

Christ is the Model

DUANE KELDERMAN

In the long history of the Christian Church, a lot of ink has been spilled on the question: Who is Jesus Christ; and how does Christ actually change me and how I live? The first verses of Philippians 2 are probably the most revealing verses in the whole Bible for answering those two questions. Stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

DUANE KELDERMAN

And I am Duane Kelderman. We live in an age where a lot of people know more than ever before about other religious traditions; and of course, the more we become familiar with great world religions, the more we get driven back to the question: What really is at the core – the heart – of the Christian religion? What sets the Christian religion apart from other world religions? There is very little doubt that one of the answers to that question is Christianity's teaching that Jesus Christ was the son of God; that Jesus Christ was God.

DAVE BAST

Yes; I do not think there is any argument about that. It is not just one of the things that sets us apart, it is *the* thing. This man, Jesus of Nazareth, was at the same time the true, living God – the one true God of heaven and earth, which is simply staggering – simply astonishing. We are too used to it so it does not strike us as dramatically as it should – as powerfully as it should, but that is it; that is our faith.

In this series that we are doing now on the book of Philippians, Duane, we are focusing on the Christ-centered life. While the reason we center our lives on Christ is not merely because he was a wonderful person or a great human teacher, it is because it is only right that everyone should center their life on God, and he is God.

DUANE KELDERMAN

Exactly. A lot of times we have an idea of an important doctrine of the Church, like Jesus is the son of God, but we are not necessarily able to locate a scripture passage that affirms that, and this is just such a classic passage, and one of the most important – it is not the only passage, but it is a key passage for affirming who Jesus Christ is. I am just going to read from some verses in Philippians 2. He has just made this call to live in a certain kind of way, and then he says in verse 5:

In your relationships with one another have the same attitude of mind Christ Jesus had. ⁶Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage. ⁷Rather, he (that is Christ) made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

There is the affirmation right there that he is both God and human.

DAVE BAST

Right; and it is probably, as scholars tell us, language taken from an early Christian hymn. It may be that Paul wrote these verses, it may be that he is quoting them because they were used in worship, but it certainly is exalted language. It is poetry, but the meaning – the substance of it – is just mind-blowing. Paul says that Jesus Christ existed long before he was born in the manger in a stable in Bethlehem. He existed from all eternity as God, and he was in his very innermost being, God – in very nature is the translation that we read.

Everything that God was and is and ever will be, Jesus was and is and ever will be. Wow, what can you say?

DUANE KELDERMAN

Yes, and now Paul goes right on to say something about not just who Christ is, but now what has he done? Verse 8:

Being found in appearance as a human being, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. It is the work of Christ, not just the person of Christ. Both of these things are so important, and then, it does not end at the cross. ⁹Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

DAVE BAST

I think the best way I have of understanding this passage is to try to visualize it, and when I visualize it, I see a giant capital letter U, which starts at the top left and goes way down to the bottom of the line and then comes way back up to where it started, and that is exactly the description Paul gives us of the work of Jesus Christ. He was in the beginning on the same level as God in every way because he was God. He humbled himself, which means he got lower and lower and lower down. He hit rock bottom on the cross when he died the death of a slave; and then God has raised him back up to the highest point and given him the name above every name.

DUANE KELDERMAN

When I am going over those verses by memory on the treadmill, there is something that surges up within me; that there is a power in this passage that I think has to do with the truth of the passage, but also what you said earlier, Dave, about this being a hymn of praise, and it is a powerful hymn.

DAVE BAST

This is why Christians worship Jesus. Pretty simple – are you a Christian or not? One answer to that question is: Do you worship Jesus? Do you worship Jesus as God?

You know, that name that is above every name, it is the name Lord. If you ask in the Old Testament *what* God is, the answer is: God. He is God. That is what he is. If you ask *who* God is, he has a name – a personal name; and in the Old Testament it is usually translated by the word Lord; and that is the name according to Philippians 2 that Jesus now has. So, everything you read about the Lord throughout the Bible, it is talking about Jesus.

DUANE KELDERMAN

And then just to push that one step further: Who is Christ? What did he do? And then, what difference does that make in *my* life? And those are the verses that we will go to in our next segment – the very first verses that actually precede this hymn about Christ. What difference does that actually make in my life? We will look at that when we return.

Segment 2

DUANE KELDERMAN

Welcome back to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Duane Kelderman.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast, and Duane, a moment ago you were talking about the idea of what difference does it make? We have this marvelous, incomparable description of the person and work of Christ in the great Christ hymn of Philippians 2:5-11. He is Lord now; he is exalted; every knee will bow after his self-humbling and death on the cross, but what does that do for us, and the answer to that, Paul says, comes in the preceding segment, the first four verses of Philippians 2. Let me just read those, where Paul writes:

Therefore, if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ²then make my joy complete by being

likeminded; having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. ³Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit; rather in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴not looking to your own interests, but each of you to the interests of others – and then, the linking verse: ⁵Have the same attitude of mind Christ Jesus had.

