

Philippians 2:1

by W.F. Anderson

The sermon explores Philippians 2:1, emphasizing Christ's humility and servanthood as a model for Christian relationships and unity.

Duration: 26:41

Topics: "Selfless Humility", "Christian Sacrifice"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the story of a wealthy man who chooses to leave his mansion and live among the poor. The man experiences hunger and cold in his new basement apartment, but instead of seeking to satisfy his own needs, he decides to share his resources with the poor. The preacher relates this story to the temptation faced by Jesus in the wilderness, where Satan tempts him to turn stones into bread to satisfy his own hunger. The preacher emphasizes that Jesus chose to prioritize the needs of others over his own comfort, illustrating the selflessness and humility of Jesus as portrayed in the Bible.

Transcript

Now, if you go to sleep, I know it's my fault. What I should like to do in these four sessions I shall have with you is look at our Lord Jesus Christ. First of all, examine who He is as far as Scripture can tell us, and we can understand Him.

And then examine Him in His interaction with people, the kind of person He is, whom we have come to know, and hope that we shall see this as our relationship and the kind of relationship He has with us, and the kind of relationship we ought to have with one another as Christians. Let's turn to Paul's letter to the Philippians, chapter 2. And Paul did not write this for a doctrinal discussion, but it is a key passage in any discussion of a person of our Lord Jesus Christ. And I don't believe it in its doctrinal position.

I would like to use it, or have us see it, the way Paul was using it when he wrote to the Philippians. Look in chapter 2, verse 1. I'm using a revised translation, so it will be a little bit different from your PD. So, if there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves which you have in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a

thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men, and being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.

Therefore God has highly exalted him, and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, for the glory of God the Father. Who is Jesus Christ? It was a great question that plagued the church in the first four centuries of its history, and whether we realize it or not, we are deeply indebted to certain men who wrestled with this problem. If we can repeat what Scripture says, that's not the point.

What does Scripture mean in what it says? And there's one man I want to meet when I get to heaven and have a long talk with him, and it's a young man, at least he was young at this particular church council. A young man by the name of Athanasius, a young theologian, who stood against what was almost an overwhelming tide to insist on the full deity of Jesus Christ. Humanly speaking, if it had not been for that man, the Christian church as we know it would have been swept with a denial of the deity of Jesus Christ.

There have always been the tendencies to swing to one extreme or the other, so to stress the humanity of Jesus Christ as the liberals have done, that you lose his deity. There has been the other danger, so to stress the deity of Jesus Christ that you lose his humanity. Scripture brings the two together, and I don't know any passage in the Word of God that does it as beautifully as Philippians 2. And I would like to examine that, and then I hope to be able to see why Paul was right in it.

We shall have to begin with verse 6, and look at some expressions Paul uses to try to get their meaning. And we'll just go down through these verses and pick up some of these important expressions. First of all, in verse 6, we shall have to describe or talk about the word form.

Though he was in the form of God, or as the English translation has it, who being in the form of God. What is the form of God? Scripture seems quite clear, indeed, that God does not have a physical form. God is spirit being.

What, then, does Scripture mean by form? We shall have to get away from our idea of our English word form, which contains the thought that there are external, physical characteristics through which we see and comprehend this thing we are talking about. That's not the meaning here. C. B. Warfield, that great Princeton theologian of a century ago, summed up the meaning of the word form that Paul used this way.

The form of any thing is the sum of those characterizing qualities that make a thing the precise thing that it is. It is the sum of those characterizing qualities that make a thing the precise thing that it is, and not something else. If we were to talk about the form of God, as Paul is using the expression here, it is the sum of those characteristics that make God to be God and not angel or man.

And when Paul said our Lord Jesus was in the form of God, he has given us as clear an expression of the full deity of Jesus Christ as he writes. Everything essential to being God, Jesus Christ was. What does Paul mean by being in the form of God? He has used a word here that's more than existing.

It is the idea of personal existence. And Paul seems to be saying the form of God is not something impersonal. There is no deity in the abstract.

There are only divine persons, one of whom is the one we know as Jesus Christ. Now, what sometimes those who deny the deity of Jesus Christ are facing is what seems to be a mathematical contradiction. If you say that the Father is God and the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God, as the Orthodox confess, then one God plus one God plus one God equals three Gods.

And you're a polytheist, you're a worshipper of more than one God. Any second-grade child knows that one plus one plus one equals three. But we are talking about three and one in different categories.

When we say Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we grant that one plus one plus one equals three. There are three persons. When we say one, we are talking about the being of God and not the persons of God.

And so we are talking about two different categories. We are saying that one God exists in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and in this personal existence of the Son there is all the deity, Paul is saying, that there is in the Father and in the Holy Spirit simultaneously. And by deity, we are talking about the eternal personal existence of the omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient being designated God.

There was a time, according to biblical revelation, when all created matter was not. He called into existence, by the word of his power, everything created, everything material. There was never a time when God was not.

