

A Mount Everest of Truth

Humility, Part 3

Philippians 2:5-8

Several years ago, Newsweek Magazine carried an article by George F. Will in which he illustrated our suit-crazed society.

He referenced the 17-year-old Maryland girl who tried out for her high school football team. If school authorities had prevented her from playing, her rights would have been violated and she could have easily sued. So they let her play. In the very first scrimmage, she got hurt. Her parents sued the school district for \$1.5 million on the grounds that no one told her of the – quote – “potential risks of serious injury inherent in the sport.” Right!

I did a little digging and found out it isn't getting any better in more recent years. I cross-referenced the most bizarre to try and determine if they really happened – and from what I could find out, they did.

Such as, the case involving Amber Carson of Pennsylvania; she slipped on a spilled drink in a Philadelphia restaurant and broke a bone in the fall. She sued the restaurant for damages and the jury found the restaurant liable and ordered it to compensate Ms. Carson for \$113,000 dollars. Which was somewhat surprising, given the fact that the spilled drink was hers – which she had thrown in her boyfriend's face 30 seconds earlier before she got up to walk out.

It still wasn't her fault.

Kathleen Robertson of Texas was awarded \$85,000 dollars after breaking her ankle after tripping over a toddler who was running through the furniture store. The store owners were especially surprised at the jury verdict, given the fact that the toddler was her own child.

Then I came across the case of Carl Truman, a nineteen year old of Los Angeles, CA who successfully won a \$75,000 settlement from his neighbor; his neighbor had evidently backed his car over the young man's hand. According to court documents, Carl didn't notice his neighbor was at the wheel of the car while he attempted to steal the hubcaps of the car – and that's when it ran over his hand.

The audacity of his neighbor.

Jerry Williams of Arkansas was awarded \$15,000 dollars plus medical expenses after being bitten by his next door neighbor's Beagle; even though the beagle was on his chain, and in his own fenced back yard where he belonged. The jury didn't award Jerry as much as he was demanding, because someone on the jury was alert enough to notice that the Beagle was more than likely provoked, given the fact that Jerry had been in his back yard for nearly an hour, shooting at it with his pellet gun.

They should have chained up Jerry and given the dog an award.

In a rather tragic case, and law suit – a young woman accidentally backed her car into a lake after spending the night out drinking. She ended up drowning because she evidently couldn't get her seatbelt unfastened in her drunken condition. Her parents sued Honda for engineering a seatbelt a person can't open while inebriated and under water; the jury found Honda 75% responsible and awarded the family of the deceased \$65 million dollars. A court of appeals later reversed that decision.

Another tragic case that misses the point entirely was in the case, George F. Will wrote about where a man savagely clubbed his wife, fracturing her skull, severing an ear and leaving her partially deaf. A judge later decided the clubber had been temporarily insane and acquitted him. Trouble was, his employer had fired him over the incident. That was a big mistake! He filed a complaint; and, after seven years of litigation, the State Commission Against Discrimination ruled that he had been a victim of "handicap discrimination,"; the Commission ordered him rehired and paid \$200,000 dollars for having caused such emotional distress.

All I can say, in many lawsuits of our day today, truth lays wounded in the alley, and injustice sits upon the throne.

Frankly, all we ever hear about today are the complaints of those who demand their rights – their rights have been violated – they deserve redress – they deserve payment.

We rarely hear of someone who actually, voluntarily, humbly gave up their rights for someone less deserving.

Well . . . there was Someone who did!

There was indeed Someone who literally gave up His legitimate rights for the benefit of people who didn't deserve any.

His name is Jesus Christ.

We arrive today at that great paragraph in *Philippians chapter 2* where the humility of Christ and the surrender of His rights is wonderfully described.

Let me simply read the text; beginning at *verse 5. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6. Who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7. But emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, 10. So that at the name of Jesus, every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11. And that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

This is the Mount Everest of truth.

Before this paragraph every false teacher stands in uncertainty and every cult in fearful pause.

For if this is true, all of them are false.

Now we could spend a sermon on each descriptive phrase – and still not begin to exhaust the implications.

