

# “Until Christ Is Formed in You”

## Introduction

On their first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas were very successful in planting churches in an area that was generally referred to as Galatia. However, a few weeks after Paul and Barnabas got back to Antioch, where they had started the journey, Paul got word that some Jewish Christians had visited that area and were putting pressure on these Gentile Christian believers to become circumcised and submit to other Jewish practices that had grown out of their interpretation of the Mosaic Law. When Paul heard about this, he became very upset. He sat down and wrote a very strongly worded letter to the Galatians. It was the first of Paul’s epistles and the only one written with this tone.

In this epistle, Paul attempts to do three things. These are represented by three words.

- In chapters 1-2, he establishes his **authority**. He explains why they should listen to him and not to these Jewish Christians who have recently visited them.
- In chapters 3-4, he explains his **theology**. He wants them to understand the relationship that the Christian has with Judaism and particularly with the Mosaic Law. As you might expect, this section is quite theological.
- In chapters 5-6, he discusses the **liberty** that Christians have. We are free from the Mosaic Law but we are not free to do anything we wish. Paul says, “*The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love*” (5:6).

In chapter 4, Paul becomes very personal in his argument. He describes his emotions for them and their apparent emotions for him when he first visited the area.

*I plead with you, brothers, become like me, for I became like you. You have done me no wrong. As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you. Even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself. What has happened to all your joy? I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth? (Galatians 4:12-16).*

As you can see, Paul is appealing to his personal relationship with them to encourage them to come back to the faith he had taught them. In the next paragraph, he gets even more personal:

*Those people are zealous to win you over, but for no good. What they want is to alienate you from us, so that you may be zealous for them. It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always and not just when I am with you. My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you! (4:17-20).*

In this paragraph, Paul uses a graphic illustration to describe his feelings and his ambitions for them. He says that he feels like he is a mother who is in the pains of childbirth. And, in fact, this is the second time he is going through this. The first time he went through labor pains was when he was with them and led them to Christ. To use his figure of speech,

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he had successfully given spiritual birth to these Galatian believers. And now Paul says he feels as if he is having to give birth to them all over again.

It is interesting that in figurative language, people often use the same figure of speech in more than one way. Paul is using this same figure of speech in more than one way to the Galatians. However, in the second “childbirth experience,” he focuses on a different thing. He says, *“My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you.”*

This time the childbirth is for a different purpose. During the first time, he was in childbirth to bring them to Christ—to help them reach a place of forgiveness of sins and “salvation.” However, during this second childbirth experience, he is going through these pains so that Christ will be formed in them. So there are two different things that are being described here.

- During the first childbirth, Paul focused on introducing Christ to them. During this time, he is focusing on making Christ a part of them.
- During the first experience, he was helping them to get forgiveness from their sins. During this time, he is helping them get victory over sin.
- During the first time, he was trying to get them to know the beauty and holiness and simplicity of Jesus. During this time, he is trying to get them to make the beauty and holiness and simplicity of Christ to become part of their lives.

In this sermon, I will concentrate on the phrase *“until Christ is formed in you.”* This was a statement obviously written to believers. Although their faith was being threatened and Paul was very concerned about it, Paul’s real ambition was to lead them to the point that Christ would not just be a historical figure or even an object of worship but one whose character had become a permanent part of their lives. He wanted the character and image of Christ to be formed—to be stamped on them so the Christ’s life would flow through them.

I will begin by addressing some exegetical details and in so doing, do a little demonstration of the way Biblical students do Biblical exegesis. I will then look at another key scripture that gives us some insight into how to apply this thought to our lives. It is at that time that I will make some specific application. This passage also lends itself to making some specific application to missionaries.

This is a serious sermon. Paul wrote to the Corinthians and said, *“Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly—mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it”* (1Corinthians 3:1-2). However, I am doing the opposite. This is not a sermon for *“mere infants in Christ”* but for those who are mature in Christ. This is not milk; it is solid food.

