

Fellowship of Joy in Perfection: Humility (Part 1)

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[0:00] Thank you so much, Chris. Amen. Well, we're working our way through this marvelous, wonderful book of the New Testament.

! What book is that? And to the people there at Philippi.

So open your Bibles, if you would, to our text for this morning. Philippians chapter 2, verses 5 through 11. Philippians 2, verses 5 through 11.

One of those incredible texts of Scripture. Paul writes, He became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name. That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow. Of those in heaven and of those on the earth and of those under the earth.

[1:45] And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Incredible verse of Scripture.

Now the theme of this letter again is fellowship of joy. Let's keep that theme in our minds as we work our way throughout this wonderful letter.

Fellowship of joy. Fellowship of joy. And in this portion of the letter. It is the fellowship of joy in perfection.

In perfection. That is of course perfection in the sense of spiritual maturity. Fellowship of joy in maturity. Spiritual maturity. Perfection. And of course Paul's focus as I've explained.

Is the church. So this spiritual perfection or maturity. In the local church. The body of Christ. Now again chapter 1 verse 27 introduces this section of the letter.

[2:52] And we need to look at that again. Where Paul says let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ. Or again and I like this paraphrase so I want to read it again.

Paul said I have a single desire for you. Church. I'm adding that part. But he's speaking to the church. I have a single desire for you. That your daily life should match the worth of the gospel. That's incredible. Now see that is the mark of spiritual maturity. That is applied not only to the individual. Our lives as individual believers.

But certainly to our lives collectively. As a church. As a body of Christ. Both individually and collectively. We must reflect.

Express the worth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Now listen to me. What do you suppose would be the best way to prove to the unbelieving world?

[3:55] The truth of the gospel. And therefore the worth of the gospel. And therefore that they should believe it. What's the best way to express that?

To prove that to the unbelieving world? Well the proof that the gospel is true. And therefore the proof that the gospel is of great worth.

The proof of that rests first and foremost not in what we say. But in what we do. What we do. Now I'm not discounting or eliminating what we say. God's word is what we need to say and proclaim and preach. But I'm saying first what they ought to see.

The unbelieving world. What they ought to see. And what ought to prove the worth of the gospel is what we do. What we do. The proof of the gospel is not first in what we say.

[4:53] But in what we do. That is how we live. Individually and collectively. In plain view of a watching world. And believe me. They're watching. I tell you Bartlesville is watching Highland Park Baptist Church.

You don't even know it. They know you. And they're watching you. And they're watching us. And so we ought to understand that the church has no right. Our church. Any church has no right.

To expect the unbelieving world to even hear what we say. If what they see in us. Or about us. Does not line up with what we say we believe.

And what we say they ought to believe. I mean that with all my heart. And so what according to Paul represents a conduct in the church. That matches the worth of the gospel of Christ.

What does he say about that conduct? Well he gives us three. Three points of conduct. Unity. Humility. Humility. And integrity.

[5:58] These three things. Now last Sunday we completed Paul's teachings concerning unity in the church. And you might remember that I closed that sermon with this point.

I said the demonstration. What I call the demonstration of unity. And I asked this question. What does unity in the church look like? That is. How is it manifest?

How does it manifest itself in the church? That is unity. And I said last week that verses 3 and 4 answers that question. So I want us to look at that again.

As we move forward into this next subject. Look at it. Let nothing. Let nothing. Are you looking at it? Verse 4. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit.

But in lowliness of mind let each esteem or consider others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests.

[7:01] But also for the interests of others. This is humility. A tremendous statement of humility. There is an old ditty that goes like this.

It needs more skill than I can tell to play the second fiddle well. The famous American composer and conductor Leonard Bernstein was once asked.

Which instrument is the most difficult to play? And Bernstein thought for a moment and then he replied the second fiddle. The second fiddle. He said I can get plenty of first violinist.

But to find someone who can play the second fiddle with enthusiasm. That's a problem. And then he said this. But if we have no second fiddle.

We have no harmony. You see when we talk about unity in the church. We're not talking about uniformity.

[8:02] All exactly the same in every way. When we talk about unity in the body of Christ in the church. We're not talking about unison. In the sense that we're all singing the exact same note.

No, no, no. Unity is harmony. Where all of our differences and all of our uniquenesses come together and work together in concert.

All striving for the same goal. Which in the church is God's glory through the advance of His gospel. That's what we're talking about when we talk about unity.

