. This will reinforce the learning of Scripture and help you to better retain its message.

Pray

As we learn the Word of God, it is essential that we communicate with him through prayer. Commit to praying throughout the week alone or with others, asking God to help you identify areas in your life where you need to learn more humility. Write your own prayer or use this as a sample prayer:

Almighty God,

We praise you today for what a humble and magnificent God you are. May your precious name be exalted in all the world today for your glorious love for us and your mercies toward us. Thank you Father for condescending to us in your Son Jesus who became like us and died a humiliating death that was ours to die. What a selfless act Lord Jesus Christ to come, walk, and die on earth. Help us Father with the struggle to understand this reverse of priorities in our social endeavors and teach us to act according to Christ's model of servanthood. Our hearts leap with joy because of his holy example to us. Thank you. Help us Father by the power of the Holy Spirit to embrace a life of humility like Christ's life. Help us go against the pressures of society to self-promote and leave our lives open before you. We love you God. We want to live for you in the name of Jesus and in the Spirit's power. Amen.



Excavate the Site

Philippians 2:12–30

Serving others is living like Christ

Field Study 6

1:1–11 Opening, Thanks, Prayer

1:12–26 Paul's Situation

1:27–4:1 Central Appeal & Examples

2:12–30 Timothy & Epaphroditus

4:2–9 Philippian Situation

4:10–23 Thanksgiving & Closing

Philippians 2:12–30

FIELD STUDY 6

How is the text arranged?

In this portion of the letter, the apostle Paul continues to answer the question, what does it mean to live the Christian life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ? This is a question that every believer should be able to answer. At the beginning of chapter 2, Christ provides our model. However, some might say that Christ's example is too hard to follow since he is both God and man, so Paul provides two additional examples that show us how to live as worthy Christian citizens. Read the biblical text several times. Take note of the structure of the passage as this will help you grasp the train of thought:

Philippians 2:12–30

Section	Bible Text
Application and Transition (2:12–18)	
General application	¹² Therefore, my dear friends, just as you have always obeyed —not only in my presence but even more in my absence— continue working out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.
Specific application	¹⁴ Do everything without grumbling or arguing, ¹⁵ so that you may be blameless and pure, children of God without blemish in a crooked and perverse society, among whom you shine as stars in the world, ¹⁶ by holding fast to the word of life so that on the day of Christ I will have a reason to boast that I did not run in vain nor labor in vain.

The Work of God

Notice how Paul reintroduces a thought he expressed at the beginning of the letter. In Philippians 1:6 Paul was thanking God because he was confident that God, “*who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.*” Now Paul continues to expand on the work of God in Philippians 2:13.



Notes, Observations & Questions

After you have read

1. Journaling is a great way to learn. By this point, you have hand written the entire book of Philippians. What have you learned so far from this ancient letter? This week, journal your thoughts as you consider God's message to the people of Philippi and what it means for us today. Write down how God wants you to respond to this letter and then take action accordingly.
2. Now read all of Philippians in your own Bible. Be sure you have reread the book completely before you begin the final *Field Study*. This will reinforce the learning of Scripture and help you retain it.

Pray

As we learn the Word of God, it is essential that we communicate with him through prayer. Commit to praying throughout the week alone or with others, asking God to help you identify areas in your life that distort his truth. Also, ask him to forgive you for doing so. Write your own prayer or use this as a sample prayer:

Dear God,

Thank you for letting me call upon you. I need you. Life has many difficulties but you are secure. I want to learn to rely on you. I want to learn to find contentment only in you. Help me Father to be content both in abundance or in need. Lead me to find my joy and security always in you rather than money or possessions. Change my heart and mind so that I become the joyful Christian you want me to be. Let my mind and my heart to be focused in all things good and godly. I want to be pleasing to you dear God. Help me to reach out to those with whom I struggle. Amen.

Analyze the Find

Philippians

Godly living displays God to a needy world

Field Study 9

Reviewing Philippians

- 1:1–11 Opening, Thanks, Prayer
- 1:12–26 Paul's Situation
- 1:27–4:1 Central Appeal & Examples
- 4:2–9 Philippian Situation
- 4:10–23 Thanksgiving & Closing

The Message

FIELD STUDY 9

We arrive at our final *Field Study* in Philippians. It is now time to step back and analyze our findings. We are finally ready to reflect on why God gave us this letter. Let's look at the contribution of Philippians to Scripture and history and discover its call on our lives today. It has much to say about displaying God in godless times.

