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A table of contents for *The Bible Student* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bible-student_01.php

STUDIES IN PHILIPPIANS

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CHAPTER 2

CHRIST THE BELIEVER'S PATTERN

Exhortation to unity (v. 1-4)

In spite of the generally happy condition of the saints in Philippi, seeds of rivalry and discord had been allowed to germinate during Paul's absence; possibly through their zeal in the gospel. Occupation with service for the Lord, rather than with the Lord Himself, exposes us to the danger of comparison with others and consequently of envy and strife. Lack of unity is delicately and tenderly alluded to in each chapter of the epistle (ch. 1:27; 2:1-4; 3:16; 4:2). Chapter 2 indicates how true unity may be brought about.

The 'If' of verse 1 is not of doubt or possibility, but of emphasis. Consolation in Christ, comfort of love, fellowship of the Spirit, tender mercies and compassions, had been in evidence from the first day the Philippians had received the gospel to the time of Paul's writing, and they constituted the motive on which he based his appeal. Although they had given him so much joy already, he intimates that something more was necessary to fill his cup to the brim. So in verse 2 he says 'Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded; having the same love, being of one accord (lit. "joined in soul"), of one mind'. Here are four counterparts to the four grounds of appeal in verse 1: a unity of heart and soul and mind. Not that one should attempt to impose his mind on the rest; but that the gracious mind that was in Christ Jesus should be seen in all.

'Strife' is one of the works of the flesh enumerated in Gal. 5:19-21, and is the fruit of jealousy. In chapter 1 of this epistle we read of some who preached Christ even of envy and strife, which shows how subtle are the workings of the flesh even in Christians. 'Vainglory' is simply empty glory; personal vanity. We have ample grounds for glorying, but never in ourselves (see ch. 3:3; Gal. 6:14). The disposition to think highly of

ourselves, and the habit of speaking disparagingly of others, constitute one of the greatest hindrances to unity. We are to do nothing through strife or vainglory, but in lowliness of mind each is to esteem others better than himself. Most of us have little difficulty in esteeming some Christians better than ourselves; but if each one counted each other one worthy of a higher place and greater honour than himself, strife and vainglory would disappear and unity would prevail.

Verse 4 does not mean that we are to neglect our own things; nor does it mean that we are to be busybodies in other people's matters. It does mean that we are not to have regard solely to our own interests, but that we are 'also' to have regard to the interests of others. There will be no difficulty in this if we are occupied with Christ. Selfishness, as well as self-assertion, will disappear.

The Great Pattern of Humility (v. 5-8)

This is one of the outstanding passages relating to the Incarnation of the Son of God, but it is introduced to illustrate the nature of humility to which Paul was exhorting the saints. We have in these verses, therefore, not simply the downward path He took, first in His Incarnation and then in His death, but the mind that marked Him in taking that path: the lowliness of mind that was expressed in His downstooping grace, from a height of glory beyond all possible apprehension, to the death of a cross; every step that He took involving the giving up of something that might rightly have been held. So if we ask ourselves how lowliness of mind, and unselfish consideration for the things of others, can be realised, the answer is: 'Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus' (verse 5 R.V.).

'Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery (counted it not a thing to be grasped at, or held as a treasure) to be equal with God; but made Himself of no reputation' ('emptied Himself' R.V.). We may well ask ourselves 'Of what did He empty Himself? Did He empty Himself of His Godhood? Did He empty Himself of His Divine attributes?' Never. Our Lord did not lay aside the essential fact of His Deity. 'For in Him all

the fulness of the Godhead was pleased to dwell' (Col. 1:19 J.N.D. New Tr.). 'For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily' (Col. 2:9). He Who came to earth is *Immanuel*, God with us (Matt. 1:23). So that, in the words of Phil. 2, His 'emptying Himself' consisted in taking the form of a servant, becoming in the likeness of men; setting aside one form of manifestation for another form, in which the fact of equality with God was for a time veiled and hidden.

