

Lesson Three (2:1-11)

The Mind Of Christ (2:1-11)

1 So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, 2 complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. 3 Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus, 6 who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. 9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

V. 1 So If There Is Any Encouragement In Christ – This verse establishes a fourfold pattern of Christian participation and involvement. On the basis of this, Paul will go on in the next verse to issue a fourfold commandment for unity. This unity is made possible by an attitude of humility and servanthood (v. 3-4). Our perfect example of this attitude is Christ (v. 5-8).

The encouragement in Christ named here is the “exhortation” that we know because we are in Him, and He is in us. If there is any awareness of this urging in the believer, he is called upon to respond to the challenge of verse two.

Any Incentive Of Love – The word “incentive” carries the ideas of both “comfort” and “encouragement or urging.” Love has a strong ability to urge and constrain (II Cor. 5:14).

Any Participation In The Spirit – Participation (*koinonia*) can also be translated “fellowship” or “partnership.” In fact, marriage, the closest of all human relationships, was often called “the *koinonia* of life.”

Our intimate involvement with the Holy Spirit is a strong incentive toward Christian unity. The same Spirit indwelling my life is also living in you. We have something in common far more precious than a common blood-line, a common nationality, or a common friendship. If I reject you and the Spirit in you, I am rejecting a part of myself.

Any Affection And Sympathy – As in Chapter one, verse eight, the King James version has “bowels” instead of “affection” as a translation of the Greek work *splangchna*. As before, this pit of the stomach area is used figuratively to represent man’s most tender emotions. The word “sympathy” is the same word often used in the Old Testament for the tender mercies of God.

To sum up verse one: If the reader has any sensitivity whatsoever to the spiritual dimension of life, let him respond to the challenge of the next verse.

V. 2 Complete My Joy – The Philippians were already Paul’s “joy and crown” (4:1), but perhaps one thing was still lacking: their total unity in the Lord.

By Being Of The Same Mind – Literally, “set your minds on the same thing.” The point of agreement is not so much in the realm of doctrine and opinion, but in the unity of attitude and purpose. A further illustration of this “same mind” is the mind of Christ (v. 5-8). It is the attitude of humility and servanthood that all Christians must share.

Having The Same Love – No two men will ever agree completely in all their ideas. For this reason, it is not a unity of the head but a unity of the heart which Paul seeks.

Being In Full Accord – Literally, being “joined in soul.”

And Of One Mind – As in the beginning of the verse, the word used (“setting your minds on one thing”) has reference to attitude rather than doctrine. Absolute doctrinal conformity

is impossible; for every time a Christian learns more truth, he would have to disfellowship all his brothers.

V. 3 Do Nothing From Selfishness Or Conceit – The word used here for “selfishness” is the same word Paul used for “partisanship” in 1:17. A person motivated by selfishness will do anything to advance his own cause, even stepping on the fallen bodies of his brothers to reach the top. So long as people are motivated by selfishness, unity is impossible.

“Conceit” is a very graphic word, literally meaning “empty glory.” So long as people are seeking the empty glory that comes from men (John 5:44), they are out of tune with God and unity is impossible.

In Humility Count Others Better Than Yourselves – The Christian must “set his mind in a humble, lowly way” and consider the rights of others ahead of his own. The perfect example of all this is Jesus Christ, who did not try to advance his own position in heaven, who had divine glory and then emptied himself, who died on the cross that others might live.

V. 4 Let Each Of You Look Not Only To His Own Interests, But Also To The Interests Of Others – This attitude is the functional key to Christian unity. It was manifested in Christ, as well as in Paul (2:17), Timothy (2:20-21), and Epaphroditus (2:25-30).

V. 5 Have This Mind Among Yourselves – Literally, “set your mind this way.” Every Christian should have the same attitude of the Master, who became servant of all. He who washed his disciples’ feet was not establishing a worship ritual, but leaving us an example of humble servanthood. Since the servant is not greater than his Master, we have no right to think of ourselves as “too good” for any lowly service.

