

Philippians 2:1-11

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[0 : 00] I'd like us to look at Philippians chapter 2, the first part of that today, starting with verse 1. It's a familiar passage in many ways. It's a passage that talks about the character of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And Paul also makes application to us. He says that we need to look to Christ. We need to have the same mind that Christ had.

Philippians 2, chapter 2, verse 1.

Because everything he says in the first part of the passage is going to come out of what he says about Christ.

So he's going to talk to them about their relationships with one another and says, what you really need to do, what I'm really saying is, you need to be Christ-like. And so it's good for us to understand what it means to be Christ-like and what Christ was like.

[2 : 23] Paul says here, Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.

Now when we read that, we might think of the way we use the word form sometimes. We might say, well, he drew an outline on the board and it was in the form of a horse.

And we think of form because sometimes it can mean just the general outline, a similarity. And so some people would look at this and they would actually think of Christ that way.

Well, there were similarities between Christ and God. He wasn't God, really, but he was similar. He was certainly a great prophet or a great teacher. He certainly taught the truth.

He was some kind of a higher being, but not God himself. He was just higher than us. And that's what many, many religions, many people think. Many churches even teach those things.

[3 : 27] But the word that's used here for form doesn't mean the bare outline of something. It's the very form of what a thing is. It's everything that makes that thing to be what it really is.

If you go down to the toy shops, you might buy your son a toy and you might get him a small car. And it's in the form of a car.

It looks like a car and he makes car sounds when he moves it across the floor and crashes it into things. And it suits his purpose of playing with a car.

But that's not the word that Paul is using here. The word he uses here is one that satisfies everything of what the car should be. If you want to use this word and say, I'm going to get my son one of these, you need to buy him a Rolls Royce.

Or maybe a high class Mercedes. So that people look at it and say, everything that fills out the form of a car is here. We're not talking about a cheap, inexpensive car that bumps along the road.

[4 : 35] We're talking about one that glides. One that purrs. One that satisfies every longing you have for a car. And that's what Paul is saying about Jesus when he says he was in the form of God.

Everything that satisfies the criteria for being God was true of Jesus before he came to this earth. He was fully and completely God.

If we want to know what the Father is like, Jesus says, if you have seen me, you have seen the Father. Paul says, even though he was in the form of God, he didn't count his equality with God as a thing to be grasped.

Now here's another word we use in different ways in English. I may be looking over here at this backpack and I really eye it because my backpack is really rather shabby. And so I think on the way out I'm going to see if I can grasp that.

That's thinking like a thief. I'm wanting to take something that's not mine. So some people would say, well, Jesus wasn't really God. And so he didn't count this equality with God as something that he should grasp, that he should steal away and make it his own when it wasn't his.

[5 : 49] The word that Paul uses here is one to talk about holding on to something and keeping it for yourself. Being in the full form of God, he didn't count it as that equality with God as something he needed to hold on to for his own benefit.

It's the difference in seeing this backpack and seeing someone else whose backpack is rather shabby and saying to him, I'm not going to hold on to this one. I can see that you need it more than I do.

Let me give it to you. That's the attitude that Jesus had toward his divinity. This is something that I can use for the benefit of others.

It's not something I'm going to hold as my personal possession and only for my benefit. So Paul goes on to say, Though he was in the form of God, he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant.

Sometimes we might think that Jesus emptied himself. He took his being God and he set it aside. He put it on a shelf or in a corner and he locked the door.

[7 : 05] And then he came and became a man. And so he was no longer God. He was a man for that period of time. And he had no access to that. We struggle with how to understand, how to explain what it is that Jesus did.

But what Paul says is he didn't empty himself by getting rid of something. Instead, he says he emptied himself by taking the form of a servant.

What Jesus did to empty himself was to become a servant. Not to cease being God, but to become also a servant at the same time. And it uses the same word, a form.

He didn't become like a servant. So that we look at him and think, Well, he's dressed up like a homeless person. He does a good job. You would think that he is a homeless person.

