

The Christian Walk: “Walking in Humility”

(Philippians 2:1-8)

Introduction

- Appropriately called the “idolatry of self”, pride is not only a sin but also the basis of all sin. Pride is not only the enemy of godliness, but, more importantly, it is the enemy of God. Pride is not one sin among many, but a sin in a class by itself. Other sins lead the sinner further from God, but pride is particularly heinous in that it attempts to elevate the sinner above God.

What is the antidote to pride? Some would quickly answer humility. But that is like saying the antidote to pain is painlessness, or wellness is the antidote to sickness. Humility is the opposite or absence of pride; not its antidote. The antidote to pride is Christ! Just as true righteousness does not exist apart from Christ, true humility is not possible apart from Christ. Only in and through Christ can we become truly humble. Specifically, the antidote to pride is an abiding love for and submission to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

- As the saying goes, “The molehill brags about its stature until it stands in the shadow of the mountain.” Once we truly are enveloped by the goodness and greatness of Christ, our pride naturally dissipates. Christian humility is not achieved by pursuing humility; it is achieved, first and foremost, by pursuing Christ. Any attempt to be humble apart from Christ results in self-reliance, self-confidence and/or self-righteousness. Without Christ as one’s supreme and sacred pursuit, all efforts are fundamentally human-centered and ultimately for human glory. As humility is the absence of pride, so pride is the absence of humility. The two are diametrically opposed to one another.
 - ✓ **Illust:** Andrew Murray profoundly described humility as “the displacement of self by the enthronement of God. Where God is all, self is nothing” (*Humility: the Beauty of Holiness*; ch.8, “Humility and Sin”).
- This does not mean, however, that we are not instructed or commanded to pursue humility. While Christians alone can be truly humble, every true Christian seeks to be humble. Similarly, Christians alone can be truly righteous (holy), and every true Christian seeks to be righteous (holy). As Christians, we are commanded to be humble and to pursue humility.

Micah 6:8 ~ “... And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” (NIV)

James 4:10 ~ “Humble [*tapeinoō*; vb., aor., pass., imper.] yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.”

1 Peter 5:5-6 ~ “... Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility [*tapeinophrosynē*; n.] toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble” [Prov.3:34]. ⁶Humble [*tapeinoō*; vb., aor., pass., imper.] yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you”

- The prideful person is on a collision course with God. Pride puts oneself at enmity with God; contrary to His nature and will and antagonistic toward His glory and authority. God will not share His glory with anything or anyone (Is.48:11).

Isa 2:12 ~ “For the LORD of hosts has a day against all that is proud and lofty, against all that is lifted up – and it shall be brought low” (see Matt.23:12; 1Pet.5:5; Jms.4:6)

- Humility is not a feeling, but a choice; a conscious decision to surrender your life to the will of God. The humble Christian would rather see God praised than to receive praise. Humility is the relentless pursuit of selflessness, with the goal of achieving Christlikeness. Seeking humility without or above seeking Christ is foolish and futile.
- In our Summer Sermon Series on “The Christian Walk”, we have come to the biblical instruction to “Walk in humility.”

Phil 2:1-8 ~ “So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, ²complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

- This passage can be divided into two major sections – both unmistakably linking the virtue of humility with the person of Jesus Christ.

I. Jesus Christ: The Sacred Epicenter of Humility (vs.1-4)

- Christian humility is a matter of being genuinely overwhelmed and overshadowed by the greatness of God, and willfully submissive to His will and for His glory. To be sure, we are to actively pursue humility, but it is also a passive reality. The closer we get to Christ – loving, worshipping, obeying Christ – the more humble we will naturally become. Humility is more than just saying or doing humble things. It involves thinking and acting like Jesus Christ, and seeking to glorify Christ in everything!

Christian humility is not achieved by pursuing humility, but by pursuing Christ.

- Humility is not only a difficult virtue to achieve, but it is also a difficult virtue to maintain. For humility is elusive – just when you think you have it, you’ve lost it. It is quite natural for us to be self-absorbed or self-centered (e.g., taking a “selfie” seems to be our new national pastime, and social media pages are filled with self-portraits, self-promotion, and self-accomplishments).

Oftentimes our first thought, when faced with a situation or experience, is about of ourselves – how it affects us, how it portrays us, how it benefits, or how it offends or harms us. In order for us to be truly humble, we must constantly fight against our pride. The pursuit of humility is an ever-present pursuit for every Christian.

