

Unity Worthy of the Gospel

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[0 : 00] Merry Christmas to all of you here as well as all of you joining us from elsewhere.

Please turn with me to Philippians chapter 1 verse 27. This is now entering into the main body of the letter to the Philippians.

And let me pray and ask God's help. Heavenly Father, we want to be Christians worthy of the name of your Son, Jesus Christ.

We want to be characterized by His humility, His selfless sacrifice. Because only then can we be united for the sake of the gospel.

Only then can we bring glory to your name. Amen. So please God, speak to us now.

[1 : 33] May your powerful word have its effect on us this evening. To make us more like your Son. In His precious name we pray.

Amen. Philippians chapter 1 verse 27 to chapter 2 verse 18. Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind, striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents.

This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in Him, but also suffer for His sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

[3 : 18] Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men, and being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Therefore, God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence, but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish, in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.

Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. Likewise, you also should be glad and rejoice with me.

[5 : 12] In his memoir, *The Heavenly Man*, Brother Yun, recalls a time when the burgeoning house church movement in China had two main groups marked by doctrinal disagreements as well as some rivalry and faction.

At that time, Zhang Rongliang and Zhu Yongzi, the leaders of the two groups, decided to get together in an attempt to hash things out. And when Zhu Yongzi was praying in preparation for the meeting, Brother Fan said to him, Brother Zhu, I believe the Lord has given me a word for you, but I am not sure you can accept it.

He continued, I feel that when Zhang Rongliang and his leaders arrive, you should immediately get on your knees and wash their feet one by one. Brother Zhu, who was the leader of millions of Christians throughout China, responded, I accept this as a word from the Lord.

I'll certainly wash their feet. Unfortunately, however, the atmosphere, I'm quoting from the book here, the atmosphere deteriorated until it became like a business meeting with everyone talking at once about different subjects.

Many old wounds resurfaced and it became apparent the two groups were as far apart as they'd ever been. It looked as if Brother Zhu had missed his chance to wash their feet.

[6 : 33] Suddenly, Zhang slept to his knee and announced, All this talk is a waste of time. Let's pray and then we'll leave. Brother Fan pushed Brother Zhu in the back and instructed him, Quick, get some water and do what the Lord told you to do.

Zhang was praying, Zhang was praying with his eyes closed when Zhu knelt down in front of him and started gently to take his shoes and socks off. And Zhang opened his eyes and was amazed. He couldn't believe that the great Zhu Yongzi, the leader of the largest house church movement in China, would ever kneel down and wash his feet.

Zhang cried out and wrapped his arm around Brother Zhu in a warm embrace and that led to a reconciliation and an unprecedented partnership in the movement.

All because one brother obeyed the Holy Spirit's prompting to wash his brother's feet. And the gospel advanced in China, continued to advance.

Humility fostered by unity and unity enabled by, unity enabling people to persevere for the sake of the gospel. That's what this passage is all about.

[7 : 49] Humility fostering unity and unity enabling us to persevere together. In the preceding passage, Paul spoke of how we should live with single-minded devotion for the events of the gospel, but he realizes that there are a couple obstacles that stand in the way of the Philippian church.

One is external persecution, which he mentions in verses 28 to 30 of chapter 1. And then second is internal divisions, characterized by selfish ambition and conceit, grumbling and disputing.

And so knowing that Paul deals with those issues head on in this passage and exhorts the Philippians and us, by extension, to live in a manner worthy of the gospel by adopting the mind of Christ who humbled himself unto death.

Following the flow of Paul's argument, I will unpack it in three main points. First, unity for the gospel of Christ, humility with the mind of Christ, and then perseverance until the day of Christ.

First, unity for the gospel of Christ. Paul implores the Philippian believers in verse 27, only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ. He's emphatic.

[9 : 02] Only, whatever else you might forget to do, do this. Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ. That's literally, only live as citizens worthy of the gospel of Christ.

