

Right Theology, Right Attitude

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[0 : 00] Well, tonight, as I said, we're continuing our study in Paul's letter to the Philippians, and we've come to chapter 2, verses 1 to 11, which is one of the most magnificent passages in the whole Bible.

We could spend weeks and weeks in these verses. So that means that tonight, for half an hour or so, we are going to barely stretch the surface of a passage that is so rich in terms of what it reveals about who Jesus is and about what he has done for us.

So we're just going to look at a fraction of what this passage contains, and in many ways our emphasis is going to be maybe a little bit broader than it could be if we were to really focus in on some of the detail, some of the amazing detail that's contained in these verses.

This is, as I said, an utterly magnificent passage. Let me read again, verses 4 and 5. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus. And our title this evening is, Right Theology, Right Attitude.

[1 : 32] As many of you will know, over the past four or five years or so, I've had the privilege of being involved in lecturing at the Free Church College, now known as Edinburgh Theological Seminary, and that's been a wonderful experience, and it's something that I've enjoyed very much.

It's something I've done just part-time as needed. And in doing that, it's been a wonderful thing to be able to be part of that, to teach the amazing truths of theology and history.

It was also wonderful to meet students and to see their progress as they went through the course. And in doing that, one thing that I learned that became quite clear was that as a student in studies theology, there is one thing, one key thing, that will make or break how they get on.

In fact, one of the lecturers used to highlight this to the students every year. He used to say that there is one thing that is more important than anything else in determining how much the student is going to benefit from the course in theology.

There's one thing that is going to make or break it. What is that one thing? Attitude.

[2 : 58] A student with a bad attitude is going to gain very little. Now, that doesn't necessarily mean that they'll do badly. They might get good grades. They might gain a lot of information through the course, and they might eventually end up with some new letters after their name.

But they will come out of the course, and they will be no wiser, no more godly, and no more mature than when they started. And it's all because of their attitude.

And the opposite is true. For the student with a good attitude, the student who's got a humble recognition of the privileges and responsibilities that studying brings, they will have an experience that's going to be hugely beneficial and hugely valuable.

And the thing that's fascinating from the lecturers point of view is that so much of that is out of your hands. It doesn't actually matter how good or bad your lecturers are, because the key thing is going to be the attitude of the individual.

And that's true, not just in an academic setting. It's true in so many different parts of life. Another great example is in sport.

[4 : 12] I like football, as I'm sure many of you know. And in England, in English football, the team I support is Arsenal. Now, I'll explain why that is. My older brother was born in North London, where my father was training to be a doctor.

And so he was born very close to Arsenal's stadium, lived there for the first couple of years of his life. And so he supported Arsenal. I went for that age-old life, age-old decision-making process for life's choices, where you copy your older brother.

And that's exactly what I did. So he supported Arsenal, so I copied him. And over the last few years, it's been really fascinating to watch the approach of Arsenal's manager, who's a man called Michael Arteta, used to play for Rangers once a long time ago.

He became the manager of Arsenal in 2019. And he became their manager at a time when they weren't doing particularly well. And in the three years since, they've had ups and downs, but on the whole, they've made good progress.

And now they're sitting top of the league. And they're one of the best teams in the country at the moment. And they've got a young, exciting team. And it was fascinating to hear what Michael Arteta said when he became their manager.

[5 : 29] They weren't doing very well, but he didn't say, we need to improve our defence. We need to get better at shooting. We need to get fitter and faster. He didn't say anything like that.

He said, we need to change the energy and culture in this club. And just a couple of weeks ago, with Arsenal sitting at the top of the league, he was asked about the progress the team has made. And he said that when he first came to the club, it was very fractured, and that needed to be fixed. And I thought that was a fascinating comment, because if any of you know anything about football over the past 10 or 20 years, you'll know that from the outside, Arsenal were one of the most unfractured looking teams in the whole country.

They were a very well run business. They had recently built and paid for a state of the art stadium. The last 25 years have been the most successful in their history.

They've got a great academy with young players, amazing facilities, so much so that lots of other teams have copied what Arsenal have done, and yet they were totally fractured.

[6 : 39] Why? It was all because of attitudes. The club was fractured because of the way people thought.

People weren't pulling together. People didn't trust each other. People were more concerned for themselves than they were for others. And Arteta, the manager, saw that, and he realized that that was the most important thing that needed to change.

