

# Philippians

## IGNATIUS CATHOLIC STUDY BIBLE QUESTIONS

### Welcome

*“You are approaching the ‘word of God’. But for thousands of years, ... the Word of God has been approaching you.”*

The following guide is provided to enhance your reading of the Letter of Saint Paul to the Philippians using the *Ignatius Catholic Study Bible*. If you are new to this resource or to reading the Bible, we recommend you read the general Introduction before you begin. It explains what it means that Scripture is the Word of God as well as how we understand and interpret it as Catholics. It also introduces the special features of the Study Bible and tells how they can enrich your reading and study. Additionally, the *Introduction to Paul and His Letters* will provide valuable context for your reading.

A simple rhythm of prayer followed by reading and reflection is offered below to guide you through the book one chapter at a time. Questions draw attention to key footnotes and word studies to lead you into a deeper understanding of what you read and then prompt you to consider how to apply what you have learned. For a deeper dive, take advantage of additional features as you go: not just the other footnotes but also cross-references to Scripture and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)* that are provided above the footnotes as well as any maps, charts, or essays that are not touched on in the questions.

Don't miss these helpful icons as you read! They highlight footnotes that pertain to the Church's criteria for interpreting Scripture (see CCC 112–14):



### Be attentive to the content and unity of Scripture

Notes marked with a Bible icon connect Old Testament passages and New Testament mysteries, fostering appreciation for God's unified plan.



### Read Scripture in light of the Church's living tradition

This icon marks notes drawn from the Holy Spirit's guidance of Church teaching and the spiritual senses of scripture. Here you'll find official teaching as well as interpretations from Fathers, Doctors, and saints of the Church.



### Be attentive to the “analogy of faith”

Explore notes marked with an icon of keys to learn how the mysteries of faith, revealed in Scripture and defined by the Church, clarify and connect with one another in a unified, coherent way.

May God bless you as you read his word!

of God,\* did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,<sup>7</sup>but emptied himself,<sup>†</sup> taking the form of a servant,<sup>‡</sup> being born in the likeness of men.<sup>§</sup>And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.<sup>¶</sup>Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name,<sup>||</sup>that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,<sup>|||</sup>and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

**Shinin**  
12 Therefore, obeyed, so now much more in salvation with f work in you, bo pleasure.  
14 Do all thi tioning,<sup>15</sup>that y children of God crooked and per

2:9–11: Rom 10:9; 14:9; Eph 1:20–21. 2:13: 1 Cor 15:10. 2

**2:7 emptied himself:** The Greek verb *kenōō* means “empty out” or “render void”. The idea is, not that Christ divested himself of divinity when he united himself with humanity, but that he restricted his rightful exercise of certain divine abilities during his earthly life and accepted certain limitations of the human condition. In effect, the Son of God made himself poor in order to make us rich with his grace (2 Cor 8:9) (CCC 472). • Christ emptied himself by compressing the glory of his Godhead within our smallness. What he always was remained perfect and incomprehensible, but what he assumed was in proportion to the measure of our nature (St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Apollinarius*).

**2:8 death on a cross:** The ultimate indignity. Death by crucifixion was the most awful and degrading form of criminal execution in the ancient world. The Romans reserved it for slaves and insurrectionists. See note on Mk 15:24.

**2:9 exalted him:** By raising him from the dead, enthroning him in heaven, and clothing his humanity with divine glory. A similar destiny awaits all who humble themselves as Jesus did (3:21; Lk 14:11).

**2:10 every knee should bow:** An allusion to the divine oath in Is 45:23. • Yahweh swore that all peoples, to the very end of the earth, would acknowledge his Lordship and bow before him in homage. Paul moves Christ into the center of this prophecy as the divine Lord destined to be revered by all. **heaven ... earth ... under the earth:** The three principal realms in the world view of ancient Israel (Ex 20:4). Homage will come from all creatures great and small—the angels and saints above, the family of man and beasts spread over the earth, and the dead and the demons of the underworld.

**2:11 confess:** I.e., acknowledge. Included in this open dec

serious that we pur sense of awe at ser the prospect of sinn Encouragement con readers that God's g desire (intention) at 21; CCC 308) (CC “work”, he address and trembling”, he good deeds were th not boast of your g within you (St. Augu **2:15 pervers** • Deuterono poetic lawsuit that and ingratitude du

*A Thing to Harpagmos (G in the Greek O Occurrences of “robbery”. Its considerable d the leading vi (1) Some, like “something sel*

## **Prepare**

Read the Introduction to Philippians, paying particular attention to the *Purpose* and *Themes and Characteristics* of the book. What one thing stands out to you, that you would like to remember?

Read the Outline of Philippians to get an overview of the book. What are its major divisions?

## **Pray**

Use the following questions to guide your reading of Philippians, going at a pace that is comfortable to you. Before you begin each new section, pray simply for the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit:

*Come, Holy Spirit, open my heart to hear and receive these words as what they truly are, the Word of God. Enlighten my understanding and give me grace to put what I read into practice in my life. Amen.*

## **Read and Reflect**

Read and reflect on Philippians as follows:

- Pray before you read
- Read a section of biblical text by itself
- Read the text again, referring to the notes that accompany the text
- For deeper understanding and to aid in applying what you read, answer the questions that follow. The references at the top of each numbered question correspond to particular notes.

At the end of each chapter, review what you have written and linger where you feel drawn, asking the Lord to speak to your heart and into your life. What do you hear? Respond in prayer and ask his help to live what you hear in your attitudes and actions this week.

