

Imitating The Incarnation

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Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men (Philippians 2:5-7).

In this passage of Scripture, the Apostle Paul is admonishing us to live in our daily conduct in a manner that is becoming the gospel of Christ. He is encouraging us to unity of Spirit, mutual love and affection, humility, and lowliness of mind, and real care and concern for one another. He is telling us how a believer should live in this world, and why. He not only shows us how we ought to live as believers, but he gives us a supreme example to follow. The whole basis of his appeal is that which the Lord Jesus Christ has done for us.

Consolation in Christ

This world is a place of pain, sorrow, trouble, and grief. Job said, 'Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward (Job 5:7). 'Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble' (Job 14:1). The sons of Adam, as they have known life, have known trouble. Because man has defiled the world with sin, the world brings sorrow upon man. Sin is man's nature, and sorrow is his reward. Even those who are redeemed by Christ and born again by almighty grace are not exempted from pain, sorrow, trouble, and grief in this life. Jeremiah, God's faithful servant, is known to us as 'the weeping prophet'. He said, 'I am the man that hath seen affliction ... He hath filled me with bitterness, he hath made me drunken with wormwood' (Lamentations 3:1, 15). Our Lord told us very plainly, 'In the world ye shall have tribulation' (John 16:33).

You read your Bible day after day, searching for consolation. You call upon the Lord in prayer, seeking consolation. You go listen to God's servant preach, hoping for some word from God that might give you consolation. Where can a troubled soul find consolation? The Apostle Paul tells us, 'If there be therefore any consolation in Christ'. The word 'consolation' means 'comfort' or 'confidence'. Consolation is the most soothing, most desirable, most precious thing in all the world to the heart full of trouble and sorrow.

Where can I find consolation? Is there any consolation in Christ? Paul asked the question rhetorically. Of course there is, and you who know Him

have experienced it often. The fact is, true consolation, such as can reach the heart, is found nowhere except in Christ. He is here saying, if you have experienced consolation in Christ, show that experience by loving your brethren. If you have found sweet encouragement in the gospel of Christ, show that sweetness and encouragement to your brethren. If you expect consolation in Christ, console your brethren in Christ. Never once does Paul take us back to the law as a basis or rule to motivate us. His whole argument is drawn from the gospel. He presses us to our duty of love in a most tender and loving manner. He says, 'If there be therefore any consolation in Christ'. Consolation is one of heaven's most precious gifts. Like all the gifts of heaven, it is in Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ provides strong and everlasting consolation for those whom He has bought with His own precious blood.

The Holy Spirit, during the gospel age, is revealed to us as the Comforter. It is the Holy Spirit's business to cheer and console the hearts of God's people. It is true, He does convince us of sin. He does illuminate and instruct us. But the primary work for which He has been sent into the world is to lift up those who are pressed down, make glad the hearts of His renewed ones, and to bring consolation to God's elect.

The Holy Spirit is the Comforter of the church. This age is peculiarly the age of the Holy Spirit, in which Christ cheers our hearts not by His personal presence, as He shall do in eternal glory, but by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts as the Comforter. The Holy Spirit is the Comforter, but Christ is the Comfort. The Holy Spirit consoles, but Christ is the Consolation. If I might use a metaphor, the Holy Spirit is the Physician, but Christ is the Medicine.

The Spirit of God comforts the people of God by taking the things of Christ and applying them to our hearts. The Holy Spirit heals our wounded spirits and aching hearts by applying the blood and grace and power of Christ to us. He cheers our souls by showing us the things of Christ. Here is a blessed promise to cheer our souls, 'I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you' (John 14:18).

Our Lord's history is a long and eventful one, but every step of it yields comfort to the children of God. If we trace His steps from the highest throne of glory to the cross of deepest woe, and then follow Him through the grave and up again to the shining majesty of heaven, throughout every part of that wondrous pathway, we will surely find the flowers of consolation growing in abundance.

