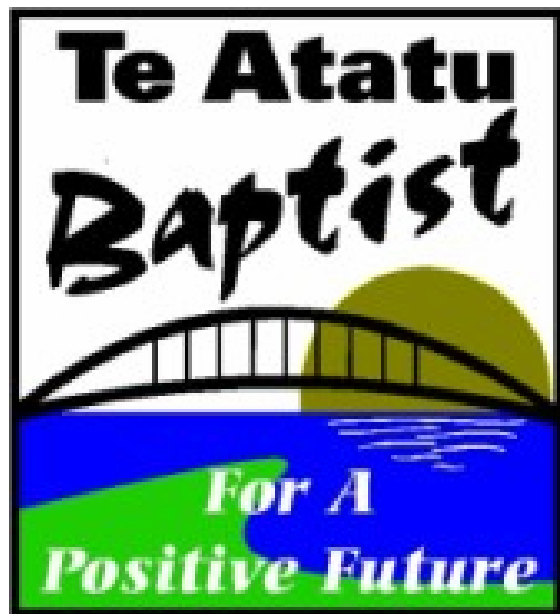


# Imitating Christ's Humility



Scriptural keys for unity and  
humility – from Philippians  
chapter 2

There was once a little girl who had just accepted Jesus into her heart as Lord and Saviour.

She was so excited about becoming a Christian that everyone she met, she would ask, 'Have you accepted Jesus into your heart?'

One day as she was leaving the church buildings, she warmly shook the hands of an aged gentleman, and in her enthusiasm asked him the same question, 'Have you accepted Jesus into your heart?'

'I'll have you know young lady,' he announced in his most sacred voice, 'That I have been pastor of this church for over 35 years, have a doctorate in theology and speak Greek and Hebrew fluently!'

'Oh', said the little girl in surprise, 'I wouldn't let *that* stop you becoming a Christian!'

Can we turn in our Bibles to Philippians chapter 2, reading verses 1 to 11.

The caption and title given to this passage in the New International Version is:

Slide # 1

# Imitating Christ's Humility.

Philippians 2:1 ¶ 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,

2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.  
3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.  
4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.  
5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:  
6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,  
7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.  
8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!  
9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that 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.

Would you allow me to read the same passage to you from the Message paraphrase of the Bible – with the aim of making this passage even easier to understand and apply to our lives and situations.

1 ¶ If you've got anything at all out of following Christ, if his love has made any difference in your life, if being in a community of the Spirit means anything to you, if you have a heart, if you care—  
2 then do me a favor: Agree with each other, love each other, be deep-spirited friends.  
3 Don't push your way to the front; don't sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead.  
4 Don't be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand.  
5 Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself.

6 He had equal status with God but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what.  
7 Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human!  
8 Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death—and the worst kind of death at that: a crucifixion.  
9 Because of that obedience, God lifted him high and honoured him far beyond anyone or anything, ever,  
10 so that all created beings in heaven and on earth—even those long ago dead and buried—will bow in worship before this Jesus Christ,  
11 and call out in praise that he is the Master of all, to the glorious honor of God the Father.

I am presently listening to an audio book by Larry Crabb titled 'The church I want to be a part of!'

And as I read this passage from Philippians, I can't help thinking, 'This is the type of church I want to be a part of!'

And even better than that, I think to myself, 'This is the type of Christian I want to be!'

The goal and purpose, the desire and longing of every Christian is summed up in this simple little phrase – *being united with Christ*.

It's as if printed words on a page – in such stark contrasts of black and white - simply can't express the deep love, peace and joy that comes from this relationship of intimacy that exists in the heart of a Christian who is indeed – *united with Christ!*

It is this intimate personal relationship with God Almighty, our loving Creator and Father - that gives strength *in the hard times* of life.

Times when we face disappointment, disillusionment – even suffering or impending death.

It is at these times that we are able to receive the true reward of years of seeking God in prayer and worship, pouring over His holy Word and allowing His Spirit to minister to our hearts.

God indeed *comforts* us with His love.

Indeed, look at the words that build upon each other as these verses progresses through the chapter.

Have a skim through the first few verses...

