



God is Self-Sacrificing

Summary and Goal

False Narrative: We work our way to God.

True Narrative: God works His way us.

Bottom Line: We can rest in the finished work of Christ.

Main Passages

Philippians 2:6-11

Session Outline

1. He Took on Flesh (Phil. 2:6-7)
2. He Underwent Trials (Phil. 2:8a)
3. He Submitted to the Cross (Phil. 2:8b-11)

Theological Theme

Because of the radical corruption of sin from which all people suffer, our salvation takes nothing less than a complete rescue by God. As Scripture says, “For while we were still helpless, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly” (Rom. 5:6).

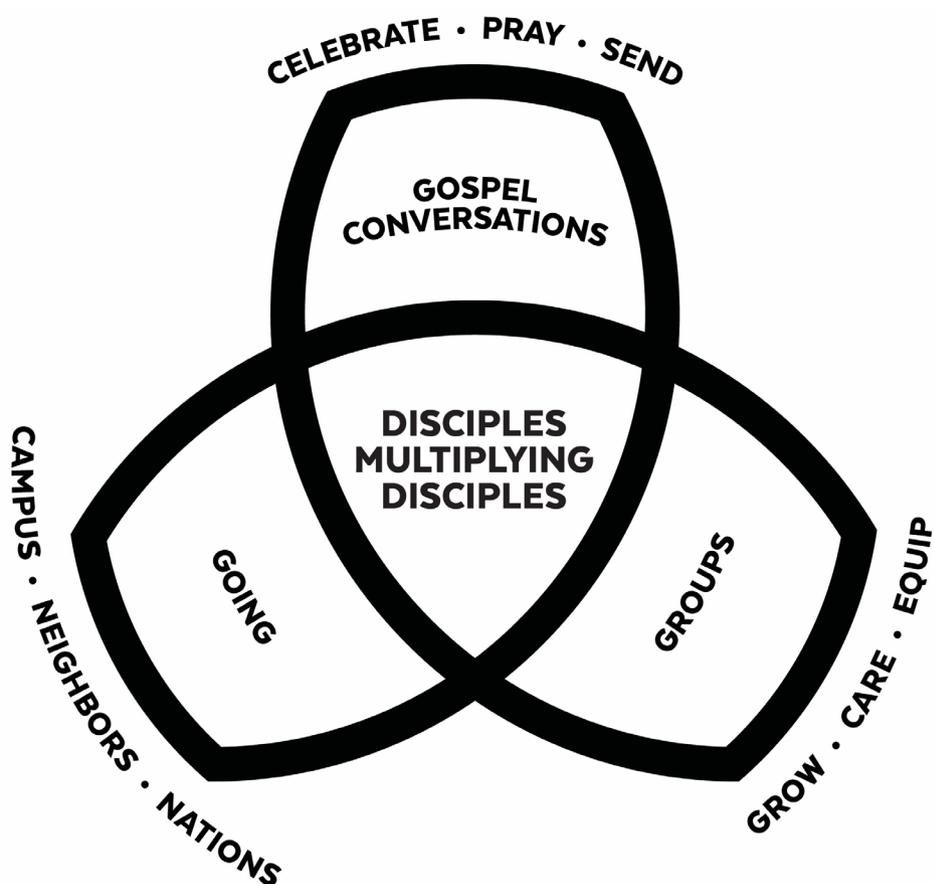
Christ Connection

Jesus of Nazareth was obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. He did all of this for the glory of God and the good of sinners. He is the perfect atoning sacrifice.

Missional Application

Those who have experienced the grace of God in Jesus Christ are called to testify about Christ to the world. Those who hear the gospel and respond with faith and repentance are saved from their sin and made children of God.

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



DxD This Week

Next Step

What is God calling you to give up in order to spend more time with Him (devotional life), to lead others (material possessions, finances), or to disciple your family and friends (time, blessings, encouragement)?

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Session Plan

God is Self-Sacrificing

Introduction

- ? What is your favorite sport to play? To watch?
- ? Why do you like that sport the best? What makes it different from other sports?

Baseball is a unique sport. When the batter hits the winning homerun, the guys in the dugout can take no credit whatsoever for the hit ball but they share in the victory. They receive the benefits of his performance. Similarly, Christians can take no credit in their salvation because Jesus Christ accomplished that victory. He did everything and deserves all the credit. Christians are in awe of His finished work and rejoice because they benefit from it.

