

Christ our motive (Phil. 2)

Part 1

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[00:00:00] We sometimes hear, beloved brethren, in these days, those who tell us that the Bible is out of date.

I need not argue against that here, because you all know very well that the Bible is right up to date.

And it doesn't matter what part you turn to, you will find something that will help you in the days in which we live. Fundamental truths that we find in the New Testament are being attacked and Satan is seeking to erode them.

You take the great epistle to the Romans, for instance, and the truth of justification by faith. There are those who want to tell us that we need something more than that, unless we have [00:01:04] received, for instance, the Holy Ghost manifesting by the gift of tongues. Well there's something wrong and defective. And there are those who tell us still, as they told in the Apostles' Day, we want to really be right with God.

We must at least keep the law of Moses, if not as our rule of faith, as our rule of belief for our justification, but as our rule of life.

Now the Apostle says that if we teach that kind of thing, Christ is become of no effect whatever.

He need never have come from heavenly glory, but he has come. [00:02:04] And so we stand by the truth of Romans and Galatians.

So then if you think a little of Colossians, here we have another thing that is being attacked today in the blessed person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Satan's greatest hatred of all is not reserved for you and for me, but for Christ himself. And if he can do anything to injure, in our thinking, the person of Christ, he will do it. It was so in the time when Paul wrote to the Colossians. Yes Christ was all right, and he was one of many excellent beings, exalted high, but he [00:03:03] was only one of many. And so Paul has to correct that thinking. He is God, God over all, blessed forever, always and ever the Son of God, but become a man for us and for our salvation.

That is being attacked also. The church should stand firm on the doctrine that Paul preaches concerning the blessed person of Christ.

And then if you think of Corinthians, the need for holiness in conduct, not only corporately as an assembly, we all belong to an assembly of some sort, but individually too.

[00:04:07] And in Corinthians, the apostle is most definite about the need for holiness. Now that also is being attacked by Satan.

The line is being rubbed out between what is right and what is wrong. And we tend, like those of whom it writes in the book of Judges, to do every man that which was right in his own eyes.

Then take the epistles of Timothy to Timothy. There we have directions, as Paul says, concerning how we should behave ourselves in the church of God.

That's what the truth was given for there, and we do well to heed that. [00:05:03] But very often we imagine that our behavior is our own affair in the church of God. The spirit that is going on in the world today is seeping in to the church of God.

But when we come to the epistles of the Philippians, there's something different here. And I want to speak to you on this lovely portion in the second chapter for a few minutes tonight.

And I want to speak of it to you so that you may go away and you may think over this portion and that your love for the Lord may be increased, and your devotedness to him may be even more.

But first of all, to give you a little background to this great scripture. [00:06:07] It towers over everything else in the epistle to Philippians. In fact, it's one of the great passages in the whole of the New Testament. We haven't time to go into that much tonight, but there it is. It towers over everything in this epistle.

The doctrine of the person of Christ, his moral glory towers high.

Paul wrote this epistle about nine years, nine or ten years after he had first visited Philippi.

I think he'd been there in the interval, but at the same time this was a comparatively [00:07:03] new assembly.

And Paul writes to them, not in a controversial kind of way, as for instance in Galatians or in Corinthians, not to argue for the person of the Christ at all, but merely to state the truth as to his humiliation, how he came and emptied himself, became of no reputation as the words are in our authorized version.

And he brings it in that their hearts with ours in a late day, might be strengthened and encouraged.

Well nine years is quite a long time and many things have happened in Philippi, no doubt. [00:08:07] We attempted to think for a little while, was Lydia still there? Was the jailer still there?

Or the slave girl who'd been so wonderfully converted and brought from the power of Satan unto God, was she still there? We do not know about that, but there it was the apostle writes to them. He writes this beautiful letter in the even delightful way of a friend to his own friends whom he could count upon.

They were very dear to his heart, perhaps the dearest of all whom he had visited. He'd been used to their conversion, many of them. [00:09:03] And so he just assumes that they'll be deeply interested in his words because they came from him.

And we know of course that those words written through the human instrument as Paul was, nevertheless are written by the Holy Spirit of God.

