
Day 1

Learn: Prayerfully read Philippians 2.5-7. In 2.7, Paul talks about Christ becoming man, taking on human nature when he was born as the baby Jesus. In 2.6, he is talking about before this event. Christ existed before baby Jesus was born; who was he? He existed in the nature [or form] of God. Christ is the divine Son of God, who has always eternally existed. He was fully God; yet he was not God the Father, because Paul in 2.6 compares him with God the Father, saying Christ [as the Son of God] was equal with God the Father.

We believe in one God, but God has revealed himself to be three individuals – God the Father, the Son of God, and the Holy Spirit – each distinct from the others in personality and actions, but so unified in essence, character, and will, that they somehow are one God together. Each is all of God, yet God is all three. This is what we mean when we talk about the Trinity or the Triunity of God. Scripture reveals that the Son of God came to be born as the baby Jesus, to fulfill the prophecies about the Messiah-savior, also known as Christ. Paul is making reference to this here: before Jesus was born, Christ existed as the Son of God, equally as divine as God the Father, but distinct from him.

Reflect: If the concept of the Triune God is new to you, prayerfully accept this truth, even though it is impossible to fully understand or explain. Talk about it with your pastor or small group leader. It is one of the most important beliefs in Christianity, one of the few that separates true believers from heretics. Given who Christ is as the Son of God, what can he reveal to us better than anyone else? What authority does he have in our lives, given who he is?

Day 2

Learn: Prayerfully read Philippians 2.5-8. As Jesus, Christ was fully human: he had flesh, bone, and blood; he ate when hungry, drank when thirsty, slept when tired; he had a human nature. But he was without sin and corruption, so he lived a sinless life; he thought, spoke, and acted as God always intended people to do. Another foundational belief of Christianity is the dual nature of Christ: he is fully divine and fully human, both God and man. This is the miracle of the “incarnation”: that the divine Son of God came as one of us.

Reflect: Given that the divine Christ is fully human, and has lived as one of us, what can he reveal to us better than anyone else? Why might you be more comfortable with [and reassured by] Jesus, knowing he is human like you?

Day 3

Learn: Prayerfully read Philippians 1.27-2.8. Paul has been exhorting his readers to live worthy of the gospel, providing some instruction on how to do so. In 2.5-11 he offers Christ as an example of what he has described. If we invest time into contemplating Christ, we not only will learn about the character of God and what it means to be God’s person, we also will find we are conforming more to the pure Christ rather than to the corrupted world.

The Son of God, being equal and of the same essence as God the Father, was the most powerful being in the universe, he was creator rather than creature, he was omniscient [all-knowing] and omnipotent [all-powerful]; but he did not see the need to grasp or hold tightly or lay claim to his position, power, and authority for his own advantage. Instead, he was willing to sacrifice and suffer to meet our needs. He came here and experienced the trials and pains of life, from birth onward. During his ministry, he was willing to live without anything other than one set of clothes, giving up material things, his time, his comfort, everything, to model for us what it means to walk with God, to teach us essential truths, and to meet the needs of people he encountered. He was willing to sacrifice and suffer even to the point of crucifixion, the most loathsome and painful death of his era, and in that moment to bear all the penalty for our sins [much worse than the physical and emotional trauma]! He was willing to empty himself, to pour himself out for us. He was selfless so as to bless us through the gospel mission.

Reflect: If we have the same mindset as Christ, will we be willing to sacrifice and suffer for the sake of the gospel mission, for the sake of living worthy of the gospel as Paul describes? How do you need to adjust your attitudes or way of life to better live this out? In your church, what opportunities are there to sacrifice? Think of how you could sacrifice more time and leisure to work for Christ; more effort and energy to work for Christ; more comfort level and

pride to reach out to unchurched people; more money and things to support the church. How should you be more bold about your faith in public [even though that might bring some antagonism from non-believers]? Christ gave everything for the gospel mission; reflect on that and then pray about your life being for Christ [1.21].

