

'He Humbled Himself'

The Context

In his epistle to the saints – the body of Christ – at Philippi Paul is exhorting and encouraging them to 'stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel...' And he goes on to say that 'If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies [tendernesses and compassions], fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.

'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. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus... he made himself of no reputation... he humbled himself...' from Philippians 1:27-2:8.

So the subject of this passage is the saints' unity in all things pertaining to 'the faith of the gospel'; and to secure that unity Paul emphasises the one element which is absolutely necessary for bringing it about: that they have one mind. Unification of thought, of purpose, of mentality is essential to unification of testimony, fellowship and endurance amidst opposition from those with a contrary mind – see Phil. 1:28-30, not included in the above quote.

But although this must be a strong mind, one which, through the Spirit, gives them power to strive for the truth and against the adversaries; nevertheless within itself, among the members who possess this mind, there should not be strife, pride, high-mindedness, haughtiness. No. For Paul describes this mind as one which is like unto 'the mind of Christ Jesus': which will always cause those who dwell therein to possess 'lowliness of mind', never leading the members into 'strife or vainglory'.

This of course is the opposite to how it is in the world, and in merely carnal Christianity. In the world you will find many associations, parties, companies and groupings with unity of purpose – their very existence and ground for continuation and future success depending solely upon this maintained unity – but because these are not spiritual organisations then within them you will

always find some rumbling strife, discontent, or faction, working to get power, or change, or the overthrowing of some other member. Just look at political parties, both at a national and at a very local level. Witness the intrigue, the jockeying for position, the briefing and counter-briefing.. Watch the ladder-climbers within companies, the secret handshakes within businesses, the 'off-the-record' agreements between individual members in organisations, all designed to secure personal advancement, usually at the expense of some unwary colleague. And all this continues while outwardly there remains professed broad agreement of purpose among the members. But it exhibits a different mentality to the one Paul is writing about.

As does the mind manifested in many a church fellowship today. In this degenerate age where the gospel that the ancient Philippians believed has more or less vanished, what we are left with is a mere semblance of the true cunningly disguised under the continued use of the same gospel language. So although you will still hear the professing church speak of 'unity', 'faith', 'comfort', 'fellowship', 'love' – all words used by the apostle above – these words have now been made to mean something different to what Paul meant when he used them.

Therefore today's church, because it uses the same phraseology as found in scripture and in the true gospel, thinks that it is like the true church to whom Paul wrote. But it is not. For when you live and move and have your being in the modern church, and presently start to discern the true meaning and application of those words and phrases as revealed to you by the teaching of God himself, John 6:45, then you begin to realise that the 'unity', 'love', and 'fellowship' which they try tenaciously to hold on to behind contrived Christian smiles, is not the same in character to what Paul wrote of. But in their pride and rebellion they will still take the teaching of the apostle and apply it to themselves, as though they betray the same spiritual characteristics as those at the beginning.

Thus when you see apparent unity in their fellowships they will point to a passage like Philippians 2 and say, 'Here is the exhortation we are following and obeying'. But scratch the surface and the unity disappears revealing nothing but carnality and pretence; for, as in the worldly organisations mentioned above, you will find within the 'fellowship' factions, cliques, envying, jealousy, backbiting, the seeking of pre-eminence, false humility

and vainglory. Why? Because 'the mind which was in Christ Jesus' is absent from the whole company, because the work of the Spirit is absent: it being merely man's religion being exercised in the flesh and not a fellowship of true Spirit-born and Spirit-taught members of the body of Christ.

As my regular readers will know, I have written on these things before. I just do not believe that the modern profession of Christianity – in any of its recognised forms – ancient or modern – is anything akin to the church which Christ said he would build; is the same in character – at its very heart – or the same in calling as the church to which the apostles addressed their epistles. Therefore the modern Christians' taking of the scriptures and applying the blessings, promises, exhortations (but rarely, if ever, the warnings or discipline), not to say the very salvation of God's elect to themselves, is nothing short of stealing something which does not belong to them, for which kleptomaniacy they will get their reward, except they repent.