Now the way they arose was this, Epaphroditus was one of the Philippians and they in their ardent missionary interest, this is the mark or one of the marks, beloved friends of a healthy assembly, if there is missionary interest. One has noticed it so many times and it was there in Philippi. Once and again they had not only enjoyed the apostle's words but thought of his body and [00:10:07] his bodily needs.

And this is a thing that has to be thought of even in these days. And they'd thought of these things and they had sent once and again to his necessity. And the means of sending it were through Epaphroditus.

And the circumstances of the Philippian church were a happy set of circumstances.

From the very first, the first days that you read of in the Acts, they had stood with the apostle in the preaching of the gospel. And when he'd left them and gone away, as you know he had to, they went on with their [00:11:02] testimony. They were gospel conscious and that's a great thing isn't it?

And not only that, but there was love amongst them in a great degree and care for one another.

Now this is the kind of background to the epistle to the Philippians.

And I want just for one moment to draw a picture to you.

Perhaps you've heard me do this before but it helps my own thinking. I can see Epaphroditus coming to Rome where Paul was dwelling in his own hired house, nevertheless a prisoner.

And he comes with the contributions of the Philippians and hands them over to Paul. [00:12:09] And how Paul thanks God for it. Not only for the monetary value of those contributions but for the wonderful thought behind it. And he says this is fruit that abounds to your account. This is why I value it he says. This is the fruit of his own work in these dear Philippian saints.

And you can imagine Epaphroditus sitting down with Paul and you can see them chatting together.

And Paul says to Epaphroditus, now just tell me, tell me all you can about the Philippians. [00:13:01] And so Epaphroditus tells him of their energy, of their love for the gospel. He doesn't need to be told of their interest in him, it's there evident. And perhaps there is quite a lot because Paul mentions some of them by name. I'm quite sure he knew every one of them by name.

And then at the close of this conversation Paul says to Epaphroditus, now Epaphroditus, have you told me everything?

And perhaps Epaphroditus hesitates a moment, as you would have hesitated, as I would hesitate.

And he says, well Paul, as you've asked me, I just have to tell you that diligent as they are, [00:14:04] active as they are, there is something among them which worries me a little.

There is a tendency among them to be very active in their own affairs, little cliques of them.

And there's not quite the togetherness that there should be. Yes, they're diligent and they're occupied with their own affairs, but well, it would be nice if they were occupied more in the things of others.

If you study the epistle carefully, and you have to study it carefully, you will find that there are a number of references to this throughout the epistle. Paul in the first chapter uses the word all, and you might think at first sight that that's [00:15:08] quite unnecessary. It doesn't say much, the word all, but Paul does use it, and deliberately uses it, because he's emphasising this need for togetherness.

And then in the portion that we have just been reading, we have read together, Look not every man on his own things. One expositor, a very great man, has translated that, Look not every circle of you on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

And then he speaks, strangely enough, of strife and vainglory.

[00:16:01] These spring out of the same kind of thing, but we shall speak of them perhaps a little later on. And then in chapter 4, and we shall not tarry over this much tonight, in chapter 4 we read of two wonderful women, we have to say that, as we believe, energetic in the gospel, but who couldn't get on together in the right way.

As I've said so often, it happens there to be two sisters, they're both female names, but it could be two brothers as well. However, let that pass now. So what I'm illustrating now is that throughout this epistle there are indications of this very thing. And so it is that as Epaphroditus speaks about it, Paul makes up his mind that he will write to them a letter. [00:17:09] He was not one to ignore a thing like that. He must deal with it if he knows about it. They're far too dear to him to leave a thing like that alone. Why? Because, beloved friends, this thing is fundamental. We look for the Lord's blessing, and if we did but know it, there is a far greater reason why blessing is withheld because of this very spirit.

Paul has already spoken about himself and appealed to them in their love to him. But the one thing Paul doesn't do, and this is worth noticing, the one thing he doesn't do is to lecture them, [00:18:04] or to hector them and tell them how disgraceful this is.

They really should be in a different frame of mind. He doesn't do that. What Paul does is that he lifts the whole thing up onto a higher level. In the second chapter he displays Christ to them in all the moral glory of his humiliation.

How he came from heavenly glory and became a man, and even as a man humbled himself as the great example with a capital E to us all.

