

AN ATTITUDE ADJUSTMENT

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11

*THE ONLY WAY TO BRING UNITY TO THE CHURCH, GLORY TO GOD,
AND CREDIBILITY TO THE GOSPEL MESSAGE,
IS FOR US TO IMITATE CHRIST IN LOVE, SERVICE, AND HUMILITY*

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IV. EPILOGUE

AN ATTITUDE ADJUSTMENT

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11

This morning's text is perhaps one of the most complicated New Testament passages. I guess I knew this, but it really didn't hit home until I started preparing it to preach. There is so much written about it, it becomes overwhelming. Scholars have debated this passage from all sorts of angles. They have argued about the meaning of the words, the structure of the passage, and whether it is prose or poetry. It has been argued from several philosophical and theological perspectives. I am certainly not capable of solving these problems with my little mind.

This passage could be preached from several perspectives. I am going to try and simply preach this from a pragmatic view by keeping it in the immediate context. For example, most modern scholars see this passage as an ancient Christian hymn composed or borrowed by Paul. If it is a hymn, I am going to use it like our worship leader Ken does in our closing song of response. I preach on a particular topic, and Ken picks out a song that punctuates the sermon theme.

Last week we saw that we bring glory to God and credibility to the gospel message by maintaining unity in the church. We are to live as good citizens of God's Kingdom. We do that by being humble, loving one another, and serving one another. In next week's passage, Paul is going to remind them this is not simply a suggestion to be considered, it is a command to be obeyed. So today's passage is a hymn of response. Jesus is the King of God's Kingdom. If we are Christ's ambassadors, then we must bring credibility to the message by living as Jesus did.

Humility is the key to successfully living the Christian life. But we are not good at being humble and receiving those whom we consider to be different than us.

Let me give you an example. You remember that church I used to pastor, the one that was so tough? It was so tough that they really were not very tolerant or humble. One Sunday morning we had an evangelistic Sunday. In this church, everybody had postgraduate degrees and they dressed in very expensive suits.

A young man with blue jeans, kind of unshaven, and long hair came to church that morning. As he took a seat in the pew, people around him started to move away. No one greeted him or got to know him. In fact, they made it evident that they didn't want

his kind in the church.

On his way out after the service, the head Deacon approached him and said, "Son, do me a favor. Before you come back next week, have a talk with God and ask Him what kind of clothes would be appropriate for worship here."

The young man assured the deacon he would. The next week he came dressed exactly like the week before. The deacon pulled him aside and angrily said, "I thought I asked you to speak to God before you came back to our church."

The young man said, "I did." The deacon said, "If you spoke to God, what did he tell you the proper attire should be for worshipping here?"

The young man replied, "Well sir, God told me that He didn't have a clue what I should wear. He says He's never been in this church."

The deacon needed an attitude adjustment. If we were to take an honest look at ourselves, we would confess that we need an attitude adjustment as well.

We are reminded by this morning's passage that God's heart is with the poor and humble. He tends to stay away from the rich and proud. From last week's text, Paul informed the Philippians that the greatest threat to the unity of the church was individual sinfulness. In other words, each one of us, because of our self-ambition, our pride, and our self-absorption, threatens to bring disunity and disruption to the church. Further, he told us that if we are to maintain the unity that God commands, we need to die to ourselves. We need to sacrificially love and serve one another. That mindset only comes as we humble ourselves.

That does not sound pleasant. In fact it sounds horrible, especially to those of us who have been raised in the west. We have been taught from birth that we are individuals and it is up to us to pursue life, liberty, and happiness. This humility stuff doesn't sound so appealing. When we hear sacrificial love and service, we want to ask, "What do I get out of all of this?" Since these concepts of humility, sacrificial love and service go against everything inside of us, Paul wants to reinforce his point by directing our attention to the character and example of God Himself. The main idea of this morning's text is this. **THE ONLY WAY TO BRING UNITY TO THE CHURCH, GLORY TO GOD, AND CREDIBILITY TO THE GOSPEL MESSAGE, IS FOR US TO IMITATE CHRIST IN LOVE, SERVICE, AND HUMILITY.**

I. FULLY GOD (VS 5-6)

Jesus Never Held On To A Sense Of Entitlement.

