

Divide-The-Truth Sunday School Preview Notes
Philippians 2:1-11
Explore the Bible Sunday School Lesson for September 21, 2003

Introduction: As we continue into chapter two, Paul will more specifically deal with the problem that plagued the church at Philippi. Paul, in Philippians 1:27 spoke about conduct that was becoming of Christ. He spoke to them about their behavior “having the weight of (weighing as much as) the gospel message itself. Literally, Paul was saying, “Let your manner of life weigh as much as the gospel you profess; otherwise, your words do not have the same weight.” As we continue into this book, it is very clear that though this church did not face doctrinal heresy, it was facing something that could equally disrupt the church. It was the danger of division and strife. In Philippians 4:2 Paul will give names to the persons in, conflict and we will discuss this more thoroughly when we get there. However, it must be pointed out that a lack of unity was a common problem that Paul had to face (Romans 15:5-7, 12:4, 16, I Corinthians 1:10, II Corinthians 13:11, and Galatians 5:26, 6:2-3).

Today this is perhaps the greatest threat that the church faces. Very rarely will church conflict come over doctrine, but it most always comes when the selfish desires of men and women take priority over what is best for the corporate body or what God’s Word clearly states.

Paul, repeatedly, tells us to make a “diligent” effort in the church to maintain peace (Ephesians 4:3). “Diligence” speaks of making a persistent effort.

Point: If church members would spend as much time in seeking unity as they do seeking their own selfish desires, the church would be overwhelmed with peace, and this peace would “*becometh the gospel of Christ.*”

1 The exhortation given in Philippians 1:27 is now developed by Paul by providing four incentives. All four incentives are preceded by the word “*if.*” The word “*if*” does not imply an uncertainty but rather a certainty and is best understood by replacing the word “*if*” with the word “*since.*” Thus, verse one could read since there is consolation in Christ, since there is comfort of love, since there is fellowship of the Spirit, since there is bowels and mercies.”

Paul thus mentions four reasons or incentives why there should be unity.

First, because there is “*consolation in Christ.*” The word “*consolation*” is the Greek word “*paraklesis*” which is best understood as the word encouragement which has the root meaning of coming alongside someone to stimulate or comfort him. It is very similar to the word used by our Lord when He referred to the Holy Spirit (“*parakleton*”).

Second, because there is “*comfort of love.*” There appears to be very little difference between the “comfort of love” and “consolation in Christ” although the idea here is to speak tender and loving words to someone who is close in relationship in order to offer incentive.

Third, there is “*fellowship of the Spirit.*” The word “*fellowship*” is the word “*koinonia*” in the Greek, which describes a common interest, and a mutual participation in the things of God.

Lastly, there is “*bowels and mercies.*” The word “*bowels*” is better understood by the word “*affection.*” The Greek word speaks of emotions.

The apostle’s four reasons for unity in the church are all based upon the fact that all four of these realities are based upon our relationship “*in Christ.*” Thus Paul was saying to them and to us that “since there is consolation in Christ, since there is comfort in Christ, since there is fellowship of the Spirit in Christ, and since there is affection and mercies in Christ” there should be no reason that unity does not exist between all believers.”

Paul is appealing our salvation experience. If you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, then you have experienced His compassion, love, affection, and tenderness through the cross of Calvary. We deserve hell but He has provided heaven. We deserve death but He has provided life.

2 The apostle makes his plea mainly on the grounds of what they have experienced in the Lord (v.1), but he also adds, *“fulfill ye my joy.”* Paul clearly communicated his joy in chapter one. Yet now he is saying make it go one step farther by completing it. Remember that Paul had personal interest in this church. He started it with only a few Gentile converts and it was now a church that had blessed him numerous times. He, like any parent, desired that his children mature and develop rightly. I cannot speak from a pastor’s heart but I can speak knowing how a pastor feels when those the Lord has placed under him live the truth they are taught. I also know how the hearts of pastors are grieved when those they oversee live lives that dishonor the name of our Lord.

Paul then continues to tell them how they might *“fulfill ye my joy,”* but more importantly how the four incentives in verse one work their way out in the lives of believers.

