

WORKING OUT GOD'S GOOD WORK IN YOUR HEART

Studies in the Book of Philippians - Part Nine

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HOW JESUS CAME TO BE LORD OF ALL

Philippians 2:5-11 - "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, [6] who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, [7] but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, [8] he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. [9] Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, [10] so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, [11] and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

There are texts that are simply too big for any of us. They're not too big because we can't *understand* them but because they present truth so *contrary* to our natural instincts and ambitions. These familiar words from Paul seldom carry their proper medicine to our souls. It is so easy to read them and only see a wondrous description of the incarnation and exaltation of our Lord - which they *are* - but only *secondarily* so.

That Paul's ultimate purpose in this text is *practical*, not merely *doctrinal*, is obvious from the way he uses it to complete the directives he initiated in **verses 1-4** - "So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, [2] complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. [3] Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. [4] Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others."

Paul knows there is nothing at which the human spirit recoils more than the idea of "*counting others more significant than yourselves*" (3). He knows it is *one* thing to do a kind act for someone in need and quite *another* thing to permanently take yourself off the *throne* of your own life. Bible study is peanuts compared to this. Church attendance and church support are a walk in the park compared to valuing and treating your worst enemy as though he or she was *more* worthy of your love and attention than you give yourself.

So how can Paul promote this non-self dominated lifestyle? What is left for Paul to say? Should he yell at these Christians? Should he plead and beg? Perhaps an altar call? How will Paul lead these Christians into the life they fear the most - that life of self-refusal that they think will compromise justice and threaten their identity, but which will ultimately produce their greatest joy and freedom? What can Paul do to prompt this deepest level of godliness in their lives?

1) **PAUL TURNS THEIR ATTENTION TO CHRIST**

Philippians 2:5 - "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus...."

Notice the depth of the issue - "*Have this mind*...." It's more than just an *action*. He's pointing to a *deep inward awareness - an ongoing perception*. It's a kind of *constant, willful remembering*. He tells them what they are most likely to *forget*. He reminds them he's calling them to do the very thing that, had Jesus Christ *not* done for them, they would still be perishing in sin and facing eternal damnation.

Jesus reached them in love and grace because Jesus, shockingly, "*considered others (them!) more significant than Himself*" (2:3). They live because Jesus "*did not look to His own interests, but also the interests of others (their interests!)*" (2:4).

Paul says we all need to meditate on this because the mind we all have *naturally* - the kind of *orientation* we live by - is one which *preserves the rights of self*. The old unrenewed mind props up the rights of self - always.

Of course, we *know* this self-justification is a bad tendency when we are *wrong* in our actions and *guilty* of sin. We all *know* we have no right to excuse ourselves when we are in the wrong. We *do* it sometimes, but, unless our hearts are very calloused and blind, we know we err in excusing our guilt.

But everything changes when we know we're **right**, not **wrong**. It is the hardest and perhaps the most **spiritual** of all disciplines to remove ourselves from the throne of freely selecting our own responses to others when we know we have **been** wronged, not **done** wrong. And that's why Paul reminds these Christians about Jesus. Jesus put **their** interests first - turned from all that was rightly **His** - gave up all the security, justice, and peace that comes from **not** being the one in the wrong - and laid down His life for **their** blessing rather than His **Own**.

We are all the same, you and I. Nine hundred and ninety-nine times out of a thousand, when we're asked to **make** things right when we're the ones who **are** right, we feel the **unreasonableness** of that request. We all complain against it.

This is why Paul paints this lovely picture of Jesus. We all gather here together for a service like this. I think with genuine joy in our hearts, in song and in prayer and in words, we lift up Jesus Christ as our **Lord**. That is the **title** we use for Jesus more than any other in our worship. "**Lord**" - that's what Jesus **is** in terms of His relationship to us. In fact, the end of our text has **everyone** lifting up Jesus Christ as "**Lord**" (11).

And that's the title Paul turns to next:

2) HOW DID JESUS GET TO BE LORD?

The question almost seems sacrilegious when the words flow all strung together from our lips, but it's the very issue Paul tackles in this great text. If we **call** Jesus Lord we should think about **how** He came to **be** Lord. One could think Jesus is Lord because, after all, He's **God**. But that is **not** the track Paul takes in these oft quoted verses. Look at the words very carefully:

Philippians 2:6-11 - "...who (speaking of Jesus), though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, [7] but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, [8] he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. [9] **Therefore** (this is the important word in the passage) God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, [10] so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, [11] and every tongue confess that **Jesus Christ is Lord**, to the glory of God the Father."

The "**Therefore**" in **verse nine** explains the **why** - the **reason** - the Father exalted the Son - "**Therefore God has highly exalted him....**" Just to be crystal clear, this is not when Jesus became **divine**. This is not when He became **God the Son**. No. That's not the point of Paul's discussion. This is when He fulfilled His **incarnational, redemptive mission** to redeem and purchase His bride the church. This is when the period of His **becoming a curse for us** - to use Paul's words - came to the triumphant goal of His resurrection and ascension.