1. He Took on Flesh (Phil. 2:6-7)

The prophet Isaiah, hundreds of years before Christ, prophesied, “Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign: See, the virgin will conceive, have a son, and name him Immanuel” (Isa. 7:14). Long before that, God promised a Rescuer would come from Eve’s offspring. (See Gen. 3:15.) But it wasn’t until after Jesus’ arrival that people truly understood what those Old Testament promises meant. Paul wrote to the Galatians, “When the time came to completion, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons” (Gal. 4:4-5).

- ? Is it necessary to believe Jesus was God incarnate (in flesh) to be a Christian? Explain.
- ? How was the incarnation an act of sacrifice on our behalf by Christ?
- ? Application: Do you believe Jesus Christ was the Son of God and was born of a virgin to take on flesh? How might Jesus’ humiliation on your behalf spur you on to humble yourself before your brothers and sisters in Christ?

2. He Underwent Trials (Phil. 2:8a)

Jesus' condescension and humiliation wasn't only His leaving heaven, being clothed in human flesh, and assuming a human nature. That was the first step in a long, humiliating work of providing salvation for those who don't deserve to be saved and who could never save themselves. He humbled Himself by becoming obedient.

- ❓ Why did Jesus humble Himself and take on flesh? What was the point?
- ❓ What does it mean for us today that Jesus sacrificed Himself and overcame these trials?
- ❓ Application: How does Jesus' example and work on your behalf help you face trials when they come your way?

3. He Submitted to the Cross (Phil. 2:8b-11)

Finally, Jesus condescended and humbled Himself to the point of a shameful death on the cross.

- ❓ Why was it necessary for Jesus to die on the cross? How does this great and glorious truth affect those who believe it?
- ❓ How has the finished work of Christ changed the way God receives the works of believers compared to those who have not trusted in Him?
- ❓ Application: How do you view good works? Are they a way for you to gain God's favor and pay the price for your own sin? Or are they out of an overflow of joy and gratitude because of what God has done on your behalf through Christ?

Conclusion

- ❓ What has been most impactful for you as you've reflected on the sacrifice of Christ on your behalf?
- ❓ How does the sacrifice of Christ lead us to live differently with those within the church? How has it enabled and empowered us to live in a sacrificial way with others?
- ❓ How might you seek gospel conversations with others by sharing about the sacrifice of Christ?



Expanded Session Content

God is Self-Sacrificing

Introduction

- ❓ What is your favorite sport to play? To watch?
- ❓ Why do you like that sport the best? What makes it different from other sports?

Baseball is a unique sport. The main action throughout the game is between two players: the pitcher and the batter. The game of baseball is like watching a series of duels. Even though each of those two players has a whole team behind him, in the moments that the ball is travelling from the pitcher's hand to home plate, there is nothing those other players can do. Everything depends on just those two players. It isn't uncommon for the outcome of the game to come down on what happens in that final duel between pitcher and batter.

This is a helpful example of what it means to be saved. When the batter hits the winning homerun, the guys in the dugout can take no credit whatsoever for the hit ball but they share in the victory. They receive the benefits of his performance. Similarly, Christians can take no credit in their salvation because Jesus Christ accomplished that victory. He did everything and deserves all the credit. Christians are in awe of His finished work and rejoice because they benefit from it.

Session Summary

Paul's letter to the church in Philippi was a joyful, grateful encouragement to a group of believers Paul loved dearly. Paul sowed the seed of the gospel there and was encouraged by the reports he received about their continued faith in Jesus Christ. His purpose in writing was to urge them to continue on the pilgrim way toward heaven. He wanted them to live as citizens of heaven (which is what they were), even though they had not yet reached that eternal rest.

In the passage we are studying today, Paul encouraged the Philippians to live in unity. He sought to motivate them toward that unity by reminding them of the way Christ humbled Himself on their behalf. If Christ, being their Savior and God, humbled Himself for their good, then they ought

to do the same for their brothers and sisters. As Paul laid out his argument for the Philippians, he reiterated the essence of the gospel that we see throughout Scripture. Salvation was not of their works, lest they boast, but by grace through faith. Jesus did the work to save God's people.

Many people believe they must work their way to God. They have the erroneous idea that their good works will curry God's favor and cover their own sins. Nothing could be further from the truth. The truth is God has done everything necessary for our salvation. He comes to His people, calls them out of sin and darkness, and draws them to His Son, Jesus Christ, the Savior of the World. Christians today can rest in the finished work of Christ for the salvation of their souls.