Which You Have In Christ Jesus – What follows is one of the grandest passages in all the Bible to teach the deity of the Lord Jesus. It was not for this purpose, however, that the passage was written. It is the ultimate example of loving, sacrificial servanthood.

V. 6 Who Though He Was In The Form Of God – In the beginning (John 1:1) before anything was created (John 1:3; Col. 1:16-17), Jesus existed in heaven with the Father. He existed in the very “form” of God. Unlike our English word, the Greek word for “form” is more than just an outward or superficial similarity. It points to the very essence of God the Father and says Jesus was the same. He was not only with God—He was God! (John 1:1)

It is quite impossible to define the precise nature of the Trinity using human thought and human language. In some divine way, the Son is of the same essence and being as the Father, and yet is a separate personality. The New Testament affirms in several places that Jesus is God (John 1:1, 18; 20:28; Titus 2:13; Heb. 1:8; II Peter 1:1), but always maintains the careful distinction between the Son and the Father.

The Son is God. The Father is God
But the Son is not the Father.

Did Not Count The Equality With God A Thing To Be Grasped – Paul was not trying to prove the deity of Christ to the Philippians. They already accepted it as true. Instead, he was reminding them that Jesus could have clung to his divine rights and privileges, but did not. His manner of existence was equal to that of the Father, and he might well have decided to “hang on to it at all costs,” but he did not.

V. 7 But Emptied Himself – Of what did Jesus empty himself? Consider the following possibilities:

- A. His heavenly glory and privileges.
- B. His omnipotence (state of being all-powerful)
- C. His omniscience (state of being all-knowing)
- D. His omnipresence (state of being everywhere present)
- E. His divine essence

It is quite obvious that Jesus laid aside the glorious privileges of heaven when he became a man. He was excluded from the Bethlehem inn, from the hearts of God’s chosen people, and from ownership of a simple place to lay his head.

What about omnipotence? As the Son of Man, Jesus put a voluntary self-limitation on his powers. He did the works which his Father gave him to do (John 5:19, 36; 14:10). He steadfastly refused to work miracles to his own advantage (Matt. 4:1-4). In a physical sense, he could become weary (John 4:6) and he could die (John 19:30). Still, his mastery of all nature and of death itself shows that he was not just a man. He was a man. And he was God.

What about omniscience? The clearest case here of a self-limitation is found in Matt. 24:36, where as the Son of Man, Jesus did not know the day or hour of his second coming. Still, he knew the hearts of his enemies, he knew when Lazarus had died, and he knew when his hour had or had not come. Even from the age of twelve, he knew his identity as the unique son of the heavenly Father (Luke 2:49).

What of omnipresence? Obviously Jesus could not be in two places at once while he was in human form. Much of his adult ministry was spent simply travelling from place to place so he could teach more people.

Finally, what of his divine essence? Did he ever cease to be God? No—never at any time. Even as he emptied himself to become fully man, he continued to be fully God.

Taking The Form Of A Servant – The kind of servant Jesus became was actually a “slave” or “servant under bondage.” He was not just a king disguised as a beggar—he actually became the most lowly among men. It was necessary that Jesus fully experience humanness and be tempted in every respect, so that he could offer his own life to satisfy our sentence of death (Gal. 4:4-5) and become our sympathetic high priest (Heb. 4:5).

Being Born In The Likeness Of Men – It is admittedly difficult to combine Jesus’ human and divine natures. But we must do so, and we must avoid either of two extremes. Modern theologians often conclude Jesus was a very good man, but in no way God. The ancient Docetics concluded that Jesus was wholly divine, but in no way really human. When he walked in the sands of Galilee, for instance, he left no footprints! The refusal to admit that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh was one of the earliest heresies of the church (II John 7).

