

A church realized the importance of humility, so it formed a committee to find the most humble person in the church. Many names were submitted and numerous candidates evaluated. Finally, the committee came to a unanimous decision. They selected a quiet little man who always lived in the background and had never taken credit for anything he had done.

They awarded him the "Most Humble" button for his faithful service. But the next day they had to take it away from him because he pinned it on.¹

In Philippians chapter 2, we find a lesson on humility. In chapter one, Paul has already exhorted his readers in verse 27 to be unified:

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...

Now in chapter two he gives them the basis for this kind of unity...Jesus Christ Himself.

(Phil 2:1 NASB) If therefore 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,

The word "if" in verse one could be translated to the word, "since." In the Greek, it is the translation of a conditional particle referring to a fulfilled condition. The word "if" could be translated "since" or "in view of the fact." (Wuest)

The word "any" in this verse comes from a Greek word that means, "a certain thing." We say, "any day now" or "any minute now" to mean the certainty of something coming to pass.

Paul is saying in verse one, "*Since therefore there is any (or a certain) encouragement in Christ, since there is any (or a certain) consolation of love, since there is a certain fellowship of the Spirit, since a certain affection and compassion...make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.*"

In verses one and two Paul is giving his readers several reasons or motives for living in unity and harmony with one another.

- 1) *Since there is a certain encouragement – exhortation, admonition* – If Christ showed mercy to us when we deserved condemnation...if He gave His life to save us from sin, certainly we can strive to live in harmony with our brother or sister.
- 2) *Since there is a certain consolation of love* – also, "comfort of (divine, agape) love." This is referring to the love of Christ that reached down to save the believer from sin. If God would do that for us, shouldn't we do the same for the brethren?

¹ (Kent Crockett, *Making Today Count for Eternity*, Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2001, p. 122)

- 3) *Since there is a certain fellowship of the Spirit* – This is the sharing of the things that pertain to Christ—each believer shares in the things of Christ together. We will look at this in more detail.
- 4) *Since there is a certain affection and compassion* – As Jesus Christ looks at us and pities us, we ought to treat one another compassionately. None of us have arrived; we are all a “work in progress”.

Paul is saying that “with all that we have going for us in Christ...with all the riches and blessings that are found in Christ, the members of His body ought to have unity of purpose, fellowship, affection for one another and compassion.

In verse two Paul continues and writes, “*make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.*”

You may remember that Paul was experiencing the “joy of the Lord” even while under house arrest for the Gospel. The Philippian believers were sending money to support his needs and the work of spreading the Gospel and he had already stated earlier in this letter, “*I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy...*” (vs. 1:3-4)

In verse 18, rather than moan and lament because some were preaching Christ out of envy and strife and other to add affliction to his chains, Paul wrote, “*What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice.*”

Paul was rejoicing in spite of his circumstances—and this is what sets happiness apart from true joy in the Lord. Happiness relies on or depends upon favorable circumstances but joy is that inner exhilaration and peace that is not dependent on whether or not things are going right in your life.

- The Christian can “rejoice” when it’s a sunny day or when the clouds are gray.
- The Christian can rejoice in good health or when sickness ravages the body.
- The Christian can rejoice when a bill is due and there is no money to pay it.
- The Christian can rejoice when church property has been vandalized or stolen.

You see, the Christian’s joy is rooted in the knowledge and faith that there is a sovereign God who is in control and this God knows what His children are going through and never leaves and forsakes them.

If and when things come into our lives that are bad or evil or stressful and even discouraging, we realize that God has allowed these things to come into our lives for our good (Romans 8:28).

Paul was rejoicing in spite of his circumstances, **but**, his joy would not be complete until the Philippians were “*of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.*” (verse 2)

There was friction in the Philippian church. Paul already shared with his readers that some were doing ministry out of envy and strife. Later in chapter four, Paul would address two women in this church that were at odds with one another.

Phil 4:2 I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.

Phil 4:3 And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life.