Every knee bows and exalts Jesus Christ as "**Lord**" because of certain things the Son willingly **did**. And what He **did** is set out plainly, step by downward step, in **verses 6-8** - "...who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, [7] but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, [8] he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

The steps to Jesus' Lordship are clearly marked out: He "**did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped....made himself nothing....took the form of a servant....humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death....even death on a cross** (not even a dignified, honorable death - but the death of a filthy criminal - the death pronounced a curse in the Old Testament)."

Notice the use of **verbs** in these phrases. Jesus did these things **Himself**. They were **His** choices. He didn't **have** to do any of them. He said very clearly that no one **took** His life from Him. He laid it down by His own **choice**. He thought this through. He didn't **deserve** any of the things people did to Him and He didn't **have** to take them. But He **did**. He **chose** them.

Why did He choose this path? What could He have been thinking? He chose this path because He wasn't preserving His own rights. He was, to use Paul's words, not only "**looking to His own interests, but to the interests of others**" (2:4). He did all these things because, again using Paul's words, He was "**in humility counting others more significant**" than Himself (2:3). And the "**others**" for whom He did all these things were His **enemies**. The "**others**" were the ones whose sins were, quite literally, **killing** Jesus.

Now we're almost ready to read **verse 5** properly - "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus...." If these Philippian believers claim to follow their Lord they must walk the same path. This is what it means to be "*in Christ Jesus*" - "...Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus." You can't follow Jesus just by talking about Jesus. You must be "*in*" Christ Jesus. That is the final point of this teaching:

3) THE LORDSHIP OF JESUS FROM THE INSIDE OUT

Philippians 2:5 - "Have this mind *among yourselves*, which is *yours in Christ Jesus*...."

Everything Paul says hinges - turns - on the last three words in this verse - "*...in Christ Jesus*...." This says more than we sometimes think. He *isn't* just telling these people to *copy* Christ Jesus. It's not just that Jesus is their *example*. He *is* a great example, to be sure, but that's not Paul's point here.

If you and I are *in* Christ Jesus the mind that is *in* Him is the mind that is *in* us. This mind is the *only territory left* for those who are *in* Christ Jesus. Paul is telling these Christians - and telling you and me - that we must all *stop thinking we have other options* in setting the direction of our thoughts.

This mind of Christ - the one that considers others above ourselves - the one that treats enemies with greater love and care than ourselves - the one that doesn't look after its own interests but gives all its energy to the interests of others - *this* mind is the only one *Christ* has. So if I am *in* Christ this is the only mind *I* have because this is the only mind Christ *gives*.

Paul seems to pull us all away from some *mystical* interpretation of being "*in Christ*." He makes it all so *actual* and *dominant* and *practical*. You can see this in so many places where Paul talks about us being "*in Christ*:"

Colossians 3:2-3 - "Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. [3] For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God."

Any manifestation of my free will that doesn't look like Jesus I treat, with the Holy Spirit's help, the way a radiologist burns up cancer cells - "*For you have died*...." These people weren't physically dead. They could read Paul's letter. But Paul wants to tell them something about the *way* - the *only way* - they now live: "*Your life is hidden with Christ in God*" (3).

Their lives are now *wrapped up inside Christ in God*. That means the only part of their life that is *manifested* to others isn't *themselves*. Nobody can *see* them anymore. That part is *hidden*. It can't be seen. What is now the *visible* part of their lives - the part that is on the *outside* - is Jesus because they are *hidden in Him*.

Back to **Philippians 2:5** - "Have this mind among yourselves, which is *yours* in Christ Jesus...." This is the only mind that is *yours* if you are *in* Christ Jesus. This is now *your* mind because you are *in* Christ. This is the only territory of your thinking and living. There is nothing else about you to be thought of as even being alive anymore. The mind of Christ is the only mind Jesus gives.

One more thing. The final picture Paul paints of Christ is of an *exalted* Christ, but still the *same* Christ. Look at Paul's words: **Philippians 2:9-11** - "Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, [10] so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, [11] and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

For years I read those words and saw nothing more than the description of the trajectory of Christ's journey. First He is up, with the Father in eternal glory. Then He comes down in the humble form of a servant. Then He goes up again to a position of glory and exaltation.

But I think this misses Paul's point. The *likeness of men* (7), and the humble "*human form*" (8) were never exchanged back. *To this day* Jesus is still in that condition while exalted at the right hand of the Father. Paul clearly says He is still the "*man, Christ Jesus*" - **1 Timothy 2:5** - "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, *the man* Christ Jesus...." He still bears the scars of His death for my sin and yours.

Do you see it? This is *still* the kind of Lord we worship. He is still the "*humble King*." He is still sympathetic to sinners who wrong Him daily and mar His holiness and blaspheme His beautiful Name. This is still what the *mind of Christ* looks like *in*

Christ. We wouldn't have a chance if your Lord didn't still have the same condescending mind toward the likes of us.

If this is Christ Jesus **today** - if He is still **condescending** to wrath-deserving sinners - how ugly it must look for someone like me - who is a sinner just like those toward whom I exercise my anger and vengeance - how ugly my attitude must look when compared to the grace I daily receive from my exalted-yet-condescending Redeemer.

Here's Paul's point in this glorious text: The mind of Christ is the only place Christians have to **show** they are Christians. When people don't see this mind of Christ in me there is simply nothing more ridiculously contradictory or revoltingly ugly. But it's a great starting place for a humble, broken-hearted, tear-filled repentance.