***How Jesus Got to the Manger***

**Christmas Letters: Philippians 2:1-11 December 5, 2021**

***Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:  
Who being in very nature God,   
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,   
but made himself nothing . . . .*Philippians 2:5-6**

**Reading Paul’s “Messiah Poem”**

1. The Epistles focus more on the cross than the manger

2. The Epistles connect the First and Second Advents

3. The Epistles always connect the incarnation with Christian living

4. Philippians, a prison letter, gives us insight into what fulfills Paul’s joy

**The “if” that ends up with an example to follow**

If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus . . . .

Philippians 2:1-4

1. This is an “if” that might better be translated “since”

2. Note how the structure of this passage emphasizes humility (NIGTC commentary attached)

3. Unity can’t be achieved without humility

**A “deeper magic”**

5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

6 Who, being in very nature God,

did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,

7 but made himself nothing,

taking the very nature of a servant,

being made in human likeness.

8 And being found in appearance as a man,

he humbled himself

and became obedient to death—

even death on a cross!

Philippians 2:5-8

1. Four movements reveal God’s initiative in the incarnation

*morphē* of God pre-existed (*huparchōn*)

*morphē* of a servant he took on himself

*homoiōma* of humanity he made himself

*schēma* of human-ness he was found

2. Jesus poured out the privileges, not the essence, of his deity

3. The highest form of servanthood always includes a cost (and it’s sometimes very steep!)

**There’s something about that Name**

9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place

and gave him the name that is above every name,

10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,

in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,

to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:9-11

1. The Jesus pattern: exaltation follows humiliation

2. There is no place in creation that is outside the Lordship of Jesus Christ

**The “Messiah Poem” for today**

1. It really was God who gave up heaven to become a servant, to die on the cross for us!

*22 “Turn to me and be saved,*

*all you ends of the earth;*

*for I am God, and there is no other.*

*23 By myself I have sworn,*

*my mouth has uttered in all integrity*

*a word that will not be revoked:*

*Before me every knee will bow;*

*by me every tongue will swear.*

*24 They will say of me, ‘In the Lord alone*

*are righteousness and strength.’ ”*

Isaiah 45:22-24

2. Are we really ready for the humility/unity connection?

*20 “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: 23 I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.*

John 17

3. Am I ready to pay the cost of Jesus-style servanthood?

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her . . . .

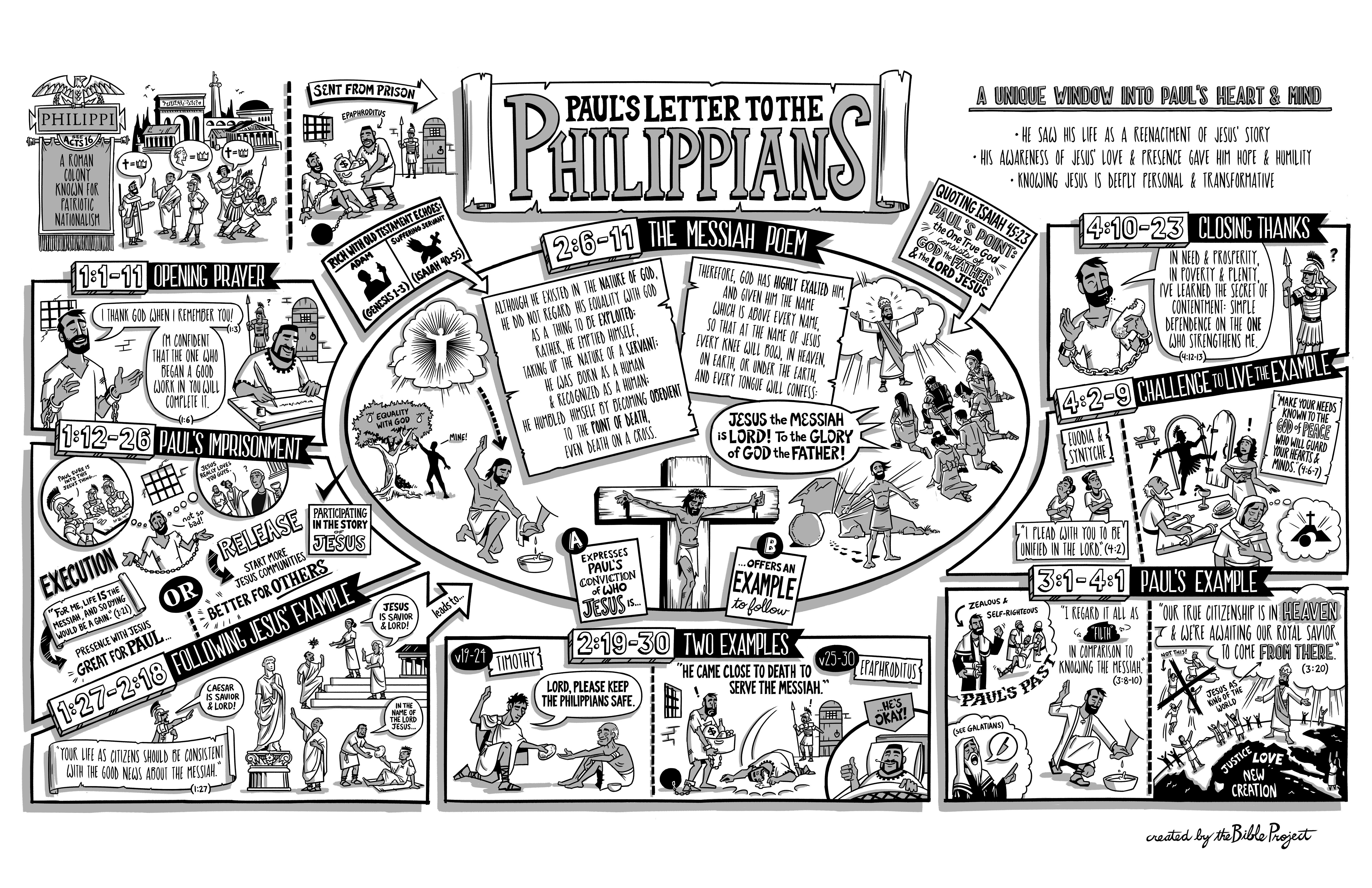
Ephesians 5

Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin.

1 Peter 4:1 (read all the way to 4:11)

2 Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. 3 For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: “The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.”

Romans 15



**Resources for the Philippians 2**

Please be sure to check the [Bible Project’s poster](https://bibleproject.com/downloads/posters/) on the Philippians.

Bob Deffinbaugh’s “Ultimate Humility” message at [*https://bible.org/seriespage/7-ultimate-humility-leaving-comfort-zone-phil-23-11*](https://bible.org/seriespage/7-ultimate-humility-leaving-comfort-zone-phil-23-11)

Alexander Maclaren has a good summary of this text at [*https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/mac/philippians-2.html*](https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/mac/philippians-2.html)

On the Kenosis problem, [Phil Johnson has a good summary](https://teampyro.blogspot.com/2011/08/kenosis-and-omnipresence-of-christ.html), [Sproul has this good answer](https://www.monergism.com/how-could-jesus-be-both-divine-and-human) to what Jesus actually poured out in the incarnation, and Packer contributed to [this short analysis](https://heidelblog.net/2016/08/a-brief-history-of-the-kenosis-theory/), and Berkhof has [an interesting take on the limits of Kenosis Theory](https://www.monergism.com/kenosis).

I especially liked the Peter O’Brien’s NIGTC commentary on this passage (Eerdmans, 1991).

Spurgeon has several good sermons on this text: “The Exaltation of Christ” at [*https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/the-exaltation-of-christ/#flipbook/*](https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/the-exaltation-of-christ/%23flipbook/)the [“Consolation in Christ” on Philippians 2:1](http://www.spurgeongems.org/vols7-9/chs348.pdf), and the attached [“Our Lord in the Valley of Humiliation”](http://www.spurgeongems.org/vols37-39/chs2281.pdf)

**OUR LORD IN THE VALLEY OF HUMILIATION**

**NO. 2281**

**A SERMON INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD’S-DAY, NOVEMBER 6, 1892**

***DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON***

**AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE ON THURSDAY EVENING, JUNE 5, 1890**

***“And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself,***

***and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”***

***Philippians 2:8***

PAUL wishes to unite the saints in Philippi in the holy bands of love. To do this, he takes them to

the cross. Beloved, there is a cure for every spiritual disease in the cross. There is food for every

spiritual virtue in the Savior. We never go to Him too often. He is never a dry well or a vine from which

every cluster has been taken. We do not think enough of Him. We are poor because we do not go to the

gold country which lies round the cross.

We are often sad because we do not see the bright light that shines from the constellation of the

cross. The beams from that constellation would give us instantaneous joy and rest if we perceived them.

If any lover of the souls of men would do for them the best possible service, he would constantly take

them near to Christ. Paul is always doing so, and he is doing it here.

The apostle knew that to create concord, you need first to beget lowliness of mind. Men do not

quarrel when their ambitions have come to an end. When each one is willing to be least, when everyone

desires to place his fellows higher than himself, there is an end to party spirit, schisms and divisions are

all passed away.

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, “Being found in fashion as a man, he

humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”

Before Paul thus wrote, he had indicated, in a word or two, the height from which Jesus originally

came. He says of Him, “Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God.”

You and I can have no idea of how high an honor it is to be equal with God! How can we therefore,

measure the descent of Christ, when our highest thoughts cannot comprehend the height from which He

came? The depth to which He descended is immeasurably below any point we have ever reached, and

the height from which He came is inconceivably above our highest thoughts.

Do not however, forget the glory that Jesus laid aside for a while. Remember that He is very God of

very God, and that He dwelt in the highest heaven with His Father. But yet, though He was thus

infinitely rich, for our sakes He became poor, that we, through His poverty, might be rich.