Paul does not rehash the details of what was going on between the two women so it must have already been known by most of the people in the church. If it would have been a private matter, Paul would not have addressed it in this letter, staying in line with the words of Jesus in Matthew 18:15.

Mat 18:15 "Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother."

The disunity of the two women may have started small but by now it has blown up into a public matter and Paul has become aware of it. While he doesn't address it specifically until chapter four, he begins to lay the groundwork for a resolution to their problem in chapter one:

"Since therefore there is any (or a certain) encouragement in Christ, since there is a certain consolation of love, since there is a certain fellowship of the Spirit, since a certain affection and compassion...make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose." (2:1-2)

These are the things of Christ that bind Christians together.

- It is His dying for our sins—giving His life's blood as an atonement for our sin.
- It is His burial and His rising from the grave with all power.
- It is His mission to seek and to save the lost.
- It is His love that looks beyond our faults to see our needs.
- It is His fellowship—the sharing in things that are common to those found in Christ.

All other things, though they may be important, are secondary.

There are so many things that Christians fuss about with one another—this fussing and striving come as a result of exalting other things as more important than the things of Christ.

Perhaps Paul didn't want us to know the details of what Euodia and Syntyche were fussing about because it would then limit our attempts to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4) to their issue.

For example, if these two women were working on a church building committee and disagreed on a contractor to hire—we would only limit our attempts today to keeping unity with respect to "building projects."

In a Washington Post article about the former mayor of Baltimore, William Donald Schaefer, readers are told that the mayor was never reluctant to employ colorful language and dramatic gestures to make his point. He once told his mayoral aides: *"I found an abandoned car today and I want that blankity-blank thing removed." 'Where is it?' they asked. "If I can find it," he responded, "you can find it."*

I am told that most of the abandoned cars in the city at that time were taken off the roads. If Mayor Schaefer had been specific and said, for example, "The car I saw is on Baltimore and Carey Streets," that is the only car that would have been moved.

Paul doesn't give us the details on Euodia and Syntyche's feuding so we are left to do whatever it takes, in whatever situation, to be *"like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind."*

- You see, Euodia and Syntyche could have been on the Food Ministry team and were feuding on whether to have chicken or ham as the main entrée.
- Euodia and Syntyche could have been two deaconesses who were fighting over what day and time to have the deaconess's meeting.
- Euodia and Syntyche could have served with the Children's Church and were at odds with one another Syntyche's grandson hit Euodia's nephew.
- Perhaps Euodia and Syntyche were no longer talking to one another because Euodia stole Syntyche's solo that she's been singing with the choir "for years."
- Syntyche could have sat in Euodia's reserved seat in the church—the one Euodia's mother used to sit in before she went home to be with Lord.
- Perhaps, Euodia had a relative serving food at the church picnic and gave her 6 chicken nuggets and Syntyche only got 4.

These women could have been fighting over a number of issues: where to direct the use of the tithes, what color the carpet should be or where to place the church Christmas tree. They could have been squabbling over the time when one didn't greet the other when arriving at church or one taking the other's parking space, etc.

Paul says, up to this point you've done a good job at giving me reasons to rejoice, now complete my joy by *being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.*

Then Paul continues in verses three and four with:

Phil 2:3 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.

Phil 2:4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

Self ambition/selfishness/strife: Party spirit or faction—this is when Christians split off into cliques. This is when groups of Christians huddle with one another in the church. Birds of a feather flock together for their own selfish purposes. Cliques and factions cut against the grain of God's mission and vision for the entire local assembly of believers.

Conceit/vainglory: Here we find two Greek words that mean, "Empty Pride"—this is when the Christian is proud of things that have no importance (to God). This is the promotion of one's own interests.

The antidote or the remedy to church cliques and empty pride is *humility* and the *esteeming of others better than yourself*. It is as Paul says in verse 4, "*Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.*"

Humility or lowliness is defined by Plato as, "*That state of mind which submits to the divine order of the universe, and does not impiously exalt itself.*" In other words, the lowly or humble person doesn't think the world revolves around them, they know, believe and follow God's plans and purposes for their life and exalts His interests above their own.