The work of the Spirit in calling, regenerating and separating his people unto Christ by his gospel just does not issue in what the modern church is. It is all a corruption of the true, though it all be done in the name of Jesus and with an open Bible in its hand. Just read Jesus' words again in Matthew 7:21-23. 'MANY'! The fulfilment of those words is getting nearer every day, and yet the many continue to ignore the warning.

But we must realise that the 'lowliness of mind' found among the members of the true church does not mean that what you have is merely a gathering together of naturally humble-minded souls, whose firstborn propensity to submissiveness has somehow been 'sanctified'. No. There is nothing of the old nature carried forward into the character of the new man of grace, for in Christ all of 'the old' is passed away, 2 Cor. 5:17. Real God-wrought humility is only that which is found in regenerated souls. Even if a person was a humble type before being called, the humility manifested now is totally different in character to what existed previously. The most notable 'shrinking violet' by nature will soon discover that a work of grace in the soul exposes its 'humility' for what it is: nothing but a conceited show: a false humility which is pride. Likewise the wildest, proudest man will be made passively submissive and willingly humble before the will, mind and purpose of God through the glorious work of salvation wrought in his soul.

Just consider the apostle Paul himself. If ever there had been a proud PHARISEE – in capital letters – it was Saul of Tarsus. But once those words ‘Saul, Saul’ sounded from heaven, and once the Father revealed the Son in him – in all the fulness of that work – then what humility was found in the apostle. Here was a new man – Paul couldn’t have walked very far with Saul, nor Saul with Paul, for each possessed a different mentality. The apostle had a mind humble before the Lord; he had been made willing to suffer the loss of all things for Christ; to spend and be spent in the work of the gospel for the brethren’s sake; was content and even rejoiced to be in bonds for Christ. He cared nothing about what scoffers and unbelievers thought of him; took all opposition, persecution and suffering gladly and patiently, for he knew that he was ‘given’ not only to believe on Christ – wonder of wonders! – but also to suffer for his sake. None of these things moved him; he continued to strive, to press, to run, for he had only one thing in view: Christ, glory, an incorruptible crown.

And did he retain this God-given humility to the end, even amidst all his ‘success’ as an apostle? He certainly did. He endured to the end: ‘I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course [the whole of his calling], I have kept the faith’, 2 Tim. 4:7. What a testimony. What grace was manifest in this once proud man. And so Paul exhorts the same mentality in those who have received the same salvation in Christ: the same calling. As he goes on to describe the sum and substance of all his desire in Philippians 3:8-14 – which is Christ, and everything to do with Christ – he then exhorts them to be ‘thus minded... let us mind the same thing. Brethren, be followers together of me...’ as he follows Christ: in other words, ‘Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus...’ Phil. 2:5.

‘...they follow me’

Now we need to establish an important truth here which will counter and, indeed, cancel out all pride, works, and Pharisaism. It is common for people to read the exhortations of the gospel – like this one in Philippians 2 – and conclude that, well, here is something I must do; here is something I must do my best to achieve. I have elsewhere alluded to people sitting in church or chapel with notepad and pen, listening intently to the sermon and taking down everything they think they must do to make themselves ‘better Christians’. This is typical of false religion – of a works-based Christianity – one devoid of the grace of God and the faith of Christ. Well, they say, now

that we are saved we must be obedient: we want God to be pleased with us; we want to live our lives the best we can for Jesus; so we must make sure that we do all we are supposed to do so that we can give a good testimony to the world that we love the Lord.

But this attitude – this mentality – dismisses completely the work of God. How? Because *they* are the ones working! *They* became Christians, *they* accepted Jesus, *they* did God the great honour of believing in his Son, and now *they* are working to obey and please him even more, so that when they appear on the day of judgment they can hear those expected words of their saviour: ‘Well done, thou good and faithful servant...’ (misapplied).

But this is not the mentality of the true children of God. The thought of receiving reward, or even final salvation, based on something they have done – even obedience to the exhortations – is alien to the whole of their experience of the working of the grace of God, cp. Luke 17:10. Why, even in this epistle Paul has already stated that ‘he which hath begun a good work in you will perform – go on to complete – it until the day of Jesus Christ’, 1:6. And he is soon to write again that ‘it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure’, 2:13.

