

A New Life (Philippians 2)

Introduction: *Denying ourselves*

You hear people say, “We all have our crosses to bear.” They usually mean that we all have to bear some suffering in this life, a sore knee, an irritable husband, or a difficult boss. And the suffering that we endure is our cross. But that’s not the Biblical idea at all. The cross we must bear is not a bad knee, or an irritable husband. The cross is a symbol of *dying to ourselves*, or as Jesus puts it, *denying ourselves*. Jesus said, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him *deny himself*, and take up his cross *daily*, and follow Me” (Luke 9:23).

And it’s this self-denial that holds our chapter together. This is the mind which was in Christ Jesus, at the heart of this chapter, who took the form of a servant, who looked not to his own interest but to ours, and laid down his life for us. This is the attitude that the Philippians are to have for each other, being of “the same love. . . . Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit. . . . Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others” (Phil 2:2-5). And this is the attitude exemplified in Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus.

Next week we’ll focus in on some of these magnificent passages that have so much to teach us. But as we come to chapter 2, we need to have in view the big picture, how the cross is at the center of our faith and life. “By this we know love,” says the Scripture elsewhere, “because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

Chapter 2 begins with the word “therefore,” or “so,” strangely omitted by the NIV. But this reminds us of what we learned last week. Verse 27, conduct yourself as a citizen worthy of the gospel. What is conduct worthy of the gospel? You might think, “Holy, blameless, pure.” And that’s good. But Paul has something else in mind here: living not for ourselves, but for others.

Do you see how he weaves the gospel itself into his appeal? Someone lived for us. And because of that, we are not to live for ourselves any longer. Someone didn’t consider his own interests but laid down his life for us. That’s the gospel. And we’re to live lives worthy of the gospel. And therefore self-centeredness is not a side issue. Self-interest is not something we can excuse. That is a contradiction at the heart of the gospel.

Our suffering isn’t the same as Christ’s, of course. His suffering was for our sins. His was the sufferings of God incarnate, as we’re reminded here. Only Christ can suffer in this way. Only Christ can suffer so that you may be freely forgiven your trespasses. Only God incarnate can be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And by the way, if you’re trying to be your own savior, make atonement for yourself by trying harder, there’s someone you’ve got to meet, someone who can cleanse you fully, and restore you from within. Christ’s life and cross and death for us is unique. But it does become our pattern, as we deny ourselves, take up our cross, and live lives worthy of the gospel. Let’s consider what it means to have the mind of Christ, and then we’ll see this exemplified three times in the chapter, and then we’ll consider how it should be exemplified in us.

Main Idea: Having the Mind of Christ

Verse 5, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.” Let’s start here. What was the mind of Christ? He was in the form of God. But what did he do? Or better yet, from verse

6, what did he not do? My translation says, he “did not consider it robbery to be equal with God.” And the footnote translates the meaning of this figure of speech, he didn’t consider being equal with God something to be held onto.” He was in the form of *God*. But he took the form of a *slave*. He humbled himself. And he gave his life for ours in love. He became obedient even to the death of the cross. That is the gospel. That is the mind of Christ.

Putting verse 3 the other way around, did Jesus act in selfish ambition? Did he esteem himself better than others? Did he look out for his own interests? We see Jesus, the Second Person of the Godhead, laying aside what is his by right, laying aside self-interest in order to serve our interest. He gave his life that we might live. What did such love cost him?

Though God, he took the form of a bondservant, of a slave. Very interestingly here, Jesus emptied himself by taking. He took the place of the most humble servant and become slave of all. Jesus laid aside his *position*. He laid aside his *possessions*. Born in a manger and laid to rest in a borrowed tomb. “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). Greater love has no man than this, than to lay down his life for his friends. That is the gospel of Christ.

Verse 1, “Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind” and so forth. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.” Just like Christ.

Our own interests do not come first. You parents, I’m sure, have had these kind of talks with your children. Children, especially those of you with brothers and sisters at home, isn’t the attitude too often, “Hey, that’s mine. Me first. Is that selfishness and conceit? Or is that being humble and esteeming others better than yourself? Is such an attitude worthy of the gospel? Now, there are many times when your parents will tell you, “Take turns and share.” Because that’s what fairness requires. But what does brotherly love require? “You first. I want you to enjoy it.”

Beloved, that is how it is to be in the church, the family of God, with your brothers and sisters in Christ. Christ didn’t say, “me first.” He didn’t even do what was fair. He humbled himself. He considered others better than himself. He was more concerned with our interests than his own. And we have definitely not arrived in the church if we’ve only gone from “me first,” to “what’s fair.” We’ve not arrived until we say, “*You* are more important. I esteem you *better* than myself. I want to give my life to serve you, and I choose to take the place of your servant for Christ’s sake. You are more important to me than I am, because I love you.”

Now, from this point on in the chapter, Paul basically wants to tell them three things. First, although he hopes to be released and come to them shortly, it’s possible that he may not come out alive. So, second, he’s sending Timothy to them. And third, he’s sending Epaphroditus back home to them now with his thanks. But I want you look briefly at what he says about all of these people concerned. He’s not left his subject.

