

Week Three/Day One

Unity Through Humility

These opening verses of chapter 2 are a continuation from chapter 1:27-30 (notice that they begin with “therefore”, linking them to the previous verses) and serve to introduce the “Christ Hymn” of 2:6-11. We are getting into the meat of Paul’s letter; what he really wants to say to the Philippians and further explaining what it means to live as a Kingdom citizen worthy of Christ.

Philippians 2:1-5 - Therefore, if there is in you any encouragement in Christ, any comfort through love, any fellowship in the Spirit, any tender affections and mercy, ² complete my joy: be of the same mind, having the same love, being of one accord and understanding. ³ Do not be motivated by self-promotion and pride, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves. ⁴ Do not look to your own interests, but to the interests of each other. ⁵ Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

Initial Takeaways

1. List the 4 things Paul is asking the Philippians if they have in verse 1.

2. From where/Who would the Philippians acquire these things?

3. Write down some initial thoughts about “the same mind as in Christ Jesus”.

Into the Text

There are two prominent thoughts on this passage. The first is that it is split into two distinct parts based on agency, or who is acting, 1. God as the agent (verse 1), and 2. The Philippians as the agent (verses 2-5).(Hellerman et al. 91–103) We will see this same pattern of “if/since God did this, you do that” again later in this chapter. Paul knows that the Philippians possess these things, that God has gifted these things to them, and he rejoices in that. For his joy to be complete he is encouraging them to even more characteristics of Christ.

The second is a Trinitarian + Paul, then Philippians formula. If you are encouraged through Christ, if you have comfort in the love of God, if you have fellowship in and with the Holy Spirit, and if you have tender affections and mercy/compassion for me; then you will do these things to complete my joy.(Witherington 119–21; Fee 179) These views are not mutually exclusive, so I think they are both correct. Our Trinitarian God gives us encouragement through Christ, comfort through His love, fellowship in and with the Holy Spirit, as well as tender affections and compassion/mercy for others.

Gordon Fee breaks down verse 2-4 in a way that makes it easier to understand. Paul is exhorting them to “be of the same mind”, what follows describes how they are to do that.(Fee 176)

- To complete my joy, do this:
 - Be of the same mind, which means:
 - Having the same love
 - Being of one accord and understanding, which means you cannot:
 - Be motivated by self-promotion or pride
 - Humbly consider others as more important than yourselves, which means you cannot:
 - Look to your own interests, but:
 - Look to the interests of each other

In this exhortation, we see Paul make clear comparisons between characteristics of the typical Roman citizen and characteristics of a citizen of the Kingdom of God. The Roman citizen would have been motivated by self-promotion and pride and would most definitely been focused on whatever it took to promote his own interests. In contrast, the citizen of God’s Kingdom must be humble and look to the interests of others before his own.

It is interesting that the word *eritheian*, translated as “self -promotion”, can also have a political connotation meaning “partisanship”, “party spirit”, or “divisiveness”.(Witherington 122) This word would have described the average

citizen's daily life, always involved in partisanship, aligning oneself with the party that can bring one the most advantage. There would have been strong political affiliations in this Greco-Roman society. Paul says the Philippian Christian can NOT be involved in this type of behavior.

When Paul urges the Philippians to be of the same mind, he does not mean that they should all think the same and be photocopies of one another; not uniformity, but unity. Dean Flemming aptly explains what Paul means by this unity:

When Paul urges the Philippians to be like-minded, he is not saying they must all have identical ideas, opinions, or points of view. In the context, having the same mind involves subordinating selfish desires for the good of the community. It means sharing the same priorities, having a unified purpose, and embracing a common way of seeing the world. The church is not an army, where everyone marches in step. It is more like a philharmonic orchestra, in which each member uses his or her gifts, contributing toward the goal of creating a harmonious symphony.”(Witherington 165)

This same mind that Paul is urging the Philippians to have is “the same mind that was in Christ Jesus.” This is the introduction to the “Christ Hymn” that follows and will explain the mind of Christ Jesus and the ultimate mindset of the Kingdom citizen.