As I said before, scholars have approached these verses from all sorts of angles. There are a lot of theological, philosophical, and literary issues that can be raised from this section. I am going to try and deal with it simply in context, without doing anything fancy. In describing what humility, that results in sacrificial love and service is, we start from a position of strength. Verses 5-6 remind us that Jesus is fully God. In other words, as we look at the life of Jesus, we can see **JESUS NEVER HELD ON TO A SENSE OF ENTITLEMENT.**

A. THE COMMUNITY MINDSET (5)

In verse 5 Paul calls the Philippians to a community mindset. In English, we may miss this because your attitude refers to the whole community. Keep in mind that last week we described the church as an athletic team who had one goal and fought on together as a team with one mind and one soul. Since this community exists to bring glory to God and credibility to the gospel message of Jesus, the mindset that is to characterize us should reflect the mindset of Jesus. What follows in the passage is a picture of what kind of mindset within the community leads to humility. In other words, our attitude should be modeled after Jesus, as individuals and as a church.

B. THE NATURE OF JESUS (6a)

The first half of verse 6 describes the nature of Jesus. I think this is worth pointing out. Genuine humility starts out from a position of strength. We often confuse weakness or powerlessness with humility. The first half of verse 6 starts out by describing Jesus as God. There is a great deal of debate about the words in this first phrase. I'm going to try and avoid all the Greek philosophy and theology wrapped up in all of this. The first phrase reads, "*Who, being in very nature God.*" The word *being* there is not the usual word. The word is *huparkown*. I couldn't find any breakdown of the word, but it looks to me to be a compound word. *Arkein* has to do with the beginning. We get the English word *archaic* from this root. *Hyper* can mean above and beyond, like hyperactive and words like that. So I think this word means something like, *even before the beginning, Jesus was in very nature God.*

This sounds a lot like the first chapter of the Gospel of John and John sounds a lot like Genesis chapter 1. Now the word form can also be problematic. Jesus was in the form

of God. The word for nature is form, which in Greek is *morphe*. Keep this in mind. Paul is trying to do his best to describe a heavenly, spiritual reality using earthbound physical words. Paul is saying whatever this God material is, Jesus is made up of it. Jesus is fully God. If we put this passage together with other Scriptures, we could say that there is only one God-stuff in the universe and it consists of, and permeates, The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I want to remind us that the word *Trinity* does not appear in the Bible. It is simply a word we use to describe God. Jesus exists as God before the beginning, in other words, for all eternity. Jesus was the creative word of God. All that exists was created by Jesus. As God, Jesus ruled the universe together with the Father and the Holy Spirit. The point I'm trying to make is simply that Jesus was God from the beginning.

C. THE MINDSET OF JESUS (6b)

We would expect God to be this unapproachable power that everyone feared. We would expect God to demand everything in all creation to serve Him. But Paul gives us some insight to a very different attitude. The second half of verse 6 gives us a glimpse into the mindset of Jesus. For the most part, we don't understand God because we often project our thoughts onto Him. Human leaders who are powerful often use their power to lord it over people. The more powerful the ruler, the more people serve him. The ruler feels he is entitled to this kind of service.

In the United States, we have evolved into a people who think we are entitled to all sorts of things. From the very beginning in the *Declaration of Independence* we write, that God has created all of us with inalienable rights. We list these rights as "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." We are entitled to be happy. I think this thought was perverted enough when it was connected to hard work and achievement. In other words, people thought if they worked hard, completed higher education, and pursued a career, they were entitled to make plenty of money and enjoy a comfortable life. But what's even more perverted today in America is the thought that even if I don't work hard or complete school, I'm still entitled to buy all sorts of stuff. For example, young people may waste time and never complete school. They may drop out of high school, get pregnant and have to try and support a family. Somehow, they think they are entitled to all the luxuries and benefits of people who actually went to school, worked hard, and played by the rules. I used school because that was an easy one. But people do all sorts of things to screw up their lives and they think they are entitled to live without the consequences.

In general, we are a nation of people who think we are entitled to happiness, an

abundant life, and freedom to do what we want without suffering consequences.

