

STUDY GUIDE

LETTERS FROM PRISON: PHILIPPIANS (Week 5)

A MESSAGE SERIES AT NEW CITY CHURCH

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BRIAN KRUCKENBERG

Philippians 2:5-11

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.

Background

Even as we get deeper into the 21st century's medical advancements, it is difficult for us to imagine taking on someone else's mind. A heart transplant is one thing...but having the mind of someone is something different entirely. Yet, that is what Paul tells us to do in this passage, to have the mind of Christ. Just how do we do that? Let's find out.

Jesus is God.

6 Jesus, though he was in the form of God (being in the very nature), did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,

For our minds to be changed by this passage, we will need to address three claims that Paul is making about Jesus: 1. He is God; 2. He was Man (the God-Man) and 3. He came as a servant. In Verse 6, Paul claims that Jesus was in the *very nature God*. This means "the complete essence of something that makes it what it is." Jesus has the very substance, characteristics and being of God.

This is a big statement and it causes many to claim that the Jesus story in the Bible is a myth developed overtime. Many gladly admit that Jesus was a teacher of peace and love and that is all he was. Then, after a period of time, legend grew into this belief that Jesus was God. As good as that may sound, this theory does not take into account what the scripture says.

This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God. - John 5:18

Further, study of verses 6-11 of Philippians shows that this passage is either a poem, a hymn or confession that Paul is quoting.¹ Paul wrote Philippians approximately 25 years after the death of Christ and he is quoting an earlier writing that expresses Jesus' divinity. It is apparent from the claims of Jesus and His followers that Jesus claimed to be God and was recognized as such by His followers.

Questions for Reflection

1. Is it difficult for you to believe that a man was also God?
2. Think about yourself. What different roles do you fill? For instance, are you a father and a son or mother and daughter?

¹ Bob Utley, *Paul Bound, the Gospel Unbound: Letters from Prison*, Bible Lessons International, Marshall, Texas (1997).

The famous theologian, [St. Augustine](#), said that a non-trinitarian God would be defective in that a God who never loved anybody until He created humans would be creating to fill a need. But, a trinitarian God has always had relationship and always had love so a trinitarian God would not create to receive but to give love.

3. If you believed this, how would that impact how you gave of your time in service of others? In other words, how would this impact your mind?

Jesus is Man.

6 who, though he was in the form of God (being in the very nature God), did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant,

Paul writes that not only was Jesus God, but He was also man. Not only that, the verb tense used here (imperfect) communicates that Jesus became man and He DID NOT STOP being God. He continued to be God when He became human.

If this is true, it must change our mind in a few ways. First, it shows us that there is value to all aspects of life. The spiritual is not more important than they physical and vise versa. By God becoming man, we see a God who is willing to “get His hands dirty.” He does this in the act of creating us, in becoming human and again at the end of the Bible in building a new city. This is teaching that the physical and spiritual are both being redeemed by God through Jesus.

Further, because God became human, he can understand us. Have you been betrayed or lonely? So has he. Have you ever cried at the funeral of a friend? So has He. Have you had a prayer answered “no?” So has He!

Questions for Reflection.

4. Is it difficult for you to understand how a transcendent God, who created the universe, can relate to your most intimate feelings?
5. Do you believe that God became a human?

Servant of All.

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.

It is one thing to think about God becoming human, it is another thing to imagine Him coming as a servant. He could have come and reigned as a king on earth. But, He was born in a stable and died a thief's death on a cross even though He was convicted of no wrongdoing. Jesus, as God, had every right to come and rule and proclaim His greatness but He humbled Himself and emptied Himself of those rights.

Questions for Reflection.

6. Is it difficult for you to surrender your rights?
7. What would it mean for you to serve others and not worry about your name, significance or success?

The Mind of Christ.

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. - Philippians 2:8-9

So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing.

For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. - John 5:19

Questions for Reflection.

Read those passages again. Slowly.

8. Do you see that word, “therefore?” What does therefore mean? Don’t over-think it.

Because Jesus became *NOTHING and emptied* Himself, HE was given a great name. ***Because*** He did this He was able to get all of His power from God. He gave up all of His authority and relied on God. The world teaches us that we need to make our own name...the Bible teaches that when we become nothing and serve and give our lives to God, THEN we become something. Then, we can do great things.

Consider this:

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. - John 14:12

10 The things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.11 For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.12 Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God... 16 "For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ. - 1 Corinthians 2:10-16.

Questions for Reflection.

9. What does it mean that we can “do greater things” than Jesus did?

10. Why do many followers of Jesus fail to believe Him for supernatural things when His word promises He can do these things through us?
11. When you think about doing “great things,” whose name and fame is it for?