

Subject: *The Humility of Christ*

Scripture: *Philippians 2:5-11*

Of all Christian virtues, humility is probably the greatest. Christ taught us the importance of humility. He warned about the consequences of pride and the blessings of humility.

Matthew 23:12 *And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.*

Christ not only taught humility, but He was the supreme model of humility. He described His character only once in Scripture:

Matthew 11:29 *Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.*

Just think of that...the King of kings and the Lord of lords was a servant at heart.

Humility is an attitude, a state of mind, a disposition, but it can be seen in someone's actions and reactions. In this classic text we see the humility of Christ on display and presented as a model for all believers to follow (vs. 5).

Our text in Philippians 2 is considered by scholars to be an ancient hymn of the church, and like all good hymns, it is rich in biblical doctrine. We don't know the tune, but we know and appreciate the truth of this hymn about Christ. In this text we see the two natures of Christ: His divine nature and His human nature. We also see the two states of Christ: His humiliation and exaltation.

1. Christ's humility was revealed in His earthly life and death (vs. 6-8)

His humility is revealed in the steps down from the highest position to the lowest. This describes His condescension or lowering Himself in obedience to the Father. We see the steps down as He went lower and lower:

A. He had the exact nature of God and perfect equality with Him (vs. 6)

In order to appreciate Christ's humility, we must understand something of His eternal glory. He was in the form (*morphe*, inner essence, nature) of God. This word doesn't refer to His outward appearance, but to the essential nature of His being. He was eternal and equal with God. He did not consider equality with God something to be grasped or seized. It was His by divine right. J. Vernon McGee said of this verse: "He was God without effort." Christ was fully God. He is the visible expression of the invisible God.

John 1:1-3 ¹ *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.* ² *The same was in the beginning with God.* ³ *All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.*

John 1:18 *No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.*

Colossians 1:15 *Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature.*

Colossians 2:9 *For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.*

Hebrews 1:1-3 ¹ *God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets,* ² *Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds;* ³ *Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.*

John MacArthur comments: “Though Christ had all the rights, privileges, and honors of deity—which He was worthy of and could never be disqualified from—His attitude was not to cling to those things or His position but to be willing to give them up for a season.”

B. He gave up His heavenly glory and became a human servant (vs. 7)

This verse describes Christ’s incarnation as a man. He was a real man.

Hebrews 2:14 *Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.*

He made Himself of no reputation (literally, “emptied himself”). He did not lay aside His divine nature, but He laid aside the constant use of His divine rights and privileges. He set aside His privileges in five areas: 1) His heavenly glory; 2) His independent authority (He submitted to the Father’s will); 3) His divine prerogatives; 4) His eternal riches; and 5) His unbroken fellowship with the Father (He was abandoned by the Father on the cross and suffered the wrath of God as the sin-bearer).

John 17:5 *And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.*

2 Corinthians 8:9 *For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.*

As a man Jesus became poor. He owned no land or house, no gold or jewels. He owned no business, no boat, no horse. He had to borrow a donkey when He rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, borrow a room for the Last Supper, and was even buried in a borrowed tomb. He refused any honors, any special advantages, any special services to Himself. He took upon Himself “the form or a servant.” He was a bond-slave. This is the same word used in verse 6 (form of God). He took upon Him the very nature of a servant.

Mark 10:45 *For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.*

C. He appeared as a man and humbled Himself (vs. 8)

He was very ordinary and common in appearance.

Isaiah 53:2 *For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.*

He humbled Himself to serve others.

John 13:3-5³ *Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God;*⁴ *He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself.*⁵ *After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded.*

Elisabeth Elliot: "Does God ask us to do what is beneath us? This question will never trouble us again if we consider the Lord of heaven taking a towel and washing feet."

D. He was obedient to death on the cross (vs. 8)

His humility is revealed in His commitment to do God's will. He laid aside His majesty. He became a servant. He was obedient unto death. He was willing to die on the cross. He submitted Himself to the Father's plan. Dying on the cross was the lowest step in His humiliation. It was the most shameful and cruel means of death. It was a death reserved for the worst criminals.

Matthew 26:39 *And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.*

Hebrews 12:2 *Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

2. Christ's humility was rewarded by the Father (vs. 9-11)

We have seen how Christ humbled Himself. Now we see how God the Father exalted Him. God is the one who exalts Christ. "Wherefore" means as a result of His humility. His exaltation includes His resurrection, and His ascension to be seated at the Father's right hand.

A. The Father has highly exalted Him (vs. 9)

John 17:24 *Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.*

B. The Father has given Him a name above all others (vs. 9)

This is the name "Lord" which mean sovereign ruler. In the NT, He is called Lord 747 times. In the Book of Acts, He is referred to as Savior only twice, but as Lord 92 times. The first creed of the early church was "Jesus is Lord."

C. Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord (vs. 10-11)

Every knee will bow before Him and every tongue will confess Him as Lord—no exceptions. He has sovereign authority over all creatures. Three groups are mentioned: *those in heaven*: cherubim, seraphim, all holy angels, and all the redeemed saints; *those on earth*: all human beings, both saved and unsaved; *those under the earth*: all demons and unsaved people in hell. His dominion, power, and authority are complete and unchallenged, as Christ said after His resurrection and before His ascension. All creatures will confess Jesus as Lord to the glory of God the Father.

Matthew 28:18 *And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.*

We don't make Jesus Lord. The Father has already done that. But we confess Him as Lord. To confess means to say the same thing or to agree with God that He is sovereign Lord. But just calling Him "Lord" without allowing Him to be Lord of your life is worthless.

Matthew 7:21-23 ²¹ *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.* ²² *Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?* ²³ *And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.*

Luke 6:46 *And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?*

3. Christ's humility should be reproduced in all believers (vs. 5)

This magnificent text is not only doctrinal; it is practical. It is written to motivate us to be like Christ. Jesus humbled Himself and died on the cross not only to satisfy God's justice and pay the price of our redemption, but to give us an example that we should have the same attitude that He had.

1 John 2:6 *He that saith he abideth in him (Christ) ought himself also so to walk, even as he (Christ) walked.*

Micah 6:8 *He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?*

Believers are to walk in humility. We should have the same mind and attitude He had. The key to humility is submission to God. We will be humble toward others if we are humble toward God.

Paul closes this passage with a powerful promise that all people, both saved and unsaved, will confess Jesus as Lord. God's people now submit to Christ and confess Him as Lord because we want to. Unsaved people will one day bow and confess Him as Lord because they have to.

Isaac Watts wrote these words about humility and where it comes from...

*When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of Glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.*