
NT8 Christ's Learning and Growth

We are looking at what are known as reflexives in the New Testament. I will clarify the definition of a reflexive in this session.

First, I would like to begin in Philippians.

Philippians 2:3

3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. **4** Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. **5** Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,^a **6** who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,^b **7** but **emptied himself**, by taking the form of a servant,^c being born in the likeness of men. **8** And being found in human form, **he humbled himself** by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

So, there are two reflexive constructions with respect to Christ. **He emptied himself** and **he humbled himself**. Since we're supposed to be imitators of Christ and we want to have the mind of Christ, it says, have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus. We need to understand what this really means.

Reviewing the Definition of a Reflexive Construction

It is important that we understand reflexives and not be intimidated by the grammatical term.

A reflexive simply is a grammatical construction where the subject of the sentence does the action of the verb upon himself or herself. When it says, Christ humbled himself or he humbled himself, he himself did the action of being humble by himself.

He humbled himself. "He" is the subject, "humbled" is the verb, "himself" is a reflexive pronoun because it reflects back to the subject. This sentence is called a reflexive construction.

Let's look at an example of what it is, and what it is not.

He gave himself as a ransom. That is reflexive.

He gave gifts. He gave money. Those two are not reflexive constructions. Why not? "He" is the subject. "Gave" is the verb. "Gifts or money" are the object, what is being given is not the subject, it is something other than the subject that is being given.

What makes a reflexive construction is the subject performing the action upon himself: He gave himself.

There is a command in the epistle to Timothy where it says, "Train yourselves." The subject in that command, "You," is understood. "Train" is the verb. Who is the subject, "You," training? "Yourself." The action of the verb reflects back upon the subject.

It puts the responsibility on the individual. It doesn't say, you train the dog, or you train the team, or you train the students. Those are all objects apart from or independent from the individual (subject).

However, when you train yourself...ah, that's me. I have a responsibility to train myself. I must take action upon myself. I am to figure out my training program, etc., and I do it **to** myself.

There is another command in the epistles where it says, "you clothe yourselves" with righteousness. You clothe yourselves. It doesn't say you clothe *your children*, but **you clothe yourself**.

When you're really young, your mom dressed you. As you get a little older your parents teach you how to dress yourself. One day you say to mom, "Can you get me dressed for school?" Mom would respond, "No, **you dress yourself**." That is reflexive, where you have to do the action of getting dressed by yourself. The parent can provide the clothes, but you have to do it.

Why is this so important? It is a construction that is used very often in the Epistles. It clarifies the roles and responsibilities with respect to the transformation process and the discipleship process.

We just read in Philippians, he emptied himself. It doesn't say he emptied the dishwasher, or he emptied the refrigerator, which would be objects apart from the individual.

A real simple non-scriptural example would be, "He threw the ball." The individual is throwing something that's outside of himself, the ball. What would make it reflexive would be to say, "He threw himself on the floor. He threw himself on the bed."

This becomes dynamically important when we consider not only all the reflexives regarding Christ, but all of them regarding us!

Christ humbled himself. He gave himself. He made himself. He emptied himself. He sanctified himself. He sacrificed himself. He committed himself or entrusted himself.

We need to understand those because we are to imitate him. If we understand the construction and what the roles and responsibilities are of God and us as disciples or those who want to be disciples, so when it says, "you devote yourself," we understand what it means.

It is our responsibility.

You train yourself. You clothe yourself. You humble yourself. You empty yourself. You cleanse yourself. You watch yourself. You arm yourself. You deny yourself. You reckon yourself or consider yourself dead to sin.

Do you see why I'm spending time with this?

[Why Spend Time on Reflexives?](#)

Early last year I taught on genuine discipleship and transformation and growth to maturity. I taught it from the scriptures in a way which I believed would communicate what the Word says about this important topic. However, we are always seeking to find new ways to present the Gospel, present the Word, which will resonate with people.

