

Series: Philippians

Title: *The Personification and Reward of Humility and Obedience*

Text: Philippians 2:5 – 11

Style: Exposition

Theme: Humility and obedience

FCF: *People have no natural concept of true humility and obedience*

Proposition: *In order to understand the true nature of humility and obedience, you must look to Jesus.*

Speaker's Purpose: That the hearers would be encouraged to emulate Jesus Christ in all that they think, say, and do.

Interrogative. *Just how important is unity in the local church to you?*

Transition Statement. *The answer to that question is actually best answered by another; that is: How willing are you to have the mind of Christ be the attitude that permeates and governs your personal life?*

Scripture Introduction. Please open your Bible to Philippians 2:5. In the first eighteen verses of chapter two, Paul exhorts the local church at Philippi to unity on the basis of Christ's attitude and example. These eighteen verses are divided into three sections. In the first and third sections, Paul applies the Christological truths presented in the second section. It is the second section to which I want to direct your attention to today.

Please follow along as I read **Philippians 2:5 – 11**.

Sermon Introduction.

In the first section of Philippians 2, Paul taught that *likemindedness* is the essence of unity within the local church. The *likemindedness* Paul had in mind is not that which results from the manipulative efforts of a charismatic and controlling leader who brainwashes everyone to the point where they all think just like he does. In other words, the *likemindedness* Paul had in mind, which God has in mind, is not a coerced way of thinking that is forced upon the members of a group. Rather, the *likemindedness* taught in the Scriptures is the result of mature Christians who, because of their union in Christ, share the same values and goals; that is: to please God in all that they think, say, and do.

In that first section, Paul also taught that the *likemindedness* that shares the same values and goals in Christ is manifested in *humility* and evidenced by selflessness. *Humility*, Paul taught, is the expression of *likemindedness*, which in turn, is the essence of unity within the local church of Jesus Christ.

It was this call to unity within the local church that was front-and-center in Paul's mind as he opened chapter two. But, Paul could not issue a call to unity based on humility and simply let it go at that. Why? Why was such a call insufficient? The simple answer is this: *people have no natural concept of true humility and obedience.*

Remember, you, like every other person, are a sinner by nature. This means that your spiritual vision and perspective of reality, of truth, of righteousness, and yes, of humility and obedience, are naturally skewed. In ophthalmology this disorder is called *astigmatism*. "Wonderful," you say: "What's *astigmatism*?" A simple definition of *astigmatism* is: a defect of the eye resulting in the distortion of images. Everyone, with the sole exception of Jesus Christ, has spiritual astigmatism; that is: we all have one or more defects in our spiritual eyes. Therefore, what you, in your natural and sinful condition think of as being humble and obedient, no matter how hard you may try to think correctly, is distorted due to the sinfulness of your old nature. In this condition you *have no natural concept of true humility and obedience.*

But, there is hope. As a believer in Christ, you can gain an understanding of the true nature of humility and obedience. God, in His mercy, has made a way for you to gain this understanding. It's found in Jesus Christ.

Paul's primary objective in verses 5 – 11 is to teach that: *in order to understand the true nature of humility and obedience, you must look to Jesus.* Just as every spiritual truth is found in Jesus Christ, so too is the understanding of the true nature of humility and obedience. The point Paul makes in this passage is that the attitudes, words, and actions that lead to disunity in the local church will be rendered ineffective when the members of a local church look to Jesus and imitate Him in every way. Therefore: *in order to understand the true nature of humility and obedience, you must look to Jesus.*

Transition. We start with the transitional verse five in which Paul identifies the *mind* of Jesus as being . . .

I. *The type of mind you need in order to understand the true nature of humility and obedience*

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.”

Let's look at a few of the significant words in this statement.

A. “Mind”

As previously explained, the Greek word translated *mind* refers to your attitude toward life. Consisting of your will, affections, and conscience your mind determines the way in which you process the events and circumstances that define the way in which you live your life. In other words, it is your attitude about everything in life, including God, that determines your approach to life: what you say and what you do. ***Attitude is everything.***

B. “You”

The word *you* is plural in the Greek. Paul is addressing the local church as a whole. Paul is speaking of an attitude that is to be the defining attitude of the local church. One English translation reads: **“Have this mind among yourselves”** (ESV). Another reads: **“Have the same attitude toward one another that Christ Jesus had”** (NET).

