



CAPITOL COMMISSION

Unity, Humility, and Perseverance (Phil 2:1-30)

30 MARCH 2010

Ron J. Bigalke, PhD / PO Box 244, Rincon, GA 31326-0244 / www.capitolcom.org / ron.bigalke@capitolcom.org

Bible studies for legislators are held Tuesday mornings at 8:30am in 514 CLOB. All Senator and House Members, all Democrats and all Republicans, are invited for a time of study and prayer on Tuesday mornings. The weekly Bible study is nonpartisan and non-denominational. (Time and/or location for lobbyists and Capitol staff are still to be determined. If you can help, please let me know.)

The current study for the 2010 General Assembly is the Book of Philippians. The previous weekly study examined the Apostle Paul's thanks, prayer, and confidence in God. I pray that this study will be invigorating to you. I am here to serve you and to be a resource for prayer and counsel. Please accept my study in the Word of God, as an evidence of my desire to be serving you.

With the Bible as our foundation and authority, the mission of Capitol Commission is obedience to the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20) within the Capitol communities of the world. We are not a lobbying group attempting to garner votes or reform society. Our mandate is to see the hearts and lives of elected officials transformed with the Word of God. Capitol Commission is a ministry of the church seeking to proclaim the gospel message, and to help believers mature through the verse-by-verse teaching of Scripture. In the Bible, we see God's great love for the world, especially for those who have been placed in authority. This is the foundation for our ministry to you.

At the very beginning of these Bible studies in the Capitol for the 2010 General Assembly, I would like to communicate the biblical goals of my ministry service to you and with you. The Apostle Paul articulated several of these goals as he petitioned God on behalf of the church. He was thankful for their Christian life, fellowship in the gospel, and confidence in the sovereign work of God in their lives. He then prayed that that their love would abound "still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment" so that the church would approve the best things of life from the many good things in life, for the purpose of being "sincere and blameless until the day of Christ," and to be fruitful in righteousness "to the glory and praise of God."

Introduction

Philippians 2 begins a new section with the theme being "rejoicing in others." The saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi needed encouragement to have unity, humility, and perseverance. The church at Philippi was

composed of people from dissimilar backgrounds. The believers at Philippi were exhorted to be confident (1:25-26), stand "firm in one spirit" (1:27-28), and be willing to endure suffering for the sake of the Lord (1:29-30). Throughout the remainder of this epistle, the church would be exhorted to remain united.

The plea for unity is evident in Philippians 2:1-4 wherein believers are instructed to be "of the same mind" and "intent on one purpose." The threefold cause for disunity is identified in the next two verses: (1) "selfishness"; (2) "empty conceit"; and, (3) "personal interests." The remedy against disunity is provided in verses 3a-4. Joy in one's own life and the life of others is the consequence when biblical injunctions are obeyed. Such obedience not only affects relationships with others, but also with God. Humility is the reality of being dependent upon God. Nevertheless, this perspective is not an intellectual ability but a mental attitude, as evident in the example of Christ Jesus (2:1-11). Living in unity with others, in an attitude of humility and action of perseverance, is accomplished "in the Lord with all joy" (2:12-30).

LIVING IN UNITY

(2:1-4) Philippians 2 begins with an exhortation to Christian unity on the basis of four aspects, which are visualized in the following table. As a consequence of these four aspects (2:1), the believer is to be "of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in Spirit, intent on one purpose" (2:2). Christian unity should be an evident characteristic of all true believers because Jesus taught it and prayed for it (cf. John 13:35; 17:21). The spiritual unity that all believers possess should be visible.

Any encouragement in Christ	Any consolation of love	Any fellowship of the Spirit	Any affection and compassion
Be of the same mind	Be maintaining the same love	Be united in Spirit	Be intent on one purpose

Nevertheless, there are persistent obstacles that threaten this unity. Conduct that is pleasing to God begins with the Creator as the priority of life, then others, and self last (cf. Matt 6:33; Rom 12:10; 15:1-2; Gal 6:2; cf. Isa 14:12-14; Ezek 28:15-17; Eph 6:12). As opposed to exalting himself, which was his divine prerogative, Jesus gave himself for others (2 Cor

CAPITOL COMMISSION BIBLE STUDIES -- GEORGIA

LEGISLATORS: TUESDAYS @ 8:30AM, 514 CLOB
LOBBYISTS: TIME AND ROOM TBD, CAPITOL BUILDING
STAFF: TUESDAYS @ NOON, ROOM TBD

5:21; 1 Tim 2:5-6; Tit 2:14). Opposition to the will of God inevitably results in dire experiences for self and others; therefore, the chief good of the creation is communion with God.