## **The Facts about Christ Being Formed in You**

### **Exegesis**

Exegesis is extracting from a passage the message intended by the writer. We do exegesis every day. Any time we read a passage from any written document, we have done exegesis. Even when you read the newspaper you have to do exegesis to try to discern the message intended by the writer. Because the New Testament was written in another language,

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when we are doing exegesis of the New Testament, we have to pay special attention to issues that we would take for granted if the writing had been in English, the words and the grammar. I will focus on those two particular issues in this brief exegesis.

### Observations from the Word

The Greek word translated “formed” in this passage is the Greek verb *morphoo*. The younger generation already recognizes the word “morph.” This is a term that is used in computers when you take two digital pictures and the computer slowly changes one to the other. The verb form of the word means to change. The word is actually found only six times in the New Testament. This is the only place where the verb form of the word is found.

The noun form of the word is found five times. It describes the condition after the change has taken place. Mark 16:12 describes the appearance of Jesus to the two men who were on the road to Emmaus. It reads, “*Afterward Jesus appeared in a different **form** to two of them while they were walking in the country.*” Jesus had been in one form before his death but he was in a different form after his resurrection. He had changed. He had “morphed” from a physical body to a spiritual body. The spiritual body was the new form. In 2 Timothy 3:2-5, Paul describes what will happen in the end times:

*People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy . . . lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a **form** of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.*

This seems to be describing people who have not changed. They claimed to have become followers of Jesus but there was no change. They are still living like they did before. They still possess their original form. This suggests that there will be religious people who will have a form—an outward appearance of religion but their actions will take a totally different form. The people Paul was describing here had two different forms here.

- There is the religious form, the outward appearance.
- There is the real form of life that comes from their heart.

With this background, we should have a fair understanding of this word “form.” Paul is praying that Christ will be formed in them. He is praying that they will be morphed from the old forms of their lives to a new form patterned after Christ.

### Observations from the Grammar

Every Greek verb has five different components that affect the meaning. Therefore, when conjugating or analyzing a Greek verb, those doing exegesis normally look at those five different aspects including: tense; mode; voice; person and number. For those familiar with Greek grammar, the Greek verb here is *morphothe* which is an aorist, subjunctive, passive, 3<sup>rd</sup> person, singular verb. Let’s look at the significance of those components:

#### *Tense*

Tense relates to the time of the verb. We use tense in a very sophisticated way every day without thinking much about it. Note these examples:

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- Present Tense: This is ongoing activity. “I am preaching in Miango.”
- Future Tense: This is a future activity. “I will preach in Miango on Friday.”
- Past Tense: This is an action in the past. “I preached in Jarawankogi yesterday.”
- Imperfect Tense: This is continuous action in the past: “I was preaching earlier.” This could mean two minutes ago or years ago but stress the ongoing activity.
- Perfect Tense: This is completed action in the past: “I have preached in Miango many times before.” Those sermons in the past are not over.

Greek has a tense we do not have called the aorist tense. The aorist tense is normally thought of as point action. It looks at the action as one event.

- Present Tense: “I am hitting the table.”
- Imperfect Tense: “I was hitting the table.”
- Perfect Tense: “I had hit the table.”
- Aorist Tense: “I hit the table” or “I will hit the table.”

You can have a future aorist tense and a past aorist tense but you cannot have a present aorist tense because the slice of time is too small. By the time you are telling about the point action, it is already in the past.

The verb *morphothe* is in the aorist tense. This was actually a little bit surprising to me. You would think that the process of morphing into the image of Christ would be a long process and therefore, Paul should have used the present tense which would stress that process. After all most people view sanctification is a long continuous process. However, Paul did not use the present tense but the aorist tense. What does that mean? Paul is certainly not denying the fact that changing into the form of Christ is a process. In fact, he clearly states this in Romans 12:1-2. However, at this point, Paul is looking at the over all process. Another way of describing this is that he is looking at the finished product.

Paul’s goal is that all of the Galatians believers should be changed into the image of Christ so that when someone looked at that person or interacted with that person, he or she would say “that person is a Christian”—“that person is a little Christ”—“that person has the character of Christ formed in him.”

