

Shorter Catechism 27-28 “Humiliation and Exaltation”
Isaiah 53
Psalm 113
Philippians 2

January 20, 2013

People sometimes ask me,

“Why do you preach on the Old Testament so much?”

I believe that *all scripture* is inspired by God (2 Tim 3:16)
and is *profitable* for teaching, for reproof, for correction,
and for training in righteousness,
that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

After all, you have been drawn into a story of God’s mighty deeds in history.
If we love God – if we want to know *who God is* –
then we need to pay attention to what he has said and done throughout history.

What story does the Bible emphasize the most?

You might say “Jesus”! –

and you would be right, because the whole Bible is about him!

But I’m asking what story receives the most direct attention?

My bible has around 1250 pages.

The five books of Moses take up the first 200 pages.

The historical books that cover the period from Joshua to David
take another 120 pages.

The wisdom literature takes another 180 pages.

The historical books and the prophets dealing with the coming of the exile,
or the aftermath of the exile
take up 450 pages.

And then the New Testament covers the last 300 pages.

In other words, over one-third of what God inspired for the use of his church
is taken up with preaching about the Exile of Israel.

Why is the exile so important to God?

One of the most powerful lessons of the OT is its emphasis on humiliation and exaltation.

Over and over, you see God “humbling” his people –

not always because of their sin! –

sometimes it is simply to show them that the way of suffering
is the only way to glory.

Think of Job.

He was blameless and upright, a man who feared God and turned away from evil.

But what happened?

God asked Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job?”

In other words, God was the one who “set Job up” –

in order to demonstrate the righteousness of his servant.

That’s what Isaiah speaks of in Isaiah 52-53.

Normally we think of the prophets emphasizing the *guilt* of Israel –
and they do!

But here, Isaiah says that it is the *innocent* servant of the LORD
who must suffer.

Because if the guilty *deserve* judgment,
then the only way for God to be just and the justifier of the ungodly,
is if the *innocent* suffers on behalf of the guilty.

But if God destroyed the *innocent* on behalf of the guilty,
then how can God be just?

That’s why Isaiah begins to see that it is only if God takes our guilt upon himself
that he can be *just* and the *justifier* of the ungodly.

Sing Psalm 113

Read Philippians 2

What does it mean to have the mind of Christ?

The Men’s Discipleship Study has been working through John Murray’s little book,
“Redemption Accomplished and Applied.”

Murray lays out the basic *doctrines* of redemption succinctly and clearly –
and therefore he demonstrates *powerfully* how *practical* doctrine is.

After all, you *will* practice your theology!

If you believe that Christians are still fundamentally sinners –

that we are characterized by sin and misery –

then you will practice what you believe!

(hey, everybody sins – it’s no big deal!)

But if you believe that Christians have been *delivered* from the estate of sin and misery,
and that we are *no longer* what we once were,

that we participate in the new creation – we have new life –

then you will practice what you believe!

(sin is utterly inconsistent with who we are in Christ!)

Since you *will* practice your theology,

it is important that we make sure that we have the right theology! –
and not merely in the abstract.

“Knowing the right answers” is not the same thing as having the right doctrine.
Faith *includes* knowing the truth (but even the devil *knows* the truth!),
so faith must also include assent – that we *agree* with the truth.

But one more thing is needed:

faith *knows* the truth, *agrees* with the truth,
but faith also *trusts* the Truth.

Think of it this way:

if you are standing on the top of a house in the midst of rising floodwaters,
and a rescue helicopter comes along with a ladder,
you may *know* that the ladder is your only way of escape,
and you may *agree* that the ladder would save you,
but until you *trust* the ladder by actually taking hold of it,
you do not yet have *saving faith!!!*

That’s certainly the way the apostle Paul teaches us
about the humiliation and exaltation of Christ in Philippians 2.

Paul speaks to the church,

and calls us to have the same mind –
the same way of thinking.

Yes, Paul expects that this will include doctrine,
but the point is that we should share a common mindset –
a shared vision of reality based on who Jesus is and what Jesus has done.

