

## We Can Please God, 2

### Hebrews Benediction

By Bob Vincent

**Bible Text:** Hebrews 13:20,21; Philippians 2-3

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...and verse 21 we notice in that verse that the writer of Hebrews is praying that we would be equipped with everything good for doing his will. And he expresses the desire that God would work in us what is pleasing to him through Jesus Christ.

We pointed out, last week, a basic truth that I think is reflected in that verse. You and I can please God. I think sometimes that we don't believe that, that we think that we really can't please God. But we can please God and this verse tells us that we can please God.

Don't have the picture here when the writer of Hebrews expresses this as a prayer, "May the God of peace,"<sup>1</sup> verse 20. Verse 21: "Equip you with everything good..."<sup>2</sup> as if it is someone in the grandstand looking down at the contestants on the ball field and saying, "Oh, Lord, if only he would just catch that ball. Or, Lord, if only he could put a little more energy into his running so that he can make that touchdown. Oh, Lord, if only he would turn around and run in the opposite direction because he is confused and he is going for the touchdown at the opposite end of the field which will be no touchdown at all."

Is that the way God is as he looks at us in the Christian life, sitting back passively, wringing his hands in frustration, "Oh, if only they could get it?" Is that the picture that we have here? Or is it of a God who is active in our lives. "May the God of peace...equip you with everything good for doing his will...May he work in us what is pleasing to him through Jesus Christ."<sup>3</sup>

And the answer of Scripture if we will look in just a moment at a parallel passage is that God doesn't just want this for you and me, but that he is accomplishing this in you and me. God wants you to live a life that pleases him and God is in the business of enabling you and enabling me to live a life that pleases him.

Turn with me, if you will, to Philippians chapter two because it is so parallel; Philippians chapter two—page 1827—verse 12. Well, really, verse 13 and we'll hit 12 in a moment.

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<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 13:20 (All Scripture references are from the New International Version of the Bible unless otherwise indicated).

<sup>2</sup> Hebrews 13:21

<sup>3</sup> Hebrews 13:20,21

He says in Philippians chapter two, verse 13—page 1827, bottom of the page—“For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.”<sup>4</sup> God is at work. It isn’t just as Hebrews 13:21 tells us that God wants this for us, that God is up there in the grandstands cheering for us to get it and to accomplish it, God is actually at work in us. That’s what he says here. God is at work in us “both to will and to do according to his good purpose.”<sup>5</sup> So a life that pleases God is possible because, we are told here, God is working in our lives. He is working in us as we make choices. We are not always aware that God is the one who is doing this work in us. It seems, often times, it is us.

Look at verse 12. “Therefore, 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.”<sup>6</sup> It seems like it is all us, doesn’t it, this living of the Christian life? It’s a matter of choosing and of doing what we ought to do as over against, sometimes, what we feel the impulse of doing. But, even though we are the one choosing, even though we are the ones doing this, in reality verse 13 tells us that it is really the result of God the Holy Spirit working in us to produce these desires and this power to live a life that pleases God. So we reflect on that for a moment.

What kind of life is it that pleases God? Well, we have spent several months looking at the wills of God, not his secret will, but his revealed will—Deuteronomy 29:29—in light of the Lord’s Prayer. The Lord’s Prayer reveals to us the revealed will of God. What are the things you ought to pray for since the Bible tells us in 1 John chapter five that “if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.”<sup>7</sup> What is it, this will of God? It’s not mysterious. Jesus lays it out in the petitions that we pray in the “Our Father,” in the Lord’s Prayer. That’s the will of God.

But it is God’s will to bring those things about in your life. And because it is God’s will and because his Spirit is at work in us, these things will begin to be true for you and me.

Look at verse 12 again. “Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed...”<sup>8</sup> What is that “therefore” there for? That “therefore” connects verse 12 with what precedes it. What is it to work out our salvation?

Well, let’s be clear about salvation for a moment. Salvation is not something you do. Salvation is not something you accomplish in yourself. Salvation is something, as we will see in a few moments, that God has done for you. And how do you receive Salvation? You receive salvation by accepting the promises of God as true, by casting yourself on God’s mercy in Christ.

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<sup>4</sup> Philippians 2:13

<sup>5</sup> Paraphrase of Philippians 2:13

<sup>6</sup> Philippians 2:12

<sup>7</sup> 1 John 5:14

<sup>8</sup> Philippians 2:12

The moment that you look to Christ, at that moment God receives you. You receive salvation. There is a great transaction occurs. Your sins are laid on Christ and Christ's perfect obedience is laid on you, it is put to your account. This transaction, my debt is put to Christ's account. His virtue, his righteousness, his merits put to my account. We receive that salvation in a moment of time by means of faith, by means of faith alone. Yet that salvation we are called upon to work it out in our lives. The moment we believe, no matter who we are, no matter what we have done, no matter how many failures there are in our lives, at that moment God receives us. It is just like the prodigal son returning to the father in the parable that Jesus told. The moment that that boy comes in sight of the father the father runs up to him. He commands that they slaughter the fatted calf and have a feast. He hires musicians. He is going to have a dance. He commands that the best robe be put on his son and a gold ring on his fingers and sandals on his feet. And it is all in a moment of time. It is a gift.

