

Text: Phil. 2:9-11

Title: "The future of the unified church"

Time: 9/26/2021 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: Not long ago a young brother in Christ texted me about his search for direction from the Lord. Young adulthood involves a lot of big decisions, and this brother expressed a desire for God's will in those decisions. Young adults must decide on a career and a spouse. They must make big financial decisions like purchasing a car and finding a place to live. And then come all the decisions related to the kids.

In the three verses before us this morning, Paul pulls the curtain back on the future. He is still writing about Jesus, the perfect example of obedient humility, which is essential for local-church unity. It is a passage about the exaltation of Christ, and in this context, it is also a passage about the future of the unified church. Paul discloses this future to encourage believers to be part a unified local church.

Humanly speaking, we do not know what the future holds as we make a decision like this. The good news when it comes to deciding in favor of local church unity, however, is that the Lord not only knows its future, but also He tells us what the future of local church unity is. The Lord can see this future, and He assures us that in the end the joy of local church unity following the humble, obedient example of Jesus Christ is going to be a good investment of our lives.

You may remember that in verses 1-4 of this passage, Paul describes for the Philippian church the joy of local-church unity. The book of Philippians makes clear that, for the Christian, joy and local-church unity go hand-in-hand.

Then in verses 5-8, Paul points to Christ as the perfect example for local-church unity. He did not look on His own things, but rather on the things of others. His was a life of humble obedience, and as such He provides the perfect example for us of what our unity will require from us.

And now in verses 9-11, Paul further exhorts this church to local-church unity by pulling back the curtain on the future. If we follow Jesus's humble example of obedience, we can expect to be a part of the glory of Jesus's future, the future of the unified church. In the day described by verses 9-11, there will be no more goodbyes, no more divisions, no more irreconcilable differences, and no more abandonment among believers. In that day we will know what our unity in Christ really means, because all will be with Him.

This morning we will consider three things the passage tells us about the future of the unified church.

I. The future of the unified church is guaranteed (v. 9).

Illustration: The vaccines that have been developed to stop the Covid-19 virus come to us with no guarantees. Since the Nuremburg trials, informed consent has always been an important part of medical care. The consent form related to the vaccine skips the "informed" part of informed consent. It is unable to inform the recipient about the risks of taking the vaccine because they simply are not known. Under emergency use authorization, the vaccine program is an experimental program, whose outcome in the life of patients cannot be guaranteed.

Application: When asked to be a part of the unified church, we are given informed consent. We are told that this unity has a guaranteed future, and we are told what makes this

future guaranteed in verse 9 – “God hath highly exalted Him and given Him a name that is above every name.” The future of local-church unity is guaranteed because Jesus is highly exalted. Three days after Jesus was crucified, He arose bodily out of the tomb. Seven weeks later, He ascended to heaven. These facts of history guarantee our glorious future in Christ in at least two ways.

1. The resurrection and ascension of Jesus fulfilled ancient prophecies, which also guarantee the future of the unified church.

Ps. 16:10 – “For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.”

Ps. 68:18 – “Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them.”

Ps. 110:1 – “The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.”

Isaiah 53:10-12 – “Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore, will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”

The prophecies that promised Jesus's death, resurrection, and ascension have been fulfilled, and they tell us also that His enemies will be vanquished. This part will also have its fulfillment. Jesus's enemies are the enemies of the unified church. The victory of our future unity over our enemies is guaranteed in Jesus's fulfillment of ancient prophecy.

2. Jesus's possession of the name that is above every other name guarantees this future.

The name above every name is the name of God (Ps. 148:13). It is the name *Lord* (v. 11). One commentator (Lightfoot) explains that the word *name* carries the meaning of *title* (see Eph. 1:19-23). Jesus was not given a new appellation when the Father exalted Him. He was given a new title. This too was in fulfillment of ancient prophecy: "I will praise thee: for thou hast heard me, and art become my salvation. The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it" (Ps. 118:21-24).

The resurrection and ascension of Jesus are the resurrection and ascension of the one who holds the titled that is higher than anyone else's title. It is the title of the chief cornerstone. He is in charge, and the rebellion of lower titles and powers against Him is treason that He will correct. The future of His church is a guaranteed future, because prophecies regarding Jesus have their fulfillment and because Jesus's title is higher than any other.

So, we do not need to wonder about the future consequence of following the instruction we receive in Philippians 2 about local-church unity. Investing our lives in that cause shall be worth it all someday. That future is guaranteed.

