

# Philippians

## Part 9 – The Mind of Christ

### Philippians 2:1-11

Verses 6-11 of Philippians two are often called the Christ Hymn or the *Carmen Christi* because of the almost lyrical beauty of the words. But to suggest that Paul was quoting an existing Christian hymn is mere speculation. This passage, along with the opening chapter of John's gospel and Colossians 1, is one of the most important Christological texts in the Bible. And Paul's use of the truths expressed is an example of the great practicality of theology.

If unity is essential to the spiritual welfare of Christians and if unity depends upon humility, then what better way to commend a humble heart than to set before God's people the example of Jesus himself? When Paul wanted the Corinthians to be generous to the Lord's work he set before them the example of Christ: "though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich" (2 Cor 8:9). When Paul commanded love within marriage he pointed to the example of Jesus' sacrificial love for his church (Eph 5). In the same way here Paul exhorts the Philippians to be humble by pointing them to the incarnation and death of the Savior.



There have been many efforts, especially in the modern period, to separate Christian theology from Christian ethics, as if it might be possible to keep the high and noble ethics of the Bible while jettisoning its supposedly time-worn and outdated theology. "Life! Not Doctrine!" was a rallying cry for Protestant liberalism. People talk about *practical Christianity*, as if somehow we could have *that* without having to believe in the Trinity, in Christ's deity, his resurrection and Second Coming. But there is not such separation in the Bible between the practical and the theological. Life and doctrine; ethics and theology are things we should never separate. Practical Christianity draws its strength and meaning from Christian theology and has none without it (Moule, 63). When Paul wants his Christian friends to think and live as they should, he reminds them of who Jesus Christ is and what Jesus Christ did.

**Main Idea:** As Christians pursue unity they must look to the example of the Lord Jesus who humiliated himself to the point of death on a cross for the sake of his people.

**Vs. 5** – The word translated "mind" (*phroneo*) literally means "to have understanding; to think." A more literal translation might be: "Have this way of thinking toward one another which was also in Christ Jesus." Paul lays stress upon our union with Jesus Christ as the fundamental fact of our existence. [Silva, 95-97]

**Vs. 6** – The Son, being equal with the Father, being fully Divine and having in his possession all the attributes and the prerogatives of Almighty God did not hold on to those prerogatives and did not regard his equality with God as something to use to his own advantage. [Silva, 103-104; O'Brien, 215]

**Vs. 7** – "emptied himself" (*ekenowsen*) should not be understood as a giving up of divine nature. Should be understood as "humbled himself." The two clauses that follow serve to explain "he emptied himself."

**Vs. 8** – The addition of "even death on a cross" emphasizes the extent of the Lord's emptying of himself. Death by crucifixion was the most degrading and repellent form of execution known to the ancient world. It was the death of a common criminal.

**Vs. 9** – Not to be understood as the Son being given something he did not possess prior to his incarnation. Rather in his resurrection and glorification the self-humiliation of the Savior comes to an end.

**Vs. 10 - 11** – Two issues: First, this last statement does not suggest that the confession of all creatures that Jesus is Lord is offered willingly and cheerfully. As Calvin rightly points out, the submission of the

devils and of unsaved men will not be voluntary. But all *will* acknowledge the Lord's supremacy whether they like it or not. It is helpful to note that Paul cites the same text from Isa. 45 – where comes the phrase every knee shall bow and every tongue confess – in Romans 14:11 in reference to the Day of Judgment. So both the doomed and the saved will make this confession. Second, the phrase “every knee shall bow and every tongue confess...” is taken from Isa. 45:23, a statement found in the midst of one of the most powerful affirmations of the uniqueness of the one living and true God in the entire Bible. For Paul, monotheism – belief in only one God – is not compromised by the confession of Jesus Christ as God. Jesus *is* Yahweh! But that means to confess his Lordship to the glory of God the Father can only be done on the assumption of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity: the one living and true God who exists in three persons.

## 1. What humility meant for Jesus

### a) He embraced our limits.

Vs. 6

- We tend to think of “form” as being something along the lines of a façade; something that relates strictly to appearance. But this misses what is going on with the word translated “form” (*morphe*). It is to be understood as, “to be really and truly” or “to be characteristically.” *Morphe* captures two ideas: that of essence and function.

### b) He took up a lowly status.

Vv. 6-7

- We can best understand “made himself nothing,” or “emptied himself” by looking at the explanatory clause immediately following – “taking the form of a servant.” Jesus made himself nothing, not by draining himself of his divine nature but by taking on the form of a slave. So Jesus’ emptying himself was not about losing something. It was about taking on something – a lowly status.

### c) He took on our shame.

Vs. 8

- The cross was the fullest expression of Jesus self-humiliation. On the cross Jesus bore upon himself the shame and guilt of our sin.

## 2. What humility requires of us

### a) Humility only works in community.

Vs. 5 – “Have this mind among yourselves...”

### b) Humility requires that we put away our demands.

Vv. 3-4

- We are to look to the example of Jesus whose life, from the moment of his birth would be characterized by a lack of status and privilege. He became a carpenter’s son from Nazareth even though He was the eternally begotten Son of God. This is to call forth from us a similar rejection of demands.

### c) Humility is the result of humiliations.

- It pleases God to use what we suffer to bring about humility in our lives. We are simply too sinful and proud to learn humility through unbroken success and pleasant circumstances. Pride is something that God wages war against in our hearts. And we must join Him in this war against our pride. We are made humble through humbling circumstances.