

Philippians

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Philippians 2:1-11

Intro:

- Whenever I am leading a Bible study I will from time to time remind people to beware of editors. When dealing with the Bible, you have contemporary editors who may add commentary and notes, highlighted words or verses, or subtle little changes to the translation (the 2011 NIV editors worked toward gender free references for example). You also have the first editors who broke up otherwise seamless manuscripts into chapters and verses. Sometimes its hard to see why they put a chapter break where they did, such as here. Paul begins a new line of thought in 1:27, shifting the focus away from himself and his life in prison, on to the life of the Philippian church and that line of thought continues here at the beginning of Ch. 2.
- To recap the closing verses (27-30) of Ch. 1, Paul's theme there is the value of unity: "Standing firm in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel..." (vs. 27). Perhaps Paul has learned something of Roman intentions toward the Church while a prisoner in Caesar's palace and being literally closely connected to the Praetorian Guards, for he tells the Philippians it has been "granted" to them that they will have conflict and suffering just as he has had. He tells them that their unity will make them unconquerable and will be the destruction of their enemies.
- Paul's #1 concern then, going into Ch. 2, is that disunity and factions may be creeping into the Philippian church as it had in Corinth and elsewhere. With the storm to come, disunity would be disaster.

2:1-4

- To Paul's mind the single biggest threat, the only real threat, to the Philippian church was not attack from the outside, but division and disunity

from the inside. When people have strong feelings about their beliefs and are highly enthusiastic about their church, then often those beliefs may collide with the beliefs of others. This is common in churches in transition. Whether it's moving from using the KJV to a modern translation, moving from organ and piano to a praise team, or moving a church to keep up with the demographic changes around it. I once heard a lady complain that she wanted her church to go back to the way it was when her grandfather was pastor in 1955. And while none of these opinions may be wrong, one way or the other, the problem is the pronoun, "I". To achieve the undefeatable unity Paul envisions we must put "I" below "WE" and put "WE" below Christ.

- Barclay's translation of verses 1-2 reads: *If the fact that you are in Christ has any power to influence you, if love has any persuasive power to move you, if you really are sharing in the Holy Spirit, if you can feel compassion and pity, complete my joy, for my desire is that you should be in full agreement, loving the same things, joined together in soul, your minds set on the one thing.* What Paul is doing of course, is holding the Philippians accountable for they say they believe. There can be no "but". We cannot say "Yes, we really are sharing in the Holy Spirit, **BUT I think...**". We must subjugate our opinions and our determinations for the good of the church. Praises for the one who says "Well, I didn't agree with how the vote came out, but if that's what my church says we're doing, for the sake of the unity of the church, then I will fully support it."
- "Make my joy complete": What makes every coach, every teacher, every parent happy is when they see that their players, students, and kids "get it". The same is true of pastors. Make my joy complete by being the cross bearing, Jesus following disciples I led you to be...and then I can die a very happy man.
- Paul cites selfishness/contentiousness and conceit as the first major source of division. Again, when people put themselves and their egos ahead of all else it can be disastrous for a church. I have known people who were willing to destroy a church before they would let God or anyone else have their

way. Some do this because they are so completely convinced that they are right and will not consider that another point of view may be correct. Others do it for power and prestige. Think Mr. Potter from "It's a Wonderful Life". He *WILL* have his way. I have heard churches referred to as "Mr. Jones' church" or "Preacher Smith's church". And those may be apt marquis's for the front of the building, but don't call either one the church of Jesus Christ if Jones or Smith are only concerned about control. A positive example is James, the brother of Christ, in the book of Acts. He was head of the Jerusalem church, the mother church of all churches until the Roman destruction of the city in 77AD. He had been committed to keeping to Jewish practices within the church, following all the Laws of Moses, until Paul and Silas came to Jerusalem in Acts 15. James could see the movement of the Holy Spirit among the Gentiles and submitted to what was clearly the will of Christ. Romans 6:6 tells us that our old self has been crucified. Only when the self has died on the cross can we truly live.

- The very things Paul starts with are the very things that cause unity to triumph over disunity: the power of Christ's influence over your life; the persuasive power of His love; sharing together in the Holy Spirit; compassion and pity that pours from the heart of Christ within you – these are the things that bind a diverse people into a single unified congregation.

Vss. 5-11

- These seven short verses may be the most profound statement Paul makes about the person of Jesus Christ. Staying with the idea of crucifying the self, he tells the Philippians (and us) to have the same attitude as Christ did. Prior to coming to earth, Christ existed in the form of God "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God," (John 1:1). Yet even though He was rich, He became poor for our sakes so that we may become rich (2 Cor. 8:9). Christ is THAT example that we are to follow.
- When vs. 6 says Christ was "being in the form of God" the Greek word for "being" describes one's very essence, that which cannot be taken away, unchangeable. So the Christ who was in Heaven with the Father is the same

Christ who walked on earth. Likewise, the word “form” means unalterable. So the very essence of who Christ is, is the same very essence of who God is. “He who has seen Me, has seen the Father,” (John 14:7-9). But this equality with God was not something that Christ would jealously cling to, refusing to abandon. Rather, He willingly laid it aside to become flesh, lesser, lower, suffering as we do, tempted as we are, living in the same world of pain and cruelty as we do, but never losing the essence of who He had always been - God Himself.

- Vs. 7 tells us then that Christ “emptied Himself” meaning to literally pour out completely. In other words, all the joys of Heaven (remember our studies on the last 2 chapters of the Revelation), all the peace and joy and magnificence of being in the presence of the Father, were all willingly and totally abandoned to take on the form of a human. He who had only known joy and love, became “a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:3). But Christ did not simply take the form of any man, but the form of a bond-servant, a slave. Paul here uses the same word for “form” meaning that Christ was truly human. Cut Him and He bleeds. He gets hungry. He gets thirsty. He begins as a newborn and grows into an adult. Therefore, Jesus Christ is fully divine and fully human. Jesus, the man from Galilee. Christ, the divine Word of God. To ask how this is possible is pointless. It is beyond human understanding. All you can do is marvel at His splendor.
- Vs. 8 – the “fashion/appearance as a man” – Here Paul uses a different Greek word for “form”. Earlier when Paul said Christ was in the form of God he used the word *morphe* meaning unchanging, the very essence of. Here the word *schema* meaning a form which alters, changeable. A flower’s form would be *schema*, changing in season and out of season. Having then humbled Himself to become human, Christ’s life is defined by humble obedience to the will of the Father. Further, He chose not to dominate people but to serve them (Mark 10:45). If then a life of self-denial, humility and obedience is the chosen life of Christ, as His followers these should be our defining qualities as well. We worship Christ not because we are terrified He will destroy us if we do not, but because of His love for us, love even to the point of death on a cross for us.

- In verses 9-11 we return to an idea that we saw in our study of the Revelation: the mysterious and omnipotent name above all names (Rev. 19:12). New names are not uncommon with God. Abram became Abraham. Simon became Peter. Another Simon became Barnabas. Saul became Paul. The people of the church in Pergamum are to receive a new name as a reward if they will remain faithful to the end. As we said when looking at Rev. 19:12, whatever the new name the Father gives to His Son it will surely contain “Lord”. Romans 10:9 tells us that to begin to be a Christian you must verbally confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. So when we say that “Jesus is Lord” we are saying that He is Lord of Heaven and earth and all that is under the earth. Even the demons will bow and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, not for His glory, but for the glory of God the Father.
- Isaiah 45:22-23 – “Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God and there is not other. I have sworn by Myself, the word has gone forth from Myself in righteousness, that to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear allegiance.”