And now, one thing that's absolutely clear about Arsenal is that there's a great togetherness about their team and about their club. They're all pulling together with an excellent attitude.

Now, that's just one of many examples. I'm sure you can think of tons of examples of exactly the same kind of thing. Attitude is so crucial.

In Philippians 2, Paul is telling us that exactly the same applies in the church.

[7 : 42] Exactly the same applies to us. If you look at verses one to five of this chapter, it is all about the way we think.

It's all about our attitude. And you can see that if you go through it and you look at the mindset language. If there's any encouragement in Christ, any comfort and love, any participation in the spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love being in full of cord and of one mind.

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility, count others more significant than yourselves. Let you look not to your own interests, but also to the interest of others.

Have this mind among yourselves, which was also in Christ. It's all about the way we think.

That's what Paul is addressing for the Philippians, and that's what he's addressing for us as well.

[8 : 56] Why does he do that? Why is this so important to Paul? Well, I think one of the main reasons is because just as there is one thing that will make or break how a student gets on when they're studying at university, one thing that will make or break a football team, there is one thing that will make or break our church.

Our attitude. Our attitude is so crucial. That's why when you read through Paul's letters, he is constantly emphasizing the importance of our mindset.

He's constantly making us think about the way that we think. Here's five examples that you can see. Romans 12 talks about the renewing of your mind.

Corinthians 1 talks about us being united in the same mind. Philippians 3 later in this chapter, Paul talks about those who are mature, thinking in this way. Colossians 3 said your mind some things that are above.

Second Timothy 2, think over what I say. These are just five examples of something that you see everywhere. Paul is constantly challenging us to think about the way that we think.

[10:11] That importance of our attitude works in two directions. It's in terms of how we think of ourselves and it's in terms of how we think about one another.

That's crucial. Our attitude affects what we're going to think of ourselves and that will affect the way we behave. Our attitude affects what we think of one another and that's also going to affect the way that we behave.

This is one of the many, many areas where as Christians we've got to be prepared to swim against the tide of the culture around us. So often what is basic and fundamental to discipleship in the New Testament is actually the complete opposite of what you will see in the world around you.

This is definitely an example of that. In our culture today there is such a massive emphasis on the self and on the individual.

Individual choices, individual identity, individual preferences, individual affirmation, that kind of stuff, that kind of mindset is so dominant in society today.

[11:22] That's why if somebody is talking about doing something, if somebody is talking about making a decision, one of the most powerful reasons that they can give in today's culture for pursuing a certain course of action is if they say that by doing this I'm being true to myself.

That's like the ultimate reason for doing something because there's this massive emphasis on self. Not every aspect of that is bad.

We absolutely want to live in a society where individuals can thrive, but a lot of it is dangerous. The reason it's dangerous is because it's taking us down a path which culminates in everybody doing what's right in their own eyes.

The minute everybody just starts doing what's right in their own eyes you stop being a society and you start becoming an anarchy. Everything becomes a mess. There's loads of ways in which this is manifested and I'm sure you can think of them yourselves and you can think of other examples to these ones.

I just want to highlight three ways in which we often see this in the world around us. Today, number one is that today, people will very often insist on their own rights.

[12:39] People will absolutely insist on their individual rights. Rights are a good thing. We are not saying we don't like rights, rights are a very good thing. But an excessive individualism can be disastrous where people use their own rights to justify all sorts of kinds of behavior.

A good example is probably one that anybody who works in a school today has possibly experienced either directly themselves or individually with others.

Children today are told about their rights which is good, children are told about their right to play which is good. But sometimes it can manifest itself where you have a child who will completely disobey what the teacher says because they'll say, I've got a right to play.

I've got a right to do this. They'll use their rights to basically do whatever they want. There's lots of other examples of that.

So, there's this great insistence on individual rights. One thing is that today there's a huge emphasis on people wanting recognition. And so, whether that's in terms of my rights or my identity or my preferences or my achievements, people want to be recognized.

[13:56] They want to be respected. They want to be listened to. All my illustrations tonight are from football. I apologize for that. But there was a really interesting example of this in football news earlier this week where I read of a group of supporters who were saying that they were going to sue a local council because they weren't being given enough tickets for an away game.

So these supporters, they wanted to go to a big match in a different city and they had only been given half the number of tickets that they would normally get.

And the supposed reason for this was because of security issues, policing and all that kind of stuff to make sure that would happen. But the supporters who didn't get enough tickets said, we're going to sue the local authority for doing that because they're treating us like second-class citizens.

