

We have come to one of the most important passages in the letters of Paul. It was written in the form of a poem. We don't know if he composed it on the spot or if it was perhaps a poem or song of the early church. The exact meaning is debated, but the overall message is very clear.

The first four verses of this chapter were a call to humility and a preference for others' interests. It was a challenge to be gentle and kind in the way we relate and work together so that the body of Christ could be of one mind and express a unity that is supernatural. It was really a picture of what the individuals of a perfect church should be like. But then Paul pointed to the perfect example to help them understand exactly what he meant.

*<sup>5</sup> Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,* Some translators add this phrase on to the previous sentence and some connect it with the following sentence. It all flows together in the original language so we should not think of it just one way or the other. *<sup>4</sup> Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. <sup>5</sup> Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,* Philippians 2:4-6 (ESV) That humble attitude of putting others first, is the mindset we should have and do have in Christ who demonstrated it for us while he walked as a man on this earth.

Paul is referring to a way of thinking. In verse 2 he used the word for "think" twice, asking them to have the same thinking. Now he's explaining just what that kind of thinking looks like. It is the way Jesus' thought about life. I'll call it "the Jesus mindset". (Ephesians 4:22-24)

I like the way the ESV says this mindset is ours in Christ Jesus. (1Corinthain 2:16) That is true but perhaps not exactly the way the Greek is worded. "This mindset is in you and in Christ", is more literal. It's that mindset of thinking of other's interests. The Message translation words "thinking of others' interest" in this way, *<sup>4</sup> Don't be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand.* Philippians 2:4 (MSG) Jesus was certainly not obsessed with gaining his own advantage. He continually put others first for their good, whether teaching or healing or washing their feet. (John 13:3-5) But the greatest example is in his very willingness to be incarnate as one of us.

He had the glory of heaven. He was fully satisfied in His relationship with the Father. But He had this mindset of looking out for others and helping them. (John 13:15-17) So

**Commented [Paul1]: Ephesians 4:22-24 (NIV)**

<sup>22</sup> You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; <sup>23</sup> to be made new in the attitude of your minds; <sup>24</sup> and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

**Commented [Paul2]: 1 Corinthians 2:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> "For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

**Commented [Paul3]: John 13:3-5 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, <sup>4</sup> rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. <sup>5</sup> Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

**Commented [Paul4]: John 13:15-17 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. <sup>16</sup> Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. <sup>17</sup> If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

though he was in essence (form of) God, he didn't cling to that equality. It is a difficult verse to interpret. <sup>6</sup> *who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped*, We'll see in the following verse that this is regarding His choice to be human. This is not saying that Jesus didn't see Himself equal to God, just the opposite. He did not count equality as something to cling to. Even though He was in essence God, He was willing to let go of equality with God to be in human form. (Ephesians 4:10)

**The Christmas miracle is as great as the resurrection miracle**, perhaps even greater, in that one who is in essence God would become a baby within the womb of a human woman. (Isaiah 7:14) The Creator entered into His own creation. "Thou art my Son. This day have I begotten Thee," the psalmist wrote. (Psalm 2:7) "Unto us a child is born; unto us a Son is given," predicted the Spirit through Isaiah. (Isaiah 9:6)

The Apostle Paul is pointing out that though Jesus knew He was infinitely superior to His creation, for our sake He was willing to come down to our level of humble condition to relate to us in a way that would help meet our greatest need. That is the example we are to follow. That is what we must do if we are to have unity in a church and model Christ likeness to the world. If Jesus could take such a huge step down, then can't we take a little tiny step down for one another?

Let's look at what an enormous step down he took for us. <sup>7</sup> *but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men*. He stepped down from His glorious throne and entered into this fallen world. It is beyond my ability to describe. Bill Gates giving away all his wealth to live in a slum in Bangladesh wouldn't begin to come close to an equivalent step. Jesus stepped down from holy glory surrounded by worshiping seraphim and millions of servant angels (Revelation 5:11) into this fallen morass of selfish and sin sick humanity.

Don't lose the context. Yes it was for our salvation, but the context is that it was to help us in our need. We must follow this example of humbling ourselves to help one another.

**He made Himself nothing.** There is much debate over the expression. Of what did He empty Himself? The passage cannot mean that he was literally "nothing". It means He poured Himself out or emptied Himself. This is often referred to as the Emptying Passage (*ekenosen*).