Here are two illustrations that will help us understand this point.

### ***Becoming a Driver***

Most of us remember a time when we were a child that we looked forward to learning how to drive. The process of becoming a driver began with observation. We rode around in a vehicle driven by someone else and naturally learned some things about driving just watching. However, some of our fathers allowed us to sit on their lap and steer the vehicle. When we became older and our legs could reach the pedals, we were given a chance to actually drive the vehicle with someone else sitting very close by to correct any mistake we might make. At first we practiced in a place where there was nothing we could hurt. Eventually, we got on the road and faced oncoming traffic. Then we had our first experience of driving at night. Later we had our first experience of driving in the rain. After a while we had our first experience at driving long distances. And eventually, the driving habits have been so formed in us that it can be said that we “drivers.” The driving character has been so

formed in us that most of us can be using our left hand to steer the vehicle around a corner, while we are using the right hand to shift gears, while we use our right foot to release the accelerator and use our left foot to press the clutch, while we use our eyes to watch where we are going, while we are talking to someone sitting beside us. We do this automatically without thinking of it because the driving nature has been formed in us. We are drivers. Being a driver does not necessarily mean that we have reached the pinnacle of driving ability. There is no driver in the world that cannot improve on his ability to drive. However, the process of change from being a non-driver to a driver has been successful.

### ***Becoming a Soldier***

Perhaps a better illustration is that of becoming a soldier. When a new recruit, in his civilian clothes and with his long shaggy hair, raises his hand and swears his allegiance to defend the constitution of his country, he becomes a member of the armed forces. Though he is legally a soldier he is not actually a soldier yet. He goes to basic training or boot camp for three or four months. He learns many things about being a soldier there. He takes upon himself the soldier look—a very short haircut, sharply pressed uniform and spit-shined shoes. He learns the soldier language. He knows what “O six hours” means. He knows how to use basic military equipment. He knows the proper soldier behavior—how to salute and how to act around his superiors. His worldview has changed. He is now a soldier. However, over the next several years, he continues to learn what it is like to be a soldier and gradually the soldier mentality is so deeply formed in him that even when you meet a soldier out of uniform, you can look at him and say “there is a soldier.” There is no soldier in the world that cannot improve on being a soldier. That is why soldiers are constantly practicing and rehearsing so that all of their actions, if and when they have to go into battle, will be automatic and natural. The point is it is possible to morph from being a civilian to a soldier.

This is the significance of the aorist tense. It is not looking at the process of becoming a driver or a soldier but at the time when it can be said that a person is a driver or a soldier. The whole process if viewed as a single point action.

Paul is praying for a time that the Galatians will have so absorbed the teachings and example of Christ that it can be said that Christ has been formed in them. They are not just believers in sinner’s clothing and with a shaggy sinful appearance but are now “Christians” in the real sense of the word. Obviously, for the rest of their lives, they are going to continue improving that image so that when temptation comes and the problems of life try to overcome them, their Christian response will be automatic and natural.

### ***Mode***

Mode in the Greek language has to do with the reality of the action—at least the reality of the way the action is viewed or presented. In Greek grammar, there are several levels of reality. Though the following is a bit over-simplified, it gives the idea.

- The ***indicative mode*** is the mode of the greatest reality. It simply describes what is. “Bill is going to Miango.” It is a statement of fact.
- The ***subjunctive mode*** describes the mode of potential. It has less reality. It is the mode of possibility. “Bill may go to Miango” and even the mode of exhortation. “Bill, let us be going to Miango.” There is no absolute certainty that Bill will to go Miango.

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- The *imperative mode* is the mode of command. “Bill, go to Miango.” When you command someone to do something, there is no guarantee he or she will do it.
- The *optative mode* is the mode of a wish or prayer. It is the most remote in terms of reality. “I wish Bill would go to Miango.”