For such an attitude to be the defining attitude within a local church, it must first be the defining attitude of the individual members forming that local church. On this basis it is safe to say that: ***Attitude is everything and it begins with you.***

C. “Let”

The word *let* is an imperative: a command. In some manuscripts it is in the passive voice, while in others it is in the active voice. In the passive voice of the KJV it means to *allow* or *permit* the mind of Christ to be in you. The Holman Christian Standard Bible translates the active voice: **“Make your own attitude that of Christ Jesus.”**

I'm not going to debate which of these two voices is the original because, whichever voice is used, the main point of the command, from the perspective of the one being commanded, is that you must be *willing* to have the *mind*, the *attitude*, of Christ Jesus be in you. Whether you just let it happen to you or actively engage in making it happen in you, you must first be willing, desiring, to have the mind of Christ in you.

In one sense this is a passive action on your part because, as Paul writes in 2:13: **“It is God that works in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.”** On the other hand, believers are commanded to actively read and meditate on God's word; thus making it their own and letting their minds and attitudes be shaped by it (2 Tim. 4:15).

Explanation. Thus, Paul is commanding or exhorting the members of the local church at Philippi, both individually and corporately, to do whatever they could to have the same attitude governing their assembly as Christ had governing His Person. Verse five then points to the mind of Jesus Christ as being both the source and model of the type of mind or attitude that produces what Paul had just described as being the desired manifestation of this attitude of unity in a local church.

Application. Therefore, since unity in the local church is the outgrowth of the attitude of its individual members, the degree of unity that God sees when He looks at Providence Baptist Church, or any other local church, is directly proportional to the attitude of Christ that is found in you: the members of PBC.

The question I want to put before you today is this: *Do you want to have the mind of Christ be the attitude that permeates and governs the community life of Providence Baptist Church?* An even more fundamental question you will need to consider before you can answer this first question is this: *Do you want to have the mind of Christ be the attitude that permeates and governs your personal life?* These crucial questions cannot be truthfully answered without first understanding the nature or essence of the mind of Christ.

Transition. Knowing this to be the case, Paul continues in verses 6 – 11 to describe the mind that was in Jesus Christ along with the rewards associated with having that mind. Let us look now to:

II. [Jesus Christ: the personification of humility and obedience \(6 – 9\)](#)

The next five verses readily break down into two sections. Verses 6 – 8 describe the practical side of Christ: His attitude and actions. Verses 9 – 11 describe the reward He received. First, we look at the practical side of . . .

A. [Christ's attitude \(6\)](#)

To understand Christ's attitude you must first understand . . .

1. [Who Jesus Christ is \(6a\)](#)

“Who, being in the form of God”

Some have claimed on the basis of this statement that Jesus is not truly God, but only a being that had the *form* or *shape* of God. Nothing could be further from the truth. Although the Greek word *μορφή* (*morphē*) refers to the outward appearance, it carries with it the fact that what is evident or manifested externally is also true internally. As Ben Witherington puts it: **“*Morphē* normally connotes an outward form that fully expresses the real being or substance that underlies it.”**¹ In other words, *morphē* means that the outer form completely represents the reality of what is internal or below the surface of the external shape.

As a result, when Paul wrote that Jesus Christ was “in the form of God” he was confirming that Jesus Christ is of the exact same nature as is God the Father. Jesus Christ truly is, always has been, and always will be: God.

Transition. With this understanding of the nature and being of Jesus Christ you are equipped to better understand the nature of . . .

2. [Jesus Christ's attitude \(6b\)](#). Paul continues stating that Jesus Christ . . .

“Thought it not robbery to be equal with God”

This phrase, too, has been sadly misinterpreted and thus misunderstood. First, let me say clearly and unequivocally: this statement is not to be understood in any way that would indicate that Jesus has ever been less than God. Jesus must not be thought of as a mere mortal man who was attempting to steal God's divinity.

