

**PHILIPPIANS—WEEK 4**  
**The Example of Christ: Phil. 2:1-11**

In the first chapter of Philippians, Paul exhorted the church in Philippi to be a church focused on the Gospel. Paul reminded the church of the importance of fellowship, evangelism, and faith. For Paul, the key to joy no matter the circumstances was a single-minded focus on the Gospel. But the problem with the church at Philippi was not just circumstances—it was people. Two women in the church were at odds, and their conflict was threatening to rip the church apart. Paul reminded the Philippians that while being single-minded was the key to joy in spite of circumstances, being submissive-minded was the key to joy in spite of people. But what does that mean?

Rather than specifically defining what it means to be submissive, Paul instead turns to Jesus as the example of what submission looks like. If we strive to become like Christ, a humble, submissive attitude will be the necessary byproduct of such a life. When we are singularly focused on living lives worthy of the Gospel, we will necessarily live lives of submission, putting the needs of others first. Paul outlines for us how Jesus lived a life of submission:

1. Jesus willingly laid aside his rights for the sake of others.
2. Jesus did not contend with the Father for supremacy.
3. Jesus humbly and obediently submitted his life to the Father's will.
4. Jesus willingly gave his life in the service of others.
5. Jesus' chief concern was that God be glorified by His life and actions.

In contrast to this, Scripture tells us in James 4:1-2 that the source of all strife with others is ultimately selfishness—putting our perceived rights and desires above those of others.

As Americans, the preservation of our rights and privileges seems to be hard-wired into our DNA (we did fight a war to preserve “certain inalienable rights” after all). While this sentiment is perfectly acceptable from a political standpoint, we must not let this attitude invade our spiritual lives. The pathway to peace in our relationships is not through the assertion of our rights; the pathway to peace is found in our willingness to lay aside our rights for the sake of others. And, if we remain focused on the example of Jesus, anything we sacrifice for the sake of others will pale in comparison to His great sacrifice for us.

Abraham Lincoln was a man who seemed to grasp this concept. One evening during the American Civil War, President Lincoln and two of his staff members went to visit George McClellan, the commanding general of the Union Army, only to learn that he was at a wedding. The three men sat down to wait, and an hour later the general arrived home. Without paying any attention to the President, McClellan went upstairs and did not return. Half an hour later, Lincoln sent the servant to tell McClellan that the men were waiting. The servant came back to report McClellan had gone to bed! His associates angry, Lincoln merely got up and led the way home. "This is no time to be making points of etiquette and personal dignity," the President explained. "I would hold McClellan's horse if he will only bring us success." (from *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Copyright © 1989 by Chariot Victor Publishing, and imprint of Cook Communication Ministries. All rights reserved. Used by permission.)

Let us be a church that is known for peace and unity—that is known for putting the needs of others first.

**Questions:**

1. Discuss each of the ways Jesus showed submission. How can we do the same?
2. Review James 4:1-2. How is selfishness the root of all strife? How do we combat selfishness?
3. How does the example of Jesus compare with our society today? Is being submissive to others praised or ridiculed? Why?