

PHILIPPIANS

Transformed By Christ (2:12-30)

Notes: Week Four

Philippians 2:12-30 (NIV)

Do Everything Without Grumbling

¹² Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

¹⁴ Do everything without grumbling or arguing, ¹⁵ so that you may become blameless and pure, “children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.”^[a] Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky ¹⁶ as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain. ¹⁷ But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. ¹⁸ So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.

Timothy and Epaphroditus

¹⁹ I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. ²⁰ I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare. ²¹ For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. ²² But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. ²³ I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. ²⁴ And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon.

²⁵ But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, co-worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs. ²⁶ For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. ²⁷ Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. ²⁸ Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. ²⁹ So then, welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor people like him, ³⁰ because he almost died for the work of Christ. He risked his life to make up for the help you yourselves could not give me.

Footnotes:

- a. [Philippians 2:15](#) Deut. 32:5

Philippians 2:12-30 (HCSB)

Lights in the World

¹² So then, my dear friends, just as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence, but now even more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. ¹³ For it is God who is working in you, enabling you both to desire and to work out His good purpose. ¹⁴ Do everything without grumbling and arguing, ¹⁵ so that you may be blameless and pure, children of God who are faultless in a crooked and perverted generation, among whom you shine like stars in the world. ¹⁶ Hold firmly to ^[a] the message of life. Then I can boast in the day of Christ that I didn't run or labor for nothing. ¹⁷ But even if I am poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. ¹⁸ In the same way you should also be glad and rejoice with me.

Timothy and Epaphroditus

¹⁹ Now I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon so that I also may be encouraged when I hear news about you. ²⁰ For I have no one else like-minded who will genuinely care about your interests; ²¹ all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. ²² But you know his proven character, because he has served with me in the gospel ministry like a son with a father. ²³ Therefore, I hope to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. ²⁴ I am convinced in the Lord that I myself will also come quickly.

²⁵ But I considered it necessary to send you Epaphroditus—my brother, co-worker, and fellow soldier, as well as your messenger and minister to my need— ²⁶ since he has been longing for all of you and was distressed because you heard that he was sick. ²⁷ Indeed, he was so sick that he nearly died. However, God had mercy on him, and not only on him but also on me, so that I would not have one grief on top of another. ²⁸ For this reason, I am very eager to send him so that you may rejoice when you see him again and I may be less anxious. ²⁹ Therefore, welcome him in the Lord with all joy and hold men like him in honor, ³⁰ because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up what was lacking in your ministry to me.

Footnotes:

- a. [Philippians 2:16](#) Or *Offer*, or *Hold out*

Holman Christian Standard Bible - *Study Bible*¹

Philippians 2:12-30

2:12-18 Three applications follow in this section: practical Christianity ([vv. 12-13](#)), positive steadfastness ([vv. 14-16](#)), and personal joy ([vv. 17-18](#)).

2:12-13 Obedience is directed to God, not Paul, who hoped his potential death would not dampen Christian enthusiasm. **Work out** means to apply salvation, not to earn it. **Fear and trembling** means to have proper respect in response to God's blessing. True obedience comes from reverence, not fright. **God... is working** provides the deeper incentive: Christians are recipients of God's initiatives of motivation and empowerment.

2:14-16 **Grumbling and arguing** come from selfishness and vainglory ([1:15,17](#); cp. [Dt 32:5](#)). **Blameless** (complete Christian character) and **pure** (inoffensive living; cp. [1:10](#)) introduce metaphors. First, believers are to be morally **faultless** in a world **crooked and perverted** by its failure to understand the word of God. Believers are straight models for distorted lives. Second, they are to **shine like stars** whose brilliance contrasts with the darkened world.

2:17-18 **Drink offering** recalls the OT sacrificial system. Paul was the substance being **poured out** for these believers. **Sacrifice** is the offering; **service** performed the ceremony. All of this brought Paul—and the Philippian believers—joy.

2:19-30 Paul in this section expressed his hope to visit some day, but he planned to send Timothy and Epaphroditus to the Philippians immediately.