Reflection Questions

1. Write out the four gifts from God listed in verse 1 and explain them in your own words.
2. List Paul's characteristics of the Kingdom citizen, then contrast them with the characteristics of the typical citizen of our 21st century world.

3. Do you think it is possible for a 21st Century American congregation to follow Paul's instructions, especially in this politically polarized climate in which we find ourselves? Why, or why not? Or maybe, how?

Week Three/Day Two

Christ Hymn Part I

With verse 5, we see a transition, of sorts. So, it is included in today's reading as well. In verses 1-4, Paul gives the Philippians characteristics they should be following and with verse 5, he gives them an example to follow.

Philippians 2:5-8 - ⁵ *Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,*

⁶ *who, was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God*
⁵ *as something to be taken advantage of,*
⁷ *but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being made in human likeness.*

And being found in appearance as a human being,
⁸ *he humbled himself
and became obedient until death—
even death on a cross!*

Initial Takeaways

1. What two “forms” or “natures” was Jesus?
2. What was his appearance?
3. List the active verbs in which Jesus is the noun (the one doing the action)?

Into the Text

Imagine the Philippians hearing this being read in a worship service in their house church. Paul is telling them to have the same mind that Jesus had, and then explains what he means by that through this “Christ Hymn.” Every characteristic of Jesus that Paul is asking the Philippians to emulate is completely contradictory of the characteristics their culture and society tells them they must embody to succeed.

What would happen to the social hierarchies in the Philippian church, were these self-sacrificial characteristics be taken on by the Christians in Philippi? Leaders would become head servants, the lowliest in the church would be raised because Christ took on their own station. There is a sense of leveling, of Kingdom equality. “If the head of the body can renounce his privileges and prerogatives and take on the roles of a servant, indeed, even die a slave’s death, then no one in the Christian community should ever again see the roles of servants as beneath their dignity.”(Witherington 140)

The implications of this would be significant for the Philippians. Paul is asking them to have the mind of a servant, to be self-sacrificial, even to the point of giving their lives for others. No more living like your neighbors live –climbing the social ladder, choosing your friends or aligning yourself with someone who can serve your own agenda. No more self-promoting, preening like a peacock, tooting your own horn! “Honor is being redefined as following the example of Christ, and the self-sacrifice on the cross is seen no longer as shame (though it remains a scandal), but as the ultimate example of self-sacrificial love.”(Witherington 144)

What Christ does is go from the absolute highest to the absolute lowest and he does this by choice. He set aside the privileges and powers he would have had as God and took on the limitations we all live with, time, knowledge, mortality. There is much more I could say about this portion of the Christ Hymn, but I want to reserve time for deep reflection on this passage.

Reflection Questions

1. Take a moment and rewrite verses 6-8 in your own words.
2. This was counter-cultural in Philippi, is it counter-cultural in 21st Century America? Why or why not?
3. Do you think following the example of Christ found in these verses would be easy or hard in our culture?

4. What would be the societal implications of following the example of Christ,
In Philippi?
In 21st century America?

5. Do you think there would be implications in your own church congregation?
If so, what would they be?

Week Three/Day Three

Christ Hymn Part II

In the first portion of the Christ Hymn, Jesus is the actor. In the second portion, God is the actor and Jesus is the object, or one being acted upon. Because Jesus did this (v. 6-8), God does this to Jesus (v. 9-11).

Philippians 2:9-11 - ⁹ *Therefore God highly exalted him
and gave him the name
above all names,
¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus
every knee will bow,
in heaven and on earth and in the world below,
¹¹ and every tongue will confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.*

Initial Takeaways

1. Who exalts who?
2. What will “every knee” and “every tongue” do because of this exaltation?
3. What is the ultimate result of this exaltation?