The language of citizenry and civic responsibility would not have been lost on the Philippians since they were citizens of Philippi, which was a proud Roman colony.

Luke describes Philippi in Acts 16, 12 this way, as a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. Colonial status was the highest privilege that any Roman province could hope to attain.

Residents of a Roman colony were granted freedom as well as exemption from direct taxation. But Paul is not here referring to their Roman citizenship.

He's calling them to a higher allegiance because Christians are citizens of the colony of heaven.

Paul says this explicitly later in Philippians chapter 3, verse 20, where he says, But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

[10 : 16] As we see in verses 29 to 30, the Philippian believers were facing persecution, engaged in the same conflict that Paul was engaged in. They saw this, and it's recounted in Acts chapter 16, where Paul was accused of advocating customs that are not lawful for Romans to accept their practice.

And consequently, Paul was torn naked, beaten with rods, and thrown into prison with their feet fastened in the stocks. And now they see that Paul is still engaged in that same conflict as a prisoner of the Roman Empire.

And the Philippians' believers were experiencing that same opposition, persecution, which was likely a point of embarrassment for them as citizens of Philippi, citizens of the Roman Empire.

Because they might say, we're Romans after all. Should we have to go through these embarrassments, these shame? But Paul reminds them, no, you're much more than a Roman citizen.

Don't you forget where your ultimate allegiance lies. You are citizens of heaven, and your Lord is not Caesar, but Christ. So only live as citizens worthy of the gospel of Christ.

[11 : 32] Christ. So whatever citizenship or identity or privilege you might be proud of, remember this, that more importantly, you are a Christian.

Before you're an American or a Briton, before you're Chinese or Korean, before you're a Harvard grad or an MIT grad, before you're a doctor of philosophy, before you're black or white, before all else, you are a citizen of heaven, a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But what does living as citizens worthy of the gospel of Jesus entail? It entails unity in the gospel and for the gospel. Paul explains in verses 27 and 28, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel and not frightened in anything by your opponents.

The phrase in one spirit should be rendered in the one spirit, meaning the Holy Spirit. That's the way the New International Version translates it and that's the way Paul uses that exact expression everywhere else he uses it.

Ephesians 2.18 and 1 Corinthians 12.13. So he's referring to the third person of the Trinity here.

And the phrase one mind is literally one soul. It's the same word that's used later in chapter 2, verse 2, translated being in full accord, being united in soul.

[13 : 06] So then, standing firm in one spirit with one soul, that's paralleled by chapter 2, verses 1 to 2. If there is any participation in the spirit, complete my joy by being united in soul, being in full accord.

So then, only those who participate together in the one spirit can work together in one spirit. Striving side by side for the faith of the gospel is enabled by our unity in the spirit of God.

So then, the unity that Paul is enjoining here for us is not a denominational or organizational unity. unity, it's a spiritual unity established by the Holy Spirit.

In summary, then, a life worthy of the gospel of Christ is a life that promotes the gospel, a life that adorns the gospel, a life that strives for the gospel.

The phrase striving side by side is the language of athletic competition or conflict. It refers to contending together for the faith of the gospel. And as in any contest, there are opponents.

[14 : 19] So Paul tells them not to be frightened in anything by your opponents. Those who live to advance the gospel of Jesus will always be opposed. But we must not be intimidated.

We need to stick together and fight together. And this teaches us that the unity of the church that Paul is commanding here is not just a nice accessory. It's not a bonus.

Rather, it's something that is essential to the advance of the gospel. if we do not stand firm in the one spirit with one mind, we will fall apart in many directions with many different minds in the service of many spirits.

And Paul says to the Philippians in verse 28 that their unified, steadfast witness to Jesus is a clear sign to them, to their opponents, of their destruction, but of their salvation.

because it will reveal their hope in the day of Jesus Christ and the judgment that awaits those who oppose Christ.