1. He Took on Flesh (Phil. 2:6-7)

The prophet Isaiah, hundreds of years before Christ, prophesied, "Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign: See, the virgin will conceive, have a son, and name him Immanuel" (Isa. 7:14). Long before that, God promised a Rescuer would come from Eve's offspring. (See Gen. 3:15.) But it wasn't until after Jesus' arrival that people truly understood what those Old Testament promises meant. Paul wrote to the Galatians, "When the time came to completion, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons" (Gal. 4:4-5).

 Is it necessary to believe Jesus was God incarnate (in flesh) to be a Christian? Explain.

If the incarnation of Christ isn't true, then all hope is lost. It is necessary to believe this for our own salvation and because it is the clear teaching of the Bible. Those who have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb love the Book that prophesies His coming, tells of His life and ministry, and records His words. It is impossible to be a follower of Jesus and reject the very thing Jesus gave to His people so they might know the gospel and live by it.

The testimony of the church certainly stirs up and persuades those who are in Christ to adopt a high view of and reverent respect for the Scriptures. The heavenliness of its contents, the power of the truth, and the harmony of its parts serve to motivate Christians to take up and read day by day. However, a Christian's full persuasion and assurance of the truth and authority of the Scriptures comes finally and fully from the internal work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in their hearts.

 How was the incarnation an act of sacrifice on our behalf by Christ?

He Emptied Himself

The phrase he emptied is much debated. Theologians ponder what Jesus emptied himself of. It is certain that he did not divest himself of deity or its attributes. Two statements accompany the verb. First, by assuming the form of a servant indicates that God the Son came to demonstrate true servanthood. Second, the likeness of humanity explains both emptying and servanthood. Two further statements explain the second verb humbled (cp. v. 3). First, when he had come as a man provides the time of his humility. "As a man" contrasts with the "form of God" (v. 6). Jesus was more than human, though he came to earth in the form of a man. Second, Jesus's humility came through becoming obedient. Servants obey; Jesus obeyed God, even to the point of dying on a cross.

You may have heard of the condescension of God on behalf of sinners. This simply means He reaches down to meet people, because people are unable to reach up to Him. What we must also remember is that the condescension of Christ included humiliation. In other words, He underwent humiliating circumstances to meet us. He humbled Himself. (See Phil. 2:8a.) Love led Him down to the cradle. It was the strong love of Christ that brought Him down from heaven for the sake of rebels, to take on their flesh and nature. What kind of love was this that God should become man! The divine Spirit became flesh; He who formed the world was born of a poor virgin, in a dirty village, and all for the sake of His enemies!

There has never been (nor will there ever be) a greater humiliation than the Son of God taking on the flesh and the nature of man.

-  Application: Do you believe Jesus Christ was the Son of God and was born of a virgin to take on flesh? How might Jesus' humiliation on your behalf spur you on to humble yourself before your brothers and sisters in Christ?

2. He Underwent Trials (Phil. 2:8a)

Jesus' condescension and humiliation wasn't only His leaving heaven, being clothed in human flesh, and assuming a human nature. That was the first step in a long, humiliating work of providing salvation for those who don't deserve to be saved and who could never save themselves. He humbled Himself by becoming obedient.

-  Why did Jesus humble Himself and take on flesh? What was the point?

Jesus' taking on flesh is a critical part of His saving work on behalf of the ungodly. Jesus is both fully God and fully man. It could be no other way if man's sins were to be atoned for. As a man Jesus rightfully earned righteousness and the approval of God the Father through His perfectly obedient life. He was tempted in every way that we are, but He always did what was right and never did what was wrong. Not only that, but He also felt the full weight of the strain placed upon His soul when He withstood the temptations of the devil. Why did He allow Himself to be brought under that great trial? For the love of God the Father and the love of those His Father would give to Him. (See John 6:37.)

Not only that, but in His human flesh He bore the physical pain on His way to the cross and as He died upon it. This included every tear of skin, every prick of the thorn, every buffet of the cheek. He felt it all. God the Father held nothing of His wrath against sin back in the punishment

of His beloved Son. Jesus did all of this willingly, gladly even, so that Christians might be saved to the uttermost and glorify God both now and forever.