What is the contribution to the Scriptures?

From Genesis to Revelation: The story of history

Living for God in a world ruled by Satan brings tension. Nevertheless, it is God's will that we live exclusively for him. Many have done so before us blazing a trail so that we may follow their example. Let's revisit the story of mankind through the eyes of Scripture and learn from others who have conformed to the likeness of God rather than the pattern of this world.

The climax of the creation account in Genesis was the formation of a being in the very image and likeness of God. Consider it for a moment. God created Adam and Eve to be like him. Man and woman were to be his representatives on earth.¹ The world was to be, and once was, a God-honoring realm—a heaven on earth. God's image-bearers were to rule over his creation in harmony and in relationship with him, multiplying in number so that the earth would be filled with God's representatives. However, Adam and Eve's rebellion placed the world under their mediated care to Satan. The world was now controlled by the evil influence of God's angelic enemy. This resulted in disunity, tension and

1. Genesis 1:26–28

The World God Created

We often do not see our world through spiritual eyes of good and evil. Yet, God has created it and is redeeming it from the rule of Satan. Living on earth as a believer brings great tension.



Apollo 17, 1972



Thomas Cole, 1828

The Garden of Eden

The Garden of Eden was a place where the goal of God for creation could be seen. It was a place of peace, beauty, abundance, and harmony where mankind could rule the earth while enjoying perfect immediate fellowship with God without the effects of sin.

God's provision to receive and enjoy life in fellowship with him. Some, however, had the courage to stand out for God despite the pressures of the society in which they lived. Enoch walked with God;² likewise, Noah and his family put up with the scorn of an unbelieving society for many years for the sake of living God's way.³ Society may have become unrepresentative of God, but God graciously and faithfully worked with and through those who chose to live as his representative citizens on earth.

Genesis 3:15

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he will bruise your head and you will strike his heel.

Genesis 50:19–20

But Joseph said to them, do not be afraid. Am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant to harm me, but God meant it for good, to preserve many lives, as they are today.

Out of the context of man's further flagrant rebellion toward God at the tower of Babel, God called a man and his family to serve in the outworking of his redemptive plans. The family of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob constitutes the lineage of the patriarchs who bore God's promised solution for humanity. Nevertheless, they also fell prey to the pressures of society to conform, grab, cheat, lie, and compromise. But once again, one man from Abraham's family stood out in that time for his unwavering commitment to God in the midst of a godless society and personal disappointments. The story of Joseph is filled with jealousy, cruelty, injustice, sorrow, and temptation. However, in spite of these trials, Joseph was able to break the pattern of the story of Genesis in that he was completely committed and obedient to his God. Joseph showed the world that God is worth loving, obeying, and displaying in life even when things do not go our way.

1. Genesis 22:14
2. Genesis 5:21–24
3. Genesis 6:8–9, 22; 7:5

B.C. 2000

1850

1700

1550

1400

1250

2091 God calls Abraham?

Receiving the Law on Mount Sinai? 1446

1925 God calls Abraham?

Receiving the Law on Mount Sinai? 1260



Good Kings of Judah

King	Year	Reign	Character
Asa	911–870	41 years	Good
Jehoshaphat	870–848*	25 years	Good
Joash	835–796	40 years	Good
Amaziah	796–767	29 years	Good
Uzziah (Azariah)	767–740*	52 years	Good
Jotham	740–732*	16 years	Good
Hezekiah	716–687	29 years	Good
Josiah	640–608	31 years	Good

The story of mankind moves to the nation of Israel who was appointed as God's representative nation among all of the peoples of the world. God wanted Israel to display him before all nations, showing the world that being a citizen in a nation ruled by God was the best possible option for life on earth. For this reason, God

called Israel to be different, set apart, or holy. *"Be Holy for I am holy"* was God's call to those who would represent him.⁴ Israel was a nation of redeemed image-bearers worthy of living as citizens under God's sovereign rule.