Pride is self-obsession; pride is a preoccupation with self. More specifically, pride will never allow us to be honest with ourselves. Pride will not allow us to truly stand back and really look at ourselves. Pride is the touched-up edition of our own self-portrait – airbrushed to hide all our weaknesses, faults and imperfections. However, humility is not achieved by a negative, disparaging, or self-deprecating self-image. True humility has no need for a self-portrait. Rather, it seeks only to portray Jesus Christ!

✓ Illust: “Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less” (attributed to C.S. Lewis, see *Mere Christianity*; p.128).

✓ Illust: Corrie Ten Boom’s family was extremely instrumental in saving the lives of dozens of Jews during Hitler’s invasion, and then moved on to a very successful writing and speaking career. One day she was asked how she keeps from becoming prideful with all the success in her ministry. She answered: “When Jesus was riding a donkey into Jerusalem and all the people were shouting, ‘Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’ Do you think for a moment that the donkey thought it was all for him?” What a tremendously Biblical perspective!

Rom 12:3 ~ “For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment ...”

- Writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, in Philippians 2:1-4. the apostle Paul unpacks for us the reasons for humility.

A. The reasons for humility (vs.1)

- We must not pursue humility for selfish reasons or for selfish gain (“I want to be humble so Christ will reward and bless me”). True humility has humble motives. The word *“So”* (*oun*; or therefore) refers back to the previous verses:

Phil 1:27-30 ~ “Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel... ²⁹For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, ³⁰engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.”

- “Therefore”, since we are called to such a great calling – to live *“worthy of the Gospel of Christ”* (1:27), to stand together *“firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the Gospel”* (1:28), and to *“suffer for His sake”* (1:29) – and since we are commanded to be *“of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind”* (2:2), these four truths will motivate us to be humble.

Unfortunately, in our contemporary English vernacular, the word *“if”* (vs.1) connotes uncertainty. However, that is not the case with Paul’s repetitive use of this word. The construction of these Greek clauses denotes an affirmative statement (i.e. “Since there is...”). These four concise yet powerful clauses underscore the reason Christians are to remain humble and unified in the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. *“encouragement in Christ”* ~ The word translated *“encouragement”* (*paraklesis*) can also refer to counsel, comfort or exhortation. For example, another form (*parakletos*) of this same word is used from Jesus to describe the Holy Spirit as our “counselor” or “comforter” (Jn.14:16, 26; 15:26), and from the apostle John to describe Jesus as our “advocate” (1Jn.2:1). It literally means “to come alongside” in an attempt to help, instruct, or comfort.

The point is simple, yet profound. Paul is saying, “Since you as a Christian have been encouraged, counseled and comforted in Christ, you ought to encourage, counsel and comfort others in Christ.”

Heb 10:24-25 ~ “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

1 Thess 5:11 ~ “... encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.”

2. *“comfort from love”* ~ In this clause, Paul used a word – translated *“comfort”* (*paramuthion*) – found nowhere else in Scripture. The literally meaning is “to speak to someone” or “to speak to someone by coming close to his/her side”; and always in a friendly or endearing manner. Hence the word is translated “comfort” as one would be comforted by the loving words of a friend. Here, in verse one, the friend is none other than Christ Jesus. Once again, Paul is drawing the parallel between our being comforted by the love of Christ and our comforting one another in Christ.

Although not specified, the implication is that the love we have received is from God, in Christ, as is the love that we share with one another (Jn.13:34-35). True *“love”* (*agape*) comes only from God and should be demonstrated by those who are in Christ.

1 John 4:7-11 ~ “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. ¹⁰In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”

Those have truly received the love of Christ are changed by the love of Christ. This is an internal transformation that is manifested in external actions. To be sure, people – even other Christians – can be hard to love at times (as we can be hard for others to love). The Christian’s capacity to love is endless because God’s love is endless. Christians are not commanded to love out of their own innate human goodness, but from the infinite well of God’s divine love. Consequently, the love that Christians possess from God, and the love that they have to give others, is without limit or ceasing.

