
JESUS, OUR PERFECT EXAMPLE

Philippians 2:1-16

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PREAMBLE

In our lesson last week, the concluding part, we focused on conducting ourselves “in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ” (**Phil. 1:27**). The word conduct indicates that we should behave in a manner consistent with being a citizen of the heavenly kingdom. One way we do that is by being united in mind, heart, and life.

*Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel, (**Philippians 1:27** NKJV). Make my joy complete by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in harmony and of one mind; (**Philippians 2:2** BBE).*

when citizens of a country are divided, they are easy prey for their enemies. In 1769, John Dickinson (then, a member of US Continental Congress) urged his fellow citizen, “to join hand in hand brave Americans all! By uniting we stand, by dividing we fall”. Military strategists acknowledge its truth. An ancient maxim is “Divide and conquer”.

The words are doubly true in religion. Our Lord Jesus Christ prayed that His followers be one (**John 17:20-23**) and stated this general truth: “if a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand” (**Mark 3:24**). When citizens of the kingdom of heaven are divided, they are not only an

embarrassment to them. When citizens of the kingdom of heaven are divided, they are not only an embarrassment to their King (see **1 Cor. 1:10-13; Galatians 5:19-21**), but they also become vulnerable to their adversary, “who prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (**1 Peter 5:8**).

Philippians 2:1-4, though starting a new chapter, Paul was continuing the discussion of how the Philippians should conduct themselves. The central theme of the first four verses is on Unity.

UNITED IN SPIRIT (**Philippians 2:1,2**)

*“Therefore, if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfil my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord of one mind”. (**Philippians 2:1-2** NKJV).* Paul emphasized here, that a key actor or driver in remaining unmoved and unafraid is the stability and strength to be gained from fellow Christians, if only they are united. What would make Paul’s joy complete or overflow? To hear that Philippians were enjoying peace and harmony: “make my joy complete by being of the same mind (think the same thing), maintaining the same love, united in spirit (one in soul), intent on one purpose (thinking one thing) {**Phil. 2:2**}.

The wording here is like that in **Phil. 1:27**. He wanted them united in attention (in thinking, “being of the same mind”). However, he added two new items: the apostle also wanted them united in

affection (“*maintaining the same love*”) and aim (intent on one purpose”). Paul wanted the Philippians to be one in heart, mind, and life. Reminders in verse 1 can be correlated with the request in verse 2.

Since there is “encouragement in Christ” (v.1), be “*of the same mind*” (v.2). Since there is “*consolation of love*” (v.1), maintain “the same love” (v.2). Since there is “*fellowship of the Spirit*” (v.1), be “*united in spirit*” (v.2) Since there is “*affection and compassion*” (v.1), be “*intent on one purpose*” (v.2).

Unity is a precious quality – and so important to the cause of Christ! Jesus prayed for His followers to “be one” so the world would believe God had sent Him (**John 17:21-23**).

UNITED IN SELFLESSNESS -Philippians 2:3,4

“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.” (Philippians 2:3-4 NKJV)

We are different in personalities and preferences; how then can we be united? Probably the most important factor in our unity is our common faith in Jesus Christ. Romans 6:5 say we have all been “united with Him”, we are also united with one another. However, our attitudes toward fellow Christians are important. When we are self-centred and insist on having our own way in matters of opinion, unity is impossible.

In verses 3 and 4, Paul emphasized the need for selflessness. His instructions in these verses may be difficult to obey - but they are needed! Verse 3 begins with doing nothing out of selfish ambition or

conceit {self-importance or pride}. When children of God work not to advance the cause of Christ rather to advance themselves, then, Selfishness is implied.

Associated with selfishness is “*empty conceit*”. The NIV renders this “*pride*”. Example, the practice of trying to win followers to self even at the expense of strife. When one’s purpose is to bring glory to self, in the end that glory will be empty and useless.