# STUDY QUESTIONS

## Chapter 1

### *For understanding*

1. **1:1.** How were the titles bishop, presbyter, and deacon understood when Philippians was written? Who were the Philippian bishops, and what did they do? What was the role of the deacons?
2. **1:19.** What scriptural references indicate that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son? What names does Paul use for the Holy Spirit?
3. **1:23.** Why does Paul not hide his preference for martyrdom? What is the Catholic tradition regarding what happens to the souls of the blessed at death?
4. **1:29.** What are some of the benefits for ourselves and others of our suffering? How does Scripture depict suffering, and what is its challenge for us?

### *For application*

1. **1:9–11.** Read the note for v. 9. In the context of your Christian relationships (such as family, neighbors, or parish), what does it mean to love “with knowledge and all discernment”? What are some of the “fruits of righteousness” you can expect to experience? (Hint: Look up Gal 5:22–23.)
2. **1:15–18.** What are some of the wrong motives you have had for sharing your Christian faith? When have you shared it with the right motives? How did your motives affect the outcome (if at all)? What difference does Paul see in motive, here?
3. **1:20.** How do you live so as to honor Christ in your body? What are the challenges you face? How might honoring him in your body take courage in your circumstances?
4. **1:27–28.** How does the life of your parish community reflect credit on the gospel of Christ? As a group, how firm are you in your unity and striving for the faith? How does your corporate behavior demonstrate that unity?

## Chapter 2

### *For understanding*

1. **Word Study: A Thing to Be Grasped (2:6).** What interpretations of the Greek term *harpagmos* have been suggested for this verse? What seems to be the best interpretation? What does it indicate about Jesus?
2. **2:10.** To what OT verse does this verse allude? What does the divine oath proclaim? What reasoning does Paul use to insert Jesus into this prophecy?
3. **2:12.** What does it mean to “work out your own salvation”? What does “fear and trembling” have to do with it? What encouragement does Paul offer?
4. **2:15.** Why does Paul excerpt a saying from Deut 32:5? What is the lesson to be learned from the Exodus generation of Israel?

### *For application*

1. **2:3.** How has the course of your life reflected this verse—or stood in contrast to it? What kinds of people do you tend to look down upon? How can you “count others as better than yourself” and maintain self-respect at the same time?
2. **2:6–7.** What is the one thing you most want to “hang onto” in life—the one thing of which you would be most afraid to “empty yourself”? Why might God ask this of you? If he has asked it, what has your response been?
3. **2:13.** Have you noticed God at work in you, bringing you to the point of willing his good pleasure and working for it? To what incidents, trends, or circumstances can you point that illustrate his work in you?
4. **2:17–18.** Do you know anyone who has “poured himself out” so that you might come to faith or remain in it? What did this person do for you, and what kind of sacrifice do you think it entailed? How can you repay such a sacrifice?

## Chapter 3

### *For understanding*

1. **3:4–6.** What credentials does Paul present to the Philippians in the face of the Judaizing missionaries, who demanded circumcision?

## Philippians

2. **3:6.** How was religious zeal sometimes expressed under the Old Covenant? How did Paul once emulate that type of zeal? What did he realize about it after his conversion?
3. **3:14.** To what does Paul compare the Christian life? What does this analogy imply about our salvation? What is Paul, like a sideline coach, urging his readers to do?
4. **3:20.** To what civic experience is Paul alluding in this verse? To what does he compare it?

### *For application*

1. **3:3–7.** What are your “Christian credentials”? That is, what accomplishments, degrees, contacts, memberships, efforts, and so on, could you list that might convince people or God that you are a person of note? Whether you have anything to list or not, how would you echo Paul’s sentiment in v. 7?
2. **3:8.** How do you know Christ Jesus as your Lord? Do you know him or only know about him? How would anyone else but you know whether your assessment is reliable? What is that relationship worth to you?
3. **3:12–16.** What is your attitude toward the call you have from God to be holy? What does it mean for you to be holy? (Hint: Review the chapter thus far.) How are you “straining forward” (v. 13) for it? Paul looks on a desire for holiness as a mark of maturity; what do you think of it (especially in the light of your own circumstances)?
4. **3:17–19.** How comfortable would you feel asking someone else to imitate your Christian commitment? If you feel uncomfortable, how would you speak to those to whom Paul refers in vv. 18–19?

## Chapter 4

### *For understanding*

1. **4:7.** What is “the peace of God” to which Paul refers? What does Paul insist we do to obtain it?
2. **Word Study: Excellence (4:8).** What does the Greek word *aretē* mean? Although the word was common in ancient Greek, how does Peter use it? How does Paul use the term in Philippians?
3. **4:13.** What does Paul mean by saying he can “do all things” in Christ?
4. **4:22.** What indication is there in this verse that the letter to the Philippians was written from Rome?

### *For application*

1. **4:2–3.** What has been your involvement in disagreements in your parish or faith community? How have you tried to resolve them?
2. **4:4–7.** Why does Paul—and Jesus, for that matter (read Mt 6:25–34; Lk 10:41; 12:25–29)—forbid anxiety? What kinds of anxiety do you experience in everyday life? How might you do more to follow Paul’s advice in v. 4?
3. **4:8.** Have you tried to practice what Paul recommends in this verse? What effect has it had on your prayer? If you have not tried to practice it, why not? What makes Paul’s recommendation more than mere “positive thinking”?
4. **4:11–13.** What is your “style” of complaining? What do you complain about? Though Paul does not say that he *feels* content, he indicates that he knows how to *be* content. What would you say is his secret?