The verb *morphothe* is in the subjunctive mode. What does that mean? There is a possibility the Galatians will have Christ formed in them. Paul desires that this will happen but there is no guarantee it will happen. Paul had given birth to them spiritually the first time. However, there was no automatic guarantee that these Galatians would persevere to the point that Christ would be formed in them. In fact, the thing Paul was concerned about was that all of his efforts would be wasted. Here are Paul’s plaintive words in Galatians 4:8-11:

*Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.*

People believe different things about the doctrine of eternal security. This doctrine teaches that once a person comes to Christ, he or she will never fall away and be lost. However, there is no corresponding doctrine of secure or guaranteed sanctification. There is no guarantee every new believer will persevere in his or her faith to the point it could be said, “Christ has been formed in them.” There is only a possibility that this will happen.

Before we go to the next point, we must ask ourselves: Has Christ been formed in us? Is the formation of Christ in you a possibility or a reality or an ongoing process?

### **Voice**

Voice has to do with whether the subject of the sentence is the doer of the action or the recipient of the action. We have three voices in Greek but I will mention only the two that correspond easily with our English grammar.

- **Active voice.** The subject of the sentence is the doer of the action of the verb. “Bill dropped the hymnbook.”
- **Passive voice.** The subject of the sentence is the recipient of the action. “The hymnbook was dropped by Bill.”

In this case, the verb is passive. So what is Paul is saying? He is saying that Jesus is the recipient of the action not the doer of the action. Jesus is not necessarily the one who will be doing the change in the Galatians. Jesus will be the one who will be changed into the core being of the believer. Paul does not mention the means by which they will be changed. He simply says that Christ will be formed in them.

However, from other parts of the Bible we know that we will be changed by the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 2:131: “. . . *from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.*” Peter says about God’s elect that they “*have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit . . .*” (1 Peter

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1:2). It is the Holy Spirit who changes us from being self-centered, sinful human beings into “saints” who have Christ formed in them.

This should be relief to us. We do not have to change ourselves into the image of Christ. We do not form the character of Christ in us through our own initiative and our own discipline and our own creativity. In fact, it is impossible for us to change ourselves into the image of Christ with our own ingenuity. We depend upon the power of the Holy Spirit to change us from being an ordinary self-centered, sinful human beings to being persons who have the image of Christ stamped on us and the character of Christ formed in us.

Unfortunately, this does not relieve us entirely of our responsibility. Everything that God does in our lives is voluntarily received. God does not force himself upon any of us. All that we have and are is a direct result of God’s working in our lives but we believe there must be cooperation for God to work in our lives.

Here is an illustration of this from a strange place—from the Old Testament. Samuel the prophet had called Saul and anointed him to be the king over Israel. He gave him several instructions. He then said this to the newly anointed king:

*After that you will go to Gibeah of God, where there is a Philistine outpost. As you approach the town, you will meet a procession of prophets coming down from the high place with lyres, tambourines, flutes and harps being played before them, and they will be prophesying. **The Spirit of the LORD will come upon you in power, and you will prophesy with them; and you will be changed into a different person.** Once these signs are fulfilled, do whatever your hand finds to do, for God is with you. (1 Samuel 10:5-7).*

Saul had his responsibilities. He had to go to Gibeah. Had he gone to Bethel, he would have missed what God wanted to do in his life. However, as he obeyed the simple instructions, Samuel said that the Spirit of the Lord would come upon him in power and he would prophesy and he would be “*changed into a different person.*” And even after he was changed he was to “*do whatever your hand finds to do, for God is with you.*”

People went to Gibeah every day and were not changed in to a different person. However, when Saul obeyed the simple instructions God gave to him, the Spirit of God came upon him and changed him into a different person. He did not change himself. The Holy Spirit changed him

Paul is saying something like this to the Galatians. He is obviously calling on them to reject the teachings of the Judaizers who were confusing them and threatening their spiritual future. He is calling on them to simply obey what he had taught them and if they did, the Spirit of God would help to form the image and character of Christ in them.