[15 : 24] And here's why a suffering witness on behalf of Jesus is a sign for our, a sign of our salvation. Paul says in verses 29 to 30, for it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

I quoted chapter 3 verses 10 to 11 last week, but Paul believes that sharing in Christ's suffering is part and parcel of discipleship. It is a necessary aspect of our union with Christ.

Therefore, only those who share in Christ's sufferings can hope to share in his resurrection from the dead. In this way, the Philippians suffering for Christ's sake is a sign to them of their ultimate vindication and salvation.

This is why in Acts chapter 5 when the apostles are arrested and beaten for the name, for preaching the name of Jesus Christ, it says that they rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name of Christ.

They're not happy that they're getting beat up in and of itself. They rejoiced rather in what their suffering meant, that they were identified with Christ, that they were sharing in Christ's suffering, which meant that they will also share in his victory, in his vindication.

[16 : 51] And that's why he says, it was granted to you. It's kind of a, it's a funny way to put that, right? It means to give graciously. God has given graciously to you to suffer.

It's a gift from God because it tests our suffering for the sake of Christ, tests our faith, confirms the genuineness of our faith, increases our confidence in our salvation that awaits us.

That's what it means to live in a manner worthy of the gospel, adopting the mind of the suffering Messiah. But of course, the Christian life is not only about suffering and Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 1-5, for as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too.

Along this line, Paul continues his exhortation for unity in chapter 2 verses 1-2 and reminds us of the comfort that we have in Jesus. It says, So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

We find a close parallel to verse 1 in 2 Corinthians 13-14 which we use as our benediction, that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

[18 : 21] This is the only other place in the whole Bible where the phrase fellowship or participation of the Spirit occurs. They're the two same words. So then any encouragement in Christ and any comfort from God's love, the Father's love, and any participation in the Spirit, this is intentionally Trinitarian.

It's speaking of our communion with God which is the subjective experience of our union with God, the objective reality. If you have any encouragement from Christ, our good shepherd, our redeemer, if you have any comfort from the love of God, our heavenly Father, if you have any participation in the Spirit who indwells us and intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words, and then to these three conditions, Paul adds a fourth item, any affection and sympathy.

This is the only item on the list that doesn't have a modifying phrase like in Christ, from love, or in the Spirit. So likely here he's transitioning to something that they have amongst each other, relationship among believers, affection and sympathy that they had for one another and for Paul. So Paul's saying this, if you have experienced even a tiny bit of the blessings and comforts of being a Christian, then do this above all things. Be complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

Once again, the exhortation is toward unity of the faith for the sake of the gospel. Having the same mind or having one mind doesn't mean that they have to have the same exact opinions on everything, but it means that they should have the same mindset or disposition.

[20 : 08] Similarly, they are to have the same love, extending the love that they have received from God the Father to one another. But this kind of gospel unity is made possible only by humility.

So Paul says in verses 3 to 4, do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Notice how categorical this command is. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit. The word conceit literally means empty glory, vain glory.

It describes those who think of themselves more highly than they ought to think. Those who have no glory and yet act like they do. We should not say or do anything out of such selfish ambition or empty glory.

Instead, it says we should in humility count others more significant than ourselves. What does that look like? Paul explains in verse 4, let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

[21 : 24] This is essentially Paul's version of the second greatest commandment. Love your neighbor as yourself. Paul's not telling us to compare ourselves unfavorably with other people.

rather he's telling us to forget ourselves in the service of other people. He's telling us to lose ourselves for the gain of other people.

Think about it this way. The fact that there are more important people in this world doesn't ever stop us from thinking of ourselves first and foremost, does it?

The fact that there are more knowledgeable people in the world doesn't stop us ever from giving the greatest weight to our own opinions, does it? The fact that there are busier people in the world doesn't make us ever stop us from valuing our time over theirs, does it?

The fact that there are more needy people in the world doesn't ever stop us from thinking first of our needs, does it? That's because selfishness is in our sinful human nature.

[22 : 32] But Paul is telling us that as people who have been united with Christ, we should go beyond our sinful human nature and count others more significant than ourselves.