And so, there's that great yearning for recognition. And it's like, you're not recognizing us. You're treating us like second-class citizens because you're not giving us the ticket allocation.

We wanted, people demand and expect recognition. And so there's people insisting on their individual rights, people demanding and wanting recognition.

[15:18] And thirdly, there's a huge desire to protect ourselves. And that can again be seen in so many ways. It can be seen in the workplace where things happen and nobody wants to take responsibility.

Nobody wants to shift the blame and make sure, well, whatever happened is not my fault, wasn't me. And maybe you've had to work with people like that. That can be a nightmare. It can happen socially where we want to protect ourselves.

So often socially, especially online, we kind of present this filtered appearance of ourselves so that none of our weaknesses are visible to others.

But perhaps most of all, it's in terms of our health. We all desperately want to survive. And the culture around us desperately wants to survive as well.

And as I said, not all of that is bad. Some of it's good, but a lot of it is bad. And it's everywhere in our society. We are dominated by an attitude that wants to put self first.

[16:29] You can see it all over the place, in sport, in social media, in the workplace. You'll see it in the school playground. You'll see it in families, in communities, in politics, everywhere, including the church.

You see it there as well. And that's tragic because the Christian church should be the place where you find the best attitudes, the best atmosphere, and the best mindset in the whole country.

So you look anywhere in Britain today, the place where you should find the best attitudes, the best atmosphere, the best mindset is here in the church of Jesus Christ.

And that is not even the slightest exaggeration. The Christian church should be the pinnacle of good attitude.

The way that we think, the way we think about ourselves, and the way that we think about one another, the atmosphere that we create as we meet and as we work and plan together, the mindset that shapes everything that we do, that should be the best that you can find anywhere.

[18:02] Why is that? Because our theology tells us that that is the way it must be.

Anything else, any bad attitude, any harsh atmosphere, any negative mindset, any selfishness or conceit or arrogance, anything that makes our attitude bad means that we are failing to understand Jesus and we are failing to be like Him.

The way we think our attitude has got to be shaped by our theology and in particular it's got to be shaped by the person and work of Jesus Christ. Anything else is just worldliness.

Anything else is just more of the same rubbish that you will find at work or in football or in the media or whatever else it may be. What we believe about Jesus has got to transform the way that we think about ourselves and about one another.

Or if we put it the other way around, if our attitude is bad, it means that our theology is poor. But if our theology is right, then our attitude will be as well.

[19:21] And that link between theology and attitude is made so clear by Paul in this passage.

In verses one to five, he is commanding us to have the right attitude. As we've been seeing, it's all full of mindset language. And then in order to prove that point, to drive home the application of what he's saying, to prove why that's the case, Paul gives us one of the most magnificent paragraphs on Christology that has ever been written.

We have all this instruction. Culminating in verse five, have this mind among yourselves, which is you and Christ. And then you have this amazing description. Have this mind which is you among yourselves, which is you and Christ.

Who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped. But emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men, and being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth. And every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God, the Father.

[20:52] Now these verses are so important and so helpful because they're teaching us so much about the person and work of Jesus Christ. What Paul is describing here is what we tend to call the humiliation and exaltation of Jesus.

And so we can think of it just in terms of a very simple diagram. We have humiliation and exaltation. I won't write it all out because my spelling is going to be pure.

My handwriting is terrible. Humiliation and exaltation. If you like a downward arrow and an upward arrow, that's what Paul is describing for us here.

This is key to the work that Christ undertook. And at the center of it is the cross right here. Now that humiliation, exaltation framework is crucial for understanding who Jesus is and for understanding what he's done.

And it gives us three crucial things that lie at the heart of Christology. Number one, humiliation and exaltation points to a high starting point.

[22 : 06] It all begins at a high, a high starting point. So when we say humiliation, we don't really mean embarrassment.

What we mean is in terms of being brought low, a movement from high to low. And being brought low can only happen if you start high.

And Jesus starts from the highest point, from the absolute highest point. That's made clear in verse six.

It says that he was in the form of God. At as high as you can get in terms of a starting point.

In other words, he is God. He's God the Son. That's Jesus' starting point. He is and forever was and forever will be the eternal Son of the Father.

[23 : 08] He's the second person of the Trinity. He is God himself. And many heresies have arisen over history because people have got that starting point wrong.