Day 4

Learn: Prayerfully read Philippians 1.27-2.8 [try a different translation!]. As the divine Son of God, Christ has all authority in the universe. Yet, rather than be self-serving, rather than be self-promoting, Christ demonstrated absolute humility. He was willing to empty himself by becoming human. That was quite a comedown from being God! He traded his status as Lord of all to be a mere creature like us. And as a man, he was willing to humble himself further by living as God the Father's slave. Jesus was born as the rightful heir to David's throne, he was the rightful king of Israel, which also meant he was born to be God's ultimate representative on Earth, because under the covenants God established with Israel, the king of Israel was to represent God as he led Israel, and Israel was to obey her king as they represented God to the other nations. So Jesus was born to be the most powerful and exalted person on earth, and as the promised Messiah-savior, he was destined to be the most powerful and exalted person in all of human history, because his kingdom would never end. With all that to live for, Jesus further humbled himself with slavish obedience to God the Father to the point of sacrificing himself on the cross for us. He already had given up his divine rights, now he humbly gave up his human rights, to obey the plan of God the Father and to provide the means of salvation to all of us. Paul said we should not act out of selfish ambition or empty vanity, rather being humble enough to value others above ourselves and to tend to each other's interests, not just our own. Then he says Christ is our example, so we should not exploit whatever rights or authority we might have so as to help ourselves, instead we should humbly be willing to sacrifice and suffer for others as part of the gospel mission.

Reflect: Most of us are not very humble. Even when we are down on ourselves, we usually are not willing to give up our rights or our comforts for the sake of someone else. Even when we do help someone else, it usually is not that much of a sacrifice, since we give out of our abundance and we serve only in ways that leave us fulfilled. Be honest, how aware are you of the concerns of others in the church? How much time do you spend praying for them or trying to actively help them? Are you a willing servant in the ministry for your pastor-elders? Do you accept coaching, invest in getting further training, cooperate in teams, faithfully pursue the spiritual disciplines for your ongoing spiritual health and growth? Pray about what attitudes and actions you need to change to be truly humble and sacrificial, so you can follow the example of Christ.

Day 5

Learn: Prayerfully read Philippians 2.5-8 one more time [dwell on these verses!]. As a person, Christ considered himself a slave of God the Father. If God is our creator, he is our master. If Christ has redeemed us from slavery to sin and evil, he now is our Lord. Christ was submissively obedient to the will of God the Father, so much that to pursue the gospel mission fully, he was willing to be crucified for us. By first century standards, this was the most loathsomely degrading way to die, involving torture and public humiliation. And Jewish belief was that crucified people died under the curse of God. So to Jews and Gentiles, Jesus – born to be king – humbled himself to the lowest rung of humanity in his death. This fulfilled prophecy of the coming Messiah-savior [Christ]. In the "Servant of Yahweh" passage in Isaiah 52.13-53.12, the prophet described the coming Messiah-savior as a slave or servant of God [called Yahweh in this passage], who would sacrifice and suffer for mankind, particularly to take our sins. Consider Isaiah 53.5 NIV: "...he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed."

Reflect: If Jesus – as the divine Son of God, the ultimate Davidic King, the Messiah-savior – was willing to obey like a slave, what should our attitude be? If Jesus – the perfect and pure human – submitted to God's will and obeyed God's commands all the time, what should our attitude be? If Jesus reveals God's character and God's idea of humanity to us, in what ways should you change your attitudes, priorities, or lifestyle? Think about how much of your life is focused on pursuing your goals, your comforts; and how much really is dedicated to pursuing God's goals, the blessing of others? Are there sins you tolerate in your life? Are there any you struggle to eradicate? PRAY! GET HELP! There is no shame in getting prayer support, counsel, and other help from your pastor-elders or fellow believers; the shame is remaining in the spiritual shadows, mired in sin, rather than living a life of freedom from sin and victory over it! Believe enough in Jesus to believe he can empower you to change!