Consider others' interests before our interests. What we naturally do for ourselves, we do this even when we are less significant than others. We consider our interests before theirs.

He's saying, do that for others. It doesn't matter whether you think you're wiser than them or not, more significant than them or not. Consider their interests before yours.

Let each of you look to the interests of others. Look, here is where we get, it's a Greek word from which we get the English word scope, to be on the lookout for something. Pay careful attention to something.

We are to be on the lookout for others' interests. Pay careful attention to their interests instead of thinking only of my time, my life, my reputation, my money, my future, my health, my family.

[23 : 40] Some people make much of the fact that Paul doesn't say in verse 4, don't look for your own interests, but look only to the interests of others. But says, look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Ah, you see, they say, Paul's telling us about telling us that we need to look out for our own interests, too. Just not only for our own interests. But to emphasize that is to miss the whole point of this passage.

Paul's not commanding us to look out for our interests. Rather, he's assuming that we will look out for our interests and telling us to subordinate our interests to the interests of others.

The concept of enlightened self-interest is a category of modern psychology, not of scripture. This is the scripture's antidote to selfish ambition. This is the scripture's cure to empty glory.

The grumbling and disputing mentioned later in chapter 2, verse 14. Humility fosters unity and unity enables the church to persevere together for the faith of the gospel.

[24 : 50] This serves as a transition to the next section where Paul speaks of humility and how we ought to live with the mind of Christ. These verses, verses 5 to 11, is the crux, the center of this entire section.

It's the meat of the passage, really of the entire book. It's sandwiched between two exhortations toward unity in the faith, but these exhortations are controlled by the example of Christ at the center.

Many people think that verses 6 to 11 are lyrics of an early Christian hymn because of their poetic nature, which is possible but not certain. Regardless, these verses beautifully encapsulate the magnificent truths about Jesus and his humiliation and his subsequent glorification.

It begins this way, have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus. This mindset that he's been speaking of, of putting others first, this mindset of humility, that's what Paul's commanding here.

And he tells us that this mindset is yours in Christ Jesus. By virtue of our, your union with Christ, by virtue of our union with Christ, we are empowered to live out this kind of humility that Christ exemplified for us.

[26 : 09] Verses 6 to 7 continue, Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of man.

There's several things about these verses that can easily be misunderstood and have been misunderstood in the past. First, the word form in English usually means the external shape or appearance of something.

For example, the form of that phone is beautiful, but inside it's made of cheap parts. So sometimes people mistakenly think that Jesus was only in the form of God, the outward appearance of God, but wasn't actually God in his essence.

But the word form used here, it's the Greek word morphe, from which we get the English words like morphology or metamorphosis. It refers to the essential mode in which something exists.

It refers to the nature or character of a thing, the essential nature of a person. There's a different Greek word, schema, that's used to refer to the external appearance, merely the formal appearance of things.

[27 : 30] And that's used later in verse 8 to describe Jesus' outward human appearance. So it's a little confusing that the ESB, translated the two different Greek words, morphe and schema, with the same English word, form.

But the New American Standard Bible helpfully translates morphe as form and schema as appearance to make the distinction clear. NIV does the same thing. The New International Version translates morphe as nature and schema as appearance.

Christ, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped, but rather he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant being made in human likeness and being found in appearance as a man.

He humbled himself by becoming obedient to death. So what Paul is saying is this, Christ Jesus was already God in his eternal preexistence. And while he was divine, he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.

He did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage. That's the way the NIV puts it. The word translated, a thing to be grasped, refers to a seizure of property, or laying claim to something, or gripping, or grasping, or holding on to something.

[28 : 49] It's the characteristic of all pagan gods created in the likeness of man, in the image of man. They are avaricious, acquisitive, exploitative, and self-serving, always saying get, get, get more from its worshippers.

But Christ was not like this. He was not looking only to his own interests. He did not seek to exploit his status as God to his own advantage.