2:19-24 On **Timothy**, see note at [1:1](#). **Encouraged** (lit "good souled") means "cheered." **Like-minded** (lit "equal souled") means "soul mate or partner" in service. Paul characterized Timothy three ways: he genuinely cared for their interests (cp. [vv. 1-4](#)); he valued the things of Jesus Christ and others; and he had **proven character** (lit "tested by fire"), refined in the demands of the **gospel ministry**.

2:25-30 **Epaphroditus** shared Paul's ministry (**brother, coworker, and fellow soldier**) and represented the church. **Messenger** (lit "apostle") and **minister** (lit "religious servant") indicate that the church expected Epaphroditus to care for Paul in Rome. Traveling to Rome, Epaphroditus suffered a near-fatal illness. He felt he had failed Paul and the church. The words **welcome him** ("appropriately") and **hold... him in honor** reveal that Epaphroditus did not fail. He gave his best for the **work of Christ**. The words **what was lacking** refer to the churches' care for Paul. Epaphroditus took it upon himself to make up that lack.

1. Jeremy Royal Howard, ed., *HCSB Study Bible*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Phillippians 2".

English Standard Version - Study Bible²

Philippians 2:12-30

2:12-18 *Living as Lights in the World.* With the breathtaking portrayal of Christ before them ([vv. 5-11](#)), Paul exhorts the Philippians to demonstrate the same faith and obedience in their everyday lives.

2:12-13 The Philippians have **obeyed** (cf. Christ's obedience, [v. 8](#)) in the past and should continue to do so as they **work out** their **salvation with fear and trembling**. They cannot be content with past glories but need to demonstrate their faith day by day as they nurture their relationship with God. But while God's justice is a cause for sober living ("fear and trembling"), it is not as though Paul wants the Philippians to be anxious that they can never be good enough to merit God's favor. Rather, it is God's love and enabling grace that will see them through: **it is God who works in you**. They can rejoice in God's empowering presence even as they work hard at living responsible Christian lives. While [v. 12](#) may seem to suggest salvation by works, it is clear that Paul rejects any such teaching (cf. [3:2-11](#)). In [2:12](#) Paul means "salvation" in terms of progressively coming to experience all of the aspects and blessings of salvation. The Philippians' continued obedience is an inherent part of "working out" their salvation in this sense. But as [v. 13](#) demonstrates, these works are *the result* of God's work within his people. **both to will and to work for his good pleasure**. Even the desire ("to will") to do what is good comes from God; but he also works in the believer to generate actual choices of the good, so that the desires result in actions. (On fear of God, see notes on [Acts 5:5](#); [9:31](#).)

2:14-15 Paul continues the theme of "working out" one's salvation ([vv. 12-13](#)). The Philippians should **shine as lights** amid a **crooked and twisted generation**. Paul's choice of words recalls the wilderness generation of Israel, who in [Deut. 32:5](#) are described by these very words ("crooked and twisted generation") and whose spiritual progress was thwarted by **grumbling** and **questioning** (cf. [1 Cor. 10:1-12](#)). Shining "as lights" probably alludes to [Dan. 12:2-3](#). Those who express their faith by living in this way will be raised to eternal life (see [Dan. 12:2](#)), to Paul's great joy.

2:16 The Philippians' obedience to the **word of life** is not merely a matter of private concern. As an apostle and fellow sharer in the gospel, Paul's own **labor** would be **in vain** if they failed to hold fast until **the day of Christ** (cf. [1:6](#); [1 Thess. 5:2-11](#); [2 Pet. 3:10-13](#); [Rev. 20:11-21:8](#)) and thus proved not to be genuine believers. **Holding fast** means both believing God's Word and following it. Since the Greek *epēchō* can mean either "hold fast" or "hold out to, offer," some think that Paul may have in mind "holding forth," i.e., proclaiming, the word of life.

