

Philippians 2:1-11 – Copying Christ's Humility

Paul and the Philippians were together in receiving the grace of God, and being willing to carry on working and suffering for Christ. But they needed to stay together and continue until the end. This part of the letter is about togetherness, and how it comes through humility.

1. What is Christian unity? (v1-2)

Christian unity is first of all, to be united with Jesus Christ. This happens when we trust in him. His death becomes our death, and he gives us his life. He comes to live in us by his Spirit. This brings many blessings, such as encouragement (we are with him, and will arrive where he is), comfort (his love can never fail or let us down), fellowship (the real work of the Holy Spirit in a believer, e.g. Romans 5:3-5), and the tenderness and kindness of Christ in our lives. We must struggle to show this unity in our lives together, and not deny it. This was Christ's prayer for his people (John 17:20-23). We must aim for one heart and mind – one spirit and purpose. This will only happen as we all grow nearer to Christ himself.

2. What is the key to unity? (v3-4)

The key to unity is humility. Only when we think less of ourselves, and more of others, will we grow together. When someone tries to lift himself up above others, there will be disorder and trouble. But when we try to get underneath others to serve them, then this will bring us together. For this, verse 3, we must stop acting out of self-interest, or out of big ideas about ourselves (which are mistaken; we are not better than others). Rather, we must look to bring blessing to others. A person is only truly happy in themselves when they forget themselves and give themselves to others. That is how God made the human body (when one part stops being of use to the others, we call it “sickness”), and that is how Christ's body, the church, is too.

3. Who is our example? (v5-11)

In this, Paul was a great example; but the best example is Christ himself. Though he was God, he did not choose to use all his rights and remain in the rest and glory of heaven. He took a human nature to himself, and came down here amongst us to serve us. He became fully man as well as fully God; and as a man, he was a servant. In his life, he fully obeyed his Father, even going to the dreadful death of the cross for us. Is it too much for us to humble ourselves to help each other, when Christ left behind the worship of heaven to be hated, rejected and executed for us? We are only pleasing to Christ when we become like Christ, and are ready to do the same things.

It is only when we lower ourselves, that God will lift us up. He has shown us this with Jesus too. After his obedient service and suffering, he lifted him up to great glory. He made him Lord of all. All must bow to him, and that is the aim of the gospel. Have you bowed to him? “The way up is down”; if you want God to lift you up at last, you must lower yourself now. You must serve his people.