
**“Becoming Like Christ”
(Philippians 2:1-11)
Pastor Peter Yi
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Proposition: We must become like Christ in his humility

Introduction:

One of the primary ways in which Paul expects Christians to grow is in a manner that may be counter-intuitive to many of us. How are we accustomed to growing? Well, much of our lives were spent in classrooms. We absorb knowledge. Sometimes it's useless knowledge. We Asians are known for our ability to memorize incredible amounts of information for a test and then to wipe clean that hard drive moments after the test is over. So for many of us, the way we grow is cognitively, from books, from teachers, through information. And it's probably more that way now than ever before as we're well into the information age. We have incredible resources online like wikipedia and google and other sources for unheard of amounts of information.

The problem is that we can often get into thinking that our spiritual life is merely a matter of knowing the right stuff and that would be enough. So we know the general content of our bibles, the major stories. We have down the basic doctrines of our faith. We might not fully understand them all, but we know about the Trinity, and salvation by faith in Christ, and basic doctrines of Christian living and the church. So we think that we have our bases covered. But there's a danger with people who just amass great amounts of knowledge. Even the bible says that 'knowledge puffs people up' meaning that it makes them arrogant. And we all know how annoying the know-it-all could be. He was annoying back in elementary school. He was annoying in high school. And he's even annoying today at the office. And he'll be annoying in the future to his grandchildren. Why? Because with that accumulation of knowledge, there's the danger of pride.

So Paul in today's text and all throughout his writings actually, shows us a better way to grow as Christians. His methodology is not deplete of knowledge. In fact it's packed with knowledge and facts and information and truth. His writings are actually almost a perfect 50/50 split between truth and practice. His methodology is actually incredibly simple and ingenious. He's definitely not the originator of this model either. He copied this model from someone else, namely Jesus, and in his copying he's perpetuating this model to every subsequent generation of Christians. His way of growing Christians is through **imitation**.

Throughout his letters he repeats over and over this charge to imitate great Christians. I found no less than twelve direct references to imitation in Paul's writings as the method of spiritual growth and even in this short 4 chapter letter to the Philippians he refers to imitation 3 times.

The first is found in today's text when Paul says,

5 Have this mind among yourselves, which [was also] in Christ Jesus,

Then later in chapter 2 he mentions two great saints that we'll be looking at closer in a couple of weeks, Timothy and Epaphroditus and he spells out their spiritual character as models worthy of imitation. And then in chapter 4:9 he says it explicitly once again.

“Whatever you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.”

So for all of us, in order to become like Jesus and grow as Christians, we have to imitate Jesus. Let's look at today's text a bit more closely.

2:1 So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy,² complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.³ Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

We need to imitate Christ's unity. (1-2)

Verse two gives the command, but verse one gives the reasons for the command. The command is to be of the same mind, have the same love and be in full accord and of one mind. In other words be on the same page in your faith. Don't be divided, rather be united. Be united in what you believe, be united in your fellowship experience and be united in your purpose as a church. In everything as a Christian community we are to be united. Does that mean there can't be any disagreements? Paul would be the first to confess that there can be. But being in disagreement on certain points doesn't mean we are disunited. We become disunited when we become self-centered. Listen carefully to that church. The unity starts to break down when we start looking out for ourselves instead of looking out for others and we'll look at that a little bit later. Euodia and Syntyche. (4:3)

What you'll notice about this call to unity is that it doesn't come from nowhere. It's birthed in our relationship with Christ. So look at verse one. How does it read?

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy,

Look at the things he mentions. Encouragement, comfort, participation, affection and sympathy. Now let's ask ourselves a question. Is this a check list of things we should go through and if we have checked them all off, then we can move on to the unity part of the verse? I don't think so. When you look at the things he mentions, these are the experiences of every Christian. What Christian hasn't experienced every single one of these things to some measure? We all have. And it's because we've experienced all these incredible things that flow out of God the Father, Christ the Son and the Holy Spirit, that we can heed this mandate to be united.

So in other words there is no viable reason for Christians to live in disharmony and disunity. Our experience with Christ moves us to unity. So let's do everything we can to preserve the unity of our church. This is one of the reasons why YN is able to celebrate 30 years as a church without a split. It's because of unity.

We need to imitate Christ's other-centeredness.

3 Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

There's a dysfunctional way that we can do church. We can do it out of rivalry and conceit. We can have this attitude *between* churches and *within* the church. And when that happens, the church has begun to live in sin and has gone away from the church Christ wants her spotless bride to be.

Many of us have been in churches where we sensed the tension in the leadership, where there was always a power play going on. We may have been part of churches where it's about the glory of the church more than about the glory of God.