2:17 Paul compares himself to a **drink offering** (cf. [2 Tim. 4:6](#)). This type of offering, familiar in both the OT and Greco-Roman culture, involved pouring out wine, either onto the ground or, as here, on an altar along with an animal or grain sacrifice (see [Num. 28:7](#)). It was a vivid illustration of a life "poured out" for God's service. The Philippians, too, are a **sacrificial offering**; they are to emulate Paul's joyful service to God.

2:19-24 *Timothy as an Example of a Service-centered Life.* Paul's desire to send his protégé **Timothy** highlights the very personal nature of early church life. Timothy emulates Christ in that he is **concerned for** the Philippians' **welfare**; he does not look out for his own **interests**, but for those of **Christ**.

2:25-30 *Epaphroditus as Another Example of Service.* Epaphroditus, who is himself from Philippi, is another example of genuine Christian love. He has been longing for the Philippians just as Paul longs for them ([1:8](#); [4:1](#)), and has been eager to let them know that God has spared him from his severe illness.

2. Lane T. Dennis, ed., *ESV Study Bible, The: English Standard Version*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Bibles, 2008), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Philippians 2".

2:27 To die and be with Christ is far better (**1:21**), and yet God shows **mercy** to Epaphroditus in sparing his life. Christians can be assured that a fellow Christian truly is in Christ's presence upon his or her death (see note on **1:23**); even so, it is proper on such occasions to feel **sorrow upon sorrow**.

2:30 The Christlikeness of Epaphroditus is highlighted by Paul's careful use of words. Having said that Christ was obedient "to the point of death" (**v. 8**, Gk. *mechri thanatou*), Paul now says that Epaphroditus was "near to death" (**v. 27**) and that **he nearly died** (**v. 30**, also with Gk. *mechri thanatou*). Epaphroditus had faced this peril on behalf of the Philippians, who had desired to send gifts to support Paul but had not been able to do so (**what was lacking in your service to me**) until Epaphroditus made it possible (see **4:10, 18**).

NLT Life Application Study Bible³

Philippians 2:12-30

2:12 "Work hard to show the results of your salvation," in light of the preceding exhortation to unity, may mean that the entire church was to work together to rid themselves of divisions and discord. The Philippian Christians needed to be especially careful to obey Christ, now that Paul wasn't there to continually remind them about what was right. We, too, must be careful about what we believe and how we live, especially when we are on our own. In the absence of cherished Christian leaders, we must focus our attention and devotion even more on Christ so that we won't be sidetracked.

2:13 What do we do when we don't feel like obeying? God has not left us alone in our struggles to do his will. He wants to come alongside us and be within us to help. God gives us the *desire* and the *power* to do what pleases him. The secret to a changed life is to submit to God's control and let him work. Next time ask God to help you *desire* to do his will.

2:13 To be like Christ, we must train ourselves to think like Christ. To change our desires to be more like Christ's, we need the power of the indwelling Spirit (**1:19**), the influence of faithful Christians, obedience to God's Word (not just exposure to it), and sacrificial service. Often it is in *doing* God's will that we gain the *desire* to do it (see **4:8, 9**). Do what he wants and trust him to change your desires.

2:14-16 Why are complaining and arguing so harmful? If all that people know about a church is that its members constantly argue, complain, and gossip, they get a false impression of Christ and the Good News. Belief in Christ should unite those who trust him. If your church is always complaining and arguing, it lacks the unifying power of Jesus Christ. Stop arguing with other Christians or complaining about people and conditions within the church; instead, let the world see Christ.

2:14-16 Our lives should be characterized by moral purity, patience, and peacefulness, so that we will "shine brightly" in a dark and depraved world. A transformed life is an effective witness to the power of God's Word. Are you shining brightly, or are you clouded by complaining and arguing? Don't let dissensions snuff out your light. Shine out for God. Your role is to shine until Jesus returns and bathes the world in his radiant glory.

3. *Life Application Study Bible*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1988), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 2018-2019.

