

The Mind Of Christ – Part 1

Philippians 2:5-11

Pastor John Miller

Philippians 2:5-11 says, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation...”—or literally, “emptied Himself”—“...taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him...”—that is, “Christ”—“...and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

I never come to this passage without feeling like Moses at the burning bush, where God spoke to him and said, “Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.” Philippians 2:5-11 is one of the most holy, sanctified, deep, theological passages on the person of Christ in all of Scripture. I almost feel we should take our shoes off, because in these verses, we are treading on holy ground.

J. Vernon McGee said, “It is one of the greatest theological statements in the Scriptures.” Some consider it the greatest doctrinal statement in the New Testament relative to the person of Christ. Lehman Strauss said, “These seven verses of Scripture form one of the most sublime and majestic paragraphs on the person of Jesus Christ to be found anywhere in Scripture.” Howard Vas said, “One of the most significant, doctrinal passages in all of Scripture, one that would show the essential nature of the mind of Christ.” And James Montgomery Boice said, “This passage is among the most glorious sections in the New Testament. In these few verses, we see the great sweep of Christ’s life from eternity past to eternity future.” I like that.

So take your shoes off; we’re on holy ground. Buckle your “theological seatbelt,” and give me your undivided attention as we unpack these verses for the next two Sundays.

Why this passage in this book of the Bible? Whenever you study a verse of Scripture, you must always look at the context. You must look at the context in terms of whether it is Old Testament or New Testament. You must look at the context of the genre, literature or material that you are reading. Is it a Gospel, the book of Acts or is it history? Is it didactic doctrinal material? Is it an epistle? Is it prophetic or poetic?

So we find ourselves in this doctrinal epistle, written by Paul, as one of his prison epistles, to the Philippians. Paul was writing to a church that he was near and dear to. He was writing to them to exhort them to unity, to lowliness and to humility.

Before you get to verse 5 in this famous gnosis passage or emptying of Christ, you have to back up to chapter 2, verse 1 and understand that the only problem that can be detected that

goes on in the church at Philippi that Paul wanted to correct was disunity or disharmony. It was because they were walking in selfishness and pride and weren't getting along.

So verses 1-4 of this chapter set the context where Paul says, "Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy..." Where he says "if," in my King James translation, Paul is really affirming "since there is." Some modern translations render it that way. "Since there is compassion in Christ, there is comfort in Christ, there is the fellowship of the Spirit in Christ, there are tender mercies and compassion in Christ..."—and Paul continues—"...fulfill my joy by being like-minded..."—and here's the theme—"...having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind."

They weren't doing that; they weren't loving each other, and they weren't humbly serving each other. So Paul said that he wanted them to have "the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit..."—and here's our theme—"...but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others." He says "others...others."

Philippians is about the joy we have in Jesus when we put Jesus first, others second and you are last on the list. In our culture today, you come first. It's all about you and whatever meets your needs. But in the Bible, Jesus is first, others are second and we are to be last.

Paul gives us this exhortation in verses 1-4, but the appeal "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" does not appear until verse 5. Paul was pleading for humility and unity, and he gives this transitions in verse 5 by giving us the pattern to follow. So first there is the plea for humility and unity, verses 1-4, and then there is the pattern of humility, in verses 5-11.

Paul's purpose in this passage is not to teach doctrine but to use doctrine to illustrate his exhortation to oneness, lowliness and helpfulness. It is Paul's picture of the Lord Jesus Christ as a pattern or example that is a powerful incentive to unity and humility.

I wanted you to understand that as it appears in Philippians, this is a deep, theological, doctrinal section. And it is for the purpose of teaching a very practical lesson that we, like Christ, should humble ourselves and consider others more important than ourselves, and we should serve others. That's a very important lesson.

I want to outline where we are going to go in parts 1 and 2. In verse 5 today, we will see the illustration of Christ's humiliation. In verses 6-8, we will see the humiliation of Christ in His submission to the Cross. Then in verses 9-11, we will see His exaltation as Christ is exalted at the right hand of the Father. He has "given Him the name which is above every name."

