

The Letter of Paul to the Philippians

Chapter 2

Exhortation to Humble Service. Paul calls the Philippians to unite in love and humility, as exemplified by Christ's humble service. They are to live as lights in the world, just like Christ's faithful servants Timothy and Epaphroditus. ~ *ESV Study Bible*

Verses 1-11—Christ's Example of Humility:

The Philippian believers must make sure they continue to progress in the absolutely critical area of love for one another. As Paul emphasizes, they must be of the same mind.

Verses 5-11 is often referred to as the "hymn of Christ." Paul depicts Christ's example of service in a stirring poem that traces his preexistence (John 1.1, *etc.*), incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension to the right hand of God. Paul wrote this magnificent theology to encourage the Philippians to consider other people's interests first.

Paul is not saying that Christ became less than God or "gave up" some divine attributes; he is not even commenting directly on the question of whether Jesus was fully omnipotent or omniscient during his time on earth. Nor is he saying that Christ ever gave up being "in the form of God." Rather, Paul is stressing that Christ, who had all the privileges that were rightly his as king of the universe, gave them up to become an ordinary Jewish baby bound for the cross (cf. 2 Cor 8.9, "though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich").

Crucifixion was not simply a convenient way of executing prisoners. It was the ultimate indignity, a public statement by Rome that the crucified one was beyond contempt. The excruciating physical pain was magnified by the degradation and humiliation. It was the ultimate counterpoint to the divine majesty of the preexistent Christ, and thus was the ultimate expression of Christ's obedience to the Father.

This astounding union of Jesus' divine and human natures is reinforced by the allusion to Isaiah 45.23 in the words "every knee should bow...and every tongue confess," which in Isaiah refer exclusively to YHWH.

~ *ESV Study Bible*

There are two Greek words for *form*, *morphe* and *schema*. They must both be translated *form*, because there is no other English equivalent, but they do not mean the same thing. *Morphe* is the essential form which never alters; *schema* is the outward form which changes from time to time and from circumstance to circumstance.... The word Paul uses for Jesus being in the *form* of God is *morphe*; that is to say, his unchangeable being is divine. However his outward *schema* might alter, he remained in essence divine.

The great characteristics of Jesus's life were humility, obedience, and self-renunciation. He did not desire to dominate men but only to serve them; he did not desire his own way but only God's way; he did not desire to exalt himself but only to renounce all his glory for the sake of men. Again and again the New Testament is sure that only the man who humbles himself will be exalted (*Matthew 23.12; Luke 14.11; 18.14*). If humility, obedience, and self-renunciation were the supreme characteristics of the life of Jesus, they must also be the hall-marks of the Christian.

~ William Barclay

Phil Yancey made this observation: "In my career as a journalist, I have interviewed diverse people. Looking back, I can roughly divide them into two types: **stars** and **servants**. The stars include sporting heroes, film actors, music performers, famous authors, TV personalities, and the like. In my limited experience, these "idols" are as miserable a group of people as I have ever met. Most have troubled or broken marriages. Nearly all are hopelessly dependent on psychotherapy. In a heavy irony, these larger-than-life heroes seem tormented by incurable self-doubt.

"I have also spent time with servants. People like Dr. Paul Brant, who worked for 20 years among the poorest of the poor, leprosy patients in rural India...or relief workers in Somalia, Sudan, Ethiopia, Bangladesh, or other such repositories of human suffering. I was prepared to honor and admire these servants, to hold them up as inspiring examples... I was not, however, prepared to envy them.

"But as I now reflect on the two groups side by side, stars and servants, the servants clearly emerge as the favored ones. They work for low pay, long hours, and no applause, "wasting" their talents and skills among the poor and uneducated. But somehow in the process of losing their lives they have found them."

~ Nicky Gumbel

"God opposes the proud but give grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you."

~ 1 Peter 5.5b-6

The Incarnation:

Looking down over the battlements of heaven [Jesus] saw this planet swinging in space—doomed, damned, crushed, and bound for hell. He saw you and me struggling beneath our load of sin and bound in the chains and ropes of sin. He made His decision in the council halls of God. The angelic hosts bowed in humility and awe as heaven's Prince of Princes and Lord of Lords, who could speak worlds into space, got into His jeweled chariot, went through pearly gates, across the steep of the skies, and on a black Judean night, while the stars sang together and the escorting angels chanted His praises, stepped out of the chariot, threw off His robes, and became man!