There was never a time when Jesus Christ was not. Full being, subsisting, personal, in the form of God, in full deity. Then there's another expression Paul uses here, did not count equality with God.

Equality with God is a state of existence, a condition of existence, in keeping with the form of God. Who, being fully God, lives in a condition that goes along with being God. Equality with God is a state of living, a state of existence.

Now, the way Paul has constructed this statement, he says, in the form of God. The very way he has constructed this statement, existing in the form of God is true while all the other actions of Philippians chapter 2 go on. When he emptied himself, he was still in the form of God.

When he humbled himself, he was still in the form of God. When he subjected himself to death, the death of the cross, he was still in the form of God. This is something that never changes.

You have a parallel construction that I want to use in a moment, in 2 Corinthians chapter 8, where Paul says, He knoweth the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich. It's the same kind of construction. Who, being rich, for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich.

What he's saying is, being rich is a condition that was true while all the other actions went on. When he became poor, he was still rich, in the way Paul is using the term rich. And that's what he's saying here.

While all these other actions occurred, he was still existing in the form of God. What then did he do? This translation has, he emptied himself. And that is probably the greatest passage of controversy about the person of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Our tendency is immediately to ask, and this is a proper translation of it, emptied himself. Our tendency immediately is to ask, emptied himself of what? And I think right there is where we make the mistake. This particular verb, to empty, is never used literally in the New Testament.

It is always used metaphorically, never literally. So, you can't ask of what? Do you empty a thing? Now, if it were used literally, I could say, I will take the glass and empty it. I mean, I pour out what is already in it.

But not so if I use it metaphorically. Paul uses metaphorically that he refused the words of man's wisdom in preaching the gospel, let the cross of Christ be made of none effect. Let the cross of Christ be emptied.

Emptied of what? Well, you don't ask that question when you're using this word metaphorically. Just annul the cross, the meaning of it, to make it of none effect. When Paul says our Lord Jesus emptied himself, you can't jump beyond the himself to ask of what.

It was himself he emptied. Not of anything, but himself. The whole point Paul is getting at is, we, in our relationship with each other, are to follow his example.

What are we to do? Empty ourselves of anything? No. We are to become servants of our fellow Christians. And Paul is saying that's precisely what the Lord Jesus did.

He emptied himself. He took the loaf of it. How did he empty himself? He goes on to describe how he emptied himself.

By taking. Now, if you were to use this word literally, emptied himself, you don't empty something by adding to it. But that's precisely what Paul said he did.

He emptied himself taking the form of a servant. That was the emptying. And the form of a servant was just as real as the form of God.

And our Lord Jesus, the eternal form of God, emptied himself by taking on human nature. He goes on to explain what he means by the form of a servant. That is, human nature.

Becoming a man. So, in the great act of incarnation, our Lord voluntarily took human nature to himself. And what we have to say of our Lord Jesus Christ, without pretending to understand it, is in the one person of Jesus Christ there are two natures, divine and human.

I'm using the term divine as a substitute for deity. It's a common term in the discussion. In that one person of Jesus of Nazareth, there are at the same time, without any change of nature, there is the divine nature and the human nature.

And when the divine person, the Son of God, took the human nature, that was emptying himself, he left the condition of being on an equality with God to take the condition of humility and servanthood, of human equality, of human life. What I understand the Scriptures to teach is something like this. Our Lord deliberately chose to become man, genuinely man, without, of course, giving up any deity.

That would be impossible by very definition of deity. Once you predicate immutability of deity, the deity cannot change, I the Lord change not, then it's impossible to give up any deity and still be God. In fact, the idea of giving up deity would be impossible to discuss.

So, without surrendering any deity or any of the attributes of deity, he took on human existence, human nature. So, while he was here on earth, he had all the attributes of deity and all the attributes of genuine man. Now, what I understand is this, that our Lord became poor all the while he was rich.

That is, he had all the attributes of deity, but deliberately refused their exercise in his own interest. In other words, he took a genuine human existence, a genuine human life. He lived the way we have to live apart from sin.

He lived in voluntary self-limitation, that is, limited himself to human existence, lived as we must live. Lived a life of dependence upon the Father and the Holy Spirit. The words that I speak, he said, are not mine, but his incentives.

The works that I do, the Father does, and I don't do. And he did not enter his public ministry in the baptism of the Spirit of God. Dependence.

The writer of the Hebrews put into the mouth of the Lord Jesus those words, I will put my trust in him, that is, I will put my trust in God. And he would not, in order to ease his own life here, call into play the attributes of his deity. Now, let me go back to that 2 Corinthians 8-9.

You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and try to illustrate it. Who being rich became poor. The same idea as I understand it in Philippians 2. Let's take a very wealthy man who wants to go down into a poverty-stricken area and share the life of the poor.