Instead of placing Jesus at the starting point at the very highest level, some people have said, well, it's a wee bit lower. Your Father, God the Father is sort of most significant and Jesus is a little bit lower. Not through.

That's a heresy. Other people have said, Jesus is actually a creation of the Father. The first of the Father's creations, but a creation nonetheless. Not through.

That's a heresy. Other people have said that Jesus' starting point is actually in Bethlehem, way down here, when he was just born like anybody else and then he later on becomes the Son of God. That's not through. That's a heresy. None of these are through. Jesus' starting point is at the very highest level. He is God himself.

[24 : 02] So the humiliation exaltation, that's the first thing it tells us, that Jesus' starting point is at the highest level. And secondly, we see that from that point, he moves downwards.

It's a downward movement, a humiliation. Jesus leaves the glory and security of heaven and he enters into the fragility of our humanity.

Born in poverty in Bethlehem, raised in obscurity in Nazareth, exposed to all the temptations, emotions, struggles and bruises of life.

He travels down further and further. And all of this is in obedience to his Father.

All of this is so that his Father's will might be done. But that will, the Father's will, is a downward path. It's a path that leads downwards, down, down, down.

[25 : 06] He's down into the suffering and experience of humanity. It's a path that's going to lead all the way to the agony of the Garden of Gethsemane. It leads to the hurt of being betrayed by one of his twelve disciples, to the mockery of the trial in front of the religious leaders, to the brutality of being crucified by the Roman soldiers and to the utter darkness of being forsaken by God the Father on the cross as he bears our sins.

It's a path that leads all the way to death on the cross. Jesus starts high, but he moves downwards. But then the third thing that this pattern teaches us is that from there, there's an upward journey, a pathway to exaltation.

Jesus rises from the dead. Jesus ascends in triumph, and now he is exalted in total authority over every square inch of the universe, over every moment of time and eternity.

That's the amazing journey that Jesus undertook. It tells us who he is, that he's the Son of God, that he's become one of us, that he's the servant who obeys, that he's the spotless sacrifice who dies, that he's the victor who overcomes, and that he is now the Lord who is exalted over all.

[26 : 34] It tells us who he is. It also tells us what he's done. Tells us that he's come down, he's obeyed, he's served, he has suffered, he's died, he's risen, he has overcome, and now and forevermore he reigns.

Jesus is humiliated and exalted, and in doing so, he makes salvation possible. But what I want us to focus on, there's loads we could say and unpack about all of that.

I want us to focus just in the last few minutes that's left on three key things that this humiliation involved, three key aspects of what this involved.

These are the verses that we have, and we'll dip between the verses and back to that diagram. I want us to focus first of all on the fact that in Jesus's humiliation, he relinquished his rights. That's said before us so powerfully in verse six and verse seven, that he was in the form of God, but he did not count equality with God, a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself.

[27 : 56] As God the Son, Jesus had the right to all the privileges and prerogatives of divinity. He's got the right to rule, the right to govern, the right to ownership.

He's got the right to receive honor, the right to receive glory and praise. He's got the right to dwell in majesty, the right never to be exposed to impurity.

He's got the right to all of that. If we think about our individual rights, Jesus has the greatest claim on individual rights in the whole history of the world, and he relinquishes them.

He gives them up. And in doing so, he exchanges majesty for a manger, authority for fragility, purity for obscurity, honor for mockery, glory for agony.

We live in a world that is dominated by an attitude that says, my rights must never be compromised. Jesus, whose right to his rights is greater than anyone else's, he's the opposite.

[29 : 16] He relinquishes those rights. He leaves the glory of heaven. He becomes one of us.

And he did it so that he could stand right by your side. In his humiliation, Jesus relinquished his rights. The second thing is that in his humiliation, Jesus shunned recognition.

Let me clear that all the muck on my thing there. In his humiliation, Jesus shunned recognition. In verse seven, you can see Jesus taking up a new form.

You can see the word form there. It's repeating the word that you've already seen in verse six. So he's gone from the form of God, which he retained still God, but he takes up the form of a servant. In fact, that word servant, you could actually translate it slave if you wanted to.

[30 : 24] Think of all the glory, status and majesty and recognition that Jesus could claim. You get a glimpse of that in the Mount of Transfiguration.

Jesus comes to earth and he could have come with a glory and a splendor that obliterates everything, that takes the world's breath away, that would eclipse everything in a split second.

Jesus could have done that and he could have enjoyed glory and status at another level all together, but he doesn't do it. He becomes a servant.

