

Every Knee Will Bow

By Barry Minsky

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: Philippians 2:1-12
Preached on: Sunday, September 9, 2007

Quacco Baptist Church
215 Quacco Road
Savannah, GA 31419

Website: www.quaccobaptist.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/minsky

Good Morning.

We are continuing in our studies in the book of Philippians and we have finally reached chapter two. In chapter two we are actually having a continuation of what we discussed last week at the end of chapter one. You will remember that we talked last week about our attitude towards one another, how we should view one another, what our attitude should be towards one another.

In this passage the apostle focuses on one aspect of that attitude and he speaks of our being humble in our relationship with other people. He says in this passage:

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.¹

Regard one another as more important than yourselves. Does that sound at all like human nature to you? It doesn't really sound like human nature to me. I have heard people talk about being concerned about their own interests. In fact, it seems as if that is the attitude of most of humanity. You have heard the expression, "I am out for number one." You have heard that, haven't you? I have often wondered who number two is.

You see, "I am out for number one," basically means, "I am interested in what I can get for myself. I am interested in what I can achieve in my life. I am interested in having as much wealth and as much prestige and as much as honor as I can possibly have and I don't care about the next guy." That is what that basically means.

The Lord Jesus is telling us here that our attitude as Christians is to be the exact opposite of that. That instead of being overly concerned with our own needs—that doesn't mean we shouldn't be interested in meeting our own needs—but instead of being overly concerned about our own needs we are to focus on the needs of others. We are to be interested in other people to the extent that we consider them to be more important than we would consider ourselves.

¹ Philippians 2:3-4

Now that is a tall task. Let's admit that. That is not easy to do. We look around at other people and we see their needs and we begin to realize that we have some of the same needs. And we may ask the question: Why should I be concerned about that person rather than being concerned about myself? And yet this is what the Lord Jesus tells us in this passage that we are to do.

He gives an interesting parable in the book of Luke that I think emphasizes and brings out the same concept. And I am going to read it. In Luke chapter 14 beginning with verse seven we read this.

And He began speaking a parable to the invited guests when He noticed how they had been picking out the places of honor at the table, saying to them, "When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for someone more distinguished than you may have been invited by him, and he who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give your place to this man,' and then in disgrace you proceed to occupy the last place. But when you are invited, go and recline at the last place, so that when the one who has invited you comes, he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher'; then you will have honor in the sight of all who are at the table with you. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."²

A little explanation is needed. It was common at a feast that there would be a seat of honor and that seat of honor would be held by the person who was giving the feast. And people who would be invited would be designated certain places at the table. People who are to be honored, those who are considered to be the more important, would sit close to the one who is giving the feast. They would sit right next to him, either to his right or to his left. And then so on down the table those who are lesser and lesser in importance in the eyes of the person who was giving the feast.

So what would happen sometimes is people who would go to a wedding feast would say, "I am going to get there first and I am going to get the best seat in the house. I mean I am going to sit at the right hand of the man who is in charge of this thing, because, you see, I want to be honored. I want to be viewed as something special."

Jesus is saying that is not to be our position at all. When you go to the feast don't consider yourself to be the best and the most important, but take the lowest seat and possibly you might be invited to sit at a better seat. But, you see, you are to demonstrate the fact that you have a humble spirit.

I wonder what it would be like if in all of the relationships that Christians had, they demonstrated that kind of humility, the humility that would say to each and every person, "You are more important than I am. I am going to do some thing to help you. I want to encourage you. I want to lift you up even if it means that I will be lower. That's ok. It is important that you be lifted up."

² Luke 14:7-11

Imagine what it would be like in all areas of life. Let's take a look at that for a moment. What about in the family? Can you imagine how wonderful family life would be if every husband would say, "My wife, she is the queen of my life. She is so important to me. I am going to lift her up. She sits on a pedestal as far as I am concerned. And anything I can do for her, even if it means I will go out of my way. It doesn't matter what difficulty I might experience, but I am going to give to her and she is going to be honored in my sight and in the sight of other people."

And then if every wife would say of her husband, "I am going to honor my husband. I am never going to say an unkind word about him. I am going to always be building him up and lifting him up and encouraging him. Whatever his needs are, I am going to see to it that they are met and I am going to love him with a love that is beyond anything that can be imagined."