I believe as we look at these reflexive constructions in the Word, it will give us a pathway to discipleship and help us to better understand what our role is in the process of being transformed by the renewing of our minds.

Romans 12:1 and 2

1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, ^a by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ^b **2** Do not be conformed to this world, ^c but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Be transformed by the renewing of your mind. If you focus on “be transformed,” you would say that is passive. I’m going to be transformed. God transformed me. The rest of the verse says, **by the renewing of your mind.**

So here we have the roles and responsibilities in the process where the spirit of God will work within us and help change us and enable us to grow, to be disciples. We will be transformed. But hey, it’s by the renewing of your mind. That is our role and our responsibility.

That is where those reflexives come in. Many times, they take the form of commands, things we are supposed to do, things that God commands us to do. It provides another way for us to better understand how we can be transformed. We all know there are so many Christians who are not changed.

During the Christmas Eve service, for example, there were 250 people there. As I looked out at them, and knowing many of the folks, I began thinking of the issues, the problems, the challenges they and their families are dealing with. And I thought, gosh, if they only knew what’s available from God and how to actually change, things would be so different in their lives. Also, if they were teaching their children, their grandchildren, their great grandchildren, they too could be free and live as God designed us all to live.

Few really understand it to the place where they’re bearing the fruit that God wants us to bear.

That is why we are going to spend time on this. I plan on going through each one of the reflexive commands. We will start with Christ and what he did as we read in Philippians 2. Hopefully this has clarified your understanding of what a reflexive construction is.

Our intent is to become increasingly Christlike. Christ had to do these things. It is important for us to realize that Christ actually had to learn, grow, and change. Remember, he was the son of God. He was a man and he had to grow just as we have to grow. Christ was born and he grew. We are born-again and we grow.

Two Words Translated “Grew”

Since Christ is the example, we need to take a look at the Word to see what he actually did. In the Gospel of Luke, I want to show the difference between two Greek words. These two words are often translated the same. However, they are two different Greek words. They highlight how Christ actually grew.

Luke 2:39,40

39 And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. **40** And the child grew auxanó and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.

This is after Mary and Joseph, according to the law, brought Jesus to the temple, and then they returned to Nazareth. It says, the child grew, became strong, filled with wisdom. That word “grew” is [auxanó](#). It is growth from within. It is growth, which just naturally takes place. A child simply grows. They are born and they grow. There is no one from the outside saying, okay, now grow. They eat, they drink, they sleep, and they naturally grow.

This is before he was twelve years old. We know this because in verses 41 and 42 we get to the verse that records his age as twelve.

41 Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. **42** And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. **43** And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it,

We are familiar with this record. When he was twelve, in the temple he amazed everybody by his understanding and his answers. Then after that, in verse 52, it says

52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and in statureⁱ and in favor with God and man.

Some translations say, **and Jesus grew in wisdom and stature**, and in favor with God and man.

This sounds very much like verse 40 but the difference here is the word for “increased” or grew is not [auxanó](#). Rather it is the word, [prokoptó](#). If you look at Bullinger and other word studies, [prokoptó](#) means to drive forward as if by repeated strokes. *prokóptō* – properly, to cut (beat) to go forward; to advance (proceed).

It is a forward work. It means to further, to push forward, to make progress, to advance, to increase. So, after he was twelve years old, he increased in wisdom and stature. He’s moving forward, he’s learning, he’s growing. After this record, we don’t hear about him again until he’s 30.

So, what is he doing from age twelve to 30? What did he do up to age twelve? Obviously, he was spending time in the Word, in prayer, learning, because by the age of twelve, he was amazing!

46 After three days they (his parents) found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. **47** **And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.**

So that was Jesus was and what he did up till twelve. But then from twelve to 30, Jesus is not just hanging around waiting until he’s 30 to begin his official ministry. He is increasing. He is continuing to move forward.

When we read in Philippians 2, where it says, he humbled himself and became obedient, that word “became” is [ginomai](#), it is growth, it is movement.