We must therefore be careful to distinguish the word 'form' in verse 6 and 7 from the word 'fashion' in verse 8, which denotes the outward appearance. 'Being in the form of God' describes His essential and eternal Being. The only other place in the N.T. where this word occurs is in Mark 16:12, where we read that, after our Lord's resurrection, He appeared 'in another form' unto two of His disciples as they walked and went into the country. It was the same Person, but in a changed form; so that they did not recognise Him until He revealed His identity.

'The form of God' and 'the form of a servant' were both real: one intrinsic, the other that to which He condescended in infinite grace. Taking upon Him the form of a servant is one of the evidences of His Deity, for only God could take the form of a servant. Michael or Gabriel or any other created being could not take the form of a servant, for they are already God's servants, and have no greater dignity. It was Self-humiliation for Christ Jesus. The Self-emptying was His own voluntary act.

In this same spirit He came, not in angelic form but 'in the likeness of men'. The outward 'fashion' of a man was all that men could see, and in it they saw no comeliness or beauty that they should desire Him (Is. 53:2, 3). The anointed eye can see infinitely more than that, and the heart is bowed in wonder and worship in contemplation of the stupendous fact that obedience to His Father's will brought Him farther still in His downward path. 'Being found in fashion as a man He humbled Himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea the death of the cross' (v. 8 R.V.); the most shameful and ignominious of all deaths. Even our Lord's obedience could not go farther. Yet the very

fact that He humbled Himself in this way proclaims His Divine glory, for it shows that death was not the natural portion of our Lord even when come in the likeness of men.

Although we see in these verses the mind that seeketh not its own, but the good of others at all cost to itself, our Lord's death is not here regarded as making atonement (although of course He did make atonement); for that is not a path that we could take, and therefore in that sense could not be a pattern for us. Paul is setting before the saints the Supreme Example of Christ in His voluntary humiliation, and in the climax of His obedience to the will of God, so that they might imbibe the same spirit.

The Corresponding Exaltation (v. 9-11)

During His public ministry our Lord declared that 'he that humbleth himself shall be exalted' (Luke 14:11; 18:14). No one ever did or could humble himself as Christ Jesus. 'Wherefore God also hath *highly exalted* Him'; a word used nowhere else in the N.T., calling to mind the words of Is. 52:13. Since it was to God He became obedient, God highly exalted Him. It is God's answer to the mind that was in Christ Jesus. God has such pleasure in obedience that the One Who obeyed to the uttermost has been exalted to the highest place, bears the greatest Name, and will yet have and exercise universal sway.

The Name of 'Jesus' is the Name which our Lord bore in His humiliation. It is the Name that proclaims His character as Saviour. Once men bowed the knee in mockery before Him, but the lowly Name that was His as the Nazarene on earth shall yet be honoured everywhere. Reconciliation includes 'things on earth and things in the heavens' (Col. 1:20). Ph. 2:10 includes 'things under the earth' also, and contemplates the universal subjection of all to the One Who humbled Himself and God highly exalted. It does not contemplate the salvation of all. All shall own Him Lord, willingly or unwillingly, to the glory of God the Father. How we bless God for 'the grace that has taught us now, before that Lord the knee to bow' (see Rom. 10:9)!

The Practical following of His Example (v. 12-30)

The word 'Wherefore' in verse 12 connects the exhortations that follow with the preceding verses: their obedience is thus connected with the obedience of Christ. As in ch. 1:19, so in ch. 2:12, the word 'salvation' is to be understood in the light of its context. When a man fears and trembles as to his eternal salvation, it is evident that he is ignorant of the truth of the gospel. The particular aspect of salvation from which the Philippians needed to be saved was the danger of division, which could only be attained by allowing the mind that was in Christ Jesus to be in them. The presence of Paul had meant a great deal to them, and there may have been a tendency to lean upon him. Paul counteracts this tendency by reminding them of the greater necessity, during his absence, of working out their own salvation; not indeed in their own strength and power, 'for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure'. And what is God's good pleasure? 'That ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel' (ch. 1:27); 'that ye be likeminded, having the same love, joined in soul, of one mind' (ch. 2:2).

