

JOY THROUGH HUMILITY

Philippians 2:1-15

Paul was not at all sure what was going to happen to him. He was ready for whatever the outcome might be. One possibility that would impact the Christians at Philippi was that he might be released from prison and he could make a visit to their area. Whether that would happen or not was not his main concern. As he noted toward the end of the first chapter, an important concern he had was that their behavior or “conduct” was what it should be considering that they had responded to the gospel message and were now members of the family of God.

We hear a lot today about political correctness in what we say or the way we behave. The word translated “conduct” (conversation in KJV) is a form of the Greek word from which we get the word “politics.” If Paul were writing this advice in today’s vernacular, he might advise us to be “politically correct” from the point of view of or alignment with the gospel in all our behavior. If the message of the gospel is what is guiding believers individually, then the result will be that the entire body will be in agreement on issues that really matter. This is important for the success of the church in its impact on the culture or society in which we live. If the church would stand firm and be in agreement on important issues, then the influence of the gospel message would have more effect on those who are not part of the family of God. D. A. Carson has noted that the greatest hindrance to the advancement of the gospel is the inconsistency of Christians. It is almost like we not all on the same team.

The need to take a firm, united stance is all the more important when there is opposition to the principles of the word of God from those outside of the church. The world, the flesh and the devil resist the Kingdom of God and oppose the citizens of the Kingdom. They ridicule and intimidate Christians in an attempt to cancel out our effectiveness. We have no reason to be intimidated or frightened because Christ has overcome the world, has defeated Satan and has put to death the fleshly nature on the cross. However, the importance of a humble attitude and perspective must be in the forefront of our thinking if there is to be unity in the body of Christ. Pride and self-importance will cause chaos in any organization that needs teamwork in order to be effective. Humility is key in healthy relationships and we find the perfect example of such in what Christ did which then impacts the way we conduct our lives.

In Relationships – 2:1-4

¹ Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, ² make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. ³ Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; ⁴ do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Philippians 2:1-4 (NASB95)

Paul’s appeal for unity among the believers at Philippi could have been motivated by what he had seen in other churches where pride and selfishness had hindered the work and witness of the church. There may have been some hints of some of the members of the church at Philippi being in disagreement and these general comments regarding the need for unity were meant to be preventive.

The reasons we can have unity are fourfold. First mentioned was the fact of “the encouragement in Christ” which is the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. In John 14, Jesus told the disciples that He would send the “Comforter” or “Encourager” (meaning the Holy Spirit) to be with them and in them. We typically think of this comfort as consolation for problems we encounter; however, Paul was likely emphasizing that since we have the same Spirit indwelling

us, then there was and is a strong basis for unity.

The impact of the reality of the Spirit comforting and encouraging us can affect us at an emotional level resulting in expressions of love which was mentioned next by Paul. Regarding “love,” Paul wrote to the church at Rome that the love of God has been shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. As this love overflows from us to others, then we have assurance (evidence) that God abides in us and His love is being perfected in us (1 John 4:12). This overflow blesses both the one from whom it issues and the one who is the recipient of that love. Is it easier for us to show love to another person or to open up ourselves to be able to receive love from others? What are the factors that may influence this exchange? (It is likely related to pride and humility.)

Unity that is based on truth and love is based on a sure foundation and, therefore, will not fail. If our unity is based on anything else such as preferences or things that might be characterized as styles of worship, then failure (disunity) is a definite possibility.

The fellowship of the Spirit could mean our fellowship with the Holy Spirit and it could also simply mean the “spirit-to-spirit” connection that we have with others who have also been born again of the Spirit of God. This reality also impacts us on a basic life level in that the affection and compassion (or tenderhearted mercy) that God showed to us in Christ should be reproduced in us toward others. All these factors will result in unity in the church.

We find in verse two the expression of unity in that we have some distinct similarity or “sameness” that would characterize or “stereotype” us as Christians. As we have already noted, the world in which we live today is concerned with “political correctness” which allows various groups to show signs of unity or everyone “being on the same page” or literally “reading from the same script.” This is being done in the extreme in that any dissenting ideas are not allowed or these are severely ridiculed. This appears to be effective in influencing people regarding what they believe is truth. The “world” seems to do this more effectively that we do in the church. Unfortunately, this practice works as well for false information as well as for truth.

One of the weaknesses that we can see in looking at the big picture of the church is that various groups tend to promote and emphasize their differences rather than the basic fundamental truths that every Christian should be able to embrace. We certainly should be in agreement with regard to the things we love and hold dear. The phrase of “being of one accord” used in the KJV is rendered “united in spirit” in the NAS and “joined in soul” in Darby’s translation. This unity or “sameness” on a soul level (mind, emotion, and will) appears to be what Paul was trying to communicate to them. When we have a “sameness” on a soul level and agreement (resulting in actions) with regard to what we love and hold dear, then we will not have any real problems in working toward the same purpose or objective.

If each of us is letting Christ live His life in us, and since Christ is going to be in agreement with Himself, then we will find agreement with each other as we discover His will in any situation. What Paul was saying is “if we have found a place of rest (from our own labors) in Christ and are comfortable and have peace with that position, then we will not be acting out of the old fleshly nature toward each other.” When that happens, then we will supernaturally consider the feelings of others and will have empathy with them. You have likely heard the statement that the key to communication is to “seek first to understand and then be understood.” We are to listen empathically and to respond with empathy. Most of us don’t listen at all and wind up responding emphatically with our own agendas and opinions. That behavior is not Jesus working in us, such action is the influence of the world, the flesh and the devil.