[2:17](#) The drink offering was an important part of the sacrificial system of the Jews (for an explanation, see [Numbers 28:7](#)). Because this church had little Jewish background, the liquid offering may refer to the wine poured out to pagan deities prior to important public events. Paul regarded his life as a sacrifice.

[2:17](#) Even if he had to die, Paul was content, knowing that he had helped the Philippians live for Christ. When you're totally committed to serving Christ, sacrificing to build the faith of others brings a joyous reward.

[2:19, 22](#) When Paul wrote these words, most vocational training was done by fathers, and sons stayed loyal to the family business. Timothy displayed that same loyalty in his spiritual apprenticeship with Paul. Timothy was with Paul in Rome when Paul wrote this letter. He traveled with Paul on his second missionary journey when the church at Philippi was begun. (For more information on Timothy, see his Profile in [1 Timothy 2, p. 2059](#).)

Just as a skilled workman trains an apprentice, Paul was preparing Timothy to carry on the ministry in his absence. Paul encouraged younger Christians to learn, to observe, to help, and then to lead. Paul expected older Christians to teach, to model, to mentor, and then to turn over leadership. The benefits of such a process are new enthusiasm and vision, new methods and energy. Are you a teacher? Whom are you apprenticing for God's work? Are you a learner? How are you showing your eagerness to fulfill the call God has on your life?

[2:21](#) Paul observed that most believers are too preoccupied with their own needs to spend time working for Christ. Don't let your schedule and concerns crowd out your love and Christian service to others.

[2:23](#) Paul was in prison (either awaiting his trial or its verdict) for preaching about Christ. He was telling the Philippians that when he learned of the court's decision, he would send Timothy to them with the news. Paul wanted them to know that he was ready to accept whatever came ([1:21 -26](#)).

[2:25](#) Epaphroditus delivered money from the Philippians to Paul; then he returned with this thank-you letter to Philippi. Epaphroditus may have been an elder in Philippi ([2:25-30](#); [4:18](#)) who, while staying with Paul, became ill ([2:27, 30](#)). After Epaphroditus recovered, he returned home. He is mentioned only in Philippians.

[2:29, 30](#) The world honors those who are intelligent, beautiful, rich, and powerful. What kind of people should the church honor? Paul indicates that we should honor those who give their lives for the sake of Christ, going where we cannot go ourselves. Our missionaries do that for us today by providing ministry where we are not able to go.

Life Essentials Study Bible⁴

A Principle to Live By Philippians #8: Christ-like Examples

from Philippians 2:19-30

To help Christians understand and imitate Christ’s attitude of unselfishness, humility, and self- sacrifice, we should expose them to spiritual leaders who model these qualities.

After exhorting the Philippians to have the same attitude as Christ Jesus ([v. 5](#)), he informed them that he was hoping to send Timothy to visit them. The reason Paul gave for sending him was that he genuinely embodied the qualities he had just exhorted the Philippians to practice with one another. Timothy would genuinely care about their interests, not his own. He would model Christ’s attitude ([v. 20](#)).

Paul was not certain when Timothy could visit them, so he was sending Epaphroditus immediately. Though he seems to have been a pastor in the Philippian church, he had also become Paul’s dear and beloved “brother, co-worker, and fellow soldier” ([v. 25](#)). Paul told them that their personal “messenger” was so dedicated to them and to Paul that he nearly died delivering their gift ([vv. 25-27](#)), demonstrating the “attitude . . . of Christ Jesus” who gave His life on the cross ([v. 5](#)).

By sending Epaphroditus back earlier than planned, Paul was exemplifying unselfishness. Though this dear brother had become a very close companion and support person, Paul released him to return to the Philippians. Paul put their interests above his own. He was saying with his actions what he wrote to the Corinthians: “Imitate me, as I also imitate Christ” ([1Co 11:1](#)).

Reflection and Response

Why are godly models like Timothy, Epaphroditus, and Paul so effective in communicating biblical truth?

4. Gene Getz, *Life Essentials Study Bible*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2011), *WORDsearch CROSS e-book*, 1643.