He doesn't say to the son, "Now, son, I'm glad to see you back. But you have hurt me terribly. Now, son, you know, I'm almost not happy to see you because, you know, boy, nobody in this world ever hurt me the way you hurt me." You know the story, don't you? He was a rich old man. And the younger son comes to his dad and says, "Daddy," well, I'm going to paraphrase it, "Daddy, I know you're loaded with a lot of money and one day when you die I'm going to have a lot of money. And you just seem to be holding on past your time. This is what I'd like to ask you to do, dad. Would you go ahead now and cut out my portion of what I'm going to inherit after you are dead and give it to me now while I've got my good looks, while I've got legs that will dance, while I've got muscles and while I can attract the ladies and have a good time, while I can abuse my body and have it bounce back?"

You know, there is a time in your life when you can abuse your body and it bounces back and you get a long a few decades and it doesn't bounce back so quickly and sometimes doesn't bounce at all.

That's really what the boy is saying to his dad. "Divide the portion to me now. I want it now?"

"You want it now?"

The amazing thing about the father is he actually does figure out his estate and divides out the portion that the son would inherit and gives it to the boy. Now, what does the boy do with it? Well, you know the story that Jesus tells. He can't wait to leave home. He can't wait to get out of town. "I am so glad to get out of here. I ain't never coming back."

He hits the road. And he goes into the far country and he is everybody's best friend. When he walks into the bar he says, "Hey, the drinks are on me." And everybody thinks he is a great guy. The women can't keep their hands off of him because he is what? Loaded with cash and he is spreading it around. The guys are all his friends. Everybody takes him into his confidence. He feels terrific. It's an ego trip.

And then he is spent out and he discovers he doesn't have any friends. None of the women are interested in him. None of the guys want to be his friends anymore. One guy says to him, "Look. I'll tell you what I'll do." You got to remember this is a Jewish boy. And you've got to remember that the most unclean animal is a pig.

When I was in Israel in 2000 in the Galilee I went to a pig farm, no kidding. How was it they had a pig farm in the Holy Land? Well, they had to have special rules. The little hooves could never touch the soil and all of the droppings of the pigs were caught, trapped and removed from the Holy Land. Nothing of those pigs ever touched the Holy Land. They were fed and shipped out and it was kind of like, I guess, chickens in a cage, except there was great insulation.

But you've got to understand: The swine is a very un-kosher animal. And you need that in this story because here is what happens to this now impoverished young man in a far country. One of his friends, one of his buddies, one of his boon companions, one of the guys that was always flattering and praising, "Man, you are a terrific guy. So I'll tell you what. I can help you out. I'll have you feed swine at my pig ranch." Pig ranch? Pig farm. There aren't pig ranches, are there?

So the boy can't find any other work and he is feeding swine. But the amazing thing is that his wages are so small that he can't even afford enough to feed himself and so he is looking with lust on what's being fed to the swine.

The Scripture says—I love the way the King James makes the most outrageous things sound beautiful—"And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat."<sup>9</sup> It sounds so poetic, doesn't it? "And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat."<sup>10</sup> Or to put it in modern language, "He was salivating over the slop that he was going to slop the hogs with."

Can you imagine that? Can you imagine being so hungry that you actually want to eat the slop you are going to slop the pigs with?

Then one day the boy gets this thought. He thinks to himself and he says, "You know, my daddy took better care of the hired help at his farm than is being taken care of me. I know what I am going to do." Scripture says he came to his senses. It means that previously he had been out of touch with reality. Previously he had been delusional. Previously, if you want to use the word, he had been a little bit insane. But now he comes to his senses and he says, "I am going to go back. But I'm going to go back and the first thing I'm going to say to daddy is, 'I have sinned against heaven and against you and I'm not worthy to be called your son, but all I'm asking you, sir, would you hire me? Would you hire me? Would you let me be your hired help?'"

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<sup>9</sup> Luke 15:16 (King James Version – KJV)

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

Now, the picture of the gospel in this is that the father really doesn't pay any attention to what the boy is saying at all. He doesn't throw it up into his face. He simply says, immediately, "Clothe him with the best robe. Put a ring on his finger. Put sandals on his feet. Go hire the musicians. We're going to have a party."

It's a celebration. He doesn't scold. He doesn't take him to task. He doesn't worry about correcting the boy. You know, the amazing thing is: When someone is broken by the circumstances of life they don't need to be broken by us. When someone has experienced the chastisement of his own misconduct, of his own bad deeds, they don't need to be fussed at by you and me.

You know, the amazing thing is that God has designed the world to break us so we would come to him. God designed the world so that when you set your goal on pleasing yourself it isn't very long until you realize this is a fruitless, empty task and you are left unsatisfied.

You know, when you decide to put yourself first, please yourself, realize yourself, fulfill your dreams, your desires, your goals, your ambitions, it isn't long before you realize: This stuff is worthless. This stuff is junk. It doesn't satisfy. It doesn't meet my needs.

