

# WHEELERSBURG BAPTIST CHURCH

## Life Application Sunday School Class

### Philippians - Session 5

May 13, 2001

READ Philippians 2:1-4

*If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, <sup>2</sup> then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. <sup>3</sup> Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. <sup>4</sup> Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

Today, we are going to start to look at a key to true fellowship and unity in the body of Christ.

In this part of his letter, Paul is admonishing the Philippians to be one in spirit and purpose. He appeals to their relationship with Christ as the basis for pursuing unity, and humility and rejection of selfishness as the means to unity.

First, let's take a closer look at the means experiencing the unity we have in Christ.

1. From verse 3, what is the means to experiencing unity and oneness in the church?

Humility is the key, which is in contrast to selfish ambition and vain conceit. Let's

begin by considering some definitions:

2. What is humility?

Humility: A state of mind; It is how we view ourselves. Do we think of ourselves as great? When we think of ourselves, are we proud of what we are, of our accomplishments, of our knowledge, of our position in life, of our giftedness, of our talents, of our possessions? Or do we view all of these as gifts bestowed by a gracious God. Our speech concerning these matters will many times reveal our heart. We need to listen carefully to the words that we speak concerning ourselves. How aware are we that we are what we are only by the grace of God?

For us to have unity in the body of Christ, there must be humility. Humble people realize that they are sinners saved by grace, and that they are what they are and have what they have because of God's grace, and that apart from Him, they can do nothing. Their confidence is in Christ alone, and not in themselves. A humble person is teachable because he realizes that his understanding, knowledge, and wisdom is limited and fallible. He recognizes that he needs others in his life, and that he cannot stand alone. The humble person will be quick to confess his weaknesses, and ask for help. He sees Christ as the vine, and himself as a branch, totally dependent on the vine for life. Because a humble person recognizes that gifts and talents are distributed by God as He sees fit, he finds great joy and appreciation in the accomplishments and blessings of others. A humble person is content, realizing that any good thing in his life is from God, and is undeserved. A humble person is ready to help another in need, recognizing that he also struggles and is in need of help to stand strong.

### 3. How can you tell if you are a humble person?

- Do you view your talents, accomplishments, position in life, possessions as gifts given by God?
- When you speak with others concerning these matters, do you give God the credit, or yourself?
- Are you a thankful person?
- Are your private prayers full of appreciation toward God?
- How often do you feel a need to call on God for help?
- How often do you call on others for help?
- How do you react when you see others do well, express giftedness, accomplish success?
- How content are you with your place in life?
- How ready are you to help others in need without excessive judgment being passed?

### 4. What is selfish ambition and vain conceit and how are they related?

Literally, the words selfish ambition mean self promotion to gain a following - creating factions and strife. It carries the idea of being partisan and contentious, taking sides.

Vain conceit means empty pride, self esteem, vain glory. Verse 3 says that we can do things with these as motives. People who want recognition and a feeling of importance do things to promote themselves and gain a following. They can many times be people pleasers and flatterers, but their motive is always to make themselves look good. In the modern vernacular, they are politicians. The admonition here is to do nothing from these motives. Certainly there are those who have this as their sole motivation, to have the applause and approval of others. But we need to ask God to search our hearts to be sure this is never our motivation.

### 5. According to verse 4, what is the result of the humble spirit.

A humble person will not be self-centered. A humble person realizes that the world doesn't revolve around him. Our words reveal our hearts. Listen to yourself when you converse with others. Does everything you say relate to you or your job or your family? Do you take a sincere interest in others and their lives and families and joys and problems? In our relationships, are we there to give as well as take? An outward demonstration of Christ-likeness is when we are sincerely interested in the well being of others, and not just ourselves. A humble person recognizes the privilege and blessing in giving as well as receiving. Are we transparent in our relationships? A humble person will make himself vulnerable, and take the risk of being hurt for the sake of edifying another. True fellowship and unity will only thrive in an atmosphere of humility.

Now lets go back to verses 1 and 2 and look at the imperative Paul gives and the motivation he appeals to for the pursuit of unity.

