

IMITATE CHRIST'S HUMILITY

Philippians 2:1-30

Key Verse: 2:5

"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:"

In chapter 1, Paul confessed his love for Christ. "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (1:21). Because he loved Jesus so much, he could enjoy all kinds of hardships and sufferings for Jesus' name's sake. In chapter 2, Paul urges the Philippian Christians to imitate the humility of Jesus. Paul tells us how we can imitate Jesus' humility in several ways.

First, from being united with Christ (1-4). Look at verse 1. "If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion..." In this verse, we find many beautiful words: "encouragement," "comfort," "fellowship," "tenderness" and "compassion." These words well describe the components of the inner man of a humble person. How can we be humble persons who encourage and comfort others while we live in a world similar to a jungle, in which the law of the survival of the fittest rules? Humanly speaking, it seems to be impossible. But there is a way in Christ Jesus. If we carefully ponder on verse 1, we learn that the phrase "...from being united with Christ..." is the key point of verse 1. When we are united with Christ, we can have the inner strength and character of a humble person. In Paul's teaching, this personal union (Rom.6:4) or personal relationship with Christ is the basis of Christian life. John 15:5 depicts this relationship most properly; it says, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." To be united with Christ means to be in an intimate, personal relationship with him. From this relationship flows the life source of a Christian's inner person, including encouragement, comfort, fellowship or friendship, tenderness and compassion.

It is imperative for all Christians to encourage others instead of burdening others. We must encourage others to overcome their fears and sinfulness and live the life of faith in Jesus. As Christians, if we are

always a burden or burdensome to others, it is most shameful. We should not always be a burden to others. Shepherd Tim Fitch used to be a burden to others. But since he began to have a personal relationship with Jesus, he has become a joy and an encouragement to others. At this time we must ask ourselves a question: "Am I an encouragement to others or a burden?" If we are an encouragement to others, we must ask God's grace all the more so that we can be an encouragement all the more. If we realize that we are a burden or burdensome to others, then we must ask God's mercy and abide in Jesus through studying the word of life.

We can see a beautiful example of encouraging others in the man named Barnabas. When Paul was converted to Christianity, he was in a discouraging situation. In his zeal he was eager to preach the gospel and tried to join the disciples (Ac 9:26). But all the Christians who knew who he was--a murderer--were all afraid of him. Yet Barnabas, whose name meant "encouragement," encouraged Paul to hold on to God's grace firmly in his personal life. He also brought Paul to the apostles and showed them the evidences that Paul was converted to Christianity. Because of Barnabas' encouragement, God could use Paul as his chosen instrument to carry his name to all the Gentiles and to their kings.

What kind of personal relationship must we have with Jesus when we want to have an inner life source? We must have a personal love relationship with Jesus. Then we can experience the love of God in our souls. We also can experience God's comfort. Then, we can encourage others with the love and comfort of God that we have received. If we encourage others, we can please our Lord Jesus.

Verse 1 continues, "...if any fellowship with the Spirit...." Fellowship is the aggregation of friendship. These days, most young people fail in making friends; how much more difficult it is to have spiritual fellowship! But those who don't have any true friendship or spiritual fellowship are as lonely as an outcast who lives in no man's land. We must have a personal relationship with Jesus, then we can have true fellowship or friendship with others also.

Look at verse 1 again. "...if any tenderness and compassion...." These days, only tough people can survive in this world. How then can we have a tender and compassionate heart? How can we have intense care

and deep sympathy for others? When we have a personal relationship with Jesus, then he supplies the necessary strength to do so.

Look at verse 2. "...then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose." In this verse Paul urges us to have the spiritual unity that should exist among Christians. We are all different. But when we are in Jesus, we can be one in spirit and purpose.

Look at verse 3. "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves." In this verse Paul urges the Philippians to think of others as better than themselves. To consider others better than oneself might be hard for anyone to do because of Satan's passion and pride in man's heart. Everyone is proud. No one thinks that others are better than himself. Instead, each person thinks: "I am a little better than he is." Each person thinks that he himself is more able than others. Even the most stupid person is not an exception to this. As Paul said in Romans, the proud mind is the root of sin and of human tragedy.

How can we humble ourselves and consider others better than ourselves? In Paul's case, it meant to die in Jesus to his passion and pride. Before conversion, Paul was so proud that he thought he was righteous because he kept all the requirements of the law superficially. He called himself "Saul"--the great one. But after meeting the Risen Jesus, he realized that he also was a "sinner." He realized that he was a sinner just the same as others. He was under the power of sin and in need of God's salvation equally with others. He changed his name from Saul to Paul--a small man. Paul had to experience painful death to his passion and pride in order to have a personal relationship with Jesus. When he died to his passion and pride, he was born anew as a humble man in the Risen Christ. We must be sure that "In Jesus I died to my own passion and pride."

How can we be humble enough to consider others better than ourselves? It is possible when we believe that each person is created in the image of God with the unique greatness of God. No one can be greater than another in the unique greatness which God endowed to that person.