By Example – 2:5-11

⁵ Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. ⁸ Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:5–11 (NASB95)

The way we perceive and discern what is happening in our universe is referred to as the mind, our thought process, our frame of reference, our attitude, our approach to and view of life. If Christ is in us, then we can choose to let Him be in control or we can choose to do it our way. Christians have a choice. Jesus had a choice. He did not let the fact that He is God prevent Him from coming to us in human form so that we could know Him. He did not take the attitude that "being God" was something that He had to hold on to. The fact that he took on the role of a servant and was limited in time and space in the human body did not diminish His worth. He was still God. The fact that He suffered death for us and became sin for us did not make Him any less God than He was. In the same way, if we do what the world considers to be a menial task by helping someone who is poor, if we befriend a person who is outcast by society, or if we get down on the floor and take care of little children in the nursery it does not diminish our value or take away from our dignity.

If Jesus had been only human, then He would not have been able to do what He did since pride would have prevented Him from doing so. It was the fact that He is God is what made it possible. It is only because Christ is in us that we can do the humble and lowly things that really minister to other people. Jesus was exalted to His place at the right hand of the Father and because He is in us and we are in Him, we too are with Him in the heavenlies. The ultimate outcome of all things is that Jesus will be recognized as Head of all things in heaven and in earth. Now He is Head of all things to the church, but eventually He will be all and in all.

A common theme in several places in the Scriptures (e.g., Matthew 23:12, James 4:10, and 1Peter 5:6) is that God will exalt the humble. How humble can a person's situation be? Starting with the birth of Jesus and continuing with His life and His ministry and especially looking at His arrest, trial, and crucifixion, we would conclude that in all the circumstances He encountered that humility was ever present. His humility was climaxed (or reached its depth) with His death on the cross. Because of this obedience in humility, He was "highly exalted" by God.

How high can one be exalted? We see in verse nine that He was given the name which is above every name. What does that mean? The idea of a person's name is more than what someone calls you when they address you. When we talk about slandering a person, we might say that his or her name was dragged through the mud. In that use of the term "name" we mean the person's reputation or the character of the person. For example, if I were to mention the name Benedict Arnold, what is the reputation or character associated with that name. What about Albert Einstein or Mother Teresa?

Think of all the good and beneficial qualities that we could list about a person. I would say that the highest of these would be associated with the Lord Jesus as exemplified by His life, death, resurrection and ascension to heaven. His reputation (name) is higher than the reputation (name) of any other being you can think of.

If Jesus is recognized as being of greater character, ability, power, and reputation than anyone else, then what will be the reasonable reaction to this realization? We see in verse ten that "every knee shall bow" **at** the name of Jesus. If we take this literally to mean that everyone

should have a physical reaction of bending their knees, then we miss the intent. The literal name of Jesus was fairly common among the Jewish people (being equivalent to Joshua) and we even see that name being used commonly by people in Hispanic communities. John Gill's assessment is that this is a ridiculous conclusion. He points out (and rightly so) that a better translation is "in the name of Jesus" which gives us a different emphasis of what our response should be upon realization of the truth of Who Jesus is.

The essence of this passage is that the evidence presented to us by the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus will call all to acknowledge that He is Lord of all. Most translations following this with the phrase "to the glory of God, the Father." While we can legitimately make the argument that confessing the Lordship of Jesus glorifies the Father, the interpretation could also mean that our confession is that the Lord Jesus Christ has the same glory as God the Father. In other words, His exaltation above all in heaven and earth or under the earth is proof that He is One with the Father.

Maybe the question we should be asking of ourselves is simply this: What sort of name (reputation) do we have as a person? Is it a name that is in alignment with the gospel of Christ or would it be contrary to who we are in Him?

In Lifestyle – 2:12-15

¹² So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³ for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. ¹⁴ Do all things without grumbling or disputing; ¹⁵ so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, Philippians 2:12–15 (NASB95)

Sometimes we get the idea that we need to go on retreats or have some great or famous Christian come in to conduct meetings to keep us on the right track. Paul was encouraging these followers of Christ to not let such things as whether or not he was present or absent make any difference in the way they lived. You see, it was not Paul or any other preacher that was the difference in their lives, it was the fact that God was resident in them and was actively working in them to transform their desires and will. As God works in us those things that are pleasing to Him, then we are to manifest the results of this inner working by our walk or lifestyle that is aligned with His will or that which is pleasing to Him. As we manifest what God is doing in us, we should be in awe that it is, in fact, Jesus Who is expressing Himself through us and our personality. Not only is it a wonderful high calling to be a Christian, it also comes with great responsibility.

As we "work out" or walk out our salvation – that which God is working in us, we will find that discontent and disputing will cease to be part of our character. Instead, we will be recognized as salt and light in the world. We will be seen as steady and reliable and dependable while all around us is perverse and not dependable. As Christ lives and expresses His life in us, even what we say will be words that bring life and not death, encouragement and not defeat. God will take pleasure in us and we will not only have His acceptance because we are "in Christ" but we will have His approval because Christ is in us.