

Philippians 2:1-11

Section 1: 2:1-4 –Unity

¹If then there is any encouragement in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, ²make my joy complete by thinking the same way, having the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. ³Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves. ⁴Everyone should look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

Paul is pleading for the believers in Philippi to walk together in unity by thinking the same way, having the same love, united in spirit and intent on one purpose.

The Basis for Unity (2:1)

- a) Encouragement in Christ
- b) Consolation of Love
- c) Fellowship with the Spirit
- d) Shared Affection and Mercy

The Command for Unity (2:2a)

- Make my joy complete – “commanded”

The Expressions of Unity (2b-4)

- a) Thinking the same way. - Philippians 4:8
- b) Having the same love. - 1 Corinthians 13
- c) United in one spirit. - Ephesians 4:5
- d) Intent on one purpose. - 1 Corinthians 10:31

Then we come to humility. Humility is like the glue that helps us maintain our unity. How we connect our thinking, love, spirit and purpose is by humbly serving and caring for one another. There will never be unity in a church apart from people walking in humility. Consider Romans 12:16: *“Be in agreement with one another. Do not be proud; instead, associate with the humble”*. We must genuinely love and care for one another.

Discussion Questions

- ❖ What kind of motivations does Paul give for the church to serve one another with compassion in 2:1-4?
- ❖ How does the command for unity in 2:2 strike you?
- ❖ How does Jesus show us the Philippians 2:3-4 kind of life?
- ❖ How would our lives and church be different if everyone faithfully lived out Philippians 2:3-4?
- ❖ How does this passage show us our need for the Savior?
- ❖ What are some ways you can humbly serve others?

Section 2: 2:5-11 – Christ: Humble and Exalted

⁵Adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus, ⁶who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be exploited. ⁷Instead He emptied Himself by assuming the form of a servant, taking on the likeness of humanity. And when He had come as a man, ⁸He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death – even to death on a cross. ⁹For this reason God highly exalted Him and gave Him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow – in heaven and on earth and under the earth – ¹¹and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, **to the glory of God the Father**.

Adopt the same Attitude as Christ – humility.

The Attitude (Mind) of Christ (2:5)

Observations about verse 5:

- Adopt means we must embrace the attitude of Christ fully and completely. It should be a natural part of who we are; it must define us. What should we fill our hearts and minds with? Jesus. What must we meditate upon? Jesus. How do we understand our Heavenly Father more clearly? Jesus. Jesus is to fill and influence every aspect of our lives.
- Attitude (or mind) is a “second person plural verb”. Let this attitude be in you all (y’all). Paul is still speaking to the church as a whole body. This isn’t just an individual endeavor; we are expected to be imitating Christ together. You cannot fully experience all that God has for you alone. We need one another. We are a body. We have the privilege of experiencing and glorifying God together.
- “*that was also in Christ Jesus*”: we are to follow the example that Jesus gave us; how He approached life, loved, served, lead, taught. We are to duplicate the attitude and mind of Jesus. Paul is commending the attitude that Jesus had in order to stimulate humility and unity among the congregation. We are united with Christ, and we must now seek to imitate Him together.

The Humility of Christ (2:6-8)

“*Existing in the form of God*”. The Greek word for form (morphe) doesn’t speak of the external appearance or outward shape but of the essential attributes and the inner nature of Jesus. Regarding His divine nature, Paul says Jesus existed “*in the form of God*”. He isn’t saying that Jesus only “appeared as God”; His nature or very essence was still fully God.

Other biblical writers highlight Jesus’ preexistence in many different passages (John 1:1-2, 14; 8:58; 17:5; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:2-3). The eternal existence of Jesus teaches us that there never was a time when Jesus didn’t exist. He had no point of origin. He is Alpha and Omega. John says, “*He was with God in the beginning. All things were created through Him, and apart from Him not one thing was created that has been created*” (John 1:2-3). He is Creator. He wasn’t created. The book of John was written for the purpose of us understanding that Jesus is the Son of God (John 20:31).