So we can say that, although these exhortation exist to admonish and encourage the saints of God to continue in the faith, and in the right way, the actual working of the obedience – the constraint, cp. 2 Cor. 5:14 – is the Lord’s, the Spirit’s within us *causing* us to walk according to his commandments. I do love those words in Ezekiel 36, for experience testifies to the truth of them: ‘Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them’, verses 25-27.

Now where does your religion of works stand in that? It is the work *of God*, not your work, that ye believe, John 6:28,29. ‘*I will cause you* to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them’, saith the Lord unto his people. Jesus again affirmed this when he said, ‘My sheep hear my voice... *and they follow me*’, a statement of fact, not of mere hope. So we can

say of the exhortations and commandments found in the gospel that they are really more of a declaration of the character of the children of God: they describe what the saints are like and how they walk. They do love Christ and they do keep his commandments. The mind of Christ Jesus is manifest in them because they '*have* the mind of Christ', being 'in him', 1 Cor. 2:26. Nothing they do is done through strife or vainglory, and they each in lowliness of mind do esteem other better than themselves.

It is impossible for those born again of the Spirit of God, who have been saved by an almighty salvation, who have passed from death unto life, from darkness to light, not to show forth his praise. It is impossible for them, as new creatures, not to have a new mentality and new desires. It is impossible for them to continue thinking, reasoning and walking the same as they did before being called, cp. 1 Peter 4:1-4. What can be said of the power of almighty God – Father, Son, and Holy Ghost – if his work cannot really be manifested in all its transforming power in those for whom Christ died? Can his salvation really be hidden? Can a regenerated soul really go unnoticed in this godless world? and in the fallen church? Can God's 'willing' and 'doing' really fail to bear fruit in the lives of his saints? Whose glory is at stake here? The glory of the saint? No. The glory of God who said he would do all these things in his people – *causing* them.

In Isaiah 43 the LORD says of 'Jacob' – the people of God – that he has been 'called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him', verse 7. 'This people have I formed for myself; they shall show forth my praise', verse 21; hence 1 Peter 2:9,10. And again in Ezekiel 36, in the few verses before the ones quoted above, we read that although Israel had profaned the holy name of the Lord GOD when scattered among the heathen because of their disobedience, yet 'I had pity for my holy name... Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for my holy name's sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen, whither ye went. And I will sanctify my great name... and the heathen shall know that I am the LORD, saith the Lord GOD, when I shall sanctify you before their eyes.'

For whose glory is salvation? All those saved by the grace of God, who experience the saving mercy of God in his Son, can only say, 'Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy

truth's sake', Psalm 115:1. In nothing, least of all in salvation, will the LORD give his glory to another, cp. Isaiah 48.

The Mind of Christ

Now as the apostle is exhorting the saints unto humility of mind he is suddenly taken up with the supreme example of this: 'Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus'. The saints are to follow Christ in all things: after all, he has left us an example that we should follow his steps, cp. 1 Peter 2:21; and the Saviour did say, 'Follow me.' And what was the primary characteristic of the Lord Jesus in his walk that we follow? His way of thinking: 'Let this mind be in you'. From this all else flows. Paul has been exhorting the saints to be of one mind, and that mind is the mind of Christ; and the essence of that mind was humility: '...he humbled himself...'

Now this passage: Philippians 2:5-11, is often highlighted as a great proof-text for the Person of the Son – that he was God manifest in the flesh – which of course it is: (at least it is in the Authorised Version, for, not surprisingly, it is often mangled and distorted in the modern versions to cast doubt upon the fact; especially this is so in the rotten NIV: no one taught of the Spirit of God can possibly countenance that version). But actually this is not the subject of Paul's writing as we have seen, it is 'merely' an illustration of what he is saying. But what an elevated and wonderful illustration of humility it is!