V. 8 And Being Found In Human Form – The word for “form” is not the same as the word for “form” in verse six. This time the word implies a changeability, or a form that is not permanent (I Cor. 7:31). Jesus was always God, even from the beginning, and always continued to be God. At a given point in time, he became a man, taking on a nature which would not be permanent.

He Humbled Himself – As if it were too little that Jesus had stooped from the highest heaven to the lowest earth, he humbled himself even further!

And Became Obedient Unto Death – Jesus did not desire or welcome the cross. He offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death. And although he was God’s own Son, he learned obedience in the things that he suffered (Heb. 5:7-8). See also the beautiful parallels in Heb. 12:2 and I Peter. 2:21-14.

Even Death On A Cross – Crucifixion was one of the most hideous forms of execution ever devised by man. The Greeks used a simple upright stake, but the Romans always added the crossbeam. The victim was tied or nailed to the beams with great spikes through his wrists and feet. While the weight of the body hung from the wrists, the lungs were unable to inhale and exhale effectively. The victim would have to shift his weight to his pierced feet, thrusting himself up to gasp for breath. The hours of death on the cross were not spent quietly hanging there, but were spent in a constant struggle for breath. The ultimate cause of death was loss of blood, shock, and suffocation.

V. 9 Therefore God Has Highly Exalted Him – Literally, God has “hyper-exalted” him. (This is the only use of this word in the New Testament.) Just as Jesus made the supreme sacrifice in humiliation, so also the Father has honored him with the highest exaltation. Jesus became the perfect example of the principle he had taught his disciples: “For every one who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Luke 14:11)

And Bestowed On Him The Name Which Is Above Every Name – Various suggestions have been offered as to what this “name” is. Perhaps it is “Jesus” (v. 10); perhaps it is “Lord” (v. 11); perhaps “Jesus Christ” (v. 11), or perhaps Jesus’ ultimate name is yet unknown to us. At any rate, it is not the name itself that is important. What is important is that this name or title marks Jesus as supreme above all others. He holds first rank over all the universe. He is equal with the Father.

V. 10 That At The Name Of Jesus – The “name of Jesus” could be either the name which is “Jesus,” or the name which belongs to Jesus (see above). The wording of the text does not allow us to be dogmatic in our interpretation.

Every Knee Should Bow – The knee bows in worship of the divine. No man (Acts 10:25-26) or angel (Judges 13:15-16) may receive worship, for it belongs exclusively to God (Matt. 4:10).

“As I live, says the Lord, every knee
shall bow to me, and every tongue
shall give praise to God.”
(Isa. 45:23; Rom. 14:11)

The Father thus presents the Son as the worthy object of worship.

In Heaven And On Earth And Under The Earth – Every creature must acknowledge that Christ is worthy of worship. Whether angelic or human, whether in heaven or on earth or under the earth—all must worship Jesus Christ.

The phrase “under the earth” was probably not intended to be a specific statement concerning the whereabouts of demons or of deceased humans. More likely, it just completes the sequence, indicating that any and every sphere of existence is subject to Christ.

V. 11 And Every Tongue Confess – Every creature must sooner or later recognize and admit that Jesus Christ is Lord. Those who have not made confession as an act of conversion (Rom. 10:9-10) will make their confession as an admission of defeat.

That Jesus Christ Is Lord – The full force of “Lord” (*kurios*) is not appreciated by modern, English-speaking people. This word had come through a long history of development before it was ready to serve as a fitting title for Jesus Christ.

The *kurios* was originally the owner of a piece of property. Next, the *kurios* was the owner and master of a slave. Then, when the Greek mystery religions began to develop, *kurios* was used in reference to the deity they worshipped. By this point in ancient history, then, the *kurios* was recognized as owner, obeyed as master, and honored as a god.