Unity is harmony. And there is no harmony without humility. That is a willingness to play the second fiddle.

Willingness to put the interests of others first. A willingness to do that for the glory of God and for the greater good of His kingdom.

[9:06] Now, having said that, if you were the Apostle Paul and you're sitting down to write a letter. A letter to the church that is, by the way, and we'll see this later on in our study, having some struggle with unity and humility.

So, you're the Apostle Paul and you sit down, you're writing a letter and you want to teach your readers a strong lesson on humility. And your thought was to give an example of humility.

One that would inspire them and encourage them and even challenge them. Then what example would you choose? Well, Paul chose the supreme example.

I mean, you could not find a greater example. He chose the supreme example of humility and that is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote in verse 5, look at it again. Let this mind, or this way of thinking, be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.

[10:21] And verse 8 tells us what it was. He humbled Himself. He humbled Himself. Became obedient to the point of death, even death of the cross. Jesus is our supreme example of humility.

That's Paul's point. But I understand that Paul's point here is the mind of humility, not the mode of humility. Let's make sure we understand that first.

It's the mind of humility, not the mode of humility. He said, let this mind be in you. That is, we could never hope to experience and to express exactly the same humility that Jesus experienced and expressed.

That's the danger, I guess, though I say it respectfully, the danger of using this kind of example. He's talking about the mind, not the mode of humility. In fact, I would say to you that Jesus' act of humility is unique because He is unique.

And so for reasons that should be obvious, Jesus' act of humility is not repeatable. It's not reproducible. Because no one else can do what Jesus did, and that is because no one else can be Jesus.

[11 : 36] Alright? So it's the mind of humility. Because you see, all of us can and should have the same mind of Jesus, which is a mind of humility.

Humility toward one another. That is Paul's point. So look at it again. We've got to get this before we can move forward.

Look at it close. Let this mind be in you. That is literally among you, Paul says, because you is plural here in the text.

Let this mind be among all of you. All of you. And it's imperative, too. This is written in the form of a command. So really, we ought to say it. Have this mind among all of you.

All of you, church. And what mind? What mind is it? What way of thinking is it? The mind which was also in Christ Jesus.

[12 : 43] He humbled himself. Pretty clear, isn't it? Alright, so let's see this extreme example of humility. I tell you, Paul starts with the most basic of spiritual disciplines.

Humility. And then he very quickly transports his readers to the Mount Everest of theological doctrinal truths. The incarnation and exaltation of Christ.

I tell you, listen. This is a huge point of theology that Paul is giving us. And all of it to help us understand that we're to have that same mind toward one another.

That is, we're to have humility as a church. But what a doctrinal truth. The incarnation and exaltation of Christ. C.S. Lewis, the author of Chronicles of Narnia, wrote many other books.

But he also wrote a book simply by the name of Miracles. And in that book, C.S. Lewis wrote, in the Christian story, now listen to this. In the Christian story, God descends to reascend.

[13 : 53] He comes down, down from the heights of absolute being into time and space. Down into humanity. But he goes down to come up again and bring the whole ruined world up with him.

What a statement of the incarnation. The incarnation and exaltation of Christ. And so here is Paul's example of humility.

The humiliation of Christ. But also the exaltation of Christ. Christ descends to reascend. Christ goes down to come up again.

Amen. All right, so let's consider this morning the down part of this theological truth. It'd be hard to get all that in.

Just that part of it this morning. Let's consider the down part. The coming down. Or what I want to call, number one, the depth of Christ's humiliation.

[14 : 58] The depth of it. The depth of his humiliation. And by the way, it goes all the way to the cross. And he could not go deeper than that.

The depth of Christ's humiliation. The next time, we will consider the height of Christ's exaltation. All right, so the depth of Christ's humiliation. He descended.

And the height of Christ's exaltation. He descended to reascend. He goes down to come up again.

So this morning, the depth of Christ's humiliation. In verses 5 through 8. Two incredible statements describe the depth of Christ's humiliation.

Two incredible statements. The first one is found in verse 7. In the New King James translation, it goes like this.

[16 : 00] Made himself of no reputation. I believe it's very similar to the King James. This is an incredible statement. Made himself of no reputation.

Now, some of you New American Standard people out there. I really like that translation. It's much shorter. Quite a better economy of words. It reads, but emptied himself.

That's an incredible statement. But emptied himself. The second one, the other statement, comes in verse 8. He humbled himself.