~ Billy Graham, Peace with God

The Divine Name:

“YHWH, YHWH, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty... (Ex 34.6f)”

The name of God conveys: 1) What he has done
2) What he is like
3) And what he has promised he will do.

There is a reason the Jews had a tradition of not using the name of the LORD lightly. The 3rd commandment says: “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.”

When you invoke a name, you bring all the attributes of that person with it—all power and authority. When we exalt the name, we exalt the person.

If you do something in the name of God, you best be sure you have his blessing, because when you invoke the name of God you align yourself with him, and his righteousness will not stand the presence of evil. So, if you were to take his name in vain. Invoke his name foolishly. You may bring judgment on your own head.

~ Fr. Michael

Verses 12-18—Lights in the World:

The Philippians cannot be content with past glories but need to demonstrate their faith day by day as they nurture their relationship with God.... They can rejoice in God’s empowering presence even as they work hard at living responsible Christian lives....

Holding fast means both believing God’s Word and following it.

~ *ESV Study Bible*

Work out your own salvation; the word he uses for work out is *katergazesthai*, which always has the idea of bringing to completion. It is as if Paul says: “don’t stop halfway; go on until the work of salvation is fully wrought out in you.” No Christian should be satisfied with anything less than the total benefits of the gospel. [**Keep pressing forward—we cooperate with God in the work**]. There can be no salvation without God, but what God offers man must take. [**We are not passive in the process**].

~ *William Barclay*

Freedom and responsibility go hand in hand. As George Bernard Shaw put it, “Liberty means responsibility. That is why most men dread it.” We all have free will and are therefore responsible for our actions. Christians enjoy an even great freedom: “the glorious freedom of the children of God” (Romans 8.21). With this greater freedom comes greater responsibility.

Paul tells us that we are to “work out” our freedom. This is different from working *for* our freedom. It is not “an objective yet to be reached” or “a benefit to be merited,” but rather it is “a possession to be explored and enjoyed ever more fully.” Our freedom is to be worked out just as “marriage has to be worked out. Marriage once possessed is possessed in full but merits a lifetime of exploration, enjoyment,

development and discovery.” So our freedom is already possessed to the full, but we need to work it out day by day.

In particular, we need to work out the path along which we are to walk in response to God’s call and the sphere of our Christian service. Each person has a different calling.

~ Nicky Gumbel

In Libby Purves’s book, *Holy Smoke*, she devotes a chapter to her encounters with various Christians. She writes this, “Even more unforgettable was Jackie Pullinger, a radical young Christian musician who set off across the world with a Quixotic naivete to find where she was called to work. She lighted upon Hong Kong’s walled city of Kowloon, the ‘City of Darkness,’ before that unspeakable slum was pulled down in 1989. In this place of misery, of violence, of prostitutes from 10 to 70 years old, of almost universal drug addiction and Triad gangs, she walked the dark alleys seeing ‘another city in it place, ablaze with light. It was my dream. No more crying, no more death or pain.’

“She looked at me gently, this skinny straw-haired flame of a woman, when I asked her about the sacrifice she has made. ‘No sacrifice. That’s dumb. I have more fun than most people. People are always telling me to take it easy or I’ll burn out, but a couple of years later it always turns out that they’ve burned out themselves, and I haven’t. The Bible doesn’t say anything about looking after yourself, does it?’

Unreasonable, incomprehensible in the world’s terms, infuriating, glorious, Christian, all the way.

~ Nicky Gumbel

Verses 19-30—Timothy and Epaphroditus:

Friendship is at the heart of Christianity, and it should be at the heart of church life. Men and women were created to live in a relationship of friendship with God... [and] not just friendship with God but friendship with one another.

Christian friendship arises out of a genuine love for other people. Dale Carnegie, who wrote *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, said, “You can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you.”

When talking about His friendship with His disciples Jesus said, “Greater love has no one than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15.13). It is in giving that we receive. It is in hazarding our lives for others that we find life and friendship. We are not to seek friends for ourselves, but to be friends to others.

~ Nicky Gumbel