

Sample Inductive Bible Study

Passage: Philippians 2:1–11

Student Sample Submission

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine Philippians 2:1–11 using the inductive method. This study will proceed in three stages: observation (what the text says), interpretation (what the text means), and application (how the text should shape belief and life).

I. Observation

Context

Philippians is a letter written by Paul from prison to the church at Philippi. In chapter 1, Paul speaks about suffering, unity, and living worthy of the gospel. Immediately before 2:1–11, Paul exhorts the church to stand firm in one spirit and strive together for the faith of the gospel (1:27–30). Therefore, unity and humility are already thematic concerns.

Structure

The passage divides naturally into two sections:

1. Exhortation to humility and unity (v. 1–4)
2. The example of Christ's humiliation and exaltation (v. 5–11)

Key Words and Repetition

Several words and ideas are repeated:

- “One” (v. 2, 2)
- “Mind” / “thinking” (v. 2, 3, 5)
- “Form” (v. 6, 7)
- “Humbled” (v. 8)
- “Exalted” (v. 9)

There is a clear downward movement (humility, obedience, death) followed by an upward movement (exaltation, name above every name, universal confession).

Notable Details

- Paul does not begin with command but with gospel realities (“If there is any encouragement in Christ...”).
- Christ is described as existing “in the form of God.”
- Christ “did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.”
- Christ’s obedience extends “to the point of death — even death on a cross.”
- The result is universal acknowledgment of Jesus as Lord.

II. Interpretation

Unity Grounded in the Gospel

Paul’s exhortation to unity (vv. 1–4) is rooted in shared participation in Christ. The appeal is not moralistic but theological. Because believers share encouragement in Christ, participation in the Spirit, and affection and mercy, they are called to reflect that reality in humility toward one another.

The Meaning of “Did Not Count Equality with God a Thing to Be Grasped”

Christ did not cling to the privileges of divine status. Rather than exploiting His equality with God for self-advantage, He emptied Himself by taking the form of a servant. The “emptying” is defined not as subtraction of deity but addition of humanity and servanthood.

The Pattern of Descent and Ascent

The passage presents a Christological pattern:

Descent:

- Preexistent in divine form
- Takes servant form
- Obedient to death
- Death on a cross

Ascent:

- God highly exalts Him

- Bestows the name above every name
- Universal submission
- Universal confession

This pattern shows that humiliation precedes exaltation in God's redemptive economy.

Theological Significance

This passage teaches:

1. Christ's preexistence and full deity
2. The incarnation as voluntary self-humbling
3. The centrality of the cross
4. The Father's vindication of the Son
5. The ultimate lordship of Jesus

Most importantly, Christ's humility is not merely doctrinal content but ethical foundation. Theology fuels transformation.

III. Application

Personal Application

This passage challenges pride. If the eternal Son of God embraced humiliation for the sake of others, then self-promotion among believers is deeply inconsistent with the gospel.

It forces the question: Where am I grasping for status, recognition, or control?

Corporate Application

Church conflict often arises from selfish ambition (v. 3). Paul's remedy is not technique but Christology. A church shaped by Philippians 2 will be marked by:

- Mutual submission
- Shared joy
- Gospel-centered unity
- Willingness to suffer for others

Spiritual Formation

The phrase “Have this mind among yourselves” (v. 5) indicates that humility is cultivated by meditation on Christ. Worship precedes imitation.

Conclusion

Philippians 2:1–11 teaches that Christian unity flows from participation in Christ, that Christ’s humiliation defines true greatness, and that God exalts those who humble themselves. The gospel reshapes both theology and community life.