3. “**participation in the Spirit**” ~ In the Bible, the word fellowship means more than simply talking or interacting together. It is much deeper, and more sacred, than that. It is a word that is used in the Bible to describe our fellowship with the Son of God (1Cor.1:9), it is a word used to describe our fellowship with the Holy Spirit (Phil.2:1), and it is a word used to describe our fellowship with God (1Jn.1:3).

In Scripture, the word fellowship (*koinonia*; translated “**participation**”) signifies a spiritual union and edification. True Christian fellowship is much more than talking together around punch and cookies. It refers to the selfless and sacrificial sharing of life together. True Christian fellowship is a work of God’s Holy Spirit as Christians are united together in Christ and mutually serving one another in and for Christ (not just wanting others to serve you!).

1 John 1:3 ~ “that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.”

Rom 14:19 ~ “So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.”

4. “**affection and sympathy**” ~ In the fourth clause, Paul used two near synonymous nouns. The first word, “**affection**” (*splagchnon*), literally refers to one’s bowels or intestines (cf., Judas; Acts 1:18). In Philippians 1:8, Paul wrote that he yearned for the Philippian believers “*with the affection of Christ Jesus*”; describing the deep compassion and love he felt for them. Today we use similar idiomatic expressions like “gut-wrenching”, “heartache”, or “visceral” to describe emotional anguish or compassion.

This describes the kind and degree of affection Christians should have for one another. Do you have a yearning affection for other believers? Do you feel a deep sense of compassion for when your brother or sister in Christ who is hurting? Do you have a gut-level concern for them when they are sinning? Is your heart stirred with an overwhelming love for those in the church?

1 John 3:16-18 ~ “By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. ¹⁷But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart [*splagchnon*] against him, how does God's love abide in him? ¹⁸Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.”

The second word is translated “**sympathy**” (*oiktirmos*), which could be rendered mercy or pity. Once again, it seems as though Paul is referring to Christ’s affection and sympathy toward us that we ought to show to one another.

Col 3:12-14 ~ “Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate [*oikteirmos*] hearts [*splachnon*], kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.”

Since Christians have received love and mercy from Christ, they ought to share that love and mercy with others. To not do so is not only arrogant, but disobedient to the commands of Christ and dishonoring to His name.

- The point is this: Christian humility, harmony and unity are essential and inseparable components of the Christian life.

B. The results of humility (vs.2-4)

- When a Christian has been encouraged in Christ, comforted by His love, in fellowship with His Spirit, and received affection and sympathy from Him there is a dramatic transformation. While Christians are not perfect, their lives ought to display that they are in Christ – emanating the humility that comes from knowing His goodness and greatness.

In verses two through four, Paul identified three related but distinct results of humility.

1. Unity not rivalry ~ One clear result of humility is the promotion of unity and not rivalry.

People who always demand their way; people who are easily offended and often irritated; people who are discordant and divisive are not humble people.

1 Cor 1:10 ~ “I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.”

1 Cor 11:17-18 ~ “But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. ¹⁸For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. ...”

It is only through true humility that Christians can be “*of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind*” (vs.2). This is not uniformity, but unity. Since Christians have the same “renewed” minds (Phil.2:5; Rom.12:2; 1Cor.2:16; Col.3:2), and the same sanctified love (Jn.13:34; Eph.5:2), they are to be naturally and spiritually unified together. Divisive Christians, who are unrepentant, are not to be tolerated (Tit.3:10). Christians who hate other Christians are practically, if not spiritually, false Christians (1Jn.2:9, 11; 3:15; 4:20-21). Christian humility promotes and protects Christian unity.

2. Selflessness not selfishness ~ How do we achieve this Christ-honoring and mutually edifying unity in the church? Simply put, by not being selfish. In Paul’s words, “*Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves*” (vs.3). The Greek word translated “*selfish ambition*” (*eritheia*; also 1:17; Gal.5:20) refers to contention, especially with a spirit of enmity, frequently associated with envy and jealousy, as well as with other sinful passions, such as greed and malice. Envy leads to competition, hostility, and conflict.

Unfortunately, churches can be known for their discord and division. Most of the time, this stems from “*selfish ambition*” or “*conceit*” (*kenodoxia*; lit. vain-glory), not humility.

James 3:14-4:2 ~ “But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. ¹⁵This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. ¹⁶For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. ¹⁷But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. ¹⁸And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

¹What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? ²You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. ...”