- 1) *“be like minded”* - To *“be like minded”* means to be of the same mind or think the same thing. Of course this does not mean we can throw doctrine out the door, but rather to think the same of the right things. Paul will further elaborate on this beginning in verse five.
- 2) *“having the same love”* - *“Having the same love”* flows out of *“being like minded.”* The word used for love is *“agape”* which speaks of the sacrificial love that God displayed toward us *“in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.”* God expects that same kind of love in our lives to be expressed to one another. In I John 3:14 John makes it clear that this kind of love is what characterizes a true believer as does John 13:35.
- 3) *“being of one accord”* - The word *“united”* literally means *“one-souled.”*
- 4) being *“of one mind”* - *“One mind”* speaks of purpose and literally means to be pre-occupied with what is on one’s mind. In this case it is unity. Here again I make the point that if believers were preoccupied with what brings or continues unity in the local church rather than what satisfies one personally, our churches would *“fulfill”* Paul’s joy, but more importantly they would communicate that there is encouragement, comfort, fellowship, compassion and mercy in our lives because we are *“in Christ.”*

3-4 In verse one Paul provides us the why of unity. In verse two he provides us with what will result because of unity. Now in verse three he provides us with instructions on how to accomplish unity in the body of Christ. Each instruction is first started with the way not to (negative) and then followed with the way how to (positive).

- 1) *“Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory”*- This is how not to accomplish unity. The word *“strife”* speaks of a faction or clique while the word *“vain glory”* speaks of a self-centered or self-promoting attitude. This is what John wrote against in speaking about Diotrephes in III John 1:10. The two, *“strife”* and *“vain glory”* work well together because strife pulls one down while *“vain glory”* pulls ones self up both at the expense of someone else and both with the same outcome: division. Both words speak of selfishness, which is how the NASB interprets the word *“strife.”*
- 2) *“but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves”* – Paul counters the way not to accomplish unity (1) with the way to accomplish unity. The answer is through humility or humbleness. It is the opposite of strife or selfishness, and it’s result is that we might *“esteem others better than ourselves.”* The word *“esteem”* here is the opposite of *“vain glory.”* The word *“esteem”* speaks of the way one feels about oneself. If we say that young man has a high self-esteem, we are saying that he thinks well of himself. If we say that he has a low self-esteem of himself, it means that he does not think well of himself. Paul is not stating that we should devalue ourselves but is rather stating that we should not over value ourselves (over inflated ego or *“vain glory”*) because this will cause us not to think of other persons rightly.
- 3) *“look not every man on his own things”* - This is how not to accomplish unity. The NASB, NJKV, and NIV all rightly interpret this in regards to personal interest, agendas, or opinions. This gets down to the heart of the matter. A lack of unity is caused by selfish people wanting their way.
- 4) *“but every man also on the things of others”* - Paul, once again, counters the negative with the positive. The positive being *“that we look out for others.”* The words *“look out”* mean to fix the

attention to something. Here it speaks of fixing our attention on the interests of others. We are mindful of others.

Point: If there is encouragement in our relationship in Christ, which there is, if there is comfort because of the love of Christ in our hearts, which there is, if there is fellowship of the Spirit, which there is, and if there is compassion and mercy in Christ, which there is, then it should work its way out in our lives by us thinking the same, loving the same, acting the same, and being preoccupied with the same purpose. We then know that this will come by humbleness in our thoughts and humbleness in our actions toward one another.

Class Interaction:

1. If this is all true, then how can we continue in our petty bickering?
2. If this is all true, then why do we see so much envy and strife in the church today?

Answer: First, the church is full of individuals who are not “in Christ.” In other words, they are lost. It is impossible for a lost person and a saved person to be like minded in one accord and of the same love. It is impossible for a lost person to esteem others higher than himself. It is impossible for a lost person not to put his interests ahead of others.

Second, the church is also filled with believers who are not walking in the fullness of God’s Holy Spirit. In other words, they are walking in the flesh (Galatians 5:16-26). If two believers or two hundred believers are all spirit filled, there will not be conflict! It is the power of God’s Holy Spirit that unifies the lost with a holy God and unifies the saved with each other!

