OVERVIEW OF PHILIPPIANS

CHAPTERS 1-3

The Epistle for the 23rd Sunday after Trinity:

BRETHREN, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.) For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself. (Phil. Iii. 17)

OVERALL THEME: *Living Worthy of the Gospel Through Christlike Humility, Faith, and Perseverance*

The Epistle to the Philippians was written by the Apostle Paul while he was imprisoned, traditionally understood to be during his Roman imprisonment around AD 60–62.

Paul writes to encourage the church at Philippi to remain steadfast in the faith, united in Christian love, joyful amid suffering, and committed to following the example of Jesus Christ.
The three chapters develop a progression:

1. Chapter 1: Living for Christ and advancing the Gospel.
2. Chapter 2: Following Christ's example of humility and obedience.
3. Chapter 3: Pursuing Christ through faith and pressing toward the heavenly goal.

Chapter 1 – Living for Christ and Advancing the Gospel

Central Theme: Christian perseverance and Gospel advancement

Key Verse: Philippians 1:21 - "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

I. Paul's Thanksgiving and Prayer (1:1–11)

- Paul addresses the believers at Philippi with Timothy.
- He expresses gratitude for their partnership in the Gospel.
- He remembers their faithfulness and fellowship in Christian ministry.
- He expresses confidence that God will complete the good work He began in them.
- He prays that their love will abound in knowledge and spiritual discernment.
- He desires that they grow in righteousness and bear spiritual fruit through Jesus Christ.

Important theological principle:
Philippians 1:6 emphasizes God's continuing work of sanctification in believers. Christian growth is not merely human achievement but the continuing work of God's grace.

II. Paul's Imprisonment Advances the Gospel (1:12–18)

- Paul's imprisonment has actually helped advance the Gospel.
- His imprisonment has become known throughout the imperial guard.
- Other Christians have become more courageous in proclaiming Christ.
- Some preach Christ out of genuine goodwill, while others preach from envy and rivalry.
- Despite their different motivations, Paul rejoices that Christ is being proclaimed.

Important lesson: *God can use circumstances that appear unfavorable to accomplish His purposes.*

III. Paul's Desire to Glorify Christ in Life or Death (1:19–26)

- Paul trusts that Christ will be magnified through his circumstances.
- He recognizes that death would mean being with Christ.
- Remaining alive would allow him to continue serving the Church.
- He understands his continued ministry as beneficial to the Philippians.

Paul presents the Christian life as one entirely directed toward Christ.
Theological significance:

Paul does not regard life as an end in itself. Whether living or dying, the Christian's ultimate purpose is to glorify Christ.

IV. Living Worthy of the Gospel (1:27–30)

- Christians are called to conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel.
- Believers must stand firm in one spirit.
- They must strive together for the faith.
- They should not be intimidated by opposition.
- Suffering for Christ is presented as part of Christian discipleship.

Chapter 1 - *Main Lessons*

1. *Christian fellowship involves partnership in the Gospel.*
2. *God continues His work of grace in believers.*
3. *The Gospel can advance even through suffering.*
4. *Christ must remain the central purpose of Christian life.*
5. *Christians are called to unity, courage, and perseverance.*

Chapter 2 – The Humility and Exaltation of Christ

Central Theme: Christlike humility and obedience

Key Verse: *Philippians 2:5*
"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

Chapter 2 is particularly important for understanding Christology, the Incarnation, and the relationship between Christ's humility and His exaltation.

I. Christian Unity Through Humility (2:1–4)
Paul encourages the Philippians to:

- Be united in love and purpose.
- Demonstrate genuine Christian fellowship.
- Reject selfish ambition and conceit.
- Regard others as more important than themselves.
- Look beyond their own interests and consider the interests of others.

Important principle: *Christian unity is not simply organizational agreement. It requires humility, selflessness, and mutual love.*

II. The Humiliation and Exaltation of Christ (2:5–11)
The Christological centerpiece of Philippians

"Only God Rules the World" *This passage is commonly called the Christ Hymn because of its poetic structure and theological depth.*

A. Christ's Divine Nature (**2:5–6**)

- Christ existed in the form of God.
- He did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited for His own advantage.
- His divine identity precedes His earthly incarnation.