Today we want to start by looking at the first two divisions, verses 5-8. We'll see the illustration and the humiliation of Christ. Verse 5 says, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." Here we see the pleas to have the mind of Christ. He is going to be our illustration.

There are two things Paul does in verse 5. He first issues a command: "Let this mind be in

you.” It is essential that you understand what that means. What it means is that the same attitude and outlook that Jesus had of serving others should be found in us. Having the mind of Christ is having a humble mind that puts others first and serves others. So in the Greek this is a command, an imperative. It’s not a suggestion. “Let this mind be in you.” Then Paul gives us the example, which was also “in Christ Jesus.” So the very same actions, attitude and outlook that Jesus had—putting others first and giving Himself to die for our sins—we are to have as believers. Christ is our example.

What does Paul mean by the mind of Christ? It is a humble attitude of unselfish devotion and sacrificial service to others. Someone said of it, “A disposition of the eternal Son of God was that of sacrificing Himself in obedience to the Father’s will to redeem man.” So it’s humiliation. And it was painful but it accomplished the redeeming work of God. Basically it is saying that as Jesus left heaven and came down to earth, He gave Himself as a servant and suffered and died for others, so we should give ourselves to others.

In 1 John 2:6, John says, “He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.” So if you say, “I’m a Christian, a follower of Christ,” how should you walk? In humility. A proud Christian is contrary to Scripture. A humble Christian is what a Christian is supposed to be; like Jesus Christ. Jesus said, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.”

“Oh, I wish I hadn’t come to church today! I want to indulge myself. I want my way! I want my will! I want my wife to cooperate with what I want.”

Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Him. The same is true of a wife in relationship to her husband. It’s the way of helping Him be exalted.

Now we move from verse 5, from Jesus as our supreme example, to verses 6-8, to the humiliation of Christ. There are three things we will see: His sovereignty, verse 6, His servanthood, verse 7, and His sacrifice, verse 8. These are three of the greatest verses in the Bible on the person of Christ. He is the sovereign, He is the servant and He is the sacrifice for man’s sins.

Verses 6-8 say, “...who being...”—referring to “Christ Jesus”—“...in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God...”—He didn’t think it was something to hold on to—“...but made Himself of no reputation...”—it means He literally emptied Himself—“...taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”

We’ll see that there are going to be seven steps down from heaven to earth to the Cross, then the exaltation starts as we move into verse 9, where God “has highly exalted Him.” So first the humiliation and then the exaltation of Christ.

First we see, in verse 6, that Jesus is the sovereign. We see His deity. It says, “who being in

the form of God.” The word “form” is one of the important words to understand in this passage. It is the Greek word “morphé.” It denotes the inner nature and essence of His being, not the external appearance.

When we use the word “form,” we think of shape or outward appearance, like maybe a tennis player having perfect form. But this is talking about inner essence, His being. So it’s not His shape or outward form but His inner essence.

So where it says, “being in the form of God,” it is actually saying that Jesus is God. There are a lot of people who say that the Bible doesn’t teach that Jesus is God. Here it is clearly teaching the deity of Christ. The NIV translation renders this, “...who, being in very nature God.” That is a great translation of that phrase. This is a clear teaching of His deity.

And notice it says, “being in the form of God.” “Being” indicates that Jesus did not begin to be “in the form of God,” because, as God, He was from eternity “in the form of God.” In other words, Jesus has always been; He is eternal. Jesus, as the Second Person of the Triune Godhead, is eternal. And when I say “Triune Godhead,” the Bible teaches that there is one God manifested in three Persons: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

You say, “I don’t understand this,” but I say, “If God were small enough for my brain, He wouldn’t be big enough to meet my needs.” God is transcendent and God is infinite. The praise song goes, “God in three Persons, blessed Trinity.” So we speak of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. They are not three gods; they are one in essence but three, separate persons. And we cannot understand that, because God is transcendent and infinite, and we can’t comprehend Him. We can only understand about God as He reveals Himself to us. And that’s what the Bible has revealed.