The Christian is not at enmity with other Christians, rather “*in humility*” they “*count others more significant than*” themselves (vs.3). The word translated “*more significant*” (*hyperechō*; lit. “to hold above”; “*surpassing worth*” [Phil.3:8]; “*surpasses*” [Phil.4:7]).

3. **Self-sacrifice not self-serving** ~ This means that true (mature) Christians are not self-serving: *“Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others”* (vs.4). It is important to note that Paul did not command us to neglect our own needs or completely abandon our own interests. This is very reasonable and balanced. We are to maintain a healthy and biblical view of self, and in doing so we should seek to serve and not to be served. ✓**Illust:** “The measure of a man is not the number of his servants, but in the number of people whom he serves” (D.L. Moody).

Before His crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus spoke these profoundly counter-culture words to His disciples:

Mark 10:42-45 ~ “And Jesus called them to him and said to them, ‘You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ⁴³But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. ⁴⁵For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.’”

The teaching is as convicting as it is clear. If Jesus Christ – the incarnate Son of God – came to serve and not be served, how can we as followers of Christ seek to be served and not serve! Self-serving Christians – who come to church to be served rather than to serve – reflect more of the sin of pride than they do the humility of Christ.

II. Jesus Christ: The Supreme Example of Humility (vs.5-8)

- Of course, the sinless Savior – Jesus Christ – is the supreme example of Christian humility. Specifically, in His incarnation (i.e., the Son of God taking on human flesh).

The humanity of Christ is not only the greatest act of humility, but also the greatest example of humility.

- Christians are commanded to be like Christ. Here we see the direct command to walk in the humility of Christ: *“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus”* (vs.5). The word *“mind”* (*phroneō*; also Phil.2:2^{x2}), can mean “to think” or “to set one’s mind on something” (see Col.3:2) Christians are to have a Christ-centered mindset. Christ is the absolute epitome of Christian humility – He is perfect humility personified! To be Christlike is, in part, to be humble like Christ.

A. The glory of Christ (vs.6)

- First, we note the glory of Christ. To truly understand the humility of Christ, we need to understand His condescension. That is, before we can truly understand the depth of humiliation Christ endured, we need to understand the height of His divine glory.

In verse six, we read that Christ *“was in the form of God”* (vs.6). In other words, Jesus Christ was fully God. In fact, Jesus never ceased to be God. The word translated *“form”* (*morph*) signifies that He was in very nature God, possessing the divine nature, essence and attributes of God. Jesus Himself repeatedly declared, and never denied, the fact that He was God and the Son of God.

John 8:58-59 ~ “Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.’ ⁵⁹So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.”

John 10:30-33 ~ “‘I and the Father are one.’ ³¹The Jews picked up stones again to stone him. ³²Jesus answered them, ‘I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?’ ³³The Jews answered him, ‘It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God.’”

John 17:5, 24 ~ “And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed. ... ²⁴Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.”

- Jesus’ own affirmation of His divinity is readily and repeatedly proclaimed throughout the New Testament:

The apostle John testified:

John 1:1-2, 14 ~ “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ... ¹⁴And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

To the Colossians, Paul wrote:

Col 1:15 ~ “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.”

The writer of Hebrews declared:

Heb 1:1-3 ~ “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ²but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. ³He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature ...”

- This is where His humiliation began – as the second person of the Trinity – one in essence and nature with God. The incarnation in no way diminished or detracted from His deity. As the Son of God, the incarnate Christ came from God the Father – was with God and was God!

✓ Illust: “... before, during, and after His incarnation, He was, by His very nature, fully and eternally God. Existed translates a present active participle of the compound verb *huparchō*, which is formed from *hupo* (“under”) and *archē* (“beginning”) and denotes the continuance of a previous state or existence. It stresses the essence of a person’s nature, that which is absolutely unalterable, inalienable, and unchangeable. ...

Jesus Christ eternally and immutably existed, and will forever continue to exist, in the form of God. *Morphē* (form) refers to the outward manifestation of an inner reality. The idea is that, before the Incarnation, from all eternity past, Jesus preexisted in the divine form of God, equal with God the Father in every way. By His very nature and innate being, Jesus Christ is, always has been, and will forever be fully divine” (John MacArthur; *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Philippians*; 2:6a).

B. The humility of Christ (vs.6-8)

- From the heights of divine glory, and from the majesty of His throne in heaven, Jesus came to earth to die for sinners: “*who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross*” (vs.6-8).