There was still the continued tendency to compromise and assimilate into the nations of the earth rather than stand out as godly citizens. However, there are examples in every stage of Israel's history that show the watching world that it is possible to live displaying the values of God in a pagan society. In the times of the exodus and the conquest of the Promised Land, we see people like Moses, Joshua, and Caleb who lived according to the Law of God despite the path of the masses. In the period of the Judges generations of God's people ignored his will and values as expressed in the Law, but there were also individuals like Ruth and Boaz who lived self-sacrificially in obedience

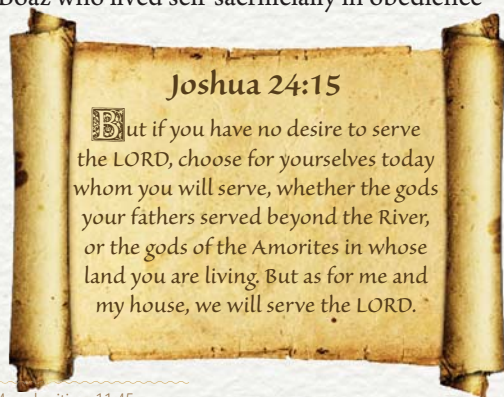


Ruth and Boaz

In the book of Ruth, obedience to God is presented in the relationships between Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz. All three depict God's loving-kindness toward his people.

Victory over the Amalekites

In Exodus 17:8–16, Moses called Joshua to lead the fight against the Amalekites. Moses stood on top of a hill with the staff of God in his hand and God blessed the Israelite's obedience and gave them victory.



Joshua 24:15

But if you have no desire to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.

4. Leviticus 11:45
1250

1100

950

800

650

500 B.C.

Saul becomes king 1050

David becomes king 1010

Solomon becomes king 971

930 The kingdom divides

722 Northern kingdom falls to Assyria

Southern kingdom falls to Babylon and the temple is destroyed 586

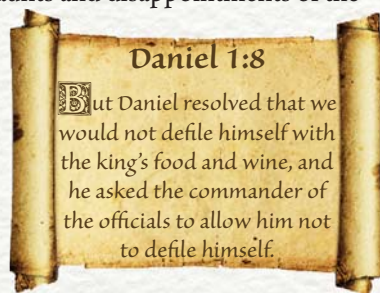


Bottin Rivière, 1890

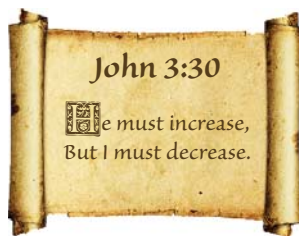
Daniel's Answer to the King

The jealousy and envy of the leaders of Babylon caused Daniel to be thrown into the lion's den, but not even this was able to move him from his devotion to the one true God. After an entire night among lions, he testified to the king that God protected him (Daniel 6:22).

to God for the sake of others. The period of the monarchy also provides rare glimpses of kings who countered the values of their wicked generations to conform to the Law of God. Countless prophets also stood strong for God amidst trials and tribulations. There were also men like Daniel and his three friends Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah who chose to live without compromise while exiled in a culture where even their lives were at stake.¹ After the return from exile, individuals like Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah lived in conformity to God despite the taunts and disappointments of the society

**Daniel 1:8**

But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food and wine, and he asked the commander of the officials to allow him not to defile himself.

**John 3:30**

He must increase, But I must decrease.

around them.² Finally, John the Baptist at the end of the Old Testament age stood as a bold, counter-cultural, humble representative of God.³ History shows that God can be represented on hostile terrain.

Then God himself came to earth in the person of Jesus Christ, and showed the world that the Father can be obediently represented despite the pressures to compromise. For this reason, only Christ's perfect sacrifice provides the way to fellowship with God through faith in him.⁴ According to the Scriptures, those who believe in Christ are still responsible to live in this age as his representatives and not in love with the things and ways of this world.⁵ The call of God to "Be holy because I am holy" remains. Imitating him is still the privilege and responsibility of those who have



Philips Augustijn Immermaet, 1663

The Temptation of Christ

At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After forty days of fasting, Jesus resisted the temptations of Satan and modeled perfect godly obedience.