UNITY	DISUNITY
“of the same mind” “intent on one purpose”	“selfishness” “empty conceit” “personal interests”
REMEDY: <i>but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others</i>	

LIVING IN HUMILITY

(2:5-11) Unity among believers is a mental attitude. Four illustrations exhibit this perspective in chapter 2. The humiliation of Christ Jesus is the first and most important illustration. Jesus humbled himself and surrendered the use of His personal attributes and power. He “existed in the form of God” (2:6). The Greek word, *huparchōn*, translated “existed” is a present tense participle, which indicates that existence “in the form of God” is the continuance of an antecedent form into the present. The form is a prior mode of being, which is consistent with the concept of eternal existence, as opposed to existence for a limited duration of time or a certain time period. According to the text, this mode was prior to Jesus “taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men” (2:7) (i.e. the incarnation did not interrupt the sustained mode of being).

The meaning of “form” (*morphē*) is the inner nature and essential attributes.¹ “Form” (*morphē*) is used interchangeably with “glory” (*doxa*) and “image” (*eikōn*) in the Septuagint. Therefore, “form of God” certainly means that Jesus is God of very God, the second Person of the Trinity (Triunity). Confirmation of Jesus’ deity is found in Philippians 2:7, wherein it is stated that He took “the form of a bond-servant,” which means that He was truly a servant. The Lord Jesus took the form of a servant (while never emptying Himself of His divinity) to become true humanity (2:5-8). Jesus emptied (*ekenōsen*) himself of the prerogatives and powers that were His eternally by virtue of His divine attributes. Rather than exalting Himself, which was His divine prerogative, Jesus “humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (2:8).

Jesus humbled and denied himself for the sake of others. God, therefore, has “highly exalted Him” (2:9-11; cf. Matt

23:12). It is certainly not natural to live in humility, and to give of oneself in the manner exemplified by Jesus. Pride is the easier choice, but it will always be harmful to self and others. How does one not think solely of self?

If anyone would like to acquire humility, I can, I think, tell him the first step. The first step is to realise that one is proud. And a biggish step, too. At least, nothing whatever can be done about it. If you think you are not conceited, it means you are very conceited indeed.²

Of course, living in such a manner is only possible by the sovereign work of God (cf. 2:12-13). One must be humble “under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time” (1 Pet 5:6). The believer may then experience the truth of Philippians 4:13 which states, “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.” Living in such a manner is not only possible, but also an act of obedience.

LIVING IN PERSEVERANCE

(2:12-30) Believers are reminded that present afflictions are not without purpose because it is God “who is at work in you, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure” (2:13). Believers are encouraged to “work out” this salvation that they already possessed, as a process of maturity. They were also warned with regard to “grumbling or disputing” (2:14), which would manifest in controversy and disunity.

Paul provided his own testimony as a second illustration for living in unity with other believers. He had devoted himself to the church and given himself in devotion to them (2:17-18). Timothy is another example because he devoted himself to the Apostle. He was equally concerned for the welfare of the church and served with Paul “in the furtherance of the gospel” (2:19-24). Epaphroditus is the fourth example because he labored with the Apostle, in addition to serving the church even to exhaustion (2:25-30). He was willing to sacrifice without any complaint. The examples of Jesus, Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus should be an encouragement to live in thought of others, and to stimulate believers to live in unity.

CONDUCT THAT IS PLEASING TO GOD BEGINS WITH
THE CREATOR AS THE PRIORITY OF LIFE, THEN OTHERS,
AND SELF LAST. . . .

¹ Samuel G. Green, *Handbook to the Grammar of the Greek Testament*, rev. ed. (New York and Chicago: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1912) 384; Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, comps., *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) 1147.

² C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, rev. ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1952) 114.