

# Christ's Condescension

## Part 1

### Philippians 2:5-11

Christians are never more like Christ than when we humble ourselves in the service of others.

LTS. John 1:1-18

If you are new to Calvary Bible Church, it's important for you to know that we believe in what is called Expository Preaching. That is, we preach the bible verse by verse, all the while seeking to interpret each passage according to its context because "Context is...King"

We learned last week that the interpretive key to much of what we have looked at in Phil 1&2 is found in 1:27 where Paul writes, "Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ..." We learned also that nearly every pronoun used in this text is plural, indicating that Paul's concern is for the church as a body, as a plurality, as a group rather than emphasizing the primacy of the individual. We have all been rescued by Christ OUT of the world and INTO His church. And, since we all share union with Christ in the church, we are united with one another. It is Paul's great concern that we recognize the importance of preserving that unity of the Spirit and living in a manner that is consistent with that unity.

In chapter two, Paul appeals to us directly on this matter of unity, and here is the essence of his appeal: Paul argues, since you all have experienced the personal consolation of Christ, comfort from his love and fellowship with the Spirit, is it not reasonable that you should show your gratitude to Christ by living in unity with one another? Isn't it reasonable for Christ to ask you to relate to one another with the same mind, same love, and same purpose and thus show the world what the gospel is like? We need to think of the church as "The Gospel Made Visible."<sup>1</sup> And Paul is saying that the most visible characteristic of the church should be its unity.

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Dever, *The Church: The Gospel Made Visible*, (Nashville, B&H Academic, 2012), cover

How do members of a church live in a way that makes the gospel visible through its unity? Well, we do it (2:3) by refusing to do anything that is motivated by selfish ambition and conceit but instead considering others more significant than ourselves. Again, we live like this when we choose NOT to pursue our own interests exclusive, but also the interests of others. This is the essence of humility. It is self-denial for the edification of others for Christ's sake. And we can rightly infer from this passage is that the unity which Christ has given his church can only thrive and grow in an atmosphere of humility.

If we need an example of what that kind of humility looks like, Paul offers us the ultimate role model in the next set of verses. Let's stand together and read them.

Read v. 5-11

This passage is one of the richest, most profound texts in all of the N.T. At the very least, "By anyone's estimation, these verses constitute the single most significant block of material in Philippians"<sup>2</sup> Many scholars believe this passage was originally a hymn, sung by early Christians to commemorate and celebrate the incarnation of the Son of God. I don't know of such a hymn, but perhaps we can put Charlie to work on that. This passage has been called a theological diamond that perhaps sparkles brighter than any other in Scripture.<sup>3</sup>

That being said, we should not step into a study of this text thinking it will be simple. Theologically speaking, this paragraph is the most challenging part of Philippians to interpret and understand. Yet, while it is both rich and difficult, it is at the same time one of the easiest passages to outline. Just two main themes are presented to us by the Apostle Paul:

I. The Humiliation of Christ (6-8)

II. The Exaltation of Christ (9-11).

Though there are only two main themes in this passage, I intend to spend three weeks unpacking it for us. This week and next we will consider the humiliation of

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas Constable, *Dr. Constables*

<sup>3</sup> John MacArthur, *Philippians*, (Chicago, Moody Press, 2001), 118

Christ and his decent to the tomb. And then, on Easter Sunday morning, we will glory in the Exaltation of Christ in His resurrection, ascension, and ultimate exaltation.

Let's begin where we left on with verse 5. Paul has been calling for unity through humility. But I think Paul knows that abstract teaching on a virtue like humility will only take us so far. We would benefit even more if we have a model to follow, a man whose life exhibited what it means to set the gospel on display through humility. So, Paul offers us the ultimate example; namely, Jesus Christ. In verse 5 he says, "Have this mind [attitude] among yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus." What attitude? The attitude of humility. The attitude that diminishes self for the benefit of others.

Beginning in verse six, then, He unpacks the greatest truth in the Bible; namely, that God Himself, who is worthy of unrestrained and unmitigated worship and praise; This Being before whom every intelligent creature on earth, above the earth and under the earth should bow in humble adoration, actually humbled Himself and made Himself nothing so that we could be made something.

Let's take a few minutes to study this out.

## I. The Goal of Theology:

1. Paul writes, "Have this mind among yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God..."

2. The first thing I want you to see is that Paul is appealing to deep, rich theology to move us toward humility. He starts with an ethical question and turns to some of the richest theology in the Bible to answer it. Too often, pastors attempt to separate biblical virtue from biblical theology. I sometimes hear men say things like, "I don't want to get bogged down in doctrine. My people need to know how to live!" But Paul never separated doctrine from the practical issues of life. Paul never divorced virtue from revelation. Rather, for him, the doctrines of Scripture are what give strength, purpose and sustainability to Christian virtue.