5 Beginning in verse five and continuing through verse ten we come to the greatest doctrinal passage in all the scriptures regarding Jesus Christ. There is no other passage in the entire Bible that communicates what these verses communicate regarding the person and the incarnation of our Savior and Lord. However, as great as the doctrine is in this passage, the apostle Paul’s intent was not to simply pen this great and lofty doctrine. Rather, his purpose was tied to the context of the whole book and especially verses one through four of this chapter. I cannot state too much the importance of expository teaching and preaching (verse by verse, chapter by chapter, book by book). This is a perfect illustration. This passage so clearly points out the importance of verse by verse teaching. Typically, verses five through ten are taught emphasizing the incarnation of our Lord. Though this is not incorrect, it fails to communicate that the purpose behind Paul’s writing it to us is not to focus on the incarnation, but rather to point out the importance of unity in the church. Context is always important when you teach God’s Word!

After exhorting the believers in Philippi to be like minded, have the same love, be of one accord and of one mind, and to think of the interests of others over their personal interests, Paul says, “*Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.*” Verse five looks back to what he has just said and it looks forward to what he is about to say in verses six through eight.

The statement “*let this mind be in you*” speaks of attitude, which is how the NIV and NASB interpret it. The attitude that Paul is speaking of is the attitude of our Lord, (“*which was also in Christ Jesus*”) in regards to his leaving heaven and becoming man. We will develop this much farther as we study the following verses. Paul, however, is stating on the front end of this great doctrinal teaching that it should be our attitude to give up, give in, or give over whatever hinders unity in the church. If Christ was willing to leave heaven and become man, should we not be willing to do whatever it takes to get along with our brothers and sisters in Christ?

6 Now we dive deep into the grandest doctrine in the all the Bible regarding the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Volumes have been written over these few verses that we will try to teach in less than one hour!

“*Who, being in the form of God,*” - Paul begins by stating our Lord’s preincarnate status. The first thing that is stated is that he is in the “form of God.” The words “*form*” and “*God*” are the Greek words “*morphe theos*” which refers to inner nature of our Lord. It is the inner nature that does not change.

Class Interaction:

1. Have your class turn to Colossians 1:15, John 1:1-2, 14, and Hebrews 1:2-3. Ask them what they see in common regarding our Lord.

Now point out to them that word “*being*.” The word being is interpreted “existing” in the NASB and NKJV, and interpreted “*being in the very nature*” in the NIV. It is a present active participle in the Greek language, which denotes the continuance of a previous state or existence. Thus Paul, in writing these words, was saying that Jesus was, is, and will always be God. Though Jesus became the “*form of a servant*” and the “*likeness of man*” He was fully God.

Point: The incarnation of Christ was not an emptying of His deity, but rather a clothing of Himself in humanity. He always was God, He is God, and He will always be God!

“*thought it not robbery to be equal with God*” - The Greek word for robbery has two meanings. One speaks of a thing unlawfully seized and the other speaks to a treasure to be guarded and retained at all costs. When a Greek word has more than one meaning the rule of thumb is to interpret it in its context. Here, once again, it is important to understand the context of what the scripture is saying. Under the context, it is saying that Jesus was willing to wave His rights as being “*equal with God*” which means to be exactly the same as God in order that He might take on the “*likeness*” of man (v.7).

Class Interaction:

1. If the Lord Jesus Christ was willing to give up His rights and take on the “*likeness*” of man, how can we breathe the word “I have my rights?” When we look at the example of humbleness of our Lord, do we really have rights? When we look at our Lord’s example of giving all of Himself for us, how can we not do the same towards others that we might maintain unity in the church?

7-8 Paul continues to build his case in urging unity among the believers by revealing the extremes that our Lord went to purchase our pardon. Verse 7 tells us how or in what way our Lord gave up His rights in “*being equal with God.*”

First, He “*made himself no reputation.*” The words “*made no reputation*” are actually one word in the Greek: “*kenoo.*” It means to empty, which is how the NASB interprets it; thus, it means that He emptied Himself. J.B Lightfoot states, “He stripped Himself of the insignia of His majesty.”