We're actually given a rare look into eternity past at the Savior. We're given a rare look into eternity future where every human being will acknowledge the deity of Christ and His coming reign.

James Montgomery Boice, now with the Lord, wrote, In these few verses we see the great sweep of Christ's life . . . and we are admitted to the breathtaking purposes of God . . . they teach the deity of Christ; His preexistence; His equality with God the Father; His genuine humanity; His voluntary death on the cross; the certainty of His ultimate triumph over evil, and the permanence of His reign.ⁱ

By the way – what I just read is the Apostle Paul delivering by inspiration a list of statements about our Lord – and he's making them within 30 years of His death and resurrection.ⁱⁱ

Today, pseudo-scholars try to tell our world that these beliefs [were made up by people wanting to keep their jobs] – that they are more recent developments in the history of a slowly evolving church.ⁱⁱⁱ

These beliefs were not developed over the centuries; nothing's evolving here.

What we just read is exactly what we still believe to this day – and the Apostles began delivering these truths after watching Jesus ascend through the clouds back to His Father.

This Mount Everest of truth has been standing now for nearly 2000 years.

Some of it has already come true . . . and the rest of it is going to come true one day.

Now while I'm inclined to separate out and focus on each of these 11 theologically rich statements, what I have prayerfully decided to do is to stay in step with Paul's original intention – and cover them all in 3 sermons, Lord willing.

Paul isn't as interested in delivering a lesson here in theology – though he does; what he really wants to do is provide a lesson in humility.

He has been challenging the church in Philippi to remain united in humility.

He's been described humility in no uncertain terms – if you remember from *verse 3. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; 4. Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.*

Paul is pleading with the Philippians to live in harmony, to lay aside their selfish desires and their personal rights; their pride and a desire for attention. And now . . . and now . . . his final appeal is to point them to the humility of Jesus Christ.^{iv}

The seventeenth-century Puritan pastor and author, Thomas Brooks wisely wrote that an example is the most powerful [argument].^v

Jesus Christ is about to be shown to us as the greatest argument against selfishness and pride . . . and the most amazing example of humility and grace.

And what Paul does, New Testament scholars agree, is begin to quote a hymn text.

These verses are written with poetic prose. We don't have the original melody line, but it may very well have been one of the church's earliest hymns as they sang of their triumphant Lord. Many believe, with good reason, that the martyr Stephen was the author of this six-stanza hymn.^{vi}

What we do know is that this hymn text would have reminded the church, as we have done today in part, of the fact that all people will one day vindicate the name of Jesus Christ and His gospel . . . and in the meantime, for the church, humility and self-sacrifice and suffering and even death are only temporary moments on the way to eternal life with our risen King.

With that introduction, and in order to gather our thoughts as we attempt to scale Mount Everest – I want us to focus on the primary issue at hand – the humility of Christ. The self-sacrificing, refusal to stand up for His rights and instead to lay them down for the sake of sinners like us who don't deserve any.

Namely you and me.

As we begin going through these stanzas, I'll outline them for you today in two points.

Yes, I'm a preacher and everything's supposed to have three points.

Actually there are more, but we're going to cover two of them today.

1. The first right that Jesus Christ voluntarily surrendered was the right to live like God.

The right to live like God.

Notice verse 5. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, now notice, 6. Who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped.

In order for Paul to show us the breathtaking humility of Christ, he takes us back into eternity past.

And this becomes one of the strongest Biblical statements concerning Jesus Christ's deity that you'll find in all of scripture.

Who, although He existed – stop there. That Greek verb is “to be” . . . like Shakespeare's “to be or not to be”.

Your translation might read it that way, **“Who, being in the form of God”**.

Only in this case, the normal Greek verb “to be” isn't used here; Paul uses a stronger verb (huparchon: υπαρχων) and it's a verb used to make sure the reader understands they are describing the very essence of a person which cannot be changed – it is that part of a person which, in any circumstance, remains the same.^{vii}

It is their nature.

You could render this, “Who, existing unchangeably in the nature of God.”

Paul is effectively saying, “Look, I know I'm about to give you the example of Jesus Christ becoming a man, but you need to understand that He existed in eternity past and will exist into eternity future as the very unchanging essence of deity.”