The apostle, having mentioned what Jesus was, by another stroke of his pen reveals Him in our

human nature. He says concerning Him that, “He made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the

form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.” A great marvel is that Incarnation, that the

eternal God should take into union with Himself our human nature, and should be born at Bethlehem,

and live at Nazareth, and die at Calvary on our behalf.

But our text does not speak so much of the humiliation of Christ in becoming man, as of His

humiliation after He took upon Himself our nature. “Being found in fashion as a man, he humbled

himself.” He never seems to stop in His descent until He comes to the lowest point, obedience unto

death, and that death the most shameful of all, “even the death of the cross.” Said I not rightly, that as you cannot reach the height from which He came, you cannot fathom the

depth to which He descended? Here, in the immeasurable distance between the heaven of His glory and

the shame of His death, is room for your gratitude. You may rise on wings of joy, you may dive into

depths of self-denial, but in neither case will you reach the experience of your divine Lord, who thus, for

you, came from heaven to earth, that He might take you up from earth to heaven.

Now, if strength is given me for the exercise, I want to guide you, first, while we consider *the facts*

*of our Lord’s humiliation,* and secondly, when we have considered them, I want you *practically to learn*

*from them, some useful lessons.*

**I.** First of all, CONSIDER THE FACTS OF OUR LORD’S HUMILIATION.

Paul speaks first of *the point from which He still descends,* “Being found in fashion as a man, he

humbled himself.” My gracious Lord, You have come far enough already, do You not stop where You

are? In the form of God, You were; in the form of man, You are. That is an unspeakable stoop. Will You

still humble Yourself? Yes, says the text, “Being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself.”

Yet, surely one would have thought that He was low enough! He was the Creator, and we see Him

here on earth as a creature, the Creator, who made heaven and earth, without whom was not anything

made that was made, and yet He lies in the virgin’s womb, He is born and He is cradled where the

horned oxen feed. The Creator is also a creature. The Son of God is the Son of man. Strange

combination! Could condescension go farther than for the Infinite to be joined to the infant, and the

Omnipotent to the feebleness of a newborn babe?

Yet, this is not all. If the Lord of life and glory must needs be married to a creature, and the High and

Mighty One must take upon Himself the form of a created being, yet why does He assume the form of

man? There were other creatures brighter than the stars, noble spiritual beings, seraphim and cherubim,

sons of the morning, presence angels of the eternal throne, why did He not take their nature? If He must

be in union with a creature, why not be joined to the angels? But “He took not on him the nature of

angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham.”

A man is but a worm, a creature of many infirmities. On His brow death has written with his terrible

finger. He is corruptible and he must die. Will the Christ take that nature upon Him, that He too, must

suffer and die? It was even so, but when He had come so far, we feel as if we must almost put ourselves

in the way to stop Him from going farther. Is not this stoop low enough? The text says that it was not,

for “Being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself,” even then.

What will not Christ do for us who have been given to Him by His Father? There is no measure to

His love, you cannot comprehend His grace. Oh, how we ought to love Him and serve Him! The lower

He stoops to save us, the higher we ought to lift Him in our adoring reverence. Blessed be His name. He

stoops, and stoops, and stoops, and when He reaches our level and becomes man, He still stoops, and

stoops, and stoops lower and deeper yet, “Being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself.”

Now let us notice next, *the way in which He descended after He became a man,* “He humbled

himself.” We must assume that He has stooped as low as our humanity, but His humanity might have

been, when born, cradled daintily. He might have been among those who are born in marble halls, and

clothed in purple and fine linen, but He chose not to be. If it had pleased Him, He might have been born

a man, and not have been a child, He might have leaped over the period of gradual development from

childhood to youth, and from youth to manhood, but He did not.

When you see Him at home at Nazareth, the apprenticed son, obedient to His parents, doing the little

errands of the house like any other child, you say as our text says, “He humbled himself.” There He

dwelt in poverty with His parents, beginning His life as a workman’s boy, and I suppose, running out to

play with youthful companions. All this is very wonderful.

The apocryphal gospels represent Him as having done strange things while yet a child, but the true

Gospels tell us very little of His early days. He veiled His Godhead behind His childhood. When He

went up to Jerusalem, and listened to the doctors of the law, though He astonished them by His

questions and answers, yet He went home with His parents and was subject to them, for “He humbled

himself.” He was by no means pushing and forward, like a petted and precocious child. He held Himself

in, for He determined that, being found in fashion as a man, He would humble Himself.

He grew up, and the time of His appearing unto men arrived, but I cannot pass over the thirty years

of His silence without feeling that here was a marvelous instance of how He humbled Himself. I know

young men who think that two or three years’ education is far too long for them. They want to be

preaching at once, running away, as I sometimes tell them, like chickens with the shell on their heads.

They want to go forth to fight before they have buckled on their armor.

But it was not so with Christ, thirty long years passed over His head, and still there was no Sermon

on the Mount. When He did show Himself to the world, see how He humbled Himself. He did not knock

at the door of the high priests, or seek out the eminent Rabbis and the learned scribes, but He took for

His companions fishermen from the lake, infinitely His inferiors, even if we regarded Him merely as a

man. He was full of manly freshness and vigor of mind, and they were scarcely able to follow Him, even

though He moderated His footsteps out of pity for their weakness. He preferred to associate with lowly

men, for He humbled Himself.

When He went out to speak, His style was not such as aimed at the gathering together of the *elite*

together, He did not address a few specially cultured folk. *“Then drew near unto him all the scribes and*

*Pharisees for to hear him*.” Am I quoting correctly? Nay, nay, *“Then drew near unto him all the*

*publicans and sinners for to hear him*.” They made an audience with which He was at home, and when

they gathered about Him, and when little children stood to listen to Him, then He poured out the fullness

of His heart, for He humbled Himself.

Ah, dear friends, this was not the deepest humiliation of the Lord Jesus! He allowed the devil to

tempt Him. I have often wondered how His pure and holy mind, how His right royal nature could bear

conflict with the prince of darkness, the foul fiend, full of lies. Christ allowed Satan to put Him to the

test, and spotless purity had to bear the nearness of infamous villainy. Jesus conquered, for the prince of

this world came, and found nothing in Him, but He humbled Himself when in the wilderness, on the

pinnacle of the temple, and on the exceedingly high mountain, He allowed the devil thrice to assail Him.

Personally, in His body, He suffered weakness, hunger, thirst. In His mind He suffered rebuke,

contumely, falsehood. He was constantly the Man of sorrows. You know that when the head of the

apostate church is called, “the man of sin,” it is because it is always sinning, and when Christ is called

“the Man of sorrows” it is because He was always sorrowing.

How amazing it is that He should humble Himself so as to be afflicted with the common sorrows of

our humanity, yet it was even so! “Being found in fashion as a man,” He consented even to be belied, to

be called a drunken man and a winebibber, to have His miracles ascribed to the help of Beelzebub, to

hear men say, “He hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye him?”

“He humbled himself.” In His own heart there were frequently great struggles, and those struggles

drove Him to prayer. He even lost consciousness of God’s presence, so that He cried in sore anguish,

“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” All this was because still He humbled Himself.

I do not know how to speak to you upon this great subject, I give you words, but I pray the Holy

Spirit to supply you with right thoughts about this great mystery. I have already said that it was

condescension enough for Christ to be found in fashion as a man, but after that, He still continued to

descend the stairway of condescending love by humbling Himself yet more and more.

But notice now, *the rule of His descent,* it is worth noticing, “He humbled himself, and became

obedient.” I have known persons try to humble themselves by will-worship. I have stood in the cell of a

monk, when he has been out of it, and I have seen the whip with which he flagellated himself every

night before he went to bed. I thought that it was quite possible that the man deserved all he suffered,

and so I shed no tears over it. That was his way of humbling himself, by administering a certain number

of lashes.

I have known persons practice voluntary humility. They have talked in very humble language, and

have decried themselves in words, though they have been as proud as Lucifer all the while. Our Lord’s

way of humbling Himself was by obedience. He invented no method of making Himself ridiculous, He

put upon Himself no singular garb which would attract attention to His poverty, He simply obeyed His

Father, and mark you, there is no humility like obedience, “To obey is better than sacrifice, and to

hearken than the fat of rams.”

To obey is better than to wear a special dress or to clip your words in some peculiar form of

supposed humility. Obedience is the best humility, laying yourself at the feet of Jesus, and making your

will active only when you know what is God’s will for you. This is to be truly humble.

In what way, then, did the Lord Jesus Christ in His life obey? I answer—There was always about

Him the spirit of obedience to His Father. He could say, “Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is

written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart.” He was always,

while here, subservient to His Father’s great purpose in sending Him to earth, He came to do the will of

Him that sent Him, and to finish His work. He learned what that will was, partly from Holy Scripture.

You constantly find Him acting in a certain way “that the scripture might be fulfilled.” He shaped

His life upon the prophecies that had been given concerning Him. Thus He did the will of the Father.

Also, there was within Him the Spirit of God who led and guided Him, so that He could say, “I do

always those things that please the Father.” Then He waited upon God continually in prayer. Though

infinitely better able to do without prayer than we are, yet He prayed much more than we do. With less

need than we have, He had a greater delight in prayer than we have, and thus He learned the will of God

as man, and did it, without once omitting, or once transgressing in a single point.

He did the will of God also obediently, by following out what He knew to be the Father’s great

design in sending Him. He was sent to save, and He went about saving, seeking and saving that which

was lost. Oh, dear friends, when we get into unison with God, when we wish what He wishes, when we

live for the great object that fills God’s heart, when we lay aside our wishes and whims, and even our

lawful desires, that we may do only the will of God, and live only for His glory, then we shall be truly

humbling ourselves!

