**WORSHIP**

**Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost**

OLD TESTAMENT

Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32

*The Soul Who Sins Will Die*

**The word of the LORD came to me: ﻿2﻿ “What do you people mean by quoting this proverb about the land of Israel: ”‘The fathers eat sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge’? ﻿3﻿ “As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, you will no longer quote this proverb in Israel. ﻿4﻿ For every living soul belongs to me, the father as well as the son—both alike belong to me. The soul who sins is the one who will die.**

The theme that runs through Ezekiel 18 concerns inherited guilt. The proverb in this reading addresses the problems of self-pity, fatalism, and despair in the lives of the people. In the face of the Babylonian captivity and exile there are questions on the minds of the people. Whose fault was this? Was it their forefathers? Were the people of Ezekiel’s day supposed to pay the penalty for someone else’s sin? And if so, then why should they even bother following the way of God? Ezekiel explains why this generation has to pay for sins. It is not because they are paying for the sins of the fathers but rather because they are still sinning themselves. (CSB)

Theologically, this chapter ranks as one of the most important in the Book. Its overall theme is individual accountability before God. A person’s ultimate judgment comes when he must face the heavenly Judge at death. Ezekiel addresses the issue through three examples or case studies (vv 5–9; 10–13; 14–17). Ch 18 has affinities with chs 3; 33. (TLSB)

**18:2** Ezekiel is not asking for a direct answer, but challenging his audience to defend their shallow attempt to deny their guilt. (TLSB)

*this proverb.* Cf. Jer 31:29, which indicates that the proverb arose first in Jerusalem. Jeremiah predicted the cessation of the proverb, and Ezekiel said its end had come. (CSB)

Jeremiah’s refutation is oriented more to the future time of the new covenant. (TLSB)

*about the land of Israel.* And about the fate of those who have suffered loss. (CSB)

*The fathers … on edge.*† The proverb, though it expresses self-pity, fatalism and despair, and though it mocks the justice of God, had its origin in a false interpretation of corporate solidarity (see Ex 20:5; 34:7 and Ezekiel’s own words in chs. 16; 23). In La 5:7 the thought appears as a sincere confession. (CSB)

There is a tendency in each of us to blame someone else for our troubles. Ezekiel’s warning that Jerusalem would be punished because of the accumulated sins of the nation led the people to complain about being punished for the sins of others. They probably said it was all King Manasseh’s fault. He had been notorious for his “detestable sins” (2 Kings 21:10-15). (PBC)

The people accused God of being unfair. Behind their complaint was the idea they were not as guilty as their fathers had been and didn’t deserve what was about to happen. (PBC)

*set on edge.* The Hebrew for this phrase perhaps means “blunted” or “worn” (cf. Ecc 10:10), but it may refer to the sensation in the mouth when eating something bitter or sour. (CSB)

**18:3** *As surely as I live.* A divine oath, revealing God’s unalterable intention. It is used often in Ezekiel (5:11; 14:16, 18, 20; 16:48; 17:16, 19; 20:3, 31, 33; 33:11, 27; 34:8; 35:6, 11). (CSB)

God answered their objection. He created everyone. Each individual has a direct relationship with God. God expects each person to respond to his love with a life of love. (PBC)

In Ezekiel, in contrast, Yahweh contents himself with simply making a dogmatic statement: people will no longer use the proverb because he sets forth his justice in the rest of the chapter. In the broader context of the book, the eschatological element cannot be said to be absent from this chapter, but it recedes very much into the background, except for the implications of the verdicts that the righteous will “live” (18:9, 17, 19, 21–22, 27–28) and the wicked will “die” (18:4, 13, 18, 20, 24, 26; see further the commentary on 18:4). After the inevitable judgment comes at the fall of Jerusalem (Ezekiel 33), God will manifest his grace so thoroughly in the new covenant (34:25; 37:26) that the pardoned sinner will no longer have any doubts about God’s forgiveness, and the eschatological emphasis is especially pronounced in Ezekiel 40–48. But its relative absence here is simply a reminder that Ezekiel, like other prophets, was not writing systematic theology. (CC)

**18:4** *The soul who sins is the one who will die.* Or “Only the soul … ” Ezekiel spoke out against a false use the people were making of a doctrine of inherited guilt (perhaps based on a false understanding of Ex 20:5; 34:7). What follows is his description of three men, standing for three generations, who break the three/four-generation pattern. (CSB)

Summarizes ch 18. Since all souls were created by God, He guides their destinies and judges them. Death is the punishment for unrepentant sinners. Throughout ch. 18, life and death are used in their ultimate, beyond-this-world aspects. Gregory of Nyssa: “The death of the body consists in the extinction of the means of sensible perception, and in the dissolution of the body into its kindred elements: but ‘the soul that sinneth,’ he says, ‘it shall die.’ Now sin is nothing else than alienation from God, Who is the true and only life” (*NPNF* 2 5:126–27). Ambrose: “[The soul] dies to the Lord, through the weakness not of nature but of guilt. But this death is not the discharge from this life, but a fall through error” (*NPNF* 2 10:179). St. Bernard of Clairvaux: “Who, then, is righteous, except he who returns to God, who loves him, His meed of love?… And he receives by one and the same Spirit both the reason for thinking that he is loved and the power of returning love, lest the love of God for us should be left without return” (*SLSB*, p 157). (TLSB)

Everyone is responsible to the Lord for his way of life. The Lord punishes the sinner for his own sins. God does not punish anyone for someone else’s sin. (PBC)

“Die” appears in 18:4 for the first time in this chapter as the punishment for “the soul who sins.” It and its opposite, “live,” form the two poles of justice throughout the rest of the chapter (as, for that matter, throughout the Bible). The words obviously may have many applications, depending on context. Especially with the destruction of Jerusalem looming, the simple issue of physical survival through the catastrophe may loom large. But the many cultic and ethical details that Ezekiel will detail shortly make it unlikely he is limiting himself to such a temporal conception. Just as exclusion from the community could be a form of living death (as when Adam and Eve were excluded from Eden; cf. Gen 2:17), it is much more so with God and the family of the righteous, the covenant people (hence excommunication is handing a person over to Satan, 1 Corinthians 5). Similarly, life involves inclusion in the family of God with all the promises of which the people are heirs (hence the Third Article of the Apostles’ Creed confesses “the communion of saints” and “the life everlasting”). (CC)

*soul.* “Life” or “person,” not used here to distinguish spirit from body. (CSB)

**25﻿ “Yet you say, ‘The way of the Lord is not just.’ Hear, O house of Israel: Is my way unjust? Is it not your ways that are unjust? ﻿26﻿ If a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits sin, he will die for it; because of the sin he has committed he will die. ﻿27﻿ But if a wicked man turns away from the wickedness he has committed and does what is just and right, he will save his life. ﻿28﻿ Because he considers all the offenses he has committed and turns away from them, he will surely live; he will not die. ﻿29﻿ Yet the house of Israel says, ‘The way of the Lord is not just.’ Are my ways unjust, O house of Israel? Is it not your ways that are unjust? ﻿30﻿ “Therefore, O house of Israel, I will judge you, each one according to his ways, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall. ﻿31﻿ Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, O house of Israel? ﻿32﻿ For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live!**

**18:25, 29-32** The last part of the chapter turns on the people’s new charge that Yahweh’s behavior is unjust. Yahweh vigorously refutes the charge by insisting that it is the other way around. In so doing, he simply reiterates his previous pronouncements that he does not judge by a person’s past, but by his disposition and behavior when the Judge is at the door (cf. Mt 24:33; James 5:9; Rev 3:20). (CC)

**18:25** THE WAY OF THE LORD IS NOT JUST – It seems that no matter what God did, Ezekiel’s fellow countrymen criticized him as unjust for punishing them, for forgiving sinners, and for condemning the righteous man who turned away from the Lord. (PBC)

The people still protest that the Lord’s ways are not fair, but arbitrary or unpredictable. It is the other way around—God acts consistently according to His rules of justice, while people are fickle and reject God’s revelation. Athanasius: “A servant would not dare to say, because I worked yesterday, I will not work today; and considering the past [I] will do no work in the future; … so let us daily abide firm in our discipline” (*NPNF* 2 4:201). (TLSB)

**18:26** *If a righteous man.* Verses 26–29 repeat the argument developed in vv. 21–25. (CSB)

**18:27** *he shall save his life*. As throughout ch 18, the life Ezekiel refers to seems to be eternal life. Temporal life or death may or may not be included. (TLSB)

**18:30** *Therefore.* Concluding, summary oracle. (CSB)

*each one.* While the house of Israel as a whole was guilty, God’s judgment would be just and individual. (CSB)

*Repent!* Second call to repentance (see 14:6). (CSB)

Two forms of the Hbr “turn,” here repeated for emphasis. From the totality of Scripture, we know that this is possible only through the gracious gift of the Holy Spirit. (TLSB)

The first half of the verse simply restates and summarizes the message of the entire chapter: each person will be judged individually according to his own standing before his Creator and Redeemer at the moment of judgment—never mind his past faith and life, or that of any of his relatives. A typical judgment oracle would end here with “therefore” (לָכֵן֩) plus the verdict and the signatory formula “says the Lord Yahweh” (18:30). But matters do not end with some capricious or ineluctable fate. The door of mercy is still wide open—to all who will repent, as emphasized by the repetition of the Hebrew verb in a more emphatic form (שׁ֤וּבוּ וְהָשִׁ֙יבוּ֨, “repent and turn away”). The remaining verses of the chapter (the summary and climactic ones) will repeat and expand upon the thought. (CC)

*lest iniquity be your ruin*. As the ESV note indicates, “ruin” is a free translation of “stumbling block,” i.e., lest there be another relapse into apostasy. (TLSB)