Of course, Jesus' taking on of human flesh did not nullify His divinity. Jesus, while fully human, was still fully God. He had to be. Being divine, Jesus wasn't corrupted with original sin that all humans are born with. Furthermore, no mere man would be able to bear up under the wrath of God against sin without being destroyed. Jesus was able to shoulder the punishment for sin because He was truly the Son of God. Both His identity as well as His finished work were proven in His resurrection from the grave.

 What does it mean for us today that Jesus sacrificed Himself and overcame these trials?

Jesus triumphantly overcame all the trials that he faced when he walked the earth in human flesh. He never faltered in a single area. He never gave in to a single temptation. He never vacillated in his full obedience to the Father.

We may take three wonderful truths as we reflect on Jesus' victory over trials. First, we have a Savior who sympathizes with us: "we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15). Second, we have a Savior who is truly able to save us because the righteousness He earned by overcoming all trials in perfect obedience is now credited to the accounts of those who trust in Him. Third, because Jesus overcame the trials through which He had to pass, He lives forevermore and intercedes on behalf of those who trust in Him. Thus, Christians rest in a sympathetic, righteous, and mediating Savior!

 Application: How does Jesus' example and work on your behalf help you face trials when they come your way?

3. He Submitted to the Cross (Phil. 2:8b-11)

Finally, Jesus condescended and humbled Himself to the point of a shameful death on the cross.

 Why was it necessary for Jesus to die on the cross? How does this great and glorious truth affect those who believe it?

The Bible is clear that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness for sin and the wages of sin is death. (See Rom. 6:23 and Heb. 9:22.) Thus, there was a need of a death. God the Father, to meet this need, sent

the Son to take on flesh and die. He died because the Scriptures say, “The person who sins is the one who will die” (Ezek. 18:4). Now, because of Christ, God is both the just and the justifier. (See Rom. 3:26.)

Christ’s sacrifice on the cross is the very basis for living a life that is right in God’s sight. It all starts with the work Jesus accomplished on our behalf. Apart from Jesus’ work, Christians don’t have the ability to glorify God in any way. Without Jesus’ atoning sacrifice, all people remain under God’s judgment and wrath. In fact, the Old Testament describes our good works as “filthy rags” (Isa. 64:6, NIV). But, once a person is saved and given the right to become a child of God (see John 1:12), then they are able to please their Creator by doing good works.

Not only are Christians given the ability to please the Father, but they are also given the desire to worship Him through obedience. Followers of Jesus look to Him as an example to follow. That is what Paul said here in this passage. Not only did Jesus open the way for Christians to know God and please Him with their works, but He also showed them how to do those works. Peter commanded believers to walk in Jesus’ steps. (See 1 Pet. 2:21.) Jesus gave the ultimate example of thinking of others’ interest first in His death on the cross.



How has the finished work of Christ changed the way God receives the works of believers compared to those who have not trusted in Him?

The Bible is very clear that a person that is not in Christ remains under God’s wrath and judgment. (See John 3:36.) In fact, in Isaiah 59:2 we read that our sins cause God’s face to be hidden from us and that He does not hear us. Then, in Isaiah 64:6, our good works are described as “filthy rags” (NIV).

No, the good works of unbelievers do not please a holy God. Why are the good works of believers pleasing to God? The good works of believers are pleasing to God because of their standing before Him through Christ’s sacrifice. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says that Jesus became sin so that we could “become the righteousness of God.” In other words, Christians are made righteous in God’s sight because Jesus’ righteousness has been transferred to those who have repented of sin and trusted in Christ. Ephesians 2:8-10 explains this well, saying Christians were created in Christ Jesus for good works! As children of God, through the work of Christ Jesus on the cross, Christians can please their heavenly Father by being obedient to His will revealed in the Scriptures.

- ❓ Application: How do you view good works? Are they a way for you to gain God's favor and pay the price for your own sin? Or are they out of an overflow of joy and gratitude because of what God has done on your behalf through Christ?

Conclusion

The only thing Christians contribute to their salvation is the sin that made it necessary. One of the greatest lies of the enemy is to convince the world that if they work hard enough, do enough good deeds, and are religious enough, then they can earn their way into heaven. Nothing could be further from the truth.

- ❓ What has been most impactful for you as you've reflected on the sacrifice of Christ on your behalf?
- ❓ How does the sacrifice of Christ lead us to live differently with those within the church? How has it enabled and empowered us to live in a sacrificial way with others?
- ❓ How might you seek gospel conversations with others by sharing about the sacrifice of Christ?

