



We Need an Attitude Adjustment

Introduction

Philippians 2:5-11

This week's passage continues the theme of unity and humility from the last couple of weeks. Paul has instructed the Philippians to strive to be "of one mind," and to achieve this by considering others before themselves, and putting the wants and needs of others before their own. To underscore how important this is, he introduces the best example of humility and self-sacrifice for the sake of others: Jesus himself.

We could spend weeks unpacking all the theological gems in these few verses, but for devotional purposes I want us to grasp the big picture of what Paul is saying about Jesus here, and how that applies to his point. First, he wants their like-mindedness to ultimately be like-mindedness with Christ. It is his attitude that they (and we) should primarily emulate. And Christ's example of humility is one that no-one on earth could surpass. One might, for theological reasons, want to understand Paul as saying that Jesus only appeared to be God, or was somehow not really divine. But if that were true, Paul's point here is lost. The point is that Jesus was and is divine. Prior to the incarnation, Jesus shared in all the divine attributes. However, in order for God's plan of salvation to come about, it was necessary for Christ to set aside the privileges that come with divine status, and become enshrined in flesh, and subject to time, hunger, temptation, and death. He did not cease being divine, but this was certainly a huge step down, in some way akin to a king being reduced to a beggar.

The language of these verses is somewhat poetic, and it is thought by many that this is a very early Christian hymn that Paul's readers may well have known. I want us to get a sense from this hymn the depth of humility that the Son of God, the Lord of Glory was willing to show by lowering himself not just to our level, but even lower than that. Most of us don't have to experience the kind of ill-treatment Christ did while on earth. He was beaten, mocked, and eventually crucified by those who should have worshiped him. And he did this for our salvation.

Certainly, upon his resurrection, Christ was exalted and restored to his former glory. And one day, every knee shall bow and recognize him as Lord (this doesn't mean everyone will be saved—but that's a discussion for another time). But even his resurrection and exaltation was part of the plan for our salvation (see Romans 5).

If Christ was willing to humble himself like that, how much more we Christians, who call ourselves after his name, should display that same kind of humility to one another. Not exalting ourselves over each other, but considering the needs of others as more important than our own.¹

¹ Devotional by Colin Smith found @ <http://www.colindsmith.com/blog/2012/02/12/sunday-devotional-philippians-25-11/>

Open it

1. Have you ever been recognized for an accomplishment or been a recipient of an award? What was it and how did you feel upon receiving it?

Read it

Philippians 2:5-11

Explore it

2. What does Paul tell the Philippians about Jesus and His relationship with God the Father?
3. How does Paul describe what happened when Jesus was “born in human likeness”?
4. Where does the name of Jesus stand among all others? What will happen as a result?
5. What will every tongue confess?

Apply it

“Goin’ By the Book”

Philippians 2:5-11 is one of the most amazing passages in the Bible. We are on holy ground here. It appears to be an early hymn or poetic creed, perhaps used liturgically in ancient worship. It seems to have a unified structure, starting with God in eternity and ending in the same way, but hinging on verse 9. Think V-shape, with verse 9 being the bottom angle—“even death on a cross.” Some propose that it was written by an early Jewish community in Jerusalem and sung during the Lord’s Supper. One could certainly write a whole book on this passage; our approach here is more telescopic than microscopic. This text is both doctrinal and ethical in nature. It emphasizes the stunning humility of Jesus, who became a servant and died on behalf of sinners to the glory of God. As a result of His cross-work and resurrection, He is now exalted as the true King. He is our Savior and our example.²

6. Many scholars believe this passage was a beloved ancient song sung by the early church. What song or hymn resonates with you most? What truths in it have made such an impact?

7. Our text gives us a great template for worship songs. What are some of the themes in the text and why are they important for Christians to declare and affirm?

² Merida, Tony. *Exalting Jesus in Philippians (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary)* (p. 90). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

"I Walk the Line"

The saints at Philippi (as is true of all believers) had "the mind of Christ" (1 Cor 2:16) but Paul is them to continually think like Christ. He knew that when they had their Lord's attitude, they would not be defending their own rights, promoting their own selfish interests and living for themselves. How did you begin your morning today? Did you choose to put on Christ and His attitude or were you influenced by the world system which incessantly promotes and "exalts" selfishness.³

8. Can you think of examples of things people do from "selfish ambition or conceit" today? How do such acts begin to erode the society that we live in?

