



**Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for August 8, 2010
Released on Wednesday, August 4, 2010**

“Serving Others”

Lesson Text: Philippians 2:1-13

Background Scripture: Philippians 2:1–3:1a

Devotional Reading: Matthew 20:20–28

Philippians 2:1–18

- 1 If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies,
2 Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.
3 Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.
4 Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.
5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:
6 Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:
7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:
8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.
9 Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name:
10 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth;
11 And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.
12 Wherefore, my beloved, as ye 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;
13 For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

LESSON AIMS

Facts: to show the divine pattern of unity, humility, and exaltation demonstrated by Christ to His followers.

Principle: to be aware that God may take His children down before He raises them to new heights.

Application: to urge Christians to be faithful through difficult experiences by knowing that their glorious destiny is assured.

INTRODUCTION

A mark of Christian commitment is serving the needs of others. Believers first must realize their unity by experiencing their oneness in Christ. Where there is unity of mind and heart among Christians, we find an awareness and a concern for each other's interests and needs.

The example of being considerate of the needs of others and actually serving them finds its supreme expression in Jesus Christ. He gave Himself unselfishly to serve the needs of others in obedience to God the Father. He made the ultimate sacrifice, even suffering the horrific death of crucifixion. This is did out very clearly by Paul in the primary New Testament passage on the incarnation, which is in Philippians 2.

Paul explained how Christ left the glories of heaven, which were His as God, to enter into human life. He did not divest Himself of His deity when He became a man, but He did lay aside the prerogatives of deity to serve others in humble obedience to God. Believers have a genuine man as an example of how we as human beings are to serve others.

APPEAL TO SERVE OTHERS (Philippians 2:1-4)

1. What four incentives did Paul give for Christian unity (Philippians 2:1)?

Paul emphasized the necessity of unity among believers. Unity is essential if Christians are to serve others. The conjunction "if" appears four times in this verse. In each instance it introduces a conditional clause that assumes the statement to be true. Therefore, the conjunction could just as well be translated "since." Four incentives for unity are thereby identified.

First, since there is encouragement from our union with Christ (cf. Eph. 1:6-10), believers have an obligation to obey His directives. Second, since there is comfort from God's love in our hearts (cf. Rom. 5:5), we should love each other.

Third, since there is unity in the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13), believers should practice unity. Fourth, since there are feelings of affection or tender compassion and the showing of mercy and kindness to other believers, Christian unity should follow naturally.

2. How could the Philippians make Paul's joy complete (v.2)?

Paul then urged the Philippians to make his joy complete by showing their unity in Christ. There were four ways this could be done. First, they were to be "like-minded," which means they were to think in concert or be of one mind. Second, they needed to exhibit mutual love. We are indwelt by the same Spirit (v. 1), and love is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22).

Third, they were to be in harmony with each other ("of one accord"). The phrase used here means "one soul" or "joint soul." They needed to function together as one person, dependent on each other. Fourth, they were to be of one mind, coming together around a single, all-consuming purpose.

3. What is conveyed by the idea of selfish ambition (vs. 3,4)?

The opposite of unity is "strife," or selfishness and "vainglory," that is, vanity. These are to be shunned. Paul is describing selfish ambition, which is an unholy craving for honor and prestige.

At the other end of the scale from this ambitious pride is "lowliness of mind." In humility of mind, believers should instead consider one another to be of surpassing value to themselves. This means that we should give preference or first consideration to other believers (Rom. 12:10).

Paul has in mind persons who willingly put themselves in a position where they "esteem other[s] better than themselves." They have taken the focus off themselves and think first of the well-being and interests of others.

4. Paul wanted the Philippians to look out not only for their own interests, but also for the interests of others. Why is it important to put others' interests ahead of our own? When, if ever, should we not do this?

It's natural for people to look out for themselves. However, when a person has the Spirit of Christ, that person can become just as excited about the interests of others. And over everyone's interests we place the Lord's interests. We seek first His kingdom and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33). So we put the body of Christ ahead of ourselves, and others in the body do the same. Instead of every member looking out for himself, every member is being looked out for by all the others. That's a net gain!

In specific cases, we need to be discerning about what that means. If we yield to another, will it help him or her be a better disciple, or will it reinforce a selfish spirit? Sometimes it's in a person's best interest to say no!

