

Paul's letter to the Philippians



Christ's example of selflessness

Philippians 2:1-11



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2:1 ~ The basis of Paul's appeals

- **“Therefore”** connects what Paul will say here with what he had just said about **“standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together”** (1:27).
- He appeals to them based on four things that are true:
 - **“if any encouragement in Christ”** (*paraklēsis*) – It is true that “in Christ” you have been urged forward in your spiritual growth and Christian life.
 - **“if any consolation of love”** (*paramuthion*) – It is true that from God’s kind of selfless love you have experienced gentle comfort which provides an incentive for action.
 - **“if any fellowship of the Spirit”** (*koinōnia*) – It is true that from the Holy Spirit you have experienced communion with God and sharing in common with others.
 - **“if any affections and mercies”** (*oiktirmos*) – It is true that you have experienced heartfelt affection and abundant mercies both from God and from other believers.

2:2 ~ Paul's command for spiritual unity

- If the first statements are true, and they are true, then this must result.
- **“make complete”** (*plēroō*) Paul's joy ~ an imperative that depicts a cup being filled completely. Paul shared four aspects of their duty:
 - **“being of the same mind”** - “continually think the same” (*phroneō*, present tense verb).
 - **“maintaining the same love”** - “the same love having” (*agapē*, “selfless dedication”).
 - **“united in spirit”** - “souls together” (*sumpsuchos*, adjective).
 - **“intent on one purpose”** - “one-minded” (*phroneō*, participle).
- These are four specific ways their spiritual unity should be expressed, corresponding to the four truths in 2:1. Their demonstration of spiritual unity would make Paul's joy complete.

2:3a ~ Attitudes to avoid

- The Greek text does not have a verb, and the nearest antecedent verb is “**continually think**” (*phroneō*) from 2:2. We could put this sentence together in this way: “[thinking] not according to selfishness nor according to self-esteem.” Connecting this sentence to the previous verb (“think”) places Paul’s exhortation into the realm of the believers’ thought life and mindset. Our *doing* flows from our *thinking*.
- “not according to **selfishness**” (*eritheia*) = “selfish ambition” (1:17), self-centeredness, putting oneself forward in contention for a better position, gaining a superior place, and having rivalry within the church.
- “not according to **empty conceit**” (*kenodoxia*) ~ fruitless pride, worthless self-love, and egotistical vanity. These ways of thinking come naturally and are the normal reaction when believers act out of fleshly thinking.

2:3b-4 ~ Attitudes to embrace

- **“humility of mind”** (*tapeinophrosunē*) ~ lowly-minded; a term adapted by Paul for a more noble purpose. “Humility of mind” consists of **“regarding one another as more important than yourselves.”**
- **“regard”** (*hēgeomai*) ~ typically means “to lead the way or to take the lead,” but it is also used figuratively: “to give something a leading place in one’s thoughts.” Believers are to give others a leading place in their thoughts and consideration.
- **“more important”** (*huperechō*) ~ giving others superiority or considering them to be above or better than ourselves. Modern “self-esteem” culture finds this degrading, but God finds it to be an essential attitude.
- **“look out”** (*skopeō*) ~ fix one’s eyes, direct one’s attention, and take notice of something. Put the interests of others ahead of one’s own.

2:5 ~ Paul's ultimate example of unselfish humility

- Paul will share his supreme example of an unselfish attitude of humility.
- **“attitude”** (*phroneō*, ^{present}_{tense}^{imperative}) ~ They are to continually think, keep in mind, or have the attitude that was personified in the example of Christ Jesus.
- The concepts that Paul will discuss in verses 6 through 8 are profound, to the point of being almost incomprehensible to the human mind.
- He will dance around the edge of a deep well, touching on the inscrutable essence of the Triune God. He will hint at the unfathomable dual natures of Jesus Christ, referred to by theologians as the “hypostatic union” of the divine and human in a single person simultaneously.
- The point Paul is making is that the incarnation of Jesus Christ is the ultimate example of humility of mind.

