

PHILIPPIANS – 3rd CD

III. PAUL'S EXHORTATION TO STEADFASTNESS AND UNITY (1:27-2:18)

In v26 Paul turns their thoughts from his imprisonment to his coming (parousia) to them and now turns the focus onto their circumstances.

We now come to the heart of his purpose for writing which includes the sublime passage regarding the mind of Christ as a motivation for their conduct together.

A. PAUL APPEALS FOR STEADFASTNESS AND UNITY IN THE FACE OF OPPOSITION (1:27-30)

- Fee v27 "The whole is a single, nearly impossible, sentence in Greek, which probably assumes this form because Paul tries to include all the urgencies of the letter in the opening word...This paragraph thus holds the keys to much in this letter."

Fee's translation: "'Only - in the light of what I have just said about my coming, but *in the meantime* before I get there - let this be what I hear *you* to be about,' namely, 'living out your citizenship - the heavenly one of course - in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.'"

- Motyer "The force of the word 'only' is tremendous. Nothing else must distract or excuse them from this great objective; it must be their all-embracing occupation."
- Barth "'Only' - lifted like a warning finger." (cf Gal 5:13)

Whether Paul is present or not.

- Motyer "An apostolic church is not necessarily a church in which an apostolic person is resident, but it must be cast in the apostolic mould."

"Conduct yourselves" (NIV, NASB etc) fails to pick up nuance.

- literally - "Exercise your citizenship worthily of the gospel of Christ."

Amplified Bible - "Only be sure as citizens so to conduct yourselves..."

Paul is making a play on their "dual citizenship."

- Fee "As Philippi was a colony of Rome in Macedonia, so the church was a 'colony of heaven' at Philippi."
- Motyer "Philippi was a Roman 'colony', a title seen as one of the coveted prizes of the Roman empire. 'Colonial' status meant

that the people of Philippi were reckoned as Roman citizens. Their names were on the rolls at Rome; their legal position and privileges were those of Rome itself. They were a homeland in miniature. But all this is also true of them spiritually as men and women in Christ. Grace has made them citizens of a heavenly city; in their far-off land they are the heavenly homeland in miniature; heaven's laws are their laws, and their privileges, its privileges."

- Hawthorne "Originally Jerusalem was the ideal city, localised and restricted in scope. But under the influence of the Psalmist and prophet the concept 'city' was expanded until Jerusalem was not only home for every member of the commonwealth of Israel, but a spiritual fellowship into which the nations of the world eventually would enter (see Ps 87 READ), a universal centre of worship of Israel's God, the God of the whole earth."

The gospel is again the crucial matter (see 1:5, 7, 12, 16, 2:22, 4:3) - 'worthy of the gospel'.

Three ways of living worthy:-

(1) Standing firm in one Spirit (not in one spirit)

- Motyer "When Paul speaks of their unity in the Spirit, he is directing attention to the blessings bestowed upon them by the Spirit who has incorporated them into the church, regenerated them into new life, and indwells them in the fullness of divine power."
- Fee "What is altogether missing in Paul is any hint that 'spirit' might be an anthropological metaphor for a 'community disposition'.
"Paul himself uses this very language ('in one Spirit') in Eph 2:18 (cf 4:4), 1 Cor 12:13 to describe the Holy Spirit, precisely in passages where the emphasis is on believers' common experience of the one Spirit as the basis for unity."

(2) With one mind "as one person" (Fee) for the faith of the gospel

- Motyer "It is a single description of that complex of heart, mind and will (Greek psyche) which is our experience of ourselves 'on the inside' day by day."

(3) Contending together - Greek athleo - "to engage in an athletic context"

- Paul repeats the word in 4:3 when referring to Euodia and Sytyche.
- for the faith the gospel (cf Jude 3 but different Greek word)

v28 without being "frightened" (only use in N.T. - the uncontrollable stampede of startled horses - Motyer)

They are being opposed - maybe, as Paul by those in Rome for whom Caesar is lord.

They are not to be startled - (Paul uses double-negative - "not in anything")

This is to be the stance of those who know "that to die is gain" and who "press on to the upward call of God" (3:14).

- Fee "Such people cannot be intimidated by anyone or anything since they belong to the future with a kind of certainty that people whose lives are basically controlled by fate could never understand...indeed such a disposition will serve as an omen with regard to the opponents of their destruction."
- v29 We are called not only to believe, but also to suffer (not suffering in general, but) for his sake.
- v30 Experiencing the same conflict you saw in me (at Philippi - beating and imprisonment) and now hear to be in me (in Rome - imprisonment).