Love's incentive

Next, Paul says, 'If any comfort of love'. If we enjoy the comfort and strength of God's love, the everlasting love of the Father, the redeeming love of the Son, the quickening love of the Spirit, and the brotherly love of grace, that love which is so pleasant and delightful, then we should give to

one another the comfort and strength of mutual love. If we have any genuine grounds of hope in Christ, founded upon His Person, His righteousness, His death and His intercession, then we ought to comfort one another.

Have you found any comfort in God's love for you in Christ? If you have found comfort in Christ's love, then abound in that love toward others. Share that comfort with your brethren. Have you been comforted by the love of your brethren for you? Then show love to your brethren.

'If any fellowship of the Spirit.' If we have been brought into fellowship with God and one another by the Spirit of grace, then we should strive to maintain and build upon that fellowship.

'If any bowels and mercies.' If we have any real depth of affection, if we have any real compassion and concern for Christ, His glory, and one another, if our religion is real, if it is more than lip service to God, let us show to each other love and concern. If these things are not in us, if they do not flow from our hearts to the hearts and lives of our brethren, then our religion, our profession of faith, our doctrinal orthodoxy, and moral uprightness is nothing but a vain show of hypocrisy!

Here is the incentive for Christian love. The love which we have experienced from Christ, from our brethren, and from God's servants should be displayed by us to others.

Love directed

Paul gives us three general directives to follow. He is saying, if you would show the love of Christ to one another, here are three things which must characterise your attitude and actions toward one another. If you would live in a manner becoming the gospel of Christ and adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour, follow these three principles of conduct.

The first thing that should characterise God's people is unity. Like those early disciples, every church family should be known by their unity, their oneness of heart, of mind, and of purpose. Let us have the same love. Let us love the same things, have our minds set on the same objects, and see to it that our hearts pull together in the same direction. If these things are in you, Paul says, 'Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind' (v. 2). Nothing brings greater joy to God's servants than the sight of God's people displaying love, affection, and concern for one another. Let the heirs of heaven, the children of God, believers in Christ, and the family of God be likeminded; one in love, affection, and care, one in unity, harmony, and peace, one in mind, purpose, and desire! These things reveal the reality of our faith. These are the marks, fruit, and evidences of inward grace.

Paul is saying brethren should be known for their love to one another.

Believers are the family of God. A family, if it is what it ought to be, is bound together and made strong by cords of family love. Paul reminds us that as we have been the objects of love, we should be the dispensers of love.

Second, lowliness of mind and disposition should characterise the people of God. 'Let nothing be done through strife and vain glory' (v. 3). Nothing should be done through strife, or passion, or contention. Nothing should be done in pride. There is no greater enemy to the unity of the church, the gospel of Christ, and brotherly love than pride and self-importance among the Lord's professed people. Anything that is done through strife dishonours God. Anything that divides brethren is a reproach to Christ. Anything that is born of contention casts a slur upon the gospel of the grace of God. The source of strife, division, and conflict between brethren is always vain-glory, pride, self-seeking, self-serving pride. Love is not selfish, but self-denying and self-sacrificing. Believers live not for themselves, but for the glory of God, the gospel of God, and the people of God.

'In lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves' (v. 3). We should quickly observe the defects and infirmities of our own, but readily overlook and make allowances for the defects which our brethren may have. We must esteem each of our brethren in Christ more highly than we esteem ourselves. We know ourselves best, and we know our own worthlessness and corruption. Any man who knows himself will not find it hard to esteem others highly and himself lowly.

Third, Christian love should characterise the people of God. Here Paul is talking about the fellowship and unity of the church. 'Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others' (v. 4). He is saying, look not every man upon his own interests, but upon the interests and welfare of his brethren. Do not ask, 'Is this the best thing for me?' Rather ask, 'Is this the best thing for my brethren?' He is saying the way to promote unity, peace, fellowship, and love is not to look out for yourself, but look out for one another. Do not seek your praise; seek somebody else's praise. Do not promote yourself; promote someone else. Do not be concerned about your own feelings; be concerned about your brother's feelings. We must be severe on our own faults but charitable on those of others. Love is helpful, it really seeks the welfare of God's people.