It is His nature.

“Who, being – existing – in His unchangeable nature – **in the form of God.**

Again, Paul uses a loaded word, translated **form** here. Jesus existed from eternity past in the **form** of God.

The word is morphe (μορφη) and it refers to the outward display of an inner reality.

So Jesus existed in eternity past, outwardly displaying His inward divine nature.

Paul tells the Colossian church that God the Son is the image of the invisible God – the firstborn of all creation. (Colossians 1:15)

Now cults unfortunately hang their hat on that English translation – **the firstborn of all creation** – without taking the time to learn the Greek language.

I mean, doesn't everybody want to spend 300 dollars an hour learning Greek?

Imagine it's worth eternity for some.

Prototokos (πρωτοτοκος) is the word “firstborn” of creation and it doesn't refer to someone who was first of creation to be born – that doesn't make sense anyway since He wasn't born in Bethlehem until the first century; quite a lot had been created before that; the Greek word actually means that He preceded creation and is first over it all.

So Paul is writing to the Colossian church that Jesus Christ is the outward image of the invisible God – preceding anything that was created and having sovereignty over all that is.

So the verse actually reinforces the eternal preexistence of Christ, not some false teaching that He had a beginning somewhere in Heaven or on earth when He was born.

Paul reinforces that truth here in this text to the Philippians – He eternally preexisted in the form of God.

In other words, He outwardly manifested an inner reality – that He was equally God.^{viii}

Or to put it another way, Jesus Christ possessed inwardly and displayed outwardly the very nature of God.^{ix}

Now notice, and here's to Paul's primary point – **look again at verse 6 – although He existed in the**

form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped.

By the way, are you picking up on the fact that Paul isn't really defending these amazing statements. He's just delivering them.

You see, the amazing thing to Paul here in this context, isn't that Jesus existed from eternity past, it's that Jesus – who is the eternal image of God is about to give up all the rights and privileges related to deity.

Can you believe it? Is how he's writing here, "Can you believe that Jesus – although He preexisted from eternity past as God the Son with the inward nature of deity and the outward form of God – Can you believe He didn't hang on to that kind of glory, and humbly set it aside – for you and me?"

That's the amazing thing to Paul . . . and that's the amazing demonstration of humility in Jesus Christ's incarnation!

You see, the thing that blows Paul's mind is not that Jesus Christ is eternally God the Son, but that God the Son becomes a bondservant and dies for you and me.

Notice how Paul adds here in ***verse 6 – He did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped.***

Again – this is another stunning declaration that should remove all doubt that Jesus Christ was equal with God the Father.

In fact, the word Paul uses here for *equality* – is the word *isos* (ἰσος) and it means exact equivalence. The word is used in the world of mathematics for the isosceles triangle – a triangle with equal sides; it's used in the field of science for isomers – which are chemicals that differ in certain properties or structure but are identical in atomic weight.^x

So Jesus is distinct in His person from God the Father, but equally, eternally, divine.

I've heard people say, "But wait, Jesus never really said He was God . . . He never said He was equal with God the Father."

And I want to respond by saying, "Have you ever read the New Testament? The religious leaders wanted to kill Him because they clearly understood what He claimed to be."

For instance, John 5:18 records, "For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father and making Himself equal with God."

This is the glory of Christ – *equal* to the Father. And He's about to demonstrate incredible humility

in leaving His position and place of glory and splendor and descend to our dusty planet.

He is going to give up the right to live like God.

And He doesn't clutch the right He has to His glory – He releases it.

To put it another way, Jesus Christ had all the rights, honors and privileges of the Godhead – He lived in the unimaginable splendor of almighty God – John describes His throne sitting on a sea of glass with lightning flashing around it and angels circling and singing, Holy, Holy, Holy.

Paul writes here at the end of ***verse 6 – it wasn't something to be grasped.***

Or you can render it, "clutched."

He didn't hang on with a tight fist . . . He effectively opened His hands and allowed royal privileges to slip from His grasp.

The Son who has equal rights with the Father; will literally give up His favored position with God the Father and God the Spirit and with humility, descend the ladder from Heaven to earth.

