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# **October 1, 2017 - Downward Movement**

Given by Pastor Mattei

# Philippians 2:1-13

*1 If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, 2 make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. 3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. 5 Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, 7 but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, 8 he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death -- even death on a cross. 9 Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.12 Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*

Christians believe God became incarnate. The early Fathers of the Church professed that God, by taking on human flesh, said yes to all that was physical, material, and earthly. Unfortunately, Christianity has lost this full understanding: our faith has been limited to intellectual assent and we have contented ourselves with belief systems. We have taken intimacy with God and its most profound expression, trust in God, out of the spiritual experience. When one takes faith out of spirituality one is left with pietism, religion without substance. In essence, we want to follow in Jesus’ footsteps. Yet, our actions show otherwise. We find ourselves constantly in competition with one another, revealing our insecurities and lack of trust in the divine abundance available to all.

Philippians 2 is a course of downward mobility: the way of compassion, relinquishment of potential power over others and instead honoring others. It demonstrates how Jesus has made himself available and vulnerable, shedding even that which we might consider important, for the purpose of coming closer to us. By doing that, he got closer to God. That path is for us to follow. Shedding all that we deem important allows us to assume the humility necessary to go every moment to the essentials of life, the core or ground of Life even in the simplest of events. There we see God. But it takes slowing down; it takes the discipline of prayer, meditation, concentration. The decision to relinquish the lure of power over (authoritarian power) actually strengthens our power to be fully ourselves.

To experience non-separateness, or nonduality from anything, particularly with God, one must move to the mystical mind. Until people have had some *inner spiritual experience,* there is no point in asking them to follow the ethical ideals of Jesus or to really understand religious beliefs beyond the level of formula. We don’t have the power to follow any of Jesus’ major teachings about forgiveness, love of enemies, nonviolence, humble use of power, and so on, except in and through radical union with God.

In Paul’s mind, humility is a necessary ingredient for community, indeed world, unity. And true humility is measured, not by low self-evaluation, but by demonstrable concern for others. Paul’s aims are neither self-degradation nor the affirmation of power discrepancies, but to call out individualistic quests for societal status and honor as contrary to the spirit of Christ -- and potentially harmful to community. A society that falls for the lust of power and riches will grab resources even from other lands that should be available to all for the benefit of all. Empire has no desire to serve but itself.

We may think of mystics as people completely different from the rest of humanity, aloof and otherworldly. But a mystic is simply *one who has moved from mere belief to actual inner experience of God.* Jesus’ purpose was to help us rediscover intimacy with God. Without a life of prayer, meditation and contemplation, we cannot offer the world a new vision of reality, a new consciousness, a different reading of what it means to be human. British philosopher, Alan Watts (1915-1973),put it this way: “From the beginning, institutional Christianity has hardly contemplated the possibility that the consciousness of Jesus might be the consciousness of the Christian, that the whole point of the Gospel is that everyone may experience union with God in the same way. . . as Jesus himself.” [[1]](#footnote-1) In other words, the Christ event is our personal transformation and development into the fullness of our humanity as exemplified by Jesus. The more Jesus takes over and grows in us the closer we get into unity with God, creation and others.

When we get to the point of seeing ourselves in others and, vice-versa, seeing others in us than we perceive the presence of the Spirit of Jesus making us One. Becoming aware of our common humanity and our unity with the rest of creation and celebrating that unity prompts us to live in a way that shares the love of God for all. The mission to the nations manifests our enthusiasm for a life grounded in the gospel news that through the sacrifice of Christ, we are all in God and God is all in all. Our mission proclaims the dignity of all in God. This message we can honestly spread when we renounce the race to a higher status that individually and as a society we so avidly seeks and embrace the value of a humbler life. We won’t even think about self exaltation but God will see in the depth of our heart. Our reward will be life in God. This noble downward movement may only be sustained in disciplined prayer and meditation, individually and in community. Let us support each other in prayer.

1. Alan Watts, *Behold the Spirit: A Study in the Necessity of Mystical Religion*  [↑](#footnote-ref-1)