So Jesus is the Second Person of the Godhead, equally God with the Father and equally God with the Spirit, all possessing the same divine nature, “being in the form of God.”

First, Jesus is eternal. John 1:1 says, “In the beginning was the Word...”—so He is eternal—“...and the Word was with God...”—literally “face to face”—“...and the Word was God.”

Second, Jesus preexisted. Naturally if He is eternal, He preexisted His birth in Bethlehem. Jesus said, “Before Abraham was, I AM.” Colossians 1:17 says, “He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.” In John 17:5, Jesus said, “And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.”

Third, Jesus possesses all the divine attributes. That’s logical. If He’s God, He has to have all the divine attributes.

Fourth, Jesus claimed to be God in John 10:30. He said, “I and My Father are one.” When the Jews, who were there when He made that statement, heard it, they picked up rocks to stone Him to death. Jesus then said, “Many good works I have shown you from My Father. For which of those works do you stone Me?” The Jews answered Him by saying, “For a good work we do

not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God.” So they understood that Jesus’ claim, “I and My Father are one,” was a claim of deity.

And the word “one” there is neuter, so it indicates that Jesus and the Father are not one person, but they are one in essence or one in their divine nature. In Hebrews 1:8, the Bible actually says that Jesus is God. Better than that, it is God the Father who says that God the Son is divine in this verse. God the Father speaking says, “But to the Son He...”—that is, “God the Father”—“...says: ‘Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom.’”

If you’ve ever had a Jehovah’s Witness knock on your door, you’ll find out they don’t believe in the deity of Christ. Here in Hebrews 1:8, God the Father calls God the Son “God.” This is good. Many cultists who have denied the deity of Christ have come to faith in Jesus as God because of this one verse.

Notice verse 6. “...did not consider it robbery to be equal with God.” He didn’t regard equality with God a thing to be grasped. What that means is that for Jesus to claim deity was not robbery; He wasn’t taking something that wasn’t His. He didn’t have to hold on to that claim, because it already belonged to Him; He is divine. God, who cannot change—Jesus, being God—is the preincarnate, eternal Son of God.

In verse 7, we now move from His sovereignty of verse 6 to His servanthood. “...but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.” In verse 6, we saw “the form of God,” and now we see “the form of a bondservant.” So the sovereign, in verse 6, now becomes the servant, in verse 7.

Now we have the first step down from heaven, in verse 7: “made Himself of no reputation.” This phrase literally means “emptied Himself.” It comes from the Greek word “gnosis.” That’s why theologians call this “the gnosis passage.” When Jesus left heaven and came to earth, He emptied Himself.

So the question is, “What did He empty Himself of?” He did not empty Himself of His deity, of His divine attributes. Malachi 3:6 says, “For I am the Lord, I do not change.” He is immutable. Jesus still had all of His divine attributes, although He temporarily laid them aside and only used them as a man, submitted to the Father’s purpose, will and plan. He temporarily—that’s an important word—divested Himself of His divine glory and display of majesty.

When Jesus was on the Mount of Transfiguration and He was transfigured, I like to think of that as Jesus pulling back the veil of His humanity, allowing the essence of His deity to shine forth. They saw His majesty and His glory. It was a little glimpse of who He is in His divine nature.

So when we say that Jesus “emptied Himself,” He did not give up His deity. That would be impossible. But what Jesus did was He clothed His deity in humanity for all eternity. How marvelous that is. Through the Incarnation, God became a man.

Secondly, He emptied Himself of the independent use of His divine authority. When Jesus turned water into wine, when He healed the blind beggar, when He raised someone from the dead, He was being lead, guided and directed by the Father and the Holy Spirit to do that. He was doing it in the will of God the Father. He didn't do it on His own; He did what the Father commanded Him to do as He was in this body of humiliation.