Love's motivation

Why should we be willing to abase ourselves? Why should we set aside our own desires, ambitions, and preferences for the sake of others? Upon what grounds can anyone make such an appeal? Do you need a motive for such a manner of life as Paul has described? Look to your Saviour, your Redeemer, your Lord.

'Let this mind be in you', this loving, self-abasing, self-sacrificing mind,

‘which was also in Christ Jesus’ (v. 5). In order to redeem us, the Son of God lived and died in lowliness and humility. Words cannot express the depths of His humiliation. He came ‘not to be ministered unto, but to minister and give his life a ransom for many’. Our Lord thought not of Himself, but of us. He served not Himself, but us. In His life, He left us an example to follow. He says, ‘Do as I have done’. This must be our rule of life. ‘Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.’

Who is the Lord Jesus Christ? ‘Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God’ (v. 6). Paul assures us that Jesus Christ is God. He is declaring that the Man Christ Jesus is the very nature and essence of God, the express image of His Person. The Man, who is our Redeemer, is our God. Because He is God, our Lord Jesus justly claimed equality with God in all things. The Man Christ Jesus is Himself God almighty, God the eternal Son.

What has the Lord Jesus Christ done? He ‘made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men’ (v. 7). The Son of God emptied Himself of all the brilliance of His glorious Person which had forever shone forth from Him in the courts of heaven as the Son of God. He robed Himself in human flesh, concealing His glory as God from all eyes except the eyes of faith. He was not forced into servitude, but He willingly ‘took upon him the form of a servant’, by His own voluntary act. He was, in reality, in His inmost soul, a servant in voluntary subjection to the Father. Throughout the days of His life upon the earth our Saviour lived in total subjection to God as His Servant.

Paul tells us that God’s own Son ‘was made in the likeness of men’. Our Lord Jesus was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners. His human nature was incapable of sin. Yet, it was a real human nature. Like us, He ate when He was hungry, slept when He was weary, wept when He was in sorrow, and cried out to God when He was in agony of soul. He knew all the weaknesses, pains, temptations, and fears of humanity. The only thing about humanity he never knew was sinning.

Jesus Christ, our Saviour, really is one of us. The Son of God, assumed human nature, lived in righteousness as the Representative of His people, suffered and died at Calvary as the sinner’s Substitute, satisfied the law and justice of God for all who believe, rose from the dead, and ascended to the throne of God. Our heart leaps within us when we think of the coming of Immanuel! God with us, in our nature, brings the dawning of hope to sinners. ‘Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.’

‘And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross’ (v. 8). We owed obedience to the law which we could not render. But Christ rendered that obedience and paid that debt for us. Our Lord Jesus rendered obedience not only to the law of God and the Word of God, but to the entire will of God. It is Christ’s obedience to God as our Representative which constitutes our

righteousness, justification, and redemption. Our Saviour went to the cursed tree with joy and delight in His soul, to suffer the wrath of God for us, to do His Father's will.

What is the result of our Lord's humiliation? 'Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father' (vv. 9-11). Because of His humiliation, His obedience, His sufferings, and His death as our Substitute, the Lord Jesus Christ has been exalted to the throne of universal dominion (Isaiah 53:10-12; John 17:2).

Love's example

By means of Christ's incarnation, peace and pardon are accomplished. Now, God can be just and the justifier of all who believe. Here, in the incarnate God-Man, every attribute of God is revealed in perfect harmony; the law of God is magnified, the grace of God in the gospel is revealed, the sinner is saved, and God is glorified.

We should meditate upon our Lord's incarnation and imitate the example of love, humility, and compassion He has given us in His incarnation. As we imitate Him, we will both honour our God and do good to our brethren.

May God give us grace that we might follow our Lord's example, ever submitting to and delighting in obedience to our Father's will. 'Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.'

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