B. UNITY THROUGH HUMILITY (2:1-4)

v1 Therefore - following Paul's discussion of the worthy life in 1:27-30.

- a further call for unity

- Motyer "Paul's repetition of the subject not only underlines its importance but lifts it to a higher level: unity is not just a useful weapon against the world, but rather it belongs to the very essence of Christian life."

- A "trinity" of motivations - cf - Grace in 2 Cor 13:14 - Christ, love, Spirit.

(a) Any comfort in Christ.

(b) Any consolation of love.

(c) Any sharing or participation in the Spirit.

- Fee "Indeed, the Spirit is the empowering agent of all that God is currently doing in them."

v2 Complete my joy

- Fee "In keeping with the tenor of the whole letter, he interjects this strong personal appeal...His own life and apostleship are deeply bound up with his converts' well-being and especially with their perseverance."

Paul has already referred to his joy in the gospel advancing in Rome. Now he wants his joy completed by successful gospel advance in Philippi.

(a) By being like-minded (NIV) (Having the same 'mind-set' - Fee)

(b) Maintaining the same love

(c) Together in soul (sunsynche) and purpose.

v3 Do nothing from selfishness or vain conceit (lit. "empty glory").

Selfish ambition hinders God's purposes.

Jesus invited us to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow him.

It is in losing our lives that we find them. Wrong ambitions are desperately dangerous in God's work.

Phil 2:6-11 - the two words 'empty' and 'glory' appear at the beginning and end of the 'hymn'. Jesus 'emptied' himself and obtained 'glory'.

- Fee " 'Selfish ambition' stands at the heart of human fallenness...Paul understands that if these attitudes are allowed to continue unchecked, the believing community in Philippi is headed for serious trouble."

With humility - a uniquely Christian virtue. The Greeks regarded 'lowliness' or 'humility' to be shameful.

Christian humility has its roots in a relationship with God.

- Fee "Humility is thus not to be confused with false modesty, or with that kind of abject servility that only repulses, wherein the 'humble one' by obsequiousness gains more self-serving attention than he or she could do otherwise. Rather, it has to do with a proper estimation of oneself, the stance of the creature before the Creator, utterly dependent and trusting."

Not necessary to see one another as 'better than' (NIV) you are, but rather to be more preoccupied with their interests than yours.

Paul uses his favourite 'one another' - a word which emphasises the community relationships to the church (who are e.g. 'members of one another' - Rom 12:5).

See also:- 1 Thess 5:11, 1 Cor 11:25, Rom 13:8, 1 Thess 5:15, Eph 4:2, Gal 6:2, Eph 4:32, Eph 5:21, Rom 12:10 etc.

- Fee "To translate this 'others' as in the NIV is to make it too general and thus to tone down the community significance of the exhortation."

C. THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST (2:5-11)

v5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus.

Paul then breaks into one of the most magnificent passages in the N.T. regarding Christ. Many believe it is an early Christian hymn.

Full of theological revelation and grandeur. (Not time and place for us to dissect at length.)

(1) As God he emptied himself.

- Motyer "It begins with one who was in the form of God, that is one who possessed inwardly and displayed outwardly the very nature of God himself."

He did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped.

- Lightfoot "a prize which must not slip from his grasp"
- Vincent "something to be held on to at all costs"

v7 But emptied himself.

- Motyer "We ought to notice that in asking the perfectly natural question, 'Of what did Christ Jesus empty himself?', we are, in fact, departing from the direct line of thought in this passage. For the verb *emptied* is at once followed by an explanatory clause, *taking the form of a servant* (slave). Our eye, in other words, is removed from the realm of mystery (the relation between the new incarnate life and the eternal divine life) and focused on the realm of historical factuality, the reality of the eternal God becoming truly man. It is not 'Of what did he empty himself?' but 'Into what did he empty himself?'"
- Augustine "He emptied himself not by losing what he was but by taking to him what he was not."

Taking the form of a servant.

The passage is reminiscent of Is 53:12 where we are told that the Servant 'poured out his soul to death'.

- Motyer "The fundamental thought is that of a deliberate, conscious consigning of oneself to a foreseen situation: the Servant of the Lord brought himself voluntarily and totally into death; Jesus, in order to die, first brought his total being down to the condition of the Lord's Servant."
 - (i) The purpose of the change was obedient service - He took form of a slave.
 - (ii) The sphere of that service was humanity - he was born in likeness of men.

But:-

- Wright "The real humiliation of the incarnation and the cross is that one who was himself God, and who never during the whole process stopped being God, could embrace such a vocation."
- Lewis "Man is indeed what he was, but not all that he was; he was truly man but not merely man."