The beautiful thing is: The father here is a picture of God. What is it like to meet God? What it is like to meet God is: The moment that you decide, "You know, I've been a fool. I've been giving my life to this. I've been giving my life to that. I'm going to come back. I'm going to come to the God that made me. I'm going to return. I'm going to come to God as Father." And we've got all these promises we are going to make to him. "Oh, God, you know, if you will accept me back I'll do this, I'll do that. I'll go here."

You know, I had a pastor friend back in the early 70s. He had been captured in World War II. And he said, "God, if you ever let me out of this German POW camp I'll be a preacher."

You know, I've never felt that way about preaching. I've always felt that it was the greatest privilege in the world to be able to preach the Word of God. I count myself incredibly blessed of God to have the privilege to be able to study Scripture and apply Scripture. I don't feel like I've sacrificed anything for God. I feel as if I am the most privileged man in the world.

I'm going to tell you this—and some of you will think I'm just being hyperbolic—but compared to being president of the United States, compared to being governor of the state or mayor or whatever you name it or to being a movie star, I'm going to tell you: There is nothing in the world more fulfilling for me than the pursuit of Christ and sharing Christ with other people and to being able to devote myself full time to the study of the Word of God. I'm telling you. I don't feel that I've sacrificed at all. I consider myself tremendously privileged.

Here is the amazing thing that I considered. God has taken what I would do anyhow—but I'd have to do in limited amount of time because I'd have to earn a living somehow—God has taken what I would do anyhow, God has taken my hobby and allowed me to get paid for it. I mean, I really feel tremendously privileged, tremendously blessed.

So the gospel is what? The gospel is that God receives us just the way we are, just as the case of the prodigal son who had wasted all that money on prostitutes and riotous living. The father doesn't scold him. The father doesn't take him and say, "Now, son, look here. Let's go over here and talk before we allow you in the house. First of all, you stink. Has anybody told you you stink? I want you to know you stink. You stink. You have got nasty clothes on. I can't believe you showed up at my house in these nasty clothes with a body...you haven't bathed in weeks, have you? Look at you. You've got a scruffy face. You have scraggly hair. You have got lice. Oh, my goodness. You've got lice on your body." You are just nasty. Would you go over there, first of all, and we're going to get the maid to draw some bath water. You are going to scrub yourself from stem to stern and we are going to get some old clothes that are clean and you are going to put them on you and then you come over here and talk."

I want you to understand something. This boy stank. This boy was nasty. This boy had messed his life up. This boy had been slopping hogs. This boy didn't have a bathroom to wash himself in or to go to. This boy was nasty and he was raggedy and he stank.

And what does the father do? The father runs after him. The father grabs him. The father embraces him. The father hugs him, holds on to him and says, "Welcome home. Welcome home." And he is still hugging him. He doesn't leave the boy's side. He doesn't say, "Son, wait here. I'm going to go get some things." He hollers over to the servants, "Bring me a ring. Bring me the best clothes. Call the musicians. Slaughter the fatted calf. We are going to have a celebration."

That's the picture of the gospel. You have got to understand that salvation is an event that happens in a moment of time when you put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, the moment you put your trust in Christ. At that moment, God receives you just the way you are. You don't have to bathe first. You don't have to change your clothes first. You don't have to shave first. You don't have to get a haircut first. You don't have to be de-loused first. He receives you just the way you are. And that's an important truth to understand about the gospel. You don't work out your salvation in the sense of working for your salvation, you receive your salvation in a moment of time and then you work out the outworking of it the rest of your life.

Well, what is it? Well, look here at Philippians chapter two for a moment again. "Therefore, 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."<sup>11</sup> So he wants you, now that you are saved, now that you have received salvation, now that your sins have been forgiven, he wants you, now, to begin to put into effect the Christian life.

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<sup>11</sup> Philippians 2:12

Well, what is the Christian life? Well, here it is. He describes it this way. Start back at verse one. “Therefore,” so the therefore takes us back to what precedes. He has got a problem because there is some squabbling going on at this local church at Philippi. And he writes to them—page 1827, Philippians 2:1—

If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing [look at verse three again] Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.<sup>12</sup>

“You mean that’s working out salvation?”

Absolutely.

Here it is. What is it to work out your salvation? To work out your salvation is not simply to be a better person. To work out your salvation is not simply, if you think of the parable of the prodigal son, to get a bath and perfume yourself and shave and get a haircut and clean clothes. To work out your salvation is not simply to begin to keep the law. To work out your salvation is not simply to begin to be a moral person, a more moral person. What is this?

Here it is. The essence of it is to be like Jesus. There it is. Let’s see how it works out. First, look at verse three again—page 1827. “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.”<sup>13</sup> What does that mean in humility to consider others better than yourselves? Is that an inferiority complex? No, my friends, it is the opposite of an inferiority complex. Let me tell you about people who suffer from feelings of inferiority and inadequacy. They are never humble.

People who suffer from feelings of insecurity, inferiority, worthlessness are always bloated with pride, bloated with pride, always without exception. When you meet someone who is full of pride, when you meet someone who is haughty, when you meet someone who looks down on other people you are always dealing with somebody who is very insecure.

