

Nuggets and Gems from the Bible

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AS OUR
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TAKING CHRIST AS OUR PATTERN

In [Philippians 2](#) Paul appeals to the Philippian saints to make his joy full. This appeal is not confined to the first four verses of [chapter two](#), but includes all of [2:1-16](#). It concludes with Paul's word about holding forth the word of life so that in the day of Christ he could boast that he had not run in vain nor labored in vain.

CHRIST AS THE PATTERN WITHIN US

In [Philippians 2:5-8](#) Paul presents Christ as our pattern. This pattern is not only objective, but also subjective.

Where is this Christ who is our pattern? Is He in heaven, or is He in us? [Philippians 2:9](#) indicates clearly that God has highly exalted Christ. Thus, there can be no doubt that as our pattern Christ is in heaven. He has been exalted to the highest peak in the universe, where God is. This is related to the objective aspect of the pattern. However, if Christ were only in the third heaven objectively, how could we take Him as our pattern

today? How could we, who are on earth, follow One who has been exalted and who is now in heaven? It would be impossible. In order for us to take Christ as our pattern, this pattern must be subjective.

[Philippians 2:12](#) indicates that the pattern is subjective: “So then, my beloved, even as you have always obeyed, not only as in my presence, but now much rather in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” How is it possible for us to work out our own salvation? If we could work out our salvation, would that not make salvation a matter of our own works? Suppose I fall into a pit and someone rescues me. That is salvation. But if I succeed in delivering myself, that is not salvation, but my own working. Since salvation is not of works, but of grace, what does Paul mean by telling us to work out our salvation?

The key to understanding Paul’s word is to know the meaning of salvation in this verse. Salvation here is not salvation from the lake of fire. Rather, it refers to what Paul has already said about salvation earlier in this Epistle. The words “so then” in [verse 12](#) indicate that what Paul says in this verse is a consequence of what has gone before. Working out our salvation is the result

of taking Christ as our pattern, as seen in the preceding verses. As our pattern, Christ is our salvation. However, this salvation needs to be worked out by us.

In order for this to be accomplished in our experience, the pattern must be subjective to us as well as objective. If it were only objective, it could not be the salvation worked out by us. The salvation here is not the salvation we receive; it is the salvation we work out. The salvation we receive is the salvation from God's condemnation and from the lake of fire. There is no need for us to work out that kind of salvation. The salvation here in Philippians is salvation of another kind, or of a different degree. It is higher than that mentioned in [Acts 16:31](#), where the jailer is told that if he believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, he and his household will be saved. The salvation in [Philippians 2:12](#) is actually a living Person. This Person is the very Christ whom we live, experience, and enjoy. A pattern which is only objective could not be our salvation in this way. The fact that salvation is a living Person and that this Person is our pattern indicates that the pattern is subjective as well as objective.

Another reason for saying that the pattern is subjective as well as objective is related to the

fact that the book of Philippians is a book on the experience of Christ. Anything that is a matter of spiritual experience must be subjective. Based upon this principle and upon the context of the book of Philippians as a whole, Christ as the pattern is not only objective, but also subjective and experiential.

Furthermore, following his word about working out our salvation, Paul goes on to say, “For it is God who operates in you both the willing and the working for His good pleasure” ([Phil. 2:13](#)). The word “for” at the beginning of [Philippians 2:13](#) indicates that God’s operating in us is related to our working out our own salvation with fear and trembling. God operates in us both the willing and the working for His good pleasure. Surely the working in [verse 13](#) refers to the working out in [verse 12](#). We may confess that we are not able to work out our own salvation. Yes, in ourselves we are not able. But God, the One operating in us, is able. Since He is operating in us both the willing and the working, we can work out our own salvation. Paul’s word about God operating in us is a further indication that the pattern is subjective as well as objective. Doctrinally, the pattern is objective; experientially, it is very subjective.

COOPERATION, NOT IMITATION

In [Philippians 2](#) Paul does not charge us to take the objective Christ as our pattern and then imitate Him. Trying to imitate Christ in this way is like a monkey trying to imitate a human being. We should not take [verses 5 through 8](#) out of context. When we consider these verses in context, we see that the pattern is our salvation and that this salvation is God Himself operating in us to save us in a practical way. Although in ourselves we cannot work out our salvation, the One who is able is now operating in us to will inwardly and to work outwardly. Our responsibility is to cooperate with Him. When we cooperate with God's operation in us, we take Christ as our pattern.

THE MIND WHICH WAS IN CHRIST

Let us now consider [verses 5 through 8](#) in more detail. In [verse 5](#) Paul says, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.” The Greek words translated “let this mind be in you” can also be rendered “think this in you.” The word “this” refers to the counting and regarding

in verses 3 and 4. This kind of thinking, mind, attitude, was also in Christ when He emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, and humbled Himself, being found in fashion as a man (vv. 7-8). To have such a mind requires us to be one with Christ in His inward parts (Phil. 1:8). To experience Christ, we need to be one with Him to such an extent, that is, in His tender inward feeling and in His thinking.

THE STEPS OF CHRIST'S HUMILIATION

Philippians 2:6 says, “Who subsisting in the form of God did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped.” The Greek word rendered subsisting denotes existing from the beginning. It implies the Lord’s eternal preexistence.

