

## Philippians 2 • The Submissive Mind

### Introduction

While it is true that times of trial or persecution can cause us to lose our joy, people can also bring trials and situations which rob us of the same. The best remedy for these circumstances is a submissive mind, the kind of mind that is humble and seeks only to honor Christ. Whereas pride is the cause of much unrest and contention, biblical humility brings contentment and joy. Paul provides four examples by which we can follow and achieve the submissive mind.

<sup>1</sup>Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, <sup>2</sup>make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.

### [Read v.1-2]

**Q: Who is being addressed here? What is the message to them?**

A: The collective church as a whole is being given the goal of to strive for unity.

**Note:** Sometimes, as in the case of these verses, we can better understand what is being taught by working through them backwards.

**Q: How is that unity described in v.2?**

1. "...by being of the same mind...": Unity of the mind.
2. "...maintaining the same love...": Unity of the heart.
3. "...united in spirit...": Unity of the soul.
4. "...intent on one purpose": Unity of ministry or service.

**Q: What are the methods by which this unity is attained according to v.1?**

1. "...encouragement in Christ..."
2. "...consolation of love..."
3. "...fellowship of the Spirit..."
4. "...affection and compassion"

**Q: What do all of these methods have in common?**

A: They are expressions of biblical love in the course of personal relationships.

**Application:** Biblical unity cannot be achieved by simply agreeing to the same doctrines or statement of faith; it requires their application in the pursuit of personal relationships within the church from the heart, mind, and soul.

<sup>3</sup>Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; <sup>4</sup>do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. <sup>5</sup>Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup>who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup>but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.

<sup>8</sup>Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. <sup>9</sup>For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every

### [Read v.3-11]

**Q: Whereas the opening verses address "the same mind", what is the focus here?**

A: "...humility of mind..." (v.3)

**Q: According to v.3-4, how would we be able to prove that someone has achieved biblical humility?**

A: By the way they treat others by regarding them as more important than themselves and looking out for their interests rather than their own.

**Q: What is our best, guiding example of biblical humility?**

A: Christ, who did not hold on to His privileges as God but took on "the form of a bond-servant"—someone who served others and was preoccupied with carrying out the Father's business.

name,<sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth,<sup>11</sup> and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

<sup>12</sup>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;<sup>13</sup> for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

<sup>14</sup>Do all things without grumbling or disputing;<sup>15</sup> 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,<sup>16</sup> holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain.<sup>17</sup> But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all.<sup>18</sup> You too, I urge you, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me.

**Q: What does it mean that Christ “emptied Himself”?**

A: It expresses how He voluntarily humbled Himself and assumed the role of a Servant to others, willingly putting aside His own glory and position for the sake of others.

**Q: What is the key characteristic of biblical obedience as exemplified in Christ?**

A: According to v.8 it is obedience.

**Q: And what resulted from Christ’s obedient example of humility?**

A: “...God highly exalted Him...” (v.9) Glory and exultation are the spiritual result of obedience and humility.

*Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time,  
— 1 Peter 5:6*

**Application:** *The submissive mind of God’s servant is visibly evident in their elevation of others’ interests over their own. They are not working for their own self-interest but according to God’s glory bestowed when and where He sees fit.*

**[Read v.12-18]**

**Q: What is the theme Paul has been developing to this point?**

A: “...the sacrifice and service of your faith...” (v.17) The submissive mind is single-minded in its service to God through others by its willingness to sacrifice self.

**Q: According to v.13, what must take place before God can work through us?**

A: Before God can work **through** us He must be allowed to work **in** us.

**Observation:** *Ever notice the pattern by which someone is called (such as Paul or Moses), but before they are sent out into service they are first prepared by the Lord?*

**Q: Why would this be logical in terms of achieving biblical humility?**

A: The flesh cannot “work up” either humility or dedication—that is pride at work; it can only come from within by the power of the Spirit.