**18:31** *get a new heart.*† What had been promised unconditionally (11:19; 36:26) is here portrayed as attainable but not inevitable (cf. Php 2:12 and 2:13). (CSB)

May be read as a condition: If you cast away … then you will get a new heart and spirit. (Cf 36:26.) Chemnitz: “Just as there is an old and a new man, so the Law exercises control over the old man or his nature, coerces, crushes and mortifies it by outward discipline, punishments, and threats; but the consolation of the Gospel pertains to the new man and indeed produces the new man. For it is the ministration of renewal through which, when the man is outside he is brought low and when he is inside he is renewed from day to day” (*LTh* 2:664). (TLSB)

Hbr idiom is involved, which may be translated “get/acquire for yourselves” (cf 28:4; Dt 8:17; 2Sm 15:1; 1Ki 1:5). Sinners do not have a free will or ability to make their hearts new. (TLSB)

As elsewhere, Ezekiel pinpoints the real problem as one of the לֵב, “heart,” and the רוּחַ, “spirit.” Juxtaposed as they are here, the two words are virtually synonymous. The real problem is interior, a matter of the will and of the mind. But in 11:19 and 36:26 such a radical moral and spiritual transformation is clearly presented as a miraculous, divine act and gift of a “new heart” and “new S/spirit.” Here, on the surface at least, the change is recast as a command. (CC)

If we were to isolate this and the following verse and have Ezekiel, in effect, telling the dead to raise themselves, we would not only involve him in self-contradiction but also raise questions about his theological soundness in general. We must let Ezekiel interpret Ezekiel as the immediate example of the basic hermeneutical principle of interpreting Scripture by Scripture. (CC)

The problem might be described in various ways, but I am often tempted to speak of two “languages”: first, the language of human experience and rationality, and second, the language of revelation and theology. We struggle with the issue of language all the time ourselves, and countless parallels could be found in the Bible itself. When we say “believe,” “repent,” and so on in the imperative, who else could possibly respond positively—humanly speaking—other than the person addressed? To his consciousness, it will indeed appear as though he, of his own free will, has made the decision to repent and believe in Christ. (CC)

Yet, theologically, we will stress increasingly that the decision was not really his—that a fallen sinner is by nature simply incapable of making that choice. Fallen man retains the “freedom” to refuse and reject, but has lost the ability to “get … a new heart and a new S/spirit” (18:31). That he obtains only by God’s action, by dying and rising with Christ in Word and Sacrament, in the dual operation of both Law and Gospel. God does not impose his grace on the unwilling; only after the will has been changed by God can one speak theologically of a person’s “freedom” to believe and live accordingly. Without repentance and the perfect righteousness of Christ, which is imputed to the sinner through faith, the just and predictable God cannot forgive the sinner, and the death sentence remains inevitable. (CC)

A probable parallel in Jeremiah (21:8–9) speaks more concretely to the historical situation of those trapped in Jerusalem under siege: either to remain in the city (and die) or surrender to the Babylonians (and live). We have no way of knowing to what extent Ezekiel’s debate with his audience of exiles involved those still back in Jerusalem, but as we have seen at many points, those already exiled were at one with them in spirit, and the theological principles remain the same. Ezekiel’s prescinding from historical specifics facilitates theological exegesis, but we easily change biblical revelation into a philosophy of religion if we forget that the issues of life and death, of belief or unbelief, always operate in this world of space and time into which God has placed us. (CC)

The rhetorical question at the end of Ezek 18:31, together with the repetition of the thought of 18:23 in 18:32, poignantly ends the chapter with an emotional (anthropopathic) and standing divine invitation to all to repent and live in the life for which God created them before the fall—and who, through his Son, has provided the means for them to do so. (CC)

**18:32** *I take no pleasure.* Verse 23 is echoed in this final, grand summary, called by some the most important message in the whole book of Ezekiel (see note on 16:6). (CSB)

Repeats v 23 as a conclusion and as an invitation to repent and live as God intended before the fall into sin. Through His Son, God has provided the means for such a change of heart. See notes, 11:19; 36:26. Cyprian: “While God is provoked with frequent, yea, with continual offences, He softens His indignation, and in patience waits for the day of retribution, once for all determined; and although He has revenge in His power, He prefers to keep patience for a long while, bearing, that is to say, mercifully, and putting off, so that, if it might be possible, the long protracted mischief may at some time be changed, and man, involved in the contagion of errors and crimes, may even though late be converted to God” (*ANF* 5:485). (TLSB)

REPENT AND LIVE – God doesn’t want people to be cut off from his blessings. He wants them to live. Man can’t get a new heart and spirit on his own. The call to repentance expresses the need to acknowledge and turn away from sin, and to turn to God as the source of forgiveness. Christianity is not a movement, an organization, or an attitude. It is a relationship between God and an individual person based on Jesus Christ the Savior from sin. To attempt to base our relationship with God on ourselves without Jesus is to tell God that we think Christ’s work is neither necessary nor beneficial. This chapter gives us a rich banquet of the gospel. Even when we think He is unfair for doing it. God still forgives. Our God, although just and willing to carry out His drastic threats and punishments, doesn’t like doing it. He would much rather bless and give life. (PBC)

**Ch 18** God gives a clear, almost dogmatic, statement of how His justice operates. Life or death depends upon whether or not one believes and, as a result, lives out that faith. God severely condemns natural man’s tendency to justify himself on the basis of his own supposed righteousness, or to blame God (or someone else) for unfairness. Ezekiel also beautifully asserts God’s desire for everyone to be saved (“live”). • Lord, keep us steadfast in Christ’s righteousness, which has satisfied Your justice and has given us new lives. Amen. (TLSB)

EPISTLE

Philippians 2:1-18

*Imitating Christ’s Humility*

**If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ﻿2﻿ then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. ﻿3﻿ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. ﻿4﻿ Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. ﻿5﻿ Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: ﻿6﻿ Who, being in very nature﻿ God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ﻿7﻿ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ﻿8﻿ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross! ﻿9﻿ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ﻿10﻿ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ﻿11﻿ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.**

**2:1** ANY ENCOURAGEMENT – Paraklyeesis is a tender encouragement which addresses itself to the will of a Christian. Every true exhortation is based upon Christ, upon what He is and what He has done for us. The Apostle calls upon the Philippians to be moved to action for Christ’s sake. Christ must always be the chief motivation for Christian action. Christians undertake every project to glorify Christ. Christ ever moves them to humble obedience. (Stoeckhardt)

*united with Christ.* Or “united in Christ.” In Paul’s teaching, this personal union is the basic reality of salvation. To be in Christ is to be saved. It is to be in intimate personal relationship with Christ the Savior. From this relationship flow all the particular benefits and fruits of salvation, like encouragement (see, e.g., 3:8–10; Ro 8:1; 2Co 5:17; Gal 2:20). (CSB)

If the Philippians and other believers are to stand firm against the enemies of the gospel that threaten them from without, they must first be firmly united among themselves. (PBC)

*comfort from his love.* The comforting knowledge and assurance that come from God’s love in Christ, demonstrated especially in Christ’s death for the forgiveness of sins and eternal life (see Jn 3:16; Ro 5:8; 8:38–39; 1Jn 3:16; 4:9–10, 16). (CSB)

In this appeal of love the person admonished is to feel that the speaker is not trying to force his own will upon the person addressed, but rather that only his good and the glory of Christ is sought. (Stoeckhardt)

*fellowship with the Spirit.* The fellowship among believers produced by the Spirit, who indwells each of them (see 2 Co 13:14). (CSB)

“Fellowship” or joining together of the Holy Spirit with the believer, which comes about through the inspired Word. (TLSB)

Pnematos indicates that the fellowship here is not a natural one, but one wrought by the Spirit. (Stoeckhardt)

*tenderness and compassion.* Christians are to have intense care and deep sympathy for each other (see 1:8; Col 3:12). All these benefits—encouragement, comfort, fellowship, tenderness and compassion—are viewed by Paul as present realities for the Philippians. (CSB)

Paul speaks to the Philippians’ hearts, reminding them of the gospel blessings that are theirs in Christ, then appealing to them on the basis of those blessings. (PBC)

Splanchna really means the heart as the seat of affection. The readers as believers are united by the Spirit, and so they are already filled with cordial affection and mercy and sympathetic regard for the very thing which the Apostle’s exhortation here is driving at. (Stoeckhardt)

**2:2** *like-minded … same love … one in spirit and purpose.* Emphasizes the unity that should exist among Christians. (CSB)

*like-minded.* Not uniformity in thought but the common disposition to work together and serve one another—the “attitude” of Christ (v. 5; see 4:2; Ro 12:16; 15:5; 2Co 13:11). (CSB)

ESV has “one mind.” Christ is the head of His Body, the Church, which He calls to be of one mind and to think the same things. Scripture reveals to us Christ’s mind. The Spirit gives us a renewed mind. Love will to extend the kingdom of God’s grace to everyone. This is the single-mindedness of Jesus, of Paul, and of God’s Church. (TLSB)

The Philippians had already brought much joy to the apostle. Their partnership in the gospel, their faith and love, their generosity all brought him joy every time he thought about them or prayed for them. But there was one more thing the Philippians could strive to do, Paul’s says, that would truly make his joy complete. That one thing was to seek a greater measure of harmony in their dealings and relationships with one another. (PBC)

SAME LOVE...ONE IN SPIRIT AND PURPOSE – That means they should love the same object in such a manner that one loves the other as he desires to be loved of the other. They should be animated by the same sentiment. Love shows itself in the agreement of thought and sentiment, however, in such a way that at the same time they agree with the will of God. The things in which they must all agree lies outside of themselves, and that is the Word of God. (Stoeckhardt)

