



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

Putting Others First in the Capitol

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11

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NAME RECOGNITION. This is certainly an important issue in the world of politics. With so many running for governor in the upcoming special election, a key factor will be those whose name is best known around the state. As a matter of fact, life in the capitol can easily become all about getting your name known, putting yourself forward, touting your accomplishments, and doing what is necessary to climb the ladder of higher office or achieving greater positions of leadership and influence. However, Paul shares in his letter to the Philippians that the citizen of heaven will not live this way. The heavenly citizen will have an attitude of humility. They will seek to serve others and put others first. Paul encourages such an attitude by sharing the greatest example of one who expressed such an attitude—Jesus Christ.

In Philippians 2:5-8 we find one of the most profound statements regarding the person and work of Jesus Christ found anywhere in scripture:

⁵Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. ⁸Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Philippians 2:5-11

While it is a profound statement describing the very nature of the Son of God, Paul actually has a quite simple reason for sharing it. He wants the believers in the church at Philippi to be like Christ! Paul's epistle to the believers in Philippi is the most personal of any of his letters to the various churches. It is actually a "thank you note" for a gift they had sent Paul (4:10-20). Besides thanking them for their generosity, Paul takes the opportunity to deal with several issues in the church. Like any church, the congregation at Philippi apparently had some problems. There seems to have been some rivalries, disagreements, and divisions going on among the members. Paul even specifically mentions by name two who were struggling in their relationship with each other (4:2). A significant theme in Paul's letter, then, is the encouragement of the believers

to maintain unity and to keep a spirit of humility and servanthood as they worked together to worship and serve the Lord. As Paul encouraged the believers to maintain an attitude of unity and servanthood, he gave them a pointed exhortation and a powerful example. In doing so, Paul gave us perhaps the greatest passage in all of scripture declaring the nature of Jesus.

I. PAUL'S POINTED EXHORTATION

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus – "Attitude" has to do with "having understanding, being wise, directing one's mind to a thing, or seeking or striving for." It is an important word, used at least 16 times in this letter. Paul is encouraging the believers to think correctly, to think like Christ. In 2:2-4 Paul describes what having such an attitude will look like:

²...Make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. ³Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; ⁴do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

When Paul speaks of "this mind" in verse 5, he is exhorting them to have among themselves the frame of mind, disposition, or attitude that he had just described. Paul now shares that they can develop this attitude by following Jesus' powerful example.

II. JESUS' POWERFUL EXAMPLE

This is a good passage to consider in the statehouse since it deals with having an attitude of humility and selflessness towards others. Paul describes how Jesus demonstrated this attitude through the tremendous truths surrounding the incarnation¹ of Christ. This is the teaching that God took on human flesh and became both God and man, in order that He might suffer and die for our sin. Verses 6-10 actually outline Jesus' entire life and ministry. In doing so, they present a powerful example of humility and self-sacrifice.

A. HIS PREEMINENT POSITION

Two statements clearly present Jesus' position as God, or His deity.

BIBLE STUDIES

LOBBYIST / STAFF STUDY: TUESDAYS, 12:00 NOON – TREASURER'S CONFERENCE ROOM (EB 54)
LEGISLATOR / ELECTED OFFICIAL STUDY: THURSDAYS 8:00 A.M., SENATE PRES. CONF. ROOM (M219).
12:00 NOON, TREASURER'S CONF. ROOM (EB 54)

Putting Others First in the Capitol (Philippians 2:5-11)

...He existed in the form of God—The word “form” has to do with the outward expression of His true inward nature or character. This is a clear statement of the deity of Christ in eternity past. The tense of the verb “being” indicates that Christ’s deity did not end when He came to earth to take on human form.

...Equality with God— This phrase has to do with the expression of His deity. In His preincarnate state He enjoyed all the rights, honors, and privileges of being God. Together, these two statements are a tremendous affirmation of the deity of Christ!

B. HIS WILLING DESCENSION

Paul writes that Jesus “did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped”. “Grasp” has here the idea of something to be seized or held on to for one’s own benefit or profit. Although Jesus was God and was equal with God in all His privileges, He did not consider this something to be grasped or held onto for His own good. Because of that, He was able to make the most amazing sacrifices imaginable.

He emptied Himself – This describes how Jesus laid aside the rights and privileges of being God. Christ did not empty Himself of deity. He remained fully and completely God! What He did empty Himself of was the independent use of His divine rights, privileges, and prerogatives as God.

He took the form of a bondservant – “Form” here is the same word as “form of God” indicating that Christ’s servanthood was not merely external but an outward expression of His inward nature and character. Jesus’ whole life and ministry expressed His servant attitude. He told His disciples “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” (Matthew 20:28) Perhaps no greater example from His life can be found than when He washed His disciple’s feet, setting a pattern for how they should serve one another. (John 13:3-14)

He came in the likeness of man – When He took on a human body, Christ took on all the characteristics of humanity. He was born as a baby and grew into maturity as an adult. He grew tired. He hungered. He could feel pain. Paul goes on in verse eight to say that “He was found in appearance as a man”. It simply means He had an ordinary human body. It is important because it meant He was able to suffer, bleed, and die for our sins.

He humbled Himself – How humbling to be born as a baby in a lowly manger. How humbling to live a life of relative poverty.

How humbling to face the sneers, ridicule and rejection of men. The amazing fact is, He chose this humiliation!

He became obedient to the point of death – Not only did He humble Himself in His birth and life on this earth. He consciously chose to obey His Father’s will that He die to pay the penalty for the sins of those who believe.

Even the death of the cross – Jesus did not just die, He died one of the most painful and cruel deaths imaginable. Crucifixion was a form of execution used by the Romans only on the lowest of criminals. Jesus came all the way down from heaven to endure this death on the cross. He who knew no sin bore the punishment of sin for us and the just One was crucified for the unjust. He was wounded for our transgressions, Isaiah wrote. He was bruised for our iniquities. He died in *our* place because of *our* sin.

CONCLUSION

It would be easy to get lost in the details of this marvelous passage of scripture. We need to remember Paul’s reason for penning these great words. He is encouraging the believers to pursue unity and humility in their relationships with each other by following Jesus’ own example of humility and self-sacrifice. This indeed is an important issue for those who work in capitol. Jesus’ example in His birth, His life, and His ministry encourages us to lay aside our own rights and privileges in order to serve others.

CONCLUSION

- **JESUS HUMBLING HIMSELF AND PUT US FIRST BY SUFFERING AND DYING FOR US. HAVE YOU ACKNOWLEDGED HIS ULTIMATE ACT OF HUMILITY AND SERVICE BY PLACING YOUR FAITH IN HIM AND HIS WORK ON THE CROSS?**
- **IT MAY BE A REAL TEMPTATION TO SEEK NAME RECOGNITION AND SELF ADVANCEMENT HERE IN THE STATEHOUSE. HOW CAN YOU PRACTICE THIS ATTITUDE OF PUTTING OTHERS FIRST IN THE CAPITOL?**

¹ From the Latin *in carne* meaning literally “in flesh”. This term does not appear in scripture but many passages throughout the NT speak of this incomprehensible truth. John 1:14; Galatians 4:4; 1 Timothy 3:16; and 1 John 4:2 are but a few.