

Imitating The Incarnation

Introduction. We are exhorted to imitate Christ in many places throughout the New Testament (1 Corinthians 11:1; Philippians 3:16; 1 Peter 2:21). Christ Himself invites us to do the same (Matthew 11:30; John 13:12-17, 34). All these exhortations are similar to Paul's words in Philippians 2:5 when he wrote, "Let this mind be in you."

The word "incarnation" was adopted during the twelfth century and was taken from the Latin *incarnatio*. The word corresponds to the Greek *sarkosis* which is used in John 1:14: "And the Word was made flesh."

We see Christ at birth, in His youth, at the beginning of His ministry, among the thousands at Galilee and walking the path of suffering appointed for Him. In every case, He sought to do the will of His Father and is a worthy exemplar. Paul encouraged the Philippians to emulate in their own lives the distinctive virtues of the Lord Jesus. This exhortation reaches back to 2:2-4 for its definition and ahead to 2:6-11 for its illustration.

I. **We See Christ Lacking Selfish Ambition Or Conceit**

A. Jesus was in the form of God and was equal with God.

1. The word "form" is equivalent to our phrase "specific character" or "essence." Its characteristics speak of the unchangeableness and permanency of an object. It was the outward expression which a person gives of their innermost nature. The Lord's expression of His innermost Being was the divine essence of deity.
2. The characteristics of "form" are further illustrated by contrasting the two words, "form" and "fashion" as used in this context. They are like "soul" and "body" in comparison. The soul has permanency but the body, like the appearance of this world, will pass away (1 Corinthians 7:31; 2 Corinthians 4:16).
 - a) Remember that Christ was in the form of God and the form of a servant but was found in fashion as a man.
 - b) The unchangeableness of form and the complete changeableness of fashion can be illustrated by observing a fruit tree. Although the tree can be budding, blossoming, bearing fruit or picked clean, the form is unchanging.
3. Our Lord did not merely possess spirituality; He was actually God. He had every characteristic that makes God differ from every other creature in heaven. God's omnipotence, infinite exaltation and unapproachable blessedness was in Jesus. By saying that He was existing in the essential form of God is tantamount to saying that He possessed the nature of God. While Christ exists in the form of God, we mortal creatures exist in the form of sinful man (John 8:34; Romans 3:23; 6:17-18).

4. The Lord shared glory with the Father (John 1:1; 17:5), which is something the Father refused to share with any created being (Isaiah 42:8).
- B. He did not consider it robbery to be equal with God.
1. The expression literally means something to lay hold or retain jealously. The "glory" of equality with God which Christ enjoyed from eternity was not something He felt like He had to cling to. This was a true demonstration of a lack of selfish ambition.
 2. The Lord was willing to lay aside His participation with the members of the Godhead in their expression of divine essence. Do we consider our "standing" before others something to be held on to? Do we consider ourselves more important than others, and consider that distinction something to be preserved at all costs?

II. ***We See Christ Looking Out For The Interest Of Others***

- A. He made Himself of no reputation.
1. The Lord was willing to relinquish His rights to the expression of the essence of deity. If Christ had taken account of Himself when He existed in the form of God, He never would have left heaven! There was no possible incentive that we could offer for Him to want to leave His place of glory with the Father.
 2. In contrast, how many of us empty ourselves when someone else asks us to do something in the kingdom? When we refuse to sacrifice certain things or lifestyles to become a Christian, what are we really doing? Are we not really taking account of ourselves, how busy we are or how important we are? How many of us refuse or complain because we have to be present at the assemblies, or study, visit, pray or give?
- B. He took upon Himself the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of men.
1. We must note very carefully that the "form" of God was not changed into the "form" of a man, but He took the "form" of a servant. He was both God and man; He was God incarnate (John 1:14; 2 Corinthians 8:9). When the Lord expressed Himself as a servant, He exchanged one form of expression for another.
 2. This is the direct opposite of what took place when He was transfigured (Matthew 17:2). His outward expression as a servant ceased and He gave outward expression of the glory of His deity. The one expression was set aside to show the other.
 3. We too must become servants before we can imitate Christ (1 Peter 2:21; Matthew 16:24; Luke 14:11). No matter how great we may be in our own eyes or in the eyes of the world, true greatness is not determined by some office we may hold or title we may wear, but

- by the service we render (Matthew 20:25-28; Ephesians 5:21).
- C. He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death on a cross.
1. Christ humbled Himself by having to learn obedience by the things which He suffered (Hebrews 5:8-9). This does not mean that Jesus passed from disobedience to obedience. Rather, He learned obedience by actually obeying. There is a certain quality involved when one has performed a required action -- a quality that is lacking when there is only a readiness to act (John 14:30-31).
 2. If we wait until we are humbled by circumstances here on earth or in the judgment, we will have waited too late. We must learn to humble ourselves. And if Jesus had to learn obedience by the things which He suffered, how can we expect to learn obedience any cheaper? Too many problems in churches are the result of a lack of humility. Will we make the same mistake?
 3. Someone once wrote, "Only a divine being can accept death as obedience; for ordinary men it is a necessity." The death of Christ was not something inflicted upon Him, but it was a voluntary forfeiting of His life for the salvation of men (John 10:17-18); therefore, it was, on the part of Christ, obedience to the Father's will.

III. *We See Christ Being Highly Exalted By God*

- A. He was exalted in the present.
1. Because of Christ's voluntary act of humility and suffering, God highly exalted Him and gave Him the name which signified all the majesty and dignity of deity itself.
 2. The name of God denoted divine presence and glory upon an object of adoration and praise. The context here dwells upon the honor and worship bestowed on Him upon whom this name was conferred. Because of the Lord's humility, He now has the name by which each one of us must be saved (Acts 4:12).
- B. He would be exalted in the future.
1. The meaning here is not that a special act of adoration should be shown whenever the name "Jesus" is mentioned, but that it would be proper that all in heaven and on earth should worship Him, and that the time would come when He would be acknowledged everywhere as Lord.
 2. Confess means to "agree with someone." One day, the entire Universe will agree with God the Father on the testimony which He has given of His Son. Our confession of Christ is required before we can be saved (Romans 10:9-10).
- C. Those who have the mind of Christ will be exalted.
1. Here is the great truth that comforted and sustained the weary

- prisoner chained to the Roman guard. This was the reason why martyrs died with the blessed name of Jesus on their lips. Here is the basic conviction of the redeemed of all ages; namely, that Jesus Christ our Lord is supreme and seated at the right hand of God.
2. Those who possess the mind of Christ will participate in that great future exaltation of Christ (Romans 8:16-18; 2 Thessalonians 1:10-12). Is that not a wonderful inducement for us to have the mind of Christ?

Conclusion. If we are to have the mind of Christ, we must learn to follow Him in every way. Christ's will was to do the will of the Father and ours must be also! Christ sacrificed Himself for you and me. Therefore, it should be difficult to set a limit on the self-sacrifice which we must be ready to undergo for the good of our fellow men and our own brethren.

We are no longer our own but belong to Christ (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). We should rejoice that we have a God whom we can love and trust. We should rejoice that we have a God capable and who actually performed the amazing act of self-sacrifice for the redemption of man.

Self-sacrifice brought Christ into the world and self-sacrifice will lead us, His followers, not away from, but into the midst of men. We should always involve ourselves wherever needed. Wherever men suffer, there we will be to comfort; wherever men strive, there we will be to help; wherever men fail, there we will be to uplift; wherever men succeed, there we will be to rejoice. Can we be called upon to do too much?