Prayer of Response

Praise God for His mercy and kindness displayed in Jesus Christ. Ask the Lord to give you a renewed vision of the meaning of the cross. Ask the Lord to break your heart for sin and fill you with joy because of the forgiveness of sin in the atoning blood of Christ. Petition the Lord to help your group members rest in the finished work of Christ on the cross and leave behind any traces of thinking that a person must earn salvation by their own merit and good works.

Additional Resources

- *Exalting Jesus in Philippians* by Tony Merida
- *Be Joyful* by Warren Wiersbe
- *Philippians, Colossians & Philemon: New American Commentary* by Richard Melick

For Next Week

Session Title

- A Roadmap For Gospel Conversations

Main Passages

- Romans 3:10-12,23; 5:1,6-11; 6:23; 8:1,38-39; 10:9-10,13-14

Session Outline

1. All Have Sinned and Face Death (Rom. 3:10-12,23; 6:23)
2. Jesus Made the Way for Salvation (Rom. 5:6-11; 10:9-10,13-14)
3. Through Jesus We Have Peace with God (Rom. 5:1; 8:1,38-39)

Memorize

⁹ *For this reason God highly exalted him
and gave him the name*

that is above every name,

¹⁰ *so that at the name of Jesus*

every knee will bow—

in heaven and on earth

and under the earth—

¹¹ *and every tongue will confess*

that Jesus Christ is Lord,

to the glory of God the Father.

- Philippians 2:9-11

Daily Readings

- Monday - Philippians 2:6-11

- Tuesday - 1 John 2:2

- Wednesday - 1 John 4:10

- Thursday - Ephesians 5:2

- Friday - 1 Peter 2:24

- Saturday - 2 Corinthians 5:21

Historical Context of Philippians

Purpose

One purpose of this letter was for Paul to explain his situation at Rome (1:12–26). Although he was concerned about the divided Christian community at Rome, his outlook was strengthened by the knowledge that Christ was being magnified. Paul's theology of life formed the basis of his optimism. Whether he lived or died, whether he continued his service to others or went to be in Christ's presence, or whether he was appreciated or not, he wanted Christ to be glorified.

Author

Paul the apostle wrote this short letter, a fact that no scholar seriously questions.

Setting

The traditional date for the writing of Philippians is during Paul's first Roman imprisonment (AD 60–62); few have challenged this conclusion.

Paul planted the church at Philippi during his second missionary journey (AD 50) in response to his "Macedonian vision" (Ac 16:9–10). This was the first church in Europe (Ac 16).

The text of this letter from Paul suggests several characteristics of the church at Philippi. First, Gentiles predominated. Few Jews lived in Philippi, and, apparently, the church had few. Second, women had a significant role (Ac 16:11–15; Php 4:1–2). Third, the church was generous. Fourth, they remained deeply loyal to Paul.

Philippi, the ancient city of Krenides, had a military significance. It was the capital of Alexander the Great, who renamed it for his father Philip of Macedon, and it became the capital of the Greek Empire (332 BC). The Romans conquered Greece, and in the civil war after Julius Caesar's death (44 BC), Antony and Octavius repopulated Philippi by allowing the defeated armies (Brutus and Cassius) to settle there (eight hundred miles from Rome). They declared the city a Roman colony. It flourished, proud of its history and entrenched in Roman political and social life. In his epistle to the Philippians, Paul alludes to military and political structures as metaphors for the church.

Special Features

Philippians is Paul's most warmly personal letter. After initial difficulties in the city of Philippi (Acts 16), a strong bond developed between Paul and the converts there. Paul wrote to thank the church for a gift it had recently sent him in prison and to inform them of his circumstances.

Extended Commentary

Philippians 2:6-11

2:6. Jesus is the preeminent example of humility. He has always been God. John 1:1 speaks of Jesus: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” As God, he did not selfishly grasp hold of or tightly hold to his position as equal with God. Instead, he was willing to leave his high position in heaven temporarily and to give himself over to serving our needs. Although he set aside the rights and privileges of being God, he remained God.