- Behind the bible's teaching on marriage is the deep, rich doctrine of Christ and His church.
- Behind the Bible's teaching on work is the deep, rich doctrine of the priesthood of the believer.

- Behind the bible’s teaching on personal forgiveness is the deep, rich doctrines of redemption and atonement.
- Behind the Bible’s teaching on roles in marriage is the deep rich doctrine of the Trinity
- And behind the Bible’s teaching on practical humility, is the deep, rich doctrine of the condescension of Christ.

3. I would dare say that the primary reason the church has become so much like the world in the practical issues of life is because pastors have essentially hollowed out the life-giving, soul-strengthening doctrines of the church. Like a termite infested tree the church has become weak because its rock-solid core has been eaten away.

4. Paul, on the other hand, teaches the very practical virtue of humility and grounds it in the deep – almost unfathomable – doctrines of the humiliation and hypostatic union of Christ. Let’s take a look at the truths Paul reveals about Jesus.

## II. Deity of Christ:

1. Verse 6 asserts, “though he was in the form of God.”

2. Now if we were not taking the time to be careful with this text one might read it and say, “A-ha! Paul is teaching that Jesus came in the “form of God” but he is not really God. And if you believe that, you are a Jehovah’s Witness or a Mormon. Perhaps he is wearing the clothes of God, they say, but he is not God in his in-most essence. But that would be a mistake. When Paul speaks of Christ’s being in the “form of God” he was speaking of how Christ appeared before his incarnation. To the extent that he could be seen or perceived in heaven it was ONLY in the form of God.<sup>4</sup>

- Before Mary gave birth to Him, Jesus existed in the form of God.
- Before the Babylonian captivity, Jesus existed in the form of God.
- Before the prophets foretold the suffering servant, Jesus existed in the form of God.
- Before David became King, Jesus existed in the form of God.
- Before Abraham and the patriarchs turned the course of history, Jesus existed in the form of God.

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<sup>4</sup> Jason Krus, *The Exegesis and Theology of Kenosis* (In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Master of Divinity degree at The Master’s Seminary, Sun Valley California, (March 3, 2018), 4

- Before the tower of Babel or God's global judgment in the world-wide flood, Jesus existed in the form of God.
- Before Adam ate from the forbidden tree, Jesus existed in the form of God.
- Before light burst into darkness and before the earth was born, Jesus existed in the form of God.
- Before there was even the existence of Time, Jesus existed in the form of God.
- For all of eternity past, as the Second Person of the Trinity, Jesus existed in the form of God.

To the angels and to the other Persons of the Trinity He was perceived in a state of perpetual glory because he existed in the form of God.

3. In just a few moments we will see that He who existed ONLY in the glorious form of God, eventually took on a new morphe, a new form – that is, the form of a man.

4. In fact, the weight of Paul's whole exhortation here is in the stunning revelation that God Himself (the 2<sup>nd</sup> Person of the Trinity) humbled Himself by stepping down from His heavenly throne to become a servant among men.

5. As we get caught up in the glory of Christ in this passage, we must not forget that Paul is illustrating true humility; the kind of humility he expects of us. So, when he declares that Christ Jesus "was in the form of God," I think he wants us to notice the disparity between Christ's status and our own. What ruins unity in the church is self-exaltation and self-aggrandizement among sinners. But Jesus isn't a sinner. He is God. And as God he really does deserve to have others worship and adore him. Do we? Are any of us really worthy of adoration and worship?

6. Paul is showing us the utter disparity between Holy God who deserves worship but enters into personal humiliation, and sinful men who deserve eternal humiliation but demand to be worshiped. The example of Humility comes from God the Son who has for all of eternity past existed in the form of God.

7. This is the Deity of Christ.

### III. The Humility of Christ:

1. In the second half of verse 6 Paul says that Christ Jesus “Did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.”
2. “Grasped” here means “to “cling to” or “to seize for one’s self.” When the Father sent the Son to earth to redeem a people for his own possession by taking on the form of a servant, living among sinners, and dying in their place, the Son did not demand His rightful status and place of supremacy. HE didn’t refuse this humiliating mission in order to maintain the Glory that had been his for eternity! Rather, he accepted the assignment. He willingly set out to accomplish the Father’s will. And that required that him to “empty himself.”
3. What does it mean that Jesus “emptied himself”? Well, it doesn’t mean he stopped being God. It doesn’t mean he gave up ANY of His infinite attributes. (contrary to that famous hymn by Charles Wesley that say Jesus “Emptied Himself of all But Love.” But this is contrary to the facts. If he would give up any of His infinite attributes he cease to be God. And if he is NOT God than He can save No one! Paul didn’t say he emptied something from Himself, but rather that he emptied himself or poured out Himself.
4. In other words, “All of who Christ is as eternal God, all that he is as the one who always existed in the form of God and is equal with God, is poured out”<sup>5</sup> in order to glorify His father in the salvation of sinners.
5. Beloved, this is a level of humility you and I will never know. God will never ask you to stoop for your brother as low as Jesus willingly stooped for you. What he is asking of you in infinitesimally small compared to the awesome condescension of Christ.
  - 1 Cor. 6 “Why not rather be wronged?”
  - 1 Peter 2:21-23 “When he was reviled he did not revile in return, when he suffered, he did not threaten, but kept entrusting himself to God who judges righteously.”
6. To you and me God is saying, “For the sake of unity, stop trying to seize the status, respect, acceptance, and prestige you that you think you deserve from those around you. Stop standing on your dignity. Have this mind (this attitude) which is yours in