How do I know that? I’ll show it to you in a moment.

But I want you to notice what he commands us here. He commands us, what? To do what? “Nothing,” verse three, “out of selfish ambition or vain conceit.”<sup>14</sup> Why does he call “vain conceit” “vain conceit?” Why does he call it vain?

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<sup>12</sup> Philippians 2:1-3

<sup>13</sup> Philippians 2:3

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

See, if you think you are better than other people you are just a fool. You don't know yourself. You don't know other people. That's why when you start looking down your nose at other folks and say, "Well, I thank you, God, I'm not like..." You're just blind to yourself. You are blind as a bat.

So it is called "vain conceit."

But look at what he says. "In humility consider others,"<sup>15</sup> what? "Better than yourselves."<sup>16</sup>

You mean this is the Christian life? You mean this is the essence of the life that pleases God? You mean the kind of thing that he is talking about in Hebrews 13:21 that God would work in us what is pleasing in his sight through Jesus Christ is this? This is it? You mean it's not quitting committing adultery or quitting killing or quitting stealing or quitting lying? You mean it's no longer taking God's name in vain that's the heart of it?

That's right.

Now, all those things are important. I mean, we should be moral. And, of course, to know the Lord Jesus is to experience moral change. But it is not the heart of it. What is the heart of it? Here it is in one simple clause. "But in humility consider others better than yourselves."<sup>17</sup>

You are better than me. I don't believe that. Do you think I believe that? Do you think that I believe you are better than me? Do you believe that I am better than you? Do you believe your husband is better than you? Do you believe your wife is better than you? Do you believe your parents are better than you? Do you think you children are more important than you are? Do you believe that?

Ah, now you understand why salvation is both an event—when God pardons our sins and accepts us just the way we are as the father received the prodigal son—and is a process that is never complete in this life. Here it is in a nutshell. Look at it again. "But in humility consider others better than yourselves."<sup>18</sup>

"Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others."<sup>19</sup>

A little weak there on the part of the New International Version translators. Here is how it would be better to be translated. "Each of you should not look to your own interest, but even to the interest of others."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Philippians 2:4

<sup>20</sup> Paraphrase of Philippians 2:4



Do you think that God ever commands you to look out for yourself?

Now, I know if you listen to a lot of modern pop psychology and a lot of modern pop preaching you think, “Yeah, God. You know, you can’t love other people until you love yourself. I’m going to tell you something. Loving yourself comes naturally. Looking out for yourself comes naturally. Putting yourself ahead of other people is a natural thing. We are not talking about a natural thing. We are talking about something supernatural. And you have got to put verse four in the context of verse three. He doesn’t say, “Well, look out for yourselves and also look out for other people.”

What he is saying is, in the context, both before and, as you will see in a moment, afterwards, “But in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but [even] to the interests of others.”<sup>21</sup>

Do you see how it fits with verse three when you translate it that way? Now look how it fits with verse five. “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.”<sup>22</sup>

Here is the essence of the Christian life. What is the essence of the Christian life? What is it that Christians do that atheists don’t do? What is it that people who have been born again begin to do that people who have never been born again never do? Here it is. It is the mind of Christ. What is the mind of Christ? Is it some weird mysterious thing?

“Oh, I wish I understood the mind of Christ.”

Well, my I give it to you? Here it is. The mind of Christ takes us back to verse three. “In humility consider others better than yourselves.”<sup>23</sup>

“What a minute. You’re talking about Jesus. You mean that Jesus was a humble man?”

Yup.

“Do you mean that Jesus considered other people as better than himself? Do you mean to tell me that Jesus considered other people as more important than himself?”

Well, let’s see if that isn’t exactly what he is saying? Verse five. “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.”<sup>24</sup> Look at verse six.

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing [of no account], taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Philippians 2:3-4

<sup>22</sup> Philippians 2:5

<sup>23</sup> Philippians 2:3

<sup>24</sup> Philippians 2:5

<sup>25</sup> Philippians 2:6-7

What's he saying in those two verses? Here it is in a nutshell. He is saying Jesus is God. Jesus is God. Do you know that the man that walked the dusty streets of Galilee, the man that walked into the temple and purified the temple, the man that was arrested and beaten and put on trial and nailed to a cross, that that man is not only a human being, but that he is God almighty?

That's what the Bible says.

“Who, being in very nature God.”<sup>26</sup> Who being in the form of God. That means that every attribute of God is an attribute of Jesus. Jesus could say “Before Abraham was, I am.”<sup>27</sup> He is eternal.

Jesus is everywhere present. Jesus is all knowing. He did not take away his deity to become a man. He took his deity as it is and added to it a human nature. Jesus is both truly God and truly human. But now I want you to notice this incredible contrast in verse six. “Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped.”<sup>28</sup>

I want you to go back with me to the dawn of human history. The first man who ever lived reached out and grasped to be equal with God. That's the first man, your daddy, the person that you are like, the one that you have inherited all of this selfishness from. You know, your wife, your honeymoon got over about two or three weeks and she turned to you and she said, “You're just like your daddy. I watched you. I watched your daddy treat your momma this way and you are just like your daddy.” Or the guy turns to the woman and says, “You know, my daddy warned me about people like you. You know, I saw how your momma dealt with your daddy and you are turning into your momma. And I didn't marry your momma. I married you.”