## II. The future of the unified church is bowing (v. 10).

Illustration: Airline pilots spend much of their time above the clouds, that part of the atmosphere that the disciples were gazing at just after Jesus's ascension into heaven to the right hand of God's throne (Acts 1:9-11). So, through the ascension of Christ, the upper atmosphere where jetliners fly is symbolical of the dwelling place of God, which is a literal reality, but not a part of the creation of the known physical universe. So, the Lord uses metonymy as a literary device to help us visualize heaven. The sky symbolizes heaven because heaven is somewhere like it.

And just like the Bible points to the sky to speak of the afterlife's heaven, it also points to the subterranean to speak of the afterlife's hell. The dead are buried under the earth. At times, the earth has swallowed people in God's judgment. Hell is like being buried alive in some ways. We see the use of the subterranean to indicate this in a passage like Rev. 5:3, "And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon." So, the Bible categorizes people in one of three places, which is really one of three realities – those still on earth; those in heaven above; and those in hell below. Every person exists in one of those three categories of reality.

Application: What people in these places all have in common is that they all have knees, and they all will bow. In response to the title of Jesus Christ, everyone will reverently worship Him. Our world is not like that today. In our world today, not only do unbelievers fail to bow together, professing believers also fail to reverently worship their Savior as He deserves. We strive through obedience to the Great Commission to change this corruption of our world, but ultimate success awaits the future of the unified church, when this failure will not happen anymore. In the future,

we will not miss worship times together. In the future, worship will be prioritized correctly. The future of the unified church is that we shall bow together.

III. The future of the unified church is confessing (v. 11).

Illustration: This passage is a quotation from Isaiah 45. Paul quotes it here and in Rom. 14:11. It was that Romans verse that I studied one morning as a teenager after having met Jehovah Witnesses at the door of my home for the first time. They had tried to convince me that Jesus was not Jehovah God, and they had been more successful than I should have let them be.

But turn with me to Isaiah 45 and see with me what the Lord showed me about the Jesus Paul is describing with this Isaiah passage and these quotations from it (Isa. 45:21-25). Very simply, the passage teaches that Jesus is Jehovah. From that day forward, I have never questioned whether the Bible teaches that Jesus is Jehovah (Yahweh) God.

Application: In the future everyone will confess that. The future of the unified church is confessing together that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

Illustration: In the days of the early church, the title *Lord* was given to the Roman Caesar to signify his divine nature. It was required of the Roman citizen to confess "Caesar is Lord" to the glory of the state of Rome. Faithful believers who resisted this requirement did so in favor of saying that Jesus, not Caesar, is Lord. And they paid dearly for this confession.

Application: This is the context for Paul's teaching in 1 Cor. 12:3, "Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man

speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost." In our modern context today, it is easy to merely say "Jesus is Lord." You do not really need the power of the Holy Spirit in your life to do that. All we must do to say that today without the Holy Spirit's help is empty the word *Lord* of all its significance. In Paul's day, that was not an option, because Roman authorities demanded the word's significance be maintained.

Others have heard us say, "Jesus is Lord," but did we really say that with the help of the Holy Spirit, or have we emptied the word *Lord* of its significance? *Lord* is a title of sovereign authority. Those who confess through the Holy Spirit's work in their lives that Jesus is their Lord are those who are led by the Spirit to obey His sovereign lordship. Anyone can say, "Jesus is Lord" today and then do what they want to do anyway. That option was not available in the days of the Roman Caesars. If you said "Jesus is Lord" in those days, it cost you your life. Do you believe "Jesus is Lord"? Has your confession cost you the rule of your life?

Conclusion: So, this is the future of the unified church. It is a guaranteed future; it is a future of worshipping our worthy Christ together; and it is a future of confessing His lordship over our lives to the glory of God the Father.

And so, we know the future as we face the question today, "Is my life going to be a part of local-church unity?" "Am I going to invest in this future that is guaranteed?" "Am I going to worship the Savior with my fellow believers?" "Am I going to obey the sovereign authority of Christ and enthrone Him as Lord in my heart?" There are no unknowns about the future as we face these questions. The guaranteed future you and I will experience someday

shows us that being a part of local-church unity now will be worth it all then.

And perhaps even more importantly, this understanding of the future tells us that now is the time to bow and confess Jesus's lordship over us with the Spirit's help, so that we can be saved from our sins. A wonderful promise awaits those who do: "For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Rom. 10:11-13).

"A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction—the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*