The word “form” refers to the expression, not the fashion, of God’s being (Heb. 1:3). It is identified with the essence and nature of God’s Person and thus expresses His essence and nature. This refers to Christ’s deity.

In **Philippians 2:6** Paul tells us that Christ did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped. Although the Lord was equal with God, He did not consider this equality a treasure to be grasped and retained. Rather, He laid aside the

form of God, not the nature of God, and emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave.

EMPTYING HIMSELF AND TAKING THE FORM OF A SLAVE

Verse 7 goes on to say that Christ “emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming in the likeness of men.” When Christ emptied Himself, He laid aside what He possessed—the form of God. The word “form” in verse 7 is the same word as used for the form of God in verse 6. In His incarnation, the Lord did not alter His divine nature, but only His outward expression of the form of God to that of a slave. This was not a change of essence; it was a change of state. The word “becoming” indicates entering into a new state.

BECOMING IN THE LIKENESS OF MEN

According to verse 7, Christ became in the “likeness of men.” The form of God implies the inward reality of Christ’s deity; the likeness of men denotes the outward appearance of His humanity. He appeared outwardly to men as a man, but inwardly He had the reality of deity.

HUMBLING HIMSELF AND BECOMING OBEDIENT UNTO THE DEATH OF THE CROSS

Verse 8 continues, “And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient even unto death, and that the death of a cross.” When Christ became in the likeness of men, entering into the condition of humanity, He was found in fashion as a man by men. The word “fashion” implies the outward guise, the semblance. What Christ looked like in His humanity was found by men to be in fashion as a man.

Being found in fashion as a man, Christ humbled Himself. First He emptied Himself by putting aside the form, the outward expression, of His deity and becoming in the likeness of men. Then He humbled Himself by becoming obedient even unto death. Christ was God with the expression of God. Although He was equal with God, He put aside this equality and emptied Himself by taking the likeness of men. This indicates that He became a man through incarnation. Then, being found in the appearance of a man, He humbled Himself. This means that when He was a man, He did not insist on anything. Rather, He humbled

Himself to the point of dying on the cross. This is Christ as our pattern.

Humbling Himself was a further step in emptying Himself. Christ's self-humbling manifests His self-emptying. The death of the cross was the climax of Christ's humiliation. To the Jews this was a curse ([Deut. 21:22-23](#)). To the Gentiles it was a death sentence imposed upon malefactors and slaves ([Matt. 27:16-17, 20-23](#)). Hence, it was a shameful thing ([Heb. 12:2](#)).

The Lord's humiliation involves seven steps: emptying Himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming in the likeness of men, humbling Himself, becoming obedient, being obedient even unto death, and being obedient unto the death of the cross.

LIVING A CRUCIFIED LIFE

The pattern presented in these verses is now the life within us. This life is what we call a crucified life. The seven steps of Christ's humiliation are all aspects of the crucified life. Although Christ had the expression of deity, He laid aside this expression. However, He did not lay aside the reality of His deity. He laid aside the higher form, the form of God, and took on a much lower form, the form of a slave. In this, He emptied

Himself. Surely this is a mark of a crucified life. Then, after becoming a man and being found in the appearance of a man, Christ humbled Himself even unto the death of the cross. This was the crucified life lived out in a full and absolute way.

Christ is not only an outward pattern for us; He is also the life within us. As this inner life, He would have us experience Him and thereby live a crucified life. In this crucified life there is no room for rivalry, vainglory, or self-exaltation. On the contrary, there is self-emptying and self-humbling. Whenever we experience Christ and live Christ, we automatically live such a crucified life. This means that when we live Christ, we live the One who is the pattern of a crucified life. Then we also shall empty ourselves and humble ourselves.

If we did not have the crucified life within us, we could never live according to the pattern presented in [Philippians 2](#). Only the crucified life can live such a pattern. If we still do things out of rivalry and vainglory or are still ambitious to be leaders or elders, we are not living a crucified life. We are not emptying ourselves or humbling ourselves. However, we have a life within us that truly is a self-emptying and self-humbling life.

This life never grasps at something as a treasure. Instead, it is always willing to lay aside position and title.

THE PATTERN BECOMING OUR SALVATION

When the pattern in [Philippians 2](#) becomes our inward life, the pattern becomes our salvation. Then we are saved from rivalry and vainglory. If the Philippians were not willing to live according to this pattern, they could not make Paul's joy full. He would still be troubled by their rivalry and vainglory. But if they were willing to live the crucified life, a life that always empties itself and humbles itself, not grasping anything as a treasure, they would have the genuine experience of Christ. Their experience of Christ as such a pattern and inward life would make the apostle extremely happy.

Living a crucified life shows that toward the apostles we have encouragement in Christ, consolation of love, fellowship of spirit, and tenderheartedness and compassions. Only when we live a crucified life can we make the apostles happy and cause their joy to be full. In prison Paul was not concerned with how he was treated by others. His concern was whether or not the believers

would take Christ as their pattern and live a crucified life. This was the desire of Paul's heart, and only this would make his joy full.

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