Here is the bottom line. The guy that you and I have gotten our inheritance from, our basic makeup from, Adam, he is being alluded to in Philippians 2:6. He was just a man. He was simply an ordinary human being. And he was tempted, as his wife was tempted, to do what? Well, to reach out...remember? To reach out and to grasp that forbidden fruit.

What was it about the forbidden fruit that made it forbidden? Here it is. It is called the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Do you remember how Satan sold it to them? First of all, Satan contradicted the Word of God, first, by planning it out. “Has God said you can't eat of any of this fruit?”<sup>29</sup> You know, he is always trying to make God say more than God says.

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<sup>26</sup> Philippians 2:6

<sup>27</sup> John 8:58

<sup>28</sup> Philippians 2:6

<sup>29</sup> Paraphrase of Genesis 3:1

“Oh, no, no, no. We can eat all the fruit of this garden, but we can’t eat of this.” And she says, “Because in the day we eat of it we’ll die.”<sup>30</sup>

Then Satan goes into a direct and overt attack on Scripture. He said, “You won’t die. Let me tell you what will happen to you. In the day you eat that fruit your eyes will be opened and you will be as Gods knowing,” and the Hebrew verb is **יָדַע**, “knowing for yourselves good and evil.”<sup>31</sup>

And there are a couple of flavors to that Hebrew verb **יָדַע**. One is experimentation and experience. “You will know, you will experience for yourselves good and evil.” When a man marries a woman the Scripture refers to that as knowing that woman. He experiences that woman. So knowledge, going back to the Hebrew mindset summed up in that Hebrew verb **יָדַע**, is not simply an intellectual thing like the Greeks. It is an experiential thing. “You will experience for yourselves, good and evil.”

“How do you know this isn’t good unless you try it? Apply the scientific method to morality. Test it and see. How do you know that suicide is wrong? Have you tried it?”

The scientific method applied to morality.

But there is a second element of that verb. It is determination. It is autonomy.

“Choose for yourself.”

To know something in the Hebrew verb is to choose it. “You will be as God’s choosing for yourselves good and evil. You will be as Gods determining for yourselves good and evil. Nobody is going to be your boss. You will be your own boss. You will decide for yourselves.”<sup>32</sup>

Now, I want you to see the first temptation in the Garden of Eden is what? Think of Philippians 2:6. It is an ordinary man reaching out his hand to be equal with God, to put himself on a par with God, to dethrone God and enthrone self, to be supreme, to be my own boss, to call my own shots, to determine what is right and what is wrong for me. That’s what it is to be as God.

And in Philippians chapter two, verse six, we see it is the opposite of what Jesus did. Jesus, who actually is God incarnate, does not reach out to hold onto this equality with God, but allows himself to become a nobody, a nothing. He empties himself of self.

What does that mean? It doesn’t mean that he emptied himself of being God and cease to be God in becoming a man. No. He added to his deity his humanity. What did he empty himself of? He emptied himself of the need to be number one. He emptied himself of the desire to be important.

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<sup>30</sup> Paraphrase of Genesis 3:2-3

<sup>31</sup> Paraphrase of Genesis 3:4-5

<sup>32</sup> Paraphrase of Genesis 3:5

I'll tell you what it is that he emptied himself, it goes back to Philippians 2:3. "But in humility consider others better than yourselves."<sup>33</sup> That is what it is that Christ emptied himself of. Christ became humble. That's what the incarnation is about. The eternal Son of God came into this world and became a real human being just like you and me. But not just like you and me because he put you ahead of himself. He is the only man who has ever lived who has lived a totally selfless life. He lived an empty life if you want to put it that way, empty of the need to be worshipped, empty of the desire to be number one. Jesus didn't give up being God. He gave up the manifestation of being God.

Jesus didn't give up being God. He gave up the prerogatives and privileges of being God. Jesus did not cease to be God. He just put you ahead of himself. He said, "You are more important than I am."

Can it really be? Is that the essence of the life of Jesus? It is the essence of the life the Jesus. He said that you and you and you and you and I are more important than he is. He put you ahead of himself. He gave up his rights because of your needs.

Verse seven of Philippians two: "But made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant."<sup>34</sup> He became a servant. "[And] being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself."<sup>35</sup> You see it, humility, "and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!"<sup>36</sup>

And the end result, verse nine, is: God blesses him. God Exalts him.

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.<sup>37</sup>

Now, I want you to see this. Do you understand the "Therefore" now? Do you understand that the goal of the Christian life is not, "We don't smoke and we don't chew and we don't go with girls who do?" The goal of the Christian life is not, "Well, we don't commit adultery and we don't steal and we don't use crude language and we don't take God's name in vain." I mean, all those things are important, but that's not the heart of the matter? What is the heart of the matter? The heart of the matter is to be like Jesus. That's the heart of the matter. It's putting other people ahead of yourself. It is putting other people first. It is saying, "I don't count. You count." That is the essence of the Christian life. It is the core of it.