- Paul then, in glorious detail, explained Christ’s descension – His humiliation – from Heaven. This is a step-by-step account of the Son of God taking on human flesh in order to be crucified by sinful men to redeem sinners.

✓ Illust: “As he expounded Jesus’ ethically flawless example of humility, Paul also chronicled theologically the descent of the Son of God from heaven to earth, describing the exalted position that He left, then presenting a series of downward steps from that glory and honor to ever-increasing indignity. These parallel categories will be dealt with together in regard to each of the descending stages mentioned in this passage” (John MacArthur; *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Philippians*; 2:5-8).

✓Illust: “Now, in order to create lowliness of mind, Paul, under the teaching of the Spirit of God, spoke about the lowliness of Christ. He would have us go down, and so he takes us to see our Master going down. He leads us to those steep stairs down which the Lord of glory took His lowly way, and he bids us stop while, in the words of our text, he points us to the lowly Christ ...” (Charles H. Spurgeon; sermon “Our Lord in the Valley of Humiliation”; June 5, 1890).

1. He “**did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped**” (vs.6) ~ In order to be our Savior, Jesus would leave His throne at the right hand of God in heaven in order to descend to earth. But Jesus would never cease to be God. Instead, He relinquished the divine rights and privileges He had as the Son of God. Paul is not denying Jesus deity, but affirming His humility.

The word translated “**grasped**” (*harpagmos*) refers to that which is stolen, seized or carried off by force (hence the KJV translation: “thought it not robbery to be equal with God”). In an act of supreme and perfect humility, Jesus deferred His divine prerogatives in submission to His Father’s will. He was truly and always equal to God, but Jesus would not cling to – “selfishly” grasp for – His equality in order that His incarnation, and God’s redemptive plan, would not be hindered.

As God, Jesus did not have to endure the weaknesses of mortality, or the sufferings of being tortured and crucified. He did not have to tolerate the blasphemies, the slander or the mockery. He did not have to allow sinful men to arrest Him, falsely accuse Him, and murder Him. At any time, He could have “**grasped**” His “**equality with God**” and been freed from these humiliations.

Matt 26:51-55 ~ “And behold, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear. ⁵²Then Jesus said to him, ‘Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword. ⁵³Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? ⁵⁴But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?’”

Jesus did not endure the sufferings because He had no choice; He endured these sufferings because He chose to. He chose not to demand that people treat Him as the Son of God. He chose to be submissive to His Father’s will. He chose to embrace His incarnation. He chose to relinquish His divine rights and privileges to live the life we could never live and die the death that we deserved to die. He “**did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped**” because in humility He was seeking to glorify His Father in heaven (Jn.12:28, 17:1-5).

2. He “**emptied himself**” (vs.7) ~ Stepping out of heaven, in His incarnation, Jesus laid aside His divine glory. Paul explained this mystery by writing that He “**emptied himself**” (vs.7). Although short, this phrase is packed with theological importance. It comes from the Greek word (*kenoo*) which literally means “to make empty” While always and perfectly maintaining His deity, Jesus willfully deprived, or divested, Himself of some aspects of His divine glory. This is not to suggest that Jesus surrendered His divine nature, attributes, or glory. Instead, we are to understand that Jesus renounced, or concealed, His divine glory, refusing to fully manifest His glory in His humanity.

Rather than cling to His divine prerogatives, Jesus “**emptied himself**” (vs.7). But we must be clear that Jesus never emptied Himself of any aspect of His divine nature. He didn’t pour out some measure of His deity to make room for His humanity (this is heresy!). As we will see, Jesus Christ was simultaneously fully God and fully man (Col.1:19, 2:9). The incarnation is not Jesus less than God (not half-man and half-God, but fully man and fully God). He did not exchange His deity for humanity. His incarnation did not subtract or diminish some portion of His deity, but added full humanity to His deity (i.e. “hypostatic union”). To be sure, this is both one of the greatest miracles and greatest mysteries of our faith.

This should be our attitude as well (vs.5). Rather than pursue our own selfish ambitions, or demand that our “rights” be esteemed, or selfishly require others do things our way, we are to be willing defer our personal prerogatives for the sake of the glory of Christ and the unity and testimony of His church.