**2:3** *selfish ambition or vain conceit.* The mortal enemies of unity and harmony in the church (cf. 1:17; see Gal 5:20, where “selfish ambition” is listed among the “acts of the sinful nature”). (CSB)

*humility.*† This is the mind-set of the person who is not conceited but who has a right attitude toward himself. (CSB)

*consider others better than yourselves.* Not that everyone else is superior or more talented, but that Christian love sees others as worthy of preferential treatment (see Ro 12:10; Gal 5:13; Eph 5:21; 1Pe 5:5). (CSB)

View yourself conservatively: other people are greater in need or in wisdom. Such a perspective leads you to help or to be helped. (TLSB)

In flourishing congregations, where many members are knowledgeable and gifted, there is always the danger of the more gifted members looking down on the less gifted, and of the less gifted envying the more gifted. And it is always characteristic of human nature to minimize one’s own weaknesses and to exaggerate one’s own strengths, while doing just the opposite when observing the weaknesses and strengths of others. (PBC)

Lowliness, or humble-mindedness, is also a key New Testament concept, a distinctive mark of the committed Christian. Lowliness is the opposite of the selfishness and pride of our corrupt and sinful natures. First century society placed little value on lowliness. It regarded it, in fact, as the equivalent of cowardice and equated pride and self-assertiveness with manhood. The non-Christian world today thinks in the same way. Books and classes offering assertiveness training and ever more effective methods of exercising power and “looking out for number one” are tremendously popular and profitable. But the attitude of a heart changed by God’s grace is no longer “me first and everybody else after me, if at all.” Rather it is an attitude that humbly and lovingly places the interest of others before one’s own. (PBC)

Paul is advocating a false modesty? He does not want talented believers to deny their special gifts or hide or neglect them. A humble child of God, no matter how many or how few his gifts may be, will strive to put the best construction on everything the neighbor does. He will happily acknowledge and respect whatever gifts the neighbor has, be they many or few. In everything the humble Christian will strive to give the neighbor first consideration. (PBC)

A Christian is to esteem the other as higher and wiser than himself, as he is conscious of his own weakness and shortcomings, while the in the neighbor he observes much merit and superiority. (Stoeckhardt)

**2:4** *your own interests.* These are proper, but only if there is equal concern for the interests of others (cf. Ro 15:1). (CSB)

We are to be concerned about our brother’s affairs and interests in the same measure as we are interested in our own. (Exegetical Notes – Buls)

With God’s providence as our foundation, we relinquish concerns for ourselves in order to care for others. (TLSB)

Harmony becomes practical among Christian in helpfulness, when each believer strives to do those things that serve and help the neighbor in every possible way. The world’s way is to look out for oneself. It considers the needs of others only when it sees some ultimate advantage for itself, but believer’s concern for their neighbor’s interest will supersede concern for their own. (PBC)

**2:5-11** The Epistle for today is pivotal, providing a bridge from death to life while giving us both promise and reason for following where Christ leads. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 2)

**2:5** *Your attitude … the same as … Christ.* In spite of all that is unique and radically different about the person and work of Christ (see vv. 6–11), Christians are to have his attitude of self-sacrificing humility and love for others (see vv. 2–4; Mt 11:29; Jn 13:12–17). (CSB)

The Beck Bible is to preferred: “Think just as Christ Jesus thought.” (Exegetical Notes – Buls)

ESV has “have this mind.” Paul presents the imperative to think with our minds as Christ thought with His. A soul regenerated in Christ’s image (Titus 3:4-7) has the revelation of Christ through the Word. (TLSB)

There is some disagreement over how to translate the word *phroneō*, “to think.” The series of imperatives in the verses preceding may explain why some manuscripts included “for” at the beginning of this verse, understanding that the mind of Christ in us would explain compliance with the imperatives. For our purposes we might let the tension stand and consider the verb as both indicative and imperative. The presence of God’s inspired Word in our lives, confirmed in our Baptism, means that we do have the mind of Christ. The fact that our regenerate, inspired soul dwells within a contrary human nature means that it is imperative that we continually reorient our thinking to match that of our Savior. The verses that follow are Gospel in nature but also provide an insurmountable logic that is effective in Christian apologetics. No other religious system even begins to suggest a parallel to Christ, true God who became incarnate, provided redemption for the whole world, and rose from the dead. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 2)The more they are in Christ and Christ is in them, the more Christ-like and unselfish they will be in their attitudes and actions. (PBC)

As if the Apostle would say, “All that I asked of all of you is to be meek and humble so as to be of one mind and one soul, all that you see exemplified in the person and conduct of our Lord. I would like to have you cultivate a mind that is similar to the mind found in Christ. (Stoeckhardt)

**2:6–11** The poetic, even lyric, character of these verses is apparent. Many view them as an early Christian hymn (see note on Col 3:16), taken over and perhaps modified by Paul. If so, they nonetheless express his convictions. The passage treats Christ’s humiliation (vv. 6–8) and exaltation (vv. 9–11).

Note from Colossians 3:16 – *psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.* Some of the most important doctrines were expressed in Christian hymns preserved for us now only in Paul’s letters (1:15–20; Eph 5:14; Php 2:6–11; 1Ti 3:16). “Psalms” refers to the OT psalms (see Lk 20:42; 24:44; Ac 1:20; 13:33), some of which may have been set to music by the church. “Psalm” could also describe a song newly composed for Christian worship (cf. 1Co 14:26, where “hymn” is lit. “psalm” in the Greek text). A “hymn” was a song of praise, especially used in a celebration (see Mk 14:26; Heb 2:12; see also Ac 16:25), much like the OT psalms that praised God for all that he is. A “song” recounted the acts of God and praised him for them (see Rev 5:9; 14:3; 15:3), much like the OT psalms that thanked God for all that he had done. See note on Eph 5:19.

**2:6-8** Paul repeats the Greek term *morphe*, “form,” and also uses *schema,* “manner,” or “shape.” The Son of God took human form, a body like ours except without sin. Note how here and elsewhere Paul’s account of Jesus’ life fits readily with the historical accounts in the Gospels. (TLSB)

**2:6** What follows is truly a remarkable passage. Here Christ is presented as our model, our example in lowliness. But at the same time this passage is very important for the doctrine of the person and two states of Christ. Christ is our example in lowliness. That’s ethical. But we cannot imitate His states or saving work. This text rminds us of the necessity of preaching the person and two states of Christ. This also reminds us of the necessity of preaching the person and work of Christ for justification and sanctification. (Exegetical Notes – Buls)

BEING – nuparchao – *come* *into* *existence* – (*be* *present* or *at* *hand*); expletively, to *exist* (as copula or subordinate to an adjective, participle, adverb or preposition, or as auxiliary to principal verb):—after behave, live. – Implies his pre-existent deity, previous to his birth, and his continued deity afterwards.

*in very nature God.* Affirming that Jesus is fully God (see note on Ro 9:5). (CSB)

We need to be careful here (as many translations are) not to misunderstand “form” (*hē morphē*) as form only without content. The Son of God does not simply bear the form of God. Rather, “He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power” (Heb 1:3); “In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell” (Col 1:19). The fact that Jesus is God made it both possible and necessary for him to empty himself on our behalf—possible because no one and nothing could ever really strip him of his divine nature, necessary because the essence of his character is love. We see this clearly in John 13, when Jesus sets aside his garments (as he set aside his divine prerogatives) in order to offer the most humble of services, washing his disciples’ feet. Contrast Jesus with the competitive and self-serving nature of people. Our unwillingness to serve others betrays an absence of certainty about our nature. This has only become worse since Darwin and evolutionary deception has stripped humanity of any kind of inherent dignity as the crown of God’s creative work. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 2)

From all eternity Jesus has been one with the Father, truly God. His eternal existence as God is unshakeable and unchangeable. In Jesus’ incarnation the human nature Jesus assumed shared in all the characteristics of His divine nature. The two natures are now perfectly united. After the incarnation the Bible speaks of one divine-human Christ, the God-man. (PBC)

*nature.* Essential form (see NIV text note), the sum of those qualities that make God specifically God. (CSB)

As the Son of God, Jesus is God (Col 1:15). Not simply appearance. (TLSB)

*equality with God.* The status and privileges that inevitably follow from being in very nature God. (CSB)

Jesus, as the true Son of God, cannot be less than fully God. He is equal with His Father according to His divine nature. (TLSB)

Jesus is indeed true God, equal with the Father in power, authority and majesty, and He possesses all the characteristics of God. This He clearly demonstrated during His earthly ministry. Here was a man who read the hearts of men, feed multitudes, control the weather, cast out devils, heal the sick and even raise the dead. Those who observed Him at closest range had to declare, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus was and is in very nature God. (PBC)

*something to be grasped.*† Something to be forcibly retained—the glory Christ had with the Father before his incarnation. But he did not consider that high position to be something he could not give up. (CSB)

The Greek word means “a thing for self-glorification.” (Exegetical Notes – Buls)

Fully God, He felt no necessity to cling to the honor or privileges that were His as God’s Son (John 13:3-4). God grants us a similar ability ourselves in the service of others, because we are His children too. (TLSB)

aaragmos *plunder* (properly concrete):—robbery. This divine equality was not something Jesus had to steal or even strive for.