But look at Jesus' mindset in the last phrase of verse 6. Jesus did not consider equality with God something to be grasped. The word *grasped* is hard to translate. It can mean anything from *stolen*, to *grabbed*, to *held on to*. Here is what I think the phrase means. Jesus was God from the beginning. Even though He could legitimately force everyone and everything to serve Him like slaves and robots, Jesus did not use this power to his own advantage. He didn't consider the fact that He was God a tool to enslave everyone to serve Him. Jesus did not use power for selfish reasons.

If we are Christians, then we are operating from a position of strength. We are forgiven of our sins. The Holy Spirit lives in us. We have spiritual gifts, talents, and resources. But if we are to have the mindset of Jesus, we will never use this power for self-serving reasons. We need to take the attitude that we are not entitled to anything. We are not to use any sort of power to promote ourselves. Think about how much time, energy, and emotion we spend trying to get ahead, to buy things we cannot afford, to promoting ourselves so others will look up to us. How much do we do to impress others? I think if we were all brutally honest, we would have to admit that we really are proud and we want to impress others and have them think highly of us. If we were brutally honest we would have to admit that by the way we spend our time, our thoughts, our energies, and our resources, we are really worshipping ourselves, and not God. And somewhere deep inside of our hearts, we think that what we have, we have earned and we deserve it.

Jesus was fully God, yet He did not use it to His own advantage. Why should we lose this sense of entitlement? It is because **JESUS NEVER HELD ON TO A SENSE OF ENTITLEMENT**, even though in reality He really was entitled. He chose to let it go.

II. FULLY HUMAN (VS 7-8)

Jesus Submitted To The Will Of The Father In Order To Demonstrate God's Love For Us.

Jesus indeed was fully God from the beginning of time. In verses 7-8, we are informed that Jesus was fully human as well. In other words, **JESUS SUBMITTED TO THE WILL OF THE FATHER IN ORDER TO DEMONSTRATE GOD'S LOVE FOR US**. As hard as I try, I cannot really grasp the fact that the awesome God of the universe comes to us as a little baby. That concept blows my mind. Every Christmas

we see the Christmas play and the climax is Jesus being born as a baby. We think it is cute and it is beautiful. But do we understand what we are saying? That baby is the great Jehovah of the Old Testament. That baby created the universe. I believe it, but my mind cannot hold it. How is it that God became fully human?

A. POURED OUT (7)

Verse 7 says that Jesus poured Himself out. He made Himself nothing. He emptied Himself. From the very beginning of the New Testament times, scholars and theologians have argued as to what Jesus emptied Himself of. Did He empty Himself of His Godly attributes? We will not have time to discuss all of this. I want to approach it from a more simplistic, pragmatic view. The act described here is one of pouring out. This is a common description of how God approaches humans. He pours out His love. He pours out His Spirit. Some day He will pour out His wrath. Jesus poured Himself out into the role of incarnation. He became a human being. Now here is what I want us to get because this is the crux of the passage. Even though Jesus was authentically entitled to glory and honor and worship, He set aside all His legitimate rights. If we want to have any chance at understanding life, enjoying life, and being authentic Christians we have to start from the premise that we are not entitled to anything. We must accept that everything we have comes as a gift from God. If we think we are entitled, then we can never receive gifts and graces from God.

Here is where our culture and upbringing conflict with Biblical Christianity. We think if we work hard, go to school and act wisely, then we are entitled to make money, pile up money, to amass wealth, property, influence, notoriety, and comfort. The Capitalist system works only on the basis of personal ambition and greed. We work harder to buy more. We work and live to acquire more and more. We think somehow it is ours.

However, start from the premise that we are not entitled to a thing. Everything we have comes as a direct result of God's grace and gifts. Everything really belongs to God. God sets aside all His entitlement to serve. In other words, in Jesus, God divested Himself of all privilege. Instead of working to acquire more wealth, power, and comfort, we are to realize that we are called continually to divest ourselves of privileges and all forms of wealth in order to serve others.

The word *servant* in verse 7 is too soft. Jesus took on the very nature of a slave. Jesus didn't just step down to human flesh. After all, He could have come as a king or a wealthy landowner, or a very prestigious business leader. He could have had a nice house with many household servants. No, Jesus didn't just step down into humanity; He stepped down all the way and took on the nature and character of a slave. Jesus said

that He came to serve, not to be served.