And children would say to their parents, "You know, I want to be the best child possible. So I will tell you. You are not going to have to ask me to do the dishes. I am going ask if I can have permission to do the dishes."

Can you imagine that?

Can you imagine if a son would walk in and say, "Dad, you know, I know you have been working hard all week. Let me mow the lawn for you this week. You know, I don't want to see you doing that."

An attitude that says, "Everybody in the family is more important and everybody is more significant than I am." Can you imagine what wonderful Christian families we would have if that were the attitude everywhere all the time?

Imagine what it would be like if that was the attitude that we had at work wherever it is that we might work. Imagine that you walked into work one day and the boss came over to you and said something like, "You know, you look a little tired today. Why don't you take off a couple of hours early and go home?"

Wouldn't that be nice? I mean, could you imagine what an encouraging thing that would be? What would it be like if...I am trying to think of the army mentality. You know, all the years I spent in the army. Can you imagine if the commander would come over and say, "You know, you have really been putting in a hard day. I mean, you know, our normal time to leave is 4:30, but I just want you to just go home and take it easy for a couple of hours"?

I don't think I have experienced. Anyway, but that...

You see, that could be a wonderful thing. And what if as an employee you went in to work and you said, "You know, I am so concerned about my company and its needs. I am so concerned about the organization, I am going to volunteer to work a couple of extra

hours because I know things are needed here and I am going to make sure things are done well. And I am going to do the best job that can ever be done. Whatever it is my job is. Whether I am a carpenter or a secretary or I am a supervisor. I am going to be the best there possibly is so that my company can achieve and my boss can be viewed as important because of the good things that I am doing.”

Imagine what that would be like if that were the attitude of everybody in every church. Can you imagine how wonderful a church would be if every single person walked into church thinking, “Now what can I do for somebody else in the church? What can I do to help another person?”

I have seen the opposite in churches and you have, too, where there is anger and dissention and difficulties and problems. But I have seen love, the kind of love that walks in and says, “You know, I think that so and so is not feeling too well today. Let’s see if we can invite him or her out to eat just to be an encouragement.” Or you hear that so and so has a special problem or a special need so you go to that person’s home and say, “What can I do to help?” You see a financial need so you gather the people together and say, “Let’s put a little money together and see whether we can help so and so in this time of need.”

This extends to more people than just the members of a church. I often look at pastors—and I happen to be one—but I look at pastors and one of the things I have enjoyed is to meet those pastors who have what I consider to be a humble spirit. I am thinking of one man in particular right now. His name is John Reisinger. I don’t know whether any of you have ever heard of him. He has written a number of books. He has been a preacher for many, many years, a pastor and an evangelist. And John is on a couple of the email lists that I am on for pastors and for other Christians.

Now, as I have said, he has written a number of...I have read his books. He has written some excellent books. He preaches everywhere. Right now he is sort of retired. He is 82 years old, still very active in the things of the ministry. And I read his posts to the lists and one of the things that has always impressed me, I mean really impressed me, that at the age of 82 with years and years of ministry he is still learning. Isn’t that neat? He is still learning. And he will write a post and he will say, “So and so, I really enjoyed the things that you said in that last post you gave. That taught me something.”

Now I don’t know how many people who have been involved in ministry for that many years are still ready to learn, to gain and to develop and to complement another person on having been his teacher. I thought that was very special.

You see, each one of us—regardless of what position we find ourselves in—is to have an attitude that says, “I want to lift others up and consider them to be more important than I am.”

An ideal example of this is given to us in our passage. I mean the perfect example, the Lord Jesus Christ is used by the apostle Paul here as an example of that kind of humility.

You can't get a better example than that. If Jesus would do it, if Jesus would have an attitude that says, "You are more important than I am," than certainly that can be an attitude that we can have.

It says in the passage, "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus."³ In other words, look at Jesus. He is the example. Whatever his attitude was, whatever his approach to these things was, we should have that same attitude in us. And then he goes on to describe the attitude. He says:

Who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant.⁴

If you don't mind, let me give you a little lesson in the Greek language that is used here. I think it is very important for us.

This is one of the most controversial passages in the study of theology that you will find anywhere in the Bible. It doesn't sound controversial, but it has been. And let me explain what I mean by that.