Thus, I have shown you that Jesus did descend after He became man, and I have pointed out to you

the way and the rule of His descending. Now let us look with awe and reverence, at *the abyss into which*

*He descended*. Where did He arrive at length in that dreadful descent? What was the bottom of the

abyss? It was death, “He humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”

Our Lord died willingly. You and I, unless the Lord should come quickly, will die, whether we are

willing or not, “It is appointed unto men once to die.” He needed not to die, yet He was willing to

surrender His life. He said, “I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This

commandment have I received of my Father.”

He died willingly, but at the same time, He did not die by His own hand, He did not take His own

life as a suicide, He died obediently. He waited till His hour had come, when He was able to say, “It is

finished,” then He bowed His head and gave up the ghost. He humbled Himself, so as willingly to die.

He proved the obedience of His death also by the meekness of it, as Isaiah said, “As a sheep before

her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.” He never spoke a bitter word to priest or scribe,

Jewish governor or Roman soldier. When the women wept and bewailed, He said to them, “Daughters

of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children.” He was all gentleness,

He had not a hard word even for His murderers. He gave Himself up to be the Sin-bearer, without

murmuring at His Father’s will, or at the cruelty of His adversaries.

How patient He was! If He says, “I thirst,” it is not the petulant cry of a sick man in His fever, there

is a royal dignity about Christ’s utterance of the words. Even the “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani,” with the

unutterable gall and bitterness it contains, has not even a trace of impatience mingled with it. Oh, what a

death Christ’s was! He was obedient in it, obedient not only till He came to die, but obedient in that last

dread act. His obedient life embraced the hour of His departure.

But as if death were not sufficiently humbling, the apostle adds, “even the death of the cross.” That

was the worst kind of death. It was a violent death. Jesus fell not asleep gently, as good men often do,

whose end is peace. No, He died by murderous hands. Jews and Gentiles combined, and with cruel

hands took Him, and crucified and slew Him.

It was also an extremely painful death of lingering agony. Those parts of the body in which the

nerves were most numerous, were pierced with rough iron nails. The weight of the body was made to

hang upon the tenderest part of the frame. No doubt the nails tore their cruel way through His flesh

while He was hanging on the tree. A cut in the hand has often resulted in lockjaw and death, yet Christ’s

hands were nailed to the cross. He died in most exquisite pain of body and of soul.

It was also a death most shameful. Thieves were crucified with Him, His adversaries stood and

mocked Him. The death of the cross was one reserved for slaves and the basest of felons, no Roman

citizen could be put to death in such a way as that, hung up between earth and heaven, as if neither

would have Him, rejected of men and despised of God.

It was also a penal death. He died not like a hero in battle, nor as one who perishes while rescuing

his fellow men from fire or flood, He died as a criminal. Upon the cross of Calvary He was hung up. It

was an accursed death too. God Himself had called it so, “Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.”

He was made a curse for us. His death was penal in the highest sense. He “bare our sins in his own body

on the tree.”

I have not the mental, nor the physical, nor the spiritual strength to speak to you aright on such a

wondrous topic as that of our Lord in the Valley of Humiliation. There have been times with me when I

have only wanted a child’s finger to point me to the Christ, and I have found enough in a sight of Him

without any words of man. I hope that it is so with you tonight. I invite you to sit down and watch your

Lord, obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. All this He did that He might complete His own

humiliation. He humbled Himself even to this lowest point of all, “unto death, even the death of the

cross.”

**II.** If you have this picture clearly before your eyes, I want you in the second place, to

PRACTICALLY LEARN SOME LESSONS FROM OUR LORD’S HUMILIATION.

The first is, learn to have *firmness of faith* in the atoning sacrifice. If my Lord could stoop to become

man, and if when He had come as low as that, He went still lower, and lower, and lower, until He

became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, I feel that there must be a potency about that

death which is all that I can require. Jesus by dying has vindicated law and justice.

Look, brethren, if God can punish sin upon His own dear Son, it means far more than the sending of

us to hell. Without shedding of blood there is no remission of sin, but His blood was shed, so there is

remission. His wounds let out His life blood, one great gash opened the way to His heart, before that,

His whole body had become a mass of dripping gore, when in the garden, His sweat was, as it were,

great drops of blood falling to the ground.

My Lord, when I study Your sacrifice, I see how God can be “just, and the Justifier of him which

believeth in Jesus.” Faith is born at the cross of Christ. We not only bring faith to the cross, but we find

it there. I cannot think of my God bearing all this grief in a human body, even to the death on the cross,

and then doubt. Why, doubt becomes harder than faith when the cross is visible! When Christ is set forth

evidently crucified among us, each one of us should cry, “Lord, I believe, for Thy death has killed my

unbelief.”

The next lesson I would have you learn from Christ’s humiliation is this, cultivate a great *hatred of*

*sin*. Sin killed Christ, let Christ kill sin. Sin made Him go down, down, down, then pull sin down, let it

have no throne in your heart. If it *will* live in your heart, make it live in holes and corners, and never rest

till it is utterly driven out. Seek to put your foot upon its neck, and utterly kill it. Christ was crucified, let

your lusts be crucified, and let every wrong desire be nailed up with Christ, upon the felon’s tree.

If, with Paul, you can say, “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ,

by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world,” with Him you will also be able to

exclaim, “From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.”

Christ’s branded slave is the Lord’s freeman.

Learn another lesson, and that is *obedience*. Beloved, if Christ humbled Himself and became

obedient, how obedient ought you and I to be? We ought to stop at nothing when we once know that it is

the Lord’s will. I marvel that you and I should ever raise a question or ask a moment’s delay in our

obedience to Christ. If it be the Lord’s will, let it be done, and done at once. Should it rend some fond

connection, should it cause a flood of tears, let it be done.

He humbled Himself and became obedient. Would obedience humble me? Would it lower me in

man’s esteem? Would it make me the subject of ridicule? Would it bring contempt upon my honorable

name? Should I be elbowed out of the society wherein I have been admired, if I were obedient to Christ?

Lord, this is a question not worth the asking! I take up Your cross right joyfully, asking grace to be

perfectly obedient by the power of Your Spirit.

Learn next another lesson, and that is *self-denial*. Did Christ humble Himself? Come, brothers and

sisters, let us practice the same holy art. Have I not heard of some saying, “I have been insulted, I am not

treated with proper respect. I go in and out, and I am not noticed. I have done eminent service and there

is not a paragraph in the newspaper about me.”

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.

Meanwhile, it behooves you, while you are here, to humble yourself. If you are already in a humble

position, should you not be contented with it, for He humbled Himself? If you are now in a place where

you are not noticed, where there is little thought of you, be quite satisfied with it. Jesus came just where

you are, you may well stop where you are, where God has put you. Jesus had to bring Himself down,

and to make an effort to come down to where you are.

Is not the Valley of Humiliation one of the sweetest spots in all the world? Does not the great

geographer of the heavenly country, John Bunyan, tell us that the Valley of Humiliation is as fruitful a

place as any the crow flies over, and that our Lord formerly had His country house there, and that He

loved to walk those meadows, for He found the air was pleasant? Stop there, brother.

“I should like to be known,” says one. “I should like to have my name before the public.” Well, if

you ever had that lot, if you felt as I do, you would pray to be unknown, and to let your name drop out of

notice, for there is no pleasure in it. The only happy way seems to me, if God would only let us choose,

is to be known to nobody, and to glide through this world as pilgrims and strangers, to the land where

our true kindred dwell, and to be known there as having been followers of the Lord.

I think that we should also learn from our Lord’s humiliation to have *contempt for human glory*.

Suppose they come to you and said, “We will crown you king!” you may well say, “Will you? All the

crown you had for my Master was a crown of thorns, I will not accept a diadem from you.” “We will

praise you.” “What, will you praise me, you who spat in His dear face? I need none of your praises.”

It is a greater honor to a Christian man to be maligned than to be applauded. Ay, I do not care where

it comes from, I will say this, if he be slandered and abused for Christ’s sake, no odes in his honor, no

articles in his praise, can do him one-tenth the honor. This is to be a true knight of the cross, to have

been wounded in the fray, to have come back adorned with scars for His dear sake. O despised one, look

upon human glory as a thing that is tarnished, no longer golden, but corroded because it came not to

your Lord.

And O beloved, I think when we have meditated on this story of Christ’s humbling Himself, we

ought to feel our *love to our Lord* growing very vehement! We do not half love Him as we ought. When

I read the sentences of Bernard, half Romanist, but altogether saint, I feel as if I had not begun to love

my Lord, and when I turn over Rutherford’s letters, and see the glow of his heart toward his divine

Master, I could smite on my breast to think that I have such a heart of stone where there ought to be a

heart of flesh.

If you hear George Herbert sing his quaint, strange poetry, suffused with love for his dear Lord, you

may well think that you are a tyro in the school of love. Ay, and if you ever drink in the spirit of

McCheyne, you may go home, and hide your head and say, “I am not worthy to sing—

***“Jesu, lover of my soul,’***

for I do not return His love as I ought to do.” Come, seek His wounds, and let your hearts be wounded.

Come, look to His heart that poured out blood and water, and give your heart up to Him. Put your whole

being among the sweet spices of His all-sufficient merit, set all on fire with burning affection, and let the

fragrance of it go up like incense before the Lord.

Lastly, let us be inflamed with a strong *desire to honor Christ*. If He humbled Himself, let us honor

Him. Every time that He seems to put away the crown, let us put it on His head. Every time we hear

Him slandered—and men continue to slander Him still—let us speak up for Him right manfully.