Example #1: Paul Himself (2:17)

What kind of man is Paul? Even from the first line of this letter, what does he say about himself? He doesn't introduce himself here as an apostle, as he could, as he does elsewhere. How does he describe himself and Timothy to the Philippians, Phil 1:1? Bondservants.

And this isn't just flowery language. This is from a man in prison. This is authentic. He's not sitting in a cozy study somewhere. Here's someone who's living what he's teaching. By the way, who else took the form of a bondservant in our passage? Christ. Just as Christ took the form of a bondservant, Paul and Timothy live as bondservants of Jesus Christ.

Paul said in 1:21, "For to me, to live is Christ." Living is Christ. And he desires to go and be with Christ; so for him, "to die is gain." Don't mistake him. If Paul were only thinking of himself, of his own interests, he'd want to do what's best for him. And he desires to depart and be with Christ, for that would be gain. But Paul is not one of these *idiotes*, remember last week? He's not someone who's interested in himself and his own affairs. He's a *polituma*, one who lives his lives for others. Personally, he'd rather depart. 1:23, "I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you." Paul has the mind of Christ in him. He'd rather work for them than please himself. His chief concern isn't where he'd be happiest, in heaven. His chief concern is for their welfare, just like his master.

And did you notice how he criticized those other gospel preachers? 1:16, "The former preach Christ from *selfish ambition*." Does that sound familiar? Nothing out of selfish ambition? There are some self-seeking preachers. But Paul says, "*Christ* is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice." Paul is not *idiotes*, a man interested in himself.

Now, here in chapter 2, he brings up his case to them briefly in verse 17, "Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. For the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with me." That's the Apostle Paul. If my service to you means death to me, I'm glad. And I want you to rejoice with me. That's a great man. Paul, their servant for Christ's sake. And Paul, their example. He says in chapter 3, "Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern" (Phil 3:17). Phil 4:9, "The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you." Here's a man joyful to lay down his life in their service.

Example #2: Timothy (v. 19-23)

Second, he wants to commend Timothy to them, whom he's sending along. Verse 19, "But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state." Now look, how does he describe Timothy? Verse 20, "For I have no one *like-minded*." Sound familiar? I have no one else who has this same mind. "[One] who will sincerely care for your state. For all *seek their own*, not the things which are of Christ Jesus." In the original, this is *exactly the same phrase* as 2:4, "Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others." Timothy truly cares for you, and not himself. And he says, you know, there aren't many Christians who really care for Christ's people like this. They all seek their own. And I think he's primarily talking about his fellow Christian workers.

They're basically self-centered. Not Timothy. You know his proven character, that he sincerely cares for your state.

You see, he hasn't left this theme. He keeps pressing it home. There's none like Timothy who genuinely cares for *your* interests. So many just seek their own. I have no one like minded who sincerely cares for *your* state. Can you hear the echo? Here's a man who has the mind of Christ.

Example #3: Epaphroditus

Third example, Epaphroditus. The church in Philippi sent him to Paul to bring him assistance in prison and to take him an offering. This man Epaphroditus, what's he like? 2:25, "Yet I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your messenger and the one who ministered to my need." Here's a man who's truly Christ-like, the one who ministers to my need. And even while he's away, verse 26, "he's longing for you all." He cares for me. He cares for you. He's living his life worthy of the gospel.

Obviously Paul would rather have him stay with him in prison. Why is he sending Epaphroditus back home then? Paul's not thinking about himself. He wants them to rejoice. Verse 26, "he was longing for you all, and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. For indeed he was sick almost unto death; but God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. Therefore I sent him the more eagerly, that when you see him again you may rejoice, and I may be less sorrowful."

Verse 29, "Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such men in esteem; because for the work of Christ he came close to death, not regarding his life, to supply what was lacking in your service toward me." And look at this phrase in verse 30, "because for the work of Christ he came *close to death*." Or even better, "*to the point of death*." Does that sound familiar? Who else went to the point of death? Christ. And it's exactly the same phrase as he used in 2:8, "Christ humbled himself and became obedient *to the point of death*." Exactly the same words, *mechri thanatou*. And Epaphroditus, hold such men as him in high esteem, because for the work of Christ, *he* also served me *to the point of death*, *mechri thanatou*. This is a Christ-like man. His conduct is worthy of the gospel of Christ.

Here's the pattern to be followed. "Hold such men in high esteem" 2:29. Don't go after all the ambitious self-centered, self-serving people. Look at Timothy and Epaphroditus, people who live for others. "Hold such men in esteem." This is what it means to walk worthy of the gospel of Christ. This is what it means to have the mind of Christ. It's giving your life for others. It's giving up your own comforts and taking the form of a servant.