And so in the second chapter he begins, if there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love. [00:19:05] JND's version reverses those words. If there's any comfort in Christ, if there is such a thing as that, or if there's any consolation in love, and you Philippians know that there is. He says, if any fellowship of the Spirit, you've known what that is, haven't you? He says to them, if any affections, mercies, fulfill ye my joy that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one

accord, of one mind.

Now let me say at this point, that when you read the Epistle to the Philippians, and you read the mind that was in Christ Jesus, which is in this portion, [00:20:03] do remember that the word means attitude of mind.

In a company, and the company at Philippi must have been of a fair size, because Paul speaks of the bishops and deacons, that is more than one, so there must have been a considerable company there. In a company of that size, with people who are thinking in different ways, it is quite impossible always to think exactly the same thing, as it is with us, as it is with any company of people. We think a little differently. But, what the Apostle is striving for, is that each one of them might have the right attitude of mind of Christ. And he then knows that they will be brought closer together in their thinking, [00:21:08] and that will be a great blessing to them and to their testimony.

And so he says, Be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory.

Strife. What's that?

Well, it's when I, myself, assert myself, and I have my own opinion, I have my own thoughts, and without regard to others, I want to push those, I want to force them. Strife and vainglory.

[00:22:04] These are days when we are seeing such a lot of strife, aren't we? We know what it is for people to assert themselves and push their case.

And if they can't get it, they take violent means to get it. I'm not going to lecture you or talk about politics to you tonight, but I do say that this teaching that Paul has in the Epistle to the Philippians is right up to date.

And so he says, let nothing be done through strife or vainglory. This is seen in the world about, but alas, alas, it comes in to the ranks of Christians too.

Yes, we serve the Lord.

No one could accuse anyone of that kind of doing other than serving the Lord. [00:23:04] But we serve ourselves as well.

We want to be put on the map. We want to achieve something. We want others to know it. Then that brings out the flesh in other people and the result is strife. And the result of it all is our attempt at vainglory. Oh brethren, I ask you and I ask myself to challenge ourselves as to whether when we serve the Lord as these Philippians were doing, there's any thought in our minds of wanting to be somebody, wanting to be noted, known, and achieve some kind of reputation.

I don't believe God blesses that. And I believe that is the secret of why so often there's an absence of blessing. [00:24:04] And then he goes on and says, let it each esteem other better than themselves. I very well remember Mr. Dudley, Henry Dudley's father, in a Bible reading speaking of these words. And he said it doesn't mean that a very gifted brother will look upon a very simple and uneducated brother and count that brother better than himself in the matter of education and teaching. That would

be foolish to think that, wouldn't it? But what it does mean is that I have to look at my brother and I say, well he hasn't had the same opportunities as I've had.

But the way he's responded to those opportunities, the way he's served the Lord goes beyond me. [00:25:01] You have to take a sober judgment about that. It may be a very limited way of explaining it, but I have to leave it because there is much more to say. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Don't be selfish even in your service for the Lord and what you do for him. Think of others.

Let this mind be in you.

Now remember what we said about mind. Let this attitude of mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus. And then there comes, and this is really what I want to leave with you tonight, then there comes this wonderful revelation of our blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. We must go through it in some little detail, [00:26:03] but we cannot possibly exhaust what should be said about it. Who being in the form of God, he was God, manifestly God in heavenly glory, but though he was in the form of God, he thought it not—do follow these words carefully, won't you? Because it's in this way that the authorised version doesn't quite give the meaning—thought it not to be a thing that he grasped and held for himself and for his own enjoyment.

It's a good many words, isn't it, to explain it, but it's the only way you can do it. [00:27:04] Who being in the form of God thought it not robbery or a plunderer's prize, as someone else says, to be equal with God.

Just pause for a moment and think of the first Adam in the Garden of Eden. What did he do?

Well, Satan said, you shall be as gods, take this fruit and eat it, and you shall be as gods. And he grasped at that to be held for himself and his own enjoyment, because he thought it was a desirable thing, stepping out of the place that God had given him and put him in. And thus, he robbed God of what was his due, from he, Adam's own heart.

[00:28:03] We should possibly have reason to think again of Adam, the first Adam. The second Adam was so different.

Thought it not robbery, thought it not to be thing grasped at and held for himself, to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation.

Now, here I have to explain what most of you know already, that the real meaning of this word and phrase is that he emptied himself. This portion is called, in theological language, the self-emptying of Christ. The kenosis, the self-emptying of Christ.

