

# He Made Himself Nothing

Philippians 2:1-11

Key Verse: 2:7

**“... rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.”**

As we have seen, the Philippian church had an exemplary partnership with Paul in the gospel. They supported him when he was in chains by sending Epaphroditus to serve him and with material support (4:15). They were world-mission minded and full of love. It seems that they had no problem at all. But still they had conflicts among coworkers. Throughout human history there has always been disunity, discord, and division among people in all organizations. The Christian community is no exception. Some people waste their whole lives struggling in conflicts with others. How can we overcome the tendency toward division and serve God harmoniously? In today's passage Paul teaches us how to be like-minded. Most of all, he points us to Jesus. He did not just give a moral exhortation to have unity. Rather, he gives spiritual direction to live a Christ-centered life. Let's learn Jesus' mindset and practice it from our hearts.

## **I. Be like-minded (1-4)**

In 1:27a, Paul exhorted the Philippians, **“Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.”** In verses 27b-30 Paul encouraged them to fight as one against enemies outside the church for the faith of the gospel. In 2:1-4, he urged them to fight against enemies within the church for the sake of unity. A life of unity is worthy of the gospel; this is the essence of Christian life, and the gospel's hallmark. Moreover, God's ultimate purpose is the unity of all things under Christ (Eph 1:10).

**First, the basis for being like-minded (1).** Let's see verse 1. **“Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion....”** The word “if” does not imply uncertainty, but assumes that in Christ they had a basis for unity. When we have personal fellowship with Christ, we have encouragement. Encouragement is a kind of vitality that sustains our spiritual lives. When we live in this world, we face many troubles. Jesus said, **“In this world you will have trouble. But take heart, I have overcome the world”** (Jn 16:33). Jesus promised to be always with us as a shepherd even in the darkest times (Mt 28:20). This gives us strength to live a vibrant Christian life, and we can even go out as missionaries. From his love, we have comfort. Living in this world,

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sometimes we experience pain, rejection and unbearable sorrows. At such times we need some comfort. If we look for comfort from others, we will be disappointed, even though we receive some. But when we come to God we can receive real comfort. Common sharing comes from the Greek word for fellowship (koy-nohn-ee'-ah). Fellowship in the Spirit drives out all fear and anxiety, and gives us deep peace and assurance that we can overcome hardships and live victoriously. The person who receives Christ is a new creation with a new heart that senses God's tender love and is able to understand and love others in a way that promotes real and deep union. By using the word, "if," Paul prompted the Philippians to recognize the blessings they had received from being united with Christ, which can be a basis for being like-minded. God has already given us the spiritual resources in Christ to bring about unity.

**Second, be like-minded (2).** Based on this spiritual blessing, what did Paul urge them to do? Verse 2 says, **"...then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind."** Whenever Paul prayed for the Philippians, he prayed with joy (1:4). But it was not complete joy because there was some discord among them. So he urged them to have real unity which would make his joy complete. Paul's joy was not in receiving some benefit, but in their genuine unity in Christ. Unity does not come naturally, without any effort. It comes when we collaborate with the Holy Spirit, who makes us one (Eph 4:3). That is why Paul urged them to be like-minded. In verse 2, the words "like-minded," "love," "one in spirit," and "one mind," indicate that unity is not a mere sharing of work together, but an inner union of mind, heart and spirit. Being like-minded is different from uniformity. It can be compared to an orchestra. Each person plays a different instrument with a different tone, but they produce one harmonious, beautiful sound of music. In God's drama of salvation, each person plays a unique role in fulfilling the world salvation plan. We are to use the diverse gifts that God gave us. But we need to be in harmony to accomplish God's purpose together. Having the same love refers to God's love, "agape," which is sacrificial, unconditional, unchanging. When we are motivated purely by this love, we can be one in love from the heart. Paul also encouraged them to be "one in spirit and of one mind." Jesus' words are the basis to do this. Jesus commanded us to love one another as he loved us (Jn 13:34). Jesus commanded us to proclaim the gospel to the ends of the earth and to go and make disciples of all nations (Mk 16:15; Mt 28:19). These are not suggestions, but commands of our Lord Jesus Christ. All Christians must obey them without exception. When we do so, we can have one spirit and one mind. As we begin preparation for the 2013 International Bible Conference, let's have a cooperative spirit to advance the kingdom of God with a focus on the glory of God.