How then is this phrase to be understood? It is to be understood as an idiomatic Greek expression that indicates something that someone already has or is and therefore does not need to

¹ Ben Witherington III, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Company, 2011), 140.

hang on to or grasp.² In this instance it means that Jesus did not have to attempt to steal or cling to equality with God because, by His very nature, Jesus is equal with God. Jesus is God.

Listen to what the fourth century preacher John Chrysostom, known as *the Golden Mouth*, wrote concerning this verse:

“What does one say then? That the Son of God feared not to descend from His right, for He thought not Deity a prize [to be] seized. He was not afraid that any would strip Him of that nature or that right, Wherefore He laid it aside, being confident that He should take it up again. He hid it, knowing that He was not made inferior by so doing.”³

Transition. This is the type of thinking that permeates the entirety of the Godhead and of Jesus Christ in particular. This verse speaks to:

B. The humility of Jesus Christ (7) that led Him to the point where He . . .

“Made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:

Proud and arrogant people live and die for their reputations. For such people: reputation is everything. For Jesus: reputation was nothing. Jesus Christ knows Who He is. He does not have to wear His rank on a fancy uniform. He does not have to have servants waiting on Him hand and foot. But this divine Person, the eternal Son of God, came not only the likeness of a man, but took . . .

1. “The form of a servant” (7a)

The Greek word translated *form* is the same used in verse six wherein Jesus is said to be in the *form* of God. As you will recall, this word refers to the outward appearance that replicates the internal reality. Jesus was and is truly a servant.

But, and this is crucial: Jesus did not cease being God when He came as a servant and in the likeness of men. Rather, Jesus added humanity to His divinity. He lost nothing of His nature. However, in becoming a man, Jesus laid aside all of the glories, rights, privileges, and trappings that justly belong to Him as God.

Roger Ellsworth says of this remarkable expression of humility:

We should not be able to read these words without a sense of awe and wonder stealing over our hearts. If anyone ever had the right to insist on his rights, it was the Lord Jesus. But his concern for others (those whom the Father had given him) was such that he refused to insist on his rights. He did not cling to his divine prerogatives, but willingly laid aside all the trappings of his glory and took our humanity.⁴

Transition. Yes, Jesus took on our humanity for Paul continues teaching that Jesus was . . .

2. “Made in the likeness of men” (7b)

Let’s be clear, however, that in taking on our humanity, Jesus did not take on the *sinful* nature of our fallen humanity. It’s for this reason that Paul used a different Greek word in describing Jesus as being **“made in the likeness of men”** rather than in the *form* of men, which may have been misunderstood to mean that Jesus took on the sinful nature men.

² Richard R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, vol. 32, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 103.

³ John Chrysostom, *“Homilies of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Philippians,”* in *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. W. C. Cotton and John Albert Broadus, vol. 13, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1889), 213.

⁴ Roger Ellsworth, *Opening up Philippians*, Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2004), 37.

Transition. The attitude or mind of Christ Jesus is inherently one of humility. But, true humility is not only an attitude that one possesses. True humility finds expression in one's actions.

This was true of Jesus.

C. Jesus' humility of mind was manifested by His actions (8)

“And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”

Jesus Christ's expression of humility went far beyond simply the laying aside His divine rights and prerogatives. By His actions, Jesus demonstrated that He is the epitome of humility. He did more than to simply take on the human limitations associated with being a man. He took it a step farther in becoming the servant of men. In this debased condition, Jesus voluntarily gave up all of His rights, not only as God, but also as a man.

As a servant, Jesus became obedient to the whims and wills of other men. This, in turn led Jesus to the most debased and despised of deaths . . . the death of a Roman cross.

Explanation. In sum, the attitude that Jesus Christ possessed was that of humility and such a humility that it led Him to identify Himself with those whom He had created. Not for His sake did He do this; no: He did it for the sake of sinful people who not only hated Him, but had no ability of their own to love or appreciate Him. Of His own free will Jesus Christ voluntarily gave Himself up to die for you while you were yet His enemy (Rom. 5:8 – 10). This is true humility.

Application. What can you learn from the humility demonstrated so vividly by Jesus Christ in what He did to save sinners from hell? This is what you can learn: *True humility involves a consideration of yourself as being far less than what you are in order to bring a benefit to another.* Paul was using the most extreme example of humility in order to inspire the readers of his letter to consider how little, when compared with what Jesus did, was truly being expected of them in the way of humility.