Into the Text

“Therefore”, indicates that what happens next is a result of what previously happened. Since Jesus did the things in verses 6-8, God exalted him, or more literally “raised him to the highest honor”(Danker et al. 1034). This honor is not something Jesus aspired to, strived for, or even worked for, but it is a “gift” from God (verse 9b – “and gave him”). It is not to be seen as a reward or a prize which is won, but rather a “divine vindication” for Christ’s humbleness and death on the cross.(Fee 220)

Verse 10 is a direct quote from Isaiah 45:23,

²² Turn to me and be saved,
all the ends of the earth!
For I am God, and there is no other.
²³ By myself I have sworn,
from my mouth has gone forth in righteousness
a word that shall not return:
“To me every knee shall bow,
every tongue shall swear.”

In Isaiah, Yahweh, or God the Creator, is offering salvation to all but requiring obeisance or homage to be paid to Himself. In the Christ Hymn, because of Jesus’ obedience/obeisance to God, God transfers this right of obeisance to His Son, Jesus Christ.(Fee 224) This obeisance includes all that God has created and the ultimate result is that God will be glorified.

“That Jesus Christ is Lord,” is called the “maranatha” and is an early Judeo-Christian confession. However, it would have been quite the scandal for the Philippians to confess this. To say that Jesus is Lord, would imply that Caesar is not. Another way that the Philippian Christians were to live counter-culturally.

In typical Pauline fashion, he is exhorting the Philippians to consider their future status in the Kingdom of God, rather than their earthly status. He will mention this later in chapter 3 in regard to himself and those who imitate him. In other words, do not seek your own honor and glory but, rather, humble yourself and it may mean suffering; and by doing so, you will be raised up in status by God, you will be “conformed to the body of his glory” (Philippians 3:21).

Reflection Questions

1. Do we, as Christians in today's world, live our entire lives by this confession "that Jesus Christ is Lord"? Is this counter-cultural now?
2. Explain, in your own words, what it means for human beings to have the mind like Christ. Explain, in your own words, what will happen if they do have the mind like Christ.

Week Three/Day Four

Humility Lived Out in Community

This Christ Hymn sets a pretty high standard for the Philippians, just how will they be able to live this out? Remember from week two when Paul used the military and athletic metaphors to stress the teamwork aspect of the Christian community? “Standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side”? They are to carry this out together!

Philippians 2:12-18 - ¹² *So, my beloveds, just as {all y'all} have always obeyed me, not only in anticipation of my coming, but even more so now in my absence, {y'all} work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³ for it is God who is working in {all y'all}, enabling {y'all} both to will and to work for the sake of his good pleasure.*

¹⁴ *Do all things without murmuring and arguing, ¹⁵ so that you may be blameless and pure, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world. ¹⁶ It is by your holding fast to the word of life that I can boast on the day of Christ that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. ¹⁷ But even if I am being poured like a drink offering over the sacrifice and the service of your faith, I am joyful and rejoice with all of you— ¹⁸ and in the same way you also must be joyful and rejoice with me.*

Initial Takeaways

1. Draw a box around all of the words/phrases that describe the Philippians or what they are doing, or Paul is urging them to do. Hint – good things
2. Circle all words/phrases that describes everyone else or what they are doing. Hint – bad things.
3. Underline all the forms of the word “joy”.
4. In what can Paul boast?

Into the Text

In English, the word “you” can be singular or plural, unless you’re from the South and then it is “you” and “y’all”! However, in Greek, the plural word for “you” completely changes form and sounds completely different than in the singular. In other words, it is very evident whether you are talking about one person or a group. Being from the South, in my Greek class, I would translate the plural “you” as “y’all” or “all y’all”. You can see in my translation that Paul is definitely talking about the entire congregation together. This is important, because not only is Paul talking to the entire congregation, he is saying that the work to be done is collective and the work God has done has been done to the collective.