He didn't clasp tightly to the privileges of deity that he was entitled to. No, instead, he emptied himself.

He says in verse 7. But what does that mean? It doesn't mean that Jesus emptied himself of his deity, his divine attributes.

Colossians 2, 9 says of Jesus, for in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily. He never ceased to be God, but without ceasing to be God, Jesus became a man.

[29 : 49] The rest of verse 7 tells us that this is exactly what this emptying was about. Christ Jesus emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

Jesus didn't abandon his divinity in order to take on humanity. He emptied himself, poured himself out on behalf of others by taking up a human nature in addition to his divine nature.

And this is the shocking message of Christmas. Christmas season is dedicated to remembering that the eternal son of God was born as a human being.

As you know, I currently have the privilege of being a father to an infant. And as I was reflecting on this truth, I was holding my third daughter in my arms and was just filled with wonder, just imagining this, thinking about this, that the eternal word which was with God in the beginning and which was God was born as a crying, babbling baby.

That the omnipresent God, God who occupies all space, was born as a baby that has to be carried from place to place.

[31 : 17] That the mighty God was born as a baby, a frail and delicate baby. That the eternal timeless God to whom a thousand years is like one day enter the timeline of human history.

That the God by whom all things were created himself became a creature. that the master, the lord of lords, the king of kings, the prince of peace, heir of all things that belongs to God the father, took the form of a servant.

Being born in the likeness of man, he became a slave. Without rights and privileges, completely disposed to the will of his father, the son of man came not to be served, but to serve and give to give his life as a ransom for many.

Jesus set aside his scepter and picked up a towel with which he washed his disciples' feet. Jesus prayed in John chapter 17 verse 5, and now father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

Though Jesus was the glorious son of God, in a real way, by taking on human flesh, Jesus divested himself of that glory. His divine glory was veiled.

[32 : 49] Unlike the conceited people that Paul mentioned earlier who boast of glory that they do not have, empty glory, Jesus empties himself of the glory that he does have.

And when he walked the earth in his flesh, Jesus didn't have a halo around his head. He didn't levitate off the floor. He didn't speak with the amplified, booming, thunderous voice.

No, he was a baby, and then a boy, and then a man. He grew in wisdom and stature like other children. He got hungry and thirsty and he had to eat and drink.

His feet got dirty from walking on the dusty roads and they had to be washed. nobody rolled out the red carpet for him. I guess they kind of did on Palm Sunday a little bit.

Jesus was humiliated. It's humiliating for God to take on human flesh. He should have had the whole of humanity at his beck and call, but instead he was despised and rejected by men.

[34 : 06] Jesus emptied himself by taking the form of a servant and he endured this humiliation to save us. In Genesis 1 26 God said let us make man in our image after our likeness the God who created us after his likeness was born in our likeness.

Why? Because in Genesis chapter 3 verse 5 Adam believed Satan's lie that when he eats the forbidden fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil that he will be like God.

Man sought to usurp God's place. That's what sin is in its essence. But God took our place to save us. That's what grace is in its essence.

Adam grasped for what was not rightfully his and Jesus did not grasp for what was rightfully his. Jesus came as the new man in order to succeed where Adam had failed.

So the Son of God took on the humiliation of becoming the Son of Man to bring about the new creation. But his humiliation doesn't stop there.

[35 : 27] We talked about the humiliation that Jesus endured as God but now he endures further humiliation as man. It says in verse 8 he being he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death even death on a cross.

Because we've lived with the idea of Jesus being crucified for two millennia now we have in some ways become too familiar and comfortable with the idea. we wear crosses on our necks and put them up on our walls but that would have been morbid and totally unthinkable in the ancient world. Jews had been taught in Deuteronomy 21-23 that a man who is killed by being hung on a tree is cursed by God. Similarly for the Greeks and Romans crucifixion was a form of cruel and unusual punishment.

It was a form of torture and execution wrapped up in one package. The Romans had plenty of other more efficient means of killing people but they used the crucifixion for special occasions for low-life criminals and enemies of the state.