The remedy for self-centeredness and pride is “*humility*”; verse 3 continues... “*but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself*”. Humility is a misunderstood word. Some suppose it means to consider oneself as having no value, but that is untrue. Moses is described as “*very humble*” (**Numbers 12:3**), but nothing indicates that this great leader thought he was worthless. Jesus described Himself as “*gentle and humble in heart*” {**Matt. 11:29, Phil. 2:8**}, but He also spoke of the glory God had given him (**John 17:22**). The Master did not waste His in self-depreciation.

Humility is a virtue for every faithful Christian, - one of the highest virtues, Peter wrote... Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “*God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.*” Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that in due time he may exalt you. (**1 Peter 5:5-6 RSV**) Humility is self-forgetfulness rather than self-depreciation. It is not thinking badly of oneself; it is being so concerned about others that one gives little thought to self. In the verses that follow our text, Paul gave the supreme example of humility; Jesus Christ was so concerned about our needs that He, in effect, “forgot” about Himself, came to this earth, and died for us (**Phil. 2:5-8**)

Humble could be seen when one talks about the need for being modest in our speech and behaviour. Paul’s admonition in **Romans 12:3** that no man should “think more highly of himself than he ought to think”. **Philippians 2:3,4** made it clearer “.....with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves, do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.”

Some struggle with the later part of verse 3... to regard others as better than self. They point to a fellow Christian and say, why should I think of him as better or more important than myself? *He is not better educated... or more talented... Or more skilled... or stronger, even more godly.*

Those who reason in this way have missed the core of the passage. It does not say that the other individual is better than you; it says that you are to regard him as better. In context, it refers to considering his needs as more important than your own. Examples: on queue, Parents love demonstrated on their children.

Philippians 2:3,4 encourages us to have a similar attitude toward our brothers and sisters in Christ. Love will cause us to look on others as “better” and “more important “. Our text closes with these words: “Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others” (v, 4). The Bible teaches a legitimate concern for self; “...Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself”. (**Matthew 22:39** KJV) {see also, **Eph. 5:28,29**}, but we must be careful not to become self-centered. We are to be sensitive to the needs of others.

HAVE THIS ATTITUDE IN YOURSELVES – Philippians 2:5-11

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus”: (**Philippians 2:5** KJV). Our text contains one of the greatest challenges in the New Testament. The challenge is to have the attitude of Jesus. “*Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus*” (**Phil. 2:5**). Weymouth NT rendered the phrase, “*let this disposition be in you, which was in Christ Jesus.*” Paul had urged the Philippians to be united (2:1,2). He had emphasized that a key to unity was to think not of self, but of others (2:3,4).

To help us understand what true selflessness entails, he pointed to the definitive example; Jesus Christ (vv. 5-8). Paul, in effect, said, “if you have the Lord’s disposition of heart, you will be united: you will enjoy peace and harmony.” We need the attitude of mind possessed by Christ. Some of us have a hard time following the footsteps of Jesus because we do not have the mind of Jesus. “*For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps*”: (**1 Peter 2:21** NKJV). The great challenge of verse 5 is followed by the grand message of verses 6 through 11. The passage divides naturally into two parts:

- 1) The humiliation of Christ (vv. 6-8) and
 - 2) The exaltation of Christ (vv. 9-11).
- The first section illustrates what it means to have Christ’s attitude; the second suggest why it is important to have attitude.

CHRIST’S ATTITUDE REVEALED – Phil. 2:6-8

1. **Selfless and Self-emptying** - The text begins with Jesus’s pre-existence in heaven: “*He existed in the form of God*” (v. 6a). That is Jesus existed in heaven with God before

He came to earth {see also **John 1:1,2; 17:5, Colossians 1:15-17**}.

Richard Gaffin wrote that “*the form of God*” refers to “*the sum of those qualities that make God*”. Other translations have “*the nature of God*” or “*divine nature*” or something similar. The New Century version says....” Christ himself was like God in everything “Paul further asserted that Jesus possessed “*equality with God*” (v.6b). The wording of verse 6 is the apostle way of affirming that Jesus was really and truly God!