To put it simply,

Paul says that we should have a common way of thinking –
a way of thinking that is characterized by humility –
because we share the mind of Christ.

1. The Way of Humility as the Mind of the Church (2:1-4)

I sometimes criticize the ESV for its translation decisions,
but Philippians 2 is one place that reminds me why I like the ESV!

In a span of 4 verses, from 2:2 to 2:5 Paul uses the word “*phroneo*” three times.

The word “*phroneo*” means “to think” –
and the ESV translates it “mind” in all three instances.

The word *phroneo* – in this context – means to think a certain way,
to have a certain perspective or mindset.

Paul is saying that your way of thinking about one another
is to be the same as Christ's way of thinking about you.

So if Christ is at work in you, then his attitude--his mindset--his perspective on life--should characterize all of us.

In verses 1-2 Paul sets forth a fourfold if-then statement.

*2:1 So if there is any encouragement in Christ,
[if there is] any comfort from love,
[if there is] any participation in the Spirit,
[if there is] any affection and sympathy,*

If these four things are true –
if sharing in the Holy Spirit produces love, affection and sympathy,
then Paul says, complete my joy in four ways:

*2 complete my joy by being of the same mind,
having the same love,
being in full accord
and of one mind.*

These four things are the expression of the encouragement that we have “in Christ.”
These four things flow out of the love that we share in the Holy Spirit.

Be of the same mind –
literally--"have the same thoughts."
Christians are to think alike –
we are to have the same mindset, the same perspective.
And the reason why is because we have been united to Christ,
and his attitude--his mindset—his way of thinking has become ours.

Notice that the second result flows from the second “if” –
if there is any comfort from love--have the same love.
And the third result flows from the third “if” –
if there is any fellowship with the Spirit—then be united in your very souls--
be harmonious (“of one accord”) because the one Holy Spirit indwells all of you.

And finally, if there is any affection and sympathy, be of one mind,
and here again we have the word *phroneo*--"think the same thoughts".

If Christ has united you to himself, then you should think the same thoughts together.
What does Paul mean by this?

Is he saying that we have to agree on every point of theology?
No, keep reading.
What sort of thoughts should you think?

This is the second point: The chief characteristic of this attitude--this mindset--is humility.

3 Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Paul insists that you are not to do anything out of selfish ambition, out of rivalry or vain conceit, but rather that you are to consider others as more significant than yourselves.

In verse four, all translations water down the force of what Paul says:

Paul did not say "Each of you should look not *only* to his own interests"
he said, "Each of you should look **not** to his own interests,
but to the interests of others."

Literally, "each looking not to his own things, but rather each to the things of others."

There is a curious grammatical point that is hard to render into English.

In verse 4, the first "each" is singular,
but the second "each" is plural!
English doesn't have a plural for "each"!

What does this mean?

Paul is saying that you may not have an individualistic way of thinking about life.
You may not look after your own interests!
Rather, y'all (or maybe y'each can be the plural of each!)
but all you each's must think first of the interests of others.

What does this look like?

Look down to v21.
Paul says that he has no one like Timothy –
who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare.
"For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ."

It's the same sort of construction as verse 4.

Timothy is not interested in his own things – but the things of Christ.
Therefore he is genuinely concerned for their welfare.

Paul is saying that the Christian has no business looking after his own interests--
after all, as we will see,

Jesus Christ was not concerned with his own interests,
but with the interests of his people.

Even so, you are not to seek your own good,
but the good of others.

True humility (verse 3) puts aside all rivalry, ambition, and conceit,

and seeks to encourage and love others,
putting their needs and interests first.

You all probably know someone who is "married to his job".
Such a man often thinks that needs to do this to provide for his family.
In some instances that may be true--
but that is rare in this country.
Often he is too concerned with status, standard of living,
just plain "keeping up with the Jones's"--
but if maintaining your standard of living
interferes with your responsibilities as a husband and father,
then it is nothing but selfish ambition.
if it damages the interests of your wife and children,
then it is simply vain conceit.