9. The phrase used in verse 5 [have this mind] is defined as, "a settled way of thinking or feeling." What would it look like for you to think the way Jesus thinks?

10. Humility is something that is described in many different ways that can blur its true meaning. How would you describe the difference between godly humility and low self-esteem?

³ Study notes on Philippians found @ https://www.preceptaustin.org/philippians_25_commentary

It must not have taken long for Paul to come up with the best example of humility—Jesus, of course! Talk about humility. In beautiful, descriptive language, Paul describes Jesus' willingness to give up the advantages and privileges of being a part of the Trinity and take the form of a man—yet without sin. Such a transformation is called the incarnation of Jesus. Jesus became a servant to God's will, even to the point of dying the most despicable death ever invented, death on a cross. That's humility to the nth degree. Jesus' God-nature never left him, even as He took on the "nature" of a human. The human form changed because He was born a baby and His body grew into a man. In the Resurrection, He changed his form again, and went to heaven with the form of both His divine nature and a human one. But through all His time on earth as a human, He didn't leave His divine nature behind, only His rights as the Son of God. He was willing to obey the Father and subject Himself to the limitations that every human faces. And the greatest limitation He faced was death— a death He willingly chose.⁴

11. Take some time and think through all the human things that you do throughout your life and compare them to life in Heaven as God. How much difference is there between the two? What does this tell you about the love and compassion that Jesus had for humanity?

12. The incarnation of Jesus Christ (God putting on flesh and dwelling with us) is a central aspect to Christianity. How does a robust understanding of this give us hope and joy in the good and bad life brings?

⁴ Miller, Kathy Collard. Paul and the Prison Epistles (The Smart Guide to the Bible Series) (Kindle Locations 3196-3209). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

“Personal Jesus”

Some mistake these verses to say Christ was created, or Christ was not fully human, or that Christ is not fully divine. The failure to hold both His humanity and His deity in tension has been the source of oodles of heresies and cults, historically and in the present ...Early church Christians wrestled with these questions long before us. These views were instrumental in helping the early church form sound beliefs about the deity and humanity of Christ. We not only gain insight from modern-day Christians who are different from us. We also have a lot to learn from the ways God’s Spirit revealed truth to the saints of history. Don’t be scared by these funky names!⁵

Apollinarianism (A)- This view stated that the One person of Christ had a human body but a divine mind and spirit. What is the problem with this? The whole human person (material and immaterial) needs redeeming. It implied that being human is essentially sinful. This heresy was rejected at the council of Alexandria (362) and the Council of Constantinople (381).

Nestorianism (N)- This view stated that there are two separate persons in Christ—a human person and a divine person. What is the problem with this? There is no indication of struggle in Christ between two persons; His person cannot be divided. There is ONE mediator between God and man: the God-man, Jesus Christ.

Eutychianism/Monophysitism (E/M)- This view stated that Christ had only one nature. His human nature was ‘absorbed into’ a divine nature and thus morphed into a third nature. What is the problem with this? A third ‘mix’ of natures is neither human nor divine. He must be fully human and fully divine.

In 451, rising from concerns over these heresies, the Chalcedonian Council was convened and wrote the Chalcedonian creed. This creed whether you know it or not has guided Christians since 451 to an orthodox understanding of who Jesus is:

“We, then, following the holy Father, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; (A) truly God and truly man, of a reasonable/rational soul and body; consubstantial (having the same nature or substance) with the Father according to the Godhead, and (A) consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the Manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, (N) to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, (E/M) indivisibly, inseparably; (N) the distinction of the natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and (E/M) concurring in one person and one subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God, the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the prophets from the beginning have declared concerning him, and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy Fathers has been handed down to us.”⁶

13. Three of the fastest growing false religions or cults today are Islam, Mormonism and Jehovah’s Witness, each of these are based on unbiblical understandings of who Jesus was and is. What makes Christology (doctrines concerning Jesus Christ) so critical and vital to our faith? How equipped are you to combat false teaching about Christ?

