

PHILIPPIANS BIBLE STUDY

Philippians 2:5-11

Lesson #12

THE ATTITUDE OF CHRIST JESUS

5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Phil 2:5-11 (NASB)

INTRODUCTION

For the last two weeks we have been discussing the implications of the exhortation of Paul for the Philippians to “think the same way, to “have the same love”, to “share the same feelings”, and “to focus on one goal.” You will remember that we pointed out that all of this is entirely predicated on having a single uniform model that all accept as the unique and specific standard to which all look for that uniformity. It isn’t a meeting of the minds, or a general consensus of opinions, it is a conformity to a specific standard. After making this point clear, Paul then presents to them that standard, which we said is the whole of holy scriptures in general, but is personified in Jesus Christ quite specifically. In as much as He is the subject of all of the scriptures.

Paul is about to introduce Jesus Christ as the prototype model of all of those who are the children of God. We are to live your lives as Jesus lived His life. We are to bring our thinking, and most specifically our attitudes, into conformity to that of Christ Jesus. This is the meaning of the statement that “we are to think the same way.” It doesn’t mean we are to all get together and formulate a plan that we all agree on. It means that we are to adopt an external supreme and divine standard, and all seek to conform our attitudes to that same divine standard. And this is the process called sanctification, which is a transformation of our whole way of thinking into conformity with that of Christ Jesus, who is Himself that standard. We are commanded to have this attitude in ourselves that was also in Christ Jesus. This isn’t just a suggestion, just a random hyperbole, it’s the whole point of our redemption in the long range plan of God for that portion of the human species that He created to be His eternal children and worshipers. There will be none in His kingdom, not a single one, that have not been so transformed. There will be no “bad boys” tolerated in the kingdom of God, only those who resemble Jesus.

Unless one is first willing to publically humble themselves, they will never be willing to forfeit their own desires and beliefs, and thus cannot be brought into conformity with those of another. And, further exacerbating the problem, the attitudes and thinking of Jesus is diametrically opposed at every juncture, to those of the flesh and the natural human nature. Now while Christ did not need to be brought into conformity of thinking with His Father, He already was, nevertheless the Father desired that He humble himself publically as a demonstration of subjection to the will of God the Father, in return for the honor that was predetermined to be given to Him for doing so, and as a model to all who are being saved *by* Him and conformed *to* Him.

Therefore, none in the universe can ever claim that Jesus got where He is, the King of kings, and the Lord of lords, the easy way. The Father made Him earn His position through the most dire and horrific of circumstances. Therefore, all who really know Him also deeply respect Him, and that's why they can willingly and joyfully worship Him. Along with a thorough and accurate knowledge of Christ, authentic respect, and just a touch of reverent fear, are mandatory ingredients of genuine worship. And Jesus earned them both in full measure with the attitude we are about to examine:

We are instructed by scriptures to have in us this attitude that was also in Christ Jesus:

verse 6

6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,

a. He existed in the form of God

What are we supposed to make of this statement? What is scripture telling us about Christ in this seemingly simple statement. On the one hand it's kind of obscure. We tend to think of, or picture Jesus more in terms of His humanity. We can relate to Him more readily that way. And the next verse says that He took on the form of humanity, so that's how we imagine Him. But, it's imperative to understand just Who and What Jesus actually is in His very eternal existence to be able to comprehend the full implications of what it means for Him to take on human form.

Just like the air around us has a form in which it exists, that is to say, it is made up of certain specific elements, yet it doesn't have a specific tangible and visible shape by which it's recognized. In a similar manner Jesus Christ has always existed in the form of an intangible spiritual deity. His divine and eternal existence is not that of a flesh and blood human being but that of an eternal, self existent, intangible, omniscient, omnipotent Spirit being.

Much discussion has taken place regarding this mystery, but virtually every credible theologian has agreed that the scriptures describe God as an eternal, self existent being, and He exists in His triune form and nature, as described in the scriptures. He did not grow or evolve into His triune state, but He exists in that state. I make this point so that we can more fully understand the very complex nature of this man named Jesus that we read about in our bibles. (Side Note:)

I just happened to be flipping through the TV channels the other day and came across a documentary on Jesus Christ on the History channel. Now I already knew what to expect from similar previous such documentaries done by liberal scholars of our day, but nevertheless, I stayed tuned for a little while to see what they would say. It's amazing how nonchalantly they either accept or reject the accuracy of the scriptures and come up with personal opinions that completely contradict the plain text of the bible. But we all know that, so it's no surprise.