But even here it is often misread, or not fully applied, because it is usually used only as an illustration of Christ's humility as a man on earth and not as the Son within the Godhead before he came into the world. Now I was going to say that if we read this passage carefully we will see this, but, really, just a straightforward reading of the words will reveal this truth, for the words themselves declare this double-humility openly and plainly without having to look for a great mystery hidden behind them. Just read what Paul wrote:

'Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant...' Now what we have thus far in this quotation is a description of Christ Jesus *before* he 'was made in the likeness of men'. What Paul has just written pertains to Christ's

‘mind’ before he was ‘found in fashion as a man’. So already we have ample evidence of the humility of the Person of the Son even within the Godhead.

First of all we are told that ‘he thought’: he thought it not robbery to be equal with God. Within the Godhead, from all eternity, in the eternal purpose of God, in the everlasting covenant, it was the Son specifically who was chosen, who ‘thought’ – determined – that he would be the Person of the Godhead who would come and be made man. The Father wasn’t made flesh in the incarnation, and neither was the Spirit, but the Son. He, as it were, said in eternity, I will go. I will condescend to the level of men of low degree, I will go into time, and will be made in the likeness of men. In Psalm 113 we read of the LORD ‘who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth!’ verse 6. But this humility of mind began in eternity, in glory – within the Godhead.

The Son ‘thought it not robbery to be equal with God’ before he became a man. He ‘made himself of no reputation’ within the Godhead. He ‘took upon him the form of a servant’ before the Father, before the incarnation. But this is not the first time in Scripture that the Son has been referred to as a servant: look at Isaiah 42:1: Jehovah says, ‘Behold my servant... mine elect...’ and he is saying it of the Son: ‘in whom my soul delighteth’, etc. cp. following verses with Matthew 12:14-21. But the point Paul is making in Philippians is that the beginning of this humility in the mind of the Son – the same mind made evident in the saints – was manifest from all eternity while he was still in the Godhead, and therefore the centre of the glory of heaven.

‘Behold my servant’. ‘He took upon him the form of a servant’ in his mind before he was found in fashion as a man. So this is the first part of the twofold condescension and humility of the Son: first as one ‘equal with God’. But then after he was born of Mary, when he became ‘the man Christ Jesus’, then as well, ‘he humbled himself’. Humility had been working in his mind from all eternity, and now it was manifest in time: as a man he humbled himself. He had already made himself of no reputation, had already taken upon him the form of a servant before leaving the realms of glory, and because he had thus humbled himself in eternity he continued to humble himself when found in fashion as a man – although, in a mystery, he remained ‘in heaven’, John 3:13, and in the Godhead, cp. John 10:30. Oh, *great* is the mystery of godliness! God was manifest in the flesh.

Just think of it: the eternal Son: God the Son, as well as occupying a position and a state far above and beyond any state man will ever attain to – everlasting, glorious deity – has also humbled himself to a greater depth than the saints will ever have to – hell – as ‘he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.’ For his people. But I am getting ahead of myself.

Remember, Paul is illustrating the mind that is humble. So first he takes us up into the realms of glory, into eternity, and shows us the mind of the Son there. But now, secondly, he shows us the humility of Christ Jesus, the man we know, the tangible Person of flesh and blood – like us – who in our state still humbled himself. This is something we should be able to relate to and understand: a man humbling himself. We cannot imagine what it is like to be deity, nor the concept of humility within deity, but we can at least begin to see and understand something of humility within humanity – although it be a sin-polluted knowledge.

But still, the Lord Jesus, the man from Nazareth, lived a life which was the very embodiment of humility, and Paul exhorts the saints to walk with the same mind as was in Christ Jesus. And with nothing less.

He humbled himself

So let us look at this humility of the Saviour and examine ourselves as to whether we possess the same mind as Christ.

And we see that nothing has changed in the mind of the Son, even as he became a man, for his humility was the same as it had always been: humility to the Father. Already at twelve years he declared that ‘I must be about my Father’s business’, Luke 2:40-52. To the Jews he said, ‘I do always those things that please him’, John 8:29. Always? Then from all eternity: ‘I delight to do thy will, O my God’, Psalm 40:8. This humility before the Father and submission to his will was the fundamental characteristic of the Son, whether he was in heaven in the Godhead, or on earth – God manifest in the flesh: the Father’s will was his delight.