Thirdly, He emptied Himself of His eternal riches. 2 Corinthians 8:9 says, "He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor." Think how marvelous it was when He was in heaven for all eternity with all the glory and majesty, and then He temporarily set that aside, came down to earth, took on humanity, so that He could die on the Cross for our sins.

Fourthly, He emptied Himself temporarily of His face-to-face relationship with God the Father. That is a mind-blowing thought. The eternal Son of God—John 1:1 says, "The Word was with God"—was face-to-face with God the Father. He said goodbye to His Father in heaven, came down to earth and was conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary. He lived for 33 years as a man upon the earth. He suffered and died.

Which one of us would give up eternal bliss in heaven with God the Father? He had a face-to-face fellowship in the Trinity to come down and suffer. When He hung on the Cross He cried out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" This is where He will end up; God the Son separated from God the Father. He had known fellowship with His Father for all eternity. He's a picture, an example of self-sacrificing service to others. How marvelous that is. He died for us on the Cross.

Now notice step two, in verse 7: "taking the form of a bondservant." I pointed out that verse 6 said "the form of God," and in verse 7, "the form of a bondservant." The word "form," which means "essence," is the Greek word "morphé" in both verses. This is a description, a way to describe Jesus' full, real humanity. He was in His very essence, man.

So His deity did not lessen His humanity. His humanity did not lessen His deity. He was fully God and fully man in one person, Jesus Christ. The divine Son was with the Father, supreme over all. Now He becomes the servant of all, fully submissive to His Father's will.

Notice step three, in verse 7. He was made "in the likeness of men." It's a way of saying that He was truly a man. He didn't just look like a man, He didn't just appear to be human; He was actually, literally human. He was without sin, sinless humanity, but genuine humanity. That's why Jesus got tired. That's why He wept. That's why He "sighed deeply in His spirit." That's why Jesus said, "I thirst." That's why Jesus had to eat food, or He would physically die. Jesus slept, He was weary and when He was rejected, He went through the same emotions as we all do, so that He could become "a great High Priest." So Jesus was actually man, "made in the likeness of men." He had full and real humanity as a supernatural conception in the womb of the Virgin Mary.

I wanted to be able to mention this very quickly. We were in Hawaii when we got the news that

the Supreme Court had overturned Roe v. Wade. I just immediately began to thank God. But as I look at the crazy, bizarre response of the unbelieving world, it just amazes me. I've never seen such darkness, such evil, such wickedness in our world as we see going on right now.

When God the Son was conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary, I'm so glad she didn't say, "My body, my choice." I'm so glad she didn't get an abortion. I'm so glad she said, "Let it be to me according to your word."

But it even goes deeper than that. Forever with the Incarnation, from the moment Jesus was conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary, God vindicated, God validated and God sanctified life beginning at conception in the womb.

There are so many ways Jesus could have come into the world. But He chose to come into the world through conception in the womb. Some say, "Oh, it's just an embryo, just a fetus." That is so bizarre. It is a human embryo, a human fetus, a human newborn, a human toddler, a human adolescent, a human adult.

You say, "What does that have to do with anything?" It's important because from the moment of conception, that is a human being in the womb of a woman. And when Jesus Christ chose to be conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary, God validated, God vindicated and God sanctified life in the womb. Amen. But it didn't stop there. Jesus was born. Jesus grew up. Jesus suffered. And Jesus died. God validated, God vindicated and God sanctified life from the womb to death.

Abortion leads to euthanasia. Abortion leads to infanticide. So it doesn't stop there. Life is sacred. It comes from God. And the Son of God, conceived in the womb of Mary, forever sanctified human life from birth to death. Not only His death, but His death was cruel and wicked and with suffering.

I've heard people say, "Well, this child's going to suffer. It won't grow up in a happy home. It won't be loved. It won't be wanted." So let's murder it so it won't have to suffer?!!! Jesus forever sanctified suffering when He died on the Cross. God sanctified life; it comes from God. We don't have the right to take a life. "You shall not murder," Exodus 20:13.