***Person and Number***

This verse was in the third person and was singular in number. This reinforces the fact that Christ is the one who is the focus here. Jesus is the one who is being formed into the Galatians. It is not just character that is being formed in them; it is not just faith that is being formed in them. It is Christ whose life is being formed in the Galatians.

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The prepositional phrase following this verb *en humin* also has person and number. It is a 2<sup>nd</sup> person plural pronoun properly translated “*in you (plural).*” Paul is not just interested in these believers having Christ formed in them as individuals. That is the starting point. Paul wants Christ to be formed in them as the church in that area—as a spiritual community. The non-Christians in the area should be able to see the church as “*a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless*” (Ephesians 5:27).

So the question is this: Have you been changed into the image of Christ? Has Christ been formed in you? Or is Christ being formed in you?

### The Significance of Christ Being Formed in You

What does all of this mean? What does it mean to have Christ formed in you? What particular parts of Christ nature should be formed in us?

- Does this mean that we should be able to perform miracles like Jesus did?
- Does this mean that we should be able to forgive sin like Jesus did?
- Does this mean that we should call disciples like Jesus did?

### Comparing Scripture with Scripture

I will respond to these questions by using another technique we often use in Bible study? We compare scriptures with Scripture. This is especially true when we are trying to understand Biblical words. There is one outstanding passage in Paul’s writings that provides us with two of the six times this particular word *morphe* is used and interestingly, both of those are talking about Christ. This helps to give us a little glimpse into what it is like to have the nature of Christ formed in us.

The key scripture we are going to use for comparative purposes is Philippians 2:5-8.

*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very **nature** God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very **nature** of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!*

### Key Quality of Christ: Humility

If you had to summarize the characteristic of Christ from this paragraph in one word, you would probably select the word humility. Verse 8 says Christ “*being found in appearance as a man, he **humbled** himself. . .*” Christ was completely God in every way. However, he did not view all of the aspects of his divine nature as something that he needed to hold onto, so he freely and voluntarily yielded them up in order to become a man.

The word “humbled” in this context is the word *keneo* which is a word that literally means “emptied.” Although the scholars disagree over exactly what is implied by this statement, in some sense of the word, Jesus had to empty himself in order to become human. Why did he have to do that? He had to empty himself because there are some things that are incompatible between God and man.



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- God knows all things; man must learn things. Was Jesus going to become a man who already knew all things or was he going to become a man who had to learn?
- God is everywhere present; man is limited to be at one place at one time. Was Jesus going to continue to utilize the omnipresence quality or was he going to be a real man—limited to being in one place at one time?
- God can do all things; man is limited and can do only some things. Was Jesus going to live a supernatural life all throughout his life or was he going to live a normal human life with all of its limitations?

Therefore, if Jesus were really going to identify with man and become a man in the fullest sense of the word, he had to yield up some of the divine characteristics.

- In order to learn like a man, Jesus had to empty himself of his divine knowledge.
- In order to learn to walk and talk and read, Jesus had to empty himself of that knowledge in order to be fully human and experience things as a human.
- In order to experience the same limitations of humans, Jesus had to empty himself of unlimited energy and power become hungry and tired and sleepy.

Some theologians like to say that Jesus did not actually give up those rights but he temporarily suspended the use of those rights.

### *A Governor Becomes a Traffic Warden*

When living in Port Harcourt, I heard a story about one of the military governors going somewhere with his large entourage of vehicles when suddenly they encountered a serious go-slow. After a couple of minutes, the governor got out of his vehicle and started directing traffic until the traffic jam was removed. As governor, there was no need for this man to start acting like a traffic warden. This was not part of the job description of a military governor. In fact, this was far too small a task for the governor of a state. The governor could have ordered his commissioner of transportation to go out there and solve that problem. However, he temporarily set aside the honor and privilege of being the governor of the state so that he could solve a particular problem. Please note that there was no time when he was directing traffic that he was anything less than the governor of the state. He had not given up his rights as governor. He would have still be addressed as “His Excellency.” The governor had simply suspended the free exercise of his rights in order to accomplish a specific job.