More subtle perhaps is the way we interact in the church--
but too often we are more interested in promoting our own concerns,
than with humbly submitting to the interests of others.
The church turns into a battlefield of competing interests--
everyone convinced that his or her way is the right way,
and true humility becomes hard to find.

So what is humility?

What does it mean to be truly humble?

How can we put aside our selfish ambition,
and really consider others better than ourselves?

Paul answers by pointing us to Jesus Christ.

2. Humility and the Humiliation of Christ (2:5-8)

True humility is rooted and grounded in the humiliation of Christ--
in his incarnation, his suffering and his death.

5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,

After all, consider the heights of his glory throughout all eternity past
as he dwelt in perfect unity with the Father before all ages.

*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.*

The humiliation of Christ, according to the Westminster Shorter Catechism, consisted

Q. 27 Wherein did Christ's humiliation consist?

Christ's humiliation consisted in his being born, and that in a low condition, made under the law, undergoing the miseries of this life, the wrath of God, and the cursed death of the cross; in being buried, and continuing under the power of death for a time.

This is the most amazing act of humility--
God--the immortal, eternal, holy, wise, unchanging Creator of the Universe,
became a creature.
The Divine Lawgiver became one under his own law.
He who knew not sin,
whose very nature was righteousness in itself
became sin for us--and for our salvation.
He who had life in himself--who had given life to all creatures--
died, was buried, and descended into hell.
He who had existed in most perfect communion with the Father from all eternity
was forsaken by his Father, and that bond of communion was broken.

How often do you stop to consider what really happened in the incarnation?
How often do you stop to think about the stupendous implications of his little phrase,
"My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"
At that moment, the spotless lamb of God had taken upon himself the sins of the world--
the holy one of Israel now bore the brunt of God's wrath against sin.
Yes, the physical pain of crucifixion was excruciating,
but the isolation of the eternal Son of God from the Father,
and the outpouring of the Father's wrath,
was greater than any agony known to mankind.

Do not think for a moment that it was only the humanity of Christ that felt that agony--
There have been those who say that even while Christ's humanity was suffering,
his divinity was enjoying a perfect relationship with the Father--
but that divides Christ's person into two.
Yes, he has two natures and two wills,
but there is a union of the two in the person of Christ,
so that it is the one person of Christ who suffered.

Nothing less would do.
He had to pay the price for our sin according to the properties of his human nature --
yet only a truly divine life could give his sacrifice infinite worth.

Why did the Eternal Son of God do this?
Because he considered you to be more important than himself.

That used to shock people--
but today we seem to think that it makes perfect sense.
Of course God loves us--why shouldn't he?
Because you are a rebel and a traitor--
you are a wicked and despicable sinner.
You take every opportunity you can to further your own interests--
Talk about selfish ambition!
Just look around you!
Our whole society has become consumed by greed--
just look at the horrid commercialism that has engulfed our culture!

So why should God love you?
He doesn't need you.
You stink in his nostrils.
You have rebelled against his commandments,
ignored his grace time and again,
and you have preferred your own interests to his--
what should stop him from sending you straight to hell?

God is merciful!

He does not reward us as we deserve,
but rather he shows mercy,
and displays before us the very humility which we have failed to exhibit.
He placed your interests--your salvation--
above his own interests.

Christ Jesus--the eternal Son of God--
did not regard being equal with God a thing to be grasped,
something to hold on to--
but willingly emptied himself of his glory,
and became a man--
just so that you and I could be saved.

How can Paul use the incarnation of Christ as an *example* for us?
After all, God becoming flesh is not something that we can imitate!
And Christ's death on the cross – likewise – is impossible for us to do!

How can we have *this mind* in us?
As Paul said in verse 5 –
“have this mind among yourselves *which is yours in Christ Jesus.*”
Jesus has united us to himself –

so that this mind that was in him might also now be in us!

And that is why Paul can also point us to the exaltation of Christ in verses 9-11

3. Humility and the Exaltation of Christ (2:9-11)

*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.*

If all we had was the humiliation of Christ,
it would be a poignant, tragic illustration of humility,
but also a rather hollow one,
because Christ's death only has meaning in the context of the resurrection.