When we see each person with spiritual eyes, we can discover the greatness of God in a person in one thing, which is unique and superior to all other people. Then, in that unique thing, we can respect that person. In Jesus we can discover others' gifts without much difficulty.

Second, have the attitude of Christ Jesus (5-11). How can we imitate Jesus? Look at verse 5. "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:" In order to imitate Jesus, we must have the attitude of Jesus. Without the basic attitude of a soldier, one cannot be a good soldier. Without the basic attitude of a student, one cannot be a good student. Likewise, without a basic attitude, all of our efforts to imitate Christ will be in vain. Whatever we do, our attitude is most important. In imitating Christ, we must have the attitude of Christ.

What is the basic attitude of Christ? It is his humbleness. Look at verses 6,7. "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness." Jesus humbled himself so much that he, being in very nature God, became a man. All men want to make progress or promote themselves. Everyone wants to be great and glorious. No one wants to humble himself or lower himself. It is amazing that God humbled himself and became a man in appearance. Jesus, in very nature God, became a man through his humbleness. This is the basic attitude of Jesus before God.

Jesus' humbleness is boundless. Look at verse 8b. "...he humbled himself and became obedient to death--even death on a cross!" It was not easy for Jesus to obey the will of God to die on the cross as someone who was cursed. But Jesus humbled himself before God and obeyed the will of God to die on the cross shamefully, bearing all men's sin and guilt. It's not easy for anyone to die, even gloriously. But Jesus humbled himself and obeyed God's words concerning his death. We learn that humbleness is the foundation of obedience.

What was the result of Jesus' humiliation? Because of Jesus' humbleness, God exalted him to be our spiritual king who rules with love and peace. Look at verses 9-11. "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 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." Because of Jesus' humbleness, God designated that all people everywhere should worship and serve him as Lord and Christ. We learn that Jesus' attitude is his humbleness before God and we must have the same attitude.

Who is the truly great man? He is a humble man. Numbers 12:3 says, "Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth." Moses' humbleness which made him great did not come naturally; it came from 40 years of humbleness training in the wilderness.

Third, continue to work out your salvation (12-18). Because of Christ's incomparable example of humbleness and obedience, which was passed on to the Philippians by Paul, Paul urges them in verse 12 to continue to work out their salvation with fear and trembling. Many of us believe that one is born again in Jesus once and for all, and that is all. But it is not true. One is born again when he believes the blood of Jesus, yet he is nothing but a spiritual baby who has to grow step by step until he can be a responsible and faithful person for his family and community, as well as for his country. He must continue to grow like an oak tree, under which many people can come and rest. He must continue to grow until he can be useful to God. He must grow in the grace of Jesus. He must grow in the love of God. He must grow in the holiness of God. This is the reason why Paul said, "...continue to work out your salvation..." and "for it is God who works in you..." (12,13). Salvation is an ongoing process. We call this ongoing process "sanctification."

St. Paul was a proud and selfish person when he did not know Jesus. To satisfy his selfishness, he cruelly knocked down the early Christians. But after he met Christ, he grew in the love of God as well as in the humility of Jesus, until he intensively cared for others with deep sympathy. In prison, he did not think of his own situation; rather, he thought of the children of God and thanked God for them and prayed for them and longed for them, crying many tears. Above all, his love for Jesus was so great that he was always ready to die for Jesus' name's sake. He said in 1:21, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." In this new

semester we must grow in many ways. Most of all, we must grow spiritually with active reverence and trembling in response to God's grace, so that we can cry many tears for our beloved sheep, and because of our Lord Jesus' immeasurable grace (12).

Paul admonishes the Philippians to grow spiritually by studying the word of life--from the level of complaining and arguing to the level of good influence, like a shining star in the universe--so that he may be happy and proud of them in Jesus. (Read verses 14-18.)

Fourth, honor men like him (19-30). In the last portion, Paul talks about Timothy and Epaphroditus. Paul recognized them to be faithful and loyal soldiers of Christ. And they were indispensable comrades to Paul. Paul gives the reason why they were so. Look at verses 20-22. Timothy proved himself to be a humble man as a Christian worker. He respected and loved Paul as his spiritual father. He did not seek his own interest, but had a genuine interest in others' welfare. To Paul, he was number one. So Paul said in verse 20, "I have no one else like him..." Paul had great love and respect for his coworker, Timothy.

Look at verse 25. "But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs." Epaphroditus had been sent to St. Paul with gifts and messages from the Christians in Philippi. He served Paul in prison on behalf of the Philippians until he became very ill, to the point of death. When Paul saw Epaphroditus lying ill and on the verge of death, he also felt like dying. But God had mercy on Epaphroditus, and not only on him, but also on Paul to spare him sorrow upon sorrow. Epaphroditus was a precious coworker who had risked his life for the sake of the gospel. Now Paul was sending him back to Philippi with this letter. Paul urged the Philippians, "Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor men like him, because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me" (29,30). Paul respected Epaphroditus as a servant of God. And Paul expected the Philippians to honor him as he honored him.

In this passage Paul urges us to imitate Christ's humility. How can we imitate Jesus in his humility? We must have a very personal relationship with Jesus as he had with God.