



THE LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS–STUDY GUIDE

LESSON 5 CHRIST IS THE SUPREME EXAMPLE

CHAPTER 2:1-11

They must avoid unprofitable arguments and give way to each other for the sake of unity. Christ's example of perfect humility is the ideal model. His humility led to the cross. But God has raised him to be Lord of all.

1: So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy:

Paul has urged his readers to stand together in defence of their faith. This keeping together requires Christ-like qualities. We are all different and the differences between us can cause friction. It requires real effort and a readiness to put aside what we want if we are to succeed in our relationships with others. It requires too a readiness to put God and His word before our own opinions and ideas.

So in verse 1 he is saying, "if you have appreciated the tender, reassuring and kindly characteristics of the Lord Jesus, if you have grasped that your fellowship together is based on all you have learnt from the Word of God, which in itself has developed spiritual qualities in you ...

2: complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind:

"Complete my joy by maintaining unity in the ecclesia." It is important to grasp that unity comes from a common understanding of the Word of God. "Fellowship of the spirit" is seen by some today as an experience which brings people together whatever their differences of outlook, and regardless of whether their thinking is in harmony with the will of God. It is clear from The Letter to the Philippians that fellowship began when the families in Philippi were baptised. They had listened to the Word of God being explained to them and had agreed that the apostle Paul's teaching was what they believed (see notes on 1:5). Paul believed the Bible was the inspired Word of God and contained all that was needed for salvation (2 Timothy 3:1 5,16). "Fellowship of the spirit" cannot be separated from fellowship which starts from accepting, without reservation, what the Spirit-inspired writings of the Bible have to tell us about God and His purpose.

The joy Paul refers to here, and so often in this letter, is also something which arises out of this unity of mind.

The basis of unity must be submission to what God tells us in His word (Isaiah 66:2). We sometimes refer to the essential doctrines as first principles. Paul was well aware that in time there would be false teachers who would try to distort the teaching of Jesus and the apostles (Acts 20:29,30; 2 Timothy 4:3,4). Here and elsewhere he urges his readers to stand by the Truth which has been committed to them (1:27; 3:17; 1 Timothy 6:20; 2 Timothy 1:13).

3: Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves.

"Selfishness or conceit" implies trying to form rival groups which take away from the unity of the ecclesia. The basis of this is usually pride when people are convinced that they alone know best. Or it can be jealousy; we simply want to work off a grudge against someone, like some of those preaching in competition with Paul (1:15). It is sad to realise that this can happen even amongst the best of brethren and sisters. "In humility count others better than yourselves," means that we must be humble enough to believe that we are not always right. We can always learn a great deal from our brethren and sisters.

4-7 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men:

We can paraphrase these words to bring out the sense of these verses as simply as possible:

"Do not feel the world has got to revolve around you. Put other people before yourself. Try to have the same mentality as Christ who, in spite of having status or rank as the Son of God, did not try to make out he was

equal with God. But rather emptied himself of any pride and took it upon himself to be the servant of others, making himself experience what being human was like.”

“The form of God” is contrasted with “the form of a servant”. Because Jesus was the Son of God, he showed men what God was like. He was “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14); everything about the Lord Jesus Christ helps us to understand what God is like.

We sometimes say a son is “just like” his father. So Jesus could say, “He who has seen me has seen the Father”. But he also emphasised: “My Father is greater than I”. He made clear his dependence on his Father in all things. He never “grasped at equality with God”, as though equality was some prize to be carried off. That was what the serpent suggested Adam and Eve might do: “Ye shall be as gods,” it said (Genesis 3:5). Human efforts to be like God are the root of human trouble. Pride comes before a fall. Jesus knew that as a Son he must be obedient (Hebrews 5:8).

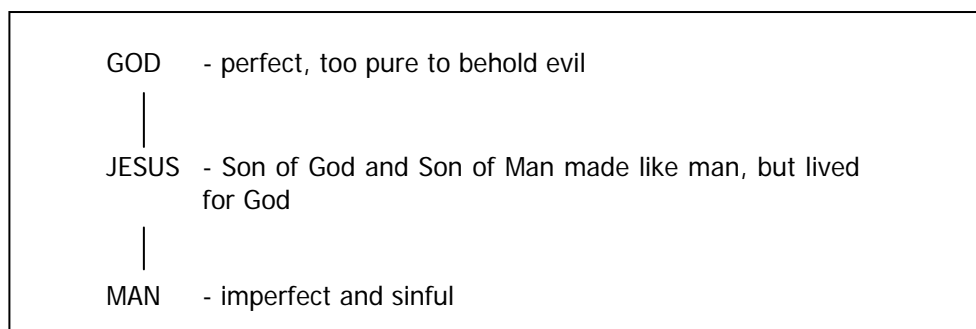
Bringing together God and Man

The wonderful thing about the person of Jesus is that he perfectly shows us what God is like, yet he was actually born of a human mother and shared our nature. “Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity” (Hebrews 2:14 NIV). It is precisely because Jesus was born with the same feelings and impulses as us, and therefore “was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15), that he is able to be our representative. He was one of us, yet he overcame our tendency to sin and submitted to his Father’s will completely.

If God had ignored human sin, we would have been left in a helpless state, doomed to continue forever making a mess of the world and a misery of so many lives. God wants us to realise how harmful sin is. In the perfect life of Jesus we see the contrast between the life of God and the sinful life of man.

But God wants to forgive us. He does so by telling us that if we join ourselves to His Son (which we do when we are baptised), then we demonstrate that we understand our need to turn away from sin. Christ shared our nature and experienced death. But because he did not sin, God raised him from the dead. He now lives eternally with God. Through Christ then, we can share the same hope, of being like him and thus like God (John 17:19-21; Romans 5:1; Hebrews 2:17; 1 John 1:5-10). What we have attempted to describe is referred to as the Atonement. The word almost explains itself; it is about making God and mankind at one.

This diagram may help:



It is Jesus Christ, both Son of God and Son of Man, who is able to bring together God and man. No one can adequately express the wonder of this method of providing for man’s salvation. No one can adequately express the wonderful and glorious achievement of Jesus.

8-11: And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which 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 confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Paul tells us that the love and obedience of Jesus reached its climax when he laid down his life on the cross. It enabled his Father to raise him to a new and glorious life, to make him the foundation stone of the ecclesias,

the mediator for all mankind and the king of all creation. Eventually, when Christ has established the kingdom of God on earth and reigns from Jerusalem, all men will acknowledge him as king. And by this means, they will give glory to God (Psalm 72; Isaiah 2:2-4; Zechariah 14:9,16; Luke 1:32,33; 1 Corinthians 15:25-28; Revelation 7:9-11).

Is Jesus Christ our Lord now, to the glory of God the Father?

Questions

1. Why is it important for believers to be of the same mind in Christ?
2. What should be our attitude to our brethren and sisters? What example does Paul give us to follow?
3. In what way was Jesus in the form of God?
4. Why was it necessary for Jesus to be born as a man?
5. Explain how Jesus became a servant
6. Why did God give Jesus a name which is above every name?
7. Paul says we must do two things as followers of Christ. What are they?
8. Use the Bible passages printed at the end of the lesson to make a list of things they tell us about the Kingdom of God.