We believe Jesus did something like that. He did not give up his right to be God. He was fully and completely God the whole time he was here on this earth. He could still be worshipped and he could still forgive sins. However, in order to fully identify with humanity, he temporarily suspended some of his divine rights and privileges.

The bottom line is that the core characteristic of Jesus that we see in Jesus was humility. That is the primary quality of Christ that we want to see formed in us. However, that humility is manifested in some other interrelated characteristics that are suggested in this passage. We will briefly examine those now.

### **Three Key Manifestations of Humility**

These are three inter-related and overlapping characteristics related to humility.

## ***Selflessness***

*“Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped . . .”* (2:6). This passage tells us that in his true nature Jesus was God. However, he did not consider equality with God or the fact that he had all of the characteristics and privileges of God something to be held onto. Therefore, he willingly yielded up those characteristics or at least the free exercise of those characteristics in order to fulfill the task he came to this earth to do.

The characteristic I see here is selflessness. The incarnation of Jesus is the ultimate example of selflessness. Think of what Jesus had to give up.

- He had to give up the constant communion with the Trinity.
- He had to give up the constant adoration and service of angels.
- He had to give up an environment of absolute perfection.

And think of what Jesus had to experience.

- He was born among the animals.
- He was reared and lived in the home of a poor family.
- He had to be misunderstood and abused like any other child.
- He had to go to school and learn to read and write like any other child.
- He had to experience all of the other hardships of that part of the world, including heat and cold and hunger and tiredness and sickness and accidents and injuries and the suffering from losing loved ones.

Jesus voluntarily gave up all of those privileges and accepted all of these liabilities so that he could come to this earth and serve humanity and ultimately provide salvation for us.

Selflessness is giving up our rights in order to improve the life of someone else. Selflessness is one of the characteristics of Christ that Paul would like to see formed in us. There can never be a greater demonstration of selflessness than we see in the life of Christ.

- Matthew 16:24: *“Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”*
- Romans 12:10 *“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.”* (KJV *“in honor preferring one another”*).
- 1 Corinthians 10:24: *“Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.”*
- Philippians 2:3-4 *“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”*

God is calling all of us to a life of selflessness—to a life in which we voluntarily give up our rights in order to bring salvation and other benefits to other people.

Of all the various kinds of Christian workers, the missionary is kind of Christian who identifies most with Jesus in his selflessness.

- The missionary leaves the fellowship of his family and goes to a foreign country where things are much different than home.

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- The missionary often becomes like a little child in the new country and has to learn such basic things as how to talk and communicate.
- The missionary often lives in a situation that is far less comfortable and convenient than the one he left behind.

In other words, to be effective, the missionary has to learn to practice selflessness.

What kind of missionary are you? Are you one who is willing to give up your rights in order to provide salvation and a better life for other people? To what extent are you willing to give up things?

- Are you willing to give up time and regular interaction with your family?
- Are you willing to give up your rights to privacy you enjoyed before?
- Are you willing to give you the food from your home country?
- Are you willing to give up freedom from tropical diseases?
- Are you willing to give up your safety and security?

By volunteering to become a missionary, you have already given up those rights. I congratulate you on that. However, we must continue to remind ourselves that when we got on the airplane, we did indeed give up those rights. Now that we are here and understand this better, are we still willing to voluntarily give up those rights?

In some sense of the word, I respect a missionary more for staying on the mission field than for going to the mission field? Before you came, you did not know what you were getting into. However, now that you are here, you fully understand what it means to be a missionary. The second term missionary is the true missionary because the second term missionary gives up rights knowing what that really means.

### *Service*

*“ . . . but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness”* (2:7). This verse stresses another aspect of Jesus’ humility.

Paul says that although he was of the nature of God, he took upon himself the nature of a servant. The word “servant” here is the word *doulos* which is the word most often translated slave. To use a term that the teenagers would understand: Jesus morphed from God to being a slave. There is no higher person in the universe than God. There is no one in the human race lower than a slave. Therefore Jesus made the greatest change possible.