DUANE KELDERMAN

It is interesting, those first four “if” statements can really be translated “since.” He is not questioning whether the readers have these things: Since you are united with Christ... Since you have comfort from his love... Since you have fellowship with the Spirit, tenderness and compassion... Since you have all of that, because you have been united with Christ, we can act in a certain way, and what way is that? Yes, verses 2 to 4: Be likeminded – likeminded – we all have the mind of Christ. We have the same love. We love Christ. We are one in Spirit and purpose. He does not say that we all agree on everything, but there is a unity that we have in Christ, in our Spirit, in our purpose, that gives us a love for one another, he is saying, that is deeper than necessarily agreeing on everything.

DAVE BAST

You know, Duane, early in 2012, Rodney King died in Los Angeles, and Rodney King became kind of a minor celebrity because of his phrase. He was arrested, he was beaten by the police and it triggered riots and all that; and Rodney King’s plaintive question, “Why can’t we all just get along?” It applies to the Church, too. Paul’s first call to the Philippian Christians is the thing he would say to every single congregation in the world. Why can’t we all get along? We need unity. We need to be together, and we have all these reasons for living out a unity of love because we all love Christ if we are real Christians; and we all share his Spirit if we are believers. There should not be the divisions that so often mar the life of churches.

DUANE KELDERMAN

And Paul’s call in Philippians 2 is not just a call to be nice in our own power. Paul knows that if we have to just get along just because we are good enough people to get along, we will not get along very well. Paul roots this moral imperative – this imperative to love – in who we are in Christ. William Willamon has a great saying in one of the sermons that he preaches. He says if we could be good just by being commanded to be good, we would be good; but simple command: Be good – be nice – does not really get us anywhere because in our own power we simply cannot do it. If the Christians’ moral imperative – the imperative to live a certain way – is not rooted in who we are in ourselves, we have the possibility of that because of who we are in union with Christ.

DAVE BAST

Right; and there is another key to it, I think. It starts with understanding our identity in Christ, but it goes on to take up the example that he has set us, the example of self-humbling love; and so Paul says here, not only should you be likeminded in being one in spirit and mind – the call to unity – but he says in verse 3: Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather in humility, value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests, but also the interests of others. So, it sounds at first when he says value others above yourselves that you are supposed to say: Everybody else is better than me; but I think we know that is not true. It is more a matter of putting our neighbor ahead of our self.

DUANE KELDERMAN

Right; this is not a call to be untruthful. It is a call to be honest, really, about our own shortcomings, and a call to be generous about others, to build up our neighbor.

DAVE BAST

I think it was C. S. Lewis who put it this way. He described what he called Christian grammar: First person, he. Second person, you. Third person, me. God is first in our lives, our neighbor really comes second. That is what Paul is getting at when he says value others above yourselves. What he means is, put your neighbor’s needs ahead of your own a little bit, the way Jesus did. I mean, I don’t know about you, but I hate waiting in line. I hate standing beside anyone else. I want to get in front and get there first, and Paul says: No, no, no. Back off. Back off. Third person, me.

DUANE KELDERMAN

And when he says look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others, there is a realism there. Paul is not saying that we do not have any self interests.

DAVE BAST

Or that we cannot pay any attention to them at all.

DUANE KELDERMAN

Exactly. But in Christ, our interests and others' interests are both important to us; and in Christ we also realize that when we give – when we pay attention to the interests of others – it actually has a way of giving back to us. That is the economy of giving and receiving that is a part of the Gospel.

DAVE BAST

Well, and it probably makes you, as well as it does me, think of the great Commandment: Love God first and then love your neighbor as yourself, which is very much in tune with what Paul is saying here. To love your neighbor as yourself does require a certain amount of self love. It is just that neighbors deserve the same kind of attention and the same kind of sacrifice that we tend to give ourselves, preferentially.

DUANE KELDERMAN

Bottom line for Paul is that we become better people; not by our own willpower, not by our own determination. We become better people because we have been united with Christ.

DAVE BAST

So, everything builds on that idea of union with Christ. Coming to him, believing in him, trusting in him, but then living in him – living it out – working it out; the implications of all that that means; taking it realistically and practically; not just words, not just gas; not just hot air; but requiring us to humble ourselves, to love our neighbor; that is where the rest of this chapter is going, as we are going to see in just a moment.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

Welcome back to *Groundwork*. I am Dave Bast.

DUANE KELDERMAN

And I am Duane Kelderman.

DAVE BAST

And Duane, we just want to talk about what people who are united with Christ actually look like.

DUANE KELDERMAN

And that leads us to verses 12 and 13 in Chapter 2: ¹²Therefore my dear friends, as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence; continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

It is very interesting that Paul juxtaposes “work out your own salvation,” and then, “God is at work in you.” Rivers of ink have been spilled in the history of the Christian Church trying to understand this relationship between God's sovereignty – we call it – and human freedom; and we are not going to explain that relationship here in just a few minutes...