Verses 14 and 15 form a lovely picture of Christ's path through the world. The children of Israel 'murmured' in the wilderness. The Grecian Jews 'murmured' against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations (Acts 6:1). There arose a 'reasoning' (same word as 'disputing') among the disciples, which of them should be greater (Luke 9:46). All such murmurings and disputings endanger unity among the saints, and are contrary to the mind of Christ. Therefore 'do all things without murmurings and questionings; that ye may become blameless and harmless, children of God without blemish (cp. Dan. 1:4) in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom ye are seen as lights in the world (reflecting the character and ways of Him Who is *the* Light), holding forth the word of life'; namely, the gospel, which forms one of the main topics of the epistle, mentioned by Paul nine times. It would thus be seen, in the Day of Christ, that Paul had not run in vain nor laboured in vain.

Three illustrations

In verses 17 to 30 we see the mind that was in Christ Jesus illustrated in His servants: Paul, Timothy and Epaphroditus.

In chapter 1 Paul stated his conviction that he would continue with the saints for their progress and joy of faith. Now he contemplates the possibility of being put to death in the course of his service; and the thought of being a libation upon the sacrifice and service of their faith filled him with joy. He says 'If I be offered (Gr. "poured out as a drink-offering") upon the sacrifice and service of your faith I joy and rejoice with you all'; and he calls upon them to rejoice with him. The allusion is to the drink offering, which was offered with the burnt offering and its accompanying meal offering. Meal offerings were of fine flour mingled with oil. Drink offerings were of wine. The oil of the meal offering, and the wine of the drink offering, were of equal quantities (see Numbers 15). 'Oil' is the well-known emblem of the Holy Spirit: 'wine' is a symbol of joy. The mind that was in Christ Jesus was so operating in the heart and mind of Paul that he represents himself, in this most expressive figure, as being ready to pour out his life in the joy of serving others. If our hearts are stirred as we see the devotedness which filled his soul, we may well ask ourselves how many of us have it as a principle and a passion entering into our own lives.

The same fruits of love are seen in verses 19-24, where he proposes to send Timothy to them, as soon as the result of his trial is known, and hopes in the Lord to come himself shortly. We can scarcely fail to detect a sense of disappointment as he says 'I have no one likeminded, who will truly care for your state; for all seek their own, not the things of Jesus Christ'. Timothy's fitness for the mission was that he had a genuine care for the welfare of others. They knew the proof of him, that, as a child serveth a father, he served with Paul in the furtherance of the gospel. To part with him might cause the greatest privation to Paul; but, in view of his peculiar fitness, he says 'Him therefore I hope to send shortly'.

Would he leave them without a word in the meantime? No. He says 'I counted it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow-worker, and fellow-soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need' (v. 25 R.V.). In verses 25-30 the fruits of love are seen in Paul, in Epaphroditus and in the saints. Epaphroditus, giving practical expression to the love of the saints, hazarded his life to minister to the apostle's need. Paul appreciated it the more as being 'for the work of Christ'. Epaphroditus is not mentioned elsewhere, except in ch. 14:8, but what a description we have of him in these few verses! The thought of 'fellowship' is expressed throughout.

Epaphroditus longed after them all, and was full of heaviness. Why? Because he had been sick? No. Because he had been sick nigh unto death? No, although he came nigh unto death. Because they had *heard* that he was sick. He was sore troubled because of the effect which the news of his sickness might have on them. In his sickness he thought not of himself, but of others.

If the life of Epaphroditus had been laid down in the accomplishment of his mission, it would have been a great sorrow to Paul and to the saints; but God had mercy on him and on Paul also. Paul would have been glad to retain him, but he knew how glad the saints would be to see him again. He sent him therefore the more carefully, and exhorted them to receive him in the Lord with all joy, and to hold him in honour. Epaphroditus was to be held in honour because he had approved himself as one who sought not his own, but the things of Jesus Christ; one who was willing to lay down his life for the brethren.

Had we only the Supreme and Perfect Example of the Lord Himself, we might have pleaded that it was too high and impossible for us to follow. For our comfort and encouragement God has been pleased to give us three witnesses, men of like passions with ourselves, in circumstances far more trying than most of us are likely to encounter, who exhibited in a very real measure the mind of Christ, and who testify that it is possible to 'Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus'.