

INTRODUCTION

In just a few short sentences, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul writes this glorious anthem that capsulizes the person and work of Jesus Christ:

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, 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 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.

From these verses Paul reminds us of the *condescension* of Christ. As David meditated on the majesty and glory of God and His mighty work in creation, he responded with, “What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him” (Ps. 8:4). Almighty and infinite God, Creator of all things, actually gives attention and cares for fallen and sinful man. That is nothing short of GRACE! When we could not come to where He was, He came to us. That is the *incarnation*: God with us! Paul’s great anthem also reminds us of the extent of Christ’s *humiliation*. Paul described it this way to the Corinthians:

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich. (2 Cor. 8:9)

The eternal Son of God, co-equal, co-eternal, and co-existent with the Father, left the splendor of heaven, took upon Himself human flesh, entered into time and space, and into a world filled with sin, suffering, and death. Although God, He did not cling to His equality with the Father. He emptied Himself of His divine rights and prerogatives. He took the form of a bondservant. He fully and completely surrendered to the Father’s will and “became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”

So the extent of Christ’s humiliation was that of *crucifixion*. But it was for this very cause He came into the world. He became our substitute and sin-bearer there at Calvary, to provide redemption and salvation for sinful man. God spared no expense!

Because He fully satisfied the just demands of Holy God in making full payment for our sins through His death at Calvary, we have the *resurrection* of Jesus Christ! He has defeated sin, Satan, death, hell, and the grave! Finally in His *ascension, glorification, and exaltation*, He has “sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Heb. 1:3). He is exalted to the highest rank and power. He is raised to supreme majesty! He has brought His earthly name (Jesus) out of the tomb and glorified it. He is Lord!

Such truth should cause the believer to break out into praise, adoration, and exultation to our Great God and Savior Jesus Christ. Yet at the same time we should humble our hearts before Him in reverence and awe of His holiness and majesty.

Ultimately, whether by choice or by force, every creature, human and angelic, Satan and demons, will one day bow before Him and openly and publicly confess “that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

But please remember the context. The very basis of this anthem is to remind us that *humility is essential for unity*. So once again, Paul gives us the greatest example of humble submission ever known to man: Christ Himself. But Paul wants to do more than touch our emotions and touch our minds. True salvation touches the human will. It's as if Paul brings us back to "earth" and says, "Now, put what I have just written to you into practice." In fact, note that verse 12 begins with a "therefore."

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure. (Phil. 2:12, 13)

How we view Christ's Lordship will determine the degree of our obedience. Jesus said, "If you love Me, [you will] keep my commandments" (Jhn. 14:15). Jesus asked a very valid and sobering question when He asked, "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?" (Lke. 6:46). His life was a life of obedience; our lives are to be lives of obedience. His life was one of humility; our lives are to be characterized with Christlike humility. His life was a life of selfless and sacrificial service; our lives are to be lives of selfless and sacrificial service.

Because of all that Jesus has done for us, this is a natural and normal response of every believer! As Paul described the goodness and grace of God in Romans 1-11, he followed it up with these words found in Romans 12:1:

I beseech you **therefore**, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.(emphasis added)

In light of all that God has done for us through His Son, such a response is reasonable and rational. Truth is, we find this literary form throughout the New Testament Epistles (precept followed by practice): i.e., this is what Christ has provided for you; this is who you are and what you have in Christ; now, live it out in everyday, practical life. Experience it! In other words, don't just learn the Word of God, live the Word of God. Don't just agree with it; apply it! James said it this way: "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (Jas. 1:22).

When we truly get a glimpse of the sufferings and the glory of Christ and His Lordship, it will change how we view other believers. If I truly humble myself under Christ's Lordship, I will have no problem submitting to my brothers and sisters in Christ (Eph. 5:21). It will change how we view a lost world. We will see the lost as those for whom Christ died. And if I truly humble myself under Christ's Lordship, I will see myself in a different light. When Paul makes this appeal to "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus," I realize that I have a long way to go. When he speaks of Christ's humility and selfless and sacrificial service, I realize I fall way short. There's so much in my life that isn't like Him. I see my own weaknesses, shortcomings, and failures. As I see more and more of His holiness, I see more and more of my sinfulness. I begin to realize I haven't even come close to the extent of Christ's humility, obedience, sacrifice, and humble service.

But Paul knew that. He acknowledges in chapter 3 that he hadn't reached some spiritual plateau of sinless perfection. He acknowledges he hadn't reached full and complete Christlikeness. So we find encouragement and motivation in Paul's words: "[Keep on] working out [to completion, to ultimate fulfillment] your own salvation." Here, Paul is not advocating a works-based salvation. They were not to work *for* their salvation, but rather "work out" their salvation. They were already believers, saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Paul is speaking of their sanctification: "growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18). When we first come to know Christ as Savior and Lord of our lives, that's not the end. It's only the beginning! It's the beginning of a whole new life and a whole new way of living. It's coming to a deeper and more intimate fellowship with God. It means becoming more and more conformed to the image of Christ. It means being used of Him in ways we could not even begin to imagine!

This is a command and therefore requires *human responsibility*. "You" work out "your own" salvation. So what will this look like? What is required? It means that I will regularly spend time alone with God in His word and in prayer. It means I will rely on the Holy Spirit to illuminate the Scriptures, to give me spiritual understanding. It means I will be open and transparent during that time as I personalize His word, and through prayer seek His strength and wisdom to implement it in my life. It means that I will regularly confess my sins, knowing that He is faithful and just to forgive my sins and to cleanse me from all unrighteousness" (1 Jhn. 1:9). It means that I will worship and fellowship with other believers and take advantage of the ministries provided by the church that will help me grow in my walk with Christ. I think you get the point.

It also means that I will do so "with fear and trembling." I know my own weaknesses and points of temptation. This involves a self-distrust, a sensitive conscience, and regularly being on guard against temptation. But it also includes a deep desire not to displease or dishonor the Lord in any way.

But I thought you said we find encouragement and motivation in Paul's words? Yes, growing in Christ requires *human responsibility*. Look at verse 13: "for it is God who works [energizes and enables] in you both to will [the desire] and to do [the dynamic] for His good pleasure." This is *divine enablement*. Praise the Lord! God, through His Holy Spirit, lives and resides within the heart of every believer. Because of His presence and our new life in Christ, the believer now has the *desire* to please God and to bring Him joy and delight, with the *dynamic* to carry it out!

I've heard folks say that they are hesitant to come to Christ because they're afraid once they come to Him, they aren't sure if they can live for Him. The truth is, we cannot live the Christian life in-and-of ourselves. Jesus Himself said, "For without Me you can do nothing" (Jhn. 15:5b). But once we come to Christ we are "blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 1:3). We are "given all things that pertain to life and godliness" (2 Pet. 1:3). It's just as Paul said, "Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6).

John said it like this:

Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. (1 Jhn. 3:2)