The key thought I want to stress here is what a slave does. He serves. So a second important aspect of the nature of Christ is the concept of service. Jesus came to this world not to receive but to serve. He came to this world not to be honored but to serve. He came to this world not to be served but to serve. How did Jesus serve?

- Jesus served his father in the carpenter’s shop.
- Jesus served his friends by helping to provide wine for a wedding.
- Jesus served many people by healing their bodies.
- Jesus served at least three families by raising their loved ones from the dead.
- Jesus served the worshippers at the temple by dealing with those who were taking advantage of them.

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- Jesus served his disciples by washing their feet.
- Jesus served the whole world by dying on the cross.

One of the major reasons that God created us human beings was to be his servants on this earth. Remember the first words that God ever said to the human race were: “*Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground*” (Genesis 1:28). God created the human race to be his workers and take care of the earth. After the human race fell into sin, God had to modify his plan so human beings could take care of fellow human beings. Paul said to the Galatians: “*You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, **serve one another in love.***” (5:13). In fact, God even measures greatness by the way we serve others. After the incident in which James and John requested the seats on either side of Jesus in his kingdom, Jesus said,

*You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many* (Mark 10:42-45).

Here is the point: When Jesus came to this earth, his nature was changed to be a servant. God created us from the beginning to be servants. Therefore, one of the greatest things we can do is to serve others. If we do not naturally have a servant spirit, God wants to change us into the image of Jesus and form a servant spirit in us.

Missionaries historically have been some of the greatest servants in Christianity. Therefore, the missionary should be by nature a servant. God did not bring you to Nigeria to have people serve you. Fortunately, most of us have people who come to our house and help serve us. However, we must remember that they are helping to serve us so that we can provide a greater service to Nigeria. And even as these people are serving us, we must make sure that we are serving them as well. A slave is a person without any rights. If you focus too much on your rights, you will not be an effective missionary.

What kind of servant missionary are you? Has the servanthood of Jesus been formed in your character?

### ***Sacrifice***

“*And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!*” (2:8). In this passage, Paul stresses one of the greatest aspects of Jesus’ humility. He humbled himself to the point that he subjected himself to death. And it was not just any death. It was the painful and shameful death on the cross. This suggests to me the word sacrifice. Jesus sacrificed his life on the cross.

What is sacrifice? It is the voluntary giving up of something for someone else. Jesus voluntarily gave up his life in order that the world could be saved.

Jesus is not the last person to give up his life for the sake of the gospel. Note that most of the leaders of the church died premature deaths, including:

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- Stephen
- Eleven of the twelve disciples
- The Apostle Paul

Church history is filled with examples of Christians who died for their faith. Even Nigeria has lost a number of missionaries here in Nigeria:

- Missionary in Lagos killed by armed robbers
- Missionary in Akwa Ibom killed by electrocution
- Wycliffe missionary killed in Ilorin as a pedestrian
- EYN missionary killed in Adamawa in an automobile accident
- Mission Africa missionary killed in Kogi State in automobile accident
- Hyo Jin Lee, missionary child killed in Yankari in auto accident
- Daughter of German missionaries died in Jos from tropical disease
- Justine Ward died in Jos from drowning
- Bob Wandersee killed on the Samanka Road by armed robbers
- Dutch missionary killed in Ebonye State by armed robbers
- Church of Christ missionary killed in Akwa Ibom state by armed robbers
- Church of Christ missionary died in Jos from heart attack
- German missionary died in Borno State from heart attack
- Ron Boot, short term missionary, died in Taraba State in mountain climbing accident

What does this say to us? It says that there is danger in doing God’s work. It also suggests that for the gospel to go forward, there must be sacrifice. All of us understand that there may be sacrifice required of us in order for the gospel to advance.