***“Ye that are men, now serve Him,***

***Against unnumbered foes;***

***Your courage rise with danger,***

***And strength to strength oppose.”***

Do you not grow indignant sometimes, when you see how Christ’s professed church is treating Him

and His truth? They are still shutting Him out till His head is wet with dew, and His locks with the drops

of the night. Proclaim Him King in the face of His false friends. Proclaim Him, and say that His Word is

infallibly true, and that His precious blood alone can cleanse from sin. Stand out the braver because so

many Judases seem to have leaped up from the bottomless pit to betray Christ again. Be firm and

steadfast, like granite walls, in the day when others turn their backs and fly, like cravens.

The Lord help you to honor Him who humbled Himself, who became obedient unto death, even the

death of the cross! May He accept these humble words of mine, and bless them to His people, and make

them to be the means of leading some poor sinner to come and trust in Him! Amen.

**EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON**

***PHILIPPIANS 2:1-18***

**Verses 1-2.** *If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship*

*of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love,*

*being of one accord, of one mind.*

Paul did not mean to doubt that there is “any consolation in Christ, any comfort of love, any

fellowship of the Spirit, any bowels and mercies,” for no one knew better than he did how those

blessings abound to them that are in Christ Jesus.

He put it by way of argument. If there be consolation in Christ, since there is consolation in Christ,

since there is comfort of love, since there is fellowship of the Spirit, be one in Christ, be not divided,

love one another, “be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.”

**3.** *Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory;*

“Nothing,” never give to exceed other givers. Never preach that you may be a better preacher than

anybody else, never work in the Sunday school with the idea of being thought a very successful teacher.

“Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory.”

**3.** *But in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.*

There is some point in which your friend excels you. Notice that rather than the point in which you

excel him. Try to give him the higher seat, seek for yourself to take the lowest room.

**4.** *Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.*

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Have a large heart, so that, though you care for yourself in spiritual things, and desire your own soulprosperity,

you may have the same desire for every other Christian man or woman.

**5.** *Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:*

What an example we have set before us in the Lord Jesus Christ! We are to have the mind of Christ,

and that in the most Christly way, for here we have Christ set out to the life—

**6.** *Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:*

For He was equal with God.

**7.** *But made himself of no reputation,—*

Emptied himself of all his honor, of all his glory, of all his majesty, and of all the reverence paid to

him by the holy spirits around the throne.

**7-8.** *And took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found*

*in fashion as a man, he humbled himself,—*

He had not descended low enough yet, though He had come down all the way from the Godhead to

our manhood, “he humbled himself.”

**8-9.** *And became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly*

*exalted him,—*

He stooped, who can tell how low? He was raised, who shall tell how high? “Wherefore God also

hath highly exalted him.”

**9.** *And given him a name which is above every name:*

He threw away His name, He emptied Himself of His reputation. How high is His reputation now!

How glorious is the name that God hath given Him as the reward of His redemptive work!

**10-11.** *That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth,*

*and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory*

*of God the Father.*

Now is He higher than the highest. Now every one must confess His divinity. With shame and terror,

His adversaries shall bow before Him, with delight and humble adoration, His friends shall own Him

Lord of all, “that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

See how the greatest glory of Christ is the glory of the Father. He never desired any other Glory but that.

The highest honor you can ever have, O child of God, is to bring honor to your Father who is in heaven!

Do you not think so? I know you do.

**12.** *Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much*

*more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.*

Get out of self! Work out your salvation from pride, from vainglory, from disputations and strife.

**13.** *For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.*

You may very well work out what God works in. If He does not work it in, you will never work it

out, but while He works within your spirit both to will and to do, you may safely go on to will and to do,

for your willing and your doing will produce lowliness of spirit, and unity of heart with your brethren.

**14.** *Do all things without murmurings and disputings:*

Do not say, “You give me too much to do, you always give me the hard work, you put me in the

obscure corner.” No, no, “do all things without murmurings.” And do not begin fighting over a holy

work, for if you do, you spoil it in the very beginning, and how can you then hope for a blessing upon it?

“Do all things without murmurings and disputings.”

**15.** *That ye may be blameless and harmless,—*

None finding fault with you, and you not finding fault with others, neither harming nor harmed,

“blameless and harmless.”

**15.** *The sons of God, without rebuke,—*

So that men cannot rebuke you, and will have to invent a lie before they can do it, and even then the

falsehood is too palpable to have any force in it, “without rebuke.”

**15.** *In the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world;*

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You cannot straighten them, but you can shine. They would destroy you if they could, but all you

have to do is to shine. If Christian men would give more attention to their shining, and pay less attention

to the crooked and perverse generation, much more would come of it. But now we are advised to “keep

abreast of the times,” and to “catch the spirit of the age.” If I could ever catch that spirit, I would hurl it

into the bottomless abyss, for it is a spirit that is antagonistic to Christ in all respects. We are just to keep

clear of all that, and “shine as lights in the world.”

**16.** *Holding forth the word of life;*

You are to hold forth the Word of life as men hold forth a torch. Your shining is largely to consist in

holding forth the Word of life.

**16.** *That I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain.*

God’s ministers cannot bear the thought of having labored in vain, and yet if some of us were to die,

what would remain of all we have done? I charge you, brethren, to think of what your life work has been

hitherto. Will it remain? Will it abide? Will it stand the test of your own departure? Ah, if you have any

fear about it, you may well go to God in prayer and cry, “Establish thou the work of our hands upon us;

yea, the work of our hands, establish thou it.” Paul cared much about God’s work, but he did not trouble

about himself.

**17.** *Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you*

*all.*

If he might be poured forth as a drink offering on their behalf, or offered up as a whole burnt

offering in the service of the Savior, he would be glad. He could not bear to have lived in vain, but to

spend his life for the glory of his Lord, would be ever a joy to him.

**18.** *For the same cause also do ye joy, and rejoice with me.*

To live and to die for Jesus Christ, with the blessing of the Father resting upon us, is a matter for us

to joy in unitedly and continually. God help us so to do!

# The Ultimate in Humility-Leaving the Comfort Zone (Phil. 2:3-11)

# Deffinbaugh at [*https://bible.org/seriespage/7-ultimate-humility-leaving-comfort-zone-phil-23-11*](https://bible.org/seriespage/7-ultimate-humility-leaving-comfort-zone-phil-23-11)

### Introduction

In the *Religion Today* section of a recent Dallas Morning News,[**38**](https://bible.org/seriespage/7-ultimate-humility-leaving-comfort-zone-phil-23-11#P679_266658) there was an article about Dr. Peter Singer, who serves as DeCamp Professor of Bioethics at the University Center for Human Values at Princeton University. Dr. Singer is quoted in the article as saying, “The only God I could believe in would be a bumbler,…How could an omnipotent, omniscient being permit there to be so much suffering in the world.”[**39**](https://bible.org/seriespage/7-ultimate-humility-leaving-comfort-zone-phil-23-11#P680_267109)  
The problem of suffering has always troubled man. Dr. Singer is no different from many others who have found human[**40**](https://bible.org/seriespage/7-ultimate-humility-leaving-comfort-zone-phil-23-11#P681_267782) suffering to be an impenetrable barrier to belief in God. Dr. Singer does not appear to leave room for factors like the fall of man and human sin. And he most certainly does not seem to have any interest in our text, although it would put the problem of pain in an entirely different light. Dr. Singer finds   
it impossible to believe in an omniscient (all-knowing), omnipotent (all-powerful) God, who allows the kind of suffering we see on this earth. He cannot bear to think of a God who (actively or passively) imposes suffering. Our text tells us that the God who allows suffering is the same God who endured the greatest suffering ever endured. Our text is about the ultimate in suffering, which our Lord Jesus Christ endured in obedience to His Father’s will. It is also about the mindset of our Lord that enabled Him to suffer as He did. It is this mindset of humility that every Christian is to possess, and this is what will enable us to set the interests of others above our own.

### Background

Paul is writing the Philippian saints from a Roman prison cell, probably in Rome itself. He is awaiting his trial before Caesar, to whom he has appealed. Paul has a very strong sense of attachment to the Philippian saints. He was the one who first came to Philippi with the gospel. He and Silas suffered a cruel beating and a night in prison before leaving Philippi. When Paul left Philippi, these saints continued to stand with him in the defense and proclamation of the gospel. Now, they were beginning to experience suffering for the sake of the gospel first-hand ([Philippians 1:29](javascript:%7b%7d)). Paul is writing to comfort and encourage them in their adversity and to encourage them to strive to maintain Christian unity among themselves.

After reminding the Philippian saints of his deep affection for them, and his confidence regarding their spiritual growth (1:3-11), Paul turns to his own suffering. He informs the Philippians about his present situation, its impact on the gospel, and his state of mind in the midst of his adversity. The false charges that led to his incarceration were seen for what they were, even by the most cynical group possible—his prison guards. They understood that Paul’s imprisonment was for the sake of the gospel, and not due to civil disobedience as the Jews claimed.

Christians also were greatly impacted by Paul’s imprisonment, with the result that the gospel was being even more boldly proclaimed. Not all were preaching Christ for the right reasons. Some, sad to say, were using Paul’s imprisonment as a pretext for questioning his motives or methods. They were competing with Paul, and thus they saw his incarceration as an opportunity to gain some ground at his expense. Other Christians had a deep love and respect for Paul. His courage in declaring the gospel strengthened their courage to proclaim Christ boldly as well. Whether out of pure motivation or selfish ambition, the gospel was being preached, and people were coming to faith. Paul was not going to allow the malice of some to rob him of his joy. Paul’s ambition was not to advance his position and status, but to advance the gospel. And God was doing just that, through Paul’s friends and through his adversaries, because they were preaching Christ.