In fact Cicero a Roman politician denounced the practice of crucifixion in a number of his writings. He called it a most cruel and disgusting punishment.

[36 : 47] And he suggested the very mention of the cross should Roman citizen's body but from his mind his eyes his ears. Crucifixion was a picture of humiliating defeat that sent the chilling message of Roman domination to all spectators.

And that's the way our king our savior our champion died. How humiliating.

And he endured that humiliation for us because Adam took an aid from the forbidden tree. Jesus climbed up and died on the cursed tree of the cross.

Jesus bore the deadly consequences of our sins. We should have been humiliated like that. We should have borne shame in our own nakedness but Jesus hung on the cross in his nakedness for us and we learn all this wonderful theology not just so we can talk theoretically about what happened who Jesus was what his two natures are but because it's supposed to have an effect in our lives.

Remember how Paul started this in verse 5 have this mind among yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus that's the effect that this is supposed to have as Christians we're supposed to have this mind that Christ demonstrated for us in his humble obedience unto death we are called to daily carry our cross and follow Jesus and what does that mean that means dying to our personal preferences that means dying to our entitlements dying to our selfish ambitions Dying to our dreams of glory in his book entitled Humility Andrew Murray the 19th century South African pastor says this until a humility which will rest in nothing less than the end and death of self which gives up all the honor of man as Jesus did to seek the honor that comes from

[39 : 15] God alone which absolutely makes and counts itself nothing that God may be all that the Lord alone may be exalted until such a humility be what we seek in Christ above our chief joy and welcome at any price there is very little hope of religion that will conquer the world a humble person does not compare himself to others he does not envy because he has made himself nothing and has made Jesus everything he seeks nothing for himself but Christ and he lives entirely for the glory of Christ he is the slave of Christ and for a servant to everyone he can boast of his weaknesses he can rejoice even in the midst of suffering he can brush off the insults and injury done to him by others he does not get puffed up by the praises and rewards heaped on him by others because he has made himself nothing and has made Jesus everything that's the blessed freedom of humility to have the mind of

Christ and we can humble ourselves in such a way only if we entrust ourselves to God's ultimate vindication and salvation as Jesus did so Paul turns his attention to Jesus vindication and glorification in verses 9 to 11 therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father the word therefore tells us that it's because Jesus willingly endured humiliation and took the lowliest place out of obedience to his Father that God the Father now exalts him to the highest place in verses 68 Jesus was the subject of all the verbs but in verse 9 God is the subject of all the verbs

Jesus humbles himself God exalts him likewise it's not our place to exalt ourselves our only lot is to humble ourselves it is entirely God's prerogative to exalt us verses 10 to 11 quote from Isaiah 45 21 to 23 where God declares his name as the Lord Yehovah and says to me every knee shall bow every tongue shall swear allegiance God the proper name of God in Hebrew Yehovah is translated as Lord throughout the Greek translation of the Old Testament which Paul and other New Testament believers used and are familiar with and this that title the Lord is the name that is above every name that God now bestows on Jesus so that every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord the name of God this is why Paul emphasizes the importance of confessing Jesus is Lord in Romans chapter 10 verse 9 1 Corinthians chapter 12 verse 3 and a name is not merely a name in scripture it represents a person's character a person's worth his accomplishment and in Isaiah 42 8 God says I am the Lord that is my name my glory I give to no other nor my praise to carved idols because no one else is worthy of the name and yet God bestows that very name on Jesus this does not mean that Jesus attained divinity through his death resurrection and ascension rather it means that it is for the first time that the name of the Lord is bestowed on Jesus Christ as the God man the redeemer of God's people isn't that that's mind boggling to think about in Jesus manhood is forever joined to the Godhead whether we do it now as the glad subjects of the Lord Jesus or whether we do it later as subdued enemies of the Lord Jesus all the heavenly beings angels and demons all the earthly beings we humans who walk on it now and all those who are under the earth the dead buried underneath every knee will bow before him and every tongue will confess his name and his lordship because that's what he deserves he didn't get that due he didn't get what was due to his name his first coming he was humiliated but in his second coming Jesus will get his due that's what we live for and this is a powerful even seditious statement that [44 : 31] Jesus is lord because in the Roman empire especially in Philippi a Roman colony emperor worship was widespread and Caesar was hailed as lord but no Paul says the true lord is Jesus Christ who humbled himself to the lowest place and died on a Roman cross that's our lord not Caesar and as Christians we are to follow in Jesus footsteps the way to glory always goes through the cross and we are to do this not only at the onset of our lives as Christians but daily until the very end that brings us to the final section verses 12 to 18 where Paul speaks of perseverance until the day of Christ he says in verses 12 to 13 therefore my beloved as you have always obeyed and so now not only as in my presence but much more in my absence work out your own salvation with fear and trembling for it is