Is that our approach to life? Do we really look to serve others? And do we do it as a slave? You see, I think that often we serve because we want to control. But a slave has no rights. The attitude we must have is that we must give up our ideas, our agendas, and our selfishness. In order to bring unity to the body of Christ, we must empty ourselves and pour ourselves out. There can be no facades. There can be no pretense. There can be no self-interest.

B. POURED INTO (8)

In verse 8 we see that not only did Jesus pour Himself out, He poured Himself fully into the role of slave. I think one of the things that characterized Jesus' life was that He demonstrated His love for God the Father by obeying Him.

There are times when I meditate on the thoughts of today's passage and I am just overwhelmed. My mind cannot really hold the fact that the God Who created and sustains the entire universe appeared in human flesh and lived life like we do. How could all that power be focused in one human being? And further, I think, "How can I possibly demonstrate my love for God?" Jesus' life gives me the answer. Jesus demonstrated His love for The Father by submitting to the plan, and obeying Him. I can demonstrate my love for God by submitting to His plan and obeying Him. Jesus submitted, obeyed, and followed that plan to humiliation and death. And look how Paul describes it in verse 8, "*even death on a cross.*" Keep in mind, Paul is in the capital city of Rome and the Philippians live in an imperial city. Roman citizens didn't even like to talk about the cross. It was such cruel and unusual punishment that for the most part, Roman citizens couldn't be crucified unless they did something as horrific as trying to assassinate the emperor. Crucifixion was reserved for war criminals, rebels, and slaves. It was the most humiliating, degrading, and painful way to die. It's no wonder that perhaps the gospel was a hard sell in the city of Philippi .

In order to maintain love and unity in the church, Paul is asking the Philippians and us to die to our selfish egos. Look at the mindset Jesus had. He gave up all His entitlements to come and save us from our sin. He humbled Himself by taking the form of a slave. He submitted to God the Father, and suffered the most humiliating death possible to redeem us. Think about the mindset; humility, love, submission, obedience, divestment. Does that describe the way we live? Is that our mindset? When I take time to get honest with myself, I can see that even though I would like to be like this and would like to imagine that I am like this, I am really a long way from achieving this. When I compare myself to Jesus, I feel as if I am so far away from this mindset, that I could

easily work myself into a depression. I don't know where you are in the process of divesting yourself of entitlements, advantages, money, wealth, power, prestige and pride, but I can tell you that personally I have a long hard road ahead of me.

If we were to think about most conflicts in churches, they could easily be traced to the lack of humility, love, unity, and a real lack of divestment. We all think we know best. We all think our way of doing things is the right way. I'm wondering how willing we are to be slaves in order to preserve the unity in church. This passage goes against everything we have been raised to think. We have woven together our views on democracy, capitalism, social Darwinism and religion to the point that we can't even understand the language of this portion of Scripture. It makes no sense to us. We are confused. We could stand to read this passage over and over and over again. The movement of authentic Christianity is always God moving down to us. We are to be climbing down the social ladders. Christians are to be working our way to the bottom. When we think about whom we want to serve, we should always look who is behind us, not above us. **JESUS SUBMITTED TO THE WILL OF THE FATHER IN ORDER TO DEMONSTRATE GOD'S LOVE FOR US.**

III. FULLY BLENDED (VS 9-11)

The Ways Of God Are Far Different From Human Wisdom.

Jesus was fully God. Jesus was fully human. In verses 9-11 we can see where the two natures are fully blended. While on this earth, Jesus was fully human. He ate, drank, and fully functioned as human. He also never gave up His God attributes. He remained fully God. When Jesus rose from the dead, He rose bodily. To be sure the body was different in many ways, nevertheless, it was bodily. Today in heaven, Jesus has a recognizable form. He is God Who still resembles a human form. He is omnipresent, yet He has form. I don't understand it, but it seems to be true. I think we have to just say that **THE WAYS OF GOD ARE FAR DIFFERENT FROM HUMAN WISDOM.** Again, there is a lot of theological debate about this passage, but I want to try and stay pragmatic. Ultimately, we learn from this section that in God's kingdom, the way down is the way up. In other words, in the world, we judge the success of people with how high they climb. In God's world, success is measured by how many we step down to serve. So as we watch the exaltation of Jesus in this section, let's keep in mind that someday we will all appear before God to be judged and rewarded. And let's also keep in mind that God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.