Paul goes on to say in verses 5, “*Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.*” Paul exhorts us to be like Christ in our attitude. And then he goes on in verse six to explain to us exactly what it means to have the mind or attitude of Christ.

Phil 2:6 who, (existed) being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God,

The word “existed” in verse six is the Greek verb (*huparcho, hoop-ar'-kho*) which carries the meaning of *continued existence*. The word “form” is *morphe, mor-fay*, which speaks of *outer appearance* or *manifestation*.

Paul is saying in verse six that Jesus Christ always existed in eternity past and in this continued existence He manifested divine attributes (characteristics). See John 1:3; Col. 1:16; Eph. 3:9; Col. 1:17; Heb 1:3

Jesus didn’t become “a god” as the Jehovah’s Witnesses teach; He always existed as God with attributes that can only belong to God. Theologians tell us that these are *incommunicable attributes* of God—characteristics about God that He shares with no one.

- God doesn’t share His attribute of *immutability* with anyone – God doesn’t change this means that He can be depended upon. What He says He will do!
- God doesn’t share His attribute of *self-existence* or *self-sufficiency* with anyone. God doesn’t need anyone or anything to exist. While He desires our love and affection, He doesn’t need it.
- God doesn’t share His “*eternality*” with anyone. God had no beginning and will have no end. He is the “Alpha and Omega” the beginning and the end. He is the One, “*who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.*”
- God doesn’t share His attribute of “*omnipresence*” with anyone. God does not have size or spatial dimensions. He is present at every point of space with His whole being. While God doesn’t share His attribute of omnipresence with anyone, Scripture tells us that He is a “*very present help in time of trouble!*”

In verse six of our text, Paul says that Jesus, *always and continually existed, being in the form of God...His **morphe**, or outer existence and manifestation was deity.*

Paul goes on to say in verse 6 that even though Jesus was God, “...*He did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped...*” In other words, He didn’t have to go around bragging to the angels, “*Look at me, I’m God! I’m God!*”

Jesus didn’t have to constantly prove to the hosts of heaven that He was God. He didn’t have to reach out to grasp hold of something tightly that was already His.

Jesus was secure in who He was. He didn’t have a “Fortress of Solitude” like Superman did. Remember, when Superman was doubting his purpose, He would run to this “fortress” and use his crystals to play recorded messages His father Jor-El left to remind Him where He came from.

Jesus was willing to leave heaven's glory and splendor and come to this earth where *"foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests but the Son of Man has no where to lay His head."*

Jesus was the very form or essence of God and did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped. He didn't have to run around in red tights and a cape with a big "SG" (Son of God) on His chest so that everyone might know who He was.

That's what the Pharisees and the other religious leaders of His day did. They walked around in their costumes and vestments and religious garb. This is what the religious leaders of our day do—they wear their spiritual "bling-bling" so you won't make the mistake of not knowing who they are.

But Jesus didn't have to do anything like this. This is what Paul was writing about in verse seven:

Phil 2:7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.

Phil 2:8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

Made Himself of no reputation... literally means, "He emptied Himself; He made Himself nothing"

But do not think that this passage teaches that the eternal Word (John 1:1) emptied Himself of either His divine nature or His attributes.

Jesus only emptied Himself of the outward and visible manifestation of the Godhead. God may change form, but He cannot cease to be God.

The word "form" in verse 7 is *morphe, mor-fay*, the same word used in verse six which speaks of "outer appearance or manifestation." This time it is referring to the manifestation of a Servant and the human nature which corresponds to it. In other words, Jesus looked and acted like a man.

The Bible is letting us know that Jesus, having existed in the form of God from all eternity, was willing to empty Himself, taking the form of a servant and ultimately becoming obedient unto death.

What does all this have to do with unity? Paul uses Jesus as the supreme example of the kind of humility the Christian should have toward others. This is attitude of Christ that believers are exhorted by Paul to imitate.