What we learn in this passage is that Jesus added humanity to His nature, He did not remove His Deity. Therefore, Jesus is fully God and fully man. Never has He ever removed, set aside or existed without His Deity. In verse 7, Paul says that Jesus took on the “*likeness of man*”. This is not the same word used earlier in verse 6 & 7: form (morphe). Jesus didn’t change His essence or being...He put on humanity much like we put on a costume. Putting on a costume may change our outward appearance, but it does not change the essence of who we are on the inside. Again, the humanity of Jesus was a veil on the outside; inside He was fully and completely God.

So, what does it mean that He emptied Himself? Basically, Jesus was still fully God, yet He took on a role of a servant, even though He is the rightful King. Jesus set aside the benefits of being the King to walk among His people. Jesus chose to veil His glory, to restrain His deserved glory. He was still glorious, but it was hidden from their eyes. That’s what is meant by “*He emptied Himself*.” Remember the mount of transfiguration; the veil of His human body was removed for a moment and Peter was able to see the true glorious nature of Jesus.

Jesus coming in the likeness of man, humbly walking to the cross, is at the heart of the gospel story. The King of kings and Lord of lords stepped off His throne, humbled Himself and died for His people. What great love on display...that God Himself would humble Himself to die for you and me.

We do have to admit that we are too limited in our ability to completely understand and describe how Jesus could be fully God and fully man at the same time. That is why we must trust the truths found in Scripture. Jesus was, is and will forever be fully God. John 1:14, 18; 8:58

¹⁴The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed His glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

¹⁸*No one has ever seen God. The one and only Son, who is Himself God and is at the Father's side – He has revealed Him.*

⁵⁸*Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, before Abraham was, I AM.”*

Jesus never claimed to be just a man full of the Holy Spirit. He claimed to be the ONLY BEGOTTEN SON OF GOD (John 3:16). No other man could ever compare. No other man could ever claim to be the only begotten Son of God. We are adopted as sons and daughters of God but we are not “begotten”. The word “begotten” means of the same essence, same material, shared being. We do not share the essence of God. We are not nor will ever be equal to God. Being like God was the lie Satan told Eve in the garden.

This was the major source of conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees, that Jesus claimed to be God. This is why they hated Him so much. During the trial of Jesus, the chief priest asked Him point blank, “tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God?” In Matthew 26:64 – Jesus said, “*It is as you say.*” In Mark 14:62 – Jesus said, “*I am*”. In Luke 22:70 – Jesus said, “*You are right in saying I am.*”

Every generation must contend for the deity of Jesus. We still hear things like “He was a prophet”, “He was a good man”, “He was fully man filled with the Spirit”. Heresy is running rampant in the world today just as Paul warned the churches of Philippi, Colossae, Rome, Corinth and Thessalonica.

For example, in the early 300s people were challenging the deity of Jesus. Believers joined together at what we now know as the “The Council of Nicea” and they adopted this statement of faith in AD 325:

We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made.

Christ's whole life was marked by humility. Look at His birth. He wasn't born in an influential city like Alexandria, Rome, Athens or Jerusalem. He was born near a feeding trough in Bethlehem. He lived for 30 years in relative obscurity. Then, in His earthly ministry, He was known for being homeless, loving unlovable people and humbly serving others. At His death, He was nailed to a cross alongside two criminals; the most shameful form of execution.

Christ humbled Himself voluntarily. Neither Herod, Pilate, nor the Romans humbled Him; no one can humble Jesus. He chose to humble Himself. We must humble ourselves now before Him. We, too, must choose humility. In the New testament the act of “humbling yourself” is expected (Matt. 18:4; 23:12; Luke 3:5; 14:11; 18:14; 2 Cor. 11:7; 12:21; Phil. 2:8; 4:12; James 4:10; 1 Peter 5:6).

It's quite possible that the Servant Song of Isaiah 53 loomed in the background of this passage. He came having no “*impressive form or majesty that we should look at Him, no appearance that we should desire Him*” (53:2). He went to the cross, taking our place, “*and the Lord has punished Him for the iniquity of us all*” (53:6). “He submitted Himself to death” (53:12). In this most degrading of all deaths, we find the hope of salvation. Peter says, “*He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, so that, having died to sins, we might live for righteousness; you have been healed by His wounds*” (1 Peter 2:24). We have been healed from the curse of sin, separation from the Father. The Gospel of Jesus has brought hope, redemption and restoration.