And instead of having people queuing up to kiss his feet, he's the one who gets a bowl and washes his disciples feet. And again, the contrast is amazing.

We're surrounded by people who are so desperate for status, people who long for recognition, people for whom it's a non-negotiable that they have to be respected. Jesus just serves.

[31 : 25] He obediently serves. He shunned the glory that he could have claimed at any moment.

And then thirdly, we see that in his humiliation, Jesus exposed himself to death on the cross. Jesus' humiliation, it didn't reach its finish line in Bethlehem or in Gethsemane or even in the trial in Jerusalem.

The finish line for the humiliation was at the cross. And in his obedience as a servant, he didn't just deny himself the rights or the recognition that he could have claimed.

He didn't just deny himself, he exposed himself. He exposed himself to death and as Paul says, it's even death on a cross.

And in that death, he took our sin upon himself. In that death, the wrath of God fell upon him. In that death, he experienced the forsakenness that our sins deserve.

[32 : 39] We are all so desperate to protect ourselves, so desperate to survive death is our greatest enemy. We want to keep it as far away as possible.

We want to flee from it. Jesus walked right into it. And it's amazing that the downward path of Jesus' humiliation, it only stops when it was impossible for him to go any lower.

And the key question is why? Why does all this have to happen? Why does Jesus do this? And that's a crucial question because if you look at this diagram again, the starting point is high.

The end point is high. And so at a certain level, you could almost say the starting point and the end point are at the same level.

So why did Jesus have to bother doing it? Why does he bother doing it? If the start point is high and the end point is high, why go through all that humiliation and exaltation?

[34 : 00] The answer is to get you, to bring you with him.

Ultimately, Jesus' humiliation and exaltation is not about where it places him.

It's about where it places you. Because we are here.

We're here in our sin. We are lost. We're helpless. That downward journey of humiliation has to happen because Jesus has to get to you.
And that great journey of exaltation is so that he can bring you with him. So that you can be part of his kingdom, part of his family, forevermore.
[35 : 06] It's not actually about where it places Jesus. It's about where it places you. And that the heart of all of that is Jesus' attitude.

His attitude towards God the Father who he wanted to obey. And his attitude towards you who he wants as a brother or a sister.
He's come to obey his Father. He's come to save you. And there's such a magnificent logic in all of what all of Paul says.

You can see it here in the word therefore that you have in verse nine. That's such an important word. It's telling us that because of the humiliation there can be exaltation.
Because of what Jesus has done in going to the cross. He's now been highly exalted by God. He now is the name that is above every name. He's now the one before whom every knee will bow.
The exaltation happens because of humiliation.

[36 : 14] But the humiliation happens because of attitude. In verse six we're told that he did not count equality with God as a thing to be grasped.

His mindset was one that was willing to serve. He had an attitude that was ready to put others before him. It's all about attitude.

And that's confirmed if you compare verses three and verse six. Verse six you've got that word. Do not count equality with God as a thing to be grasped. And then in everything that Paul says about our attitude he uses exactly the same word for us.

It's all about attitude. Everything that Paul is saying about our attitude is grounded on the attitude that we see in Jesus. He was ready to put others first.

He was ready to consider our needs instead of his rights. He was ready to put our salvation before his recognition. He was ready to give his life to save ours.

[37 : 15] He has the right attitude. He has the best attitude. He has the ultimate attitude. And that's why our attitude, our attitude as individuals, our attitude as a church should never settle for anything less.

That the mind that we see in Jesus should be the mindset that we see in ourselves. And this again is one of these verses, one of these sections that is, it's amazing in terms of what it says about what Jesus has done for you.

All that drawing, that terrible diagram that I've drawn. It's actually all about you. It's all about saving you.

That's the lens that Jesus will go to for you. And so we get such amazing reassurance and comfort and encouragement from these verses, but they also challenge us.

They also challenge us because our attitude will make or break us. It'll make or break how we treat one another.

[38 : 38] It'll make or break how we function as a church. It'll make or break how we show generosity. It'll make or break how we cope with changes.

It'll make or break how we treat people who mess up in their lives. It'll make or break how we nurture one another in our faith. It'll make or break how we reach out to the mission field that God has placed on our doorstep.

It's so crucial that that our theology is right and that our attitude is right. If that's the case, we will be a community that loves Jesus and that's like Jesus.

And that kind of community is the best place that anyone can find and that anyone can be a part of. Amen.