Q. 28. Wherein consists Christ's exaltation?

A. Christ's exaltation consists in his rising again from the dead on the third day, in ascending up into heaven, in sitting at the right hand of God the Father, and in coming to judge the world at the last day.

It is in the exaltation of Christ that his victory gains meaning for us,
because it is the resurrected and ascended Christ
who sat down at the right hand of the Father, on the throne of David,
inaugurating the kingdom of God
He was given the name above all names.
What does this mean?
It means that Jesus Christ has been made Lord of the universe--
not merely as God--he was that before--
but now as the human king over all things.
It is at the very human name of Jesus that all creatures will bow,
and every tongue will confess that the Messiah, Jesus is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

This means that humanity has been restored to favor with God--
and all who bow the knee to Jesus Christ,
and humble themselves before him,
will also be exalted with him.
The Eternal Son of God has returned to the right hand of God,
but something new has happened.
There is now a man sitting at the right hand of the Father as well.
Jesus Christ, the one who is true God and true man,
is now the sovereign Lord of the universe,
and everyone who belongs to him will share in his glory.

I want you notice something.

The way of the cross – the way of humility –
is *not* a sort of Stoic resignation.

It is *for the joy set before him* –

Christ did not endure the cross because he was “resigned to his fate.”

He endured the cross because he saw the glory that would come *to him and to us*.

Christian ethics is not a circle with a single center:

but Christian ethics is rather an ellipse with two foci:

humiliation and exaltation –

or, perhaps better, humiliation *unto* exaltation.

4. Therefore, Live a Life of Humility (2:12-18)

Therefore, Paul is saying, if this is the sort of God and Savior that you have,

keep working out your salvation with fear and trembling

because God will accomplish his good purposes--

and he is the one who is at work in you.

Verses 12-13 return us to the original thought of verses 1-4.

You are to have the attitude, the mindset, the perspective, of Christ Jesus.

This attitude is chiefly characterized by humility--

and humility is defined by the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, because you are in Christ,

continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling,

because it is God who works in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Yes, working out your salvation with fear and trembling

means being conformed to the likeness of Christ's death,

but there is a glorious hope beyond the cross!

Finally, I would like to call your attention to a small point of grammar,

which indicates a huge point in theology:

the "you" in verses 12 and 13 is plural.

Paul is not simply telling individuals to work out their salvation independently,

rather he is telling all of you to work out your salvation together--

for it is God who works in you--or perhaps we should translate it,

"it is God who works among you" to will and to do for his good pleasure!

This goes back to what Paul said in chapter 1, verse 19,

that their prayers would work out for his salvation.

Paul understood that he was not an island--

he was not a Lone Ranger Christian.
He needed the Philippians.

In fact, Paul needed them so much that he said that the Philippians' prayers
would result in his salvation.

That is how much you need each other.

Salvation includes not merely justification, but also sanctification and glorification.

Your salvation is already accomplished in Jesus Christ,
but in the ongoing application of redemption,

God uses other believers for his purposes in your salvation.

Your prayers for one another have an effect--

when the church is strong, it is because Christians are praying for each other
when the church is weak, it is often because Christians are cold in their prayers.

So all of you, together, as Michiana Covenant Church, are to work out your salvation—together.
Why?

Because it is God who is at work in you--

it is he who will bring to completion the good work which he has begun in you.

But if God is at work in you, then your lives ought to show it.

It will take time--

you--like everyone else--are a stubborn, selfish, greedy, unkind sinner,
and it's going to take time--

but you must begin to put into practice the attitude of Christ--
the mindset of humility,
as you put the needs of others ahead of your own.

Don't be lured away by greed and selfishness!

They only lead to death!

One of my professors in commenting on this passage has said
that the only obstacle to unity in the church is selfishness.

We would do well to think about that!

If you will honestly put the interests of others ahead of your own--

and resist the temptation to insist upon having your own way,

but with humility and gentleness, you seek to be united in spirit and purpose,
then I cannot imagine any obstacle that could hinder your love for one another.