But what of Paul’s future? He would soon stand trial before Caesar. There was a good chance that he might be found guilty of treason, and if this were the case, he would be put to death. Paul could rejoice in the fact that the gospel was being advanced by his imprisonment, but how did the apostle feel about the very real possibility of his death? Paul tells us what we all should know: **“to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”** Living means living out the life of our Lord, depending upon God, proclaiming the gospel, and suffering rejection and persecution for doing so. Dying means instant entrance into the presence of God, free from suffering and pain and sorrow. Obviously, death is **“gain”** for the Christian. Paul knows that to remain behind not only meant suffering for him, but continued service to the saints. It was his conviction that God would most likely leave him on earth for a time, so that he might continue to strengthen and encourage the saints. Assured of this, Paul could boldly carry on his life’s mission, knowing that death held no fear for him, but only the promise of greater things to come.

At verse 27 of chapter 1, Paul changes the focus from his suffering, his perspective, and his practice to that of the Philippians. The Philippians are now entering into the same suffering they had seen Paul endure, and now hear about from a distance. Paul calls upon the Philippian saints to conduct their lives in a manner befitting the gospel. They are to stand together in unity, practicing and proclaiming the gospel. They are not to be alarmed by those who oppose them. They are to diligently pursue Christian unity and harmony with their fellow-believers as they proclaim the gospel.

The unity that Paul urges them to practice works itself out in various ways, but it is rooted in one crucial attitude: humility. It is this humility that Paul describes in verses 3-11. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the model for the mindset of humility. His atoning work on the cross of Calvary saved us from our sins and makes us new creations in Christ ([2 Corinthians 5:17](javascript:%7b%7d)). His incarnation and death laid the groundwork for all Christian humility, because we in no way contribute to His work of saving us, since this is all of grace. His saving work on our behalf also provides us with a heart filled with love and gratitude, so that we desire to please Him by having a heart of humility. But in addition to all these things, our Lord’s incarnation, life, and death provide us with the ultimate example of humility, an example Paul exhorts us to follow.

### Humility: The Key to Unity (2:3-4)

3 Instead of being motivated by selfish ambition or vanity, each of you should, in humility, be moved to treat one another as more important than yourself. 4 Each of you should be concerned not only about your own interests, but the interests of others as well.

I came across a great definition of humility this week, attributed to John Newton:

If I ever reach heaven I expect to find three wonders there: first, to meet some I had not thought to see there; second, to miss some I had expected to see there; and third—the greatest wonder of all—to find myself there.[41](https://bible.org/seriespage/7-ultimate-humility-leaving-comfort-zone-phil-23-11#P695_274349)

Paul begins by contrasting humility with its opposites: selfish ambition and vanity. Selfish ambition is what motivated those who sought to take advantage of Paul’s imprisonment (see 1:17). Selfish ambition seeks to gain at the expense of others. Humility desires the advance of others, at our expense. This is the way Paul felt toward the Philippians (1:8-11, 18-26). It is the way Timothy felt as well (see 2:19-22). Pride and ambition are a part of our fallen nature, inciting us to compete with others, rather than to contribute to their well-being.

If we are truly humble, we are not impressed with ourselves, and we are not desperately seeking to enhance our own standing. Paul’s words in the last half of verse 3 are crucial to us, and it is most urgent that we properly understand what he is saying, and what he is not saying! We are to treat one another as **“more** **important than”** ourselves. The translations differ here, and some are misleading, in my opinion. A number of them render the verse in such a way as to indicate that we must consider others “better” than ourselves. Our Lord is the model for humility, and we would surely not think that He considered sinful men “better than” Himself. The danger is that we will only consider those “better” than ourselves whom we think are better—and if we are arrogant, that won’t be very many people!

The NET Bible is very careful here, indicating that we are to ***treat*** the other person as “more important than ourselves.” This does not mean that in every case they are “more important” than we are. It does not mean that they are “better” than we are. It means, as verse 4 indicates, that we set the interests of our brothers above our own. Their interests are to come higher on our agenda than our own selfish interests.

Let’s imagine that I am a doctor, working in the emergency room of a hospital. It may be my lunch hour, and I am on my way out the door to get something to eat at a nearby restaurant. An ambulance may arrive just as I am leaving, bringing in a street person who has overdosed on drugs. Indeed, this person might even be a murderer. Yet at the moment, his life is in great peril. Without prompt attention, this man will die. Regardless of his previous sins, and without regard for my desire to eat, I give this man my full attention and seek to provide medical assistance to him. At this moment in time, he is **“more important than”** my agenda and my hunger.

Humility prompts me to serve others, assigning my interests a lower priority than their needs. I should hasten to say that putting the interests of others ahead of my own does not mean that I should be subject to the selfish desires and whims of everyone who makes ungodly demands of me. Sometimes seeking the “best interest” of others calls for a rebuke on my part. Sometimes it means that I must say “No” to a request, or a demand. There are many who would like to inform us as to what constitutes their “best interests.” We must seek the best interest of our children, but they do not necessarily know or appreciate what this should require of us.

### Jesus Christ: The Ultimate Standard of Humility (2:5-11)

5 You should have the same attitude toward one another that Christ Jesus had, 6 who though he existed in the form of God did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself by taking on the form of a slave, by looking like other men, and by sharing in human nature. 8 He humbled himself, by becoming obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross! 9 As a result God exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow—in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess to the glory of God the Father that Jesus Christ is Lord.

#### Preliminary Observations

We need to begin this section with a few observations*. First, we must observe the structure of this passage.* As mentioned earlier, verses 5-11 fall into two major parts: (a) the humility and humiliation of Christ (verses 5-8); and, (b) the exaltation and glorification of Christ (verses 9-11). *Second, let us constantly keep in mind the monumental importance of this text.* This passage is one of the great texts of the Bible; it has been called the “centerpiece of the book of Philippians.” *Third (and closely related to what has just been said), this text has been the subject of great debate over the course of church history.*While we do not have the time to pursue this matter in detail, this passage was hotly debated in the fourth century because of its implications regarding the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. Was Christ merely “like” God (in theological terms, “of similar substance”), or was He fully and completely God (“of the same substance”). Thanks to the courage and tenacity of Athanasius, the bishop of Alexandria, the church stood behind the true and orthodox position that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man. Undiminished deity took on perfect and sinless humanity at the incarnation. We may not be able to fully comprehend this mystery, but we must acknowledge it to be true because the Bible says so.

*Fourth, Paul is not teaching some new doctrine, nor is he seeking to defend a doctrine; Paul is calling attention to a doctrine commonly and strongly held by the church as the basis for maintaining unity and harmony in the church.* In the Book of Galatians, Paul strongly defends the doctrine of salvation by grace, apart from works (i.e. circumcision and law-keeping). But while the doctrine taught here is foundational to the Christian faith, Paul does not feel obliged to defend it. It is not under attack, at least by those inside the church. And so Paul turns to the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ as the ultimate example of humility and uses our Lord’s humility as the example for every Christian to imitate.

*Finally, as we study these verses, we should beware of becoming lost in the multitude of details and minute observations which could be made here, and concentrate on the point which Paul is trying to make.* This is where some commentaries can be very frustrating, pointing out many small details, and not focusing on the argument Paul is developing. I was overjoyed to read these words in Gordon Fee’s very excellent work on Philippians:

Understandably such a passage has elicited an enormous amount of scholarly attention, which will not detain us here…. Two matters are important as we approach the passage: first, that in going through the passage we not miss the forest for the trees—that is, that we not get bogged down in the details so that we miss the grandeur of the whole; and second, that precisely because in some ways the passage can stand on its own (it is a complete narrative, after all), we not miss its very clear and essential ties to the present argument.[42](https://bible.org/seriespage/7-ultimate-humility-leaving-comfort-zone-phil-23-11#P710_281348)

#### Jesus Christ: The Supreme Example of Humility

Paul has been exhorting the Philippian saints to practice unity and harmony among themselves. He has indicated that the basis for such unity is humility, considering the best interest of others more important than our own (2:3-4). Paul now moves to the ultimate example of humility—our Lord Jesus Christ (2:5ff.). He begins by establishing His position and status, which would give Him claim to certain rights and prerogatives.

Taking into account the additional information supplied by other biblical texts, the essence of verses 2:6-8 might best be summed up this way. Our Lord Jesus Christ has always existed as the second person of the Godhead, and He was actively involved in the creation of this world ([John 1:1-3; 8:58](javascript:%7b%7d); [Colossians 1:15-16](javascript:%7b%7d)). He existed as God and was fully equal with the Father in His essence. Even though He was equal with God the Father, He did not seize[43](https://bible.org/seriespage/7-ultimate-humility-leaving-comfort-zone-phil-23-11#P715_282367) this as an opportunity to independently further His own interests.

How different our Lord was from Satan. Equality with God was never a possibility for Satan because he was a created being, vastly inferior and subordinate to God. Nevertheless, Satan sought to assert himself and to attain equality with God ([Isaiah 14:13-14](javascript:%7b%7d)). This brought about his downfall and will ultimately end in his eternal destruction ([Revelation 20:1-10](javascript:%7b%7d)). Satan later tempted Adam and Eve to do likewise, assuring them that in disobeying God by eating of the forbidden fruit, they would gain knowledge that would make them like God ([Genesis 3:4-5](javascript:%7b%7d)). It was, of course, a lie, resulting not only in the sin of Adam and Eve but also in the fall of the human race.

Satan sought to do the same thing to our Lord when he sought to tempt Him in the wilderness ([Matthew 4:1-11](javascript:%7b%7d); [Luke 4:1-12](javascript:%7b%7d)). Satan sought to persuade our Lord to lay hold of His rights as the Son of God, so that he would act independently of the Father. Our Lord’s humility, expressed by His rebuke of Satan, and in His submission and obedience to the Father, is what Paul is talking about in our text as well.