### 4. What is the commandment given in verse 2?

It is three-fold. Be like-minded, have the same love, and be one in spirit and purpose. Again, to better understand what is being said, let's look at some definitions:

- Like-minded - literally means to think the same way; think the same thing
- Same love - love for each one without respect of persons
- One in spirit and purpose - having the same desires, goals, and affections

I think first we should note what is not said. We are not called to all be exactly the same - where the same clothes, like the same foods, enjoy the same musical style, or even have the same gifts and expression of service. We are called to have the same desire and passion, the same thinking, and the same purpose. As we have seen, Paul's passion and desire was to glorify Christ and see the gospel proclaimed. His joy was made full when he saw that same thinking, desire, and goal in his fellow believers. So we are called as

members of the Lord's church, to have the same goals, affections, and desires. But how can we all come to think alike, and have the same desires and goals. This is where the ministry of God's Word is critical, to bring us to the place that we express the unity that we have in Christ.

Look at Ephesians 4:1-6

*1 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. 2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. 3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit— just as you were called to one hope when you were called— 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

This is another version on what we are looking at in Philippians. But here in Ephesians, Paul expounds the God ordained way to help bring this to pass. Look at verse 11:

*11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

Verse 11 is critical - God has provided apostles and prophets (their teaching through the New Testament) and evangelists, pastors, and teachers (ministry leadership) for the equipping and building up of His people - the goal being in verse 13 - unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God - the fullness of Christ. God has given ministry gifts to His church to perform this task.. As a minister of the gospel, this was Paul's deep desire and joy, to see these believers have the same mind, love, and purpose. This is why we emphasize the ministry of God's Word - from the pulpit, in Sunday School, on Wednesday night, and in discipleship and counseling. It is the ministry, acceptance, and obedience to God's Word that brings us to unity in the faith and mature knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

5. Paul calls for unity and humility. From verse 1 in chapter 2, what are the divine resources that enable believers to fulfill this calling?

Verse 1 speaks to the intimate relationship we have with Christ. The word "encouragement" is that familiar Greek word "paraklete" that literally means to come along side to help and edify; the phrase "comfort of love" carries the idea of closeness and tenderness based on a deep affection and love, much like the affection a mother has for a newborn child; fellowship with the Spirit speaks again of the closeness and oneness with the Spirit as deep calls to deep, and tenderness and compassion speak of being moved from within based on the love that He has for us as His own. We love Him, and others, because He first loved us; The idea expressed here is that this close relationship we have with Christ constrains and compels us to love one another as we are loved. God empowers what He commands. A command in scripture is the same as a promise. We can humbly serve one another and experience unity based on the great love, fellowship, and assistance that we receive from God through Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Let's summarize verse 1-4:

Paul is calling the Philippians to unity of thinking, purpose, and spirit. He says that it is possible if they will act out of humility and putting others before themselves, and that they can do that based on the intimate relationship they have with Christ Jesus.

6. What are some practical ways that we can look to the interests of others?

## READ Chapter 2:5-11

*5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: <sup>6</sup> Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. <sup>8</sup> And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross! <sup>9</sup> Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, <sup>10</sup> that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

In this call to humility, Paul now turns our attention to the perfect example of servant-hood and humility, namely, the Lord Jesus Christ. This passage of scripture is the most complete teaching on Christ becoming man. It is something that we must pray and ask God to reveal to our hearts, for it is overwhelming. As we meditate and think about what Christ did, it will strengthen and motivate us to be better servants and bring more glory to Him by acting as He did.

First, let's look at what Christ left to come to earth.

7. What did Christ leave to come to earth as a man?

*Heb 1: In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, <sup>2</sup> but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. <sup>3</sup> The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. <sup>4</sup> So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs. <sup>5</sup> For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father"? Or again, "I will be his Father, and he will be my Son"? <sup>6</sup> And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him." <sup>7</sup> In speaking of the angels he says, "He makes his angels winds, his servants flames of fire." <sup>8</sup> But about the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom. <sup>9</sup> You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy." <sup>10</sup> He also says, "In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. <sup>11</sup> They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment.*

*12 You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end." <sup>13</sup> To which of the angels did God ever say, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet"? <sup>14</sup> Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?*

*John 1: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. <sup>3</sup> Through him all things were made; without him nothing*