God who works in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure this is a classic text that teaches us of the Christian's need to persevere in faith and obedience till the end there is a sense in which Christians are or have already been saved we have been justified by Christ we are also being saved we are being sanctified by the spirit we also will be saved when we are glorified by the father so our salvation is past present and future the salvation that is in view here in verses 12 to 13 is in the process of being worked out currently and ultimately lies in the future it's the same salvation that

Paul mentioned earlier in chapter 1 verse 18 where he straightforwardly said that salvation is from God but that doesn't mean we don't have to do anything Paul is very concerned here with our obedience he put forward

Christ's obedience unto death as an example for us and that's what he now calls the Philippian believers to live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ by standing firm in one spirit and contending side by side for the faith of the gospel without being intimidated by opponents so then believers have a real part to play in God's saving work work out your own salvation with fear and trembling we don't work out our salvation lackadaisically we cannot be complacent this is not something we can take for granted no we must work out our own salvation with fear and trembling lest we fail lest we fall short of the goal it's important to note here that the verb work out and the possessive your are both plural in the Greek of course each individual believer is responsible for his or her faith and obedience but there's also an important corporate dimension to our perseverance we persevere together in fact the church is indispensable to our personal perseverance because as Hebrews 3 13 reminds us unless we exhort one another every day we risk being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin but this doesn't mean that our salvation ultimately depends on us verse 13 says for it is God who works in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure in other words we work because God is already working God is the one who enables us to believe and obey God is the one who empowers us to will and to work for his good pleasure he not only helps us to do what he wants he also helps us to desire what he wants to will it he so transforms us and gives us the mind of Christ that we will and work for his good pleasure and this is not a reason to be complacent rather it's an incentive for us all the more to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling because without

God working in us it would all be futile there would be no point in trying but since God is working in us we work even harder to win the prize of the upper call of God in Christ Jesus precisely because God enables us to will and work the more we persevere in our faith and obedience the more we are assured of our salvation assurance of salvation and perseverance of the saints Paul further unpacks what it means for us to work out our own salvation in verses 14 to 16 do all things without grumbling or disputing that you may be blameless and innocent children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation among whom you shine as lights in the world holding fast to the word of life so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain the command here to stand to hold fast to the word of life echoes what he said in chapter 127 standing firm in one spirit one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel

[50 : 21] Paul's main concern once again is that we hold fast to the gospel and in unity bear witness to Jesus Christ cracks were beginning to show in the Philippians united contention for the gospel so Paul exhorts them to do all things without grumbling or disputing and then he drives his point home with a pointed Old Testament allusion the word grumbling is a word that occurs again and again throughout the first five books of the Bible to describe the Israelites unfaithfulness and their grumbling against God they constantly doubted God's promises and did not persevere in faith and obedience so much so that Moses said of them in Deuteronomy 32 verse five which is quoted by Paul here they have dealt corruptly with him they are no longer his children because they are blemished they are a crooked and twisted generation exact same words that Paul uses here he's Paul using this example to warn the Philippians that if you don't want to end up being condemned as a blemished crooked and twisted generation like the unfaithful