Though equal with God (or, we might say, equally God), our Lord did not seize this as an opportunity to further His own interests at the expense of the Father. Instead, He **“emptied Himself, by taking the form of a slave”** (2:7). A great deal of discussion and debate has occurred over this word **“emptied.”** We know from other Scriptures what it cannot mean. It cannot mean that our Lord set aside His deity, that He ceased to be God when He took on human flesh, or even that He diminished His deity, becoming less God (however that could be). Our Lord did not set aside any of His divine attributes. What He set aside, so to speak, was the pursuit of His personal interests, interests that would have been in competition with the Father.

Here is the best illustration that comes to mind. Let’s suppose that a very successful businessman—Bill Gates, for example—decided to run for the office of President of the United States. Let’s further suppose that he is elected to that office. You can imagine some of the ways that a businessman could seize the power of that office as the opportunity to further his own business interests. He could insist that all government agencies use his products. He could punish foreign countries (trade agreements, tariffs, customs inspections) for not using them. He could use his position and power to destroy his competition. This is why a man who runs for office divests himself of his business interests, usually by placing his business in a kind of blind trust that leaves decisions and control to someone else, making it difficult (if not impossible) to further his own interests by the misuse of his position and power as a public official. The businessman does not give away all that he owns; he simply divests himself of the power to profit from his position.

So it was with our Lord’s “emptying” of Himself. He did not cease to be God; He divested Himself of self-interest, so that He could glorify the Father and bring about the salvation of lost sinners. Our Lord did not reduce His deity by taking on human flesh; He added perfect, sinless humanity to His deity, and this was prompted by His humility.

The humbling process had several facets. The first element of our Lord’s humbling would be His leaving the glory and splendor of heaven and coming to dwell on earth. Think of this for a moment. It would be like owning a chauffer-driven limousine, and choosing to give that mode of transportation up to ride a broken-down bicycle. It would be like living in a castle, constantly attended by servants, always having the finest in food and clothing, and choosing to live in the squalor and poverty in the streets of Calcutta. Since the glory of heaven is beyond our human ability to comprehend it, we have difficulty grasping the sacrifice that was required for our Lord to leave heaven and to live on earth.

But that is not all. Our Lord’s humbling also involved living on earth as a man, living on earth with men. I don’t think we really grasp all that is involved here. I fear we are inclined to think of our Lord’s suffering as being limited to a few hours on the cross. I believe his “suffering” lasted all the years of His life on earth. This is implied by the writer to the Hebrews:

For when he “***put all things under his control***,” he left nothing “outside of his control.” At present we do not yet see ***all things under his control***, 9 but we see Jesus, who was made ***lower than the angels for a little while***, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by God’s grace he would experience death on behalf of everyone. 10 For it was fitting for him, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings. 11 For indeed he who makes holy and those being made holy all have the same origin, and so he is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters, 12 saying, “***I will proclaim your name to my brothers; in the midst of the assembly I will praise you***.” 13 Again he says, “I will be confident in him,” and again, “***Here I am****,* ***with*** ***the children God has given me***.” 14 Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, he likewise shared in the same as well, so that through death he could destroy the one who holds the power of death (that is, the devil), 15 and set free those who were held in slavery all their lives by their fear of death. 16 For surely his concern is not for angels, but he is concerned for Abraham’s descendants. 17 Therefore he had to be made like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he could become a merciful and faithful high priest in things relating to God, to make atonement for the sins of the people. 18 For since he suffered and was tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted ([Hebrews 2:8-18](javascript:%7b%7d)).

14 Therefore since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. 15 For we do not have a high priest incapable of sympathizing with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way just as we are, yet without sin. 16 Therefore let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and find grace whenever we need help ([Hebrews 4:14-15](javascript:%7b%7d)).

1 For every high priest is taken from among people and appointed to represent them before God, to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins. 2 He is able to deal compassionately with those who are ignorant and erring, since he also is subject to weakness, 3 and for this reason he is obligated to make sin-offerings for himself as well as for the people. 4 And no one assumes this honor on his own initiative, but only when called to it by God, as in fact Aaron was. 5 So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming high priest; but the one who glorified him was God who said to him “***You are my Son! Today I have fathered you***,” 6 as also in another place God says, “***You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek***.”7 During his earthly life he offered both requests and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death and he was heard because of his devotion. 8 Although he was a son, he learned obedience through the things he suffered. 9 And by being perfected in this way, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, 10 and he was designated by God as “high priest ***in the order of Melchizedek***” ([Hebrews 5:1-10](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Our Lord not only suffered *as* a man, He suffered by living among men. Think of the agony of living among unbelieving men who were hard-hearted ([Matthew 19:8](javascript:%7b%7d); [Mark 3:5; 10:5](javascript:%7b%7d)). Even the disciples of Jesus were hard-hearted ([Mark 16:14](javascript:%7b%7d)) and slow to believe ([Luke 24:25](javascript:%7b%7d)). We should not be surprised when we read,

17 Jesus answered, “You unbelieving and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you? How long must I endure you? Bring him here to me” ([Matthew 17:17](javascript:%7b%7d); see [Mark 9:19](javascript:%7b%7d); [Luke 9:41](javascript:%7b%7d)).

11 Then the Pharisees came and began to argue with Jesus, asking for a sign from heaven to test him. 12 Sighing deeply in his spirit he said, “Why does this generation want a sign? I tell you the truth, no sign will be given this generation” ([Mark 8:11-12](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Even His closest friends failed to grasp what Jesus taught. When He spoke of His crucifixion, they were thinking and arguing about who was the greatest among them. As He prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice, they were thinking about the privileges they would enjoy in the kingdom. Jesus humbled Himself by taking on humanity, by becoming a man; He humbled Himself by living among sinful men. Peter was right when he said, “But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, ‘Go away from me, for I am a sinful man, Lord!’” ([Luke 5:8](javascript:%7b%7d)). Jesus humbled Himself by becoming a man, and by dwelling among sinful men.

His humbling goes beyond this, however. Our Lord came to earth as a man.. He was, of course, without sin, the spotless Lamb of God ([John 1:29, 36](javascript:%7b%7d); [1 Peter 1:19](javascript:%7b%7d)). Jesus could have come as One born of noble blood, but instead He was born into a very poor family. He was born in Bethlehem, and raised in Nazareth, not places of great standing (see [John 1:46](javascript:%7b%7d)). But beyond this, He came as a servant, a slave. He **“did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many”** ([Mark 10:45](javascript:%7b%7d)). The Lord of Glory came to earth as a man, not as a man of nobility, but as a most humble man, a servant.

His humbling is not yet complete. It was not enough for Him to come as a man, even as a servant. He came as the **“Lamb of God”** who would become sin for us ([2 Corinthians 5:21](javascript:%7b%7d)). He came to bear the wrath of God in the place of lost sinners. He came to die the most cruel and ignoble death possible—crucifixion. It is one thing to come as a servant, but our Lord’s service consisted of being condemned as an enemy of the state, and as a sinner against God. You can’t get any lower than this.

He who stooped so low in His humility was elevated to the highest possible place of honor by the Father. In [Philippians 2:9-11](javascript:%7b%7d), Paul turns to the glorification of our Lord by the Father, due to His humility and obedience. As a result of our Lord’s humility and obedience, God highly exalted Him, giving to Him a name above every name. He who dwelt among men, and who was rejected and crucified by men; is the one to whom every knee will someday bow. Every tongue will confess Him to be Lord of all. It does not seem to be only men who will acknowledge Him as Lord, either. Every creature in heaven, on earth, and under the earth will confess that He is Lord—all of this achieving what our Lord intended, the glory of God the Father (2:11).

### Conclusion

Many are the “gnats” which could be “strained” in this text (see [Matthew 23:24](javascript:%7b%7d)), but let us seek to focus our attention on the “camels.” I fear that most of my life I have misunderstood this text. I was inclined to think that the main emphasis was on the sacrifice of our Lord *for my benefit*. I believed that our Lord put my interests above His own by coming to earth and dying on the cross of Calvary. I am now forced to re-think my understanding of the text—and its implications.

Please do not misunderstand. Our Lord did lay aside His heavenly privileges, take on human flesh, and suffer on the cross for our sins. But as much as I would like to think of this text in terms of its personal benefits for me, it is contrary to the context and to the content of our text. Let’s back up and look at our text in terms of what the apostle has already written. Paul has spoken of his great love for the Philippian saints and of his willingness to remain here on earth so that he may continue to serve the saints, even though this necessitates suffering on his part for the sake of the gospel. Paul urges the Philippians to practice love and unity among the brethren. This is the outworking of an attitude of humility. Paul then turns to the humility and humiliation of our Lord as an example for us to imitate.

Our text will be understood correctly only if we answer the questions correctly:

With whom was our Lord equal?  
To whose interests did our Lord subordinate His own?  
What was the intended goal of our Lord’s attitude and actions?

I submit to you that, according to Paul’s words, our Lord’s equality is with God the Father, not with man. He became one of us, but we are surely not equal with Him. He set aside His divine privileges as One equally divine with God the Father. Paul is not stressing the fact that our Lord subordinated His interests to ours, but that He subordinated His interests to the interests of the Father. And the intended goal in our text is not our salvation (though this is certainly a goal of His incarnation and atoning work at Calvary), but rather the glory of the Father (verse 11). The focus is not just on the elect, who are saved by the atoning work of our Lord at Calvary. Paul insists that **“every knee shall bow…and every tongue shall confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”** ([Philippians 2:10-11](javascript:%7b%7d)). In other words, the incarnation and atoning work of Christ not only produces praise from those who believe in Him for salvation, it also results in the praise of every living thing.

