

Of One Mind—In Christ

*“If there be
therefore any
consolation in
Christ, if any
comfort of love, if
any fellowship of
the Spirit, if any
bowels and mercies,
Fulfil ye my joy,
that ye be
likeminded, having
the same love, being
of one accord, of
one mind.”
—Philippians 2:1,2*

THE BOOK OF PHILIPPI-

ans is one of the epistles that the Apostle Paul wrote while he was imprisoned in Rome. Years earlier, he had traveled to Philippi, which was in Macedonia, after receiving a vision from God, recorded in Acts 16:9-12. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul expressed his great love for them, but also exhorted them to retain the spirit of unity—the spirit of Christ—which he

had witnessed when in their midst. The focus of this lesson is on chapter 2 of Paul’s epistle, and our title, “Of One Mind—in Christ,” is its recurring theme.

The first two verses of this chapter, used as our opening text, was a wide-ranging exhortation to the Philippian church. While this letter was addressed specifically to these brethren, it is also written to the entire family of God. Therefore, it is good counsel

for consecrated believers everywhere, because it is an exhortation to unity, and to have an abundance of love one for another. These verses show that if we are to appreciate and enjoy the spirit of oneness and harmony, we should remember the life and example of our Lord—that our unity is in Christ.

We are also to remember the sweet “fellowship of the Spirit” that the Truth has brought into our life. Those who have not seen the emptiness of the friendship of this world cannot understand what the apostle speaks of when he refers to this spiritual communion. Remembering the delight of our fellowship, we will be careful to protect it, lest we lose its joy. Let us recall, too, our position in the body of Christ, that we are “many members,” but “one body.”—I Cor. 12:12

Paul continues in these opening verses by admonishing us to live in harmony with one another—be “of one accord.” Those at Philippi gave evidence of being in accord by desiring to know the will of God, and that should be true with us today. Each of us is interested in knowing the will of God, and it is the desire of every consecrated heart to do his will. There will be times when others do not act exactly as we might want. Nevertheless, as we consider our brethren, we are fully confident, as Paul was, that the consecrated desire of each one is to know and do God’s will.

RIGHT THINKING

Verses 3 and 4 read, “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the

things of others.” In these verses, Paul is telling us that if we want to do the things mentioned in the previous verses, we must first learn to have our thoughts in accordance with certain principles of righteousness. He emphasizes this truth again later in this epistle, where he exhorts: “Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.” (chap. 4:8) The Apostle Paul knew that right thinking leads to right actions. If we have properly examined ourselves, we know that the apostle was laying down a wonderful standard by saying, “think on these things.” Thus, in our earnest desire to do right, let us realize the importance of thinking right.

Let nothing be done for self-seeking or private gain. Let nothing be done that will create strife, friction, or factions in the body of Christ. Let nothing be done for vainglory or for the purpose of exalting self. These were the exhortations Paul gave to the Philippian brethren, and to us. How may we keep from trying to exalt self, or from doing things for vainglory? The apostle says we avoid this by thinking properly, humbly, “in lowliness of mind.” In so doing, we will be like the Master, who said, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.” (Matt. 11:29) Jesus was humble in heart, and Paul encourages us to be of the same disposition. Only by doing this will we be able to see in others qualities which are better than we possess in ourselves.

We should strive to see in every other member of the body of Christ something that is developed to a better degree than it is in ourselves. When we find this, and think upon that special quality which our brother possesses, the battle is won, and we have followed the exhortation of the Apostle Paul and the Master. Hence, let us forget the things in which we might excel, if they are keeping us from seeing that in which our brother excels. If we can appreciate those things in which our brethren do well, we will have little trouble in esteeming them better than ourselves.

THE MIND—DISPOSITION—OF CHRIST

Quoting from *Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott*, verses 5-11 read: "Let this disposition be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who, though being in God's form, yet did not meditate a usurpation to be like God, but divested himself, taking a bondman's form, having been made in the likeness of men; and being in condition as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. And therefore God supremely exalted him, and freely granted to him that name which is above every name, in order that in the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those things in heaven, and of those things on earth, and of those things beneath; and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, for the glory of God the Father."

Jesus was originally a spirit being, known as the Word of God—his chief representative and mouth-piece. Yet he was willing to leave this high station and come to earth in order to fulfill God's purposes. He did not try to exalt himself as Satan had done

when given some authority as Lucifer. Jesus was desirous to do only the Father's will. He was without pride, or any spirit of self-seeking, and had no vainglory. He gave up his heavenly home and became a man.

Jesus, who with God had created man, became the servant of man, by providing the redemptive price for Adam and his progeny. In Luke 22:27 Jesus said, "Who is greater, the one who reclines at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves." (*New American Standard Bible*) Even if Jesus had not shared in the work of bringing man into existence, his human life's experiences would have been a demonstration of humility. His was a greater demonstration of humility, however, when we realize that, as the chief instrument of his Father, he created the human race, and yet had become a man in order to lay down his life for their salvation.

