

PHILIPPIANS: REPLACING SELFISH AMBITION WITH GODLY ACHIEVEMENT

Part V: Following Christ's Supreme Example Of Humble Spiritual Service

(Philippians 2:5-11)

I. Introduction

- A. As we have often noted in this series of lessons, the Philippian believers lived in a city marked by a history of selfish competitiveness, so the city's culture readily tempted the Philippian believers to slip into a mindset of selfish ambition and strife even in relating to one another in the church, cf. Philippians 4:2.
- B. To lead his readers to exchange such deep-seated selfish ambition with selfless, godly ambition, Paul upheld Christ's supreme example of humble spiritual service in Philippians 2:5-11, and we view it for our instruction:

II. Following Christ's Supreme Example Of Humble Spiritual Service, Philippians 2:5-11.

- A. After directing his readers to a godly unity marked by humbly esteeming others better than themselves and concerning themselves with the interests of others (Philippians 2:1-4), Paul urged his readers to have the same "attitude" (NIV) or "mind" (ESV, KJV) in them as also existed in Christ Jesus, Philippians 2:5.
- B. Paul then explained that "attitude" or "mind" in Philippians 2:6-8 (as follows):
 - 1. Jesus was in the very *morphe* of God, "the inner essence or reality" of God, Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 654. "His complete and absolute deity is here carefully stressed by the apostle," Ibid.; Philippians 2:6a.
 - 2. Though possessing the full essence of deity, Jesus did not consider His equality the Father "as something to be grasped," as something to be held onto. He "did not hesitate to set aside His self-willed use of deity when He became a man. As God He had all the rights of deity, and yet during His incarnate state He surrendered His right to manifest Himself visibly as the God of all splendor and glory," Ibid.; Phil. 2:6b.
 - 3. Rather, Christ made Himself seemingly nothing in the Incarnation, taking upon Himself the very nature (*morphe* again) of a human servant of God, being made in human likeness, Philippians 2:7; Ibid.
 - 4. Going even further, upon having become God in the flesh in the Incarnation, Christ then humbled Himself to become obedient to God the Father even to submitting to "the despicable form of death" of death on a cross, a "form of capital punishment . . . limited to non-Romans and the worst criminals," Phil. 2:8; Ibid. For Paul to direct his Philippians readers who had been given Roman citizenship to follow Christ's example in stooping even to submitting to a form of execution that they as Roman citizens would not be legally required to experience carries enormous force in his argument on humility! (Ibid., p. 647-648)
- C. The value of maintaining such an attitude is seen in what the Father did to reward Christ for it, Phil. 2:9-11:
 - 1. The Father rewarded Christ by highly exalting Him, giving Him a name that is above every name in His "resurrection, ascension, and glorification at the Father's right hand (Acts 2:33; Heb. 1:3). His 'name' is not merely a title; it refers to His person and to His position of dignity and honor," Ibid., p. 654; Phil. 2:9.
 - 2. As a result of this exaltation of Christ, every knee by every intelligent being, "whether angels and saints in heaven; people living on the earth; or Satan, demons, and the unsaved in hell -- in all of God's universe . . . will bow either willingly or they will be made to do so," bowing before God and Christ, Ibid., Phil. 2:10.
 - 3. In thus giving honor to Christ, every intelligent being will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, "that Jesus Christ is Yaweh-God" of the Old Testament, "very God of very God," to the glory of God the Father Who sent Him to provide salvation by His payment on the cross, Philippians 2:11; Ibid.
- D. [Some theological issues mentioned in this passage need to be addressed here as follows:
 - 1. When Christ condescended to become man, He did not cease to be fully God, but merely restricted Himself from expressing His divine glory as God in the Incarnation. Paul clearly indicated He was **always** in the *morphe* essence of God while also becoming the *morphe* of a man as **both** God **and** man!
 - 2. Some wrongly take the v. 8 phrase "being found in appearance as a man" to mean Jesus only looked like a human, but verse 7 clearly states He existed in the fully human essence (*morphe*) of a man. (Ibid.)]

Lesson: *We believers are to follow the supreme example of our Lord Jesus Christ in exhibiting humble spiritual service in the local church, that example being that though Jesus knew He was fully God, equal in deity with the Father, He restricted the expression of that deity by condescending to become the God-man so as to humble Himself even to the point of obeying God in dying the wretched criminal death on the cross. In heeding Christ's example of humble service, we can expect God's reward of exaltation as in the case of God's Son, 1 Peter 5:6.*

Application: *May we follow Christ's example of being willing to condescend to the lowest of positions in humble Christian ministry to address the needs of fellow believers. God will honor this effort in His grace.*