

Philippians 1:27–2:8

Philippi a Roman colony

Citizenship — meant obeying the laws of the city

Religion — an oath to Caesar as ‘lord’, ‘son of god’, ‘Saviour’

Listen to Paul:

- 27 *Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ,
so that whether I come and see you or am absent,
I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit,
with one mind striving side by side for the faith*
- 28 *not frightened in anything by your opponents.*

Christ’s people belong to another ‘kingdom’ and have its citizenship

They need to be united in their faith

Locking arms and standing firm

Courageous in the face of their opponents

They could face crucifixion — like their Saviour, the only true Saviour

*This is a clear sign to them of their destruction
but of your salvation, and that from God.*

Your immovable fidelity under suffering points to the End:

- (a) *their* judgment,
- (b) *your* salvation.

‘Blood of martyrs, seed of the church’ (Tertullian, 2nd C).

He continues (1:29–30):

- 29 *For it has been granted to you
that for the sake of Christ
you should not only believe in him
but also suffer for his sake,*
- 30 *engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had
and now hear that I still have.*

The twofold ‘gift’ from Christ:

- (a) believe in him;
- (b) suffer on behalf of him
(for the same things he suffered for —he was the Messiah)

We continue into chapter two
 Famous words on the humility of Christ
 Who is the one we seek to imitate

He begins by describing a Christian community as it should be
 Good to reflect how we measure up: 2:1

*So if there is any encouragement in Christ,
 any comfort from love,
 any participation in the Spirit,
 any affection
 any sympathy*

Do we at CCLB

encourage one another?
 comfort one another?
 are consciously aware that we share the Spirit of God?
 are affectionate towards one another?
 are sympathetic towards one another?

Challenging words

Now he comes at it from another tack (no less challenging)

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

There is a context to these stirring words: disunity in Philippi

Disunity in Philippi

- 2:3 Do nothing from *selfish ambition* or *conceit*,
 but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.
- 2:14 Do all things without *grumbling* or *disputing*...
- 4:2 I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche *to agree* in the Lord.
- 4:3 Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women,
 who have *laboured side by side* (1:27 – same verb) with me in the gospel
 together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers,
 whose names are in the book of life.
 Euodia... Syntyche – implied: women who were educated and prominent
 – who had worked with Paul in evangelism
 – who were now a source of division

Paul then zeros in on the members of the Philippian Church

3 *Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit,
but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.*

4 *Let each of you look not only to his own interests,
but also to the interests of others.*

A true unity

(a) regarding Christian faith, and

(b) equal respect for one another

based on their experience in the body of Christ (as it should be).

Paul is calling on each of us to be humble-minded and others-centred

Now here is an astonishing thing.

What follows: a profound statement about the incarnation of Christ.

It is a key passage in the weighty theology textbooks

What is its occasion?

An argument between two Christian women in Philippi.

What is its application?

Disunity any church

v5 *Have this mind among yourselves,
which is yours in Christ Jesus.*

Let the mind of Christ be the mind that directs each member

Let the mind of Christ be the mind that directs our church

What is that mind?

*who, though he was in the form (morphē) of God,
did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,*

From all eternity the pre-existent Christ was by nature God

He was equally 'God' as God his Father

Yet he did not hang on to that

But as we shall see was obedient and left heaven for us

Paul continues

v7 *but emptied himself,*

by taking the form (morphē) of a servant [slave]

This is Paul's account to the Incarnation of the Son of God

- He 'emptied himself' — a metaphor for 'he humbled himself'
- As the incarnate Son of God he took the 'form' (nature of) a slave

When he was among us Jesus was both and at the same time

By nature God

By nature a slave

Yet outwardly he was like us as a man

being born in the likeness of men.

8 *And being found in human form*

Religious art often misrepresents Jesus as *luminous*

But no. He looked like us!

But then Paul describes how low Jesus lowered himself

he humbled [literally, 'lowered'] himself

*by becoming obedient to the point of death,
even death on a cross.*

Here is the one we are to imitate in our church's life

Death on a cross (commonplace back then; abolished by Constantine 4th C) :

- Cicero reflects a Roman citizen's elitism in his words about crucifying slaves, '...the very word cross should be far removed not only from the person of a *Roman citizen*, but from his thoughts, his eyes and his ears...'

- A form of words used at a crucifixion: 'Lictor, go bind his hands, veil his head, hang him on *the tree of shame*'.

- 'Crucifixions were usually carried out outside the city limits, thus stressing the victim's *rejection* from the civic community. They were a form of entertainment to intimidate slaves. Because of the absence of blood shed out of an open and lethal wound, which evoked the glorious fate of warriors, this

type of death was considered unclean, shameful, *unmanly*, and unworthy of a freeman. In addition, the victim was usually *naked*.

Other passages teaching the pre-existence of Christ:

- John 1:1, 14 In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God...And the word became flesh and dwelt amongst us...
- 2 Cor. 8:9 You know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich yet for your sakes he became poor that you though his poverty might be rich
- Heb. 1:1-3 Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature

Some texts teaching humility in the Bible

- 1 Sam. 16:7 *The Lord said to Samuel, 'Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart'.*
- Psa. 138:6 *For though the Lord is high, he regards the lowly but the haughty he knows [engages with] from afar.*
- Psa. 147:10-11 *His delight is not in the strength of the horse, nor his pleasure in the legs of a man, but the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love.*
- Isaiah 57:15 *For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: 'I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.*
- 1 Pet. 5:5-7 *Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble'. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.*
- Matt. 11:28-30 *Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light'.*

Reflection: Paul must regard highly genuine humility and congregational unity since his exemplar of that humility is Christ's lowering himself from deity to crucified slave.

- Paul deeply concerned at reports of division within the church in Philippi.
- This disunity seems to have been caused by a disagreement between the two women.
- Such disunity renders the church spiritually ineffective in ministry to their members and to outsiders.
- Paul instructed the warring members to respect one another and to look to the example of Christ's humility.
- Powerful passage about Christ's 'mind' (which their members are to replicate).

His pre-existence: by nature, God; equality with God

Voluntarily and intentionally 'emptied' himself:

now in 'human' form (inner nature)

in outward appearance (schema)

Obedient to God: he submitted to 'death on a cross'

- This powerful passage a measure of Paul's concern for humility and unity in Philippi.
- In the interests of unity James wrote: 'let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger'. Our tongues are very important in promoting love and unity. Let us think carefully before we speak.