Those two things. Those two things. When you understand those two things, you understand this entire text. And therefore, you understand this tremendous doctrine of the incarnation.

The humiliation of Christ. Emptied himself. Humbled himself. Now, dear people, you would be hard-pressed to find two things Jesus did that would mean more to us than these two things.

[17:09] He emptied himself. He humbled himself. You can't think of another thing that would mean more to us than those two things. And also, by the way, no one, not even God the Father, forced him to do these two things for us.

Paul's very emphatic about this. He emptied himself. It's reflexive grammatically.

He emptied himself. He humbled himself. If anything forced him. If anything compelled him. It was his love.

Pouring forth out of his grace. Now, understand this about these two statements here in these verses. When Paul says that Christ emptied himself, he is referring to his incarnation.

God becoming a man. God becoming a man. The incarnation. When he says that he emptied himself, this is a reference to his incarnation.

[18:18] And then when Paul says that Christ humbled himself, he is referring to his crucifixion. His incarnation and his crucifixion.

These two things. Alright, so let's take these one at a time this morning. First, what does Paul tell us about the incarnation? The incarnation of Christ.

God became a man. That's the incarnation. What does Paul tell us about this? Well, he gives us three important truths concerning the incarnation of Christ.

Three very clear truths. Number one. Verse six. Look at it. Who being in the form of God did not consider it robbery to be equal with God.

That's statement number one. That's important truth number one concerning the incarnation of Christ. Being in the form of God did not consider it robbery to be equal with God.

[19:26] Now, what does all that mean? I mean, really. Well, in the first place, and I have to say this because right out here we have some of you who have a New American Standard Bible and you prefer the New American Standard and I love it.

It's a great translation. Some of you, though a lesser number of you, have the ESV, the English Standard Version. Now, I want to make a point here. Not wanting to offend anyone.

Alright? So don't take offense. But the New American Standard reads, although he existed in the form of God.

You hear that? Although he existed in the form of God. The ESV reads, though he was in the form of God.

Now, I'm sorry, but both of those translations are poor and, by the way, misleading. They're misleading.

[20:31] Both imply to the reader that when Christ came to this world, He somehow became something less than what He was before. existed was in the form of God.

But the actual word in the original text is a participle. And it is a present tense. And you've heard me say this so many times. You ought to remember this.

Present tense means continuous. An ongoing reality or action. And so the KJV, you King James Version lovers, you'll be glad to hear this, it gets it right.

And so does the New King James Version, because it's very close to the King James. It gets it right. Being. The participle. It's continuous.

Ongoing. Being in the form of God. Now, there's going to be a point to all this here in just a minute that we had better get. The New American Standard should have translated it existing in the form of God.

[21:42] Continuous. Continuous state of being. Existing. That is, let's just put it down in plain terms, whatever Jesus was before His incarnation, He continued to be during His incarnation.

God. God. God of very God. How does Paul put it? In the form of God. Morphe is the Greek word. Morphe. In the morphe of God. Morphe points to the inner reality of the nature. Of His nature. The morphe.

The inner reality. That is something Jesus is that can never, ever change. Never, ever diminish in any way. His essential nature.

His eternal nature. Continued in the incarnation. He is God. God the Son. The second person of the Trinity. He's God.

[22:52] Okay? Now this is the best starting place in this entire illustration. Or in Paul's argument. It's the best starting place.

Because to get the full sense of the depth of His humility, we need to get the full sense of the height of His deity and His glory.

Jesus is God. Even when He was walking on this earth, He didn't get rid of any of it. None of it went away. None of it diminished. He is God. He said to the Pharisees, Truly, truly, I say unto you, before Abraham was even born, I am.

Eternal God. And so listen, when Jesus came down from heaven, He brought His deity with Him. Don't ever forget that.

Do you remember why the Jewish leaders wanted to kill Jesus? In John chapter 5, when Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath day, and He did those kind of things quite often, got in a lot of trouble because of it, but He healed a man on the Sabbath day, and because of that, the Jewish leaders, the Pharisees, severely, not only severely, criticized Him, but they threatened Him with death.

[24:06] And how did Jesus respond? Well, in John 5, 17, Jesus said this to the Pharisees. He said, My Father has been working until now, and I have been working.

So it's okay to do this on the Sabbath, is what He's saying. But the point is, He said, My Father has been working. I tell you, these Jewish leaders just could not stomach that.

That kind of answer. Why? Well, let me read on. Verse 18 of John chapter 5, Therefore, the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, kill Jesus.