Second, He “*took upon him the form of a servant.*” The word “*form*” is exactly the same as in verse six where it speaks of the inner nature of our Lord. The word “*servant*” is the same word used of Paul to describe himself in chapter one verse one. If you recall from that week’s study, Paul was actually calling himself a “*bond-servant.*” Jesus, who was and is God, took the form of a man but not just any man, a bondservant. A “*bond-servant*” owned nothing, not even the clothes on his back. In fact, he was considered property. He had no rights. As you look in the gospels, you notice that he had no home, no possessions, and like a “*bond-servant*” gave up all rights.

Third, He “*was made in the likeness of man.*” Here Paul specifically spells out the incarnation. The word used for “*likeness*” is the word “*homoioima.*” Our English word “*homosapiens*” which is the word used to describe man is derived from this word. It refers to similarity but allows for some differences. In other words, Jesus became truly human. He was, however, man as God intended man to be without sin and possessing a divinely unique relationship with the Father as did man (Adam and Eve) before the fall.

Fourth, He was “*being in the fashion as a man.*” The word fashion is the word “*schema*” in the Greek. It is the word from which we get our word “*scheme.*” It is very different from the word “*form*” or “*likeness*” used in the previous verses. Those words referred to the inner being while this word refers to outward shape or form in regards to appearance. The word “*being*” is the exact same word used in verse six. There and here, the word is a present active participle in the Greek language, which denotes the continuance of a previous state or existence. Thus Paul, in writing these words, was saying that Jesus not only took upon Himself outward appearance of man, He continues to have that same appearance now and forevermore. When I get to heaven and look upon my Lord and Savior, He will appear like me. He will look like man but will be fully God. He will still have the scars from Calvary.

Fifth, He *"humbled Himself"* which means to bring low. As if giving up heaven and taking upon Himself the frailty of man was not enough, Paul says He brought Himself even lower by death, *"even death of the cross."* Our Lord was so committed to the Father's plan that He obeyed it even as far as death. But not an ordinary death, but death on a cross. It must be noted that it was his choice. The words *"humbled Himself"* speak of His choice (John 10:18, John 15:13) It was his desire to die the most disgraceful and cruelest death imaginable. Not even Roman citizens could be put to death by this method of execution. It was reserved only for the vilest of slaves and foreigners.

The Jews considered those who were crucified or hung to be cursed of God (Deuteronomy 21:23). For that reason the Jews could not believe that Jesus was the Messiah. It was a stumbling block to them and foolishness to the Greeks (I Corinthians 1:23). But it was God's plan before the foundation of the world that Jesus would bear the punishment of our sin.

"Who his own self bare the sin in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed." I Peter 2:24

Even Paul, with the vastness of understanding and wisdom afforded to him could do nothing but stand back and cry out *"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and his ways past finding out!"* Romans 11:33

How can we fight over the color of the carpet? How can we fight over the location or possible relocation of our church buildings or the additions to them? How can we rip and tear apart a person's personality? How can we murmur, fight, and squabble among ourselves over matters that have absolutely no eternal value? How can we scream to the top of our lungs "I have my rights"? How can we not do anything but fall to our faces and beg the forgiveness of our Lord for our selfishness and petty differences when we look at the extreme He undertook to redeem our souls? May God help us to realize that He desperately desires that His children be unified and love one another!

Before we move to verse nine, I must also point out one more thing that is easily forgotten. Paul's lofty doctrinal statement in the previous verses was meant to have practical application: unity. Doctrine is not meant so we can look back and be awe stricken by the magnitude of the doctrine but there are practical workings out of all doctrine.

Point: Doctrine that does not result in application is empty religion.

9 *"Wherefore"* or *"for this reason"* immediately points us back to what Paul has just stated. Because Jesus voluntary humbled Himself, God the Father *"hath highly exalted Him"*. Literally, God the Father exalted Jesus to the highest rank and power. I encourage as part of your preparation to read Psalm 24, which records this exaltation of our Lord upon His return to heaven.

How did God the Father supremely exalt Jesus?