2:6 ~ The divine nature of Christ

- **“He existed”** (*hyparchō*) ~ “to exist in the beginning.” The present tense indicates that His existence is continuous, perpetual, or eternal.
- **“form”** (*morphē*) ~ expresses the essence or nature of Christ Jesus as God. He always existed as fully God. In Paul’s words, Christ Jesus has always had complete **“equality with God.”**
- **“regard”** (*hēgeomai*) ~ to give others a leading place in one’s thoughts (2:3).
- He did not consider His position (“equality with God”) as a **“thing to be grasped”** (*harpagmos*) ~ to be held fast and retained for oneself. This is the first hint of the attitude of selfless humility that Paul wanted to illustrate from the life of Christ.

2:7a ~ Actions resulting from humility of mind

- Verses 7 and 8 explain the actions Jesus took as a result of the unselfish attitude described in verses 5 and 6. Two parallel verbs: **“emptied Himself”** (v. 7) and **“humbled Himself”** (v. 8)
- **“emptied”** (*kenoō*) ~ literally “to empty,” but figuratively “to bring to nothing, to make worthless, void, useless, or without effect.” It occurs five times in the New Testament, in each case with the figurative sense.
- If we say that Christ **“emptied Himself,”** it causes us to ask what Christ emptied Himself of, or what parts of His divine nature Christ gave up at the incarnation. But those are the wrong questions to ask. Christ Jesus did not give up any aspect of His divine nature at the incarnation. KJV accurately renders it as “He made himself of no reputation.”

2:7b ~ The dual natures of Christ Jesus

- Although He has always existed in the “**form of God**” (divine essence), Christ Jesus took on the additional “**form of a bond-servant**” (sinless humanity). The Greek word “**form**” (*morphē*) means the essential nature, in this case of both divinity and humanity. While remaining in the form of God He added the form of a servant.
- “**taking**” (*lambanō*) ~ Christ’s “**emptying**” involved **taking** something to Himself, so that in addition to His divine nature He also took on the nature of sinless humanity, along with subservience to the will of another.
- “**Being made**” (*ginomai*) probably refers to His physical birth, as the same term is used to describe His birth in Galatians 4:4, “**born** of a woman” (*ginomai*). The word “**likeness**” (*homoīōma*) means something that is made like or similar to something else.

2:8 ~ Humility to the point of death

- **“being found”** (*heuriskō*) ~ to find out by discovery. His **“appearance”** (*schēma*) as a man shows how He was perceived by others. He veiled His deity behind His form as a man. There was nothing special in His appearance that others considered remarkable (Isa 53:2-3). Jesus allowed glimpses of His deity through His miracles and His transfiguration, but in general He was perceived by everyone as a man (e.g., John 10:33).
- **“He humbled Himself”** ~ Christ’s additional humiliation in His humanity. **“obedient to the point of death”** ~ Jesus was willing to sacrifice His life for the benefit of others. Even worse than the excruciating agony, Christ endured the divine curse (Deut 21:23; Gal 3:13). God the Father turned His back on the eternal Son of God who had taken upon Himself the sins of the world (Isa 53:4-6).

2:9 ~ The principle of humility before honor

- **“highly exalted”** (*huperupsoō*) ~ an intensified form of a word that means “to lift up on high, to raise to a position of dignity and honor” (see Isa 53:11-12).
- God **“bestowed on Him the name which is above every name.”** In ancient cultures the **“name”** represented much more than simply identifying an individual. It communicated the person’s character, reputation, dignity, achievements, rank, or position.
- This encompasses deity in all its expressions. It is not merely the name that is bestowed on Christ, but everything that accompanies the name which is above every other name in the universe. This includes all glory, power, position, and authority.

2:10-11 ~ Universal acknowledgement of Christ as Lord

- These actions will be taken or enforced as a consequence of Jesus' exalted position of preeminence over the universe.
- **"EVERY KNEE WILL BOW"** (Isa 45:22-23; Rom 14:11) ~ As if the word **"every"** (*pas*) were not enough, Paul added **"of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth."** These three categories indicate the universal scope of submission to Christ's authority.
- **"every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord"** ~ every creature with the power of speech. **"confess"** (*exomologeō*) ~ open agreement with what God the Father has declared to be true about Christ the Son.
- **"the glory of God the Father"** ~ The greatest glory that can be given to God the Father is to agree with His declaration concerning God the Son.