There have many, first of all, who look at this passage and they will say something like this. "Well, he existed in the form of God. That means he wasn't really God. He was just in the form of God."

And then there are others who will say, "Well, he emptied himself. That means that though he was God in heaven, he became less than God. He emptied himself of being God when he came to earth."

It doesn't mean any of those things. And let me explain.

The word that is used here which says that he existed is a very interesting word. It is a present participle in the Greek language. And a Greek present participle talks about continuous action. It has the idea of something that goes on indefinitely, the idea being that no matter how long a period of time this is discussing, during that entire period of time he existed in the form of God. He never stopped being God. He always was God.

Then it says that he existed in the form of God. The word "form" that is used here is the Greek word μορφή (mor-fay') and it means a lot more than what we mean when we say "form." I could say, for instance, that we have some artificial flowers in our house. They are in the form of flowers. In other words, they look like flowers. They are not really flowers, but they look like flowers.

That is not what this means. The word μορφή (mor-fay') has the idea of something that is the very essence of what we are talking about. Let me give you an example.

³ Philippians 2:5

⁴ Philippians 2:6-7

Every one of us who is seated here today is a human being, right? I hope so. Every one of us. We are all different. Some of us are male. Some of us are females. Some of us are older. Some of us are younger. Some of us are tall. Some of us are short. We are all different. But every one of us is in the form of a human being. We have the essence of humanity, every one of us. We have that essence.

This is saying that Jesus had the very essence of deity, that he was God himself, that he wasn't just something that formed like and looked like God, but he was God himself. So it is saying to us, first of all, that he existed all the time that this is speaking...the time that is being referred to here. He existed in the very essence of what God is, the very essence of Godhead.

Then it goes on to say but he emptied himself. And this has been the most controversial word in the passage. The word is the Greek word κενωω (ken-o'-o) and from that we have had theologians who have come up with a theory that they call the kenosis theory that has the idea that he emptied himself and became less than what he was in heaven, that he was no longer God, that he divested himself of deity. That is not what it is talking about at all.

We have already discovered earlier in the passage that he existed all this time in the form of God. He couldn't stop being what he always was. What it means is that he emptied himself of the privileges of deity. Now think about this for a moment. When he was in heaven he had perfect communion with the Father and the Holy Spirit always. There was this perfect communion. He had nothing that we could call pain. He didn't hunger. He wasn't thirsty. But when he came to earth he became in μορφη (mor-fay'), in the form of a man, in the form of a servant. He took on our essence and he gave up all or many of the privileges that he had in heaven.

He came to earth becoming a human being and yet remaining the eternal God. And as a human being he thirsted, he hungered, he experienced pain. He became a man in the very true sense, experiencing all of the difficulties and trials and tribulations that we as human beings experience.

Well, so much for the essence of what this is teaching us here. The important thing that we have here is that we are to have this attitude in us, that although he eternally existed in the form of God he did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, but he emptied himself. He gave up all of those privileges.

Taking on the form of a bondservant, being made in the likeness of men, being found in the appearance of a man he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death even death on the cross. For this reason [we're told] God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that

every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.⁵

This is our ultimate example. If Jesus was willing to come to earth, divest himself of the privileges that he had in heaven, take on the form of humanity, go through all the trials and tribulations that we experience, humbling himself for what purpose? To provide for us eternal life, to give to us the blessings and joy of an eternity that those of us who are his will spend in heaven. How can we do any less than humbly lifting each other up? That is the message that we have here. That is what he is saying.

Now, you know, there is another part to this. Sometimes we ask the question, “Well, is God going to lift us up? Are we going to be exalted?”

Well, you know, as a side effect of our humbling ourselves we will be. Listen to what is said in the parable we read before. You remember that the person who chose to go to the lowest seat would then be invited to go up to a higher seat. And Jesus ends this by saying, “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, [but] he who humbles himself will be exalted.”⁶

Jesus is the ideal example of this where it says:

For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow.⁷

If we humble ourselves—not in order to gain anything—the wonderful blessing is that God will choose to lift us up and God will bless us, bless us for looking on others as more important than ourselves.

