

Philippians Study 3: Chapter 2

Introduction

Although Paul has a great bond of affection with the Philippians, yet things in the church are not as sweet as they ought to be. Some people were being self centred to the detriment of others in the church. Paul begins to address some of these things in the chapter – and of course points them to the example of Jesus as the perfect model.

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Homework and preparation for next week:

Read chapter 3 in preparation for next week.

- *What does the church need to do to ensure unity?*
- *How do we put these things into practice?*
- *What are the practical applications in the congregation here?*

- *How do we practically practice the humility that Paul calls for, and Jesus demonstrated?*

Notes for study 3: Chapter 2

Introduction

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Body of the Study

What are the four motives that Paul gives for unity?

The chapter begins with the bridge *therefore...* which connects back to the thought in 1:27 – *I want to hear of your affairs – that you stand fast with one mind* etc. Remember that there were no chapter breaks when Paul wrote the letter.

Paul is giving a very strong call to unity (as he has in the previous verses), and build his argument on four things:

- Our consolation in Christ
- Our comfort of love
- Our fellowship of the Spirit
- Our affection and mercy

He could have just said “be united and in one mind”, but with the strong bond that he shares with the Philippians, he puts a very strong and straightforward case for unity. We all share these things through Christ – so how could we be divided, when we have these things in common? The answer is obvious.

But Paul goes a little further. Apparently there was some problems in the church – and Paul has been hinting at and driving towards them. He is going to get specific in 4:2, but that does not mean that this was the only problem. In fact, it appears that it wasn't – since Paul says “...let each of you...” (2:4), and he gives some quite specific instruction as to their conduct (both in their lives and in their worship).

In his usual style, Paul drives home the point in 2:2 “...fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind...” (2:2 NKJV).

The Philippians were apparently behaving in self-centred ways, and were typified by the following characteristics:

- Selfish ambitions
- Conceit
- High mindedness
- Self interest

Paul says that is not the way that it ought to be.

What example does Paul use to motivate them to change?

In short, he gives the perfect example – the example of Christ. Jesus' character and behaviour was not at all like the things that appear to be happening in Philippi – in fact on the contrary – he was exactly the example that Paul was pointing them to:

- *He did not think being equal to God was a thing to be grasped*

The Philippians were being high minded – they thought that being in the best position (of their career, or their status, or their citizenship) made them more important people than those that were not in such a good position. But look at Jesus. He was in a high and mighty position. So much so, that He is described as being equal to God. And yet, that did not make Him have a high minded character – although He absolutely deserved the position, the respect, and the honour that goes with it. Jesus was humble. But not just humble – He was absolutely humble!

- *He made himself of no reputation and took on the form of a servant*

His humility was such that the King was prepared to wash the feet of the pilgrims. God became a man – and His name was called *Emmanuel* – “*God with us*” (Mt 1:23).

- *And he came in the likeness of men, and was found in appearance as a man*

Jesus lived as a man, and went through all of the things that we all go through. The pain, the suffering – perhaps even the death of his father? Mary was with Jesus at the cross, but we hear hardly anything of Joseph after Jesus turns 12 years old and goes to the Temple in Jerusalem (although He is referred to in Mt 13:55 as the carpenter's son, which could imply that Joseph was still alive. However in the parallel passage in Mk 6:3, He is referred to as the carpenter). It is possible (and in my mind likely – but I'll admit that it is speculation) that Joseph had died before Jesus, and that Jesus went through the loss of a parent and the grief. He certainly felt grief at the passing of Lazarus (Jn 11:35).

He came in the fullness of flesh. He was born as a baby, and grew in the normal manner of any child, and would have been educated as any other Jewish child. Most writers believe that He would have learned the carpentry trade from Joseph (as the verse quoted above suggests).

- *He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross*

Jesus' humility was complete. He could go no further. Not only did He go to the point of death, it was the cruelest and slowest death imaginable. Death by crucifixion was a Roman phenomenon, and was used to show their superiority and cruelty to their opponents – it was a way of ensuring submission. It only occurred over a period of a few hundred years, and it is no coincidence that the death of Jesus occurred during this period when death by the cruelest means was practiced. Yet in all of this, Jesus was obedient and humble. He was perfected through suffering (Heb 2:10).

- *Therefore God has highly exalted Him, and given Him the name above every name*

As a result of His obedience and humility, Jesus was exalted (c/f Heb 2:9). Jesus was crowned with glory as *a result of* His obedience. He became King after His ascension (Heb 10:12), so that

- *At the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue should confess Jesus Christ is Lord*

None of us will escape. We will confess Jesus in this life, or we will confess Jesus on the day of judgement. There will be no denial of the fact. But sadly, that day will be too late. Our obedience to God in this life is the pre-requisite for the life to come. Someone said *if you miss out on knowing me, you wouldn't have missed very much. But if you miss out on knowing Jesus, you will have missed the greatest thing in this world ... and you will miss out on life in the world to come.*

What do we need to do about it?