(*ginomai*) means "to become, and signifies a change of condition, state or place" He became obedient unto death. He learned and matured spiritually, so that he was able to go all the way to the cross.

Now, why is this important? It is because we pattern ourselves after Christ and we do the same. We learn, we grow, we change.

Consider Christ

We are supposed to consider him.

Hebrews 3:1

1 Therefore, holy brothers, ^a you who share in a heavenly calling, **consider Jesus**, the apostle and high priest of our confession,

Hebrews 12:3

3 Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted

2 Timothy 2:7

7 Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.

So, Christ was growing, changing, and maturing. Of course, we know he was without sin. He never sinned, but he was going through this growth process.

To get a better idea of what this word [prokoptó](#) really means, we can note that it occurs six times in the New Testament, but only once in the Gospels. That is in Luke 2:52 which we just read.

In the epistles, Galatians 1:14 Paul speaking of himself says:

Galatians 1:14

14 And I was advancing [prokoptó](#) in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers.

Paul, under the training of Gamaliel, was advancing in Judaism beyond many of his own age. He was continually moving forward.

It occurs in 2 Timothy three times in a negative way; talking about false teachers, false prophets, wrong doctrine. It says they will not get very far; they will not advance. It also says that evil people will go [prokoptó](#) from bad to worse.

They will continue to move in that direction, going bad, then bad to worse, and those who indulge become more and more ungodly.

2 Timothy 2:16

16 But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness

We get a sense of this word. Paul advanced, the evil people advanced, and Christ advanced.

Now, how did he advance, and what was he doing? It is important that if we want to exhibit Christlike attributes, if we want to be Christlike, we need to be like Christ.

That of course is a play on words, but it is to make the point that if we want to exhibit his love, his compassion, his kindness, his mercy, his grace...things that we see in the fruit of the spirit. If we want to exhibit his power, his ability to heal, minister, cast out spirits. If we want to be Christlike, we need to be like Christ.

What was his lifestyle? What did he do?

When he was growing up and moving forward, we have to think about what he was doing with his time. Already by age twelve, we saw what he knew and what he did in the temple. He had to make choices. Stop and think, when he was in Nazareth at age ten, while other kids were playing soccer, what was he doing? He was praying, studying, learning. When they were 15 and thinking, there's that good looking girl over there, I'd like to marry her. He was pursuing God, pursuing the things of God.

It is interesting that he never did marry. I am sure there was pressure from the culture at the time, "Why aren't you interested in women? Why don't you want to marry? What is it that you're doing?"

Jesus was a real man. He had to have been dealing with things on a daily basis. When we understand that his focus from age twelve to 30 was growing and learning, he was not just waiting around. He was living out the law on a daily basis.

He studied the law, and then he embodied a law, and then he had to live it and apply it. That is why it says he grew or increased in wisdom and stature.

It is in the living and the application of the Word that wisdom really comes to the fore.

There is something else I wanted to mention with respect to Christ. It ties into the last session on 1 Corinthians 6, where it says, "Our lives are not our own, we're bought with a price."

Think about Christ learning, growing up, reading the Old Testament and making choices. I seek to understand what Jesus was thinking about and what drove him.

Remember that the Word says he humbled himself. It says he became obedient. It says that Christ became the source of salvation. It says that he learned obedience by what he endured, and he was made perfect because of what he endured. It was a growth process by application, by learning, by thinking.

We want to model ourselves after him. We also know that at age 30, when he began his public ministry, he went to John to be baptized. This is one of the two times where the voice from heaven declares, "This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased."

What was God already well pleased with about Christ? He obviously had done things which were pleasing to God. How did Christ know about what was pleasing to God? He knew from the Old Testament what was considered pleasing. He knew that from reading and studying that God was pleased when Solomon asked for wisdom and knowledge so he could effectively govern his people. He knew from reading Psalms and Proverbs, that God is pleased with integrity, righteousness, character, etc. He knew that the sacrifices done with the right heart were pleasing to God. He also knew what was **not** pleasing to God, sacrifices without heart, only with ritual.