Jesus voluntarily laid aside the use of His divine attributes and submitted the use of them to the Father's will. Jesus didn't stop being God; He still had "all power" but limited the use of His omnipotence to the Father's will.

The best way that I can illustrate this is by sharing an experience I had many years ago when driving my car through a elementary school zone.

I came to an intersection where four or five kids began to walk across the street. As they were walking they looked over in my direction and began to taunt me and tease me, even daring me to do anything about it.

Now, I'm sitting in my car and I have enough horsepower to take care of them but I exercise humility—I limited the use of my horsepower to the Baltimore City traffic laws.

Jesus was *God the Son*, who took upon Himself a body of flesh and blood—He took our humanity upon Himself, yet without sin, and laid aside His divine prerogative.

When He was nailed to that cruel and rugged Cross, this was God the Son, voluntarily laying down His life for you and for me. The song says, “*He could have come down from that Cross just to save Himself, but He decided to die just to save me!*”

How does this apply to us? Paul says in verse 5, “*Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus...*”

We always want to have the upper hand. Human nature makes it so that no one wants to be in last place. No one likes to be taken advantage of. No one relishes the idea of someone walking over them.

Jesus voluntarily left His throne and heaven’s glory and humbled Himself—He voluntarily did this. The trouble with us is that *God* has to humble us because we won’t come down from our self-made thrones on our own.

Oliver Cromwell once visited Yorkminster Cathedral in England, and his attention was drawn to twelve silver statues of the apostles, which stood near the ceiling of one of the cathedral apartments.

Studying them for a moment, he said, "Who are these guys?" After being informed, he yelled, "Take them down...and let them go about doing good."

According to his instructions, they were melted down and put into the treasury and the money was used to help those in need. Before those silver apostles could be used for more than admiring them from a distance, it was necessary that they be taken down and melted.

In the same way, it is sometimes necessary for Christ to take us down and melt us spiritually before He can use us.

Remember Paul is addressing some contentions that existed in the Philippian church. He is exhorting the believers at Philippi to have the mind of Christ.

The argument Paul makes is that if Christians are willing to take the lowly place, to serve others, and to give their lives in sacrifice, there will be no quarrels. People who are willing to die for others don’t generally quarrel with them.²

- If you are willing to die for your sister, you are not going to be arguing with her over a seat in the church or getting less chicken nuggets than she got.
- If you are willing to die for the brethren, you are not going to get angry and leave the church because someone decided to decorate the church for Christmas and didn’t know that you always did it (a true story).
- If you are willing to die for your brother, you are not going to leave the church because someone didn’t like your choice of color to paint the church door (this actually happened).

² William McDonald, *Emmaus Correspondence Course on Philippians*

Even though Jesus was God, He humbled Himself and took on the form or manifestation of humanity—subjecting Himself to the frailties of the human experience—hunger, thirst, physical weaknesses...even death on a cross.

When you are “going through’ and are tempted to think that God doesn’t know what you are going through, you should remember the humiliation of Jesus Christ.

When you are mock, ridiculed and scorned by folk and are tempted to think that God doesn’t care, you need to remember the humiliation of Jesus Christ.

The Bible says in Hebrew 4:15, *“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”*

Jesus was God the Son, who came down from heaven and put skin on so that He might experience all the kinds of issues and situations and circumstances and temptations that we experience. Not only did He come down to feel our pain, He came down to die our death—to pay the penalty for our sins.

But the death of Jesus Christ wasn’t the end of the story. You should know that He got up with all power!

The point that Paul makes to the Philippian believers is that “you’ve got to go down before you can come up.” You’ve got to humble yourself before you can be exalted.