So I think it's interesting to realize that God became a man in the womb of the Virgin Mary. John 1:14 says, "And the Word became flesh." The eternal Word, the divine Word "flesh became and dwelt among us." The true manhood of Jesus is in our text in verse 7. Jesus was really a man, but not merely a man. He is the Son of God in human form.

Now notice, thirdly, in verse 8, we see the sacrifice. In verse 6, was the sovereign; in verse 7, was the servant; and now in verse 8, the sacrifice. "And being found in appearance as a man"—that's His humanity, but He actually went further—"...He humbled Himself..."—He was a humble man, was an obedient man and He died on the cross—"...and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross."

Now we see the last four steps downward. Step four is He had the appearance of a man. Jesus didn't glow in the dark. He did not have a halo. (Sorry to mess up your picture of Jesus.) He didn't speak with reverb in His voice. He appeared no different than anyone else. His outward appearance was altogether human. Jesus was God veiled in the flesh and was treated as a man.

Step five is He humbled Himself. He wasn't humbled; He voluntarily humbled Himself. When He was in the Garden of Gethsemane, He said, "Father...not My will, but Yours, be done." I believe every Christian must come to their "Gethsemane"; they must humble themselves like Jesus and say, "Not my will, but Yours be done."

The sixth step is He became obedient to death, verse 8. It means He actually died. Jesus was born with a human body, so He could physically die on the Cross. That's the sacrifice He brought. That's the purpose for which He came into the world.

Then step seven is His death on the Cross, verse 8.

So our text started in eternity past, "being in the form of God," and we ended with the Crucifixion and death of Jesus Christ on the Cross. Then in verses 9-11 we will see His exaltation next time. And one day "every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." So Jesus died by Crucifixion, and His death was a cruel execution. He died on a Roman cross.

The extent of Christ's humiliation can be seen in that He went from the throne of divine majesty to the cross of agony. Why? Because He considered others more important than Himself and because He was willing to give of Himself to redeem us from our sin. Jesus suffered, He had sorrow, He took our shame and pain and He died on the Cross.

Why did Jesus die? To rescue us from sin, to defeat the devil and to reveal the Father's love. He didn't just die on the Cross to demonstrate God's marvelous love. That was there. But He died also to redeem sinful man. He died to conquer Satan.

We all know John 13, when Jesus was in the upper room with His disciples. They were having supper at the table. It was actually a low table with a bed around the outside. Jesus got up from supper and took off His outer robe and set it aside. He took a towel and tied it around His waist. The towel was a badge of the lowest slave. Then He got down on His knees and began to wash the disciples' feet. This is a picture of the verses we just read.

Jesus got off His throne in heaven; laid aside His majesty; laid aside His glory; He put on humanity, the badge of a slave; and He came and served by going to the Cross to die. He did that so He could wash us from our sins.

Remember when Peter objected to Jesus washing his feet? Peter said, "You shall never wash my feet!" But Jesus said, "If I do not wash you, you have no part..."—or "fellowship" or "koinonia"—"...with Me." Peter overreacted and said, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands

and my head!" Then Jesus basically said, "Cool your jets, Peter! You've already had a bath. All you need is your feet washed. If you want to be in fellowship with Me, you need to 'Confess [your] sins,' and I will be 'faithful and just to forgive [you your] sins and to cleanse [you] from all unrighteousness.'" It speaks of the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit. And as believers walk through life, our feet get dirty and they need cleansing. Then after Jesus had washed the disciples' feet, He took off the towel and put his outer robe back on and sat down with them.

So Jesus will go back to heaven and be exalted at the right hand of God the Father. Next time we'll finish the passage.

All this doctrinal teaching in these verses is to teach us this important lesson. It is to teach us humility, sacrifice and service. Consider others more important than yourself. Don't only look after your own interests, but also after the interests of others.

Think what this could do in your marriage. Think what this could do in other human relationships. Jesus first, others next and then you. Amen.