Or you would think that he's really a servant because he's pretty long airs. He's trying to pretend that way. Sometimes when we are around someone who is very important, We feel it's necessary for us to grovel a bit.

[8 : 09] And to be willing to wait on them hand and foot. Because we know we'll get benefit from that later on. They'll remember our act of service. That's not what Jesus did. Instead, Jesus became just as much the form of a servant as he was the form of God.

So here he is, fully and completely God, and fully and completely a servant. It doesn't even say that he came into the form of a man.

Became fully and completely man. But he goes beyond that to say he became a servant. You remember that the wise men came from the east.

It's part of the Christmas story that's not that far from our remembering it. And they went to the natural place where you would think that someone important would be born. They went to the capital city of Jerusalem.

They went to the king and they said, where is he who was born king of the Jews? And the king who should know about these things, it should be his son. He said, I don't know, basically.

[9 : 11] So he asked the teachers of the law, the experts in the scriptures. And they didn't say, well, you're in the wrong place. He didn't come as the king. He came as the high priest.

So let's go look at the high priest's house. No, instead they sent them to Bethlehem. And they went and found a very humble place where he was living with his father at that time, a carpenter, and his mother in this simple place.

And they came and they worshipped him. So when Jesus came, he didn't come to be the king and to act like a king. He didn't come to act like the high priest, a great religious authority.

He came as one to be a servant. And he described himself as not having a place to lay his head. Jesus didn't know where he would sleep that night. He wasn't sure where the next meal would come from.

He was sleeping rough, to put it the way we talk about it now. He was a homeless person in many ways. Many people welcomed them to his banquet. But the next meal might just simply be bread and water with his disciples.

[10 : 15] And he couldn't be sure of those things. When Jesus came, he became not just a man, but he became a servant. And Paul goes on to fill it out some more and say, He emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men, and being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Jesus knew that what we needed at this time was not him to come as a king, and to deliver us from our political enemies, or to come as a high priest and teach us more than what was already in the Old Testament, or provide better sacrifices.

He knew that what we needed was for him to be king in our hearts. He knew that what we needed was to have our hearts cleansed. That we needed change internally. And he came to be a servant, and he came to go to the cross, because that's what we needed.

We needed a sacrifice better than the high priest could offer. We needed a ruler in our hearts better than King Herod or Caesar. We needed something that was not like the other men who led in this world, but we needed the work that he would do on the cross on our behalf.

So that's who Jesus is that we're speaking about. Paul, in the first part of the chapter now, he tells us how this applies. So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, then complete my joy by being of the same mind, etc.

[11 : 59] Sometimes we use an if-then structure to talk about something we're not certain of. If the bus comes by in the next five minutes, I'll take the bus, otherwise I'm going to walk home.

If I get a big Christmas bonus, then I think we'll go on holiday this summer. If my child does really well in their exams, then this is their plan for education.

So we often use it for things that we're not sure about. But Paul is using a stronger form. It doesn't come out as clearly here. It's more like since you have this, and since you have this, and since you have the other thing, therefore you ought to make my joy complete by being of one mind.

Since we've already looked at the nature of Christ, we see that these things are not in question.

We're not waiting for something else to happen, to say if this happens, then I'll do such and such.

But instead, we're depending on things that really have happened. And since we understand those things, therefore this is what ought to happen in our life. Since there is encouragement in Christ, who came to the cross for us.

[13 : 14] Since there is comfort from love, the love of God the Father poured out in our hearts through Christ. Since there is participation in the Spirit, the Spirit working in our hearts.

Since we have those things going. Since God, the Holy Trinity, is working together to do these things in our lives. Therefore, Paul says, you ought to make my joy complete by being of the same mind.

Having the same love, being in full accord, and of one mind. Because God has done these things in us, we ought to be able to work with one another.

If God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit can agree together, and Jesus was willing to go to the cross for me, and the Father was willing to experience that Father-Son separation of pouring out the punishment for our sins on Him.

Since God was willing to do those things, I ought to be able to get along with my brother. I ought to be able to have unity of mind with my sister as we talk about what we're going to do.