Encouragement, unity, comfort, love, fellowship of the Spirit, and tenderness.

The reality of these qualities and words, is that God reaches out and pours them into *our* hearts and lives.

These aren't things that can be taught about – they must be experienced, and they are the reward of those who are united with Christ.

And being united with Christ, we are comforted by His love when we discover, when we realise, and when we embrace how much *He loves us!*

The God who created the universe – did so as an expression of love for you and for me.

Through His death and resurrection – He choose to *forgive* every wrong we have ever committed – past, present and future.

It reminds me of that beautiful chorus.

## Slide # 2

Before the world began – you were on His mind  
And every tear you cry, is precious in His eyes.  
Because of His great love, He gave His only Son  
And every thing was done so you would come.

Come to the Father – though your gift if small  
Broken hearts, broken lives – He will take them all  
The power of the Word, the power of His blood  
Everything was done, so you would come

Nothing you can do, can make Him love you more  
And nothing that you've done, can make Him close the door.  
Because of His great love, He gave His only Son  
Everything was done, so you would come!

Such is the love of the Father for you and for me!

And when Jesus rose from the dead and ascended back into the  
Father's heart, He didn't want to leave us as orphans, alone and  
abandoned.

And so He gave us *His Holy Spirit* to live in our hearts, in whom we  
can have fellowship with God – and with each other.

Just as the love of Jesus brings us comfort and security, fellowship  
with the Spirit of Christ brings tenderness and compassion.

Our harshness can be turned into tenderness when we turn it over to  
the Spirit of God!

Our judgment of others can be transformed into compassion when we  
allow the Spirit of God to transform our hearts from the inside out!

The moodiness we so often battle with can be soothed in His love.

And the wonderful outworking of this - *is tenderness and compassion* towards those we love – but so often *harm* with our harshness.

As we read through the verses of this passage, it's as if God is wanting to build a *foundation* in our lives today, and brick upon brick – precept upon precept – build our character – develop our love for God and for others!

Have another look at the flow of these verses in Philipians chapter 2.

Slide # 3

We start with being *united* with Christ, *comforted* by His love – *accepting* His Holy Spirit and the *fellowship* with God that results in *tenderness and compassion*. And flowing from this, the Bible says in verse 2 – make all the effort to make my joy complete by being *like minded*, having the *same love*, being *one in spirit and purpose*.

The beauty of this encouragement is that our *oneness* doesn't come from *conforming* to rules or regulations.

Unity is not uni-formality!

Unity doesn't come from all thinking the same and focusing upon the mission of the church or goals of the denomination.

Unity of mind and purpose comes from *being united with Christ* and *having fellowship with the same Holy Spirit* of God!

It truly is unity *through diversity!*

It's not about *conformity in thought*, but *unity in Christ!*

We are allowed to have different views, opinions and thoughts about as many areas as there are people in the church.

And as if to help us understand what this means, the Bible goes on to give a word-picture of what this looks like in practice.

Because one thing I have found, is that the Bible is extremely practical – it pretty much always gives us help on how to live our lives – to live in harmony with ourselves, our God and one another.

Verse 3:

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit – but in humility consider other better than yourselves. V4. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also the interests of others.

The Message puts it like this:

Slide # 4

3 Don't push your way to the front; don't sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead.

4 Don't be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand.

Here the Bible lists for us the moral enemies of unity in the church, unity in the family and marriage, and peace in our own hearts.

These enemies are – *selfish ambition* and *vain conceit*.

Selfish ambition looks like a person who has an agenda – a barrow to push – a need to fill and a desire to outwork.

Vain conceit looks like a person with a big ego who likes to feel more important and better than others.

And it's not that everyone else is superior or more talented – it's just that our attitude sees *others* as worthy of our respect and honor.

In fact, while at Baptist Assembly a few weeks ago, this tiny Asian woman by the name of Rachel Tan addressed the gathering of around 500 pastors and denominational leaders from all around New Zealand.

Now - you've got to understand that pretty much everyone in that room had at least an undergraduate degree, if not a masters or doctorate in theology or ministry!

Reading from this verse, she stood to the very top of her 4 foot frame and spoke about the arrogance of people who promote themselves above others – based on their knowledge, education – their degrees and doctorates.