In Paul’s day victorious generals and other public figures would frequently honor themselves and their achievements by using their “moment in the sun” to erect monuments to themselves and their achievements. Today, too, the great men of the world frequently use the privileges and trappings of their offices to enhance their reputations, further their careers, perhaps even line their pockets. (PBC)

Jesus, though He was God in very nature, did not appear on earth to glorify Himself. He did not look for His own advantage. Nor did He arbitrarily use the divine privileges and powers He possessed to satisfy passing fancies or to gain earthly fame and power. (PBC)

**2:7** *made himself nothing.* Lit. “emptied himself.” He did this, not by giving up deity, but by laying aside his glory (see Jn 17:5) and submitting to the humiliation of becoming man (see 2Co 8:9). Jesus is truly God and truly man. Another view is that he emptied himself, not of deity itself, but of its prerogatives—the high position and glory of deity. (CSB)

This verse begins the gradual descent of Jesus in his redemptive service to us—first taking the form of a servant, then humbling himself in death, then even lower by dying on a cross (as one accursed from God). Notice once again, that “form of a servant” means really a servant! The whole life of Christ as recorded in the Gospels is one of constant service to others (so that he had no time even to eat). The Son of God’s adoption of a human nature is beautifully and fully considered in the Book of Hebrews; because he was human he can sympathize and can be a faithful and merciful High Priest for us (e.g., Heb 4:14–16). “Being found in human form” (v 8) reminds us that Isaiah had prophesied that the Messiah would be so fully human as to be unrecognizable: “He had no form or majesty that we should look at him” (Is 53:2). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 2)

Literally, “emptied Himself.” “[The Son of Man] was received into God when He was conceived of the Holy Spirit in His mother’s womb, and His human nature was personally united with the Son of the Highest. Christ always had this majesty according to the personal union. Yet He abstained from using it in the state of His humiliation, and because of this He truly increased in all wisdom and favor with God and men. Therefore, He did not always use this majesty, but only when it pleased Him.” (FC Ep. VIII 15-16). (TLSB)

The Beck Bible says, “But He emptied Himself, made Himself a slave, became like other human beings. (Exegetical Notes – Buls)

The humiliation of Christ proceeded by degrees; the longer He lived, the more thoroughly He emptied Himself, the more completely He was clothed with the form of a servant. He became obedient to death, even the death of the cross. The greatest and most serious ill which sinful flesh is heir to is that of death, since death represents the culmination of all evils caused by sin. Christ’s death was one of an especially cursed nature, that on the cross. In this respect His humiliation went beyond the usual experience of sin-laden human beings. He died a cruel death, not that of a Roman citizen, but that of a base criminal, of a slave. This represents the last, the most abject degree of degradation. But He was willing to undergo all; He put aside, for the time being, the glory which was His, in order to be to the full extent, in the complete meaning of the term, the Savior of the world. He died as one that laid down his life of his own free will. The fact that His death was a willing sacrifice, and for that reason was so valuable, is stressed here. Note: Just as Christ showed Himself a shining example of humility, so the Christians should learn of Him. They should also, for the sake of love for Christ and their brethren, waive their rights, not be over insistent upon their rights, their honor, and their interests. They should learn to suffer also the evil, the wrong which is committed against them, willingly and gladly. Thus will they show the spirit of Christ among themselves and toward one another, thus will they preserve Christian love and harmony, thus will they live as it becometh the Gospel of Jesus Christ. (Kretzmann)

During His earthly ministry Jesus emptied Himself of the full and constant use of all the prerogatives of His divinity. He laid aside the unlimited exercise of His power and did not always use or demand His rights as God. (PBC)

*nature of a servant.* Emphasizes the full reality of his servant identity (see Mt 20:28). As a servant, he was always submissive to the will of the Father. (CSB)

Jesus was, in every way, completely a servant to those around Him. (TLSB)

doulos a *slave* (literally or figuratively, involuntarily or voluntarily; frequently therefore in a qualified sense of *subjection* or *subserviency*):—bond (-man), servant.

It was as if He covered the glory of His divine majesty with the tattered rags of a beggar. He became altogether lowly. He became like every other human being – lowlier, in fact, than most – in His earthly manner of living. Thought He Himself was sinless, He assumed human nature in the weakened condition in which have it, burdened with the consequences of sin. Although He is the Lord of the universe, He was born in a stable. He never possessed earthly property or wealth. He was despised by many of His contemporaries. He placed Himself under the demands of God’s law. (PBC)

BEING MADE IN HUMAN LIKENESS – Not mere resemblance. He was conceived as a man like any other man, except without sin. (TLSB)

**2:8** *appearance as a man.* Not only was Jesus “like” a human being (v. 7), but he also took on the actual outward characteristics of a man (see Jn 1:14; Ro 8:3; Heb 2:17). (CSB)

Jesus shared all the characteristics of a human being. (TLSB)

*humbled himself.* See v. 7; 2Co 8:9. (CSB)

The Son of God humbled himself; true love is given freely and at one’s own expense. Even as the Son of God did not think equality with God something to cling to selfishly, so also he did not think that he was above enduring death for the sake of his beloved ones. Now we see that this process of humbling himself to effect our redemption knew no limits, so that he humbled himself even to die the most accursed of all deaths. Mention of the cross here brings up all the significant imagery of the devil, who once overcame by a tree, now being overcome by a tree; the First Adam failing before a tree, the Second Adam winning absolute victory on a tree (Rom 5:12–21); he became accursed so that we might be blessed (Gal 3:13–14). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 2)

*obedient.* How Jesus humbled himself (cf. Heb 5:7–8). A “servant” (v. 7) obeys. (CSB)

Jesus put all His thoughts, words, and actions under the direction of His Father’s will. (TLSB)

*to death.* Stresses both the totality and the climax of Jesus’ obedience. (CSB)

In a person of Christ, God truly died. (Exegetical Notes – Buls)

*on a cross.* Heightens Jesus’ humiliation; he died as someone cursed (see Gal 3:13; Heb 122). Crucifixion was the most degrading kind of execution that could be inflicted on a person.(CSB)

stauros – a *stake* or *post* (as *set* upright), that is, (specifically) a *pole* or *cross* (as an instrument of capital punishment); figuratively *exposure* *to* *death*, that is, *self* *denial*; by implication the *atonement* of Christ:—cross. – The kind of death he submitted himself to amazes believers, confounds unbelievers: this was the style of execution reserved by the Romans for slaves, foreigners, and barbarians – never Roman citizens.

The most despised and cursed death. According to OT Law, being hung on a tree meant you were cut off from God. You were left there all day as an example to others (cf. Dt. 21:22-23). The Romans crucified criminals by the main entry roads into a city in order to humiliate them and to warn those who entered not to make the same mistake. (TLSB)

In OT Israel, after a wrongdoer had been put to death, the civil laws prescribed that his dead body be nailed to a post or a tree. This was to impress on the people that that individual, by his transgression, had suffer the ultimate curse of being cut off from God and His believing people. If in the sight of God, than hanging of a dead body signified His curse, how much more would the hanging of a living person be considered a curse, especially when that person was experiencing anguish beyond description. How deliberately and heavily the words fall as the apostle describes the ultimate humiliation of the God-man: EVEN DEATH ON A CROSS. (PBC)

**2:9** THEREFORE - *dio*, “therefore; that is why.” The first word of this verse is the pivot and shows the proper relationship between man (in this case the Son of Man) and God: man humbles himself in submission to God and love of neighbor, and God exalts man as is right. What we give away for the benefit of others God restores again, but if we would keep what God has given, how can God give any more to us? Remember that “name” (*to onoma*) is not just an empty title, but includes all the power and prerogatives of a being. Jesus is not only Creator but also now Redeemer. This truth is the basis and justification of v 10. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 2)

*exalted.* See Mt 28:18; Ac 2:33; cf. Isa 52:13. (CSB)

auperupsoo to *elevate* *above* others, that is, *raise* to the *highest* position:—highly exalt. (qv)

The Apostle’s Creed lists the various events of Jesus’ exaltation: “He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.” What a glorious victory these words describe. Jesus, our Savior, having successfully completed His redemptive work for us, openly triumphed over the forces of hell. Death had to relinquish its hold on Him. Earth could no longer contain Him. Heaven opened its doors to receive Him. Jesus, our victorious Savior, now holds in His hands the reins of the universe. He rules all things in heaven and on earth in the interest of His believers, and He will come again to end this age, judge the world, and take His believers to be with Him and to share His glory in eternal life. (PBC)

*the name … above every name.* Reference doubtless is to the office or rank conferred on Jesus—his glorious position, not his proper name (cf. Eph 1:21; Heb 1:4–5). (CSB)

In ancient times, people were given names to describe them. The name of Jesus describes the essence of who He is: “salvation is of the Lord.” There is no other savior or means of salvation. “After His resurrection, He entirely laid aside the form of a servant, but not human nature, and was established in the full use, manifestation, and declaration of the divine majesty. In this way He entered His glory” (FC Ep VIII 16). (TLSB)

His name, spoken with contempt by His enemies, especially by those who condemned Him to death as a blasphemer, is the only “name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.” Only through Jesus’ name, and through faith in His name and the gospel revelation which stands behind it, can sinners be saved. (PBC)

**2:10–11** *bow … confess.* Cf. Isa 45:23. God’s design is that all people everywhere should worship and serve Jesus as Lord. Ultimately all will acknowledge him as Lord (see Ro 14:9), whether willingly or not. (CSB)

All created beings must and will confess Jesus as Lord: The saints and angels in heaven, all human beings on earth, even the demons and the damned in hell. (PBC)

God the Father exalts the Son to the place that is rightly his (see last week’s Gospel) so that creation relates rightly to him. When every knee bows in submission and every tongue confesses the truth of Christ, then creation will experience paradise. Life is found in God’s design. Life is conveyed in the Word of the Lord. When all is right in God’s creation for all eternity, then God will be glorified as is proper to him. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 2)