Jesus says in Matthew 20:26-28, *“... whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”*

Later in chapter 23 of the same book Jesus says, *“But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”* (vs. 11-12)

I like what the Apostle Peter writes on this subject. He starts out speaking to the young people, who sometimes think that the older folk don’t know what they are talking about and then he includes everybody with his words of exhortation:

“...you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for “God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.” Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.” (1 Pet 5:5-7)

Jesus humbled Himself under the mighty hand of God, the Father, and because He humbled Himself (Paul tells us that) *“God has highly exalted Him...”*

Phil 2:9 Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name,

Jesus did not seek a name for Himself (this is what Satan did). Jesus humbled Himself. Jesus came as the Suffering Servant.

- Since the Savior humbled Himself, God has highly exalted Him.
- Since He did not seek a name for Himself, God has given Him a name that is above every name.
- Since He bent His knees in service to others (washed His disciples feet), God has decreed that every knee shall bow to Him.

Paul tells us in verse 9 that God gives Jesus a “*name that is above every name.*” It is interesting that while the name, Jesus is the most loved name of all born of women; it is also the most vilified and blasphemed of names.

Acts 4:12 tells us that there is, “*no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.*” This means that the name *Buddha* doesn’t save; the name *Allah* doesn’t save; the name *Mohammad* doesn’t save; the name *Joseph Smith* doesn’t save; the name *Krishna* doesn’t save.

Paul goes on to say in verse 10 that:

Phil 2:10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth,

Phil 2:11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Notice in verse 10 that “*every knee shall bow.*” Is this saying that everyone will be getting saved in the end? Does this say that at the end everyone will finally accept Jesus as the Savior and be ushered into heaven?

No. It is saying that everyone will acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord. There will be those who do so willingly and those who will be compelled to bow. Those who do not bow during these open days of grace will be forced to bow in the Day of Judgment.

This says that you need to come to Him while He has eyes of compassion before the times of the end when He will have “*eyes of flaming fire*” (Rev. 1:14). Come to Him while He is *Savior* before you will have to one day face Him as your eternal Judge.

Paul says, “*that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth...*” In other words, there will be no place to hide.

In Revelation 20:12-13 John writes, “*And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works.*”

Paul writes in our text that “*every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*”

Think of what this means! We normally think that this is referring to the heavenly worship that will be going on where the multitudes in heaven will with one voice cry out in one great crescendo of praise to the Lord.

But this also refers to the unbelieving multitudes that will with dismal regret and reluctant submission confess that Jesus is Lord.

Even Satan will do it. His demons too, will confess that Jesus is Lord. Caiaphas will do it. Herod will do it. Pontus Pilate will confess that Jesus is Lord. Hitler will do it. Stalin will do it. Mussolini will do it. Saddam Hussein will do it. Osama bin Laden will do it.

Paul writes, *“every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”* God is going to get the glory in the end. We learned in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians that *“when the times will have reached their fulfillment—God will bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.”* (1:10)

So what we’ve seen in this short passage in chapter one of Paul’s letter to the Philippians that he responds to a problem in the church—a selfish and cliquish spirit—and uses it to write an exposition on the Lord Jesus Christ.

The cure to selfish ambition and factions in the church is to have the mind of Christ. There was an incident in the life of Booker T. Washington, the renowned black educator that teaches this truth.

Shortly after he took over the presidency of Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, he was walking in an exclusive section of town when he was stopped by a wealthy white woman. Not knowing the famous Mr. Washington by sight, she asked if he would like to earn a few dollars by chopping wood for her. Because he had no pressing business at the moment, Professor Washington smiled, rolled up his sleeves, and proceeded to do the humble chore she had requested. When he was finished, he carried the logs into the house and stacked them by the fireplace where a young girl recognized him and later revealed his identity to the lady.

The next morning the embarrassed woman went to see Mr. Washington in his office at the Institute and apologized profusely. "It's perfectly all right, Madam," he replied. "Occasionally I enjoy a little manual labor. Besides, it's always a delight to do something for a friend."

She shook his hand warmly and assured him that his meek and gracious attitude had endeared him and his work to her heart. Not long afterward she showed her admiration by persuading some wealthy acquaintances to join her in donating thousands of dollars to the Tuskegee Institute.

Let’s close with again the words of the Apostle Peter, *“All of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble. Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.”*