**Q: How does God work in us before working through us?**

1. Through the Word. (1 Th. 2:13)
2. Through the Spirit. (Eph. 3:16, 20-21)
3. Through prayer.

**Point:** *A life not personally devoted to Christ cannot truly meet all the biblical requirements of devotion to others. Social works even in the name of Christ, without personal devotion to Christ, are futile.*

**Q: In v.14-16, what are the key characteristics of someone God is working through?**

1. “...blameless and innocent...” (v.14)
2. “...children of God above reproach...” (v.15)
3. “...appear as lights in the world...” (v.15)
4. “...holding fast the word of life...” (v.16)

**Q: What do these all have in common?**

A: They are all the result of the application of God's Word in our life to such a high degree that our testimony and behavior become a visible witness of it to the saved and unsaved alike. [If necessary, go back and re-examine each one individually in this context.]

**Q: What is Paul conveying by portraying himself as a drink offering?**

A: Paul has been talking about humility and submission, and here provides a personal example in that he was facing the very real possibility of death. But even in this he sees it not as the primary sacrifice, but the supplemental "drink offering" which complements the main work. It is a picture of both sacrifice and service undertaken in the humility of the spiritually submissive mind.

**Q: How does v.18 contrast with v.14?**

A: "Joy" vs. "grumbling or disputing". The example comes from Christ, the energy comes from the Holy Spirit, and the spiritual result is joy.

**Application:** *The submissive mind puts God's Word into practice to such a degree that it becomes visibly evident in their service, testimony, and personal attitude.*

<sup>19</sup>But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition. <sup>20</sup>For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. <sup>21</sup>For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus. <sup>22</sup>But you know of his proven worth, that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child serving his father. <sup>23</sup>Therefore I hope to send him immediately, as soon as I see how things go with me; <sup>24</sup>and I trust in the Lord that I myself also will be coming shortly.

**[Read v.19-24]**

**Q: How is Timothy compared and contrasted to the basic message Paul is preaching?**

A: Timothy is a role model of service and sacrifice in that he "will genuinely be concerned for your welfare" (v.20), whereas those who fall short in this regard "seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus". (v.21)

**Q: Is Timothy such a role model simply because Paul says so?**

A: Timothy has proven it in both the presence of Paul personally and the church at large. (v.22) In other words, his behavior and attitude are the visible result of having put God's Word and ways into practice so that he is a visible testimony of their working.

**Application:** *The same standard for the flock is the same standard for the shepherds of the flock.*

<sup>25</sup>But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need; <sup>26</sup>because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. <sup>27</sup>For indeed he was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, so that I would not have sorrow upon sorrow. <sup>28</sup>Therefore I have sent him all the more eagerly so that when you see him again you may rejoice and I may be less concerned about you. <sup>29</sup>Receive him then in the Lord with all joy, and hold men like him in high regard; <sup>30</sup>because he came close to death for the work of

**[Read v.25-30]**

**Q: What are the four examples of biblical service and humility which Paul has given in this chapter?**

1. **Christ.** "but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross". (v.7-8)
2. **Paul.** "But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all." (v.17)
3. **Timothy.** "For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus. But you know of his proven worth, that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child serving his father." (v.21-22)
4. **Epaphroditus** (v.26) "because he was longing for you all...risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me." (v.26, 30)

Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me.

**Application:** Each is an example who put into practice what we are expected to put into practice.

**Q: What might we surmise about Epaphroditus as an example to us?**

1. He was a **balanced** Christian, a “brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier”. (v.25) He was not solely fixated on fellowship, or service, or fighting the enemy—he was balanced in every aspect of sacrifice and service to both those within and without the walls of the church.
2. He was a **burdened** Christian. (v.26-27) Having a submissive mind, he thought of others rather than his self. Even though personally sick to the point of death, his burden was still for Paul and the church in Philippi.
3. He was a **blessed** Christian. (v.28-30) He was a blessing to Paul, a blessing to his church, and centuries later by his example recorded by Paul is a blessing to us.

**Application:** The world’s definition of “submissive” is generally negative and denotes someone incapable of functioning on their own; the biblical definition of “submissive” is someone visibly engaging in the work of Christ both to the saved and the unsaved without regard for self.

### **Overall Application**

Many suffer under the worldly notion that to humble their self means to lose, yet God’s Word repeatedly teaches that the way “up” is by going “down”. Christ had the submissive mind and God exalted Him. Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus all had the submissive mind and they were honored for their sacrifice and service. We receive this mind only as we allow the Spirit and the Word to work in our lives.

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.

— Philippians 2:12–13