[14 : 19] I ought to be able to set aside my pettiness in order to see those things happen. And Paul says, that's what's going to make my joy complete, to see that happen in your church there at Philippi, or among those of you who come to the evening lunchtime talks, or those of us working together on a particular project or a particular ministry.

We ought to be able to do those things because we have the resources in what Christ has done for us. We know what love is because we have seen it in the love that the Father has poured out on us. We know what it means to have a unity of heart. We know what it is to be comforted by the work of Christ and encouraged by Him. So Paul says, making his joy complete with a unity is not something that is beyond us.

It may be difficult. It may be a daily challenge. It may be something we never can tick off our list and say, I've done that. I never have to come back to it. But it may be something which is part of our daily walk with Christ and growing with Him as we put these things into practice.

Paul says in verse 4, or verse 3, Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit.

[15 : 36] The New International Version says vain conceit. But in humility count others more significant than yourselves. That's pretty radical, isn't it?

You all come from an office. You're all involved in your neighborhoods and in other places. We're all involved in these comparisons. Conceit and self-advancement.

It's just part of our life. I mean, even when I got up this morning, I thought, oh, I'm going to the Ely Lundstein Talk. What should I wear? What would the people there expect me to wear? I need to look dignified but not too distant.

I shouldn't look shabby. I shouldn't look dirty. I need to make sure that I comb my hair this morning. And we're often trying to think about these things.

One thing I had to learn about as an American is that in England, you don't ask questions about things like money. That's just embarrassing. You stay away from those things.

[16:34] And you don't say to someone, well, here's my business card. And I'm a very important person. You see, I'm the assistant director to the primary minister of this.

Or I have this job and I have this education. But we all are still trying to communicate those things. I don't show you where I went to school. But I use the right vocabulary so you can figure it out.

And I might be vague about certain things. But in my own way, I can communicate how hard it was to accomplish this great thing and seem humble while at the same time letting you know that I did accomplish it.

We're all involved in this. And we're all concerned about will I get a promotion or will I be left behind and so-and-so who doesn't deserve it at all gets that position or that responsibility.

We're all concerned about these things. And it's the way of the world. In a way, we feel even as a committed Christian, I have to promote myself in some way because nobody else is going to do that.

[17:44] Paul says that is a struggle and we all have to work with that. We all have to struggle with selfish ambition and conceit.

And in humility, count others more significant than yourself. Whoa. Well, I am more significant than that person. So why can't I say that?

Paul doesn't mean that you can't see any ways in which you compare. But we write people off because they aren't significant, don't we?

I've seen conversations where people are talking about, well, where did you go to school and things like that. And if they give the wrong answer, then you politely excuse yourself because you realize I don't really need to talk to this person because they don't have any influence.

They don't have anything to say to me because they didn't go to this right school. They aren't going to be in a position of responsibility where I need to depend upon their good graces.

[18:47] But when Paul says to consider others more significant than yourselves, he's talking about the part of it that we leave out.

You pass this person living rough on the pavement and you think, well, you know, I don't need to pay any attention to him. I might give him a bit of loose change because it makes me feel good and somebody else is with me.

It gives a good impression. But he's really of no significance to me or this person doesn't really matter. Even with that person, you can look at them and say, you know, I have a hard time sleeping in a comfortable bed in a warm room.

And this person manages to sleep in uncertain situations, no comfort, without the warmth. I complain if my meal comes too late or if it's not cooked the way I want it.

This person doesn't know what their next meal is. And they're coping with that. They're dealing with that. They have far more resilience than I have. And they might well have similar education and background and opportunities.

[19:55] But this is how life is for them. And they are dealing with it. And I'm complaining about the situation I'm in. In that regard, this person is more significant than I am. Because I've got it easy.

And I'm still complaining. They have it hard and somehow they're making it through. We don't tend to think that way because we are too busy thinking about our own advantage and how it works to us.

Paul says it's going to bear fruit in the way in which we live with one another. Let each of you look not only to his own interests but also to the interests of others.