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**Third, stumbling blocks and building blocks for being like-minded (3-4).** In verse 3 Paul mentions two stumbling blocks to becoming like-minded: selfish ambition and vain conceit. There are two kinds of ambition: selfish ambition and holy ambition. Paul had a holy ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known (Ro 15:20). This ambition came from God and was to please God. We should all have this holy ambition, as Romans 12:11 says, **“Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.”** However, selfish ambition comes from one’s sinful nature, along with sexual immorality, idolatry and the like (Gal 5:20). Selfish ambition causes people to bite and devour each other and eventually destroy each other (Gal 5:15).

Vain conceit is a high opinion of oneself without any basis. We can call it groundless pride. The Swiss philosopher Carl Hilty said, “Vain conceit is the worst part of man’s sinful nature.” It is because wickedness, jealousy, falsehood, and impurity all come from vain conceit. It causes one to seek his own glory rather than God’s. Selfish ambition and vain conceit come from self-centeredness. They cause one to rob God’s glory, hurt himself, and eventually destroy a community. Such desires are in everyone’s heart (Ro 3:23), and when the opportunity comes, they rise up naturally. So we should crucify these desires every day. Galatians 5:24 says, “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”

Verses 3b-4 say, **“Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.”** Here Paul mentions two building blocks for becoming like-minded. They are to value others above oneself, and to look to the interests of others. These are other-centered and ultimately they are Christ-centered. The problem is that sinful man always values himself first above others. We tend to see only the weak point of others and only the strong point of ourselves and to look down our noses at others. We begin thinking to ourselves, “I am still a little better than you,” or, “I am slimmer than you,” or “I have more hair than you,” or “I speak faster than you,” or “I am more spiritual than you,” and so on. When we think like that, are we happy? No. Rather, we have a constant, growing anxiety. We may expect that if we value others above ourselves, we will have an inferiority feeling. Yet there is a mysterious paradox. One man had a great desire to be number one. Because of this, he suffered from a competitive spirit, envy and anxiety which developed into insomnia. After long suffering, he decided to put Jesus first, others second and himself third. Then he struggled to live by this decision. His motto was, “I will become the third willingly.” When he practiced this on a daily basis, mysteriously,

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the peace of God came into his heart. Then he began to love others and appreciate them, and he could sleep well at night. Those who value others become happy people. In order to do so, we need to learn to see others' God-given good point, such as a talent or character trait, and on that point, value others above ourselves. Then we can think, "You are more faithful than I," or "Your thought is deeper than mine," or "Your time management is better than mine." Then we can build up others.

Another building block is to look to the interests of others. Paul realized that everyone naturally looks out for their own interests. He urges us to have the same level of concern for the interests of others. In this individualistic society, it seems impossible to look to the interests of others. Each one thinks his or her cold is more serious than another's cancer. Yet when we look to the interests of others we do not feel a sense of loss. Rather, we experience joy and satisfaction which comes from God. In order to look to the interests of others we need to be concerned about them and pay attention to what they actually need and pray for them. In this way we can build up others, and at the same time build up our community.

## **II. Have the same mindset as Christ Jesus (5-11)**

In verse 3, Paul mentioned humility as a foundational virtue. Then what is humility? Humility is not just acting lowly or being in a lowly state, like a slave. Rather it is the mindset within a person - the way he thinks of himself: he is the lowest. Even though John the Baptist was a great man, he never thought about himself as a great man. Rather, he thought of himself as nothing but a voice (Jn 1:23). Apostle Paul was a great man. But he always thought of himself as the least of all God's people, and as the worst sinner (Eph 3:8; 1 Ti 1:15). On the other hand, a proud person always thinks of himself highly, claiming, "Oh, I am somebody!" Such people always try to exalt themselves. This was the folly of the devil, who was once a glorious angel, but exalted himself to be like God, and was cast out of God's presence (Isa 14:13-15). Proud people are self-centered, saying, "I will," or, "I can," while the humble are Christ-centered and say, "I cannot, but God can." Christ has set us an example of humility. That is why, in verse 5, Paul says, **"In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus...."** This was the most important thing for each of them. Without having the mindset of Christ Jesus, we cannot value others above ourselves. Nor can we look to the interests of others. Yet we must know that having Christ's mindset is not just a theory to achieve unity; it is what God has predestined for all Christians: to be like Jesus (Ro 8:29; 1 Pe 2:21). Then what is Jesus' mindset? We can find three specific aspects in verses 6-8.