2:7. Jesus made himself nothing or “emptied himself.” Scholars refer to this important statement as *kenosis*, from the Greek word. By becoming a man, Jesus did not lay aside his deity. Charles C. Ryrie sheds light on this event: “Christ didn’t become any less God, but he chose not to use some of his divine attributes. This involved a veiling of his preincarnate glory (John 17:5) and the voluntary nonuse of some of his divine prerogatives during the time he was on earth (Matt. 24:36). For God to become a man was humbling enough, but he was willing to go even further. Christ could have come to earth in his true position as King of the universe. Instead, he took the role of a servant. The Creator chose to serve his creatures.

Jesus did not come into existence as a baby in Bethlehem. As God, he always existed. He did take on human nature as Jesus of Nazareth being made in human likeness but remained sinless (Heb. 4:15). Christ did not have a halo as paintings sometimes portray him. He entered this earthly life looking like an ordinary man. Had you passed him on a street, he probably would not have caught your attention.

2:8. Jesus, looking like a man, humbled himself and became obedient to death. Mark 10:45, speaking of Christ, declares: “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Second Corinthians 8:9 is also helpful: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.” Even though Jesus was equal to God the Father, he submitted to his Father’s will (John 5:30).

Becoming a man was humbling. Taking the nature of a servant was more humbling. Christ went still further. He humbled himself to the extent of being willing to die like a common criminal on a cross. Crucifixion was the most degrading kind of execution that could be inflicted on a man (niv Study Bible, 1865). It was the form of capital punishment the Romans employed for foreigners and slaves. Many died in this manner. Most paid the penalty for heinous crimes. Christ’s death was unique! He died but not for what he had done. He was sinless with no penalty to pay. He died for others. He died to pay the penalty for the sins of the world. Observe Galatians 3:13: “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.’” Isaiah 53:6 asserts: “We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” Jesus Christ is the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd laid down his life for his sheep (John 10:14–15).

2:9. Following Jesus' humility and obedience, God the Father exalted him to his rightful position of honor and glory. Through the miracle of resurrection from the dead, God gave new honor to the obedient, humble Son. The Lord Jesus Christ resumed his preincarnate rank and dignity seated at the right hand of God's throne (Heb. 12:2). God bestowed upon Jesus the name that is above every name. The exalted Christ, seated at God's right hand, was now called "Lord." He became the object of worship for the church. He became the Master instead of the servant. The church became his slaves and looked to him as their Lord. All this is a result of God's exalting the humble, obedient Son.

2:10–11. The result of Christ's humiliation was exaltation. Following his obedience, God the Father decreed at the name of Jesus every knee should bow. The emphasis here is on every creature in the universe acknowledging Jesus as the Lord of the created order. God's heavenly forces and his earthly church will honor Christ. Likewise, demonic powers and people who opposed Christ and his church will bow down before him (see Isa. 45:23–24). In God's heavenly precincts, in humanity's earthly home, and in the devil's domain below the earth, every tongue will worship Jesus for who he is: The Lord, the Sovereign of the universe. These verses do not mean that all will confess him as Savior, for the Bible offers no second chances after death (Heb. 9:27). This is the combination of worship from those who believe in him and acknowledgment of his power and authority by those he has defeated. The honored place the Savior now occupies and the universal acknowledgment of his lordship in the future are all to the glory of God the Father.¹

References

1. Max E. Anders, *Holman New Testament Commentary: Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians & Colossians* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1999).

Author Bio

Max Anders (Holman New Testament Commentary: Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians & Colossians)

Dr. Max Anders is the author of over 25 books, including the bestselling *30 Days to Understanding the Bible*, and is the creator and general editor of the 32-volume Holman Bible Commentary series. He has taught on the college and seminary level and is a veteran pastor. Max provides resources and discipleship strategies at www.maxanders.com to help people grow spiritually.

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Warren Wiersbe (Be Joyful)

Warren W. Wiersbe, former pastor of the Moody Church and general director of *Back to the Bible*, has traveled widely as a Bible teacher and conference speaker. Because of his encouragement to those in ministry, Dr. Wiersbe is often referred to as “the pastor’s pastor.” He has ministered in churches and conferences throughout the United States as well as in Canada, Central and South America, and Europe. Dr. Wiersbe has written over 150 books, including the popular BE series of commentaries on every book of the Bible, which has sold more than four million copies. At the 2002 Christian Booksellers Convention, he was awarded the Gold Medallion Lifetime Achievement Award by the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association. Dr. Wiersbe and his wife, Betty, live in Lincoln, Nebraska.

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