Instead of saying, how can I make this work out the best for me? How can I make this turn to my advantage? How can this fit our advantage? How can it be to the benefit of that person as well?

It opens us up to sacrifice. It opens us up to giving. A concern that we often have is what about myself? Who's going to take care of myself?

[20 : 57] Benjamin Warfield, a theologian in the U.S. in the 1800s he said it's not that Paul is speaking against self he's speaking against selfishness.

because the best way for us to become what we really ought to be is to become like Christ. And that's the whole point of the passage. If the best we could ever be is to be like Christ who is willing to give up his privileges and become what we needed for our benefit.

He put our considerations our needs our significance ahead of his even though he had every right to the claims and we had none. I like a story about a very posh church everyone dressed very nicely they were very proud of their group together and after the service had started a homeless man came walking in and he was looking for a place to sit and you know how that works sometimes you know there's a seat near you but you I'm not picking on you but you put your arm over it so he thinks oh his wife is not here or something or you move your books over there or you just kind of close ranks and so he comes down the aisle the center aisle and nobody is welcoming him and offering him a seat and so he just keeps moving looking for a spot but it's a very full church and he gets down and he's at the end of the aisle in front of the pulpit and there's no space so he sits on the floor ready to listen and then an old gentleman in the church very nicely dressed obviously a successful man he begins coming down and you can hear his feet shuffling and his cane tapping on the floor as he comes and he's going down and people are thinking well it's hard but he really shouldn't be sitting there and you know

John is the man to just gently and kindly take him and usher him out and maybe give him a little bit of money or some food and send him on his way John gets down to where the man is sitting and he puts his hand on his shoulder but not to tell him to leave but to ease himself down and sit next to this man and listen to the worship and the sermon next to this homeless man John could have said he is not significant and I am John said he is significant because he's come to hear about Jesus and I want to be like Jesus so he can hear about Jesus Paul finishes the passage talking about what God has done for Christ therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord the glory of God the Father notice what it didn't say it didn't say

God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name so that at the name of Jesus many knees should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and many tongues confess that Jesus Christ is Lord of the glory of God the Father Jesus isn't saying this is one Paul isn't saying this is one way to the Father or that a lot of people are going to follow Jesus because of what he did in the example that he set he says every tongue every will confess every knee will bow right now in America there are people protesting with signs that say not my president in your own history there were people who didn't like the king who was on the throne they preferred Bonnie Prince Charlie we can object in our hearts and say this is not my king this is not my president but it still doesn't put us out from under the law under their rule it doesn't mean that we can do as we please and that we can make that choice it doesn't change the facts of the case

[25 : 22] Paul says the facts of the case are that God has highly exalted Christ and put him on the throne and that every knee would bow and every tongue confess some are going to confess joyfully and worshipfully and are going to kneel into life that Christ is their savior and others are going to have to acknowledge that whether I like it or not he is the king a lot of people who would look at the sermon on the mountain say Jesus was a brilliant teacher and I think he's a wonderful example and we should all follow these things whether they actually know what it says or not I don't know but they can look up to it and think well then the question is about the content of the sermon on the mountain how are you doing with lust because Jesus condemns lust as being the same as adultery and they might say well I'm doing great with lust it's a major part of my life I pursue it on a regular basis and I seek to keep it satisfied as much as I can or Jesus talks there about hatred being the same piece of cloth as murder at just the other end how are we doing with hatred well

I don't hate most people but I do have a list and I'm pursuing ways in which I can carry out that hatred and see if I can get something bad to happen to those people Jesus Paul tells us that we need to make a choice about Jesus we're going to bow we're going to confess will we do that gladly as our savior as our king or will we do it with regret that we didn't say that earlier let's pray Father in heaven we thank you that you have loved us in Christ we thank you that we know that we have encouragement in Christ and the love of the Father and the fellowship of your spirit we pray Lord that you would teach us these things that you would work in our hearts that King Jesus would do the

work needed in our hearts to change them that the work that you did on the cross Lord Jesus would be applied in our own hearts in your name Amen