Lessons

Now, let's consider some practical lessons for us, of which there are at the beginning of the 21st century. Ours is an age of very low commitment to other people. I read this week how the telephone company in New York did a detailed study of phone conversations to find out which word was the most frequently used. They found it was the word, "I," used 3,990 times in 500 phone conversations. We "want to talk about me, want to talk about I, want to talk about #1," says the country song. Though we have an age of increasing social consciousness, we have very

little commitment to others. Everyone now wants to be seen supporting a cause on social media especially or to collect donations in support of this or that. But even in our wealth, this generation has the lowest level of per capita giving of any in the history of our country. We give a little to others as it pleases us.

We have to see how much it's affected us. We have to confront the individualism and the consumerism of the Christian church, where people are like customers looking for churches that will satisfy them and meet their needs and please them.

1. The mind of Christ in the church

At St. Bede's Episcopal Church in Santa Fe, New Mexico, there's a door into the sanctuary over which a hand-lettered sign that reads, "Servant's Entrance." There's only one door into that sanctuary. There isn't any way in or out of that church except through the servant's entrance! And that's the truth of the matter. This alone is a life worthy of the gospel.

I have a little saying, it goes like this. It's easy to be a servant, until someone treats you like one. Let's commit ourselves each one to be, not proud servants, but humble servants. It not about us.

2. The mind of Christ in the home

You husbands will remember how Paul says exactly the same thing to you elsewhere, in your own ministry to your wife and children. "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and *gave Himself for her*" (Eph 5:25). And if you can learn do it at home, then you can do it in the household of God. Every position of authority requires sacrifice for those under authority, giving yourself for them.

3. The mind of Christ in ministry

I remember years ago speaking to a man who'd deeply wanted to be an elder, but was never able to have that position. And he told me, without remorse, that one of the two reasons he wanted to be an elder was that he was concerned that his church might move locations, and that he didn't want to see it move further away from him. He did not want that to happen. Paul tells the church elsewhere, "We might have made demands as apostles of Christ" (1 Thess 2:6). We could have made demands. We had that authority. But rather, we labored in all humility to serve you. And beloved, I'm very glad to say that your elders are such men, committed to being leaders like Christ, who gave himself for you.

4. The mind of Christ in daily self-denial

The Bible speaks about us laying down our lives for each other. And if we would be willing to do that, surely we would be willing to do all else. It means dying daily to ourselves. It means a life of singular devotion. The early verses of the chapter remind us that *every conversation* is affected by the cross of Christ.

No one can deny that it's love for Christ to lay down his life for us, though only rarely are we called to do so for others. But if the same spirit of love animates our hearts, then so much can and will be done for others, the smaller sacrifices: practical help, genuine caring, generous giving, sympathy and thoughtfulness. Dying to yourself daily is a humble other-centeredness; a

practical interest in another's welfare, a regard for another's life and happiness, and a commitment that remains unsatisfied without action.

Love grows with exercise. Whether we're speaking of love for God, or the love of a husband for his wife, or friends for their friends, or the love of Christians for their spiritual brothers and sisters, the best way to grow in love or any grace is to practice that grace. And having the same love, as Paul puts here, is the way forward for us all.

Conclusion: ...*of the gospel.*

And in conclusion, I'd like to address you who are not yet followers of Christ. Sometimes people on the outside have a very negative impression of the church, mostly from what they see on the TV or in the news. They can see the goodness of the Christian life, and the rightness of our duty to God. But what do they need the church for?

My standard answer is this: The church is the place where people are committed to loving God with all that is in us, and to love one another as he has loved us. We're not all that we want to be, but we *are* committed. And we *are* growing toward it.

To live worthy of the gospel, Paul will say in the following verses, is to live humbly. The gospel is a message of grace being lavished upon the undeserving, and so no one can live worthy of the gospel who is not conscious of his own unworthiness for God's condescension to him or her. Therefore no one can live worthy of the gospel who looks down his nose at others.

Since Christ placed the interests of others above his own, and one who lives worthy of the gospel will do the same. Christ devoted himself to doing the will of his Father in heaven, and become obedient to the death of the cross. Those who have been saved by this gospel have the same mind about obedience and the service of others that he did.

And on and on it goes. Every single part of the Christian life, every duty that a Christian has, every service he or she is called to offer derives from the good news of God's love and grace and Christ's sacrifice that saved a wretch like me.

This is why new Christians, who have yet to be taught many things about the Christian life, so often instinctively know in what ways their lives must change now that they have received Christ as their Savior and confessed him as their Lord.

So dear friends, you can't live a life worthy of the gospel until you have embraced the gospel and been saved by it. Christians don't live such a life *in order to be saved* but *because they have been saved* in such a way. We live *from* life, not *to* life. And life, true life, is offered you this day in his name.

Prayer

Our Father in heaven, you demonstrate your own love for us in this, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. And we praise the greatness of your love, and the wonder of your redemption. Christ perished that we might not perish but have everlasting life. We pray that we would know and enjoy more and more of Christ in this body. We see the wonder and the glory of Christ's

mind. We desire that you would conform us all to the image of your Son, that he indeed would be the firstborn among many brethren. We pray that the love of Christ would be known and felt among us. We desire to attain to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, "from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love" (Eph 4:16).