3. He took “the form of a servant” (vs.7) ~ Jesus made Himself nothing by “*taking the form of a servant*” (vs.7), or more literally “a slave” (*doulos*). As He existed in the “*form of God*” (vs.6), He existed in the “*form of a servant*” (vs.7). Although He was the incarnate Son of God, He assumed the role and rank of a slave. A slave was considered to be among the lowest class in society, and forced to do only the most menial and undesirable tasks. Most people regarded Jesus as a nobody – perhaps less than nobody. In fact, even His own people, to whom He came to save, ultimately rejected Him as the Messiah the Son of God.

John 1:10-11 ~ “He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.”

But Jesus didn’t just appear to be a slave (as a King putting on the clothes of a slave); He actually experienced life as a slave. He was born to obscure parents in abject poverty. Though He was the King of kings, He was mistreated and disregarded. Although He was the Son of God, He was maligned and blasphemed by men. Even though He was the chosen Messiah, He was profaned, mocked, beaten and murdered. As the apostle Paul wrote, “*though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor*” (2Cor.8:9).

He dramatically displayed His servanthood when He stooped to wash the disciples’ feet (see Jn.13:1-5). In a sense, Peter was right to be repelled by the notion that Jesus would wash his feet (Jn.13:6-8) – Kings did not wash the feet of their servants – how absurd! But Jesus was no ordinary King. He was indeed the sovereign Creator and Ruler of the world, but He came to earth to serve those whom He created.

John 13:14-17 ~ “If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. ¹⁵For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. ¹⁶Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.”

Once again we see that Jesus is the perfect example of humility, service and self-sacrifice. And this was not just one night of His life – just before His crucifixion. Rather, this was Jesus’ life. He repeatedly showed His disciples what it meant to be humble, what it means to live for the glory of God. He not only showed them by example, but told them to follow His example:

Mark 10:43-45 ~ “... whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. ⁴⁵For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

4. He was “born in the likeness of men” (vs.7) ~ Continuing to describe the amazing degree to which Jesus humbled Himself to be our Savior, Paul wrote, that He was “*born in the likeness of men*” (vs.7). The word “*likeness*” (*homoiōma*) refers to a resemblance, image or representation. This does not mean that Jesus only looked like a human, simply taking on a human appearance. Rather we know that Jesus is the incarnate Son of God – wrapped in human flesh – meaning that He literally became human (he was hungry, Matt.4:2; He was tired, Jn.4:6; He was thirsty, Jn.19:28; Lk.2:40,52; He was sorrowful, Matt.26:38; He cried, Jn.11:35; and He grew in strength, wisdom and stature, Lk.2:40,52). He felt all the physical and emotional pains of crucifixion – the flogging, the crown of thorns on His head, and the nails in His hands and feet.

Jesus had a human body, emotions, mind and will but He never sinned – not in action, inaction, attitude, thought or motive. This means that Jesus was the only perfect human being. For we read repeatedly in Scripture that Jesus was without sin (cf. Is.53:9; 2Cor.5:21; Heb.4:15; 1Pet.2:22; 1Jn.3:5). In addition, as the sinless Savior, Jesus was the substitutionary sacrifice for our sin.

Rom 8:3 ~ “For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness [*homoion*] of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh”

Jesus never ceased to be God – not even to the slightest degree, or for the slightest moment. Even in His humanity Christ was fully God – God restrained not God reduced. Yet, in His incarnation He also became fully human. Although this divine miracle is ultimately incomprehensible to us, it is nonetheless clearly and repeatedly affirmed in Scripture:

Col 1:19 ~ “For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell”

Col 2:9 ~ “For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily”

Jesus’ humanity is as essential to our salvation as His deity. Without Him being fully human, Jesus could not have been our substitutionary sacrifice. Christ needed to experience the weaknesses and temptations of being human (yet without sin). Being eternally immortal and immutable, God cannot die. God cannot be diminished in His attributes or compromised in His character. Therefore, Christ needed to be like us in flesh and blood, so that He could suffer and die on our place; shedding His blood for our sins (Rom.6:23).

Heb 2:14 ~ “Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil”

Heb 4:15 ~ “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.”

Christ was not only man inwardly in all his feelings and emotions, or only man outwardly in the sense of physical appearance, but He was also man in the sense that he endured all that we endure in this world – and even more so! – its pressures, its longings, its circumstances, its temptations, its weaknesses. Jesus knew all this. Consequently, there is nothing about being human that was not also part of Jesus’ experience – except sin.