There were some who appreciated Jesus as a perfect man, and marveled at the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth. (Luke 4:22) Even his enemies recognized that no man had ever spoken to them as this man had done. (John 7:46) Nevertheless, he was rejected and condemned to death, humbling himself still further. Jesus died, but even in this he did not die an ordinary death. It was by crucifixion, an ignominious form of death, between two thieves. Three and one-half years earlier, the Heavenly Father had declared, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," and as he hung upon the cross, that is all that mattered to Jesus.—Matt. 3:17

Because of Jesus' faithfulness unto death, and his subsequent resurrection and exaltation to glory, Paul declares in Philippians 2:10,11 that those in heaven and in earth, as well as every tongue, will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to God's glory. He even speaks of those "beneath" the earth who will likewise confess the name of Christ. Those beneath are the multitudes of mankind now in their tombs, but who will come forth in the resurrection of the dead. These are wonderful words of life, for they tell of the blessing to come to all the families of the earth because of our Lord's humility.

We think again of verse 5, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus," because Christ Jesus is our example of humility. Let us have the same spirit as Christ, the same disposition of humility, realizing our weaknesses due to imperfection. Jesus gave up much in every way. How little, by comparison, we have to give up. We have no cause for vainglory, nor for seeking to exalt self. What we do have, has come to us because of the love and grace of God.

THE HOPE OF GLORY

The Philippian brethren knew that if they humbled themselves, they would be exalted and share Christ's kingdom, and we know the same thing. The Apostle Peter wrote, "All of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time." (I Pet. 5:5,6) What a wonderful description of humility is found in these words.

Pride is the sin of a heart uplifted against God, and usually includes being wise in one's own conceit. As a quality, pride can be based upon many things. One can be proud of his material possessions, or of the honor and esteem given him in the circles in which he lives and moves, in either social or business life. One can have pride in natural beauty or talents. Pride can also be an expression of human folly and disrespect toward others, simply because one thinks of himself more highly than he ought to think. Any of these things is pride, which God utterly opposes.

Humility is the grace of modesty, and the virtue of not worshiping self to any degree. It is based upon reverence for God, and is developed through the wisdom of maturity. Anyone who is mature and able to consider true worth as it exists within himself, will be modest, and cannot be proud. This is the reason humility is a mark of genuine greatness.

God resists any who are proud, vain, or self-seeking among his people, because they have been enlightened. They, above all others, should appreciate that it is only by God's grace, or unmerited favor, that they are in covenant relationship with him. (Eph. 2:4-9) Indeed, God's grace can only be given to the humble, the meek, the modest—those who exalt him alone in their hearts. Only such are in a condition by which God can exalt them in due time. Thus, the text, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus," takes on deeper meaning. Humility in the household of God is the basis of unity, and is the foundation of oneness with God, his beloved Son Jesus, and within the body of Christ.

FURTHER EXHORTATIONS

The Apostle Paul continues in verses 12-18 of our lesson: "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. Do all things without murmurings and disputings: That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain. Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all. For the same cause also do ye joy, and rejoice with me."

There are several interesting thoughts in this part of the apostle's letter. We first note, in verse 12, the use of the words "presence" and "absence." This was given as a contrast, that the brethren at Philippi would continue to be faithful, whether Paul was in their presence or was absent from them. The word translated "presence" is the Greek word *parousia*. It is the same word that is used when the disciples asked Jesus, "What will be the sign of thy presence [*parousia*], and of the consummation of the age?" (Matt. 24:3, *Diaglott*) This helps us to understand an important truth, because it is definite as to what *parousia* means in Paul's use of it in Philippians 2:12. It denotes "presence," not "coming," even though it is sometimes thus translated in the New Testament. Therefore, Paul's words "my presence," in our lesson are something we should remember

when discussing the Lord's Second Advent and the meaning of the word *parousia*, for here the word is used in a way that the definition "coming" would not fit at all.

"Work out your own salvation," Paul says. Certainly this clear statement does not teach the thought of "once in grace, always in grace." At first, it may appear that Paul's words are in conflict with the Scriptural truth that salvation, through the redemptive work of Christ, is a free gift from God. (Rom. 3:24; 5:15-21) Indeed, salvation from Adamic condemnation is free, but once we have received this gift, and become justified in God's sight, there is further work to be done, as Paul indicates. We must faithfully do God's will. We must prove ourselves worthy of eternal life and "by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality."—Rom. 2:7

We are to work out our salvation "with fear and trembling," the apostle says. This does not imply slavish terror, but deep concern and diligence so as to not fall short of the goal. This is not the reverential fear spoken of in certain Scriptures, but is a different Greek word. It is used by Paul in another place in this way: "Beloved, let us cleanse ourselves, . . . bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God." (II Cor. 7:1, *English Standard Version*) We must be deeply concerned about the work of "bringing holiness to completion" in our Christian walk.