What did He empty Himself of? I've wrestled with the Scriptures in regards to this, and personally believe He emptied Himself of His glory along with all power, knowledge and universal presence He had before the incarnation. For example, He did not know the

**Commented [Paul5]: Ephesians 4:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)

**Commented [Paul6]: Isaiah 7:14 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

**Commented [Paul7]: Psalm 2:7 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you.

**Commented [Paul8]: Isaiah 9:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

**Commented [Paul9]: Revelation 5:11 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands,

hour of His return. (Matthew 24:36) He was limited in His location. Satan's temptation to command the stones to become bread was an attempt to get Him to pray selfishly, to use His personal relationship with the Father for His own gain. (Matthew 4:3) He grew in wisdom and stature. (Luke 2:52)

You might ask, how then did He perform miracles? I believe He did them through the power of the Holy Spirit just as any man can do them at the leading of the Spirit. Think about it, He looked to God to multiply the loaves (Matthew 14:19), to raise Lazarus (John 11:41), etc. His touch healed because He was sinless, utterly holy, but not because He was all powerful. (Exodus 29:37) When others asked Him why they could not do a miracle, He told them it took prayer. (Mark 9:29) He didn't say it was because they didn't have the power of God.<sup>1</sup> He operated out of prayer and obtained the power of God through the Spirit.

Please understand that Jesus was no less God, but that to be human He had to set aside those all-powerful abilities or He could not have been our example in all things. He accessed the power of God to do God's will in the same way we do, through prayer and obedience to the Holy Spirit. He rebuked Satan the same way that you and I do, with the Word. (Luke 4:12) Everything He did we can do if it is at the leading of the Holy Spirit. In fact, He said we would do greater things because He was going to the Father. (John 14:12)

Jesus took the form of a servant. Angels and men are made to be the servants of the living God. (Psalm 103:20) Paul, and many of the Old Testament prophets took it as a title of honor to be the servants of God. (Romans 1:1) It meant that they were walking in God's will. Jesus went from being the One that gave the orders (in love and for our good), to only taking orders from His Father in heaven. He could say that He did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many. (Mark 10:45) He could say the greatest was the servant of all because in serving God He served all of humanity. (Matthew 23:11)

Is this your mindset? Is this the way you think? Is obedience to God a way to serve everyone and the way that you picture of true greatness? Kingdom thinking is completely unlike worldly thinking.

*<sup>8</sup> And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.* I've wondered when Jesus consciously became aware that He was God emptied and now in human form. Remember Satan's temptation, "If you are the Son of God, then..." (Matthew 4:6) But even at the age of 12 He said He had to be in His Father's house. (Luke 2:49) Whenever that moment came, He realized the frailty of the human form. (Psalm 103:14) He knew the only hope

**Commented [Paul10]: Matthew 24:36 (ESV)**

<sup>36</sup> "But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only."

**Commented [Paul11]: Matthew 4:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread."

**Commented [Paul12]: Luke 2:52 (ESV)**

<sup>52</sup> And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.

**Commented [Paul13]: Matthew 14:19 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass, and taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds.

**Commented [Paul14]: John 11:41 (ESV)**

<sup>41</sup> So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me."

**Commented [Paul15]: Exodus 29:37 (ESV)**

<sup>37</sup> Seven days you shall make atonement for the altar and consecrate it, and the altar shall be most holy. Whatever touches the altar shall become holy.

**Commented [Paul16]: Mark 9:29 (ESV)**

<sup>29</sup> And he said to them, "This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer."

**Commented [Paul17]:** He spoke of the power of God as something the Sadducees did not know personally and were therefore wrong in their understanding. That implies that they as men could know that power and then draw a right conclusion. See Mark 12:24

**Commented [Paul18]: Luke 4:12 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> And Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

**Commented [Paul19]: John 14:12 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father."

**Commented [Paul20]: Psalm 103:20 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> Bless the LORD, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his word, obeying the voice of his word!

**Commented [Paul21]: Romans 1:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,

**Commented [Paul22]: Mark 10:45 (ESV)**

<sup>45</sup> For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

**Commented [Paul23]: Matthew 23:11 (NIV)**

<sup>11</sup> The greatest among you will be your servant.

**Commented [Paul24]: Matthew 4:6 (NIV)**

<sup>6</sup> "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: "He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.""

**Commented [Paul25]: Luke 2:49 (ESV)**

<sup>49</sup> And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"

**Commented [Paul26]: Psalm 103:14 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.

of anyone living in a human body was to humble oneself and become completely obedient to the Father. **Humility comes before obedience can follow.**

Man is the most undeservedly prideful creature that was ever created. It was pride in the Garden that tempted Eve to desire to be as God. (Genesis 3:5) It was pride that welcomed Satan's lie. It was wounded pride that was behind the first murder (Genesis 4:8), and pride that motivated the first great ruler, Nimrod. (Genesis 10:8-10) It was pride that caused the nation of Israel to murmur against God, their Deliverer and Redeemer. (Exodus 16:8) It was pride that rejected and crucified Jesus. (John 18:40) It is pride today that refuses to subject oneself to God's ordained leadership whether secular (Romans 13:1) or of faith. It is pride that was bringing division to the church at Philippi and there was one solution; humble yourself as Christ humbled Himself. He came down so far for us; can't we come down a tiny bit for one another?