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<sup>33</sup> Philippians 2:3

<sup>34</sup> Philippians 2:7

<sup>35</sup> Philippians 2:7-8

<sup>36</sup> Philippians 2:8

<sup>37</sup> Philippians 2:9-11

And I'm telling you that anything that gets in the way of that is chaff. The wheat is, "But in humility count other people as more important than you are."<sup>38</sup>

It is saying, "My kids are more important than I am." It's saying, "It's ok if I have to suffer in order that my kids don't." It's saying that "My wife, my husband is more important than I am. It's ok if I don't get what I think I deserve. I'm going to meet his needs, her needs. I'm going to put him or her above myself."

That's the mind of Christ.

Now, if you begin to understand it you understand what Paul is saying in verse 12. This life is not the place for rewards, though God does reward us in this life. But this isn't where it is. The place of reward is coming in heaven.

He says in verse 12: "Therefore, 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."<sup>39</sup> If you understand that working out salvation, that is, putting into effect in your life the fruit of a relationship that began in a moment in time by faith in Jesus Christ, if you understand what that means, that it means dying to self and living for other people for the sake of Christ, you begin to have a sense of fear and trembling about it. You begin to, at times, shake. You begin to say, "You know, man, I wonder if I'm a Christian at all."

If you understand that the very essence of the Christian life is not obedience, that's a fruit, isn't it? But the essence of it is death to self, total death to self, putting other people ahead of myself. "My husband is more important than I am. My wife is more important than I am. My children are more important than I am."

Being respected isn't the heart of the matter. To hell with being respected. Serve your children. To hell with your dignity. Serve your children.

Do you understand what I am saying? The essence of the Christian life is putting your children ahead of yourself. The essence of the Christian life is putting your husband ahead of yourself, your wife ahead of yourself, your employees ahead of yourself. Even though you are the boss, it is putting the people that work for you ahead of yourself and doing it for the sake of Christ. That's the essence of it. When you begin to understand it, when you begin to see that the Christian life is being like Jesus and you realize that he has everything. He is the king of angels. He is worshipped along with the Father and the Spirit in eternity. Any he gave it all up for you and me.

When you begin to understand that's the essence of it you begin to look at yourself and you say, "Man, I don't measure up." Instead of being puffed up with your own importance, you begin to see, "Hey, I need to take my place along with the prodigal son. I need

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<sup>38</sup> Paraphrase of Philippians 2:3

<sup>39</sup> Philippians 2:12

to see myself as part of the great unwashed mass of humanity. I'm not like Jesus. Oh, I can be moral. I can think...I can make people think I'm good."

But really being like Jesus, well, it causes a sense of fear and trembling. But, verse 13 reminds us, taking us back to Hebrews 13:21. It is going to happen. God is already working in you. The moment you came to Christ he forgave your sins. The moment you came to Christ he began this work.

"For it is God," we are told in Philippians 2:13, "who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose."<sup>40</sup>

Now, let's see how that works out practically. Just a few more minutes, please, bear with me.

Page 1828, top of the next page, verse 14: "Do everything without complaining or arguing."<sup>41</sup>

Why do you complain? Because you think you are important. Why do you argue? Because "It's my opinion that counts here. Who are you to take issue with me?"

You get mad when people disagree with you. Drop of a hat, your opinion on everything from toenail fungus to how to solve the problems of poverty to something that you have never studied but you have great opinion about. Where does all that come from? It comes from not being like Jesus.

Do everything without complaining or arguing, [Verse 15] so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life—in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labour for nothing.<sup>42</sup>

What is he saying? Do people who are merely moral stand out as lights? No. Atheists can be merely moral as we will see in a moment. What is it? You shine as a light in the world when people look at you and say, "That woman only thinks of other people."

That's when they notice. Do you want your children to walk in the faith that you have? Being good will never bring them to that faith? But when your children see that in a practical way, on a day to day basis, you account them, their mother, their father, the people that work for you, as being more important than yourself and your desire in life is to serve other people for the sake of Jesus, you shine as a star. You become a great light drawing people to Christ.

Listen to how Paul puts it, again, in verse 17.

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<sup>40</sup> Philippians 2:13

<sup>41</sup> Philippians 2:14

<sup>42</sup> Philippians 2:15-16

But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.<sup>43</sup>

What is he saying in verse 17? “Even if I am being poured out like a drink offering.”<sup>44</sup> “I’m just being spent. I am wearing myself out,” he is saying. What am I doing this for? What is the result of my labor? What if I’m dog tired and exhausted and somebody needs me and I just pour myself out more and more, he said, “Big deal.” He said, “I rejoice in it because I am doing this for the sake of Christ. I am not doing it for reward in this life. I am doing it to see Christ’s name exalted.” You can see that throughout the first chapter.

And he asks them to be...to rejoice and be glad with him.

