

STUDY ON THE BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS

HUMBLE LIVING IN LIGHT OF JESUS' HUMBLE EXAMPLE II

Read Philippians 2:1-11

Introduction

We are continuing from where we stopped last week:

As an introduction, last week, we taught on what Paul meant by being united with Christ and others. Coming together as a church in single-mindedness leads to unity because we are aiming to glorify God. However, when our hearts grow selfish, we think less of unity.

We should strive to be selfless rather than selfish. It is through humility that we become more like Christ. A good quote describes a humble person as one that “yields himself to Christ to be a servant, to use what he is and has for the glory of God and the good of others.” When we focus on others instead of ourselves, we follow Jesus’ great example.

The Ultimate Example of Selfless Humility Displayed in Christ

“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore, God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name, which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (vv5-11)

Paul will, in wonderful detail, describe for us the mind of Jesus in these verses. before he describes the mind of Jesus, he tells us what we must do with the information. Let the mind of Jesus also be in you! It is all too easy for us to read the following description of Jesus and admire it from a distance. God wants us to be awed by it, but also to see it as something that we must enter into and imitate. Let this mind means that it is something that we have a choice about.

Remember also that this mind is something granted to us by God. 1 Corinthians 2:16 says that we have the mind of Christ. But let this mind shows us that it is also something we must choose to walk in. You have to let it be so.

Jesus was in the form of God.

This describes Jesus’ pre-incarnate existence. We must remind ourselves that Jesus did not begin His existence in the manger at Bethlehem but is eternal God. Some scholars explains that the ancient Greek word translated “form” is very difficult to translate. When we use the word “form”, we think of the shape of something; but the ancient Greek word had none of that idea. It is more the idea of a mode or an essence; it is the essential nature of God, without implying a physical shape or image. “Thus, the Greek word for ‘form’ refers to that outward expression which a person gives of his inmost nature.

Did not consider it robbery to be equal with God

Reading from the classic amplified version, verse 6 reads:

“Who, although being essentially one with God and in the form of God [possessing the fullness of the attributes which make God God], did not think this equality with God was a thing to be eagerly grasped or retained” (v6 AMPC)

The pre-existent Christ already possessed equality with God and determined not to clutch at it or cling to it, but rather to obey his Father and humble himself. It wasn't that Jesus was trying to achieve equality with the Father. He had it and chose not to cling to it. Jesus' divine nature was not something He had to seek for or acquire, but it was His already.

Jesus made Himself of no reputation.

The meaning of the Greek words themselves are clear enough. "Made himself nothing" (NIV), "made himself of no reputation" (KJV), and "emptied himself" (NRSV) is the Greek verb *kenaō*, literally, "to make empty, to empty," and figuratively or metaphorically, "to make of no effect." Used with the emphatic "himself" makes it clear that this was a voluntary action by the pre-existent Christ.

Did he give up the form or nature of God, that is, his actual divinity? Or did he give up some of the "relative attributes" of deity -- omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence -- while retaining the "essential attributes" -- holiness, love, and righteousness? Frankly, this text in Philippians doesn't really tell us exactly of what he emptied himself. But we know from the text that he:

- Became a slave and
- A human being.

"He took on the form (*morphē*) of a slave," an expression of servility. This is in contrast to expression of divinity in the preexistent Christ, "although he was in the form (*morphē*) of God."

Obedient to Death

The humiliation of the transcendent Almighty God to become a human being might be compared to a human taking the form of a slug or a mosquito. But this voluntary humiliation was not enough. In addition, he took on the humiliation of death, and a very painful and shameful death at that. Jesus' death on the cross is comparable to being executed as a criminal by the electric chair or a slow public death by hanging -- a shameful and tortured death, nothing as painless or private as lethal injection.

Paul's point all along is that Jesus set the ultimate example of humbling oneself rather than insisting on one's own way with selfish ambition and vain glory. Jesus did this twice over -- first in his humbling by becoming a human being and whatever loss of divine power and prestige that required. Then again by voluntarily assenting to the most shameful and painful death imaginable in his day. Jesus humbled himself, Paul insists, and we must, too.

Exalted to the Highest Place

Christ -- one equal with God -- emptied himself, humbled himself, and gave himself up to a tortured death for us. "Exalted ... to the highest place" (NIV) or "highly exalted" (KJV, NRSV) is the Greek verb "*hyperypsoō*", "to raise to a high point of honour, raise, exalt." Here, "to raise someone to the loftiest height."

Humility, followed by being exalted by God, is a theme that runs through the New Testament, especially in Jesus' own teaching:

"Therefore, whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 18:4)

"And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." (Matthew 23:12)

"For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." (Luke 14:11)

"Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up." (James 4:10)

"Therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time." (1 Peter 5:6)

It is no accident that genuine, self-imposed humility is the only way that love and unity can flourish in the Church, the Body of Christ. And Jesus himself leads the way.

A Name Above Every Name

This goes beyond giving Jesus the Divine name Yahweh. When we consider the Hebrew concept of the name, it also implies that God declares that Jesus has a character and person above all. This verse, with its clear statement of Jesus' deity, is powerful ammunition against those who deny the deity of Jesus Christ. There is no higher name than Yahweh, and Jesus has that name.

Every Knee Shall Bow

Not only is Jesus exalted by the Father, but the whole world is brought into submission to the Son including those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth. This conveys the absolute totality of all creation recognizing the superiority of Jesus Christ.

In this, Paul draws on the idea of Isaiah 45:23: I have sworn by Myself; the word has gone out of My mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, that to Me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall take an oath. Notice that in Isaiah, it is to Yahweh that all knees bow, and tongues confess. In Philippians it is to Jesus, showing that Jesus is Yahweh.

The combination of tongues confessing and knees bowing gives evidence that the idea is a complete submission to Jesus, both in word and in action, and one that is required of all. The totality of this recognition of Jesus' deity and exaltation has caused many to envision this happening in a formal way after the final judgment, when every creature in heaven and hell is required to bow their knees and make the confession that Jesus Christ is Lord.

That Jesus Christ is Lord

From this we can say that there is a sense in which Jesus returned to heaven with more than He had than when He left heaven. Not only did He return with His humanity still added to his deity (although a resurrected humanity), He also returned with the recognition planted among men of who He was and the worship He deserved – something unknown until the Incarnation and the full revelation of His person and work.

Remember that Paul did not give this description of Jesus in Philippians 2:5-11 simply for the theological education of the Philippians.

- He gave it to equip them to endure the hardship they were experiencing.
- He gave it help them to understand Paul's hardships.
- He gave it to help them to practice real Christian unity in the midst of hard times.

And in conclusion:

1. This picture of Jesus has helped them to understand how to assess the ministry of Paul, which seemed weak at the present time.

2. This picture helped them to understand the context of God's revelation of power – how God delights to show His power through humble actions.
3. This picture has equipped them to act in a way towards each other that will promote unity in the body of Christ.
4. This picture has shown them how to follow Jesus' pattern of patient, humble obedience – something Paul will call them to continue in the following verses.