We want to climb the ladder . . . He voluntarily came down.

I will never forget reading the Detroit News as a seminary student; it had a featured section that day, recalling the history of the automotive geniuses and entrepreneurs – men with names like David Buick – a man who became a multi-millionaire, but eventually lost his money and ended up in poverty. Or the name of William Durant, who forged a company he named General Motors by talking David Buick and a French race car driver named Louis Chevrolet into joining him. It was said that more than 50 men became millionaires by hitching their wagon to his creative genius. But like David Buick, Willie Durant eventually lost control of the company along with his fortune and eventually went bankrupt. In fact, his last job was managing a bowling alley in Flint, Michigan, until his death around 70 years ago.

What incredible reversals of fortunes!

They pale in significance when you consider the splendor of living like God in the luxury of eternity – but then, voluntarily releasing your grip and descending from riches to rags on planet Earth to live and die for mankind.

And think about this . . . if we were God, and we decided to descend in humility, we would at least arrange to land on clean sheets, not straw in a feed trough; and we would have had the finest physicians ensuring our care and our mother's health; not the witnesses of cattle and the stench of manure!

He is choosing to give up the right to live like God – the right to live with all the privilege and honor and glory as the preexisting, eternal, equally divine God, the Son.

Paul doesn't want us to miss it . . . Jesus Christ demonstrated His humility not by grasping, but by giving.^{xi}

2. Jesus Christ not only surrendered the right to live like God, He surrendered the right to act like God.

Paul goes on to write in verse 7. ***But emptied Himself . . .***

He emptied Himself. Theologians refer to this as the “kenosis of Christ – the emptying of Christ” taken from the verb *kenōō* (κενοῶ).

The question is, of what exactly did He empty himself? Did He cease to become God?

The original word translated “emptied” is *κενοῶ*, can be understood to mean, “to empty ones’ hands.”

In every other instance in the New Testament of this verb – “to empty” – it means to deprive something of its use.^{xii}

Rienecker, a linguist, writes that this verb is a graphic expression of His self-renunciation and His refusal to use what He had to His own advantage.^{xiii}

Jesus is literally giving up His right to act at will like the God He is.

Which is exactly what you see happening in the Gospel accounts of His life and ministry.

His miracles were never for His own comfort – they were always for the benefit of others. In fact, most often, His miracles made His own life more difficult.

But that's the point . . . Jesus *gave up the right* to act out His attributes for His own benefit.

He could have smashed His way through history. He could have pulled rank anytime He pleased.

He could have manipulated everything to His own liking – “I don't want freezing rain today . . . and I don't want any more snow this month . . . in fact, it's a little too cold outside today . . . so let me change that.”

Think about it – why slave over some workbench with a hammer or a chisel as the son of a carpenter; He could have snapped his fingers like some Genie and wallah! There's the table or that plow . . . why not? I would have!

Just think of what He could have done for the family business!

Yet He was willing to grow to manhood in an insignificant little town named Nazareth. He was willing to be an unknown carpenter without any halo around his head or Superman suit underneath His robe.

In fact, He was so ordinary that, when He announced who He was, even His half brothers and sisters did not believe Him . . . the Messiah? Not a chance! Him . . . God? No way!

Will He stand up for His Divine right and eliminate all opposition and vindicate His claim?

No . . . one author writes, “the kenosis – the incarnation – was a voluntary deprivation of the exercise of [who He was].^{xiv}”

Now notice, once again, as Paul describes this act of humility:

v. 7. He emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant.

The form of a servant – there's that word again – *morphe* (μορφή) the very nature and essence of a servant.

You see, Jesus isn't just taking on the appearance of a servant; He's taking on the very nature of servanthood!^{xv}

Paul is careful here to communicate that Jesus didn't give up his divine nature; He added another nature to His divine nature.^{xvi}

Jesus Christ will have both a divine nature and a human nature – so, He did not give up deity in order to join humanity.

Sam Gordon wrote it this way – At His incarnation, Jesus became what He never was, yet never ceased to be what He eternally is.^{xvii}

What a stunning descent of humility: at His conception, for the first time in all of history, the preexistent Son of God becomes a human being. He is now both God and man – the God-man.