(2) As man He humbled himself.

v8 Being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death.

Christ possessed the immortality which belonged to God alone. He subjected his immortality to death. Nothing was held back. Everything was given up.

- Motyer "He humbled himself. This feature, so central to Phil 2:6-8, must find its root in Isa 53:7-9 where for the first time in the O.T. we meet with a consenting sacrifice.
- Motyer "Whenever a sinner brought his animal to the altar and laid his hand on the beast's head the lesson was plain: this stands in my place; this bears my sin. Yet the substitution was incomplete, for the central citadel of sin, the will, was left unrepresented in the uncomprehending, unconsenting animal. Isaiah foresaw that only a perfect Man could be the perfect substitute and that at the heart of this perfection lay a will delighting to do the will of God."

It is hard for us to see the Cross as N.T. believers saw it.

It would be strange for us to see ladies wearing a guillotine or an axe dangling on a gold chain around their necks. Perhaps the public guillotine of the French Revolution is the nearest we can imagine to compare with the Cross - except that the level of suffering bears no comparison.

- Fee "Here is the very heart of Pauline theology, both of his understanding of God as such and of his understanding of what God has done and is doing in our fallen world. Here is where the one who as 'equal with God' has most fully revealed the truth about God: that God is love and that his love expresses itself in self-sacrifice - cruel, humiliating death on a cross - for the sake of those he loves. The divine weakness (death at the hands of his creatures, his enemies) is the divine scandal (the cross was reserved for slaves and insurrectionists). No one in Philippi, we must remind ourselves, used the cross as a symbol for their faith; there were no gold crosses embossed on Bibles or worn as pendants around the neck or lighted on the steeple of the local church. The cross was God's - and thus their - scandal, God's contradiction to human wisdom and power: that the one they worshiped as Lord of all, including Caesar, had been crucified as a state criminal at the hands of one of Caesar's proconsuls; that the Almighty should appear in human dress, and that he should do so in *this* way, as a 'Messiah' who died by crucifixion."

- Lewis "In polite Roman society the word 'cross' was an obscenity, not to be uttered in conversation. It is understandable, therefore, that the style of the hymn becomes abrupt at this point, the additional phrase 'even death on a cross' being inserted like an exclamation mark to signal emphasis or astonishment. It took Christ as far beneath his original incarnation as the incarnation was beneath his heavenly glory. In his coming he made himself a beggar; in his dying he made himself a curse. In the one he descended to earth; in the other he descended to hell."

(3) God has exalted Him as Lord of all. (2:9-11)

Both resurrection and ascension are presupposed.

v9 Highly exalted - only place in N.T. - compound word "hyperexalted".

Name above every name - Two possibilities:-

(i) "Jesus" - (see next phrase, "that at the name of Jesus")

- Fee "If so, then Paul does not mean that he has now been given that name, but that in highly exalting him, God has bestowed on the name of Jesus a significance that excels all other names. Moreover, 'Jesus' is in fact a *name*, whereas 'Lord' could be argued to be a title."

(ii) "Lord" - as equivalent of Yahweh.

Then v10 & 11 borrows from Isa 45:23.

- Fee "This emphasis on Yahweh, 'the Lord', as the one unto whom all shall give obeisance, seems to certify that what Paul has in mind is none other than *the* name, Yahweh itself, but in its Greek form of 'the Lord', which has now been 'given' to Jesus."

Also a straight challenge in Philippi to 'Lord Caesar'.

- Fee "The significance of Paul's using the language of Isaiah in this way lies with his substituting 'at the name of Jesus' for the 'to me' of Isa 45:23, which refers to Yahweh, the God of Israel. In this stirring oracle (Isa 45: 18-24a) Yahweh is declared to be God alone, over all that he has created and thus over all other gods and nations."

"Paul now asserts that through Christ's resurrection and at his ascension God has transferred this right to obeisance to the Son; he is the Lord to whom every knee shall eventually bow."

- Eadie "The name referred to is 'Jesus' and the title LORD with which every tongue is to greet him, characterises that universal presidency with which he is now entrusted. 'Jesus is LORD'."

v11 Every tongue will finally acknowledge Jesus Christ is Lord.

- Fee "One can scarcely gainsay the christological implications of this confession in the present passage. On the one hand, in the Jewish synagogue the appellation 'Lord' had long before been substituted for God's 'name' (Yahweh). The early believers had now transferred that 'name' (Lord) to the risen Jesus. Thus, Paul says, in raising Jesus from the dead, God has exalted him to the highest place and bestowed on him the name of God."