Try to imagine the honour bestowed on Christ, the adoration He received, and the wonders and splendours He enjoyed in Heaven prior to His coming to the earth. In Jesus prayer to His Father in **John 17:5**, He referred to “the glory which I had with You before the world was”. We can never comprehend the unselfishness of the Lord until we understand what He had to give up for our Salvation. Though Christ must have enjoyed the blessings of being “*in the form of God*”, He “*did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped*”.

Jesus was not afraid of losing His Heavenly magnificence or status. Instead of “*holding on*” to His heavenly status, Christ was willing to “*turn loose*” of it so He could come to earth to die for us. As we study the Lord’s unselfishness, we need to make some personal applications... is there anything you are holding on to, clutching tightly, that you need to turn loose so I might better serve God and man?

But, instead of holding on to His heavenly position, Jesus “*emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant, and being made in the likeness of men*” (v.7) John declared that God “*became flesh, and dwelt among us*” **{John 1:1,14}**.

2. **Serving And Sympathetic** In heaven, Jesus had all the qualities of God; on earth, He took on all the qualities of a slave. Jesus was not actually born into the slave class of His day, but He made Himself a slave in that He was totally dependent on God and obedient to Him. As a result, Christ was also a slave to the needs of mankind – especially the need for salvation.

Many passages speak of Jesus servanthood **{Matt. 20:28, Mk. 10:45, Lk. 22:27}**; an excellent illustration of Jesus as a servant is when He washed the disciples’ feet **(John 13:5)**. The contrast is very clear; Jesus had gone from being equal with God (the highest position imaginable) to being a slave (the lowest position imaginable). **2 Corinthians 8:9** – “*He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor*”.

Christ could have come “*in the likeness*” of an angel, and mankind would have marvelled. He could have come “*in the likeness*” of God, and mankind would have worshipped. If, however, He was to fulfil His mission, He had to come “*in the likeness*” of men **(Roman 8:3)**. Since Jesus was made like us, He can sympathize with us and help us **[Hebrews 2:17,18; 4:15,16]**. More, importantly, He could die for us **(1 Corinthians 15:3)**.

3. **Submissiveness and Sacrificing** - “*Being found in appearance as a man*” was not the end of Christ’s downward journey. He still had to travel the road to calvary. “*Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross*” **(Philippians 2:8)**.

Jesus did not have to die. Others had left this earth without dying – Enoch

(**Genesis 5:24, Hebrews 11:5**) and Elijah (**2 Kings 2:11**) – and Jesus could have also.

Therefore, My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father.” (John 10:17-18 NKJV). However, Jesus had to die if you and I were to have hope of everlasting life (**1 Corinthians 15:3**). He was therefore willing to humble Himself “to the point of death” – and not just any death, but the most despicable death man could ever devise. The cross was the ultimate in human degradation.

What made Jesus willing to suffer such a humiliating and painful death? **Galatians 2:20** says this was done because of His love for us. Philippians 2:8b add another reason: submission to the will of God. He became “obedient to the point of death”. During His personal ministry, Jesus said, “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. (**John 6:38 NKJV**). In the Garden of Gethsemane, He struggled with what was ahead but ended His prayer with these words “...not My will, but Yours, be done.” (**Luke 22:42 NKJV**). In the end He walked the path of obedience to death – his death on the cross (**Phil. 2:8**). Because of his submission to God, Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice for us.

Why did Paul emphasis that Jesus was selfless, self-emptying, serving, sympathetic, submissive, and sacrificing? Was it merely to help us appreciate Christ’s love and care for us? Though the message should have such affection in us, Paul wanted the Philippians and us today to know that, to have harmony, peace, and unity, they/we needed to be like Jesus.