Bow is synonymous with worship toward God (Ex. 4:31; 34:8; Ps. 95:6; 1 Sam 1:28; see note Ex 33:10) or respect and service for a human being (Gn. 33:3; 43:26-28; 1 Sam 20:41; 28:14; Est 3:2). God expressly forbade bowing to false gods (Ex 20:4-5). People also bowed to (1) greet someone (Gen 18:2; 19:1), (2) signal humility and repentance (Ezr 9:5; 10:1, and (3) express thanks (Gen 24:52). Bows were done in a variety of ways (1 Ch 29:20; 1 Kg 18:42; Ne 8:6) and likely included tilting the head, tilting the upper body, kneeling with one’s face to the ground, or lying prostate. The more elaborate the bow, the greater the expression of devotion or emotion (Gn. 33:3). (TLSB p. 1276)

UNDER THE EARTH – This is a figure of speech that refers to the souls of those who have gone not to heaven, but to damnation in the “lower regions” (1 Peter 3:18-20). (TLSB)

**2:11** JESUS CHRIST IS LORD – An early creed. See p. 1975. Jesus (Greek) or Joshua (Hebrew) is the name given to the Son conceived by the Holy Spirit (Mt. 1:21) in the Virgin Mary. Christ (Greek) or Messiah (Hebrew) is the title of the One whom God promised to send to save His people. This Jesus, who is the Christ, demonstrated Himself to be Lord over all His nature, life, death, and resurrection. No one is Lord over Him, but He is Lord over all. (TLSB)

This verse emphasizes what was said in verse 10. It is a comfort for us to know that every rational creature, be that in heaven, on earth or of the underworld, cannot but make this confession. That says two things to us: (1) God is glorified by the person and work of our Lord Jesus. Therefore Jesus ought have our utmost confidence. (2) With Jesus as our example we ought humble ourselves as Paul here tells us to do. And if we so do, although what we do is so foolish in the eyes of the world, the Lord will not forget us. (Exegetical Notes – Buls)

**2:1–11** Paul couples the imperatives of a Christian life with a description of Christ, who makes that life possible. We are certainly not lords, nor have we any excuse for refusing to honor Jesus Christ as Lord. Yet the fulfillment of the imperative to live like Christ is supported by all that Christ gives freely: the encouragement, comfort, love, and mind of Christ, along with the participation of the Spirit. • Dear Lord Jesus, place firmly in our minds and hearts both who You are and what You are so that we may proclaim Your grace and image to others. Amen. (TLSB)

*Shining as Stars*

﻿

**12﻿ Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ﻿13﻿ for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. ﻿14﻿ Do everything without complaining or arguing, ﻿15﻿ so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe ﻿16﻿ as you hold out﻿a﻿ the word of life—in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing. ﻿17﻿ But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. ﻿18﻿ So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.**

**2:12–18** *Therefore*. Paul’s teaching in vv 12–18 flows from His teaching about the humility of Christ in vv 1–11. (TLSB)

**2:12** *Therefore.* Because of Christ’s incomparable example (vv. 5–11). (CSB)

The Apostle begins anew to exhort his Christians, joining his words to what he has said with a “therefore (hoste).” Efforts have been made to connect what is said here with the foregoing. But a close connection can hardly be discovered. The “therefore” goes farther back to when the Apostle began his exhortations, 1:27, and and there said, “Walk worthily of the Gospel.” (Stoeckhardt p. 43)

*my* *beloved*. Plural. The congregation—not an individual—is described in this passage. (TLSB)

*obeyed.* The commands of God as passed on to the Philippians by Paul (see Ro 1:5; 15:18; 2Co 10:5–6). (CSB)

Paul highly regarded the Philippians and spoke charitably toward them. (TLSB)

In the NT, especially in Paul’s writings, the term “obedience” is sometimes used as a synonym for faith. Here it no doubt includes both faith and living the kind of lives that result from faith, that “conduct worthy of the gospel.” Since they had become Christians, and especially when the apostle had been personally present with them, the Philippians had shown real obedience to the gospel. They had eagerly accepted the apostle’s instruction and put it into practice in their lives. Now, in a very positive way Paul urges them to continue to live in that same way and to do so even more in his absence. (PBC)

Such a testimony encourages Christians when we day to them, “You have always been obedient, and now continue in this course” If we can speak with approval of what they have done in the past, it gains their willingness to accept further admonition. (Stoeckhardt)

*my presence.* During the course of Paul’s second (see Ac 16:12–40) and third (see Ac 20:1–3, 6) missionary journeys. (CSB)

The apostle here draws a conclusion and makes a practical application: Wherefore, my beloved, as you have always been obedient, not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence. (Kretzmann)

*work out your salvation.* Work it out to the finish; not a reference to the attempt to earn one’s salvation by works, but to the expression of one’s salvation in spiritual growth and development. Salvation is not merely a gift received once for all; it expresses itself in an ongoing process in which the believer is strenuously involved (cf. Mt 24:13; 1Co 9:24–27; Heb 3:14; 6:9–11; 2Pe 1:5–8)—the process of perseverance, spiritual growth and maturation. (CSB)

Cf v 13; God’s action is the cause of the Philippians’ salvation and good works. (TLSB)

Paul uses the word “salvation” here in a broad sense. He refers not only to believers’ coming to faith and receiving the gift of eternal life, but also to their continuing in faith until they enter into eternal life. (PBC)

In this time of grace Christians should be concerned about their faith in the Gospel, lest they lose their hold on it. In this way obedience and salvation belong together. (Steockhardt)

It is true, of course, that salvation is not earned by obedience, it is complete and perfect in Christ. But it may so easily be lost through disobedience, and therefore striving after it with fear and trembling, with the consciousness of inherent weakness and of the dreadful power of temptation, is essential in sanctification. There is here no contradiction of chap. 1, 6, where Paul states that he was sure that God would continue the good work to the end. A Christian must be sure that God will give him firmness and confidence and faithfulness, keep him from falling from grace, and he must still be in fear, lest he lose his salvation by his own foolishness. (Kretzmann)

*fear and trembling.* Not because of doubt or anxiety; rather, the reference is to an active reverence and a singleness of purpose in response to God’s grace. (CSB)

The congregation cannot boast about its accomplishments, least of all their salvation. Paul commanded that fear and trembling accompany the lives of believers to keep our rebellious, sinful human nature (Rm 5:6–10) subdued in the service of God and neighbor. (TLSB)

With his encouragement to work out their salvation with fear and trembling the apostle wants to remind the Philippians, and all believers, that believers’ live in the world and are in a constant struggle. Daily a host of spiritual enemies, led by the devil and his scheming allies, seek to rob believers of their faith and of the eternal treasures the Lord has in store for them. To ward off these enemies and continue safely along the way to eternal life on which their Lord has placed them, believers must always be watchful and alert. They must fear and tremble at the thought of their own weakness and at the possibility that they, by spiritual laziness or carelessness, may foolishly throw their spiritual treasures away. They must strenuously battle against their spiritual enemies to remain in faith. (PBC)

If a Christian looks upon his own flesh, he may well tremble, because it is weak and a willing ally of all enemies; but if a Christian looks to God, he is sure that he will remain in the faith, that he will overcome all the dangers which threaten his faith, that he will finally be victorious over world, flesh, and Satan. This admonition in itself is a means and instrument in the hands of God to keep the Christian in the way of sanctification. (Kretzmann)

**2:13** GOD WORKS IN YOU – And yet, all depends upon the power of God: For God it is who is working in us both to will and to do for His good pleasure. God works, performs, all good things in His Christians; He urges them on to true obedience. (Kretzmann)

We live with our fallen human nature. But God works in us by subduing our sinful nature, regenerating our souls, and giving us His Spirit of grace. “The preaching and hearing of God’s Word are the Holy Spirit’s instruments. By, with, and through these instruments the Spirit desires to work effectively, to convert people to God, and to work in them both to will and to do” (FC SD II 52). (TLSB)

*to will and to act.* Intention, or faith, and our obedience cannot be separated (cf. Gal 5:6; Jas 2:18, 20, 22). (CSB)

The single most important element in this working and struggling is believer’s diligent use of the means of grace, the gospel in word and sacrament. This means, by which the Holy Spirit first made them spiritually alive, are also the means by which He continues to work in believers’ hearts to strengthen and nourish their faith and their spiritual lives. Believers who remain diligent and conscientious in using the means of grace will find in them all the spiritual strength necessary for the spiritual working of which the apostle speaks so urgently in our text. (PBC)

God grants us to conceive the good intention as well as the power to carry it out. So every good deed in us in accomplished. (Stoeckhardt)

A believer shows his faith by good works. This makes two things necessary, namely, the will to do, the good intention to live as it becometh the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as it is wrought through the Holy Ghost, and then the carrying out of this intention, the changing of will into performance, so that the doing will be properly and effectually performed. (Kretzmann)

HIS GOOD PURPOSES – God effects good works in us, so that He might find His delight in them. The emphasis lies on “God,” as the position of this word in the sentence indicates. Christians are to work out their salvation lest they should forfeit God’s good pleasure. It is God’s will that Christians should please Him. So this sentence really substantiates what the Apostle said before. Since everything depends upon God and God’s good pleasure, therefore Christians ever should be found obedient. (Stoeckhardt)

God is pleased when His creation lives and thrives, meets all its potential, and has life to the fullest. (TLSB)

And all this on account of God’s good pleasure, to carry out His own, gracious will. God really wants to find pleasure in the good works of the believers. And He does find it because of the fact that they are of divine kind and nature, and their works flow out of the divine power in them. In order to be pleased with the works of Christians, He Himself works the good things in them. God gives and donates the will to do good; the regenerated will of man, in the power of God, wills and performs the good thing. The regenerated will of man is controlled, governed, and directed by the will of God. So the believers dare not lose God’s assistance in sanctification. (Kretzmann)

**2:14–17** Some things involved in working out our salvation. (CSB)

**2:14** *complaining.* Being discontented with God’s will is an expression of unbelief that prevents one from doing what pleases God (v. 13; cf. 1Co 10:10). (CSB)