We have seen this humble spirit that we are to have. We have seen the example of the humble Savior who demonstrated that spirit. And now we might ask the question: So, how do we go about doing this? And the answer we find in the 12th verse of this passage where it says:

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.⁸

People have read this and there has been a lot of confusion over the passage. There are those who have said, “Well, it says to work for your salvation.” In other words, salvation

⁵ Philippians 2:7-11

⁶ Luke 14:11

⁷ Philippians 2:9-10

⁸ Philippians 2:12

comes by works. That is not what it says at all. It says, “Work out your salvation,”⁹ the idea being that you have something within you. You are to work it out or to demonstrate it so that the world can see it, so that it can be demonstrated before the world. He is talking here about this whole idea of having a humble spirit as Jesus had a humble spirit.

And how do we demonstrate this? We work it out. We look at the wonderful salvation that God has given to us and we demonstrate that salvation in the way that we live and the way that we lift up and honor other people. It seems as if—when we read this verse—that there is an apparent contradiction here. And there isn’t. It says, “Work out your salvation... for it is God who is at work in you.”¹⁰ Doesn’t that sound confusing? We are to work it out, but God is at work in us. In other words, we have the job of demonstrating the salvation that God has given us by showing a humble, loving spirit to those around us, by lifting up others, by demonstrating a caring attitude to towards those around us. But when we do it, we have to be aware that it is God who is working in us. In other words, we don’t have the ability to do that on our own. Let’s admit it.

I’ll tell you that there are times that each one of us will sit back and say, “Why should I do a think like that? Why in the world should I have this kind of attitude towards other people? Why should I live my life in that way?”

And we find that it is God who is working in us, enabling us both to have the will and to work for his good pleasure.

And he goes on here to tell us what that attitude should be that we demonstrate as God works in us. He says, “Do all things without grumbling [and] disputing.”¹¹ Of course, none of us grumble, do we? None of us dispute.

Do all things without grumbling or disputing; so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life.¹²

Jesus says we have work to do in our lives. We are to be a testimony to the world around us. And that testimony is to show forth the humility of the Lord Jesus Christ, that just as he humbly, lovingly and caringly demonstrated his love for us by coming to earth and dying on the cross of Calvary, living a life that honored God and living that life for us, that we are to live our lives in a way that honors him.

What do we do? Well, I think we need to look at all of the relationships that we have in our lives. What are our families like? Are our families places of love? If people would walk into our homes today and see the way that we live, would they look around and say, “That’s the way that Jesus lived his life”? Husband loving wife, wife loving husband,

⁹ Philippians 2:12

¹⁰ Philippians 2:12-13

¹¹ Philippians 2:14

¹² Philippians 2:14-16

children obeying, parents bringing up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

When we go to our place of employment, will people look at us and say, “This person lives as Jesus lived. There is a love there. It is so obvious. He cares about his fellow workers, about his subordinates, about her superiors”? What a testimony for God.

And then when we look at the church we ask the question when we walk in: Is there a loving spirit that every single person could honestly say, “I love the people of this congregation”? That if a guest would come who has never been here before and would be here for a worship service and to visit could look around and say, “This is a place of love and a place of care.” When we have that kind of attitude, then we can truly say we have the attitude in ourselves which was also in Christ Jesus.

The first thing I would ask you today is: Do you know the Savior? If you don't know him, all of this is meaningless. You can't live for a Christ you don't know. If you have never come to know him as your Savior and Lord, I would challenge you to trust in him now that you might have everlasting life.

For those of us who are his, let's each one of us look into our own hearts and ask the question: Am I living as a demonstration of the love of God? When people see me and see the way I interact in all of my relationships, can they say this is a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ? May it be that each one of us can answer that with a hearty yes and that each day of our lives we grow more and more to be like Christ.

Let us pray together.

Our heavenly Father, we thank you for that love that you shower upon us. Lord, this is a time as we gather together as your children when we want to learn of you. And, Father, we have looked into your Word. We have seen the admonition that you give to us that we are to live with humble spirits, honoring the Lord Jesus Christ. For some day every knee will bow before him. What a glorious thing it would be if in each of our relationships we could honestly say we are living as Christ would want us to live. May it be, Lord, that each one of us here today will honor you and glorify you as we grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Savior the Lord Jesus. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.