Reminding us that the qualification of Jesus was none other than the Creator of the universe, Lord of all creation – Sovereign King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

The same one who was born in a smelly animal stable – grew up in a home with a father not his own, worked as a lowly carpenter and died on a Cross of wood.

This same Saviour who took a bowl of water and a towel, and washed the dirt and muck from off the feet of the disciples who would soon deny Him and turn their backs in His time of greatest need.

Slide # 5

That is why the Bible says in verse 5 of Philippians chapter 2: Your attitude should *be the same* as that of Christ Jesus.

Our attitude – our *world view*, our *thoughts*, *reactions* and *judgements* should be the same of those of Christ Jesus!

I wonder if we know Him well enough to know how He would react and act in our church service today.

I wonder if we treat others *like Jesus treats them*.

I wonder if we *worship* God the Father like Jesus did while on earth.

I wonder if we *hold grudges* or *embrace bitterness* like Jesus does.

I wonder if we have the same attitude towards our money, towards tithing and offerings, towards the church and this community of believers – as Jesus does.

Because Jesus, being in the very nature of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped – but made Himself nothing – *taking the very nature of a servant*.

I wonder how Jesus would behave and act as a *member* of Te Atatu Baptist Church.

I wonder how He would respond to requests to help out with the mundane things that need doing.

I wonder if Jesus would put His name on the cleaning roster, or help out by running a home-group or cleaning the toilets.

I wonder how Jesus would have responded to the request of repairing the stairs to my office.

And, just maybe He did respond – in the form of people who have chosen to take on the sacrificial nature of Christ.

And - I wonder if Jesus would be too busy to come to church each week and meet with other believers.

I wonder if Jesus would be too busy with the affairs of life to pursue an intimate relationship with God the Father.

Our attitude should be *the same* as the Lord Jesus Christ – being found in the appearance as a man, He humbled Himself – and became obedient to death, even death on a cross.

What we are reading is an ancient hymn that the early church would sing every Sabbath when they would meet together to celebrate the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

You see, for the early church, they knew about sacrifice and service.

Only a matter of years after Paul wrote this letter to the church at Philippi, a massive persecution against Christians swept through the churches.

When our brothers and sisters sang this song about *imitating* Christ – they knew this meant they would also have to die for Him, in the same way He died for us – and sometimes worse.

I could mention the horrible ways they died for Jesus, being roasted in human frying pans in front of the cheering crowds.

Being fed to wild animals as entertainment in the Roman amphitheatres.

Being tied to stakes, planted in the ground and used as human torches to light the festivities of Emperor Nero's garden parties.

But the reality for us today, is that we have not yet been asked to *die* for Christ.

But we have been asked of God to *live* for Him!

God is *still* asking us to *sacrifice* our lives for Him.

That means our *attitude* should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.

Think of *yourself* as God thinks of you – as beloved, as valuable, as the crowning glory of His creation.

In the same way, think of *others* as Christ thinks of them.

See them through the eyes of Jesus, love them with the heart of the Father, relate to them with the unity of the Spirit!

Because, as we each imitate Christ's humility – I know this church will continue to become a church that I want to be a part of.

Slide # 6

As we each imitate Christ's humility, we will each become the kind of *person* that our spouse wants to be married to, that our *children* want as a parent, that our *friends* want to be around.

And out of humility will come a renewed sense of unity.

Similar to a father in a small village in Africa whose family was struggling with humility, respect and unity.

One morning the father was reading through the passage we have just studied, and want to give his children a practical example of the strength they possess as a family, and the weakness they face as they drift apart and live as islands or ships passing in the night.

Giving his twelve children a bundle of twelve sticks each, he asked them to brake the bundle of sticks in pieces and scatter them on the floor.

Each child struggled with the bundle of sticks, unable to break the bundle into pieces.

Then the father took each bundle in turn, and unwound the chords that held them together – easily breaking each stick in pieces as it lay isolated and alone.

Let us close by reminding ourselves of Jesus, the humble servant – whom God has exalted to the highest place – and gave Him a name that is above every other 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!

Let's pray together.