Then there is a personal direction to some folks there starting in verse 19. But we continue to see him. And just bear with me for a moment in chapter three—page 1828. What kind of life pleases God? Verse one:

Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh.<sup>45</sup>

What does he mean by “mutilators of the flesh?” He is saying that people who try to put you back under the Sinaiatic covenant, summed up in circumcision, are dogs, men who do evil and mutilators of the flesh creeping into the Church to take it from its new covenant foundation to put it back under the weak and beggarly elements summed up in a mutilation of the body.

How do you know that’s what it says? Because verse three tells us: “For it is we who are the circumcision.”<sup>46</sup> Who is he writing to? He is writing to Jews and he is writing to Gentiles. He is writing to New Testament believers. He is writing to those who have been physically circumcised and those who have never been physically circumcised and he says of both groups, verse three, “For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh.”<sup>47</sup>

Then he said, “You want to talk about fleshly confidence? What is fleshly confidence?” It is being a good person and being proud of it and thinking you are being a good person causes you to be approved by God. Let’s look at what he says further. Bear with me.

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<sup>43</sup> Philippians 2:17-18

<sup>44</sup> Philippians 2:17

<sup>45</sup> Philippians 3:1-2

<sup>46</sup> Philippians 3:3

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

Verse four: “Though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more.” Verse five: “Circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee.”<sup>48</sup> Or, if he were speaking to today’s groups he would say, “I am Hasidic. I am the orthodox of the orthodox. I am a Hasidic Jew. That is, I practice the law according to the strict understanding of the Bible. I did not approach my Judaism,” he would say, “as merely a cultural thing or merely a thing of genealogy. “I approached it as a devout believer in the Scriptures seeking to put it into practice in the minutia. I was Hasidic, an orthodox of the orthodox. If you want to talk about religious zeal and think that your religious zeal commends you to God,” he says at verse six: “As for zeal, persecuting the church.”<sup>49</sup>

You know, when I think about religious zeal I think about those men that flew those airliners into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. You know, you can be very sincere. They were...and sincerely wrong. He says, “As for zeal, persecuting the church.”<sup>50</sup> He got letters from the high priest. He rode from Israel into Syria on his way to Damascus in order to what? To drag Jewish believers who had put their trust in Jesus as Messiah to bring them back to be punished in Jerusalem. He was very zealous.

And then he says, lastly, “as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.”<sup>51</sup> That’s an amazing statement. If you want to talk about observance of the Torah, he said, “Look at me.” My obedience to the laws of the Torah were impeccable. They were perfect. “If you want to talk about a man who was a good, moral man, look at me.” That is what Paul is saying.

As concerning the righteousness which is of the Torah he says what? Faultless.

But now look at what he says in verse seven. “But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.”<sup>52</sup> Verse eight: “What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ.”<sup>53</sup>

And this translation, at this point, is rubbish because what he actually says is: “I consider them to be σκυβαλον.”

Now, the Greek word σκυβαλον is only found in one place in the entire Greek Bible, right here in the New Testament. It is not found in the Greek translation of the Old Testament. However, it is found in a book that was written after the close of the Old Testament canon, the *Book of the Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach*. And in there Sirach uses this word σκυβαλον and he compares it to what we call B.S. He refers to it as human beings who don’t know what they are talking about sitting around and shooting the bull,

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<sup>48</sup> Philippians 3:5

<sup>49</sup> Philippians 3:6

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Philippians 3:7

<sup>53</sup> Philippians 3:8



σκυβαλον. In fact, modern Greek dictionaries, lexicons, such as Danker, Bauer, Art and Gingrich, 2000 edition and Spicq's three volume lexicon of the New Testament, do you know how they render this word σκυβαλον?

C-R-A-P, C-R-A-P<sup>54</sup> <sup>55</sup>

Do you mean to say that Paul used the word C-R-A-P? Yes, that's what he did. He used the word C-R-A-P. Here is what he says. I want you to get the picture. It's not rubbish. The King James is more accurate with "dung," but that's a little highfaluting. It's C-R-A-P. It's a pile of C-R-A-P. This is what he says. Now, I want you to think about it in terms of your life. What have you accomplished with your life? Think about it. I can think about some things I've accomplished. I won't go into them. But I have accomplished a few things in my life.

I think about the Boy Scouts and getting the silver beaver and this and that and being the president of the council and all of that. I think about being a REV (Rest, Eat and Visit). I think about all the things that I might have done in my life and I have to think about what Paul is saying here. My M.D. degree, my B.S. degree, my B.A. degree, my M.S., my M.A., my Ph.D., My Ed.D., the one I'm working on, my D.Min. What is all that? If it is a reason to feel better about myself as over against you it's all a pile of C-R-A-P. If it is something that I look at and say, "God ought to hear my prayer because I am a REV, because I am this or I am that, because I have achieved this or I have achieved that," Paul says, "It is all a pile of C-R-A-P."

You can say, "Well, I don't like that word."

Well, I've never said it. I'm a little more fastidious than the Holy Spirit. I just spelled it for you. The Greek word is σκυβαλον. He said, "I count it all, all of that—circumcised the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, regarding the law being Hasidic, as for zeal persecuting the Church, as for the righteousness that comes from keeping the Torah, blameless," he said, "I look at it all and it's just a pile of C-R-A-P."