And so he leaves his mansion, and his servants, and his wealth, and his abundance of food, and he leaves his chauffeur, and his limousine, and his fine clothes, and he puts on the clothes of the people of the area to which he is coming. And he comes into this poverty-stricken area, and he finds a little basement, one-room apartment. Damp, dirty, cold, cheerless, the way other people in this area have to live.

And he lives in that apartment. And like other people, he goes up to the employment agency and tries to find a job. And like other people in that area, he can't find a job.

And he's sitting in this apartment building, in this basement apartment, cold and hungry, and he thinks of the mansion he has left, and its abundance of food. And he refuses to send back to his servants to bring him some food to relieve his own hunger. He has determined to share to the full the experience of those whom he has come to serve.

Now, he will send back for some money and things in order to give to others, but he refuses to do it for himself. When Satan says, turn these stones into bread to satisfy his own hunger, he refused, but he could take a loaf of bread, a few loaves of bread and fish, and multiply them for a hungry mother. But he was determined to share our life, to live as we live, all the while being in the form of God.

The writer of the Hebrews tells us he did this, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest. And when I come to the Lord Jesus Christ, I'm not coming to one who hadn't experienced what I experienced in the past. He experienced temptation, of course, but the source was external, not internal, as so many of my temptations are.

But he experienced what I experienced. He lived by faith as I live by faith. He had to trust in God as I have to trust in God.

He didn't know what hunger and sorrow and thirst and heartache and weariness were, as I have to know them. He deliberately restricted himself to this kind of life. Now, what does this do? Well, this is what I'd like to look at in the gospel as our Lord interacts with different people.

He didn't overwhelm them with a blaze of glory. He lived as they lived. And when they saw him at first glance, when first meeting him, there wasn't anything unusual about him.

It's only as they listened to him talk, as they watched him work, that they came to discover there's something unique about this individual. And the only way, ultimately, they could explain his uniqueness is to say he's the only begotten of the Father. What did this do to them? Well, one of the incidents that thrills me, really, and I know why, in no way, and know why I intend to be disrespectful of our Lord, but one of the things that thrills me is when our Lord was in the upper room, you know, Passover and instituting the Lord's Son.

These men had lived with him for three and a half years and had gotten to know him pretty well. And do you remember what they were doing at that Passover and while he was instituting the doctrine? Do you know what they were doing? Well, the Gospels tell us they were arguing which of them was the greatest. Now, let me admit, they had no business doing that, but they did it anyhow.

Now, the thing that thrills me, as I've shared with some of you before, I suppose our kids are pretty normal. It's normal they can be heading up to the parents. When we are off to someone else's home for dinner, they're usually on their good behavior.

In fact, this has been a point of contention at home. Look, don't use your fork that way. Use your napkin this way, you know.

You want to act like this when we go out to someone else's home? And they respond, we don't act like that when we're in someone else's home. And they don't. They've got all their manners on in someone else's home.

And when we're sitting at someone else's dinner table, they not only have their manners on in regard to forks and knives and food and napkins, but in regard to each other. My wife and I sometimes look at each other in someone else's home and we say, are these our kids? Boy, they're polite to each other. But when we get home, you know, and we're around the supper table, things have been all jarred up that afternoon at school.

You know what happens at the supper table? Wham, wham, wham it goes, you know. And I'm not saying we tolerate this or we allow it to go on, but it occurs. They fight.

Why do they argue here and not there? Their response is, we're at home here. Those disciples were so at home with Jesus Christ, they'd go ahead and argue with him right there at the dinner table. I like the way he corrected it.

Not you bunch of unspiritual, good-for-nothing disciples. No, he just very quietly got up and took some water in the towel and went around and washed everybody. They were arguing about who was going to be the greatest and he took the place of the servant.

And that settled the argument. You see, because he did not come down overwhelming us with a blaze of glory but lived as we live, it's possible to get close to him. And they got so close.

And they were right at home with him. And they could be open with him. They could blurt out what they were thinking.

And when you begin to experience the fellowship with the Lord Jesus like that, and you begin to experience that with each other, that kind of closeness, that kind of openness, that kind of relaxation in each other's presence, life takes on a whole new meaning. And this is what Paul is saying to him. Look, our Lord got down like that.

You do the same thing with each other. Now, you can't put this on, mind you. You can't put this on.

You can't do it. I thought many a time, if I tried to do what the Lord did, take the basin and the water and the towel and wash the disciples' feet, I think Peter would have kicked me. Because he would have known it wasn't genuine.

I was putting on. I was pretending. I was saying, this is what a person ought to do and I'm doing it for the wrong motivation.

But this is the kind of relationship where you can't pretend. And what our Lord did was genuine. He has genuinely become a servant.

And what he did in washing their feet was the natural expression of the decision he had made to become man in the fullness of it. Now, Paul is saying, look, you have the same mind, it'll lead to the same action. You do what he did.

And if he...

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/7/SID7985.mp3>
Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/wf-anderson/philippians-21/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net