

Paul says, your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus. He doesn't say your theology should be the same as Christ Jesus – although it should! But in this passage he says your attitude should be like Christ's.

24 Phil Have the Attitude of Christ the Servant

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. ⁸ Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

What majestic words!

There is widespread belief among many that Paul adapted this portion of his letter from a hymn that circulated in the church. Often, Bibles will print this portion of Scripture in a different way. They will indent it or put it in verse acknowledging it to be an ancient poem or hymn. I would love to have heard the early church sing these words and if this is indeed true it shows the importance the early church placed upon the concepts that Paul wrote. As you know, it is easier to remember concepts when they are put in verse or with a melody and the early church did that because they wanted to reinforce these truths about Christ, who he is and what he has done.

I would guess that I have read this passage and thought on it as much as any other in the New Testament. For me it ranks with other choice passages in the New Testament such as Romans 6-8, 2 Corinthians 2:14-7:1; Ephesians 1-3, and Revelation 4-5 for depth of theology and Christ-exalting theology. But even as we begin to consider all that it has to teach us about Christ we must never lose sight of this, Paul wrote it because he was after an attitude adjustment in the church. Theology is crucial but we have to remember that God is not a super theologian in a celestial library thinking great thoughts. He is the living God who has created all things and He wishes to interact with us. This requires that we have His attitude and that we live, and not just think, in the way that he wishes us to live.

And so Paul says, your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus. He doesn't say your theology should be the same as Christ Jesus – although it should! But Paul is talking about attitude.

Paul has unity in the church on his heart. In 1:27 he says our unity needs to be a beneath the surface unity – it needs to be a unity of spirit. Our unity needs to be like a team striving for a championship.

Unity is a great and necessary goal for every church, but because we live in a fallen world it's hard to achieve and hard to maintain. Sometimes external enemies make life difficult for us. But Paul says, "Don't be afraid of them."

Sometimes internal problems in a church can fracture our unity. And Paul says, "Be like-minded, have the same love, be united in purpose. Don't do anything from selfish ambition or vain conceit. Consider others better than yourself. Look out for the interests of others."

It would seem that Paul has said everything he needs to say about unity in the church, but he is not done. He gives several pictures in chapter 2 and the first one is the ultimate picture of humility. Paul wants it to go deep into our mind and soul in order to change us at the deepest level of our spirit.

Paul says, "have this attitude/this mind/this way of thinking that was in Christ Jesus." Take a look at Jesus Christ – who He was and what He did – and let His attitude be your attitude in all your relationships – at work, school, in your marriage, and at church.

Paul thought on the Messiah. Who was he? He tells us in verse 6. Before he was born, he existed in the form of God. Christ was alive before He was born. I remember sharing this with a Muslim friend many years ago. The Muslim, of course, believed that Jesus was a prophet and a great teacher and miracle worker of God. But prophets, teachers, and miracle workers don't have to be divine. Elijah the prophet was a miracle worker and Isaiah the prophet a great teacher and writer. But I shared with him that Christ was alive before he was born. He pre-existed in a heavenly state. Before the Jewish man Jesus was conceived, He lived on another level.

That moves us closer to understanding who Christ Jesus really is but it doesn't give us complete information because angels lived in heaven. They pre-existed. They lived before the creation of mankind. Paul does not leave us guessing about who he was before he became a man because he says he existed in the form of God. Here we have in this passage one of the clearest verses on the deity of Christ. He not only was pre-existent, He was God in His pre-existence.

And with this thought many other passages in the New Testament agree. This is so important for us to remember. Listen to these verses

John 1:1-4 – In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. ⁴ In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men.

And if anyone wonders about the identity of the Word, they only need to go to verse 14 which tells us that this eternal Word became flesh and lived among us, and, John of of course is referring to Jesus Christ.

Here's one more important passage: Colossians 1:15-17

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by Him all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities— all things have been created through Him and for Him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

Yes, it is so important that we understand who Christ is. As you probably know, Jehovah's Witnesses will say, "Yes, I believe Christ Jesus pre-existed. He was Michael the arch angel." And Mormons will say, "Yes, I believe Christ Jesus pre-existed. He was the offspring of God the Father and God the Mother through their sexual union in heavenly realms."

But Paul doesn't say this. He was not in the form of an angel or in the form of an offspring of God. He was in the form of God Himself. The New International Version translates this, "he, being in very nature God."

And as we think upon this truth, we return to why Paul is telling us this: he wants us to be humble, and the example he provides is the most amazing example of all – God himself was humble and is humble.

Let me illustrate this for you. Imagine you are invited to a dinner hosted by the governor of your state. This dinner will be a grand occasion and in attendance will be the most powerful and influential people in your state. You dress in your finest clothes and when you arrive your breath is taken away by the governor's mansion. Everything is beautiful and in order. You sit at your table with the fine china and you enjoy the service that the wait staff provides.

But what would happen if the governor got up from his seat and personally served your meal and made sure your water glass was full all the time? You might say, "Sir, thank you but you are the governor and really you should be at your table." But he replies, "Yes, that is my table, but I take great delight in serving you." You would be astounded because the governor would be serving you. You expect the wait staff to do this, but the governor?

In the same way, as Paul begins this series of examples that he will provide in the rest of chapter 2 – Christ, himself, Timothy, and Epaphroditus – he wants to give the greatest example of humility first. God himself is the supreme example of humility and that should take our breath away and speak deeply about the kind of people we should be and how we should interact with others.

Let's see how Paul describes what Christ did. First, he says, "he did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped."

Translators have grappled with this part of the verse and have used a variety of expressions: For example, the NKJV says he did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, and the New Living Translation says he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to.

But some translations are now using the latest research and translating it this way – he did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage.

And the thinking is that what Paul had in mind here is that the pre-existent Christ who was fully God did not use his deity the way we fallen humans might think he would. Our tendency, because of sin, is to think that when people have power, they use it to their advantage all the time. Paul, and the people to whom he wrote, the Philippians, only had to think of the Roman emperor who used his power to his advantage all the time. All throughout the ancient world, the rulers would claim divine status for themselves and use that status for their benefit.

But Paul is saying, “Look at Christ. He was in the form of God. He was in very essence God but he did not use his deity in the way that we might think a divine being would or should. He did not use it to his advantage. And why is that? It is because the divine nature is not selfish as our fallen human nature is. The divine nature is one of love and giving.

And what this passage teaches is something new about God that is obscured by the rulers of history and by the rulers of our day. Hardly a month goes by without hearing of another government leader at a national, state, or local level who uses his power for his personal advantage. We hear about this in church circles, and we see it operate at schools, at work, and in our families. But God is not that way. The all powerful God is a giving, humble, serving God who empties himself and Paul in this passage says, “have this attitude in yourselves, the attitude of the true God.”

There is so much more to say and we’ll share it in our next broadcast. I hope you will be with us as we continue exploring the depths of this amazing passage of Scripture.