

BaptistWay Bible Series for November 2: Follow Christ's pattern of life

October 16, 2008

In Philippians 1:27, Paul called the Philippians to live “in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ” and to stand together as messengers of the gospel.

Our passage this week begins with Paul's building on that challenge in 2:1-2. He calls the Philippians to consider the benefit they can find in Christian unity. It is a harmony impossible through human means, but only through the power of God. The image Paul offers in verse 1 is one of being called alongside—like sharing the same yoke with—Jesus. Similarly, Paul writes of the ideal that they have “fellowship with the Spirit.” The term Paul uses is the familiar Greek word “koinonia.” It refers to those things people hold in common.

Paul's goal for the Philippians was that they experience the fullness of what it means to be one in Jesus and to share the same Holy Spirit. He knew the reciprocal effects on the person and the congregation. As the body would be built up, so would each individual. As each individual grew, so would the body. And their witness would increase.

This was a wonderful and worthy goal for the Philippians—and for us. Would it not be a tremendous witness to a fractured world for Christians and their churches to be more united and more Christ-like? OK, if that is our goal, what is the game plan? Paul gives it to us in verses 3-11.

Paul starts by summarizing the pattern of Jesus' life in verses 3-4 and, in verse 5, challenging the Philippians to live that way. This is similar to Hebrews 3:2, which encourages us to fix “our eyes on Jesus, the author and

perfecter of our faith.” The model of Jesus, Paul writes, is that of “doing nothing from selfishness” (v. 3). It is also one of humility and considering the interests of others as well as our own (vv. 3-4).

We cannot help but have our own perspectives and understandings of our own interests. What we are taught to avoid is ambition in the worst sense. It requires what is stated first—that, in humility, we “regard one another as more important than” ourselves (v. 3).

We cannot help but have our own perspectives, opinions, etc. Nor are we to neglect our legitimate health needs. The matter is one of submitting them to God and others. After all, the challenge in Leviticus 19:18 is to “love your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus even referred to this, in Matthew 22:39 and Mark 12:31, as the second greatest commandment.

Nor is the humility to which we are called one of the false or superficial variety. Song writer Mac Davis lampooned it with the words, “Oh, Lord, it’s hard to be humble when you’re perfect in every way.”

Rather, Paul teaches his readers to refuse to live life governed by self-interest. This is the pattern of all of Jesus’ life. We see it in his temptation (in Matthew 4:2-4), when he refused to use his powers to turn the stones into bread. It culminated in his crucifixion.

Paul continues, in verses 5-8, that to be more like Jesus entails having attitudes like his that will result in lives that reflect his. Verse 6 describes how Jesus, in humility, put aside his legitimate claims. Verse 7 depicts Jesus as a servant-leader that reminds us of when Jesus washed the feet of his disciples (John 13:5-15).

In a culture that inundates us—even in our churches—with messages that we deserve to be served, this is hard for us. Nevertheless, this is something we stress in Logsdon Seminary (in which I teach). However, this call is for all Christians and not just for ministers.

In verse 8, Paul points out that Jesus' humility led to his obedience and to his death. This reminds us that, if we follow the pattern of Jesus' life, it must be not only when doing so is easy, but also when it is difficult. What we see is that the pattern of Jesus' life is one of humility, obedience and sacrifice.

The story does not end there. In verses 9-11, Paul tells us of the results of the life Jesus lived. First, although living and dying the way Jesus did was demeaning in human terms, it resulted in his being exalted by the Father (v. 9). Also, "every knee will bow" (v. 10). This follows what we read in Isaiah 45:23. However, it implies more than just worship. When one kneels in subservience, it gives forth with obedience, service and action.

Finally, Paul writes, "every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" (v. 11). This tells us that a life and witness such as we see in Jesus is an irresistible force that will result in "the glory of God the Father" (v. 11).

We Americans—even we Christians—are considered by many around the world to be arrogant and so very far from humble. This has done infinite harm to our missions and witness. What would be the example if we truly followed the pattern of Jesus' life? We often give lip service to the idea. What would happen if we truly lived under the Lordship of Jesus—by following his example of humility?

Questions to explore

- *Why is it so hard to be truly humble?*
- Which part of Jesus' example to you find most difficult to follow?