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## **First, Jesus did not consider equality with God something to be grasped (6).**

Verse 6 begins, **“Who, being in very nature God...”** Jesus is God in nature. The word “nature” comes from the Greek word “mor-fay.” It means unchangeable basic essence. So the phrase that Jesus is “in very nature God” means that he is God with all of his divine attributes. John 1:1-4 shows that Jesus is the eternal God who existed in the beginning. He is the Creator and the Author of life. John 17:5 tells us that Jesus had glory together with the Father God before the creation of the world. Jesus is the eternal, almighty, glorious, majestic, holy and righteous God. Jesus had the right to exercise his authority and power as God for his own glory and purpose. But he did not consider equality with God something to be grasped (1984 NIV). This reveals Jesus’ humility that came from his inner mindset. He did not try to exalt himself but honored and obeyed his Father. Humility and pride are both attitudes toward oneself that reside in the deepest part of our being. One who exalts himself is proud. One who lowers himself is humble. We should be careful here to realize that humility does not mean having low self-esteem. Such people often engage in self-torture and self-condemnation. This is not humility. Rather, it is another expression of pride that is rooted in self-centeredness. We must see ourselves from God's point of view. We are sinners before God, but at the same time we are his precious children. So we should live with the attitude that we are forgiven sinners (1 Ti 1:15).

**Second, Jesus made himself nothing by becoming a man (7).** Let’s read verse 7 together, **“...rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.”** The words “he made himself nothing” do not mean that Jesus gave up his deity (Col 2:9). Rather it means that Jesus is fully God and fully man. In this way Jesus became a mediator between God and man (1 Ti 2:5). If a human being has power, he wants to use it to the maximum degree. Many children suffer because parents abuse their authority. They blow up and yell at their children, withhold proper care, and sometimes abandon them. Many leaders in this nation use their power for their own benefit, though it causes hurt to many others. But when Jesus became a man, he gave up his glory, authority and privileges as God. He took off the glorious garments of God, in order to wear the rugged clothes of men. He gave up the praises of angels, in order to receive man’s insults. He refused to be served, in order to serve sinners. The most honorable God became the most wretched man. The richest God became the poorest man. The Almighty wore the body of a weak man. The Eternal Being entered into time and space. We call it “incarnation.” Even among men, Jesus was not strong, rich, or privileged, but a lowly servant. So Isaiah said, “He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we

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**should desire him.”** (Isa 53:2b). During his messianic ministry, Jesus served all kinds of people with a humble mind. Jesus never used his power and authority as God to reveal his own glory. He always used his power and authority for the benefit of mankind. When Jesus fed five thousand people with five loaves and two fish, people tried to make him king by force. Then Jesus withdrew by himself to a mountain (Jn 6:15). In John 13:3-5, Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power and that he had come from God and was returning to God. So he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. Then he began to wash his disciples’ smelly feet one by one. In this way he showed an example to his disciples of how to humble oneself and become a servant.

**Third, Jesus humbled himself to be obedient to death (8).** Becoming a man and serving needy people was not enough. In order to fulfill God’s will, Jesus had to do more. God’s will was to save sinners from their sins. God is holy and righteous. He cannot endure sin. Also, God is love, and he loves sinful mankind. In order to save sinful mankind, a sacrifice of atonement was needed. In the Old Testament, people offered the blood of animals when they committed sins. God accepted the sacrifices and forgave them. But this was only a temporary solution. They pointed to a coming perfect sacrifice of the Lamb of God, which God prepared. Jesus willingly came into the world as the Lamb of God to do God’s will (Heb 10:5-10). Jesus obeyed the will of God to the point of death for our sins. In order to obey God’s will, Jesus suffered much and died, shedding his blood on the cross. He even became a curse. Hebrews 5:8-9 say, **“Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered, and once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.”** We learn here that real humility produces obedience. Obedience is not just following instructions. It requires us to die to ourselves. We cannot not just talk about dying, or pretend to die, but must actually die to ourselves with much prayer, as Jesus did in Gethsemane (Lk 22:42-44).

Did Jesus’ life end on the cross? No. **“God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that 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 acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”** (9-11). When Jesus obeyed the will of God to death, God raised him and made him Savior and Lord (Ac 2:36). Every knee will bow down before him. Jesus became the one we worship and praise (Rev 5:12).

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Today we have learned how we can be like-minded and become one. We cannot do so on a human basis. It is only possible when we learn Christ's humility from our hearts. Then we can grow in his image as mature servants of God. Furthermore, we can be like-minded and have real unity.