*was made that has been made. <sup>4</sup> In him was life, and that life was the light of men. <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.*

*18 No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.*

*John 17: "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. <sup>2</sup> For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. <sup>3</sup> Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. <sup>4</sup> I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. <sup>5</sup> And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.*

*Col 1: <sup>15</sup> He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. <sup>16</sup> For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. <sup>17</sup> He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*

- Heir of all things
- Made the universe
- Radiance of God's glory
- Exact representation of His being
- Sustainer of all things
- At the right hand of God
- Much superior to angels
- The Father's Son
- Worshipped by angels
- Rules from an eternal throne
- Laid the earth's foundations, heavens are works of His hands
- Eternal, not temporal like the creation
- With God - Is God
- All life from Him
- At the Father's side
- Authority over all people
- Perfect image of God
- Preeminent over all creation
- All created by Him and for Him

- Holds all things together

The Son of God in eternity past, was in perfect communion and fellowship with His Father through the Spirit. He is the full expression of the Father's radiance and glory - called the image of God, the exact substance of God - literally God Himself. All things were made by Him - all that exists came through the Son, and He also sustains, or holds all things together. He is truly the King of creation, and rightfully so, because He is the creator, and all creation was made for Him.

When the Son of God came to earth, He did not leave His deity behind, but He certainly veiled the glory He had with His Father. He was in the essence of God, which is spirit, and became the essence of man, which is flesh. He was no longer omnipresent, but limited to a body of flesh. He no longer fully expressed His authority over creation on a moment-by-moment basis, though there were many times that this glory was revealed, e.g. the stilling of the storm, the resurrection of Lazarus, the turning water to wine, the multiplication of the fish and loaves, the healing of the blind man. As He walked upon this earth, He was tired. He was tempted, yet without sin. He was grieved. He was despised. He was mocked. He was hated. He was ridiculed. He was misunderstood. He was forsaken. He was betrayed. He was mistreated. He was spit upon. He was cursed. This One, the creator of the universe, the sustainer of all life. The one who is the exact replica of the eternal God, and perfect expression of deity. And all this He suffered was willing - no one forced Him to do anything. From a position of perfect authority and with the right to do anything with creation, because He owned it all, He came as a servant. What did He leave - the very glory and splendor of the right hand of God.

But why did He leave all of this, of His own choice and volition. It was love for His Father. It was to redeem the ones that His Father had chosen and given to Him. It was to purchase a people for the expression of the glory of God. Why did Christ die? Certainly because He loved us - but that love is ultimately an expression of the love among the Father, Son, and Spirit. Our redemption is an expression of the Son's love for the Father and the Father's love for the Son in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. And for His obedience and submission to the Father's will, He will forever be the exalted and glorified One - King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the absolute Sovereign over all. Through Christ's obedience and humility, He brings even more honor and glory to God as He is given the name above every name. All creation will look on the lamb that was slain and cry Worthy is the Lamb to receive honor, and glory, and power. And all will acknowledge Him one day. The redeemed acknowledge it now; the unsaved will confess it later. Those that have bowed the knee now will bring glory to God through their salvation, and those who have not bowed in submission will bring glory to God through their judgement.

8. How can this admonition motivate us to follow Christ in humility and service?

So this is the point of these verses - that we should have the same attitude that Jesus Christ had when He came to this earth. We need to set aside any privilege and rights and comforts that we may have, and become a servant - a bondsman, to one another. In so doing, we are expressing the nature of our Savior. Jesus is truly in our lives when we respond and are like Him. He laid aside His rights to become a servant to bring greater glory to His Father by redeeming a people for the praise of His glory. When we lay aside our selfishness for others, we pave the way for more glory to be given to our God. To be able to walk in the service and humility that we are called to, we need a motivation stronger than human sentimentality and compassion. Jesus gave Himself because He loved us, to be sure, but it was for the joy set before Him. He saved us to bring glory and honor to His Father, and His Father gave us to His Son as an expression of His love and glory. In the same way, we need to serve others because we love them, but ultimately to bring glory to the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. Only this motivation will be strong enough to carry us through the rough times when our service and sacrifice is ignored or even despised by others.