

Session 5

May 24, 2020

YIELD

Philippians 2:1-5, (8-12), 13-15

Philippians is Paul's most personal letter. Unlike most other epistles, Philippians doesn't address big issues in their congregation, chastise them for immoral behavior, or rebuke them for false doctrine. Instead, this letter represents an extended "thank you note" for the church's continued support of Paul's ministry. His warm affection for the people of the church is obvious throughout.

While there are no explicit corrections offered, the apostle gives some not-so-subtle reminders that peace and harmony in the church must be continually guarded and intentionally nurtured. This deep care for the wellbeing of others is highlighted in chapter 2, with the emphasis on yielding to others in humility. Three distinct characteristics of the humble Christ-follower are given.

Selfless in unity (vv. 1-4). Paul uses the word "joy" five times in his little love letter; "rejoice" seven times; and "glad" twice. Here, he suggests that his own joy is fulfilled when the church he loved so much is unified. First, he offers the *motive* for unity. Christ Himself embodied the great traits of true fellowship: encouragement, consolation, communion, affection, and mercy (v. 1). If these were legitimately lived out by Christ (and they were!) then they ought to be demonstrated by His followers. He then offers the *model* of unity, four areas where unity is both needed and expected: in their thoughts ("like minded"), in their affections, in their feelings ("of one soul"), and in their purpose (v. 2). Finally, he offers the *means* of this unity: "Do nothing out of rivalry or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves" (v. 3). While the language uses plural pronouns, the admonition is strikingly personal. Each individual must set himself aside in humility and consider each other person as superior. This willful move from selfishness to selflessness is so counter to human nature, that it can only be accomplished by followers of Christ, who are committed to modeling Christ.

Servant in attitude (v. 5-8). The attitude of humility needed to consider others as better than ourselves (v. 3) is the same attitude of humility demonstrated by Christ in His incarnation. Verses 5 and following are known as the *kenosis* passage (from the Greek word for "emptied" in verse 7). There is quite a bit of interesting theology in these verses, but taken as a whole, the key idea is Christ's humility...His willingness to leave His position in glory to become not only a man, but a *servant*; and not only a servant, but a *humble, obedient* servant who was destined to die a humiliating death on the cross (v. 8). Such was the attitude of Christ. For the sake of unity and love, Paul exhorted Christ-followers to embrace that same attitude, making it "their own" (v. 5).

Shining in example (vv. 12-15). While the "book" lesson does not include verse 12, I think it's important for context. Two important concepts are evident. First, Paul affirms them for their continued obedience to God's word, whether he was there in person or not. The remainder of verse 12 is troublesome if taken out of context. "Working out your own salvation" does *not* mean that salvation is open to one's personal interpretation. Nor does it mean that salvation is earned

by doing good works. Rather, Paul is encouraging believers to *live out* their salvation with great determination. What is worked “into” believers by the Holy Spirit (v. 13) must be worked “out” through humble but determined obedience. And this godly effort, while personal and individual, is never to be done with an ungodly attitude (v. 14). The effective combination of the right works carried out with the right attitude is what the world would ultimately notice, and what Paul wanted to see in his quest to have his joy fulfilled in them (v. 2).