

“The Great Example”

July 20, 2025

Philippians 2:5-11

I. Introduction

These seven verses are the most studied verses in Philippians and are some of the most studied passages of the whole Bible. Because these verses deal with Christ’s preexistence, His equality with God, His identity with humanity, and His exaltation after His resurrection, every word has been dissected and analyzed. Many scholars have gotten so intense regarding one word or one phrase that they have missed the reason Paul included these words in his letter to the Philippians. Using an old phrase, *they can’t see the forest because of the trees.*

Paul has just finished giving the ingredients for spiritual unity: 1) Do nothing out of selfish ambition; 2) Do nothing out of vain conceit; 3) Be humble; and 4) Don’t look only to your own interests but look also to the interests of others. If there is going to be unity in a church or among Christians in general, if there is going to be joy in a Christian’s heart, each believer’s eyes must be turned from himself and focused on the needs of others. This is the key word for unity: “*others.*”

If there is going to be unity, Christians must be humble and ready to serve one another. This doesn’t mean that a believer is at the beck and call of everyone else or that he is a “*religious doormat*” for everyone to walk over. Some people try to buy friends and maintain church unity by “*giving in*” to everyone else’s whims and wishes. None of this is what Paul was advocating. Christians are to serve others for the glory of God; as Paul wrote in **2 Corinthians 4:5**, “**For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.**” Because this is a hard concept to grasp and even harder to put into action, in today’s Scripture Paul gave “*The Great Example*”—Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ illustrates the four characteristics of a person with a submissive mind.

II. Characteristics of a Submissive Mind

A. A person with a submissive mind thinks of others, not himself. Paul began his example by writing, “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.” Since, as Christians, we have made Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior, our lives should follow His example; as Peter wrote in 1 Peter 2:21, “To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.”

Paul began by looking at eternity past as he wrote, “Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped.” Paul wrote that in eternity past Jesus Christ was God. By “nature” Paul meant that part of a person that is absolutely unchangeable. By nature, we are all human beings, nothing that is done to us or by us can change that. Our physical form may change as we grow from being a baby to an adult, but we are still human. By nature, Jesus was and is God—nothing can change that. John wrote about Jesus being God, turn to John 1:1-3, 14. Jesus was and is God.

As God, Jesus didn’t need anything. He had all the glory and praise of heaven. With God the Father and the Holy Spirit, as part of the Trinity, He created and reigned over the whole universe. Jesus had all the rights and privileges of God which He could never lose. Yet He refused to selfishly cling to (or grasp) His favored position as the divine Son of God. Jesus didn’t think of Himself; He thought of others. His outlook (or attitude) was that of unselfish concern for others. Because of His concern for others, because of His agape love for them, He didn’t leave heaven reluctantly, turn to Hebrews 12:2-3. Jesus joyfully left His heavenly privileges for the sake of others—for our sake.

It is this attitude of selfless giving of oneself and one’s possessions, power, and privileges that should characterize all who belong to Christ. Christians should be willing to loosen their grip on the blessings they have, which they have only because of Jesus Christ. Romans 8:17 reminds us that Christians are set apart from the world as children of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ. Yet believers must not hang on to those privileges and blessings with a “death grip.” Instead, like their Lord, they must hold them loosely and be willing to sacrifice them all for the benefit of others. “Others” is the key word in the vocabulary of the Christian who has a submissive mind.

B. A person with a submissive mind also serves others. “*Thinking of others*” requires more than just “*thought*,” it requires action and involvement. Jesus thought of others and took action; He got involved. A person with a submissive mind serves others. Jesus came to be a servant. Paul listed the steps Jesus took in order to serve. **First**, Jesus “**made himself nothing.**” Jesus laid aside His divine glory. Turn to **Matthew 17:1-8**. This is the glory and the worship of the saints and angels in heaven that Jesus temporarily laid aside. Jesus also laid aside His independent authority as God; in **John 6:38** Jesus said, “**For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.**” During His time on earth, Jesus voluntarily limited His divine attributes. He didn’t stop being omniscient, omnipresent, or omnipotent; but while He was on the earth, He limited His use of these attributes. This is why He said in **Matthew 24:36**, “**No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.**” Believers need to follow their Lord’s example and empty themselves of everything that would hinder their obedience and service to their Lord—the Lord Jesus Christ.

Second, Paul wrote that Jesus took the “**nature of a servant.**” Just as he existed “**in very nature God,**” Jesus now existed in the form of a servant—a bondservant to be precise. He didn’t merely put on a slave’s garment, so to speak; He actually became a slave in the fullest sense. Jesus laid aside His rights as God and became a servant; He claimed no rights as God the Son and He claimed no rights as the Son of Man. In **Matthew 20:28** He said, “**The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve.**”

Third, He became a human, in a sinless body. When Christ was born in Bethlehem, He entered into a permanent union with humanity from which there could be no escape. Jesus became exactly like all other human beings, having all the attributes of humanity. Jesus took upon Himself all the frailties, limitations, problems, and sufferings that any other man would experience. He was a genuine man among men. Writing of the Messiah, **Isaiah 53:3** said, “**He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.**”

Have you ever noticed as you read the four Gospels that it was Jesus who served others, not others who served Him? He was at the beck and call of all kinds of people—fishermen, harlots, tax collectors, the

sick, the sorrowing. In the Upper Room, when His disciples refused to minister to one another, Jesus got up, took a linen towel, and washed their feet ([John 13:1-17](#))! He took the place of the lowest of slaves. This was a submissive mind in action. Service to others is the 2nd mark of a submissive mind.