A problem indicative of the sinful human nature, which is selfish and unbelieving. (TLSB)

When God commands something, we should have no more questions about it as to whether God really wants us to do it. (Stoeckhardt)

*arguing.* Over debatable points that do not need to be settled for the good of the church (see 2Ti 2:23; Tit 3:9). (CSB)

Willing and acting according to God’s good purpose requires the correct attitude of the heart. Grudging obedience is not really obedience at all. In the course of our lives as Christian we are often called on to do things that do not come naturally to us, things against which our selfish natures angrily rebel. We are often asked to do things which we know will bring scorn and ridicule from out non-Christian friends and associates. We are to do all these things, Paul says, without murmuring and complaint. There is to be no second-guessing of God, no grumbling about what God expects of us, no rationalizing or calculating about how we might escape our responsibilities or get by with doing less. (PBC)

The apostle mentions one point in which their sanctification may find expression: Do everything without murmurings and hesitations. The Christians of Philippi, like the believers of all ages, should do the will of God in all things, do all that God expects of them, even when the flesh is not pleased with it, even when questionings and criticisms want to arise in their hearts. There should be no bickerings and questionings whether this or that is really necessary, whether it is necessary to be so strict in observing the Word of God, whether it really is the Christian’s duty to take part in all the enterprises of the Church. The ideal condition of mind is that which simply, sincerely does what is needed. (Kretzmann)

**2:15** *blameless and pure … without fault.* Not absolute, sinless perfection, but wholehearted, unmixed devotion to doing God’s will. (CSB)

Everything that is wrong with us has been forgiven by the Lord Jesus. According to our new nature, there is nothing wrong (1 John 3:8-9). (TLSB)

Christians are to lead a clean life, and so be spared from disgrace. It is this that God desires, and that should also be the purpose of all Christians. If Christians walk in this way, then they are obedient children of God. (Stoeckhardt)

The result of such behavior is: That you may be irreprehensible and innocent, guiltless children of God in the midst of an iniquitous and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding up the Word of Life to a glorification for me upon the day of Christ, that I may not have run in vain or labored in vain. The goal of sanctification cannot be reached at one step, it must be reached by a gradual process. Christians must strive more and more to show and prove themselves irreprehensible, without reproof. (Kretzmann)

CHILDREN OF GOD – God provides regeneration so that by His Word and Spirit we are a new creation according to the inner person. This nature, generated by God Himself, is inclined to live as His child. (TLSB)

*crooked and depraved generation.* A description of the unbelieving world (see Ac 2:40; Eph 2:1–3; cf. Mt 17:17). (CSB)

God created us to live in perfect harmony with Him, His creation, and one another at every point of contact, in every way. Since the fall, our human nature contradicts that design at every point, nothing matches or fits right. (TLSB)

In the midst of a world steeped in every form of sin and shame they must guard against all contamination, not only to be without reproach on the part of others, but actually innocent of wrong-doing, able to meet all criticism as unjust aspersion. Christians should avoid all offense and be guiltless in this world. (Kretzmann)

*shine like stars.* The contrast, like light in darkness, that Christians are to be to the world around them (cf. Mt 5:15–16). (CSB)

By God’s grace the bright light of the gospel has dispelled the spiritual darkness that was by nature in Christina’s hearts. Now God wants Christians, who have the light of life through Jesus, to be both light-reflectors and light-bearers in the sin-darkened world. As light-reflectors Christian should stand out from their worldly contemporaries as light shines in darkness. Their words and actions should cause people to see that believers belong to Christ and should lead those who observe them to glorify God. (PBC)

This is an important theme for John and Paul. Light may be directed or reflected. We reflect God’s light (His truth and grace) by receiving it and directing that light to shine on others. (TLSB)

There should be a plain and unmistakable distinction between the Christians and the children of this world. They should stand out from the unbelievers, as the light stands out from the surrounding darkness. The entire life of the believers will offer a splendid contrast to all works of darkness and will be a constant reproof to wrong-doers. But not only are the Christians to shine as lights in their good works, in obedience to the will of their heavenly Father and in all subsequent works of faith, but they are also to be the torch-bearers of the Word of Life. The Christians should present to the world, extend before the eyes of the children of this world, the Word of Salvation for their acceptance, that it may serve to enlighten them also unto eternal life. (Kretzmann)

**2:16** HOLD OUT THE WORD OF LIFE – Christians should also hold forth the Word of life to the unbelievers, and this is done by living a pure life. The good conduct of Christians is also a sermon through which many are won for Christ. If Christians walk carefully and are seriously concerned about their soul’s salvation, they also at the same time become helpful to lead others to eternal life. (Stoeckhardt)

This means the Holy Scriptures. God gives life through the Word, as creation and the Gospel show. (TLSB)

*boast.* Not out of pride or a sense of self-accomplishment, but because of what God has done through Paul (see 1Th 2:19). (CSB)

Paul enjoyed a warm and affectionate relationship with the members of the congregation at Philippi. He had founded the congregation and was still its spiritual counselor and friend. (PBC)

This they do through the works of the divine life in them. Their entire behavior before the world will be a sermon in words and deeds. Their entire life will show what the Word of God is able to accomplish. The mere existence of believers in this world is a missionary factor. And all this, in turn, redounds to the honor of the apostle on the great day of Jesus Christ, the Day of Judgment. He wanted to be able to point to the Christians of Philippi with pride, as a result of his missionary efforts in Christ Jesus. It would show that his efforts had been crowned with success, for the Philippians would present visible, tangible evidence. Note: The Christians of our day may well keep this word in mind in their relation to their pastors, that they may be a credit to the teaching which they have received, both here in time and on the great day of Jesus Christ. (Kretzmann)

*day of Christ.* See note on 1:6. (Day of Judgment) (CSB)

*for nothing.* Cf. 1Co 9:24–27. (CSB)

When he stands before the Lord on judgment day, he wants their lives to be evidences that his apostolic labors were not in vain. Paul had labored strenuously for the Philippians. What a wonderful testimony to the effectiveness of Paul’s efforts their faith and Christian lives would be in the judgment. (PBC)

Paul uses the term “walk” to describe the Christian life. Life is active, with a path to follow, and a goal. Because Paul’s life was vigorous, he ran rather than walked. He labored because of his confidence in the Word of God. (TLSB)

**2:17–18** *I … rejoice … you too should … rejoice.* Christian joy ought always to be mutual. (CSB)

**2:17** *I am being poured out.* The reference may be to his entire ministry as one large thanksgiving sacrifice. However, it is more probable that Paul refers to his present imprisonment, which may end in a martyr’s death. His life would then be poured out as a drink offering accompanying the sacrificial service of the Philippians. (CSB)

Paul had been instrumental in bringing the Philippians to faith and to constancy in the same. That is a savory offering and acceptable to God. To help others to believe is the best service anyone can render. Therefore Paul is also willing to seal this his offering and service with his blood. (Stoeckhardt)

To impress this last fact upon his readers, the apostle adds: But if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice, and rejoice with you all; in the same way also you rejoice, and rejoice with me. In and by his imprisonment Paul was being poured out like a drink-offering. But at the same time he was offering a sacrifice, a twofold sacrifice. The first sacrifice is that of the Christians’ faith. He had succeeded in working faith in their hearts and in strengthening this faith to the present state of growth in sanctification. That was a pleasing sacrifice in the sight of God. The consequence was that the Philippians were now living a sacrifice in service, a true ministry. The apostle assumes that he himself will be offered upon his sacrifice. He may suffer the death of a martyr because of his preaching the Gospel. He knows that he will soon be liberated from the present imprisonment, but that merely places his martyr’s death at a somewhat greater distance. The final disposition of his body is even now pretty sure: martyrdom looms up before him. But even should this take place very soon, it cannot hinder the fruits of his labor. He has cause for rejoicing at the faith and Christian life of the Philippians, he is happy in the thought of what has been accomplished. (Kretzmann)

*like a drink offering.* The OT background is the daily sacrifices in Ex 29:38–41. (CSB)

Wine or oil was poured out in the OT sanctuary (Nu 28:7). (TLSB)

In the OT rituals the drink offering was poured out next to the altar on which the burnt offering was sacrificed. Paul regarded believers’ lives of obedience to the gospel as living sacrifices (Roman 12:1) to the Lord. His own martyrdom, should it occur, would be a willing sacrifice on his part, a sacrifice poured out next to the sacrifices of the Christian lives of the Philippians. (PBC)

*coming from your faith.* Genuine faith is active and working (see note on v. 13). (CSB)

The last two phrases above might literally say, “the sacrifice and service of your faith.” Faith produces a sacrificial attitude (cf. vv. 4-8), which frees us to lay down our temporary physical life in the interest of eternal life (Romans 12:1-3)

**2:18** BE GLAD AND REJOICE – Far from hindering his labors on the Philippians’ behalf, his martyrdom would crown those labors. Viewing it in that light the apostle could find joy even in the prospect of such a death, and he wanted the Philippians to find it, too. (PBC)

Paul would impress upon his readers that they also have all reason to rejoice with him over the fact that the Word had borne fruit. We see here obedience to God forms the main thought throughout. (Stoeckhardt)

And in the same way his readers should rejoice in their faith, and rejoice with him, as it behooves good Christians, in the love of Christ. (Kretzmann)

**2:12–18** Paul’s exhortation flows from the previous section revealing the significance of Jesus’ life and sacrifice. Like Paul, our labor would be meaningless and of no use to others if we lived crookedly and perversely as the world around us lives. But God is at work in us, moving us to hold fast to His Word of life, by which He extends His image and kingdom to others. • Dear Lord Jesus, please work in us to will and to do Your good pleasure, that we may be blameless in this crooked generation and blameless in the day of Your return. Amen. (TLSB)