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<sup>5</sup> Bruce Ware, *The Man Christ Jesus*, (Wheaton, Crossway, 2013), 19

Christ Jesus, who, though he existed in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself...

- Jesus didn't have to steal divine glory.
- He didn't have to commit "robbery" (KJV) to be equal with God. It was already His! He was just temporarily clothed in humility. But one day it would shine forth as gloriously as it had for all eternity. Jesus knew this, so in John 17:5 he prayed, "Now Father, glorify me together with yourself, with the glory that I had with you before the world was."

7. Jesus poured Himself out for you. Now you should pour yourselves out for one another. And that brings us to...

#### IV. The Humanity of Christ:

1. What did it mean practically for Jesus to "empty Himself" or "pour Himself out"? It meant (7) he must be "born in the likeness of men."

2. Just as in eternity past Christ always bore the likeness of God, on earth he bore the likeness of men. Again, that doesn't mean he wasn't a real man, it just means that when people looked at Jesus they saw a real man.

- If you were to see Jesus with his disciples, he would not have glowed with a golden light around his head. He looked like a real man.
- If you walked into a crowd where Jesus was, and you were looking for the Son of God, you would not have been able to pick him out. He looked like a real man. He acted like a real man.
- He was born the way all human babies are born. He grew like all humans grow. He increased in wisdom and stature like every other human.
- He became hungry and thirsty. He wept, and rejoiced. And most importantly, He died as any man who experienced crucifixion would.
- Jesus existed on this earth (and now in heaven) as a man just as surely as he existed as God.

3. At Christmas time we refer to this as the incarnation. The word means that God became man. The apostle John said it a little differently: "The word became flesh." This, beloved, points to the almost incomprehensible doctrine of the hypostatic union.

4. In GK, the word Hypostasis means "substance." The hypostatic Union refers to the union of God and man in one Person. Was Jesus really all that it means to be God?

Yes. What Jesus really all that it means to be a man? Yes. He is both God and man – the God-man.

5. Now some may be tempted to think that such a teaching must surely have been invented by a group of ancient theologians who had nothing better to do but to pontificate about the unknowable. But that would not be true. The doctrine of the hypostatic union – the belief that Jesus possessed two natures (divine and human) was brought to light by seeking to faithfully interpret certain passages of Scripture. For example:

- A. Rom. 1:1-3 Paul wrote<sup>3</sup> “concerning God’s Son [deity], who was descended from David according to the flesh [Humanity].
- B. Galatians 4:4–5 “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son [deity], born of woman [humanity].”
- C. Acts 20:28 “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God [deity], which he [God] obtained with his own blood” [humanity].”
- D. What we learn from all of these texts is that Jesus Christ is both God and man.

6. In 451 A.D. the church counsel at Chalcedon worked hard to distil this doctrine into a carefully worded creed. They confessed that Jesus Christ is,

truly God and truly man, of a reasonable soul and body; consubstantial with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the virgin Mary... according to the Manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably...<sup>6</sup>

7. One author writes, “The incarnation is the central miracle of Christianity, the most grand and wonderful of all the things God has ever done.”<sup>7</sup> What should be our response? First of all, worship him! For as we will see in two weeks, one day every

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<sup>6</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1994), 1169

<sup>7</sup> John MacArthur, *Philippians: Christ, the source of Joy and Strength* [MacArthur Bible Studies], (Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 2007) 37



knee will bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. If you let this text drive you deep into true worship of Christ humility will be the spiritual fruit that is born. You won't have to muster up humility, it will flow effortlessly out of a heart that joyfully bows in adoration before its Lord.

8. Second, we who are not God and are not worthy of such worship, should humble ourselves before one another and put the interests of others before our own in all of the practical issues, and conflicts of life. This is the kind of humility that should be evident EVERYWHERE in the church to make the gospel visible in us.

Christians are never more like Christ than when we humble ourselves in the service of others.