EXAMPLE OF SERVING OTHERS (Philippians 2:5-11)

5. What is conveyed by the phrase "being in the form of God" (vs. 5,6)?

Christ is presented here as the supreme example of humility and selflessness. Paul exhorted believers to think the same way that Christ thought about things. He manifested a spirit of self-renunciation, lowliness, and helpfulness toward others (cf. Matt. 20:28; John 13:12-15).

To demonstrate the greatness of Christ's humiliation, Paul began by saying Christ was "in the form of God" (see Hebrews 1:3, "the express image of his person"). This relationship is also described as being "equal with God." Christianity does not teach that there are two or three equal gods, only one. God is revealed to us in three persons, and all are equal in the sense of equal and complete divinity.

Paul's purpose here is not to explain the mystery of the Trinity, but to use it to illustrate the great sacrifice that Christ made in becoming a human being. Christ did this willingly, not holding on to His high position in glory. Paul says, however, that Christ had every right to hang on to this equality with God. To do so would not have been "robbery." It was something that He rightfully possessed.

6. What did Christ do in making Himself "of no reputation" (v. 7)?

The term translated "no reputation" means "emptied." Christ emptied Himself. He divested Himself of His prerogatives. We have an incomplete thought which leaves us with the question "of what?" Certainly not His deity, but only His divine prerogatives and privileges. He did not and could not cease to be God when He was made flesh (John 1:14). His deity remained throughout the whole course of His self-imposed humiliation. He gave up something that was His.

Christ's intent in doing this was to obey His heavenly Father (John 6:38) and to serve others (Mark 10:45). When He emptied Himself, He gave up His heavenly riches and became poor so that we might become rich (2 Cor. 8:9). He never wavered in His servanthood but served with loyalty, devotion, and obedience.

7. How was Christ "made in the likeness of men" (v. 8)?

Likeness refers to an outward expression that is assumed from the outside and does not come from within. Likeness means similarity, but not sameness. Christ was recognized as a human being by other people. Yet while He was a genuine man, He

was distinctly different from all other humans. He was a man, but he was not *just a man*. He was fully man (Heb. 2:14,17), but He was also sinless (4:15) and fully God (Col. 1:15; 2:9).

Christ obediently humbled Himself as a man (Phil. 2:8). He was "in fashion as a man." The word "fashion" points to an external appearance. Hendriksen observed, "In his entire *fashion*, . . . he was recognized as a human being. He had the looks and outward bearing of men. His way of dress, customs and manners resembled those of his contemporaries."

In regard to His humanity, it should be remembered that Christ entered the world through ordinary human birth (Luke 2:7), had brothers and sisters (Matt. 13:55-56), labored as a carpenter (Mark 6:3), and experienced hunger (Matt. 4:2), thirst (John 4:6-7), weariness, and sleep (Mark 4:38). Jesus suffered and died (Rom. 5:8; I Pet. 4:1), and His body was buried (Mark 15:44-47). Finally, He rose from the grave in the flesh (Luke 24:36-40).

8. What demonstrates that Christ's obedience to the will of the Father was absolute?

Christ's obedience was absolute, without reservation, for it took Him to His death. And the death that He gave Himself up to was not an ordinary one but death by crucifixion. Death on a cross was very painful and humiliating, bringing disgrace and shame to its victims. As if that were not enough, in taking on our sin, Christ was accursed of God; He bore the curse of God's law that was upon us (cf. Deut. 21:23; Gal. 3:13).

Inasmuch as Jesus Christ humbled Himself even to the point of death, believers should follow His example and humble themselves in complete obedience to God. This means embracing the spirit of lowliness and helpfulness to serve others. As our example to follow in living the Christian life, we have One who lived the full range of human experience.

9. Who will one day confess Jesus Christ as Lord (vs. 9-11)?

The self-humiliation of Christ is not the end of the story. God took the heroic sacrifice of Jesus and rewarded Him by lifting Him high above all creation. Paul describes this honor in three ways.

First, His *name*. Paul is not implying that Jesus received a new, different name when God honored Him. He is saying that Jesus' name, which stands for His person, is in a position of absolute, unchallenged supremacy. He is the King of kings (Revelation 17:14). There is none above Him in honor or authority. He has not fought His way to this pinnacle, but has been placed there by God himself, for this position is *given* to Him. Since this is a description that fits God alone, we conclude that Jesus returned to His position of equality with God.