FAITHFULNESS IN WITNESSING

Verses 13 and 14 of Philippians chapter two contain an important lesson. Paul indicates that the working out of our salvation, which both we

and God are together engaged in, should result in others, even in the world, viewing us as “blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke.” In this manner we will, the apostle says, “shine as lights in the world.” We are not surprised in this epistle that the brethren at Philippi would be encouraged to shine forth the light of the Gospel message. This exhortation applies today also, for God’s people now also have the privilege of shining as lights in this present world of darkness and perplexity.

If we did not have that spirit, the “gospel of the kingdom” would not be “preached in all the world for a witness.” (Matt. 24:14) However, because the saints of God at this time desire to shine as “lights in the world,” the proclamation of the message of the kingdom, in its clarity, goes out. Through the printed page, radio, television, the Internet, YouTube, and many other forms of electronic media, the Truth reaches nearly every corner of the globe. This has all been possible because of those who continue to shine forth as lights, both individually and cooperatively.

THE WORD OF LIFE

In verse 16 of our lesson, Paul urges the brethren at Philippi to hold forth “the word of life” so that he could rejoice, knowing that his labors on their behalf had not been in vain. We are to preach the word of life, the apostle says, not man-made creeds, theories, human traditions, or unsupported conclusions. The word of life is God’s Word of Truth. (John 17:17) We are to hold forth his Word just as we would give a cup of cold water to a thirsty soul. Let

us proclaim the message of the kingdom to the people of the land, knowing that a few, here and there, are thirsting for it.

The apostle also refers to “the day of Christ.” That day, we believe, does not refer to the Gospel Age, but to the coming Messianic Age, or kingdom. If we are faithful in holding forth the word of life now, we will be able to rejoice with Paul in the day of Christ’s kingdom. It will be in that day when those on earth and those who now sleep in death in their graves will be fully enlightened, and “confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Paul rejoiced at the faithfulness of this small group of brethren in Philippi, and we rejoice now in the opportunities we have to give a word of comfort to a hearing ear, but how much greater this joy will be in the kingdom, when all shall know God, “from the least to the greatest.”—Heb. 8:11

LABORERS FEW

Verses 19-24 read: “I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheus shortly unto you, that I also may be of good comfort, when I know your state. For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ’s. But ye know the proof of him, that, as a son with the father, he hath served with me in the gospel. Him therefore I hope to send presently, so soon as I shall see how it will go with me. But I trust in the Lord that I also myself shall come shortly.”

These words are a heartfelt reminder of what the Master said concerning the work of preaching the Gospel: “The harvest truly is great, but the labourers

are few.” (Luke 10:2) Years later, the Apostle Paul looked to see whom he could send to encourage the brethren at Philippi. He lamented that most were only looking out for themselves, not the things of Jesus Christ. Timothy was an exception. Paul could depend on faithful Timothy, ever willing and glad to serve the Lord. Here is a lesson for us. As it was in Jesus’ day, and in the days of the apostles, so it is now. Laborers in the harvest are few, but if we are willing to sacrifice ourselves in his service, the Lord assures an overflowing blessing.

FAITHFUL EPAPHRODITUS

Verses 25-30, the final portion of our lesson, read as follows from *The Amplified Bible*: “I thought it necessary to send Epaphroditus back to you. He has been my brother and companion in labor and my fellow soldier, as well as having come as your special messenger and minister to my need. For he has been . . . longing for you all and has been distressed because you had heard that he was ill. He certainly was ill too, near to death. But God had compassion on him, and not only on him but also on me, lest I should have sorrow over him coming upon sorrow. So I have sent him the more willingly and eagerly, that you may be gladdened at seeing him again, and that I may be the less disquieted. Welcome him home then in the Lord with all joy, and honor and highly appreciate men like him. For it was through working for Christ that he came so near death, risking his very life to complete the deficiencies in your service to me which distance prevented you yourselves from rendering.”

Surely, this was a sweet expression of appreciation. The meaning of the name Epaphroditus is “lovely,” and he was indeed lovely in his character likeness to Christ. He endured much in order to serve the Lord, risking even life itself to perform the service entrusted to him. He was serving the Apostle Paul, and he was serving the brethren at Philippi. Actually, however, we are told he was working for Christ. Similarly, everything we do for the brethren we are assured by Scripture is actually serving the Lord. When we serve one of the least of his little ones, and he accepts our service, it is counted as having been done unto him.—Matt. 25:40

We do not know how Epaphroditus hazarded his life in carrying out the opportunity that was given to him. All we know is that he did it gladly, graciously, and based on love. Let us, therefore, be like Epaphroditus in our service to the Lord, the truth, and the brethren. Let us serve in a loving, unselfish, and humble way. Whether it be in little things or in bigger things, may all our service be “of one accord, of one mind”—in Christ Jesus. ■