Jesus became humbly obedient even to death on the cross. What does it cost you to die to yourself a little to let another have his or her way? Not nearly what it cost Christ to be obedient to the Father. His obedience took Him all the way to the cross, but look at what it accomplished for all who will receive it! Humble obedience produces great fruit. It may not be obvious at first, but it will come in its time.

And now, look how God rewards humble obedience. <sup>9</sup> *Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name*, He is LORD! Do you remember Jesus' instruction to the Pharisees that were invited to be guests? He told them to take the lowest seat, for then the host may invite them to sit up at a more honored position. (Luke 14:10-11) True humility is rewarded with exaltation.

Jesus now has the highest title, the most exalted name. That is another indication that He is one with the Father when you consider what the psalmist wrote. <sup>13</sup> *Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is exalted; his majesty is above earth and heaven.* Psalm 148:13 (ESV)

Jesus humbled Himself and now He has returned to the equality He had with the Father from before the world began. (John 17:5) He went from an exalted position to humility and back to exaltation again. It is one thing to go from humility to exaltation, but it is a far greater thing to go from exaltation to true humility for the sake of others.

<sup>10</sup> *so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth*, Paul takes a quote from the Old Testament prophet Isaiah and applies it to Jesus, but look at the original context and you will get a clearer picture of what Paul was really saying. <sup>21b</sup> *...there is no other god besides me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none besides me.* <sup>22</sup> *"Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the*

**Commented [Paul27]: Genesis 3:5 (NIV)**

<sup>5</sup> "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

**Commented [Paul28]: Genesis 3:5 (NIV)**

<sup>5</sup> "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

**Commented [Paul29]: Genesis 10:8-10 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> Cush fathered Nimrod; he was the first on earth to be a mighty man.

<sup>9</sup> He was a mighty hunter before the LORD. Therefore it is said, "Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before the LORD."

<sup>10</sup> The beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar.

**Commented [Paul30]: Exodus 16:8 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> And Moses said, "When the LORD gives you in the evening meat to eat and in the morning bread to the full, because the LORD has heard your grumbling that you grumble against him— what are we? Your grumbling is not against us but against the LORD."

**Commented [Paul31]: John 18:40 (ESV)**

<sup>40</sup> They cried out again, "Not this man, but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a robber.

**Commented [Paul32]: Romans 13:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.

**Commented [Paul33]: Luke 14:10-11 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you.

<sup>11</sup> For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

**Commented [Paul34]: John 17:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

*earth! For I am God, and there is no other. <sup>23</sup> By myself I have sworn; from my mouth has gone out in righteousness a word that shall not return: 'To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance.'* Isaiah 45:21-23 (ESV)

By quoting the passage, Paul is declaring that Jesus is our righteous God and Savior. There is none besides Him. Turn to Him and be saved from wherever you live on this earth. He is God and there is no other. Every knee will bow to Jesus. Every tongue will swear allegiance to Him. That was the reward to Jesus for His great humility and great obedience.

And what of you and me? If we will humble ourselves and submit to the Lord will He not greatly exalt us? In fact, the One who modeled it for us made us that very promise.

*<sup>12</sup> Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.* Matthew 23:12 (ESV)

*<sup>11</sup> and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

"And every tongue shall confess to God" was the Greek (LXX) ending of Isaiah's prediction. In place of "God", the devout Jewish believer, Paul, inserted that our confession would be that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Paul had complete conviction that this passage from Isaiah that is about God our Savior was specifically about Jesus our Lord.

What a lofty poem Paul has set before us. It has taken us into the heavenly realms with wonder and awe and showed us Jesus in glory, humbling Himself to serve us through the incarnation, ending life in His obedient death, then to be highly exalted. There is no greater call to humility and service in all of Scripture, but let us not lose Paul's reason behind sharing this. It is so that we might emulate Jesus by humbling ourselves just a portion of the way Jesus did so that we might live together in love and unity.

The petty divisions that had sprung up in Philippi were being shamed by Jesus' awesome example. Our petty jealousies and divisions and disagreements are shamed by Jesus' awesome example that is recorded in this beautiful poem. It shames us and challenges us, but it also lays before us an amazing promise.

Humility comes before exaltation. The farther the step down, the greater the step up. Who will take up this challenge? You will know them by their love! (John 13:35)

#### Questions

- 1 What is the call of the first 4 verses of Philippians 2?
- 2 Does verse 5 go with verse 4 or 6?
- 3 What does verse 6 tell us?

**Commented [Paul35]: John 13:35 (ESV)**

<sup>35</sup> By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

- 4 How great was Jesus step down?
- 5 What did Jesus empty Himself of?
- 6 How did Jesus perform miracles?
- 7 What did Jesus do when He realized He was God incarnate? Why?
- 8 What is man's great weakness?
- 9 What is the reward for humility?
- 10 What was the name Jesus was given?