

"HE THAT HUMBLETH HIMSELF SHALL BE EXALTED." R2227

– DEC. 5. – PHIL. 2:1-11. –

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." – Phil. 2:5.

The exhortations of this lesson are taken from the Apostle's letter to the Church at Philippi. It will be remembered that this Church was the first one founded in Europe: the particulars connected with its small beginning were noted in our lessons for July 4th and 11th. Referring to the smallness of its beginning Dr. McLaren, commenting upon the account of how the Apostle and his companions found outside the city by the river bank a place of resort for prayer and "spake unto the women which resorted thither," says: –

"Not blowing of trumpets, not beating of drums of any sort. A few women and some worn out travelers talking together by the banks of the rushing river. How scornfully the great folk of Philippi would have smiled, if they had been told that the chief title of their city to be remembered at all would be the presence in it of that one insignificant Jew, and his letter to the Church founded on that morning!"

The Apostle indirectly reveals something respecting the general character of the Philippian Church in the Epistle written to it: we find in it nothing like reproof or correction, as we find in most of the epistles written to other Churches by the same Apostle. It is a particularly beautiful and loving letter and indicates a very close sympathetic bond between the Apostle and this Church in particular. Moreover, this Church on four different occasions that we know of rendered the Apostle practical sympathy by financial assistance, as well as by words of comfort and cheer. While at Thessalonica he twice received their gifts in his support; again while he was at Corinth they ministered to him, and again **when he was a prisoner in Rome they did not forget him. It was their messenger, Epaphroditus, who brought this last memorial of their love, who was "sick unto death" – probably prostrated by the malarial fever. On his recovery, the Apostle Paul sent back with him this beautiful letter known to us as The Epistle to the Philippians. (Phil. 2:25-28; 4:14-19; 2 Cor. 11:9.) The other Churches may possibly have ministered to the Apostle also, but if so the fact is not recorded; apparently they missed a great opportunity, and we may be sure that while the Apostle did urge them to contribute to the relief of the brethren at Jerusalem, during a period of famine, he would not make a request for personal assistance, however much he may have been in need, or however much he might have appreciated even small manifestations of their love for him and the cause he served.**

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The lesson before us respecting Christian humility does not intimate that this grace was lacking among the Philippians, but that the Apostle recognized it as being one of the most important of all the graces, and one which required *continual* cultivation, in order to a continual growth in the likeness of Christ. The opening words of this lesson are an exhortation to brotherly-love and affection amongst themselves. He says, If there be any consolation in Christ, if there be any comfort of love to those who are in him, if they have any heart, if they have any mercies, – as tho he would put them to the test whether or not any would deny that these graces appertain to all who have come into Christ as new creatures. Then, as tho they had assented to his proposition, conceding that there is comfort, love, fellowship, sympathy and consolation in Christ for one another, he adds: You can fill my joy full by being thus minded toward each other – having love for each other, being in sympathy and accord with each other, and having one mind or purpose or will as a Church, the Lord's will. How grand an expression this is, his joy would be filled merely by knowing of their sympathy and love for him, not by knowing of their professions of love for the Lord, but by knowing that they loved, sympathized with and consoled *one another*, in the proper fellowship of the members of the body of Christ! This would fill his joy more full than anything else that he could know respecting them. Likewise, we may be sure the same conditions would be most pleasing and most acceptable in the sight of our Lord and Savior. The Apostle John had the same thought respecting brotherly-love in the Church as an indication of its godliness, when he says: "He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" – 1 John 4:20.

To this end – that such a spirit of perfect unity and fellowship might obtain amongst the believers at Philippi, Paul exhorts that all shall cultivate the grace of humility, and that in every affair each shall take heed that "nothing be done through strife or vain glory," that self-laudation and strivings for preeminence be thoroughly put away as the greatest enemies to the spirit of the Lord and the blessing of the Church. On the contrary, each should have that lowliness of mind which can see the good qualities of fellow-members and appreciate some of these qualities at least as superior to his own. Lowliness of mind does not necessarily signify an ignorance of any talents or graces which we ourselves may possess; but so long as the Church is in the present imperfect or tabernacle condition, the perfection of all the graces, and all the talents, and all the abilities, need never be expected in any one person in any congregation. So, then, each one may, if he be of lowly mind, see in others certain good qualities or graces superior to his own and should delight to recognize these and to esteem their possessor accordingly.

For each one to look merely upon his own things, interests, welfare or talents and to ignore these in others would manifest a general selfishness, and consequently a dearth of the spirit of

Christ, which is a spirit of love and generosity. In proportion as we are filled more and more with the holy spirit, love, we will find ourselves interested in the welfare of others. This was the mind, disposition or spirit which was in our dear Redeemer, – which he so wonderfully manifested, which we must copy and develop in our characters if we would ultimately be of the "little flock" who shall be joint-heirs with Christ in his glory: concerning whom God has predestinated that to be accepted with him to this position they must be "**copies** of his Son." – Rom. 8:29.