Why? Because He did not only break, He not only broke the Sabbath, that was bad enough, but also said that God was His Father.

And to these Pharisees, what did that mean to them? Why did that get them so mad? Well, it goes on to say, making Himself equal with God.

[25:08] To them, when Jesus said, My Father, referring to God as Father, they would never do that. And when He referred to God as Father, to them, He was making Himself equal with God.

And so they sought to kill Him. But dear people, that's exactly who Jesus is. Always has been, and is, and always will be co-equal with God the Father.

He's God the Son. And that is exactly what Paul is telling us here. In fact, he says it twice in verse 6. He says, being in the form, that is the very nature of God.

We've already looked at that. And then notice the second part of this. Did not consider it robbery to be equal with God. Equal. Equal. That's what he said. He did not consider it robbery to be equal with God.

Isos. In the Greek, we get our word Isosceles triangle. It means at least two sides are identical.

They're the same. And Isos means exact equivalence.

[26:16] Exact equivalence. He is God in every way. Exact equivalence. Equal with God.

But the point of it is that Jesus did not have to steal that. He did not have to steal what already belonged to Him. The word translated robbery in this translation means to seize a prize.

To seize it. To grab it. Grab on to it. Some translations use the word grasp or cling to it.

Or it can even mean to take it by force. You see, to the people, there was never any question as to whether Jesus had full rights of deity.

Never any question about that. And Jesus didn't have to argue that point. He didn't have to hold on to it in case He lost it. Jesus, there is never any danger of Him losing His deity.

[27:20] He did not have to steal it. He did not have to grasp it. He did not have to hold on tight to it in case He lost it. deity was His from eternity and it always will be.

Now, as much as I'd love to camp out there a little longer, we need to move on to the second truth. Three truths. Important truths concerning the incarnation of Christ.

Number two. Truth number two. And it just gets better as we go here. Verse 7, look at it. That is better for us. But made Himself of no reputation.

That's the entire phrase. Made Himself of no reputation. Actually, in the New King James, that's just two words in the Greek. But, and, made Himself of no reputation.

All that's just one word. Made Himself of no reputation. Single word. And it is the word kano.

[28:26] And this is generally called the kenosis. The kenosis of Christ. The kenosis. The self-emptying.

That's why in New American Standard and other versions it's translated He or but emptied Himself. He emptied Himself. Kenosis. Now the word kano means and this is important to get it means to deprive something of its proper place and use.

To deprive something of its proper place and use. Not to deprive it of its essential nature. But to deprive something of its place and use.

And so Jesus did not empty Himself of His deity. Jesus did not empty Himself of any measure of His deity or any part of His deity.

He did not empty Himself of His deity. Jesus did not lose any of His glory or His deity when He walked this earth. So what did happen? Jesus deprived Himself of it.

[29 : 44] Jesus denied Himself of the free and open expression of His glory. He deprived Himself of it.

Calvin wrote, Christ indeed could not divest Himself of Godhead. He can never do that. But He kept it concealed for a time. He laid aside His glory in the view of men not by lessening it, but by concealing it.

Concealing. So now the natural question is of what did Jesus empty Himself? Of what did He empty Himself?

Good theologians have offered a number of answers. In fact, MacArthur, John MacArthur, a favorite of mine and many of you, John MacArthur lists five in his commentary.

Five things that Jesus emptied Himself of. I've read them and they're very good. But listen, in all due respect to MacArthur and many others, of what did Jesus empty Himself is the wrong question.

[31 : 02] The important question is into what did Jesus empty Himself? Into what? And that leads us to truth number three.

Paul said, taking the form of a bond servant and coming in the likeness of man. This, see, is the whole point of the kenosis.

Not of what He emptied Himself, but into what He emptied Himself. As one theologian put it, an old theologian, Jesus Christ brought the whole of His divine nature, undiminished, into a new, a new and unimaginable state.

Humanity. He brought it into it. He emptied Himself into another form, another state of existence, that of a bond servant.

The likeness of man, or man, the form of man, the very state, existence of man. Do you see?

[32 : 23] Without ceasing to be God, in any way, Jesus became man. man, what depth of humiliation.

Like a king, though even this illustration falls short, it's kind of like a king taking off the outward expressions of His regal majesty, removing His robe and taking off His crown, and clothing himself in the garb of a beggar.

And He leaves His throne, leaves His palace, and He lives among the people of His kingdom with His true identity concealed.