First, He *"gave him a name, which is above every name."* In the Greek, it literally read *"given him the name"* which refers to a particular name.

Class Interaction:

1. What is that name?

Answer: It is not Jesus and it is not Christ, for the name Jesus was a very common name in New Testament time and the word Christ is more a title than a name. Paul does not reveal what the name is until verse eleven. The name is "Lord."

2. Turn to Revelation 19:11-16 and read these verses.

What is so significant about the name and title of *"Lord"*? The significance is found in both the Greek and Hebrew language and how the word was used. The Greek word for *"Lord"* is *"kyrios."* This word was used by citizens of the Roman Empire to acknowledge the divinity of Caesar. Here again we see Paul's

choice of words, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, take on special meaning like we did in Philippians 1:27 when Paul used the word *"politeuomai"* which is translated *"conduct yourself in a manner worthy."* I encourage you to go back and read the notes on this verse. The title *"kyrios"* was never used of the emperors until they were deified through a religious ceremony; therefore, it was used as a divine title. As time progressed, a test phrase was used to check the loyalty of the people. It was the phrase *"Kyrios Kaiser"* which meant, "Caesar is Lord." As Christianity grew in numbers and it became apparent that Christians were not another sect of Judaism, Rome became more hostile towards believers. Christians who would not say these words were executed because Rome saw *"Jesus Christ as Lord"* as threat and a lack of loyalty to the Roman government.

The significance in the Hebrew language is perhaps more intense than in the Greek language. The same word "Lord" occurs in the Hebrew language only it is the word *"Adonai."* It is a title somewhat like our word "sir," but in the Hebrew language it replaced the personal name of God, Jehovah, because no Jew would dare say or spell out God's name out of reverence to God. Thus the name *"Adonai"* became synonymous with the name *"Jehovah,"* the personal name of God. So, when early believers confessed that *"Jesus Christ is Lord"* they were actually confessing that Jesus who came in the likeness of man, who died on a Roman cross, and rose again on the third day, was the one true and only God.

10-11 The purpose of our Lord's exaltation is that...

"That at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow" - The act of bowing is done by one who recognizes that the one whom they are bowing to has absolute authority and power. Paul then states who this included by three statements 1) *"of things in heaven,"* 2) *"and things in earth,"* 3) *"and things under the earth."* In the KJV you will notice that the word "things" is italicized. Whenever you see this in your Bible it means that the word was added in the translation process so that it would be easier for us to understand. There is no word in the Greek language for *"things."* A much clearer understanding would be "beings in heaven (angels), being on earth (humans), and beings under the earth" (demons).

Not only will *"every knee bow"* but also *"every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord."* The word *"confess"* means to agree with and refers to an open or public declaration. Just as every knee bowing refers to angels, humans, and demons, the confession of every tongue refers to every angel, every human, and every demon.

Point: All will bow before Him and all will agree with Him that He is *"Lord."*

Class Interaction:

1. Does this mean that all will be saved?

Answer: No. This does not speak of universal salvation but makes clear that the lost and saved (humans), the angels and the demons will acknowledge that Jesus is God. They will either do it in joy or in despair, but they will do it!

Paul then goes on and tells us why, *"to the glory of the Father."*

To proclaim that *"Jesus Christ is Lord"* is the greatest glory that can be given to God the Father. God in His plan of redemption is going to receive that glory. He has given us the opportunity to decide whether or not we will *"confess"* it joyfully or in sorrow. He has given us the right to decide if Jesus will be our Savior. But He has not given us the right to decide if we will declare Him *"Lord."* All will confess that!

Has Jesus become both your Savior and the Lord of your life? He is both Savior and Lord or He is not.

To God be the Glory!

Divide-The-Truth Sunday School Preview Notes are offered by Bro. David Brown through Shelbyville Mills Baptist Church, Shelbyville, TN and are available by request through e-mail only at Divide-The-Truth@juno.com. The purpose of these notes is not to replace your materials but to add to your current materials so that you might "rightly divide the Word of Truth" (II Timothy 2:15). A full doctrinal statement and references are available upon request.