⁵ Philippians Study Guide by Tracie Wallace found @ <https://bible.org/seriespage/2-incarnation-christ-philippians-25-11>

⁶ <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/creeds2.iv.i.iii.html>

- 14. As God, Jesus had every right to grab all the things that were His (BTW...which is everything!!!), but instead of grabbing He gave freely to those who didn't deserve it. How does knowing that Jesus gave up so much in order to give generously to us encourage you in your standing with Him and change your view of our time and treasures?**

“Ring of Fire”

But that is not all, for "He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (v 8). Jesus came into this world knowing full well that it would end with an ignominious death. Jesus would not die peacefully in his sleep. Rather, he would suffer the worst of all deaths, the dreaded torturous death by crucifixion. He was subjected to the most gruesome kind of death known to the ancient world.

This was a death so loathsome that it was reserved only for the worst criminals. Crucifixion was so despised that Roman law forbade any Roman citizen to be subjected to such cruel treatment. Yet the divine man, Jesus, would be put to death by being nailed to a Roman cross. There he would hang naked, publicly exposed, viewed as an enemy of the empire, condemned as a blasphemer against God.

More than that, Jesus submitted to having the sins of all who would believe in him laid upon him. He who knew no sin became sin for his people (2 Corinthians 5: 21). He suffered the full curse of the law (Galatians 3: 13), which is death (Romans 6: 23). He bore our sins in his body upon the cross (1 Peter 2: 24). He shed his blood and took away the sins of all whom the Father would entrust to him (John 1: 29; 6: 37).⁷

- 15. What does Paul mean when he says that Jesus became obedient to death, even death on a cross? What limits do you put on your obedience to God?**

⁷ Lawson, Steven. *Philippians For You: Shine with joy as you live by faith* (God's Word For You Book 18) (p. 98). The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition.

- 16. Hebrews 12:2 tells us that Jesus joyfully endured all the pain and sorrow the cross brought for our good. How does this example change our perspective regarding our suffering?**

“Sunday Morning Comin Down”

Jesus’ sacrifice as a man on the cross prepared Him for exaltation. He didn’t obey God with the motive of being exalted, but God lifted Him up nonetheless. When Paul says God bestowed on Jesus “the name,” this is not some ordinary naming, for the definite article “the” appears in the Greek text and refers to a particular name. Because this name of Jesus is so great and above every name, every knee will bow before Him. What a glorious thought! When you and I are in heaven, every single being will acknowledge that Jesus is God, and they will worship Him! That includes every human along with angels—even the fallen angels. Not only will they say, “Jesus is Lord,” they will worship Him, praising Him as almighty God. What glory that will be! Our beloved Savior will finally receive all the adoration He deserves—which He didn’t receive when He was on earth.⁸

The fact that everyone will acknowledge Jesus as God can give us some sense of satisfaction, since people in our day often turn up their noses at the thought of God or Jesus. They disdainfully profess that they don’t need God, believing that Jesus wasn’t God while on earth and certainly isn’t relevant now. But someday, regardless of how self-righteous their efforts and independence, they will confess that Jesus is indeed God... and bow before Him. And since the word confess means to “declare or confess openly or plainly” and “to offer praise or thanksgiving,” their confession and acknowledgment will not be concealed in some hidden place. No, we all will be there to witness it and join in!⁹

- 17. In what ways might we share in this future exaltation by imitating this Christ-like humility now? In what sense does this future exaltation belong to Christ alone?**

⁸ Miller, Kathy Collard. Paul and the Prison Epistles (The Smart Guide to the Bible Series) (Kindle Locations 3258–3263). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

⁹ Ibid

18. Two applicational questions come from this phenomenal passage about our Lord Jesus Christ- concerning serving and singing:

Who has God put in your world to serve and what ways can you begin to serve others as Christ did?

How does this future vision of the entire universe praising Jesus as King of Kings and Lord of Lords cause you to rethink your approach to our times of corporate worship on Sundays?