He's still king, but it's concealed. And so, claiming none of His rights as a king, using none of His kingly powers for His own benefit, and instead of ruling, He is serving.

That's what Jesus did. There's an interesting kind of prefiguring of this or illustration of this, the incarnation. in a particular event that took place between Jesus and His disciples, a very famous event, incident, where Jesus washes His disciples' feet.

[34 : 06] And it certainly is a tremendous lesson on humility, self-giving, and so forth. But it can be even more than that. Now listen, listen to this.

This is John 13, 4. Here's how the Bible reads. Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper and laid aside His garments.

Pay attention to that. Laid aside His garments. Took a towel and girded Himself, and after that He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.

That's a striking illustration of the incarnation in miniature. Jesus laid aside His garments. garments. The outward expression of who He really is on the inside. He laid aside His garments. He laid aside His royal splendor.

[35 : 29] And Jesus took a towel and girded Himself. He took the role of a servant. That was work that the servants would do. this is a perfect illustration of the incarnation.

The depth of Christ's humiliation is first, His incarnation. Second, His crucifixion. His crucifixion.

What does Paul tell us about Christ's crucifixion? Well, Paul begins by saying in verse 8, and being found in appearance as a man.

That's how he begins. Found in appearance as a man, a mere man. That is, Jesus did not walk around this earth in some God looking way.

He didn't walk around as some God. And when people saw Him, saw Jesus, there was nothing divine about the way He looked, or the way He acted, or the way He lived.

[36 : 43] Nothing divine about it. And the prophet Isaiah told us this already. In Isaiah 53, 2, the Bible says, For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of a parched ground.

He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him. There's anything king about Him when He was walking on this earth. Nor appearance, no outward appearance, that we should be attracted to Him.

That's what Isaiah said about Jesus and His humanity. He was a king in the clothing of a beggar. In all appearance, He was a man.

You might remember that when Jesus visited His own town, hometown, they were not impressed with Him. In fact, they said in Mark 6, 3, Is not this the carpenter?

Is it carpenter? Why should we listen to Him? They weren't impressed with Him. As far as I know, there was only one time that Jesus' appearance revealed His true nature.

[37 : 56] And even then, I think it was somewhat, obviously somewhat bailed. I'm talking about the time on the top of the mountain, the mount of transfiguration. Remember that story? In Matthew chapter 17, verse 2, the Bible says He was transfigured.

Just a word that means that the inside came to the outside. He was transfigured before them. Peter, James, and John. And the Bible says His face shone like the sun and His clothes became as white as the light.

Mark, in his account, says that it became whiter than any white could be in this world. Whiter than white. That's the only time, as far as I know in Scripture, where He was revealed for who He really was, is.

But all other times, He's a king in beggar's clothing, and in all appearance, just a man. And the Bible says, Paul says, He humbled Himself.

He humbled Himself. Words of an old, old theologian. The highest place that heaven affords is His, is His by right.

[39 : 20] Yet on earth, it was a lowly station that He sought. an insignificant village, a humble cottage, a lowly mother, a poor trade.

He was born to a borrowed cradle. He was laid in a borrowed tomb. And during His ministry, the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head.

He humbled Himself. And verse 8 says, He became obedient to the point of death. To the point of death.

Not just, as some translations say, obedient unto death. That is, in the sense that death is the Master. No, He was obedient to the Lord, to God, the Father.

Obedient all the way to the point of death. His obedience went all the way, but not just any death. Because death, just death by any form, would not have accomplished what we needed.

[40 : 19] It had to be the death of the cross. Had to be. No other death would do. The death of the cross.

And this, dear people, the cross is the absolute death of humiliation. The cross. You see, Jesus could not step lower than the cross in His humiliation.

There was no greater humiliation than the death of the cross. Galatians 3.13. Listen to it. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law.

How? By becoming a curse for us. As it is written, cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree. A reference to the cross.

The depth of Christ's humiliation. God will be to the example Paul sets before us. Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.

[41 : 27] The depth of His humiliation existing in the very form of God, equal with God, came down to the earth, down to the cross, down to the curse, and He did it for us.

All of it for us. The words of the poet, though He was rich, so rich, yet for our sakes how poor He became. Even His garments they parted when He hung on the cross of shame.

All that He had He gave for me that I might be rich through eternity. Amen and amen. Now, what should be our response to that?

How should we respond? Again, in the words of the poet, two wonders I confess, the wonder of His glorious love and my own unworthiness.