God's ultimate person and glory is revealed in Christ, not as one grasping for equality with God, but pouring himself out in sacrificial love, taking the lowest place and finding the full expression of that love in his crucifixion. Now he has been exalted by God to indescribable glory and honour.

- Lewis "Jesus did not begin to be Lord at the ascension, but he began to be Lord in a new way. To Paul, Jesus did not become the Lord of glory *after* he was crucified, for it was precisely the Lord of Glory who *was crucified* (1 Cor 2:8). But for the first time he was in heaven *in our nature*, and at the right hand of God as the god man."
- Fee "In the final analysis, therefore, this passage stands at the heart of Paul's understanding of God. Christ serves as pattern, to be sure; but he does so as the one who most truly expresses God's nature. As God, Christ poured himself out, not seeking his own advantage. As man - and not ceasing to be God - he humbled himself unto death on the cross. That this is what God is like is the underlying Pauline point; and since God is in process of recreating us in his image, this becomes the heart of the present appeal. The Philippians - and we ourselves - are not called upon simply to 'imitate God' by what we do, but to have this very mind, the mind of Christ, developed in us, so that we too bear God's image in our attitudes and relationships within the Christian community - and beyond."

D. APPLICATION (2:12-18)

Immediately followed by a "therefore".

So easy to forget that this great passage stands not simply as rich theology but the basis for Paul's appeal.

(1) Christian activity and the indwelling God (v12-13)

v12 In view of Christ's phenomenal example we are to work out our salvation with fear and trembling for God is at work in us.

- Dr Martyn Lloyd Jones "Perhaps one of the most perfect summaries of the Christian life to be found anywhere."
- Motyer "God is effectually and ceaselessly at work in you, both to will and to work - to recreate our wills and to impart to us his own capacity for effectual working."

But Fee objects that "evangelical Protestants tend to individualize Paul's corporate imperatives" and argues: "Paul's concern lies elsewhere" namely in "the believing *community* in Philippi." He argues that "what follows the imperative in v14-16 makes that certain".

- Fee "In Pauline theology people are saved one by one to be sure (which is the point of discontinuity with election in the O.T.), but (in continuity with the O.T.) they are saved so as to become a 'people for God's name.' The concern in this passage is with their being his people in Philippi, as v15 makes certain ('that you may become blameless and pure, God's children without fault in a crooked and depraved generation').....Thus everything about the sentence and its context indicates that Paul with this imperative is not referring to the 'salvation' of individual believers, but the salvation that God has wrought in making them a people of God for his name in Philippi, and that at issue is their getting on with it. Even though as before (vv 4-5) they will have to respond individually, the imperative itself has to do with what takes place in their community life."

Salvation is not only something we receive individually but something we 'work out' together.

We are able to work it out because God himself is at work (energon) in and among us. It does not mean that God is 'doing it for us' but that God supplies the necessary empowering both to will and to do.

- Fee "Christian ethics lies not just in the 'willing'. In Rom 7:18, in his description of life before and outside of Christ, but looked at from the perspective of life in the Spirit, Paul described *pre-Christian life* with these same verbs. To 'will', he said, was present with me; he recognised the good and spiritual thing that the Law truly is. But without the Spirit, he goes on, 'carrying out the good' does not happen. As a believer, however, Paul will have none of that (i.e. of their not being

able to carry out the good that they will); hence he urges the Philippians to 'work it out' precisely because God (by his Spirit, is implied) is present with them both to will and to do 'the good'."

(2) Christian character and the outshining light. (v14-15)

v14 Do all things without grumbling and complaining.

This is an echo of the Israelites in the wilderness (cf 1 Cor 10:10).

God hates that attitude and prefers us to abound in thanksgiving.

They were to be

- (i) blameless and innocent
- (ii) children without fault
- (iii) in midst of a crooked generation
- (iv) among whom they were to shine as lights
- (v) holding onto/out the word of life (cf Dan 12:3)

- Motyer " 'Light' is a beautiful illustration of something that does what it has to do by being what it ought to be."

(3) Christian incentive: the day of Christ. (v16b)

Paul always keeps that day in focus. Very conscious of it as being the focal point of all our endeavours, where everything is finally and fully assessed.

(4) Christian suffering and the call to rejoice. (v17-18)

Paul himself rejoices in the midst of his suffering.

"I rejoice to share my joy with you all."

- Fee "Suffering for Paul is ultimately a theological matter; it has to do with our relationship with Christ and our unyielding commitment to the gospel in our present, very pagan world."

CONCLUSION

APPLICATION