But again, that's not Paul's primary interest here.

Jesus didn't just become a man – He, the sovereign Lord, chooses to become the lowest class of man; in fact, Paul uses the word *doulos* (δουλος) here – in unfiltered terminology, Jesus became a slave.

The sovereign assumes the status of a slave.^{xviii}

A *doulos* had no personal rights . . . they lived to fulfill the will of their master; they owned nothing . . . everything they had either belonged to their master or was borrowed.

The church in Philippi was struggling with the normal issues of personality and power and priority – the grasping and the clutching.

The way of the world would have told them – “That’s the way to live! The measure of success is determined by how many people serve you!

Jesus Christ is demonstrating that the measure of success is in how many people you serve.

In the first century, among other duties, a slave was required to carry other people’s burdens.^{xix}

To carry their load; to do their heavy lifting . . . to carry their burdens.

He’s still serving you and me today.

But let’s take a closer look – did Jesus really live like a bond-servant?

Have you read the Gospels? Jesus borrowed:

- a place to be born
- a place to sleep
- a boat to cross the Sea of Galilee
- an animal to ride into Jerusalem upon
- a house to sleep in
- a room in which to eat with His disciples
- a tomb in which He was buried

He borrowed everything!!

He was the only person to walk the face of the earth with the right to have anything He wanted. Yet He never took advantage of His divine right nor did He ever claim special privileges.

He surrendered the right to live like God and He surrendered the right to act like God.

He wrapped a towel around His waist and demonstrated that He indeed had come to be a Servant . . . and to serve.

Now the last thing Paul would ever want the church in Philippi – and us – to conclude is something like, “Well, isn’t that wonderful of Jesus? Isn’t He amazingly humble?”

He is . . . but that’s not the application. Go back to **verse 5 where Paul began: *Have this attitude in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.***

This isn’t just for Jesus – this is for you . . . and me . . . this is for the church.

This is the way we are all to live. To voluntarily surrender our rights, for the sake of others – and for the glory of God.

In his book on Friendship, Ted Engstrom wrote of a wife who demonstrated this kind of self-less, gracious, loving servanthood.

Her husband had been paralyzed later in life. The author included a letter that this paralyzed man wrote to his grown son, describing the example of his mother’s servant spirit. He writes,

Son, few men know what it’s like to receive appreciation for taking their wives out to dinner when it entails what it does for us. For us it means that she has to dress me, shave me, brush my teeth, comb my hair, wheel me out of the house and into the garage; take the pedals off my chair, stand me up then turn me and sit me down in the seat, the twist me around so that I’m comfortable; fold the wheelchair, put it in the car, go around to the other side of the car, start it up, back it out, then get out of car and close the garage door, get back in the car and drive to the restaurant; then she gets out of the car, unfolds the wheelchair, opens the door, spins me around, stands me up, seats me in the wheel chair, pushes the pedals out, closes and locks the car, wheels me into the restaurant, then takes the pedals off the wheelchair so I won’t be uncomfortable. We sit there and have dinner – which means she feeds me one bite at a time throughout the entire meal. When it’s over, she pays the bill, pushes me out to the car again and reverses the same, tedious routine. When it’s all over and finished and we’re back inside the house, she’ll look at me and say, “Honey, thank you for taking me out to dinner. I never quite know what to say.”^{xx}

Words are hard to find in the face of genuine, selfless servanthood.

Paul is saying, “Look, if Jesus Christ can give up these incredible divine rights . . . who are we to hang on to ours?”

Selfless, humble attitudes overflow into selfless, humble actions of grace and love.

And we grow just a little bit more into the image of the Son of God, our Savior, and Jesus Christ.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 3/1/2015 by Stephen Davey.

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ii Adapted from Boice, p. 109

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- iii Ibid, p. 110
- iv William Barclay, The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians (Westminster, 1959), p. 34
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- xiv Motyer, p. 113
- xv Life Application Bible: Philippians, Colossians & Philemon (Tyndale, 1995), p. 57
- xvi Ibid
- xvii Gordon, p. 80
- xviii Ibid
- xix MacArthur, p. 129
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