

## **” Your Submission to God Must be Like that of Christ”**

### **Philippians 2:1-15**

**Facilitator: Min. Joseph Williams**

#### **I. Historical Background and Biblical Context:**

Having assured them of his prayers and concern for them, and having explained his current situation, Apostle Paul turns his attention to urging the church to **‘conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ’**. Paul insists they are to live like citizens of Heaven (*Philippians 3:20*). Paul did this in terms of what he had already commended them for and what he had prayed for them. He urged them in terms of their sharing in common (*‘fellowship’*) with him in establishing the Gospel (*Philippians 1:5 & 1:27*), and in terms of their partaking in the same gracious working of God as he had in defense and confirmation of the Gospel (*Philippians 1:7 & Philippians 1:27*) while stressing the need at the same time for them to be established in a wise and righteous love for one another (*Philippians 1:9-10; & Philippians 2:1-2*).

Along with the call to live lives worthy of the love and sacrifice of Christ, this call to unity and love is a common theme throughout this entire letter, without dominating it. As with Jesus Himself in His final words before His death, Paul was concerned that the love that Christians had for one another would be the distinguishing mark of the difference between the Kingly Rule of God and the kingdoms of the world. And he saw that this would only be possible when the lesson and mind-set of Christ’s self-humiliation, death, resurrection and exaltation was brought home to his readers as both the prime example and main characteristic of their salvation. Their oneness was to demonstrate the saving work of Christ, their awareness of the love of God and of Christ, and the effective working of the Holy Spirit.

#### **II. The Lesson: “Your Submission to God Must be Like that of Christ”**

- vv. 1-2. Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in 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 of one mind.***

This chapter begins with a series of four clauses that call the Philippians to unity and mutual consideration. Paul has just spoken to them concerning the opposition they are facing from the world, and now he speaks to them with regards to prevention of the dangers that can arise from within. They have been urged to walk worthily of the gospel of Christ. This walking involves their "standing firm in one spirit without being frightened by non-Christian opponents (*1:27-28a*) and being one in aim or direction with other members of the congregation. Verses 1-4 are a call to unity, love, and humility. They are to be united against their enemies and united in heart and mind with one another. Congregations today should become acquainted with Paul’s words here and take preventive measures against division that so frequently attacks them. It seems most

often that ignorance and/or negligence of God's word is the divisive tool that leads churches into division.

The incentives mentioned are intended to persuade them to be 'of the same mind, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind'. And if they succeed Paul says that it will fill his cup of joy to overflowing. Like Jesus Paul recognized that **'by this will all men know that you are His disciples in that you love one another'** (**John 13:35**), and that was why he longed for it, and why it would fill him with joy. There is indeed no finer incentive towards unity than a recognition that we are all equally made one with Christ through His cross, that we are all caught up in the same love of God and of Christ, and that we all participate in the one Spirit. It is contemplation of these facts, combined with the work of the Holy Spirit within, and Christ's own exhortations to a unity of love (**John 13: 34-35; 15:12**), that stirs up within us true oneness of spirit. But it cannot in the end just be manufactured by an act of will (although we must realize that we have a part to play). It must spring up as a result of the Holy Spirit's activity within, because the one mind that they and us are to have is that of Christ. That mind can only come as a result of the work of the Holy Spirit giving the mind of the Spirit, the mind of Christ. We fool ourselves if we think that we can walk that way without Him.

It might be beneficial to mention that what Paul describes here is still the basis on which God's people can come together in unity. He indicates that if we would only concentrate on Christ, and Who He is, What He has done for us, and Walking in His steps, we would recognize that everything else is secondary. Then we would be able to come together with one mind. A mind of serving Christ and each other, because our focus would be on our oneness in Christ and the Spirit. It would result in a genuine love for one another. We need to recognize that when we are not focusing on the three W's, we are not contending for God's truth but being deliberately disobedient towards God. Our focus on secondary ideas, when we take our eyes off Christ that result in Christian disunity.

**2. vv. 3-4. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.**

This is getting to the heart of the matter. 'Selfish ambition' or 'vain conceit' (empty glory). We must recognize that raising points of disagreement (for the sake of being disagreeable), having a higher opinion of ourselves and of our own ideas and interpretations (above all others), is acting contrary to God's will and pleasure. What we should concentrate on is being humble in mind and spirit, and consider others better than ourselves, recognizing that in eternity their interpretations may well be seen as equally valid (or invalid) as our own.