So when Paul said ‘he humbled himself’ it was first and foremost a humbling of himself before the Father. As he walked among men he was living in

constant submission and therefore obedience before his Father. Whatever the will of the Father was, that did the Son, even if it meant being misunderstood, laughed to scorn, despised and rejected of men, betrayed, misrepresented, falsely accused, reviled, mocked, denied, spat upon, scourged, crucified. His humility counted self as nothing, as unimportant: well, he had already made himself of no reputation – though he was the Lord of glory – even before he became a man; and this same state of mind continued when he came into the world.

Peter, in writing to ‘servants’ – ‘he took upon him the form of a servant’ – was quickly led of the Spirit, as was Paul, to call upon the example of Christ for ultimate servitude and in the context of our following him in the like path: Christ ‘who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously’, 1 Peter 2:18-23. Is this our mind? Is this how we respond and react to reviling and suffering for Christ’s sake and for obedience to the will of God? It marked the walk of the Saviour always to count himself as nothing – ‘not my will’ – and so he never thought to ‘stand up for himself’, justify himself, or ‘have the last word’: the smart comment to win the argument and put the other person down for his own satisfaction. Never did once. But we’re always ready to stand up for self, have our say, not leave ourselves looking weak, foolish, beaten or downtrodden: then we don’t evidence the mind of Christ.

But Paul said, ‘Let this mind be in you, which also was in Christ Jesus.’ Then we need to pray, plead, for grace to have this mind, and have it reigning in us at all times, as a constant. Remember the apostle is giving this exhortation in the context of the unity of the saints: in their relationship specifically to one another within the body. They all have the same Father, they are all in Christ, they are all joined to the one head, they are all indwelt of the same Spirit, so they should all possess this same mind: the mind of the humble Saviour.

Look again at the immediate context, Philippians 2:3,4: ‘Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves’: ‘everyone is better than me’ – the complete opposite mentality to the Pharisee, Luke 18:11. And then he says, ‘Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.’ What does he mean by this? Count the things – the concerns, trials, needs, fears, pains, etc. of others in the body of Christ of greater import than your own. If there is

one thing that seems to characterise much of the modern profession of Christianity it is a lack of empathy: ‘Oh well, we’ve all got problems, you know. You may be struggling, but I’m struggling too.’ No empathy, no compassion, no real care. But it is not the mind of Christ Jesus. He did condescend to men of low estate. He did have compassion on the sick, the outcast, the fallen sinner in the mess their sin had made of them. He reached out and touched, he drew alongside, he wept with those who wept, his heart broke when he saw the end of sin strike in the lives of the poor in this world. He never stood aloof, superior, untouched, proud. He was ‘touched’ – sympathised, suffered with – the feeling of the infirmities of his people; never was there an impatient sigh, a judgmental tutting, a frowning stare, or self-righteous wagging finger in the face of the spiritually broken-hearted – for whatever reason.

Jesus was no Pharisee. He was full of grace, mercy, compassion and longsuffering to the lost, the downcast and the destitute. And the mind which caused him to act in such a way toward the undeserving should be the same mind operating in us who profess his name. This is what characterises the lives of the members of the body of Christ on earth, towards one another. And this is what the Saviour calls ‘love’: ‘Love one another, as I have loved you... *By this* shall all men know that ye are my disciples...’

This humble mind which counts its own person as nothing and unimportant, is always ‘looking on the things of others’ as more important than his own. And this is what Christ did. In glory he looked ahead into time to his own people, and for their sakes he looked not on his own things – his own glory, his Person, his state of highest exaltation – but he looked on the things – the needs – of others: to their need of salvation, of redemption; and he made himself of no reputation, took upon him the form of a servant for them and because of them, and was subsequently found in fashion as a man. And then, again, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross for them, because he was looking on the things of others, esteeming them better than himself, to work and finish their salvation at inestimable cost to himself.

And now his apostle exhorts them – those brought to a knowledge of this wonderful salvation – to have the same mind towards each other as Christ had towards each of them.