What a word of warning this text has for those who have not yet trusted in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins and the assurance of eternal life! My friend, who is reading these words, do you think that if you reject Jesus Christ and His offer of salvation that is the end of it? You are wrong! All mankind, dead and alive, believing and unbelieving, will bow the knee to Jesus Christ as Lord. Those who die without trusting in Him will acknowledge Him as Lord, but not as Savior. The most terrifying thought I can imagine is being one who must bow the knee to Jesus Christ as His defeated enemy. The remedy is to acknowledge Him as Lord and Savior now; to trust Him for the forgiveness of your sins, and for entrance into heaven. Then, like Paul, you will no longer dread death, but welcome it. Then you can look forward to bowing before Him as your blessed Savior and Lord. I urge you not to leave this life without first trusting in Him. I urge you not to end this day without doing so.

Our text was not primarily written as a warning to unbelievers; it was intended to be an incentive and an example for Christians. It was meant to teach us about humility, using our Lord Jesus Christ as the supreme example of humility. As I now understand this passage, I can see that I have misunderstood and misused it in the past. I have always wanted to think of our Lord as subordinating His interests to mine, and His happiness to mine. I have wanted to think of God as serving me, rather than of myself as His servant (remember Paul’s words in 1:1). Now our Lord did come to serve, rather than to be served ([Mark 10:45](javascript:%7b%7d)), but my whole focus and orientation in looking at this text has been wrong if I think only in terms of the benefits I have received from our Lord’s incarnation, suffering, and death on the cross of Calvary. Paul’s words remind us that our Lord put His Father’s interests above His own, and the fruit of this is seen in His obedience to the Father’s will, even unto death. The result is that our Lord is exalted, but the primary aim of our Lord was to bring glory to the Father. He did not subordinate His interests to the interests of the Father in order to further His own interests. He subordinated His interests to the Father’s, so that the Father’s best interests would be served. Our Lord’s exaltation was a fringe benefit, as I view it, and not His primary goal.

What a lesson there is here for leaders. The disciples were eager for our Lord to establish His kingdom because they wanted leadership positions in this kingdom. They argued among themselves as to who was the greatest; they avoided situations where they could serve one another (like washing feet—see [John 13](javascript:%7b%7d)). Jesus made it very clear that leadership was a stewardship. Authority and power are given to leaders so that they may serve those they lead. Leaders are especially to look out for the weak and the vulnerable. The attitude God requires of leaders is the exact opposite of the attitude unbelievers have toward leadership:

14 When you come to the land the LORD your God is giving you and you take it over and live in it and then say, “I will appoint a king over me like all the nations surrounding me,” 15 you must without fail select over you a king whom the LORD your God will choose. From among your own kin you must appoint a king—you may not designate a foreigner who is not one of your kin. 16 Moreover, he must not accumulate horses for himself nor allow the people to return to Egypt to do so, for the LORD has said, you must never again return this way. 17 He also must not marry many wives lest his affections turn aside, and he must not amass much silver and gold. 18 When he sits on his royal throne then he must make a copy of this instruction upon a scroll given to him by the Levitical priests. 19 It must be constantly with him and he must read it as long as he lives so that he might learn to revere the LORD his God, and observe all the words of this instruction and these statutes in order to carry them out, 20 so that he will not exalt himself above his fellow citizens and turn from the commandment right or left, and so that he might enjoy many years over his kingdom, he and his descendants, in the midst of Israel ([Deuteronomy 17:14-20](javascript:%7b%7d)).

20 Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to him with her sons, and kneeling down she asked something from him. 21 He said to her, “What do you want?” She said, “Permit these two sons of mine to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom.” 22 Jesus answered, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup I am about to drink?” They said to him, “We are able.” 23 He told them, “You will drink my cup, but to sit at my right and left is not mine to give. Rather, it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father.” 24 When the other ten heard this, they were angry with the two brothers. 25 But Jesus called them and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those in high position use their authority over them. 26 It must not be this way among you! But whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant. 27 And whoever wants to be first must be your slave—28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” ([Matthew 20:20-28](javascript:%7b%7d)).

In short, leaders are not to abuse their power and position to further their own interests, but to pursue the best interests of others.

If leadership is one context for humility and servanthood, so is equality. It is not just leaders who are instructed to be humble; we are all to have the **“mind of Christ,”** and to put the interests of others above our own. In the case of our Lord, His equality with the Father was not seized for His own personal advantage. The benefits of being equal with the Father were set aside and He became a servant, so that the Father’s interests could be served.

Equality is a very dominant theme in our culture. For many years, women were not treated as equals in the workplace and elsewhere. This was even more true with racial minorities. The cross of Jesus Christ is the great equalizer of men:

26 For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith. 27 For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to the promise ([Galatians 3:26-29](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Those who have been unfairly oppressed rightly rejoice at the fact that unjust inequalities are finally being addressed and confronted in our society. The problem is that this newly-found equality often tempts some to “seize” it for personal gain. This is contrary to the gospel and to the teaching of Paul in our text. Equality is the context for humility and for submission. Humility is most evident in relationships that are at least on an equal level, as they were between the Father and the Son. Here is where subordination is not mandatory, but voluntary. And it is here that true humility, submission, and unity can best be demonstrated.

Let me suggest some other areas in church life where humility and servanthood are desperately needed. First is in the area of Christian liberties. I may have Christian liberty in food or drink, but humility and servanthood require me to surrender the exercise of my liberty when it will cause a weaker brother to stumble (see [1 Corinthians 8-10](javascript:%7b%7d); [Romans 14](javascript:%7b%7d)). As our Lord surrendered His rights as one equal with the Father, so we should surrender our rights for the good of our brothers and sisters.

Another area of application is that of spiritual gifts. Some seem to think that just because they have a certain spiritual gift, they have the “right” to exercise it when, where, and as often as they choose. All too often spiritual gifts are “seized” as the occasion for promoting our own interests, rather than for serving our brothers and sisters. This is why Paul spends so much time on the subject of spiritual gifts in his correspondence with the Corinthian saints ([1 Corinthians 12-14](javascript:%7b%7d)). There are times when our silence will most edify the church, rather than our speech (see [1 Corinthians 14:26-40](javascript:%7b%7d)). Having a spiritual gift—even an excellent gift—is no license to use it at the expense of others, for our own gain. Here, too, humility will prompt us to put the interests of others above our own.

True humility, Christian humility, should prompt us to leave our “comfort zone” for the benefit and blessing of others. Our Lord left the comforts of heaven and came to suffer here on earth, in order to obey His Father’s will and to promote His Father’s interests. Many of us tend to withdraw into the safety and comfort of our “comfort zone”—our place of comfort, security, and ease—rather than to venture out into deeper waters, for the benefit of others. We seek to hide behind our strengths, when God may choose to manifest His power through our weaknesses ([2 Corinthians 12:8-10](javascript:%7b%7d)). In slightly different terms, we can see from our text that God may call us out of comfort and ease into suffering for the sake of the gospel and our Christian brothers and sisters. The path of suffering which our Lord humbly chose to walk (to the glory of the Father) makes any suffering on our part seem pathetic in comparison.

I think we need to take note of the fact that in our text Paul does not take doctrine lightly. In our text, we are dealing with some of the most important doctrines of the Christian faith. Why is it that the doctrines of our Lord’s “emptying” and of His atoning work at Calvary are often subjects over which Christians heatedly argue and divide, when in our text Paul expects these doctrines to be the basis for Christian unity and harmony? Right doctrine is crucial, and heresy is deadly, but why is it that we tend to hold these truths as “upper story” truths, which we file away in our minds, or over which we fight with others, when they are set forth in the Word of God to change our thinking and conduct? Let us see that Paul is strongly committed to pure doctrine, but he is also committed to seeing to it that we put our doctrine into practice.

There is one last lesson that I would like to call to your attention. Quite honestly, I was not prepared to see it, here or anywhere else. Our text calls our attention to an attribute of God I never really considered—the humility of God. Just recently I taught a series on the attributes of God. The attribute of the humility of God never even entered my mind. I must also say that I do not recall encountering it in any of the other works I consulted in preparation for my study.

First of all, let’s take a moment to determine whether or not humility is an attribute of God. It seems quite clear that our text attributes humility to our Lord. In [Philippians 2:2](javascript:%7b%7d), Paul urges the saints in Philippi to **“be in agreement,”** or as the NASB puts it, to **“have the same mind.”** That **“mind”** is the attitude of humility, the attitude that prompts us to **“regard one another as more important**” than yourself (2:3). This humility is the attitude that Jesus Christ had, prompting Him to leave the glory of heaven and to come dwell on this earth in human flesh, dying the death of a criminal (2:5-8).