Why? Because I want Christ. He says, verse nine: "And be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the [Torah], but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith."<sup>56</sup>

In other words, Saint Paul let go of everything in the world that would commend him to God by his own efforts and he simply cast himself on God's mercy in Jesus Christ. And at that moment he is declared righteous

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<sup>54</sup> Frederick William Danker (ed.), *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature. Third edition (BDAG) (based on Walter Bauer's Griechisch-deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der frühchristlichen Literatur, sixth edit.* Chicago/London: Chicago University Press, 2000.), p. 932.

<sup>55</sup> Ceslas Spicq, *The Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994) Vol. 3, pp. 263-265.

<sup>56</sup> Philippians 3:9

And then he says this. And we are going to end where we began. Verse 10:

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.<sup>57</sup>

What's he saying? He said, "Having experienced salvation in Jesus Christ I want fully to work out that salvation by being just like Jesus. That's what I want. I want to die to self, being conformed to Christ's death. I want to experience that suffering of self denial to be more like Jesus. I want to experience more and more of that resurrection power of Jesus. That's what I want."

In other words, having been declared righteous by means of grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, he now wants to live in this world in a way that people say, "Is that Jesus?"

Did you hear what I just said?

Having been declared righteous by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone he now wants to live in such a way so that when people see him they will say, "Is that Jesus? Is that Jesus?"

Now, the last part, verse 12. "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers [and he would include sisters there] I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus. All of us who are mature [Or complete or perfect, because there is a perfect sense of this] should take such a view of things."<sup>58</sup>

What is he saying? God, the moment I believed accepted me just the way I am, loved me just the way that I am, didn't ask me to bathe, put on deodorant, shave cut my hair. He commanded that the fatted calf be slaughtered, the musicians called, the best robe put on me, ring on my finger, shoes on my feet. Just grace, merely grace. But having been received totally by grace through faith alone, embraced by the love of God I now want to do this. I want to show to God my gratitude. How can I say thanks for this free gift of eternal life?

And this is what God says. He says, "Son, I want you to be just like Jesus." He says, "Daughter, I want you to do to other people exactly what Jesus did for you." He says, "My son, I want you to be a model of self denial, putting other people, my daughter,

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<sup>57</sup> Philippians 3:10-11

<sup>58</sup> Philippians 3:12-15

ahead of yourself. I want you to treat other people the way that Christ treated you, yielding his own rights, giving up his own needs, taking his own welfare and putting you ahead of himself.”

And when Saint Paul thinks about all that and he looks at himself he said, “Folks, I haven’t reached that point. I have a long way to go.”

But the beautiful thing is—here it is—because of God’s grace in Jesus Christ, God accepts my weak and imperfect effort to be like Jesus as if it is a perfect obedience. Do you hear me again? Because of what God did for me on the cross, God accepts my weak and imperfect effort to be like Jesus, empowered by the Holy Spirit, covered by the blood of Christ as if I really had attained it even though I haven’t. And that’s the mystery of the true Christian life, to be like Jesus in this world. That’s the goal. I’m more like Jesus than I used to be.

I was reflecting. One of my children said something very beautiful to me last night and I was struck because I realized that I was a better father to my sons than I was to my daughters. I was struck that my son felt that way and my daughters nodded. But I knew that I had been a better day to my boys. Why? Because I’m a male chauvinist pig?

No, because nothing will crucify you as much as raising kids. Can I say it again? Nothing will crucify you as much as raising kids. Having raised three girls and then along comes one son and then, six years later, the last son, I learned a whole lot more not really about raising kids, but about me. I realize I really was so very self absorbed.

I’m not as self absorbed as I used to be, but I would be lying to me and lying to you if I said I have already achieved that. I am no longer self absorbed. I still struggle with it, going into my own little world, thinking my own thoughts. But I take great comfort, as I encourage you to, about reading these words in Philippians 3:12-14. I haven’t reached the goal yet but God has accepted me. Jesus took hold of me and my life I want to live taking hold of being like Jesus.

And you know, dear ones, one day I will finally be like Jesus when I see him face to face. But in the here and now God accepts that new obedience that is born of God’s Spirit who came into my heart the day I cast my helpless, hopeless self on Jesus. May you know him. If you don’t know him won’t you come to him? Let’s pray.

*Lord, teach us who we are that we, Lord, would give up on ourselves and come to you because you are the only one who can make us shine in this world in such a way that people are drawn to Jesus. Lord, I want my life to count for you. I want when people look at me to think of Jesus. I want, when I speak, for people to be thinking, “Is that Jesus talking?” Lord, I’d be a fool if I thought that I had really gotten to that point. But, Lord, I thank you for the grace that began a good work in me long, long ago when I first met Jesus and that grace that you have promised in Philippians 1:6 that you will see through to the end until I am with Jesus. Being confident of this very thing, that he who*

*has begun a good work in you will complete until the day of Jesus Christ. That is what I want for myself and for all here in Jesus' name. Amen.*