What I did notice is that the main thrust of this documentary of the crucifixion of Christ, in the eyes of these self proclaimed scholars, was that what happened to Jesus was in no way unique, and He was just one more troublemaker that was put to death by the Roman authorities. To these scholars the tragedy was the barbaric manner that was used on all of those who were so brutally crucified, and Jesus was just another victim of Roman brutality. Incidentally, they completely omitted the element of Jewish involvement, and indicated that the Romans did this entirely on their own initiative, out of fear of His leading an insurrection.

This is exactly opposite of scriptures. The Romans didn't seem to know much about Him, and even tried repeatedly to let Him go. It's amusing how subjective history seems to be in the eyes of liberal scholars and historians. Like good journalists, they've learned to never let the facts get in the way of a good story.
(End side note)

Now obviously crucifixion was a brutal and merciless manner of execution, but Jesus was Not just another face in the crowd of abused humanity. This is absolute blasphemy, and everyone who had a part in that documentary will one day kneel before this same Jesus and publically declare that He is indeed the unique cosmic King of kings, and the singular Lord of all lords. The perfect and eternal Son of God, who spoke the universe into existence, and will one day rule over it with absolute power and authority. May the Lord forgive me for my attitude, but oh how I hope I get to see the look on their faces on that day when they themselves will kneel down on their knees before His feet and with the same tongues that mocked Him proclaim Him King of kings and Lord of lords. Oh, Come quickly and be vindicated and glorified Lord Jesus, Amen.

But, getting back to our discussion of the statement that Jesus Christ originally exists in the form of God, as a divine and integral element of that entity we worship as God. That One who defines Himself with the simple statement "I Am" and then adds "and there is no other." From this perspective, a clearer image begins to emerge of who this man Jesus actually is, and just exactly where he came from. We must first see His deity clearly, or we will miss the immense implications of His human incarnation and condescension.

I looked up the word condescend in the dictionary and one of the definitions was "doing something that is considered beneath one's dignity." I had to chuckle at this definition because of the stark understatement of such a thought. Is there a term that is the antonym of hyperbole? A term that describes a statement that is so grossly understated that it reaches absurdity. If there is such a term, then that is what would describe using the word condescension is to the incarnation of Jesus Christ into human form. It is the ultimate and consummate definition of doing that which is below one's dignity. It is unmatched in the universe. For the divine creator of all matter, all energy, and all life, to then take a place within that creation as a slave to those who He created, and then humble Himself before them in the manner that Christ did simply cannot be duplicated. (Why?)

b. [He] did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped

This is that Jesus who, though He existed in the form of God (that is, the elemental consistency of His very being), nevertheless in His incarnation period as a man on the earth, He did not consider this fact to be something that He would use for any benefit to Him during His work on earth. The obvious implication here is that the benefit He denied Himself was that of the recognition of His royalty and glory. He obviously benefitted much from the fact that He knew all things about His Father's will, and about all men, and had the power to heal and to raise the dead and to cast out demons. These He certainly did grasp, and used them freely to authenticate His message.

This passage we are examining is about attitude, displayed in His humility among mankind, not about His divine power and capabilities. Jesus was willing to completely forgo the glory, the honor, the respect, and even most of the basic creature comforts that should have accompanied His time here on this earth. And it is our duty, and responsibility to earnestly ask ourselves just exactly why was He willing to do that?

You see it is the “why” that gives the meaning and purpose to the “what” that Jesus did. Unless we had the scriptures, with the full written gospel accounts of the circumstances that led up to that fateful crucifixion day, it would hold no meaning for us whatsoever. We would be just like those ignorant liberal scholars who think the only thing that happened that day was one more poor man was executed on a cross. We can draw no strength or encouragement from the incarnation, the humble life, and the willing crucifixion of Christ unless we thoroughly understand, to the fullest measure, all the immense ramifications and significance that was involved. The fullest understanding of the “Who” and the “What” must never be diminished. It is in this understanding that the whole thing has its meaning and accomplishes its purpose. So again I ask, why did Jesus endure this?

Of course this is a complex question that might be answered from a number of perspectives, but in the broadest interpretation the most accurate answer would probably be - For the sake of accomplishing the work that His Father had sent Him to do. The writer of Hebrews put it quite beautifully when he said:
2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Heb 12:2 (NASB)

The joy set before Him was that which sustained and motivated Him. He knew everything that it meant. And likewise, the more we know about the joy set before us, the more will be our encouragement to persevere, and the more earnest and genuine will or hope and expectancy be of His coming. (Discuss expectancy)

Let me say that it would take a heck of a lot of joy set before me to willingly endure what Jesus did to receive the benefits of the realization of that joy. And yet, many simple people of that time, and of this time, are in fact suffering, even unto death for the joy that is set before us, who are the children of God.