How can Paul say that the Philippians must “work out your own salvation” and at the same time tell the Ephesians, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God — not the result of works, so that no one may boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9)? Paul is not talking about initial justification in Philippians. Fee suggests that Paul is telling the Philippians how the congregation should live because they have been saved, “working or carrying out in their corporate life the salvation that God has graciously given them.”(Fee 235) That is partly true, however, Paul’s meaning is more than just how to live after being saved. It has to do with what John Wesley understood as the synergism of grace, co-operative grace, the divine and human cooperation. Wesley writes in his notes on the passage, “Having proposed Christ's example, he exhorts them to secure the salvation which Christ has purchased.”(*The Wesley Center Online: Notes On St Paul’s Epistle To The Philippians*) Wesley further explains in his sermon, “On Working Out Your Own Salvation”, “First, God works; therefore you *can* work. Secondly, God works; therefore you *must* work.”(Collins 67) He further explains that the first point by saying the work God has done, he has done to some degree in all men in preventing grace. But we must be “workers together with him” or he will cease working in us. We must “deny ourselves, and take up our cross daily” and work to make our salvation sure.(Collins 68–69)

In verses 14-15, Paul makes reference to the Israelites grumbling and arguing in the wilderness and directly quotes from Deuteronomy 32:5, “They are corrupt and not his children; to their shame they are a warped and crooked generation.”. He wants the Philippians to be, unlike the grumbling Israelites, “children of God without blemish”. The way to do this is to refrain from murmuring and arguing amongst yourselves, but in everything “be of the same mind, having the same love, being of one accord and understanding ” (verse 2:2b). Since they were Gentile Christians, the Philippians probably would not have

picked up on the Old Testament reference, but it is definitely in Paul's mind as he explains how they are to act.

If the Philippians do as Paul is asking, then what Paul has done there and the situation in which he finds himself will not be in vain, or for nothing. Notice again the athletic metaphor of running a race.

In verse 17, Paul once again mentions the possibility of his own death. However, even still, he considers sacrifice that the Philippians will make in carrying out his instructions as greater than his sacrifice, were he to be executed. The language Paul uses here is cultic language with which the Philippians would have been familiar. In the Dionysius cult, wine would have been poured out on top of an offering/sacrifice of meat (usually rabbit). (Verhoef 38) The Philippians' service of their faith is the "meat" of the sacrifice, and Paul's execution would simply be the topping or the wine poured out on top of the sacrifice.

One cannot ignore the repetition of joy at the ending of this passage. All these things that Paul is asking of the Philippians lead to joy, upon joy, upon joy. Whether the Philippians are obeying Paul because he has been set free and is able to come to them, or he has become the libation on top of their sacrifice (execution), rejoice!

Reflection Questions

1. Explain, in your own words, what is meant by co-operative grace?
2. What do you think Paul means when he refers to the Philippians “sacrifice and service of your faith”?

Week Three/Day Five

Paul Sends More Examples

In the time of Paul, it was common for teachers to tell their students to emulate or imitate their own or someone else's actions. Students learned by having an example to follow. Paul gives Christ as the ultimate example to follow in verses 1-11 of chapter 2. In verses 19-30, he gives two more examples.

Philippians 2:19-3:1a - ¹⁹ I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I may be cheered by news of you. ²⁰ I have no one like him who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. ²¹ All of them are seeking their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. ²² But Timothy's worth you know, how like a son with a father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. ²³ I hope therefore to send him as soon as I see how things go with me; ²⁴ and I trust in the Lord that I will also come soon.

²⁵ Still, I think it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus—my brother and co-worker and fellow soldier, your messenger and minister to my need; ²⁶ for he has been longing for all of you, and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. ²⁷ He was indeed so ill that he nearly died. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, so that I would not have one sorrow after another. ²⁸ I am the more eager to send him, therefore, in order that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. ²⁹ Welcome him then in the Lord with all joy, and honor such people, ³⁰ because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for those services that you could not give me.

3 Finally, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord.

Initial Takeaways

1. Circle the words joy and rejoice in this passage.
2. Who are the two examples Paul gives as examples for the Philippians to follow in this passage?
3. What words does Paul use to describe Timothy in this passage?