GOSPEL

Matthew 21:23-32

*The Authority of Jesus Questioned*

**23﻿ Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. “By what authority are you doing these things?” they asked. “And who gave you this authority?” ﻿24﻿ Jesus replied, “I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. ﻿25﻿ John’s baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or from men?” They discussed it among themselves and said, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will ask, ‘Then why didn’t you believe him?’ ﻿26﻿ But if we say, ‘From men’—we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet.” ﻿27﻿ So they answered Jesus, “We don’t know.” Then he said, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.**

**21:23-27** Today’s *Gospel* takes place on the Tuesday following Palm Sunday. After receiving the messianic praises of the crowd in his triumphal entry, Jesus had overturned the tables of the money changers and driven out those buying and selling in the temple (Mt 21:12). These things prompted the chief priests and elders to question Jesus’ authority. The builders (chief priests) are rejecting the stone that is nevertheless the cornerstone (Mt 21:42). As a result of his teaching and actions done with authority, the chief priests and Pharisees will seek to arrest the Lord (Mt 21:46). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

**21:23** HE WAS TEACHING – Tuesday of Holy Week was a long day of preaching and teaching and confronting the leaders of the Jews. (PBC)

CHIEF PRIESTS AND ELDERS – Their formal inquiry was but a smoke screen to conceal their secret machinations. They did not propose to consider carefully Jesus answer and to let this determine their future attitude toward His person. Their plans were fully formed in advance, and there could be no question of further inquiry or investigation. Jesus must be removed. (Ylvisaker)

Leaders continue to watch Jesus closely, hoping to find grounds to accuse Him. Within a few days, they will have succeeded in their plan to do away with Him. (TLSB)

*By what authority … ?* See note on Lk 20:2 (They had asked this of John the Baptist (Jn 1:19–25) and of Jesus early in his ministry (Jn 2:18–22). Here the reference is to the cleansing of the temple, which not only defied the authority of the Jewish leaders but also hurt their monetary profits. The leaders may also have been looking for a way to discredit Jesus in the eyes of the people or raise suspicion of him as a threat to the authority of Rome.). (CSB)

Chief concern of Jerusalem leaders. (TLSB)

*hē exousia*: In Matthew’s Gospel, authority (*hē exousia*) flows from the power of Jesus’ Word: the Lord Jesus taught the people “as one who had authority, and not as their scribes” (Mt 7:29). Authority is particularly wielded by means of the Word (Mt 8:9). That Word of Jesus has authority to forgive sins (Mt 9:6). But this authority that comes from Jesus has also been given “to men” (Mt 9:8). Jesus gave the Twelve authority both to heal and to cast out demons in his name (Mt 10:1). In the final words of Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel, he announces that “all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (28:18), immediately before instituting the Sacrament of Holy Baptism and the Office of the Ministry, with the promise that he would be with his disciples to the culmination of the aeon (28:19–20). Thus the Word of Jesus, the forgiveness of sins, Baptism, and the presence of Jesus all stem from this authority that Jesus has and gives. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

Now Simon Magus sought to use this authority for his own enrichment (Acts 8:19). But authority is always to be used with humility, lest we “put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ” (1 Cor 9:12; see also 9:18). The authority that has been given to the pastoral office, therefore, is to be used for edification (2 Cor 13:10). All human and demonic authority that contradicts divine authority will be done away with at the Last Day (1 Cor 15:24). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

“By what authority [*exousiai*] are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?” This is the question put to Jesus by the chief priests and presbyters; it is also a question put to men in the pastoral office today. “By what authority do you say, ‘I forgive you all your sins’?” Questions of authority, power, and rights can cripple congregations, turning pastor and people against each other. Key to understanding Christology, Sacraments, and the purpose of preaching is the *exousia* of Christ. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

The leaders’ interrogation of Jesus demonstrates their prideful hearts. This is a danger faced by all Christians. Ps 26:2 teaches us to pray, “Prove me, O Lord, and try me; test my heart and my mind.” Thus we learn from this Gospel to beware lest our hearts become prideful and we concentrate on our own authority instead of Christ’s. Luther writes regarding the sinful nature: “ ‘The subtle poison of ambition is just under the surface. This sin has often tripped even those who have grasped God’s Word purely.’ From this sin all heresies have arisen; ‘ambition is the mother of all heresies and sects.’ . . . Against this secret villain we must pray God daily to suppress our self-esteem” (LW 12:188). Thus we also learn from this text that what we need is not self-esteem, but humility before Christ, who tries our hearts and knows how full they are of ambition, pride, and selfishness. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

When they demanded to know by what authority Jesus was doing “these things,” they were evidently referring to the cleansing of the temple, which happened the day before. Jesus had a great sense of timing. Since there were many pilgrims in town for the Passover, this would normally have been a busy and profitable week for the money changers and the merchants. When Jesus disrupted business at the temple, that must have been something like shutting down a shopping mall at the beginning of the third week of December. If the chief priest were counting on getting their cut of the profits, it is no wonder they were so upset. (PBC)

**21:24** I WILL ASK YOU – By asking the Jewish leaders His counter question, Jesus is not just engaging in a “power play” to ward off His enemies. If they had answered His question, they would have had their answer to who He is and what He had come to do. Jesus’ question really is a call to repentance, an eleventh-hour invitation to believe in Him as Savior. This final call to repentance and faith is at the heart of the parable Jesus now tells. (PBC)

**21:25** *baptism of John*. John the Baptist came, announcing the advent of the Kingdom and calling for repentance. (TLSB)

*from heaven, or from men?* See notes on Mk 11:30; (“Heaven” was a common Jewish term for God, often substituted for the divine name to avoid a possible misuse of it (see Ex 20:7). Jesus’ question implied that his authority, like that of John’s baptism, came from God.) Lk 20:3. (CSB)

Jesus asks the same question concerning John that His accusers have just posed about Him: what was the source of His authority? (TLSB)

The question that Jesus asks is not merely a debating tactic. The validity of the ministry of John is directly related to the authority with which Jesus was teaching and acting. John proclaimed Jesus to be the very Lamb of God (Jn 1:29); John announced that a mightier one was coming who would baptize with fire. Since John conferred upon Jesus messianic status, the question is put back to the chief priests and elders. This is the case also with us: each of us must answer what we think about who Jesus is (see also Mt 16:15). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

The Baptism of John the Baptist was, in fact, a means of grace, with power to give the remission of sins (see Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. 3 [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953], 288). John “went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Lk 3:3). This text literally states that John’s Baptism was “into” (*eis*) the remission of sins. Like the Sacrament of Baptism instituted by Jesus, John’s Baptism worked regeneration and repudiated the works-righteousness of the Pharisees. The Baptism of John functioned much like the Old Testament sacrifices in that it offered the forgiveness of sins for Christ’s sake, although preceding in time the actual crucifixion of the Messiah. Thus the Baptism of John was not merely “from man,” but “from heaven.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

The eyes of human reason cannot see this; the heavenly nature of the Sacraments can only be discerned through the eyes of faith, as Luther sang regarding the washing of Holy Baptism (*LSB* 406:7). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

“From heaven or from man?” Jesus asks this question of the chief priests and presbyters regarding John’s Baptism—but it could well be asked about the key points of our faith: What about Jesus? Is he merely a man, or is he also from heaven (i.e., true God)? What about the Sacraments? Are they from heaven or from man? What about the Bible? Is it from heaven (inspired) or from man (ethical teachings, myths, legends)? The question that Jesus asks is not simply to demonstrate his ability to stymie them. The question is there so we also can answer it. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

THEY DISCUSSED IT AMONG THEMSELVES – If they would accept His testimony, they could not deny the Messiahship of Jesus; for John had witnessed unmistakably both as to His person and His work. The acceptance of Jesus could not be separated from the recognition of John. Both would stand or fall together. It they denied that Jesus was the Messiah they must refuse likewise to acknowledge John as a prophet, and brand him as an impostor. But John had unfortunately already gained a niche in the consciousness of the people as a true prophet. And the Jews were exceedingly proud of their prophets. (Ylvisaker)

*not believe him?* They admit to rejecting the divine origin of John’s message. In this rejection, they proved more hard-hearted than the common people. (TLSB)

**21:26** “We are afraid of the crowd.” Josephus discusses the great popularity of John the Baptist:

Now when [many] others came in crowds about him, for they were very greatly moved [or pleased] by hearing his words, Herod, who feared lest the great influence John had over the people might put it into his power and inclination to raise a rebellion, (for they seemed ready to do anything he should advise,) thought it best, by putting him to death, to prevent any mischief he might cause, and not bring himself into difficulties, by sparing a man who might make him repent of it when it would be too late. (Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* XVIII 5 2, trans. William Whiston, 1737) (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

**21:27** WE DON’T KNOW – They are struck by the power of the truth but they will not yield to the truth; so they reply that they do not know. Nor do they dare to speak derisively of John for fear of being stoned by the people. (Ylvisaker)

Answer given by Jesus’ opponents is insincere and cowardly. Even worse is the fact that they deny the authority of God’s Messiah. (TLSB)

NEITHER WILL I TELL YOU – Jesus is by no means obligated to give a further reply. And He does not intend to throw that which is holy before the swine of Israel to be trod under foot. But even if Jesus had nothing more to say in answer to the inquiries of the deputation from the Sanhedrin, He has many truths to present to them and to others who have gathered about Him, and He now proceeds to the attack. The symbolic discourse in the following is preeminently polemic in character, and is directed especially against the obdurate leadership in Israel. (Ylvisaker)

“Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.” When Jesus refuses to answer, he is not casting doubt on his authority. Rather, by refusing to submit to their interrogation, he is implicitly asserting his true authority. The point of this text is not the skillful use of language or debating technique by Jesus; rather, it demonstrates that the chief priests are rejecting the authority that has come from heaven and thus demonstrate that they are repudiating the function of their office by rejecting the one who is from heaven. Their thinking is shown to be from men, from below. “You do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent. You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life” (Jn 5:38–40). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

**21:23–27** When His opponents challenge the source of His authority, Jesus exhibits a wisdom that powerfully attests to His status as one sent by God. Like Jesus’ opponents, we sometimes challenge the Lord’s authority and attempt to stand in judgment of Him. But God rightly judges us, not vice versa. Jesus willingly submitted to the authority of those who falsely accused Him and unjustly condemned Him to death. By His death, He won our salvation. • Give us grace always to submit to Your authority, O Lord, for it comes from heaven and so can lead us there, where we will reign with You forever. Amen. (TLSB)

*The Parable of the Two Sons*

**28﻿ “What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work today in the vineyard.’ ﻿29﻿ ”‘I will not,’ he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. ﻿30﻿ “Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, ‘I will, sir,’ but he did not go. ﻿31﻿ “Which of the two did what his father wanted?” “The first,” they answered. Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. ﻿32﻿ For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.**

**21:28–32** Parable contrasts the more pious reaction of tax collectors and prostitutes to John’s preaching with the hard-heartedness of His adversaries (vv 23–27). (TLSB)

Notice that a significant variant (adopted by the NASB and some other translations) reverses the order of the two sons in vv 29 and 30, making “the latter” rather than “the first” the one endorsed in v 31. The reading reflected below (and adopted by Nestle-Aland, NIV, KJV, NKJV, ESV, and RSV) seems to be preferable. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 4)

**21:28** WHAT DO YOU THINK – Matthew is the only one to record this parable for us. Because it contains a call to repentance, it is a logical follow-up to the previous discussion. It is a logical follow-up to the previous discussion. It also seems to for, a unit with the two parables that follow: the parable of the two sons centers on the ministry of John the Baptist; the parable of the tenants centers on the mission of Jesus; and the parable of the wedding banquet centers on the mission of the church. (PBC)

TWO SONS – tekna meaning children and is a very affectionate term that Jesus applies to his own followers and that the apostles apply to their beloved children in the Lord. A loving father is making a reasonable request of his dear children. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

The father’s request was a normal request to be asked of a son. The father asked nothing out of the ordinary by requesting that his son work in the family business. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 4)

The two sons seem to be two groups in Israel. The first son corresponds to the penitent tax collectors and prostitutes, and the second son is representative of the Pharisees, chief priests, elders, and teachers of the law who refused to heed the preaching of John the Baptist. The contrast between them is twofold: what they say and what they do. (PBC)

Jesus expresses the Father’s affection for his people in the way the father addresses his offspring: “Son.” The no-saying brother responds honestly but rudely to his dad’s request to work: he doesn’t want to. He doesn’t window-dress his lack of enthusiasm to do what his father wants. But he changes! He thinks again about his father and the consistent love he’s received from him over the years. Jesus identifies this son with the “low lifes,” whom the leaders dismiss because of their lack of formal training in God’s Word: “This mob . . . knows nothing of the law—there is a curse on them” (Jn 7:49). Yet Jesus accepts their repentance and faith as they respond to the preaching of John the Baptizer. Thus Jesus affirms their willingness to “eat humble pie,” confessing their sins and believing God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 9, Part 4)

HE WENT TO – Notice that it is father who went to his sons and not the other way around. God always takes the initiative in His relationship with us. What we say and what we do is always a response to what God has said and done. (PBC)

VINEYARD – In Is 5:1-7 it represents Israel as God’s treasured possession which he carefully nurtures, expecting fruit. We demonstrate that we are God’s beloved children by working diligently in his vineyard. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

**21:29** I WILL NOT – The reply of the first child is blunt, rude, and without filial respect, in violation of the Fourth Commandment – as evil answer flowing from an evil heart. He represents people who neither profess nor practice true religion, who neither fear God nor pretend to do so. In vv 31-32 Jesus identifies him as the tax collectors, prostitutes, and other overt sinners who were bold and careless in their denial of God, visible in their lifestyles. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

His is no word of polite address, not “father,” nor even “master.” His is the answer of willfulness and obstinacy. (Ylvisaker)

CHANGED HIS MIND – The infrequent word metamelomai can mean “change one’s mind,” “regret,” or “repent.” Jesus indicates that the preaching of John the Baptist caused this very thing to happen. The case of Zacchaeus is an example from Jesus’ own ministry. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

The son answered that he wouldn’t work. He clearly sinned in disobeying the will of his father. However, the son later repented and did what his father asked. Clearly, this is the son God wants us to emulate. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 4)

Gk term also expresses regret or remorse. The son changes his behavior and does his father’s will. (TLSB)

**21:30** I WILL SIR – This one is very respectful. Resembles Isaiah’s response in Is. 6:8, “here am I, send me.” This second child clearly represents the religious leaders of Jesus’ day, who wore all the trappings of religion and exemplified the very best in spirituality. The were quick to give lip service while failing to render divine service.(Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

The yes-saying brother is smooth and slick, calling the owner “Sir.” Jesus clearly identified this son with the authorities who played their religious games in order to avoid repenting, even though they saw others (tax collectors and prostitutes) doing so. Jesus does not rule out the possibility of the leaders entering the Kingdom; he merely says that the tax collectors and prostitutes will precede them in, having sincerely repented. Thus he gives the religionists one more opportunity to change their minds and repent. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 9, Part 4)

Though he appeared to be the good son, the second one was the more disobedient. (TLSB)

His inactivity spoke louder than his enthusiastic words. It is significant that the Greek word for “sir” is the same word that is also translated “Lord.” We are reminded of Jesus’ words in His sermon on the Mount: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 7:21). (PBC)

The second says “sir,” not “father,” as we should have reason to expect. The fawning humility evidenced in his reply at once arouses a suspicion as to whether or not he is animated by the proper filial respect toward his parent. (Ylvisaker)

The second son may have told the father what he wanted to hear, but in the end he chose not to listen to his father. There is no repentance in this son’s actions. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 4)

**21:31-32** Jesus asks the people which son did the father’s will, to which they respond that the first did. Jesus then tells his hearers that those who repented after hearing John’s message are entering heaven ahead of them, even though those “tax collectors and prostitutes” had appeared to resist God’s will like the first son. Certainly Jesus is calling all people to follow the example of the first son, who repented and finally did obey his father. However, this also gives the perfect opportunity to speak of Jesus Christ as God’s perfect Son who never changed his mind one way or the other. Jesus is not like either of the two sons. He is the perfect Son of God who is not double-minded. Jesus always obeys his father perfectly—even when that meant dying on a cross (Phil 2:8). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 15, Part 4)

**21:31** WHICH..DID – The critical factor in Jesus’ question is not what each said, but each did. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

he father represents God. Jesus implicitly asks who within Israel has better discerned and fulfilled God’s will. (TLSB)

The answer involves obedience or “doing,” but it is not doing that is divorced from faith. Jesus commends the tax collectors and the prostitutes for believing the preaching of John the Baptist, and Jesus condemns His adversaries because they did not repent and believe. The distinction between repentance and believing is simply that repentance stresses turning away from sin and believing stresses turning toward God. Both are acts of faith. As Martin Luther says, faith is “a living, busy, active, mighty thing.” (PBC)

Doing the will of our heavenly Father is first of all believing in Him. Meticulous attention to all the details of the law was not what Jesus was looking for – the Pharisees had taken such obedience to excess. Their failure was their refusal to believer the Word of God spoken by His authorized messengers, John and Jesus. And so the parable of the two sons warns all of us who are serious about spiritual things to beware, lest our energies be exerted almost entirely in striving after doctrinal correctness and we regard the life of obedience as of little consequence. (PBC)

I TELL YOU THE TRUTH – Lest they miss the point, Jesus shows them what their answer reveals about their own behavior. He begins with the familiar aman “amen,” his seal of verity, the transliterated Hebrew word for “truth,” and “I say to you,” his stamp of authority. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

TAX COLLECTORS AND PROSTITUTES – They were the two worst classes of sinners who represent all who confess their own total depravity and believe. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

*go* … *before you*. By presenting such vile characters as more pious than His opponents, Jesus puts the opponents in the worst possible light. (TLSB)

**21:32** JOHN CAME TO YOU TO SHOW – John both lived and preached the true way of righteousness. He offered “a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Lk 3:3). He also stressed the necessity for producing the vineyard’s fruit of repentance (Mt 3:8). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

*the way of righteousness*. According to John the Baptist, this involved preparing to receive the coming Messiah, turning from sin, and producing the fruit of repentance (3:1–12). (TLSB)

*believed him*. Many people embraced John’s message, including some notorious sinners. Jesus’ opponents, however, persist in their rejection of John and the One whose way he prepared. (TLSB)

EVEN AFTER YOU SAW THIS – Jesus offered the Jewish leaders double motivation to do likewise. He reminded them that John had confronted them also. What’s more, the repentant publicans and harlots were indisputable evidence that the Gospel truly is for everyone and justifies even the worst sinners. But this double testimony of grace only caused them to become more stubborn and vicious in their unbelief. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

**21:28–32** Jesus graphically depicts the obstinance of His opponents and the depth of their sin in rejecting Him. There are times that our stubborn refusals to change our behavior are just as obstinate. In God’s kingdom, no repentant sinner is ever turned away. Repentant tax collectors and prostitutes were welcomed; so are we! • “Chief of sinners though I be, Jesus shed His blood for me, Died that I might live on high, Lives that I might never die. As the branch is to the vine, I am His, and He is mine.” Amen. (*LSB* 611:1) (TLSB)