Even when we aren't completely clear of exactly how it all plays out, or what we shall be, nevertheless, for the joy of being with our beloved Lord and Savior, in the presence of our God, we press on every day toward the goal for the prize of that yet unclear upward calling of God that is realized by those who are *in* Christ Jesus.

And now, this is the attitude we are being exhorted, yea commanded, to develop within ourselves, as Jesus also had in Himself. The attitude that nothing is too harsh, too tragic, too awful, or too fearful, to dissuade us from humble, self sacrificial, willing and joyful obedience to the will of God our Father. Who providentially causes all things to work out for our eventual and eternal good, regardless of how they may appear in the present.

It is this kind of understanding that fosters and nourishes faith. We aren't asked to have faith in nothing. We are given the scriptures, with all the precious promises and prophecies assuring us of the love and care of our God and Father. Armed with this knowledge, and holding to this hope, we are able and willing to humble ourselves to the will of God, for that wondrous joy that is set before us in the prophetic scriptures.

For this reason we must not ignore all those difficult prophetic scriptures and eschatological prophecies. Because it is these very prophetic scriptures that open the windows to that joy that is eventually set before us. In His letter to the church in Smyrna the Lord tells them to be faithful unto death, and He will give them the crown of life. In other words, submissively, gently, and forgivingly, give up your lives and be killed by those who hate God, solely for the sake of My name, (just like I did) and I will see to it that you are justly rewarded with eternal life, and very much more, in My coming kingdom, said Jesus to that church.

Now just so that no one misunderstands my comments about gentle and peaceful submission, let me present two various aspects of Christian living, according to scriptures.

(1) We are told to peacefully submit to human authorities and governments, and to give honor to whom it is due.

13 Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, 14 or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. 15 For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. 16 Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bond slaves of God. 17 Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king 1 Peter 2:13-17 (NASB)

(2) **But, at the same time** we are also told to stay at constant war with the invisible spiritual forces of evil and darkness, that seek to influence our internal attitudes, and our external behaviors and speech. With these invisible spiritual forces of evil we are to strike no peace at all, nor give any quarter whatsoever.

12 For our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world powers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens. Eph 6:12 (HCSB)

and then again:

*3 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, 4 for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. 5 We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, 6 **and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete.***

2 Cor 10:3-6 (NASB)

For so many professing Christians there is no battle at all. They love to sing the song “Jesus Paid It All” and bask in the glory of His victory. Yes, Jesus did pay in full the ransom for our captivity to sin. And He freed us from bondage to it. But it is a very great mistake to think that this is the end of the story. When in fact, it is only the beginning. By paying our ransom and redeeming us He also has placed us in a battle with sin, a race to a finish line that must be run by the redeemed themselves. The entrance into the kingdom of God was no downhill slide for Jesus, and it isn’t intended to be a simple slide or glide for His children. It is with much tribulation, both external and internal, that are we are to enter into the kingdom of God. (Acts 14:22)

If we seriously wish to try to have the attitude in us that was in Christ Jesus, then that can only be accomplished by knowing what He knew, thinking like He thought, loving like He loved, and focusing on one goal, as He focused on fulfilling the work appointed to Him by His Father. This kind of knowledge of God does not come by intuition or instinct, it grows slowly and steadily, by systematic study of scriptures, and fueled by personal commitment to keep learning, while ever striving to live up to that which has already been obtained.

For this reason, those who are His elect must not allow ourselves to be willingly ignorant of those great and precious prophetic promises that the scriptures afford us to build and sustain our faith. Since the scriptures exhort us to have the same attitude that Jesus had, it therefore provides for us much of the same knowledge of the joy that was forthcoming for seeking this attitude, and living in humble subjection to the will of God. As we steadily grow in our knowledge of God, and His Son Jesus Christ, we are being transformed into His image and developing His attitude. When that work is complete, just like Christ completed His God appointed task, we also will have done the work that God has appointed for us during our brief apprenticeship on this earth.

And then will be heard that glorious and long awaited declaration:

5 And a voice came from the throne, saying,

"Give praise to our God, all you His bond-servants, you who fear Him, the small and the great." 6 Then I heard something like the voice of a great multitude and like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns.

Marriage of the Lamb

7 "Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready." 8 It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints .

9 Then he said to me, "Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.' " And he said* to me, "These are true words of God." 10 Then I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said* to me, "Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."*

The Coming of Christ

11 And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. 12 His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself. 13 He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. 14 And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses. 15 From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. 16 And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS."

Rev 19:5-16 (NASB)

To Him Be The Glory forever and ever.

Amen