B. Christ's Humiliation (**2:7–8**)

- Christ took the form of a servant.
- He was made in human likeness.
- He humbled Himself.
- He became obedient unto death.
- His obedience extended to death on a cross.

This describes the Incarnation: *the eternal Son of God assumed human nature and entered into the condition of a servant.*

C. Christ's Exaltation (**2:9–11**)

- God highly exalted Christ.
- God bestowed upon Him the name above every name.
- Every knee shall bow in heaven, on earth, and under the earth.
- Every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.
- All this ultimately glorifies God the Father.

Important theological observations:

1. *Pre-existence: Christ existed in the divine nature before becoming incarnate.*
2. *Incarnation: Christ assumed genuine humanity.*
3. *Humiliation: Christ willingly embraced the condition of a servant.*
4. *Obedience: Christ submitted Himself to death on the cross.*
5. *Exaltation: The Father exalted the incarnate and crucified Son.*
6. *Lordship: Jesus Christ possesses universal authority and receives universal acknowledgment.*

The passage is particularly important when studying the relationship between Christ's divine identity, Incarnation, atoning death, and exaltation.

III. Working Out Salvation (2:12–18)

- Paul encourages believers to work out their salvation with fear and trembling.
- God is working within them, producing both the desire and ability to fulfill His purposes.
- Christians are instructed to avoid complaining and arguing.
- They are called to shine as lights in a corrupt generation.
- Paul rejoices in their faithfulness and spiritual progress.

Important theological distinction: *Philippians 2:12–13 does not teach that Christians earn their salvation through works.*

Rather:

- *God's grace is the source of the believer's spiritual transformation.*
- *Christians are responsible for living out the salvation God has given them.*
- *God works within believers, enabling their obedience.*

IV. Timothy and Epaphroditus as Examples (2:19–30)
Paul identifies two faithful servants who demonstrate Christian character.
Timothy (**2:19–24**)

- Genuinely cares for the spiritual welfare of others.
- Demonstrates sincere concern for the Church.
- Seeks the interests of Christ rather than personal ambition.

Epaphroditus (**2:25–30**)

- A fellow worker and fellow soldier with Paul.
- Served Paul on behalf of the Philippian Church.
- Became seriously ill but recovered.
- Risked his life in service to Christ.

Chapter 2 - *Main Lessons*

1. *Christian unity requires humility.*
2. *Jesus Christ is the supreme example of self-sacrificial love.*
3. *The Incarnation reveals the humility of the eternal Son.*
4. *Christ's obedience culminates in His death on the cross.*
5. *God enables believers to grow in holiness.*
6. *Christian leadership requires genuine service and sacrifice.*

Chapter 3 – Righteousness Through Faith and the Pursuit of Christ

Central Theme: Knowing Christ and pursuing the heavenly calling

Key Verse: *Philippians 3:8*
"Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord."

Chapter 3 contrasts confidence in human religious accomplishments with righteousness that comes through faith in Jesus Christ.

I. Warning Against Confidence in the Flesh (3:1–6)
Paul warns the Philippians against false teachers who place confidence in external religious qualifications.
He identifies his own Jewish credentials:

- *Circumcised on the eighth day.*
- *From the people of Israel.*
- *Of the tribe of Benjamin.*
- *A Hebrew of Hebrews.*
- *A Pharisee concerning the Law.*
- *Zealous enough to persecute the Church.*
- *Blameless according to the outward standards of legal righteousness.*

Paul demonstrates that he possessed the very credentials that others might consider grounds for religious confidence.
Yet he rejects confidence in these accomplishments.

II. Righteousness Through Faith in Christ (3:7–11)
Paul considers his former religious achievements as loss compared with knowing Christ.

Important theological distinctions:

- *Human religious accomplishments cannot establish righteousness before God.*
- *Righteousness is received through faith in Jesus Christ.*
- *Paul desires to know Christ personally and experientially.*
- *He desires to know the power of Christ's resurrection.*
- *He desires participation in Christ's sufferings.*
- *He looks forward to sharing in the resurrection from the dead.*

Particularly important verse: *Philippians 3:9*
Paul contrasts:

1. A righteousness derived from the Law.
2. A righteousness received through faith in Christ.

This passage is central to understanding Pauline justification and the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith.