DAVE BAST

Oh, you're not? I was kind of hoping you would do that for me.

DUANE KELDERMAN

But it is significant that Paul does not even get hung up with that. Paul sees the unity of those two things and he is able to affirm without having to do what we are doing, actually, to sort of get caught in that mystery of God's sovereignty and human freedom, and is able to say in one breath, "Work out your own salvation." Salvation is a gift of God's grace to us. We talk about justification – but salvation is also something that we continue to work out in our lives – what we often call sanctification in the Christian life – and that is something we do. Paul makes no apology for the fact that we are doing that, but then immediately frames it in "because God is at work in you."

DAVE BAST

Right, yes. God works – you work – end of the story; and we try to figure out, oh, now wait a minute, how does that work? As so often is the case, Duane, there are two mistakes that people tend to make at either extreme. Either they are completely passive and they say: It is all God's work. It is the sovereignty of God. It is grace alone – we say that. We believe it. But then they think, well, then, I do not do anything. In fact, I cannot do anything. It does not matter what I do. Whether I do good or bad, nothing matters. I am all in, thanks to God's work. Hallelujah, Glory be. Or the other extreme, where people say: Oh, man, I have to be good. I have to do this; I have to do that; I have to believe; I have to believe harder, then God will save me. If I only do this... which is the way of most religion, you know. Human works; human effort; and somehow, we come back to the center and the balance that says it is all God's work. Praise him. I contribute nothing to my salvation. Oh, wait a minute. I need to work hard. I need to work out this salvation. I need to obey. I need to witness. I need to strive. I need to defeat sin. I need to kill sin. All of that wonderful tension. Paul affirms both.

DUANE KELDERMAN

Exactly; and then in verse 14 he says: Do everything without complaining or arguing. Now, this is very interesting. We think of Philippians as this book of love and joy; we talked about that at the beginning of this series; and this church in Philippi is Paul's best church – his favorite church – and that might be true; but it is very interesting to read through this letter in one sitting and see how many times he tells these Philippians to quit arguing – quit fighting; do everything without complaining or arguing. In Chapter 1 we talked about how there were people who were preaching Christ out of bad motives. He talks about, in Chapter 2 in our session today, selfish ambition – vain conceit. Toward the end of the book he pleads with Euodia and Syntyche to agree with each other; and in Chapter 4 he talks about being gentle; so, there is this undercurrent of tension in Philippi that Paul is addressing, and I think we need to just name the fact that conflict and competition and self interest are going to be a part of any Christian community in a broken world.

DAVE BAST

Oh, Christians are sinners. We do not automatically become angels when we come to Christ – when we center our lives in Christ. The Church is a hospital for sinners. Complaining that it is sinful is like complaining of a hospital because it has sick people in it. So, yes; we are going to have problems. It is not a reason to bag the Church and quit on it, but it is a reason for us to be more serious and intentional about the way we work out *our* salvation, primarily in terms of our relationships, first of all, with other believers.

DUANE KELDERMAN

I am sure that a lot of the people listening to this program today are struggling with some things in their own congregation – the church they belong to – and are struggling with whether they should continue to stay in that church. Of course, we do not know all the circumstances of these situations, so we cannot just tell people in so many words what to do in these situations, but I think that the overall call of Paul here is to at least frame working through all of that; frame it with the fact that the church is a broken place, and we cannot just give up on our church because it struggles with certain things. We also should not get this idea going that the church down the road just does not have any of those kinds of problems.

DAVE BAST

Yes, exactly; and in fact, Paul says if we do live together in this wonderful unity we will shine like stars in the middle of a dark world. It will really stand out – our communities will stand out – our churches will be attractive.

DUANE KELDERMAN

Yes. In verse 16 I find it so moving that Paul makes this shift to wanting to know – he wants to know that he did not run or labor for nothing. There is a great book that has been written entitled *From Success to Significance*, and sort of the thesis of the book is that most of us in North America live most of our lives struggling to be successful, but there is a turn that should take place in our lives, sooner rather than later, to not just being successful, but having significance; and Paul is so focused on wanting to know that his life matters; that there is significance; that all this pain, all this toil, all this work – that he did not run in vain. I think all of our listeners, if they think about life and just slow down a little bit, can realize how easy it is to be so caught up in being successful; but maybe a good note to end on today is to ask, not just am I successful, but is my life significant?

DAVE BAST

And I think Paul would add the significance comes from being united with Christ.

DUANE KELDERMAN

Thanks for joining our *Groundwork* conversation, and do not forget, it is listeners like you asking questions and participating that keep our topics relevant to your life. So, tell us what you think about what you are hearing, and suggest topics or passages that you would like to hear on future *Groundwork* programs. Visit us at groundworkonline.com and join the conversation.

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Printed on November 21, 2024