C. A person with a submissive mind sacrifices for others. Most people are willing to serve others if it doesn't cost them anything. But if there is a price to be paid, many suddenly lose interest. Paul wrote that Jesus became “[obedient to death—even death on a cross!](#)” Jesus’ submission took Him all the way to death. A person with a submissive mind sacrifices for others. Because Jesus’ mind was set entirely on God’s interests and the interest of others, He willingly and gladly became obedient—even to death on a cross. [Romans 5:6](#) says, “[You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.](#)”

God the Father didn’t force death upon God the Son—Jesus the Christ. It was the Father’s will, but it was the Son’s will to obey the Father. Jesus had free choice. In [John 10:18](#) Jesus said, “[No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.](#)” Jesus chose to die, to sacrifice himself for others. A person with a submissive mind lives for the glory of God and the good of others even to the point of being ready to serve and sacrifice, if necessary. If paying a price will honor Christ and help others, a submissive person is willing to do so. Sacrifice and service go together if service is to be true Christian ministry.

The test of a submissive mind is not just how much one is willing to take in terms of suffering, but rather how much one is willing to give in terms of sacrifice. Sacrifice is often necessary if there is going to be true growth and ministry in a Christian’s life. It is one of the paradoxes of the Christian life that the more we give, the more we receive; the more we sacrifice the more God blesses. [Turn to Malachi 3:10.](#)

[2 Corinthians 9:6](#) puts it this way, “[Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.](#)” BUT we must not bless others so that we can be blessed; submission must give us joy because it makes us more like Jesus Christ. This means sharing His joy as we share in His sufferings. Is it costing you anything to be a Christian?

D. Finally, a person with a submissive mind glorifies God. This is the great goal of all that we do—to glorify God. Paul wrote in [1 Corinthians 10:31](#), “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.” In [Philippians 2:3](#) he wrote, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit.” The kind of rivalry that pits Christian against Christian and ministry against ministry is not spiritual, nor is it satisfying. It is vain, empty, selfish. Jesus submitted Himself for others, and God highly exalted Him; the result of this exultation is “[to the glory of God the Father.](#)”

Jesus’ exaltation began with His resurrection. When men buried the body of Jesus that was the last thing any human hands did to Him. From that point on, it was God who worked. Men may have given Jesus names of ridicule and scorn, but the Father gave Him a glorious name—“[the name that is above every name.](#)” He arose from the dead and then returned in victory to heaven, ascending to the Father’s throne.

Jesus’ exaltation includes sovereign authority over all creatures “[in heaven, on earth, and under the earth.](#)” All will bow to Him—[Isaiah 45:23](#) says, “[By myself I have sworn, my mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked: Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear.](#)” One day all will bow before the Lord Jesus Christ and confess or agree that He is Lord. It is possible today for people to bow and confess that Jesus is Lord and Savior and then according to [Romans 10:9](#) they will receive eternal life. To bow before Him now means salvation; to bow before Him at the judgment means condemnation.

The whole purpose of Jesus’ submissive mind was to bring glory to God. As Jesus faced the cross, the glory of the Father was on His mind; in [John 17:1](#) Jesus prayed, “[Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you.](#)” The work of salvation is much greater and grander than simply the salvation of a lost soul—great as that may be. Salvation—our salvation has as its ultimate purpose of bringing glory to God ([Ephesians 1:4-6, 12, 14](#)). A person with a submissive mind glorifies God, sacrifices for others, serves others, thinks of others, not himself.

III. Conclusion

As he lives for others, the person with a submissive mind must expect sacrifice and service; but in the end, it is going to lead to glory. Peter wrote in [1 Peter 5:6](#), “Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.” Joseph, Jacob's son, suffered and served for 13 years; but then God exalted him and made him the second ruler in Egypt. David was anointed king when he was quite young. He then experienced years of hardship and suffering, much at the hands of King Saul, but at the right time, God exalted him as king of Israel. The Apostle Paul submitted himself to God. His whole life was filled with hardships and sufferings. God exalted him when he was called home to heaven. Being a submissive Christian doesn't mean that life will be a bed of roses, Paul wrote in [2 Timothy 3:12](#), “In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”

The joy of the submissive mind comes not only from helping others, and sharing in the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, but primarily from the knowledge that we are glorifying God. We are letting our light shine through our good works in the midst of dark times, and this glorifies the Father in heaven. As Jesus said in [Matthew 5:16](#), “Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.” We may not see the glory today, but we shall see it when Jesus comes and rewards His faithful servants.

Are you following the Great Example, Jesus' example? Who is your Lord? In [Luke 16:13](#), Jesus said that you can't serve two masters, so who is your master? If you claim that Jesus is your Lord and Savior, does your life prove it? Are you ready to serve whenever and wherever God calls you? What are you willing to sacrifice for others; for God? Does all that you do bring glory to God or are you just fooling yourself? If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you? Where is your hope?