

ATTITUDE

PHILIPPIANS 2:2-11

One of our newly joined church members is an executive in the banking world. She was telling me about the test that her bank uses to hire new employees.

She said their test indicates attitude. I told her that was not what I expected. I thought they would test for intelligence because banking deals with precision and exactitude with mathematics. She said, no, the skills can be taught, but attitude is a natural trait. The test they use is not for intellect, but for attitude.

To be a good employee at her bank, she believes, is not your intelligence or where you went to school or where you are from, but your attitude.

Attitude is the most important thing, she told me, in hiring new bank employees; a willing and open attitude was the primary characteristic they seek.

Attitude is our topic today. The Apostle Paul writes about attitude: “Be of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition but in humility, let the attitude be in you that was in Christ Jesus. Have the mind of Christ.” Let the spirit of Christ be your guiding attitude.

Paul is writing to a church that was close to his heart. He loved the Philippians and encouraged them how to live. He said, “I want you to be of one mind, the same mind, the same love, united in spirit, with the same purpose.”

Have you ever been part of a church that did not know its purpose? Do you know how a church goes when it does not know its purpose? It’s not a pretty picture. Do you know how many suggestions we would get if someone asked, “What is the purpose of our church?”

Paul makes it crystal clear: Christ. Christ is the purpose of the church, of this church, of every church.

Then Paul makes this amazing statement: “Let the attitude of Christ be in you. Let your attitude be the same as Jesus Christ.”

Then Paul gets personal. He asks the Philippian church to do something shocking and misunderstood. He asks them, “Regard others more highly than you regard yourself.”

“But Pastor Bob,” you say, “that is generally impossible.”

That’s true, I agree with you.

Then what does Paul mean? Does he mean that a founding member of our congregation is to regard a newly baptized baby more highly in the church than he does himself?

Does it mean a teacher should regard a student more highly than she does herself?

No, not exactly. What it means is this: see in the other person an importance greater than you see in yourself. It is an issue of authority.

“But Pastor Bob,” you say, “It is awfully hard to regard another person anywhere near as high as I regard myself.”

I think that depends. It depends on what you do not know, on what you are ignorant of. See, I’ve never met a person who did not know something I didn’t know. Be it information or a trade or a process. Someone always knows something more than me, something I don’t know.

I see all that interesting knowledge and talents in other people that I do not have. Paul suggests, “Do not just be interested in your own interests, but in the interests of others.”

I don’t know anything that says this better than the highest civilian award of the Salvation Army. The highest award they give to someone who is not part of the Salvation Army is called The Others Award. It is a public recognition that with their life, the recipient has shown more interest in others than in them self.

Someone who lives for others, how could they otherwise have the same mind and the same love and be united in the same spirit with the same purpose if all they're showing is their ego? No, they do not. They are living for others.

Maybe that's the greatest compliment you could ever receive, that you live for others instead of yourself.

That is the problem in the Christian Church and especially outside the Christian church, ego.

"But Pastor Bob," you say, "I am not sure I can measure up to the attitude of Christ." No, but that is the standard.

Jesus is the standard and that's why there is a need to know who Jesus is. You will hear one person say Jesus is the greatest human who ever lived. Someone else will say He is the greatest teacher who ever lived. The greatest example. The greatest role model.

Yes, but what does God say?

Paul reminds us, the Son of God did not think it correct to be equal with God. Nor did He think that equality with God was something to hold on to and refuse to give up. No, Christ emptied himself, Paul says.

Emptied Himself of what? Of glory. Of supreme authority. Of heaven. He, God, became a person.

"But Pastor Bob," you say, "I've always believed Jesus is the Son of God."

Yes. The Bible makes it crystal clear that the Son is equal with the Father. The Creeds also teach this.

That is why it is the greatest act of humility in all of history, God the Son emptied Himself of everything that was His as God and became a person. And as a person, Jesus became obedient.

"But Pastor Bob," you say, "He was a man of authority and obedience was due Him."

That is so right. But Jesus became obedient to the Father, even to the point of death on a cross.

All the ego of this world is due to the fact that we measure ourselves by ourselves or by each other instead of measuring ourselves by God the Son, by Jesus.

I want to tell you something. It is impossible for any of us to get hung up on our egos if we will stop and see ourselves as God sees us and not as we see ourselves.

Paul speaks of consequences. He writes, "I want you to remember that every tongue is going to confess Jesus is Lord. Every knee is going to bow. Everyone will know the name above all names." We forget that.

Then Paul makes a statement that is so often misunderstood: "I can do all things through Christ Jesus who strengthens me."

Oh, yeah? Can you jump from the very top of our building from the pinnacle of the roof and land on your feet on Jamestowne Boulevard? Or can you make a billion dollars?

I've seen a lot of people go off on a tangent. "I can do all things. My business will thrive through Christ who strengthens me." What, does God become your servant? Do you become omnipotent? All things?

No. That is not what Paul means. He means whatever circumstances the Lord chooses to train you in your relationship with Him, your disappointments, your failures, your success, whatever the occasion, you are equal to it for one reason.

Not intellect. Not education. Not social savvy. But His strength. Because Jesus strengthens you.

On any occasion you find yourself, you are equal to the occasion if you look to the strength of Jesus Christ. It is always there. Always. You can do all things through Christ who strengthens you.

Now do you understand why it is so important to see what Paul really means in this passage of Scripture from Philippians, a passage known as the Christ Hymn, a soaring hymn to Jesus?

I want you to be of the same love.

I want you to be united in spirit.

I want you to be of the same mind, for one purpose. ... Christ!

I want you to remember that whatever the occasion, you will be equal to it.

I want you to remember that the Jesus whom you follow is the world's greatest example of humility.

That is your attitude. The humble mind of Christ.

Doesn't it make perfect sense? What a God we have.

Amen.