A. BLENDED NAMES (9-10a)

We will not present our titles and achievements to God. He will give us our names, ranks, and titles. In verse 9 and the first half of verse 10, Jesus is called by blended names. Verse 9 starts out with the word *therefore*. Because Jesus gave up His entitlements, because He divested Himself of everything in order to redeem us, He is now restored to His original position of God. If you just peek down at verse 11 you will see that the Name Jesus is called by is Lord. Jesus was the earthly name of Jesus. Lord is the equivalent of Jehovah. Jesus is Yahweh. Jesus is God of the universe. The people who knew and rejected Jesus now know Who He is. The people who spit on Him, cursed Him, beat Him, tortured Him, mocked Him, and crucified Him, now know Who He really is. I am really frightened for people who reject Jesus today and think we don't need to really obey Him. Even many of us think we can obey which commands we want and reject those we don't feel like obeying.

B. BLENDED WORSHIP (10b-11a)

The second half of verse 10 and the first half of verse 11 describe blended worship. This will happen willingly with joy or by force. But there will come a time when every living being whether human or spiritual will bow down and acknowledge that Jesus Christ is God. Here is the practical message. Jesus is God. His values and commands are spelled out in the Bible. We acknowledge Him as Lord when we submit to His teachings and examples. There will come a time when we stand before Him in eternity. Will our lives and the life of Devon Church give witness to the fact that we confess Him as Lord?

C. BLENDED GLORY (11b)

I hope so because the last phrase in verse 11 describes blended glory. Jesus made it clear that as He lived His human life, His sole intent was to bring glory to God the Father. Paul has made it clear. He started out the letter by introducing himself and Timothy as slaves of Jesus Christ. They were intent on bringing glory to God and credibility to the gospel message. We exist as individuals and as a church community to bring glory to God and credibility to the gospel message. We are citizens of heaven and Jesus is our King. The values of God are in direct conflict with the values of this world. We are in a constant battle to correct our thinking. The world tells us to get ahead ourselves. God tells us to help others get ahead. Unity is built on humility, love, and service. It sounds strange to us and it looks even stranger when we try to live it out. But remember, **THE WAYS OF GOD ARE FAR DIFFERENT FROM HUMAN**

IV. EPILOGUE

As we have studied through this passage, I want you to know that I have not even begun to scratch the surface of it. I'm sure that I did not do justice to it philosophically, theologically, or literarily. I have approached it in a pragmatic way. Paul has given us a reason and motivation to hang together as a team and fight on in this world. In doing so, we bring glory to God and credibility to the gospel message. Unity in love, unity in mission, and unity in spirit demonstrates Whose kingdom we belong to. But, **THE ONLY WAY TO BRING UNITY TO THE CHURCH, GLORY TO GOD, AND CREDIBILITY TO THE GOSPEL MESSAGE, IS FOR US TO IMITATE CHRIST IN LOVE, SERVICE, AND HUMILITY.**

Look. All of us are very imperfect examples of humility, sacrifice, love, and service. We are all too self-interested. We are all in the process of making these characteristics part of our lives. The only perfect example of what humility, sacrificial love and sacrificial service looks like is Jesus. In his book *The Pursuit of God*, A. W. Tozer gives this illustration of how we can achieve unity by imitating Christ.

He says,

"If you have one hundred concert pianos, and you tune the second piano to the first, and the third piano to the second, and the fourth piano to the third, until you have tuned all one hundred pianos accordingly, you will still have discord and disharmony. But if you tuned each piano to the same tuning fork, you would have unity and harmony. So too, it is in the body of Christ. When we each tune ourselves and our lives to Christ's, we will have unity."

Let us keep our eyes on Jesus. He is God in the flesh. He gave birth to the church. Through His human life, He taught us how to live in a way that brings glory to God and credibility to His gospel message. The attitude adjustment we need is simply to start imitating Christ.