The Philippians *knew* what they needed to do, but Paul reminded them anyway. “...*Therefore as you have always obeyed...*” (2:12). We need to obey God. Paul says *therefore* – which relates directly to the preceding verse – *therefore obey!*

But Paul says that we are to work out our salvation. This doesn't mean that we sit down with a pencil and paper and work out what we think we need to do to be saved. God has provided a plan, and it is not up to us to determine what to do. God doesn't give us our daily food without our working at it (but it is nevertheless supplied by Him). God doesn't give us our earthly safety without our working at it (but we continue to pray and ask Him to provide it). Neither does God give us our eternal salvation without our working at it. Paul says that we need to work at it to ensure that we will receive the gift that God gives – but that is **not to say** that we earn it!

The response to working at it might be to grumble about it. This morning (Monday morning) as I walked into the office, an older gentleman was grumbling as he walked through the door – something about another 5 days to go before he can continue his weekend activities. We've all seen them in the workforce. They like to grumble about everything. But in working at our salvation, that is not who we are called to be “...*do all things without murmuring and disputing...*” (2:14 NKJV).

There is a reason for this: “...*that you might 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...*” (2:15 NKJV). People will see the contrast. They will note that we are different. We are called to be different. We are called to be *transformed*, not *conformed* to the world (Rom 12:2).

How does Paul relate to the Philippians (vs 16)?

He specifically relates his personal experiences with the Philippians to their obedience. If they fall away, then Paul says that he would have laboured (amongst them) in vain. It would have been a wasted effort. This shows that Paul thought (and knew, since as an apostle, he had perfect knowledge of God's revelation) that it was quite possible for the Philippians who had been obedient to stop being obedient and fall away.

In contrast to that, if Paul is sacrificed for the sake of the Philippians “...*poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith...*” (2:17), then that would be sufficient grounds for his gladness and rejoicing. Here Paul again shows his strong bond of affection for the Philippians – and them for him (2:18).

What was Paul's expectation for his circumstances?

Paul hopes to send Timothy as soon as he knows of the outcome of his trial (2:23). He is also hopeful of coming shortly himself. This places the date of the letter as later in the period of his imprisonment – probably mid way through the second year. Paul's expectation is that he will soon be released. He is optimistic of the outcome.

The bond between Paul and Timothy is strong. Timothy had been with Paul on the second journey when they first went to Philippi. Paul says he has no-one like minded. Whilst he was in Rome, he was busy writing letters, and with his visitors:

- Luke the beloved physician (Col 4:14)
- Timothy (Col 1:1 ; Phile 1:1 ; Php 1:1)
- John Mark (Col 4:10)
- Aristarchus, who started off to Rome with Paul & Luke (Col 4:10; Phile 24)
- Demas – who later left him (Col 4:14)
- Epaphras, a preacher from the Lycus valley (Col 4:12)
- Tychius from Ephesus (Eph 6:12; Col 4:7)
- Epaphroditus who came from Philippi to bring money for Paul. Whilst in Rome he became sick and nearly died (Php 2:25-27)
- A Jew named Jesus (also called Justus) Col 4:11)

Paul would have been busy indeed, not only in his letter writing, but with his co-workers in the gospel, and also with the others “...*who came to him...*”.

The respect that Paul had for Timothy (and Luke) stands out amongst the rest “...*for all seek their own, not the things of Christ...*” (2:21). Paul shows his concern for the Philippians, in that the reason that he wants to send Timothy is so that he might know and hear back about their affairs, and “...*be encouraged when I know your state...*” (2:20).

The occasion of the letter

Epaphroditus had been sent back to Philippi by Paul. Whilst in Rome he had become homesick for the Philippians, and he had also become physically sick - so sick that he almost died. The occasion of the letter is Epaphroditus' return. Paul says “...*receive him ... with all gladness...*” (2:29), so he must have not returned previously, and Paul speaks in the present tense. An alternative to the occasion of the letter is that Paul sent it with Timothy. However, if the return of Timothy with the letter was the occasion, then Paul wouldn't have needed to explain that he was *hoping* to send Timothy shortly – since he would have arrived with the letter.

What does Paul mean “what was lacking in your service”?

We could read this as a negative criticism, that the Philippians have not fulfilled their obligations, and that Epaphroditus had to work to do the things that they had left undone.

But there is no criticism in Paul's comment – in fact such would be contrary to the tone of the letter. The Philippians were *unable* to fulfil the obligations that they so earnestly desired to do, since they were so far away. They had not only sent Epaphroditus, but had also sent money to help Paul with him.

The reading of the verse should be: “...*(Epaphroditus)... came close to death, not regarding his own life, so that he might supply the things that you were unable to do...*”

Once again, the bond of affection between Paul and the Philippians shines through strongly.