5. He was “found in human form” (vs.8) ~ While the phrase “*being found in human form*” (vs.8) appears to be a restatement of what we just studied in verse seven (“born in the likeness of men”), there is in fact a subtle yet important nuance that we must note. Jesus was not only human in nature (biological), but also in appearance (physical). The word “*form*” (*schēma*) refers to a figure or stature. When people looked at Jesus He looked like an ordinary man. His physical nature and appearance did not reveal His divine nature and attributes. In no way did Christ’s physical appearance indicate that He was the Holy Son of God.

The prophet Isaiah, writing some 700 years before the incarnation of Christ, wrote:

Isa 53:2-3 ~ “For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him.
³He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.” (see Jn.1:10-14)

With His divine nature and glory was intentionally veiled, people saw Jesus as a common man and they treated Him like an uncommon criminal (as one of the most notorious criminals of His day). They accused the Savior of being the worst of sinners. Rather than be dressed in

the royal garments of divine glory, Jesus allowed sinful men to deride Him as they beat Him, scourged Him, and ridiculed Him by dressing Him in a mock-robe, placing a reed in His hand as a quasi-scepter, and embedding a crown of thorns upon His head.

Matt 27:27-31 ~ “Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole battalion before him. ²⁸And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, ²⁹and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on his head and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him, they mocked him, saying, ‘Hail, King of the Jews!’ ³⁰And they spit on him and took the reed and struck him on the head. ³¹And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him and led him away to crucify him.” (Lk.23:1-11)

This was not a common way of treating those who were to be crucified. This mockery was specifically targeted at Christ. For the religious leaders and Roman authorities saw Jesus as a common man who claimed to be the Messiah of God. In their contempt for Him, they amused themselves by pretending to pay homage to Him. They derided Him, taunted Him, blasphemed Him, laughed at Him, belittled Him, degraded Him and humiliated Him. This was intended for their own (sinful) amusement. Perhaps beaten beyond recognition, Jesus was bloody, battered and blasphemed. And yet He willfully endured it all.

Luke 23:34 ~ “And Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.’ And they cast lots to divide his garments.”

6. He “humbled himself” (vs.8) ~ Keep in mind that others were crucified on crosses; historically thousands of people were executed by crucifixion. In fact, two criminals were crucified on either side of Christ. Every person who was ever crucified, except for Christ, had at least one thing in common: they lacked the power to stop it from happening and to get down from the cross on their own. Jesus is the only one who had the power and authority to come down from the cross, but He chose to suffer and die in our place.

In fact, the people dared Jesus to come down from the cross. They further mocked and taunted Him while He hung on the cross:

Luke 23:35-39 ~ “And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, ‘He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!’ ³⁶The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine ³⁷and saying, ‘If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!’ ³⁸There was also an inscription over him, ‘This is the King of the Jews.’ ³⁹One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, ‘Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!’”

Imagine if He did ... what a shock that would be! What if Jesus used His supernatural power to break free from the cross? What if He, in a glorious display of His deity, came down from the cross and stood before them all? What if He had called “*more than twelve legions of angels*” (Matt.26:53) to rescue and defend Him? It would have been an epic show-stopper; but it would have ended any hope we had of being saved (forgiven of our sins) and it would have meant that Jesus was disobedient to His Father’s will. And so, Jesus remained on the cross in agony and exhaustion and incomprehensible humility. The other criminals were forced to endure the nails, the mocking, the pain, the derision and the death. But not Jesus. He chose to “*humble Himself*” (vs.8) in order to suffer and be slain for us.

1 Peter 2:21-25 ~ “For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. ²²He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. ²³When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. ²⁴He

himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. ²⁵For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”

Christ is the supreme example of humility, an example that we are to follow (Phil.2:5).

7. He became “obedient to the point of death” (vs.8) ~ This is true unconditional obedience (obedience without guardrails). One commentator referred to Christ’s obedience as “excruciating obedience”, which it was. Jesus never sinned; not in action, inaction or attitude. He never did something He shouldn’t have done, or didn’t do something He should have done. He was completely and continually submissive to His Father’s will. His life was absolutely in harmony with God’s character, in conformity to His plan and honoring to His name – even to the point of death.