This will result in our not seeking our own self-advancement, while always being ready to assist in any way, not in order to be praised, but so as to serve others. This is then summed up in terms of genuine consideration for others. Not as seen in a determination to make them 'see the truth' as we see it, but in a concern for their genuine welfare and growth in Christ. Our concern is not to be for ourselves but for others, and for their

spiritual advancement. This will involve avoiding controversy, and going out of our way to be encouraging without 'picking fault', while at the same time genuinely seeking to help the weaker brother or sister. It includes the idea of having more admiration for their spiritual gifts, than we have for our own, and encouraging them to develop them. All this indeed is what was meant by "conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ".

**3. v. 5. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:**

Paul previously emphasized 'the Gospel', but now he describes it in all its fullness. It is true that we should follow Jesus Christ in denying ourselves, taking up the cross and following Him, entering personally into His humiliation and death, and subsequently into His resurrection. We must not see in these words simply a call to see Christ as a glorious example, though that is who and what He is. Rather these words are a call to have the same mind-set as Christ in following Him fully into the full-time, unwavering submission and service of God and men, through our own humiliation, death and resurrection in Christ. They are a commitment to total submission and self-sacrifice in the name of Christ, through entering into His humiliation and death, which will result in a newly resurrected life and final glorification. Paul is encouraging all to commit to having 'the mind of the Spirit' (*Romans 8: 2-11*). And that is that 'If Christ dwells in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness'. It is a call for all of us to 'follow in the steps of Christ by full participation in the cross and the resurrection'.

**4. vv. 6-7. Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.**

The Philippians were to follow the pattern of, and set their minds to walk with, the One Who, although by nature is God, set aside His status (divine nature), refusing to hold on to it, and, setting aside all His rights (as King and Creator, deity), He took the form and status of a lowly servant, being made truly man. By His own choosing, the One who had the essential nature of God took on Himself the essential nature of a servant. The One Who was by right the Master became the slave. The Creator became the servant of His creation.

**5. v. 8. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death- even death on a cross!**

This statement makes clear His true manhood and submission to the will of the Father. He could only die because He had truly become man, because being God He could not die. In this regard we can compare how as a man his body may die, but in one way or another his spirit lives on. In the same way the body of Jesus died, but as He is spirit, He continues to live. The stress here, however, is on the fact that in dying as a man He also fulfilled His position as a servant, and remained obedient to the will of the

Father. Being obedient He humbly took the lowest way and died the death of a slave. Crucifixion was looked on as the way of executing the lowest of the low (slaves and insurrectionists). He became the ultimate servant. He humbled Himself as the servant of all, He obediently accepted the path of death (only One who was God could choose to die and only One who was man could die), and finally and suffered a shameful and excruciating death on a cross. In the same way as Jesus had done, they/we are to choose the path of humility, **deliberately** electing in their/our minds to be 'crucified with Christ', to as it were, die with Him on the cross, considering themselves/ourselves as dead to sin. This was to be the end of all selfish ambition, of any sense of superiority, of any desire to be exalted over others. This is a call to die to ourselves and our own ways and ideas and ambitions in order that we might become true servants of God and live only unto God, in togetherness following only His ways and desires and ambitions, something which will deeply affect our relationships with one another.

**6. vv. 9-11. Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.**

The intention of these passages is to bring to light the truth that just as God highly exalted Jesus, and gave Him great honor, so God will exalt everyone that trust in Jesus and submits to His will in a similar way. And we have the guarantee in that it had already happened to Him, and in a certain sense also to those who are 'in Christ' (*Ephesians 2:1-7*). Because Christ is made triumphant because of His unwavering submission to the Father, we can be assured that we too will rise with Christ and be seated with Him on His throne as we humbly submit to the will and desires of the Father.

**7. vv. 12-15. Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose. Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, “children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.” Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life.**

Paul reminds us here that as a result of our participation with Christ in His death, resurrection and exhalation to put every effort into **“together working out” the salvation that “God is working” within us.** This so that as a consequence of our oneness and blameless lives, we might be lights in the world pointing towards Christ, thereby holding fast to the **Word of “LIFE”**.