So, we know that at age 30, God said, this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased up to that point. Then we also know on the mount of transfiguration near the end of Christ's ministry, the audible voice "This is my son in whom I'm well pleased. Hear ye, him." God was continually pleased with what Jesus was doing.

We want to be able to say the same! I want God to be pleased with what I do and who I am and how I fulfill my calling and my ministry.

How did Christ learn about his identity and what his ministry was and his calling and his function? From the Word! He studied his identity, his role, his mission, his calling.

He had read the servant songs in Isaiah, Isaiah 42, 49, 50, and 52. He had read Isaiah prophesying about the Messiah.

As Jesus read these things he was saying, okay, that's me. That's my identity. That's who I am, and that is what I am to do. Now, why is that so important to us? **Because we are to do the same thing.** We are to go to the Word to find out what our true identity is and then learn how to live it out!

Hence, our focus on the reflexives. Just as Christ humbled himself, made himself, emptied himself, sanctified himself. We are to do the same! He did it in order to fulfill his ministry. We learn our identity from the Word. We obey those reflexive commands in order to fulfill our ministry and actually fulfill the function and the calling which God has given to us.

We need to "consider Christ," as it says in Hebrews, twice. We need to consider deeply what he did and speculate, of course, about what he had thought about. He had to have been reading and learning his identity. He had to have been living out the Old Testament Law.

Think about his daily life from age twelve through 30. He is interacting with people. There are challenges. There are family challenges. There is work, there is the synagogue, there is going to the feasts. He is in relationship with people. He is living out the law. He is learning, he is challenged by different things. "He is in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." He is gaining wisdom and knowledge and understanding by his application of the truth of the Word.

That is how we grow. That is how we get wisdom and knowledge and understanding by the application of the Word. As I've said so often, it's a full-time job, it's a full-time endeavor.

During this period of time, twelve through 30, what is Christ doing as he reads and learns what he is going to do? He is preparing himself. He is arming himself. He is training himself. He is devoting himself. He is delighting himself in his father.

Do those all sound familiar? Those are things recorded in the Epistles that we are to do! Those same things are what Christ had to be doing in order to prepare himself for his ministry.

He is our example! We can see what it looked like in his life. We want it to look the same in our lives if we want to be Christlike, exhibit the fruit of the Spirit, operate manifestations of the spirit, and take his place in this day and time. We want to be pleasing to God.

John 8:29

29 And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, **for I always do the things that are pleasing to him.**"

He knew what was pleasing to his father.

Hebrews 11

Christ knew the things that are written in Hebrews chapter eleven before Hebrews chapter eleven was ever written.

Obviously, it says in Matthew that we have one teacher, one instructor, and that is Christ via the gift of Holy Spirit within us. We have Christ in us, the hope of glory. The spirit of God works within us and teaches us.

Holy men of God wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. That is how what is written in Hebrews was revealed. Jesus already knew it by studying the Old Testament. I want to look at it because I want us to fathom what Christ was considering when he read these records in the Old Testament.

My contention is that Christ, by learning and growing, by reading the Old Testament, knew that others had paid a steep price in their lives. Others had been obedient in order for him to finally be born and fulfill the calling for which God had sent him.

He had realized when the fullness of time came and God sent his son, which was him, that others had paid with their lives, and that his life was really not his own. People, tie this back to what we saw in God's Word last time in 1 Corinthians 6; "Your life is not your own. You were bought with a price."

1 Corinthians 6:19,20

19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, **20** for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

He realized his life was not his own. We must realize our life is not our own. Our lives were bought with a price, **his LIFE!**

He knew that others had paved the way by giving their lives.

Hebrews 11:8

8 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.

So, Abraham left his home, what he was comfortable with, and was obedient, and went out to a place, not knowing where he was going.