Too often, we like to obey God on our terms: “Ok, I’ll obey You God as long as it doesn’t hurt, or cost me anything.” “I’ll obey as long as it makes sense to me, or makes me happy.” “I’ll obey You as long as You ask me to do what I already want to do.” While we may never utter those words out loud, or even consciously think them, we essentially make statements like these when we disobey.

Jesus’ obedience had no such “as long as” conditions. Rather than saying “as long as” to God, Jesus declared “because of” Your glory or “in order that” Your name be glorified. His obedience was unconditionally selfless, sacrificial and submissive.

John 10:17-18 ~ “For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. ¹⁸No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”

John 12:27-28 ~ ““Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. ²⁸Father, glorify your name.’ Then a voice came from heaven: ‘I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.’”

Christ’s very incarnation was an act of obedience. God the Father sent His Son to be our suffering Savior, and the Son went willingly and obediently to the cross (Heb.12:2).

Heb 5:7-10 ~ “In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. ⁸Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. ⁹And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, ¹⁰being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.”

The same is true for us today. It is through suffering – trials, weakness, temptation, sacrifice – that we often grow in our obedience to God. We are called to a selfless, sacrificial and submissive obedience! But when we are focused on our desires, or exclusively on our needs, we will not be motivated to serve others in the Lord. Conversely, when we are truly and humbly focused on the needs of others, we will not be focused on self. More importantly, when we are truly focused on Christ we are not focused on self.

8. He died “on a cross” (vs.9) ~ The cross is historically one of the greatest instruments of torture and execution ever devised by man. Crucifixion – the act of literally nailing a person to hang on a cross – was invented by the Persians, but later perfected by the Romans. To the Jew, however, the cross represented more than just a graphic instrument of capital punishment. Crucifixion was a graphic picture of condemnation; specifically God’s just condemnation against sinners.

People generally love a “god” who blesses, but they hate a “god” who curses. They want God to bless them abundantly, indiscriminately and unconditionally, but they recoil at the thought that God would curse them judiciously, righteously and deservedly. Sinners are justly condemned by God, cursed by God.

The cross is the ultimate blessing of God, and at the same time it graphically displays the utter condemnation of sinners. At the cross, Jesus – the incarnate Christ, God’s one and only Son – took upon Himself the full measure of God’s wrath for us. As our substitutionary sacrifice, Jesus bore the consequence of the curse for us in order to impute to us the righteousness of God. How? By being cursed by God, “becoming a curse for us”!

Gal 3:13 ~ “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree’” (cf. Deut.21:23; Gal.3:10)

Our atonement was executed in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He bore the penalty for our sin. He endured the wrath of God in our place. He died on the cross for our sins. He became a curse for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God.

Rom 8:3-4 ~ “For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”

2 Cor 5:21 ~ “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

The theme of the cross is God’s just condemnation of sinners. In an act of incredible and incomprehensible humility, Jesus went willing to the cross to die in our place. The suffering Savior, the sinless Son of God, became sin and a curse for us that in Him we might be completely forgiven of our sins and that we might become the righteousness of God.

Conclusion

- We are called to emulate Christ’s humility. None of us will ever know the degree or the depth of the humility of Christ. We simply cannot fathom the injustice, lowliness, and shame the Christ suffered. We cannot comprehend what it would be like to experience the heights of the glories of heaven, and to chose to experience the horrors of crucifixion.

Our sinful flesh longs to be exalted – our self-esteem boosted, our egos inflated, our “rights” protected, and our wishes granted. We naturally desire the crown and want to avoid the cross. We naturally crave praise, admiration, and appreciation, and loathe criticism/insults, submissiveness, meekness. Those who truly humble themselves, before the Lord, in this life will be exalted for all eternity. And those who refuse to humble themselves will be humbled by God (see Matt.23:12; Lk.14:11; 18:14).

✓ Illust: “Oh, dear friend, your Master humbled Himself, but it seems to me that you are trying to exalt yourself! Truly, you are on the wrong track. If Christ went down, down, down, it ill becomes us to be always seeking to go up, up, up. Wait till God exalts you, which He will do in His own good time” (Charles H. Spurgeon; sermon “Our Lord in the Valley of Humiliation”; June 5, 1890).

- Christ showed us the path of humility, and He has commanded us to walk as He did.