



MOMENTS TO PONDER  
UNVEILING JOY:  
EXPLORING THE BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS

Episode 88: The Challenge (Phil. 2:1-11)

Hi Friends! Welcome to Moments to Ponder. This is a podcast designed to help you spend a few moments in God's Word wherever you are and take away something to ponder.

We live in a loud, busy world that can make it hard to find the time to get into God's word and I'm grateful for these moments we have to ponder the book of Philippians in the series that I've titled, Unveiling Joy. I'm Betsy Marvin and this is episode 88.

(music fades)

As we begin chapter 2 of Philippians today, we are met with some great literature. Rhetorical questions, a Chiasm, and a hymn make up these first few verses reminding us that Paul was definitely an educated Jew, and his use of words were meant to help his readers understand the depth of what he had to say.

Paul starts with rhetorical questions, which as a teacher, I have used often. It's the asking of a question, not to get an answer, but to make a point about something that the learner already knows or to influence them toward the answer the teacher is looking for. It creates an if-then kind of thinking. In verse 1 of chapter 2 Paul asks:

*Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ?*

*Any comfort from his love?*

*Any fellowship together in the Spirit?*

*Are your hearts tender and compassionate?*

The answer to all of these should be yes. So, **if** these are all true, **then**...Paul answers this with: <sup>2</sup>*Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose.*

Let's take the opportunity here to maybe learn something new for some of you, it's something I've been learning about myself – it's called a Chiasm and verse 2 is an example of this. A Chiasm is a form of literature, a type of poetry, that uses the sequence of the elements of a sentence or verse, paragraph or even a book which are then repeated and developed – but in reverse order. It can also be called – introverted parallelism. For example, a simple one that was said by Jesus would be, “The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath.” (Mark 2:27) Note the repeating, in reverse order, of sabbath and man. This way of writing or speaking was a great teaching tool in an oral history culture. It helps the listener repeat it as well as showing the importance of what was being said.

And, as Paul is writing a letter that would be read and re-read, he uses a chiasm to help the church hear the importance what he is telling them to do and if they can do it – he will have joy. His questions lead me to believe that the church needed reminding of their shared fellowship, comfort in Christ, compassionate hearts and encouragement... in short, they were dealing with conflict among them.

His answer is within the chiasm that we see in verse 2 in an A – B – B – A format. Let's re-read verse 2: *Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose.*

In the Greek, agreeing and one mind is the same word – phroneo (*fron-neh'-o*). It's used both first and last in this verse and it means have understanding and agree together, be wise. In the middle we have the words love (agape) and work together (sympsychos - *soom'-pse-khos*) – two different words meaning very close to the same thing - to love fully and to be united in spirit.

If the church could be of one mind, loving each other, united in Christ – this would bring joy to Paul's heart. Don't we all have joy when those we love get along with each other? Paul will go on to use the word, phroneo, 9 more times in his letter.

Ok, that's the start...but Paul's not done. He continues in verse 3:

<sup>3</sup> *Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves.* <sup>4</sup> *Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too.*

These verses give us some insight into what might be causing the conflict in Philippi. Nothing messes with connection and unity like conflict. And often, conflict is based in selfishness which we see Paul speak to here.

If you remember, in the first part of his letter, Paul addressed those that were preaching out of jealousy and competition – he called it out there and he pushes the church to be careful to not do the same. Agape love isn't jealous, sympsychos is a united spirit – which when supported by Phroneo, wisdom and understanding – the outcome is unity.

This all leads to Paul's next statement which summarizes what he has just said. Paul tells them – You must have the same attitude of Christ Jesus. This is big. This is hard. It makes us wonder if that's even possible, right?

In 1 Corinthians 2:16 he wrote, *we have the mind of Christ* because of the Spirit in us. We are able to choose to walk in His way and allow the attitude of Christ to become our own. It is the only way that all that Paul is speaking of is possible. This is the journey of grow and maturity I spoke of an early podcast in this series.

Paul doesn't leave them wondering what having the mind of Christ looks like. In the following verses, he goes into a beautiful hymn giving them the foundation for the challenge to self-sacrificing unity within the church.

Before we dive into the poem, let's remember the lord of Rome – Nero – an egotistical leader, seizing control of his court, killing of his opposition, and descending into madness. Soon, Rome would burn and Nero would turn those pointing at him to the Christians which would lead to their persecution. It's a world of status, power, greed, and ambition. In this light, he shows the church and us the character of God.

We'll start at verse 5 and continue:

<sup>5</sup> *You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.*

<sup>6</sup> *Though he was God,  
he did not think of equality with God  
as something to cling to.*

*<sup>7</sup> Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;  
he took the humble position of a slave  
and was born as a human being.*

*When he appeared in human form,  
<sup>8</sup> he humbled himself in obedience to God  
and died a criminal's death on a cross.*

*<sup>9</sup> Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor  
and gave him the name above all other names,  
<sup>10</sup> that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
<sup>11</sup> and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.*

The word therefore in these verses signals the a connection between Jesus' actions to why. He did only what God could do

Fully powerful yet choosing to be Humble.

Fully owning the universe yet choosing to be Sacrificial.

All Authority yet chose to be a Servant.

The maker of all order yet chose to be Obedient.

All because of love.

Paul is pointing to Jesus, the One who does miracles and the one who also suffered and served just as Paul was doing at that very moment as he suffered in prison while still serving Christ in any way he could.

Many commentaries point to these verses as a hymn sung by the early church and that would make sense as hymns were used historically to help an illiterate people learn the theology and character of God. Yet, I also think these verses were meant for more than a theology lesson, I think they were much more practical.

Paul is equipping them, as the church, to act in a way towards each other that would promote unity in the body of Christ and to equip them with a better understanding of the pattern of patient obedience and humble servanthood within Jesus which he is calling them to emulate.

His words are a call to all Christ-followers – even today. This is the example.

*Though he was God,*

*he did not think of equality with God*

*as something to cling to. - humility*

*<sup>7</sup> Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;*

*he took the humble position of a slave*

*and was born as a human being. – servant-hearted*

*When he appeared in human form,*

*<sup>8</sup> he humbled himself in obedience to God - obedient*

*and died a criminal's death on a cross - sacrificial*

Humility. Servant-hearted. Obedient. Sacrificial  
It was counter-cultural then – and it still is today.

It was the answer to their challenge then – it's the answer today. Yet, how many of us will truly choose to live in it?

*So, if you've gotten anything at all out of following Christ, if his love has made any difference in your life, if being in a community of the Spirit means anything to you, if you have a heart, if you care—then do me a favor: Agree with each other, love each other, be deep-spirited friends. Phil. 1:1-2 (MSG)*

Oh Dear one, may you seek to have the mind of Christ, choosing to be understanding and wise, fully loving others and seeking unity with fellow believers. It's hard, yes. It's is fulfilling, yes. And just imagine how much your Heavenly Father's heart is filled with joy as he sees you sharing his love with those around you.

And, may you receive much love in return.

Amen.