But made himself of no reputation. Doesn't mean, of course, that he became disreputable. [00:29:02] Doesn't mean that he didn't care for his reputation before the eyes of men. Some people say, you know, I don't care what people think of me, I know what I think. It's wrong, utterly wrong. We ought to be very careful of what reputation we have in the eyes of men. Especially, as the Apostle reminds us on more than one occasion, to them that are without. Because if we don't have a good reputation, we can't preach to them, we can't influence them in any way. Doesn't mean that at all. It means that the Lord Jesus, in becoming a man, emptied himself. Emptied himself of what?

Not of his deity.

He was God, and he was man in one Christ. A mystery I own.

Something that you and I cannot understand, but that was true about him. [00:30:03] He was God and man in one Christ.

What did he, does it mean then that he emptied himself? Well it means that he laid aside all those things which he could have enjoyed, to become humble in every way, and become a man.

He was the highest in heaven, and he became a man.

Coming down to this earth of sin and sadness and sorrow and woe. And he came into this earth in such a humble way. It's a babe born in Bethlehem.

To be laid in a manger, and to grow quietly as a root out of a dry ground, as the Apostle says.

[00:31:12] He made himself of no reputation, took upon him the form of a servant, a bondservant. Not only did he take upon himself bondservice to his God and Father, but it was true bondservice. It was what it seemed to be.

And he was made in the likeness of men. Leaving angels on one side, unfallen beings like that, he left them on one side. And he was made a little lower in the scale of being to angels. He became a man, in order, as we shall go on to see, [00:32:03] that he might die and atone for our sins.

He became, he was made in the likeness of men.

And as a man he might have enjoyed a distinguishing place, either in Herod's palace or in the palace of the Roman Emperor. He might have been born, and there he might have gone. Like Moses was taken into the palace of Pharaoh. But no, he wouldn't do that.

Even as a man, he humbled himself.

Why was this?

Because he would be obedient to his God and Father, and that he might so act in this world, [00:33:03] in every stage of his pathway, that God would be glorified. But particularly, that he might be obedient to his Father's will, and that will was, as you know, that he might die. The holy throne of God had been flouted by men. There it was, the awful fact of sin and rebellion. Who could deal with it? There was only one, and that was the blessed Lord himself. And so at Calvary's cross, he was the true burnt offering, suffering there, because the will of God had been flouted, and sin had come in, and he took away sin.

He purged sin.

[00:34:01] He was also the sin offering, to bear your sins and mine, in his own body on the cross.

He became obedient, obedient unto the will of his God and Father, even unto death, death itself,

even the death of the cross. All my friends, here is a devotional thought. Most of us, if the time comes for us to pass into eternity, we have a deathbed that is at least under the care of our fellow men and women. Maybe in hospital, it may be at home, but there it is. There are those who care for us, because they love us so often. There are, of course, some who do not know that, but our blessed Lord died on the cross, [00:35:06] as a felon, as one who was rejected.

And people said he's not fit to live here. The only fit thing for him is to be crucified. Such a death, that even the Romans wouldn't allow it. Paul was never crucified on a cross, because he was a Roman citizen. He was beheaded. It was considered so horrible, so undignified for a Roman citizen, that they wouldn't allow it. But our blessed Lord was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

I think sometimes we are liable, in the very familiarity of the story, to forget this. But we should never forget the kind of death he died. And why was it that he died? [00:36:02] It was because he thought not of his own things, but of the things of others. That's why it was. He left heavenly glory thinking of you and me. He came and lived in this world, in such a way that poor sinners like you and I were, might come to him. Had he been born in Herod's palace, or in the imperial palace of Rome, how could poor sinners have drawn near to him? Would have been impossible. And so he humbled himself. That's the way he lived here in the world.

And then he died. He died this death of the cross, in order that you and I might be eternally blessed. He thought not of himself, but of us.

Do you see the point?

[00:37:02] As you think of what I have said about the Philippians, they were thinking some of them about themselves. But the apostle brings before them the highest example of all, the Lord Jesus himself. And if he humbled himself, what room is there for us to think of ourselves and not of others?

I believe, brethren, that if this mind that is in Christ Jesus were to characterise us all, and all the children of God, I'm not speaking merely of our fellowship, I'm speaking of all the children of God, I believe if this were true, the very world would be turned upside down by it.