### *The Alamo*

This is similar to the sacrifice that was made in order to conquer the Western part of the United States and particular Texas. Perhaps the most well known event in the history of Texas is the Battle for the Alamo that took place in Bexar (pronounced Bejar), the present San Antonio. Texas declared its independence from Mexico on March 2, 1837. The rumblings of independence had been going on for months so about ten days before the declaration of independence General Antonio López de Santa Anna had already arrived at the Alamo with about 1500 troops to put down the rebellion. At that time the Alamo was being defended by about 100 Texans. Everyone knew the battle was coming but a few days before Santa Anna arrived two groups of defenders arrived, about 30 men led by Jim Bowie and a smaller group led by Davy Crockett. After Santa Anna arrived and surrounded the Alamo, 32 more men slipped into fort. Also while the siege was going on, Davy Crockett led a small group of men outside and found another group that was willing to go back inside to help defend the Alamo. Every one of these people who entered that compound understood that there were very grave risks and likely death.

Colonel William Travis, commander of the small force at the Alamo, wrote a letter which he entitled “To the People of Texas and All Americans in the World.” In the letter, Travis said, “I am determined to sustain myself as long as possible & die like a soldier who never forgets what is due to his own honor & that of his country. VICTORY OR DEATH.”

The battle was joined in the early morning of March 6, 1836. Within seven hours or so, all of the defenders inside the Alamo except two had been killed. No one knows exactly

how many people died. The estimate range from 182 to 257. When the fall of the Alamo was announced, instead of striking fear in the heart of the Texans as Santa Anna was convinced would happen, this galvanized and motivated the Texans. Hundreds volunteered to join the army of Sam Houston. On April 27, some six weeks later, Sam Houston’s ragtag Texas army surprised and defeated the Mexican army and captured General Santa Anna. This bought time for the new Texas Republic which later became the 28<sup>th</sup> state of the United States.

Here is the point: If Texans were willing to go to such great lengths to defend their nation or their state—to the point of giving up their lives, how much more should we be willing to follow the example of Jesus and make whatever sacrifices are necessary to see God’s kingdom advance on this earth.

## **Conclusion**

Paul’s cry for the Galatians was that Christ would be formed in them. There are some parts of Christ’s experience that we may not be able to see formed in us.

- We may not heal the sick or raise the dead or walk on the water like Jesus did.
- We may not still the storm or multiply the loaves and fishes like Jesus did.
- We may not even teach the multitudes like Jesus did.

However, the Holy Spirit can develop humility in us.

- That means that we can live a selfless life.
- That means that we can live a servant’s life.
- That means that we can live sacrificial lives.

## ***More on the Alamo***

This morning I read in my quiet time, *“Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life”* (Galatians 6:7-8). This exhortation is based upon a farming illustration.

I have two things growing in my garden right now—sweet potatoes and weeds which grew on their own. The weeds have grown there because of nature—the seeds are there and if nothing is done, the weeds will grow. However, the sweet potatoes are there because Steve Porter gave me some cuttings from his sweet potato vines and we have planted them and cultivated and they are producing beautiful red American style sweet potatoes.

The point should be obvious: The weeds of our nature will grow on their own. The seeds of everything negative and sinful are already there. However, let’s make sure that we are planting the seeds of Christ’s image so that they will produce a harvest of righteousness and joy and eternal life.

There is a story that has become one of the most well known parts of the Alamo tradition. On March 5, just a few hours before the final battle of the Alamo would begin, it had become obvious that the Mexicans were going to attack the Alamo and there was little hope that anyone would survive. Colonel Travis called all of the men together, took his sword and drew a line in the sand. He then asked all who were willing to die for the cause of Texan

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to step across that line. According to the legend only one person refused to step across. At least 181 men stepped across that line, being willing to give up their lives to defend a cause they believed in.

The Holy Spirit has drawn a line in the sand. The question is whether we will step across the line and volunteer to have the image of Christ formed in us? Yes, we have joined our friends in the “Texas of repentance;” we have come to the “San Antonia of faith;” we have entered the “Alamo of personal salvation.” But will we take that step across the line and make ourselves available to the Holy Spirit to have the image of Christ formed in us?

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