That we may partially discern how our Lord Jesus exemplified this spirit of humility, the Apostle briefly sums up in few words the story of his humiliation and how it led to his present exaltation. He points out to us that when our Lord Jesus was a spirit being, before he stooped to take our nature and to bear the penalty of our sin, he was in "a form of God" – a spirit form, a high and glorious condition. But instead of being moved selfishly to ambitiously grasp for higher things than those which God had conferred upon him – instead of seeking to set up a rival empire as did Satan – he did not meditate a robbery of God to make himself his equal (Satan's course), saying, "I will ascend above the stars [the bright ones, the angelic hosts], I will be **as** the Most High [his peer, his equal]." Quite to the contrary of this, our Lord Jesus, "the beginning of the creation of God," was willing in harmony with the Father's plan to humble himself, to take a **lower** nature and to do a work which would imply not only a great deal of humiliation but also a great deal of pain and suffering. The Apostle points out how the "Only Begotten" proved his willingness and humility by complying with this arrangement; and that after he became a man he continued of the same humble spirit, willing to carry out the Divine plan to the very letter, by dying as man's ransom-price; and not only so, when it [R2228 : page 297] pleased the Father to require that the death should be a most ignominious one in every respect, perhaps beyond the requirements of the ransom merely, he did not draw back, but said, "Thy will not mine be done," and stooped even to the ignominious "death of the cross."

Here, as the Apostle points out, we have the most wonderful demonstration of humility, meekness and obedience to God that ever was manifested or that could be conceived of. And this is the pattern the Apostle points out that we should seek to copy. "Let this same [humble] mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

It was on account of this humility, which enabled him to render perfect obedience, that the Heavenly Father has so highly honored our dear Redeemer as to raise him from the dead to the **Divine nature**, to a station far above angels, principalities and powers, and every name that is named. That this is his argument is shown (verse 9) by the word "wherefore;" **i.e.**, on this account, on account of this humility just described, God hath highly exalted him.

Not only did our Lord's beautiful and perfect humility and obedience demonstrate that he was loyal to the core to the Heavenly Father, but it also demonstrated that in him the Father's spirit, Love, dwelt richly, for he shared the Father's love for the race he redeemed. On this account also he is found worthy to be the divine agent in the blessing of all the families of the earth, as per the terms of the divine covenant made with father Abraham. Thus he has become the head of the "Seed of Abraham" which is to bless the race redeemed; and hence it will be to him that every knee shall bow and every tongue confess, when Jehovah's "due time" shall come for the pouring out of divine blessings upon the redeemed world – that all may come to a knowledge of the truth and, if they will, into full harmony with God, and to eternal life.

The Apostle not only holds up the Lord Jesus as the great example of a proper humility, self-abnegation and obedience to God in the interest of others, but he would also hold up before us the reward, the high exaltation of our Lord by the Father, the result or reward of his obedience, that we also might be encouraged, and realize that, if faithful in following the footsteps of our Redeemer and sacrificing the advantages of the present to serve the Lord and his cause, then, in due time, we also may expect to be glorified with him and to share his name and throne and work, as members of his anointed body, his Church, his joint-heir.

In the succeeding verses (12-16) the Apostle gives a most beautiful tribute to the Church at Philippi, while urging them to continue on and to make more and more progress in the race-course in which they had already started, working out in themselves through humility and obedience the character, the disposition of Christ, with fear and trembling, and thus working out each his own share in the great salvation to glory, honor and immortality which God hath promised.

We cannot work out our own justification; but being justified by the blood of Christ, and being called with the heavenly calling, we can make our calling and election sure, we can work out our own share in the great salvation to which we have been called in Christ, by giving heed to the instructions of the Lord; by following the pattern which he has set for us. Not that we will attain perfection in the flesh, but merely perfection of will, of intention, of heart; and keeping the body under to the extent of our ability, its weaknesses and imperfections will be reckoned as covered by the merit of our Lord, the Holy One.

It is encouraging also for us to know that this warfare is not merely one of our own, against weakness and sin; but that God is for us, has called us, and is helping us. He already works in us, by his Word of promise, and has led us thus far in the **willing** and the **doing** of his will, his good pleasure: and he will continue thus to lead and to help us and to work in us by his Word of truth, if we will continue to give heed to his counsel. "Sanctify them through thy truth – thy Word is truth." The gospel is "the power of God unto salvation" to every one that so accepts

it; and no greater stimulus to true godliness can be found than the "exceeding great and precious promises given unto us; that **by these** ye might be partakers of the divine nature." – 2 Pet. 1:4.

Moreover, in following in the footsteps of our Lord Jesus, running the race for the great prize set before us in the Gospel, we are not to **murmur** by the way, finding fault with its difficulties and narrowness; nor are we to **dispute** respecting it, nor to seek to have any other way than that which divine providence marks out before us, realizing that the Lord knows exactly what experiences are necessary to our development in the school of Christ, and realizing also that, if obedience were possible while our mouths are full of complaints and dissatisfaction with the Lord and our lot which he has permitted, it would indicate that we were at least out of sympathy with the spirit of his arrangement; and such an obedience, if it were possible (but it would not be possible), would not meet the divine approval, nor gain us the prize. Hence, as the Apostle exhorts, we should "Do all things without murmurings and disputings; that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke,...holding forth the Word of life in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the World."