Israelites of old then you must hold fast to the gospel and persevere in faith and obedience together when you find yourself grumbling against God when you find yourself disputing with God's people don't dismiss that as a small thing a mundane matter grumbling and disputing reflect a prideful and rebellious heart and as such they are threats not only to our unified witness for the sake of the gospel but also to our own perseverance in faith and obedience Paul doesn't take the Philippians ultimate salvation for granted he exhorts them strongly so that he says in verse 16 in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain Paul here employs the metaphors of race and labor to convey the hope of vindication that he has on the day of

Christ's return he is running a race to win the prize and if he doesn't win that prize his running is in vain he is laboring diligently so all his work all his diligence is in vain this shows just how invested Paul was in the Philippians progress and joy in the gospel we see evidences of their close relationship all throughout this letter Paul calls them beloved brothers he says in chapter 2 verse 12 not only as in my presence but much more in my absence emphasizing that just as they were eager

to please him and listen to him when he was present with them they should do so even more when he is absent from them he says the same thing in chapter 1 verse 27 he asks them in chapter 2 verse 2 to complete my joy because he knew that the Philippian believers were eager to do that he says he rejoices in anticipation chapter 1 verse 18 that he will get to continue to minister to the Philippians for their progress and joy in the faith and then Paul concludes this section in verses 17 to 18 this way even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith I am glad and rejoice with you all likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me Paul's joy was so inextricably intertwined with the Philippians joy and progress in the gospel that he saw his own life and ministry as a drink offering poured upon the sacrificial offering of their faith in the Old Testament wine was poured out as a drink offering unto an animal or grain sacrifice to use a more modern analogy Paul sees his life and ministry as kind of an icing on the cake that he is offering to God in the same way that

Jesus emptied himself Paul now speaks of being poured out for the sake of the Philippians faith and there's hints there of potential martyrdom because Paul knows that his sentence could be an execution God is a wonderful image of being spent for the sake of another but Paul he says it's no matter to him as long as the Philippian church is standing firm in their faith in the gospel and steadfastly bearing witness to Jesus then Paul says no matter that I'm fed to the lions no matter that I'm beheaded no matter that I'm executed no matter that I'm poured out for you I'm glad and rejoice with you all even in that Paul thought this way because he's following Jesus he adopted the mind of Christ who humbled himself unto death but

[55 : 45] Paul says if you do not persevere if you don't make it till the end if you don't hold fast to the word of life then I would have run this race in vain this is what's so helpful for me to think about Christian leaders owe the churches that they serve their integrity to be above reproach they owe you they owe their churches faithful preaching of the word they owe the churches their prayers as 1st Samuel 12 23 says far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you and I will instruct you in the good and right way but the people of God also owe their leaders something 1st Samuel 12 24 continues only fear the

Lord and serve him faithfully pastors do not daily worry about the spiritual conditions of their church members pray in tears for them spend countless hours cooped up in their study preparing sermons worrying about this word or that and preach their hearts out on Sundays because it's a job that makes the money they don't do that because they care nothing about the church but only about doing their part no that's not the pastor's mindset they labor for your progress and joy in the gospel and if you do not persevere till the end it would be in vain the years would be wasted so how are you persevering today church are you living in a manner worthy of the gospel by adopting the mind of

Christ are you shining as lights in the world are you holding fast to the word of life are you glad and rejoicing because of the advance of the gospel that's my prayer for you and I want to end close by citing this poem from that same book I mentioned earlier by Andrew Murray oh to be emptier lowlier mean unnoticed and unknown and to God a vessel holier filled with Christ and Christ alone yes father that's our deepest desire we want to be nothing we want

Christ to be everything help us to lose ourselves in you forget ourselves for the sake of the gospel oh help us God to persevere in faith and obedience to the end unite us as the church the body of believers to contend side by side together for the sake of the gospel in Jesus name we pray amen