9 By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. **10 For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.**

Christ, knowing that, knows if that city is going to come to pass, he has to do what he was called to do. He needs to live out the prophecies of the Old Testament. He needs to live out the servant songs in Isaiah!

11 By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. **12** Therefore from one man, and him as

good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.

All of this: Abraham's call, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph in captivity, what Joseph went through, Joseph in prison in Egypt...**all of it paved the way to get to Christ.**

Now he's Christ. He reads these things, learns his identity and his call. He knows, "I am not my own."

13 These all died in faith, **not having received the things promised**, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

Christ knows in order for them to receive the things that are promised, he has to fulfill his ministry.

14 For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland.

(Well, the good witch said, click your heels three times.) There's no place like home... indeed, for all the Old Testament saints who gave their lives and paved the way... there is no way for them to actually get home to the prophesied millennial kingdom if Christ does not fulfill his calling! Christ knows he has to fulfill his ministry.

That is **WHY** he humbled himself, why he became obedient unto death. He knew the impact his obedience would have on all of history.

You and I, ladies and gentlemen, are also individuals in the body of Christ who are sons and daughters of God who have a ministry. We have to realize that we have an impact to make on others and on the entire kingdom. We have an impact on whether or not people will actually get to go to the millennial kingdom.

We need to present the Word and the truth to them. The rewards people will receive are dependent upon if and how they live in faithfulness.

15 If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. **16** But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one.

Christ, again, reading the Old Testament, thinking about this, would have realized that's not going to happen if I don't do what I'm called to do.

Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

17 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, **18** of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." **19** He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.

Let's go down to verse 23.

23 By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they were not afraid of the king's edict.

So, each one of these we know in Hebrews 11 is referred to as the "hall of fame of faith."

They all had faith and belief in God and his word, and what was to come in the future, which would not take place if Christ didn't do what he was called to do and fulfill his identity as the son of God, which he learned from the Old Testament.

I know I'm belaboring the point here, but you see that we learn our identity from the Word. That is why we are to deny ourselves and follow him. We lose our lives in order to become like him. The reflexes that we will study enable us to live that out.

23 By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they were not afraid of the king's edict. **24** By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, **25** choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.

Christ knew that Moses made that sacrifice with his life in order for the children of Israel as a people, to get to the time when the Messiah would come. He chose, because of faith, to be mistreated with the people of God, rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin, the temporal fleeting pleasures of this world. He sacrificed in order to see that God's plan would be fulfilled.

Christ knew this. He knew that his life was not his own. In order for Moses and Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Joseph and Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel and Ezra, to get to the millennial kingdom and enjoy what God promised, he had to do, what he was called to do.

26 He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.

Moses was looking to the reward which could only take place if Christ fulfilled what he was called to do.

27 By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible. **28** By faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them.

Christ paid the price with his life in order to see that everyone prior to and after him could enjoy eternity, rewards, and the millennial kingdom which was promised in the Old Testament. We have not only that same opportunity, but that same privilege. We are not our own, we were bought with a price.

You may think this doesn't sound like very inviting Christianity. It is inviting though in that no one can experience the joy that is available in this life unless they live out the discipleship that Christ called us to.

Continuing now in Hebrews 12...

Hebrews 12:1

1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

We are to look to the Jesus I just described to you, who in his early life sacrificed playing with other kids in order to spend time with God and continue to learn about his identity and his calling. This Jesus who after age twelve, continued to seek God and was increasing in wisdom and stature!

[2](#) looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

And then the next verse says, **consider him**.

Consider him! We are to consider him just as we are considering him and considering what he did, how he learned his identity, his calling, his function, how he carried it out because he humbled himself and became obedient unto death.

[3](#) Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. [4](#) In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

In the sessions to come, we will look further at what Christ did with himself, with his heart, in order to fulfill his ministry. Then we will see what we can also do, as the Scriptures outline, in order to fulfill our ministry.