III. Pressing Toward the Goal (3:12–16)

- Paul acknowledges that he has not yet attained spiritual perfection.
- He continues pursuing the goal of knowing Christ.
- He refuses to become preoccupied with his past.
- He presses forward toward the heavenly calling of God.
- He encourages believers to maintain spiritual maturity and unity.

Important principle:
Christian maturity is not a state of having completed the spiritual journey. It involves continually pursuing Christ and growing in conformity to Him.

IV. Following Godly Examples (3:17–19)

- Paul encourages believers to imitate his example.
- They should observe those who live according to the apostolic pattern.
- He warns against those whose lives are governed by earthly desires.
- He describes these individuals as enemies of the cross of Christ.
- Their ultimate end is destruction.

Paul contrasts a life shaped by the Gospel with a life controlled by worldly desires.

V. The Christian's Heavenly Citizenship (3:20–21)

- The believer's citizenship is in heaven.
- Christians eagerly await the return of Jesus Christ.
- Christ will transform their humble bodies.
- Their bodies will be conformed to His glorious body.
- Christ possesses the power to bring all things under His authority.

Theological significance:
Christian hope is not limited to the survival of the soul after death. It includes the future bodily resurrection and glorification of believers.

Chapter 3 - *Main Lessons*

1. *Religious credentials cannot replace faith in Christ.*
2. *Righteousness comes through faith in Jesus Christ.*
3. *Knowing Christ is more valuable than worldly accomplishments.*
4. *Christian life involves continual spiritual growth.*
5. *Believers must persevere toward their heavenly calling.*
6. *Christians possess their ultimate citizenship in heaven.*
7. *Christ will return and transform the bodies of His people.*

Overall Summary: Philippians Chapters 1–3

Chapter	Central Theme	Main Emphasis
1	Living for Christ	Gospel advancement, perseverance, and unity
2	The Humility of Christ	Incarnation, obedience, humility, and exaltation
3	Knowing Christ	Justification by faith, spiritual growth, and resurrection

Major Theological Themes

1. The Person and Work of Jesus Christ

- **Chapter 2** *presents Christ's divine identity, Incarnation, humiliation, death, and exaltation.*
- **Chapter 3** *emphasizes knowing Christ through faith and anticipating His resurrection power.*

2. Justification and Sanctification

- **Chapter 1:** *God continues His work in believers.*
- **Chapter 2:** *Believers work out their salvation because God is working within them.*
- **Chapter 3**: *Righteousness is received through faith in Christ, while believers continue pursuing spiritual maturity.*

3. Christian Humility

The example of Jesus Christ in Chapter 2 establishes the pattern for Christian conduct. Believers are called to reject selfish ambition and practice sacrificial love.

4. Suffering and Perseverance

Paul demonstrates that suffering does not necessarily indicate God's abandonment. Rather, suffering can become an opportunity for Christian witness and spiritual growth.

5. Resurrection and Eternal Hope

Chapter 3 *concludes by directing the Christian's attention toward Christ's return, bodily resurrection, and eternal citizenship in heaven.*

Key Passages to Remember

Scripture	Subject	Significance
Philippians 1:6	God's continuing work	Perseverance and sanctification
Philippians 1:21	To live is Christ	Christian purpose
Philippians 1:27	Worthy of the Gospel	Christian conduct
Philippians 2:5–11	Christ Hymn	Incarnation and exaltation
Philippians 2:12–13	Working out salvation	Grace and obedience
Philippians 3:8–9	Righteousness through faith	Justification
Philippians 3:12–14	Pressing toward the goal	Christian maturity
Philippians 3:20–21	Heavenly citizenship	Resurrection and glorification

The central message of Philippians 1–3

Paul teaches that the Christian life is entirely centered upon Jesus Christ.

- **Chapter 1**: *Christ is the purpose of our lives.*
- **Chapter 2:** *Christ is the example of our humility and obedience.*
- **Chapter 3:** *Christ is the source of our righteousness and the goal of our spiritual pursuit.*

In essence, Paul moves from living for Christ, to thinking like Christ, to pursuing Christ.

The next logical study is Philippians chapters 4, which brings these themes together through Christian joy, prayer, contentment, and perseverance.