

How to Live (Part 1)

Philippians 1:27-2:11

After talking about his situation and attitude (1:12-26), Paul turns his attention to what the Philippian Christians need to do. Read Philippians 1:27-2:11.

1. Based on verse 27a, what is the main thing the Philippian Christians need to do?¹

As Citizens of Heaven

The main command of this passage is “conduct yourselves (as citizens of heaven) in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ” (1:27a). What is involved in doing this?

2. Based on verses 27b-28a, what particular things do the Philippian Christians (and all Christians) need to do?² List them. Why are they important?



Like Paul, the Philippian Christians are facing opposition³ (1:28).

3. It's true that the Christian life is a blessed life, which some people think means success, health & wealth (in a worldly sense). What do verses 29-30 say about the Christian life?⁴
4. Have you faced opposition or suffering *because* you are a Christian? How can Christians be encouraged?⁵ How can Christians encourage one another?

In verses 27-30, Paul addresses the Philippian Christians' conduct in view of opposition from the outside. But there are also problems, or potential problems, *within* their community. This is true of our Christian communities today! So next, Paul tells us *how to live* in view of these problems.

¹ Verse 27a says, 'conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.' The New Living Translation (NLT) adds, 'you must live as citizens of heaven.' The Greek word *politeuesthe* (translated 'conduct yourselves') is related to the word *polis* (city, city-state), and could be translated 'live as citizens.' Later in the letter, Paul says 'our citizenship is in heaven' (3:20). As good citizens of Christ's kingdom, Christians should live their lives in a way that honors the gospel (good news) of Christ's kingdom.

² They need to 1) stand firm in the one [Holy] Spirit (or one spirit and one purpose); 2) strive (work, fight) together as one for the faith of the gospel; and 3) not be frightened by their opponents.

³ The text does not identify their opponents. They could be false teachers who insist that Christians have to obey the Old Testament ceremonial laws (3:2). However, it is more likely that they are non-Jewish unbelievers in Philippi who are intimidating or persecuting the Christians.

⁴ God grants (gives) not only the ability to *believe* in Christ, but also the honor to *suffer* for him. Suffering is part of the Christian life. Jesus Christ suffered, and Christians also suffer as they identify with him and follow his path. This is logical since 'the world' is opposed to Christ (*John 15:18-19; 16:33*).

⁵ Verse 28 is a reminder of the greater conflict between God and the forces that oppose him. God wins that conflict! It may sometimes seem like Christians are losing, but those who oppose God will face his judgment while those who are aligned with God (through faith in Christ) 'will be saved.' As Paul wrote elsewhere, 'If God is for us, who can be against us?' (*Romans 8:31*) This should encourage Christians who face unjust opposition and suffering.

United Together in Christ

Read Philippians 2:1-4. The blessings listed in verse 1 are already being experienced to some extent in the Philippian Christian community,⁶ and these blessings form the “ground” (basis) for Paul’s commands in verses 2-4. What are the blessings listed in verse 1?

- Encouragement from being united with Christ
- Comfort from his love
- Common sharing (participation, fellowship) in the Spirit
- Tenderness (affection) and compassion



The Philippians have already brought joy to Paul’s life (*1:3-4*), but Paul says they can “make his joy complete” (in other words, “fill his cup of joy to the top”) by responding in particular ways.

5. In what four ways should the Philippians (and all Christians) respond, based on verse 2? How would you summarize this instruction?⁷

How can we experience the unity commanded in verse 2? First of all, this unity is realized in our relationship with Christ and our common sharing in the Holy Spirit (*2:1*). This is God’s gracious provision. But we are responsible for our own conduct, and the key to unity is seen in verses 3-4.

6. Read Philippians 2:3-4. What is the key to unity? How would you describe “humility?”⁸
7. Considering our differences with other Christians, including some who are difficult to get along with, is this teaching unreasonable or too hard to follow? How can we do it?



Following the Supreme Example

After describing how Christians should think and behave, Paul points to the supreme example of right living. He says, “...have the same mindset of Christ Jesus” (*2:5*). How is Christ’s mindset described, and what else should Christians do? Come back for Part 2 of “How to Live”!

Reflection & Application

- Do you desire the blessings of Philippians 2:1? Do you value humility and true unity? These blessings and qualities are found in Jesus Christ. Do you need to give your life to Jesus?
- Brothers and sisters, are you presently experiencing disharmony with a brother or sister? Do you need to apply this lesson to that relationship? Reflect on Jesus’ example (*2:5-11*).

⁶ The word ‘if’ (*ei*) in verse 1 could be translated ‘if, as is indeed the case’ or ‘since.’

⁷ Christians are to live in unity with one another because of their common union with Christ. While individual Christians are different from each other, we should be united in our disposition toward Christ, the gospel, and God’s purpose for his Church. We should be united in our love and service of Christ, and our love for one another. Elsewhere Paul uses the analogy of the body to express Christian diversity and unity (*1 Corinthians 12*).

⁸ Christian humility is not mere self-depreciation (which can be self-centered), or politeness, or surrendering our convictions concerning truth. Verse 3 describes humility as ‘valuing others above yourselves.’ The point is not to compare ourselves with other people, or to falsely consider others ‘better.’ The main comparison we should make is between us and God, which will cause us to realize our own unworthiness before Him. Verses 3-4 say we should put others first, so that their needs and concerns surpass our own. Does this mean we must disregard our own interests? O’Brien says, ‘Paul does not prohibit any interest in one’s own affairs. It is the selfish preoccupation with them that he condemns’ (Peter O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991], 185).