What happened next had tremendous impact on the word. When the translators of the Old Testament (200 B.C.) tried to translate the divine name YHWH (Jehovah) into Greek, they faced a problem. No one knew how to pronounce the sacred name, since the vowels were omitted. There was no way to transliterate the name from Hebrew to Greek, letter by letter. The solution was to translate YHWH as *kurios*. Thus, especially to the Jewish mind, the title *kurios* even had reference to God Himself.

All of this came together to make up the meaning of our word “Lord.” And Jesus Christ is Lord.

To The Glory Of God The Father – There is no competition in heaven between Father and Son. One does not seek glory above or apart from the Other. When the Son is worshipped as Lord, it brings glory to the Father. When the Father is worshipped, it is along with, and by means of, the Son.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. What is “participation in the Spirit”? What does it have to do with unity?

2. What does it mean to be “of the same mind”? Do we have to think alike before we can have unity?
3. How can we count others better than ourselves if they are actually inferior? How can the example of Jesus help us in this?
4. What two or three key words would you choose to describe the mind of Christ?
5. Was Jesus God?
6. Of what did Jesus empty himself?
7. To what extent could “God in disguise” actually experience what it is like to be a man?
8. What is the name which is above every name?
9. Why was Paul careful to include all three regions—in heaven, on earth, and under the earth?
10. What is the history and meaning of the title “Lord”?

A.B.A. REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why are humility and servanthood essential to Christian unity?
2. Explain the meaning of “incentive” in verse 1.
3. What is the Greek word for “partnership,” and how can it be translated?
4. What role does the Holy Spirit play in uniting all Christians?

5. What is the Greek word for “affection” in verse 1? Explain the meaning of this word.
6. Provide a literal translation of “by being of the same mind” in verse 2. Explain whether these words focus upon unity in doctrine/opinion or attitude and purpose.
7. What is the literal translation of “being in full accord” in verse 2?
8. Why is it impossible to have absolute doctrinal conformity?
9. “So long as people are motivated by _____, _____ is impossible.”
10. What is the literal meaning of “conceit” in verse 3?
11. What did Jesus do to provide a perfect example of humility and counting others better than Himself?
12. Provide a literal translation of “have this mind among yourselves” in verse 5.
13. “Every Christian should have the same _____ of the _____ who became _____ of all.”
14. What do verses 5 and 6 teach about the deity of the Lord Jesus?
15. Explain the meaning of the Greek word for “form” in verse 6. What does this word teach about the deity of Jesus?
16. List 6 New Testament verses which teach that Jesus is God.
17. Explain the words “did not count the equality with God a thing to be grasped” in verse 6.
18. Provide a brief definition of omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence.
19. “As the Son of Man, Jesus put a _____ - _____ on His _____.”
20. “The kind of servant Jesus became was actually a ‘ _____ ’ or ‘ _____ ’.”

21. Why was it necessary for Jesus to fully experience humanness and be tempted in every respect?
22. What did the ancient Docetics conclude about Jesus?
23. "The refusal to admit that _____ had come in the _____ was one of the earliest _____ of the church."
24. Explain the meaning of the word "form" in verse 8.
25. Summarize the teaching of Hebrews 5:7-8.
26. Contrast the type of "cross" used by the Greeks and Romans.
27. Describe the process of executing a victim by crucifixion.
28. In crucifixion, what was the ultimate cause of death?
29. What is the literal meaning of "highly exalted" in verse 9? How many times is this word used in the New Testament?
30. Explain the phrase "under the earth" in verse 10.
31. "Every creature must sooner or later _____ and _____ that Jesus Christ is _____. Those who have not made _____ as an act of _____ (Rom. 10:9-10) will make their _____ as an _____ of _____."
32. What is the Greek word for "Lord" in verse 11?
33. Explain the development of the Greek word "kurios."
34. What problem arose in the translation of "Jehovah" into Greek?
35. "Thus, especially to the Jewish mind, the title _____ even had reference to _____."
36. What was the most significant lesson you have learned from this section? What impact will this lesson have in your life?