*“... but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant.” And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” (**Mark 10:43-45 NKJV**).* Jesus also said, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. (**Matthew 16:24 NKJV**)

CHRIST’S ATTITUDE REWARDED – Phil 2:9-11 - Exaltation Because Jesus was willing to humble Himself, God highly exalted Him. Jesus did not exalt Himself; a slave could only be exalted by another. He was restored to the lofty position He had enjoyed before He left heaven to come to earth. His humiliation came in stages – but He was exalted in one grand act! The exaltation of Jesus includes His resurrection, His ascension, and His glorification – but the emphasis in text is on His glorification on God’s right hand. “...He was received up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God”. (**Mark 16:19 NKJV**)

Since God has exalted Jesus, He should be acclaimed by all creation: So that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (vv.10,11a). To bow the knee at the name of Jesus is to worship Him (see **Ephesians 3:14**). To confess Jesus as Lord is to acknowledge Him openly and frankly as the Ruler of all. The expression “those under the earth” probably means “the dead” (see **Romans 14:9**).

Encouragement

What lesson or lessons can we derive from verses 9 through 11? The fact that

Jesus is Lord should be a powerful reason to follow His footsteps. Since Jesus was exalted after humbling Himself, if we humble ourselves and put others first as He did, in the end, we too will be exalted. As we go through life, as we face problems and as we make decisions, the Lord want us always to consider the eternity factor. In struggling with choices, we should ask ourselves, “*what will be the consequences in eternity.*”

THE CHRISTIAN’S JOB DESCRIPTION & REQUIREMENTS - *Philippians 2:12-16*

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or laboured in vain. (*Philippians 2:12-16* NKJV)

The need to Obey. In verse 12 Paul resumed the practical instruction started in 1:27.as he did so he picked up the thought of obedience from 2:8: Jesus had humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even a very shameful and painful death on the cross. Now, Paul urges the Philippians to continue in their act of obedience whether in his presence or not. Paul had spent time at Philippi several times before (*Acts 16:12-40; 20:1-3,6*). He appeals to brethren to behave as if he were still with them. There are some individuals that put up childish behaviour; They work hard when their employers or supervisors are present

and do little when they are absent. Paul said that such people are rendering “eyeservice, as men-pleasers” (*Ephesians 6:6*).

The Need to Work

Instead of being idle in his absence, Paul encouraged the Philippians to “*work out your salvation*” (2:12b). The RSV has “work out your own salvation.” The New Testament teaches much about the necessity for Christians to work {see *1 Corinthians 15:58; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Colossians 1:10; James 2:24; 1 Peter 1:17*}. However, the New Testament does not teach that we earn or merit our salvation by the work we do. Passages such as *Romans 1:16, Ephesians 2:9, and 2 Timothy 1:9* specifically states that we are saved by God’s grace (unmerited favour) based on faith.

“*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God*”, (*Ephesians 2:8* NKJV). We should understand that saving faith is obedient faith – faith that works through love (*Galatians 5:6*).

Works of obedience are the practical side of faith. By our works, we express our faith, show our trust, and demonstrate the strength of our conviction. It has been said that we are not saved by our works, but neither can we be saved without them. Each of us ought to be busy for the cause of Christ.

Job Requirements for the cause of Christ

Work Reverently! (2:12c) The first requirement is to work reverently. “Work out your salvation with fear and trembling.” This does not mean we should be overwhelmed by anxiety and nervousness as we serve the Lord. “fear”

is used here as its often used in the Scriptures, in the sense of profound awe and respect. As we serve God, we should not be paralyzed by fear; but, at the same time, we should never forget the seriousness of our task and the greatness of the One whom we serve. *“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.” (Hebrews 12:28 NKJV)*

Work Confidently! (2:13)

The second requirement is to work confidently – Paul continued, “For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure”. To work for God, we need at least two things: 1) the desire to work for Him and 2) the ability to work for him. Our text declares that He helps with both: He is *“at work”* in us *“both to will and to work.”* The Contemporary English Version renders *“... God is working in you to make you willing and able to obey Him.”* Does God do this miraculously? No, there are various ways God works in us.