I believe that the things of God would be so enjoyed by us [00:38:03] as they can never be enjoyed if there is a selfish spirit, if there's self-assertion and selfishness, thinking of ourselves.

But now, in the closing moments, I must finish this wonderful story. It's summed up very beautifully in the twelfth chapter of Hebrews. Do you remember what it says there? Christ Jesus, who for the joy that was set before him, what was that joy?

It wasn't the joy of returning to heaven. It wasn't the joy of living in heaven. It was the joy of doing his Father's will, of completing his Father's will.

Who for the joy set before him, I know there are other things involved, don't let me leave you with the impression that that's all, but there are many other things, but it was chiefly that, [00:39:02] the joy of doing his Father's will, as a man in this world, serving his God and Father in truest bond service. The joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the majesty on high.

Firstly, obedience.

Firstly, following the word and will of God, and then the exaltation after that.

So it was that the verse goes on, verses go on.

Wherefore, and this joins it on, unmistakably with what has just been said, wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, not because he was God, [00:40:05] but because he was the perfect man, and had all the way done his Father's will in perfect obedience, even unto death, the death of the cross. Wherefore, this is speaking of our Lord Jesus, more particularly as man, as you know, wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name. All my dear friends, yours and mine is not a lost cause. We are connected, we are in fellowship with, we are joined to one who is exalted at the right hand of the majesty on high.

We are privileged beyond all others to serve him, and live for him in this world. And so it is.

God hath highly exalted him, [00:41:01] and given him a name which is above every name. You're going to get a name one day if you're faithful to him. A secret name.

JND and his hymn speaks of it, doesn't it? It says, called by that secret name of undisclosed delight, blessed answer to reproach and shame, graven in the stone of white. But the blessed Lord was given this name, and at the name of Jesus, Jehovah the Saviour, every knee should bow, every knee should bow, of things in heaven, that is to say, saints and angels. You can read the revelation and find what is going to happen. And all the church of God is taken home, and we shall be around him in heavenly glory. [00:42:01] Yes, he'll be there in the midst, exalted, and every knee bowing to him. But not only in heaven, on earth. In a renewed earth, purged of sin, purged of suffering and sorrow, people of every tongues, people of every colour, people of every nation, will bow their knees to him throughout this earth. King of kings and Lord of lords. That's what he's going to be in a day that's to come. What an answer to the cross, wasn't it? When they said, we won't have this man to reign over us. And when in mockery the title was given, this is Jesus, the king of the Jews. Now, king of kings and Lord of lords, every tongue shall confess him, [00:43:01] every knee shall bow to him. Not only that, but under the earth too, for all beings will have to bow to him.

We need not say much about that, but there it is. In that verse, all beings, every created being, will have to bow to him one day.

What an answer, isn't it, to the cross. First the suffering and then the glory. First the obedience and then the exaltation.

And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

My friends, in a dark and dim and dismal day like today, with selfishness abounding on every hand, [00:44:01] we know that our Lord Jesus Christ is to be exalted. He's going to set everything right. Well, I'll leave this picture with you, just going back for one moment to the reason for it. You know, often, possibly on Lord's Day morning, we read these verses because they speak of the moral glory of the blessed Lord, and well it is that we should do so. But we forget that Paul is using this as the most powerful lever so that they should not assert themselves in their ways one with the other. That they should not think of their own things but of the things of each other, of others. And that the mind that

was in Christ Jesus, that attitude of mind which humbled himself and became of no reputation, and which would do the will of his God and Father, [00:45:01] even unto death, that that mind might be in us. We think sometimes that our Christian service is a matter of so much activity.

If we have one or two more things which will attract the people around us, well, we're going to get where we want to get. But my friends, I tell you this, that our spiritual state before God must be right. Then God will bless us. And that's what matters, isn't it? So I leave this with you. I feel that it's almost impossible to speak adequately of these things. So much more might be said and said better. But there it is. We have the person of the Lord Jesus before us. Let us go away and think of it, remember it, and let us be honest enough to face in his presence, [00:46:07] possibly on our knees, our own ways, and to see that we are really doing what we do for his sake entirely.

Then I'm sure that the Lord will begin to bless us for his name's sake.