1. Daniel 1:8; 3:1–30; 6:1–28
2. Ezra 4:1–5; Nehemiah 4:1–23
3. John 3:22–36; Matthew 3:1–17
4. Hebrews 9:1–28
5. James 4:4; Proverbs 4:14–15

B.C. 1 A.D. 10 20 30 40 50

5? Birth of Jesus

John the Baptist begins his ministry 28–29?

33–34? Paul encounters Christ on Damascus road

46–47? First Missionary Journey by Paul

4–6? Birth of Paul

Jesus begins his ministry 28–30?

Jesus is crucified and resurrected 30–33?



embraced the gospel of Jesus Christ. However, the world and its governing standards do not seek to be colonized by heavenly citizens; it constantly fights back hard in return, just as Jesus has warned those who followed him.

If the world hates you, know that it has hated me first. If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, for this reason the world hates you. Remember what I told you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they obeyed my word, they will obey yours also. But all these things they will do to you because of my name, because they do not know the One who sent me.

John 15:18-21

This will be the case until Christ returns.⁶ Therefore, God's people can expect that tension and strain will persist throughout their lives.⁷

From beginning to end, the story of mankind is about God receiving the glory he alone deserves through the restoration of a rebellious creation back to himself. In redeeming rebellious image-bearers through the gospel of Jesus Christ, God displays his unrivalled glory. Until all is restored and renewed under Christ in the end, tension remains for his people living for him in a fallen realm. The pressures to embrace the self-seeking values of a godless culture and be absorbed into the pattern of a society opposed to godly living remain strong. Living for God in Satan's domain will continue to be a struggle, and yet God deserves our lives lived exclusively for him. After all, this earth will not be Satan's realm forever.

The Contribution of Philippians

Philippians is perhaps the most affectionate and practical of all of the letters Paul wrote to churches. It is not unique in the truth it proclaims, but it is distinct in the angle and lens through which it helps the reader understand the grand biblical narrative in a more focused and practical way. It invokes concepts such as *citizenship* and the use of *role models*. So why did God allow this book to be included in the Bible? What role does it play? Let's examine three specific or unique contributions Philippians makes.

The first contribution this letter makes to our Christian faith is to demonstrate that *the advance of the gospel of Jesus Christ is unstoppable*. Prison chains, house arrest, soldiers, Caesars, societal pressure,

6. Revelation 20:7-9

7. 1 Peter 1:6-9; 2 Timothy 3:1-5

Imitatio

Imitating role models was an ancient and effective practice. The ancient writer Seneca said it well when he declared: "Let us choose, however, from among the living... men who teach us by their lives, men who tell us what we ought to do and then prove it by practice, who show us what we should avoid, and then are never caught doing that which they have ordered us to avoid."

(Epistle 52.8 translated by Richard M. Gummere, Loeb Classical Library)

God too wants Christians to imitate the right role models.

50	60	70	80	90	100 A.D.
49? Jerusalem Council	60-62? Paul arrives in Rome under house arrest	70 Temple is destroyed		John writes Revelation 95-96?	
50-52? Second Missionary Journey by Paul	64 Fire in Rome		79 Pompeii and Herculaneum are destroyed by Vesuvius eruption		

A nine lesson study through the letter to the Philippians

Living as a foreign citizen in a hostile country, you would expect to keep your head down so as not to call attention to yourself.

However, as heavenly citizens living in a world ruled by Satan, God calls Christians to do the exact opposite. We are to shine like the stars in the heavens. This of course creates immense tension for believers who live in an ever-darkening world.

Instead of the fear and trepidation that one might feel representing Christ in a godless world, the apostle Paul shows us in Philippians that we can live with complete joy and confidence, no matter what our difficult circumstances. The book of Philippians instructs believers on how to display God on Satan's turf, working out our salvation in front of our secular culture. Paul gives us role models in himself, Timothy, Epaphroditus, and Jesus as the ultimate model of how to live as a heavenly citizen on unfriendly terrain. Philippians is a book of joy meant for today. It is God's word for your life.

*Digging through Scripture
revealing God's truth
pointing us to Christ*



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