We may have been a part of dysfunctional groups within the church or we ourselves may have contributed to the dysfunction because we allowed jealousy and pride to guide the behavior and function of the group. Those attitudes have no place in Christ's church and every single one of us must guard our hearts and regularly check and see if we're beginning to think it's all about me and less about Christ.

Instead there's the right way to do church.

but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

That's not real easy to do even in the church, is it? And we really don't see a lot of good models of it? Many of us are minimalists, thinking and acting in such a way—what's the minimum I need to do to have the appearance of humility?

Friends there's a great promise that God gives to the humble. It's grace. God gives grace to those who are humble. What's grace? It's favor, blessing, strength, and spiritual help. For those who are humble God gives us grace. But there's the flipside to that promise as well. It says he opposes the proud. It's a frightening thing to have God as your opponent. If we're prideful, God will fight against us. He will go out of his way to oppose us. He doesn't ignore us. He opposes us.

So in the life of the church, we are to be humble. Meaning, we are to look at that person across that room and say, yes, he's worth dying for. Yes, she's worth dying for. He's more significant than me, and so is she. It's wondering and asking, I wonder what her needs are? I wonder what I could do to meet that need?

I think two ways we can honestly assess if we are other centered is by measuring the way we spend our time and money. Those are two of our most valued assets. And the way we utilize those things will prove if we are other centered or not. You can't be other-centered in isolation.

You can only be other-centered in community. Friends let's move toward becoming such a church community.

Finally, We need to imitate Christ's humility.

He did not consider equality with God something to be grasped.

Jesus had every right to claim all the benefits and privileges of being God. Because He was God He had every single right and power and ability and privilege and authority that would rightfully belong to God. Everything that we could think of that is a right of God, Jesus could have claimed all of those for himself. It was his for the taking. But he didn't.

Instead, He made himself nothing (literally, he emptied himself)

1. Taking on the nature of a servant (slave). You cannot have a greater contrast than the two words 'God' and 'slave'. You can't get any higher than God, and you cannot get any lower than a slave. So why the infinite contrast? Because any condescension on the part of an infinite being is a condescension of infinite proportions. When Christ became man, it was nothing more, nothing less than becoming the lowest form of a human, a slave. This is how he began to express to us his deity.

When you and I think of God, we think of God the omnipotent. We think of God the omniscient; we think of God the omnipresent. We think of God in his powerful acts of creation. But here we see another side of God. He became a servant in the human form which jives with what Jesus said about himself. In Mark, Jesus says, the Son of Man did not come be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many."

2. But there's more. There's another step of condescension. As if the former wasn't enough. It wasn't enough that he became nothing, he became a servant, and he became a man. As a man, he humbled himself, meaning that as a human he took the lowest possible place. And this is absolutely true. When you and I look at the life of Jesus as recorded in the gospels we see a man of humble means.

Think about his birth. It wasn't the maternity ward at North York General, which I hear is the place to deliver these days. It wasn't even at a hospital or a clinic. It was in a barn. There was no sterilized bassinet, just a feeding trough to lay him in. He didn't grow up in a palace. Just the son of a blue-collar laborer, a carpenter. He didn't own property. Remember when he said, foxes have dens, birds hard nests, but I don't even have a place to rest my head. He didn't travel by chariots, nor was he carried by servants. The few times we see him riding an animal, it wasn't a mighty stallion, but a donkey. That was all part of his condescension.

3. But Paul's not anywhere near being done. Let's review what he's established up to now. Jesus is God. But though he had every right to, he never took advantage of his God-rights. And as God he emptied himself in becoming a servant, literally a slave. He did that by becoming human. And as a human, the type of human he chose to be was the humblest of the humble.

And then Paul unloads on us in what he says next. He became obedient to the point of death. The ultimate act of his humility was to become obedient to death. Paul begins to let us in on why Jesus, the God of the universe became man in the first place. Jesus was on a mission of obedience unto death. Jesus lived his life in perfect obedience to the will of God. And the will of God willed for his Son Jesus Christ to die.

4. Even death on a cross (not a natural death)

The unthinkable happened. God died. Some have called Christianity a scandal. The word scandal literally means a stumbling block. In the Greek the word is *scandalon*. The message of Christianity is a scandalous message. It's an offensive message. It's a message that's hard to swallow.

This humbling, this death, led to the most glorious and highest exaltation that could ever be imaginable.

If the cross is what truly defines Jesus, then the cross is what truly defines God. God sent his Son to die on a cross.

Friends, there might be some of you here today still wondering what this is really about. It's about a God who loves rebels. He loves them so much he's willing to make a trade. A trade of astronomical proportions. Your sins for my Son. You live, he dies. If you've never received Christ into your life, you can right now by praying A, B, C. Admit, Believe, Commit.

Conclusion:

Friends, who are you imitating? Who's your example? The author of Hebrews says it well. "let us fix our eyes upon Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith." Let's do that and we shall become more like him.