Second, *Jesus* is honored through worship. To *bow the knee* is more than an act of deference. It is an act of worship. All creation is obliged to worship the Christ, for He is worthy (Revelation 5:12).

Third, Jesus is honored through confession. Confession is acknowledgement, and here it serves as an oath of allegiance. Christians *confess that Jesus Christ is Lord* (compare Acts 2:36; Romans 10:9). Paul indicates that there is nothing deviant or heretical about claiming Jesus to be Lord, for it is done in accordance with God's will, *to the glory of God the Father*.

EXHORTATION TO SERVE OTHERS (Philippians 2:12,13)

10. How does God work within believers to accomplish His purposes (vs. 12, 13)?

Christ has set the example of humility in self-renunciation and in serving others; therefore, believers have a sobering responsibility. The Philippians had followed Paul's instruction when he was with them. In his absence they were to continue to put into daily practice the principles that God was working into their lives. These included the responsibility and privilege of serving others.

Christians are to work out their salvation in daily living. This is not working for their salvation, for salvation is by grace alone (Eph. 2:8,9). Paul's exhortation is intended to spur us to make salvation continually operational in our lives.

The outworking of our salvation is implemented with fear and trembling on our part. In other words, we are to give reverence and respect to God due to His holiness while being aware of our weakness and frailty. Humility in attitude joined with selflessness and consideration for others will then be in evidence.

Human responsibility and divine enablement are both involved in this process of making salvation practical. That God "worketh" means that He energizes believers so that they have the desire and the energy to do His good pleasure. God not only energizes the will of believers but also supplies the strength to carry out what He energizes them to do to please Him (Philippians 4:13).

PRACTICAL POINTS

- 1.** Unity is achieved only by submitting ourselves as individuals to Christ (Philippians 2:1,2).
- 2.** Following Christ means putting others' needs and concerns ahead of our own (vs. 3,4).
- 3.** Christlike service demands that we sacrifice some of our own desires and goals (vs. 5-7).
- 4.** God will honor our selfless sacrifice, even if others do not (vs. 8,9).
- 5.** Christian service and witness is not "Christian" unless it glorifies God (vs. 10,11).
- 6.** We work out our salvation in our daily lives by conforming to God's will (vs. 12,13).

CONCLUSION

Heroic Service

Sometimes, even secular observers of culture get it right. One of the most respected and honored persons of the twentieth century was an Albanian nun, Agnes Bojaxhiu. She was sent to India in 1929 to teach schoolchildren, and she enjoyed it. However, she was troubled by the grinding poverty she encountered on a daily basis, so she turned her attention to helping the poor.

She founded the Missionaries of Charity, an organization dedicated to serving the "shunned of society," those whom no one else was helping. This became an international relief organization. She was known to the public as Mother Teresa of Calcutta, and in 1979 was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her ministry. Despite her international celebrity, Mother Teresa never used her public reputation for her own sake. All the money she received for books, speaking, and prizes like the Nobel was poured back into her ministry to the poor. She never tired of this work, even until the day of her death in 1997.

What motivates a person like Mother Teresa? Why would she give her life to helping people others had forgotten? How do we explain her fierce love for the unlovely? Only Mother Teresa knew this for sure, but we can attribute a lot of it to her love for God and her consequent desire to be of service to Him.

It is more difficult to understand the sacrifice made by the Son of God for our salvation. Emily Elliott, taking her cue from Paul's Philippian Hymn, wrote, "Thou didst leave Thy throne and Thy kingly crown, When Thou camest to earth for me." If we are to be like Christ, we too should be of this mind. We cannot be found holding too tightly to earthly position or riches. May there be no need for God to humble us in preparing us for Heaven because we have already humbled ourselves in obedience to Him.

PRAYER

Holy God, we understand only partially the sacrifice made by Christ to take on human form. We grasp imperfectly why He loved us enough to assume the position of a slave. We appreciate better why He is exalted above all others. May we exalt Him through our own obedient service to others. We pray this in His holy name, amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

There is great joy to be found in serving God by serving others.

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

Next week's lesson is "Living into the Future." Study Philippians 3:7-16. As background for Paul's statement that "what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ" (Phil. 3:7), read Acts 21:39 through 22:30.

LESSON SUMMARIZED BY

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