No one of you can do what Christ did. Because you are not God you cannot humble yourself to the same extent Christ humbled Himself. But, you can humble yourself enough to serve and be a benefit to others . . . if you are willing to do so. Are you willing?

The better question, however, is this: How can you not be willing? When you consider the immeasurable vastness of the divide between God and what is created by God; a vastness Jesus Christ did not hesitate to cross for your benefit; how can you be unwilling to traverse what amounts to less than a foot by comparison to serve your brother or sister in Christ?

When you consider that Jesus Christ was willing to obey His Father in submitting to the cruel, cruel, cruel death of a Roman cross in order to bring a benefit to the very ones responsible for hanging Him there; how is it possible for you to be unwilling to obey your heavenly Father in giving up your preferences for the sake of unity in the church of Jesus Christ?

Transition. Just as it was not Paul's intention to leave his readers in discouragement; so too: it is not my intention to put a guilt trip on you today. There is, after all . . .

III. The reward of humility and obedience (9 – 11)

“Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: ¹⁰ That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; ¹¹ And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

There is much too much in these three verses to do justice to in this message today. We will explore them in some detail next week. But, I want to briefly touch on one aspect in order that you might be encouraged about your future should you decide that you do in fact want to **“let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.”**

Should you decide that you truly desire to live your life as a servant, preferring others above yourself; not looking out for your own personal welfare, but the welfare of others; should you decide that you want to give more than lip-service to the ideal of unity in the local church and sincerely commit yourself to striving to make unity in this local church a reality; then know this: there is a reward awaiting you in heaven. And the best part of it is this: it's an eternal reward, an imperishable reward: a reward that will never grow old or fade away.

The riches, honors, and pleasures you may earn in this lifetime pursuing your own selfish passions will appear for what they truly are when you look back on them from the other side of eternity: foolish, cheap, insignificant, irrelevant, and unworthy of you: a child of God.

Transition. Let's review.

IV. Summary and conclusion

A. (First) Paul's call in Philippians chapter 2 is a call to unity in the local church

- 1. *It is a call whose foundation and source is Jesus Christ your Lord and Savior.***
- 2. *It is a call whose essences is likemindedness:* having the same spiritual values and goals because of your union with Christ Jesus.**
- 3. *It is a call whose expression is rooted in humility:* the humility that considers yourself as being far less than what you are in order to bring a benefit to another.**

B. (Second) Paul's call in Philippians chapter 2 is a call to imitation of the humility and obedience manifested in the Person of Jesus Christ, Who . . .

- 1. *Willingly put aside His own reputation***
- 2. *Willingly identified, not with God the Father, but with mankind whom He had created***
- 3. *Wiling yielded Himself to be shamefully and vilely mistreated and crucified:* for the benefit of others; specifically for the benefit of all who would turn away from their sins and call upon Him to be saved from an eternity in hell.**

What I am putting before you today is nothing less than the key to spiritual growth, both individually and corporately within the local church. If you have this mind, this attitude, of Christ in you: a mind that is self-abasing and self-sacrificing; a mind that prefers others before yourself; then, there will be unity in the church such as is virtually inconceivable to the human mind. Visitors will stand in amazement of the self-sacrificing unity of such a church.

When visitors arrive at such a church, members will not see them as an inconvenience or hindrance to what they want to accomplish that day. Rather, members will make visitors, and each other, a priority as they attempt to meet their needs by giving them what they came seeking: the love of Christ.

Do you remember the question I posed near the beginning of this message? Let me remind you. It is this: ***Do you want to have the mind of Christ be the attitude that permeates and governs the community life of Providence Baptist Church?***

An even more fundamental question you will need to consider before you can answer this first question is this: ***Do you want to have the mind of Christ, that is the attitude of Christ, be the attitude that permeates and governs your personal life?***

As I mentioned earlier: attitude is everything. Do you remember where I said attitude begins? Yes, that's right: it begins with you.

Are you willing to work towards having the attitude, the mind, of Christ, be the attitude that permeates and governs Providence Baptist Church? If so, keep this in mind: this attitude, which is the mind of Christ, begins in each one of you, and in me, individually.