The Exaltation of Christ (2:9-11)

Verse 9 begins by showing the results of Christ's humility. Some translations begin with “therefore” or “for this reason” to show the link. As a consequence of Christ's work, the Father “highly exalted Him”. The phrase “highly exalted” means to “super-elevate”. No one else is exalted like this. Jesus is in an exalted class by Himself. He reentered the glory that He enjoyed with the Father before the world existed (John 17:5). And for all eternity, we will join the fellow brothers and sisters in giving Him praise.

The phrase “*and give Him the name that is above every name*” raises the question, What name? The majority of commentators say it refers to Lord (Yahweh, the divine name of God). Yahweh (German version is Jehovah) in the Greek

version the Old Testament is translated as “Lord”. There also seems to be a connection between Philippians 2:10-11 and Isaiah 45:23.

By myself I have sworn; truth has gone from my mouth, a word that will not be revoked: Every knee will bow to Me, every tongue will swear allegiance.

Lord carried a very deep meaning to the people of Philippi. To hear that someone other than Caesar is Lord would be shocking. To confess Jesus as Lord in the first century meant that Caesar was not your lord. And as a result of such confessions, many were persecuted and killed. The same fate exists for many today around the world who claim that Jesus is their Lord and Savior.

In response to Christ’s universal lordship, everyone will bow and confess Jesus is Lord. As in Isaiah 45, all will bow to Yahweh, and here in Philippians, all will bow to Jesus and confess that He is Lord. By giving Jesus the name Lord, God declared the deity of Jesus. The phrase “Jesus Christ is Lord” is probably the earliest Christian confession, and it is shorthand for the gospel (Rom. 10:9; 2 Cor. 4:5). Every week when we gather for worship and encourage one another in the gospel, we are uniting with Christians who have gone before us. And when we make our confession, we are anticipating the future, in which everyone affirms this declaration.

Some will confess Jesus as Lord with great joy and humility. Others will confess Him as Lord with despair and anguish. History is not like a treadmill, going nowhere; rather, it’s all moving toward that day. Sadly, it will be too late for some. If you don’t acknowledge and confess that Jesus is Lord in this life, it will be too late after death.

Verse 11 brings all of this into focus. Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, ascension, and exaltation bring glory to God the Father. Here we see that there’s no rivalry in the Godhead, only delight and honor. This text points out the remarkable fact that Christ doesn’t keep glory for Himself, and even in His exaltation He remains the model of humbly honoring the Father. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:28:

And when everything is subject to Christ, then the Son Himself will also be subject to the One who subjected everything to Him, so that God may be all in all.

The glory of God the Father is a fitting conclusion to this passage, for this is what the heart was made to do: glorify God, not self. Humility involves following the pattern of Jesus for the glory of God.

Conclusion

How do we respond to such a powerful and challenging passage?

Believe this passage. Do you believe that Jesus Christ is Lord? You will – either now or later. Don’t wait until it’s too late. Say with the saints from all ages, “Jesus Christ is Lord”.

Follow the lifestyle presented in this passage. Jesus has the attitude and the lifestyle that we should pursue. Walking humbly in this world for the glory of the Father.

Tell the world about the message of this passage. Our mission is to tell the world that Jesus is Lord, and if they will confess and believe in Him as such, they will be saved (Rom. 10:9, 13). Let our minds be on Him. Let our attitude be like His. Let our actions reflect Him – all of this is to the glory of God the Father.

Discussion Questions

- ❖ How is Christ’s humility displayed in this passage?
- ❖ How is Jesus’ model of leadership different from a worldly view of leadership? How can you put this type of life in practice today?
- ❖ Why should we be overwhelmed by the fact that we (Christians) know Christ and that He knows us?
- ❖ The passage ends by saying that Christ’s work was done “to the glory of God the Father”. How does this move you? Is your great aim to live a humble, others-oriented life for the glory of the Father through Jesus?