The will may be stimulated through the reading of the Scriptures, a timely sermon or teaching, the encouragement of a Christian friend or even stirring of the conscience. God does not give us work to do and walk away, leaving us to struggle with them on our own. He stays with us. We are never alone as we serve Him (see **Matthew 28:20**)

God works in us *“for His good pleasure.”* It pleases Him when we serve Him willingly and diligently. He takes no pleasure in disobedience, and His heart is broken when someone dies in a state of rebellion {**Psalm 5:4, Ezekiel 18:23,32**}.

Work willingly! (2:14)

Next Paul stated that we need to work willingly. *“Do all things without grumbling or disputing.”* Grumbling could refer to *“the expression of secret and sullen discontent, murmuring, complaint.”* The Israelites were described as grumbling and complaining in the wilderness (**Exodus 15:24, 16:7,8; Numbers 11:1, 16:4, 1 Corinthians 10:10**). The word disputing refers to *“inward reasoning,”* but the predominant meaning in the New Testament is *“evil thoughts.”* The admonition to do all things without grumbling or disputing has general application; but, in context, it especially refers to the work we do for the Lord.

Some who are active in the Vineyard spoil their efforts by constantly grumbling and complaining. How does God view our grumbling as we work for Him? Imagine someone gave you a very impressive gift you so much desired, but at the point he gave you the gift, he complained about the cost or indicated that he could have used the money for some other valuable? How will you feel? I am sure you will tell him to keep his gift. Now try to imagine how the Lord feels when we grumble and complain while carrying out His divine directives, we should work willingly.

Work Inoffensively (2:15) Next, we ought to work inoffensively. After Paul said, *“Do all things without complaining and disputing,”* (v.14), he continued, *“that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world”* (v. 15). As children of light, we should be *“living a life at which no finger of criticism may be pointed.”* We must not only be good outside (blameless) but must also be good inside (innocent) – *“that you may become blameless and innocent, the sons of God, without*

rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine like stars in a dark world, (*Philippians 2:15* MNT)

The qualities of being blameless and harmless are summarized in the words “*above reproach*”. We must do nothing that would hold the religion of Christ up to ridicule by the world. “Never return injury for injury. Aim at doing what all men will recognize as honorable”. (*Romans 12:17* TCNT). We need to make sure that our “public behaviour is above criticism! If we are above reproach, we will shine as lights.

Work Steadfastly (2:16) We out to work steadfastly. After challenging the Philippians to “appear as lights in the world, “Paul added “holding fast the word of life”. We are to hold the light securely so others can see and follow it. That which we are to grasp firmly is “the word of life”. The “word of life” is God’s

Word. The psalmist said, “Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path”. (*Psalms 119:105* RSV).

How do we holdfast the word of life? By our lives - “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. “Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. “*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven*”. (*Matthew 5:14-16* NKJV). Another way we holdfast the word is by our lips (*Matthew 28:18-20*). We need to be diligent in preaching and teaching the word of life because it gives spiritual life.

Another reason Paul advanced for us to be steadfast is to receive reward on the day when Jesus Christ will return and judge everyone. He wants us to have reason to glory that we have not run in vain nor toil in vain.

CONCLUSION

We have tried to highlight two truths: 1) the need for unity and 2) a key factor in achieving unity – unselfishness. Philippians 2:5-11 may have great impact on our lives if only we could have the attitude of our Master. Someone has compared these verses with the powerful rays of the sun. the sun can bless our lives, or we can hide from it in a closed and darkened room. The sun will still be there, but we will know only the gloom and the cold. May we not ignore the wonderous truth in Phil. 2:5-11, will embrace them.

We also study that God has given us all work to do. How does He want us to do it? Reverently, confidently, willingly, inoffensively, steadfastly, and cheerfully. Work like that will enrich our lives and will glorify our Father!