Surely we must say that our Lord Jesus Christ was humble in His coming to this earth and dying for lost sinners in obedience to the Father’s will. This humility was acted out in the washing of the disciples’ feet in the upper room:

1 Just before the Passover feast, Jesus knew that his time had come to depart from this world to the Father. He had loved his own who were in the world, and now he loved them to the very end. 2 The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, that he should betray Jesus. 3 Jesus, because he knew that the Father had handed things over to him, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, 4 got up from the meal, removed his outer clothes, took a towel and tied it around himself. 5 He poured water into the washbasin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to dry them with the towel he had wrapped around himself. 6 Then he came to Simon Peter. Peter said to him, “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?” 7 Jesus replied, “You do not understand what I am doing now, but you will understand after these things.” 8 Peter said to him, “You will never wash my feet!” Jesus replied, “If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.” 9 Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, wash not only my feet, but also my hands and my head!” 10 Jesus replied, “The one who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean. And you disciples are clean, but not every one of you.” 11 (For Jesus knew the one who was going to betray him. For this reason he said, “Not every one of you is clean.”) 12 So when Jesus had washed their feet and put his outer clothing back on, he took his place at the table again and said to them, “Do you understand what I have done for you? 13 You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and do so correctly, for that is what I am. 14 If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you too ought to wash one another’s feet. 15 For I have given you an example: you should do just as I have done for you. 16 I tell you the solemn truth, the slave is not greater than his master, nor is the one who is sent as a messenger greater than the one who sent him. 17 If you understand these things, you will be blessed if you do them” ([John 13:1-17](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Our Lord’s humility is also reflected in these words, recorded in Matthew’s Gospel:

27 All things have been given to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son, and those to whom the Son decides to reveal him. 28 Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke on you and learn from me, **because I am gentle and humble in heart**, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy to bear, and my load is not hard to carry” ([Matthew 11:27-30](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

I believe that this messianic prophecy in Isaiah also calls attention to our Lord’s humility:

1 “Here is my servant whom I support, my chosen one in whom I take pleasure. I have placed my spirit on him, he will make just decrees for the nations. 2 He will not cry out or shout, he will not publicize himself in the streets. 3 **A crushed reed he will not break**, **a dim wick he will not extinguish**; he will faithfully make just decrees. 4 He will not grow dim or be crushed before establishing justice on the earth; the coastlands will wait in anticipation for his decrees” ([Isaiah 42:1-4](javascript:%7b%7d), emphasis mine).

The question must arise, “Why are we inclined to overlook humility as an attribute of God?” I suspect that it is because we believe (wrongly) that power and humility are incompatible. We expect the poor to be humble, and the powerful to be proud and forceful: “A poor person makes supplications, but a rich man answers harshly” ([Proverbs 18:23](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Paul is contrasting the **“mind of Christ”** with the mindset of the world. Our Lord had all power and glory. He could have demanded man’s homage and praise. Instead of seeking His own interests, our Lord humbly submitted His interests to those of the Father. Jesus submitted to the Father’s will, left the glory of heaven, took on human flesh, and then endured suffering, even unto death.

Our problem is that we tend to think of humility as the fate of the poor and the powerless, rather than the choice of the powerful and successful. Our Lord is the extreme example of humility in the context of power and glory. If He could manifest humility as the One who is equal with God the Father, then surely you and I can manifest humility when we are on equal terms with our fellow-believers.

There is a great deal of difference between the humility of our Lord and our humility. Our Lord was humble when He had everything to be proud of. We are often proud when we have nothing to be proud of. Think of it for a moment. What is there they we can be proud about? Salvation, our spiritual gifts, and our ministries are all given to us by God. We cannot take credit for anything of spiritual value. As Paul put it, “For who concedes you any superiority? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as though you did not?” ([1 Corinthians 4:7](javascript:%7b%7d)).

We should be humble, because there is no basis for pride. Our Lord has every reason to be proud, and yet He manifests humility. Meekness is not weakness; it is power focused on the good of others, even at one’s own expense.

As I think of this text and the humility of our Lord, I am overwhelmed by Him. Who can fathom a God who is infinitely powerful and worthy of all praise, who would humble Himself to dwell among men, and who would even suffer and die, to bring glory to God the Father, and bring salvation to sinful men like us? Hallelujah, what a Savior!

38 Kathi Wolfe, “Is life sacred? This ethicist says no.” *The Dallas Morning News*, May 6, 2000, G1.

39 It is frightening to see how far Dr. Singer is willing to go. In a very recent “BreakPoint” commentary, Chuck Colson writes, “In an article entitled ‘Killing Babies Isn't Always Wrong,’ philosopher Peter Singer writes: “Perhaps, like the ancient Greeks, we should have a ceremony a month after birth, at which the infant is admitted to the community. Before that time,” he says, “infants would not be recognized as having the same right to life as older people.” BreakPoint commentary #000920, “Are Newborns ‘Persons?’” 9/20/2000. ([www.breakpoint.org](http://www.breakpoint.org)).

40 It would appear that Dr. Singer might also include non-human suffering as well. Dr. Singer has written books such as *Animal Liberation*, and *Rethinking Life and Death*.

41 Christian Quotation of the Day. April 30, 2000. Commemoration of Pandita Mary Ramabai, Translator of the Scriptures, 1922. (<http://www.gospelcom.net/cgod/>)

42 Gordon D. Fee, *Philippians* (Downers Grove, Illinois, USA: InterVarsity Press, 1999), p. 90.

43 As the reader can infer from my words, I do not understand the word “seize” in the sense of “clinging to, and being unwilling to let go of His divine privileges and prerogatives.” I understand seizing in the sense of “seizing the day,” of “grasping or laying hold of” an opportunity.

Notes from *New International Greek Testament Commentary*

Verses 1–4 contain a stirring appeal by the apostle, and the exhortations to unity and mutual consideration are all the more effective because of the rhythmical or lyrical style. The paragraph may be structured in a threefold strophic arrangement, each with four lines as follows:

(1) A εἴ τις οὖν παράκλησις ἐν Χριστῷ,

B εἴ τι παραμύθιον ἀγάπης,

C εἴ τις κοινωνία πνεύματος,

D εἴ τις σπλάγχνα καὶ οἰκτιρμοί,

(2) A πληρώσατέ μου τὴν χαρὰν ἵνα τὸ αὐτὸ φρονῆτε,

B τὴν αὐτὴν ἀγάπην ἔχοντες

B1 σύμψυχοι

A1 τὸ ἓν φρονοῦντες,

(3) A μηδὲν κατʼ ἐριθείαν μηδὲ κατὰ κενοδοξίαν,

B ἀλλὰ τῇ ταπεινοφροσύνῃ ἀλλήλους ἡγούμενοι ὑπερέχοντας ἑαυτῶν,

A1 μὴ τὰ ἑαυτῶν ἕκαστος σκοποῦντες,

B1 ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ ἑτέρων ἕκαστοι.

The opening strophe (v. 1) is characterized by a fourfold εἴ τις (τι) together with two substantives in each line. These four brief statements in synonymous parallelism form the basis of the apostle’s appeal to the Philippians as he speaks of supernatural, objective realities that have already occurred in their lives. The fourfold εἰ (‘if’), which formally introduces four conditional sentences, should be rendered ‘since’, or ‘if, as is indeed the case’, and the construction without the verb (most interpreters suggest that ἐστιν should be supplied), together with the sense given, is classical.

The second strophe (v. 2) has a chiastic arrangement in which the first and last lines (A and A1) and the second and third lines (B and B1) are virtually synonymous. Paul partly repeats the ideas of v. 1 but ‘goes on to express explicitly the adjustments needed to be made in the Philippian church’. The fourfold appeal of v. 1 is to lead to the fourfold result of v. 2. The only Greek imperative of the paragraph (πληρώατε) appears here, although ἵνα … φρονῆτε is virtually equivalent to one. In order to stress the need for unanimity the apostle piles up several expressions relevant to it: τὸ αὐτό, τὴν αὐτήν, συμ-, and τὸ ἕν. In the last two lines the two participles (ἔχοντες and φρονοῦντες) are examples of homoioteleuton, while the verb φρονέω, which occurs at the end of the second and fourth lines, is of particular significance to vv. 1–11 (see below).

The third and final strophe (vv. 3–4) is an example of antithetic parallelism: the first and third lines (A and A1), in which Paul calls attention to the evils that menaced the Christian community, are twice contrasted (note the twofold strong adversative ἀλλά) with the second and fourth lines (B and B1), where the exhortation to positive attitudes and behaviour is presented. D. A. Black points out that the ‘contrast between self-exaltation and self-denial is highlighted by the series of alliterative pronouns’ in this strophe: ἑαυτῶν, ἑαυτῶν, ἕκαστος, ἑτέρων, and ἕκαστοι. Both the spiritual problem facing the church and its remedy are set forth in vv. 3–4, which thus form a fitting climax to the paragraph. A further stylistic feature, noted by J.-F. Collange, is the assonance between the verb φρονέω and the noun ταπεινοφροσύνη. The usage of the ταπειν- root may well anticipate the reference in the following hymn (2:5–11) to our Lord’s humbling himself (ἐταπείνωσεν ἑαυτόν, v. 8) in obedience to the will of the Father.

The place and purpose of 2:1–4 within the context of 1:27–2:18 and its relationship to the christological hymn of 2:5–11 also demand attention. It was noted at 1:27 that the apostle focussed on one highly significant demand, namely that the readers should conduct their lives in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. This would involve them, first of all, standing fast or secure with a common purpose (‘in one spirit’) in the face of attacks from outside against the progress of the gospel (1:27–30). Now the apostle looks for a steadfast resistance to all kinds of internal division. 2:1–4 functions as a call to unity, love, and humility within a closely knit section of the letter (1:27–2:18). The Philippians are to be united not only against a common foe but also in heart and mind with one another.

2:1–4 has a number of linguistic correspondences with the following hymn (2:5–11). These opening verses prepare the way for the hymnic paragraph that follows. At v. 5 the apostle introduces Christ Jesus as the supreme example of self-abnegation and humility. The meaning of a right attitude to and regard for others, humility and compassion, which Paul calls for in vv. 1–4, is marvellously presented to the Philippians in this classic passage which sets forth Christ Jesus as ‘the Lordly Example’. Later, the apostle will close the chapter with three additional examples—Paul himself, Timothy, and Epaphroditus—servants of the gospel who in obedience to Christ and following his model show joy, unity, humility, and a concern for others (2:17–30).[[1]](#footnote-1)

1. O’Brien, P. T. (1991). [*The Epistle to the Philippians: a commentary on the Greek text*](https://ref.ly/logosres/nigtcphlp?ref=Bible.Php2.1-4&off=5962) (pp. 164–166). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)