4. What words does Paul use to describe Epaphroditus in this passage?

Into the Text

A standard pedagogical tool in ancient Greco-Roman and ancient Jewish education is that of imitation. A student was to imitate the character of his/her teacher, as well as memorize things the teacher taught. Paul, as the pastor of the Philippian church, is their teacher. It would have been natural for the congregants in Philippi to want to imitate Paul.

Earlier in this chapter, Paul urges the Philippians to “let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.” (2:5); calling them to imitate Christ as he imitates Christ. Later in chapter 3, verse 17, he will urge them again to imitation: “Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us.”

Knowing that he is currently unable to visit the Philippians and that is highly unlikely that the Philippians ever saw Christ in the flesh, Paul does the next best thing... gives them two examples of Kingdom citizenship with whom they are familiar – Timothy and Epaphroditus. These are two examples of imitating Christ, self-sacrificing, servanthood behavior. They are walking, talking examples of what Paul urges for the Philippians in 1:27: “*live as citizens worthy of the gospel of Christ.*”

Notice the language Paul uses to describe Timothy and Epaphroditus. There is both familial language and battlefield language. Timothy is described as “like a son” to Paul. Epaphroditus is described as “my brother and coworker and fellow soldier”. Both are included in the family of Christ along with Paul and are coworkers or fellow soldiers in the salvation army of Christ with Paul. Perhaps Paul is also giving the relationship between himself and these two coworkers as an example of how things should be among and between the Philippians.

This praise of Timothy and Epaphroditus also serves as communicating Paul’s expectation of how the Philippians will treat them upon their arrival in Philippi. Timothy is an extension of Paul’s ministry; therefore, he is to be welcomed as Paul would be welcomed. Paul wants the Philippians to know that Epaphroditus has fulfilled the ministry to Paul (more than likely he was the person to bring Paul funds from the Philippian church and also the bearer of Paul’s letter back to the church) and Paul expects the church to once again accept him as a leader in the church.

This section also serves to remind us that Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus were real people and this letter, a portion of Holy Scripture, was written in the context of a very real world. Paul is a pastor. We can see his concern for his apprentice, Timothy, and his coworker, Epaphroditus. Epaphroditus made the journey to Rome bearing money for Paul on behalf of the Philippian church. More than likely, since he was carrying a sum of money, he would not have been traveling alone. Somewhere along the journey, he fell ill. We do not know what happened other than “He was indeed so ill that he nearly died.” (2:27b). His travel companion probably turned back and informed the Philippians of Epaphroditus’ illness. Paul received word that the Philippian church was very concerned about their friend and emissary. Hence the necessity of sending him back to them.

Remember that when Paul originally wrote any of his letters, he did not separate them into chapters and verses. These were added later. I tend to think that the first segment of chapter 3, verse 1, is a continuation of this section; or maybe that it is the conclusion of this segment of Paul’s thought. Paul speaks of joy throughout 2:19-30, but joy in each other or joy in the Christian family. The Greek word translated as “finally”, is *loipon*. It means “what remains”, or “the rest”. If you follow the “joy” in this passage you will see how what always remains is “joy in Christ” (or in the Greek, *chairete en kyrios*, notice the alliteration).

1. Paul sends Timothy to Philippi to bring Paul news of the Philippians, so that Paul “may be cheered”
2. Philippians will rejoice when they see a healthy Epaphroditus
3. Epaphroditus is welcomed with joy by the Philippians
4. As always, family members, **rejoice in Christ**

Reflection Questions

1. Are there examples in your life that you imitate? What characteristics about them do you want to imitate?

2. In this day and age, we would call those whom we imitate “role models”. Are you a good “role model”? Why or why not?

3. Are you beginning to understand the “joy in Christ Jesus” to which Paul refers?
He seems to extend this joy in Christ in this particular passage to finding joy also in our Christian brothers and sisters. Can you give a personal example of finding joy in your Christian family?