**The Model of Spiritual Unity**
Scripture: Philippians 2:5-8
Code: 50-15

Open your Bible, will you please, to the second chapter of Philippians, and I want you to look with me at verses 5-8, 5-8. The passage before us is deep. It is majestic. In many ways it is both overwhelming and unfathomable. And certainly we would agree that the text that we look at this morning would have to be included among the most important and glorious texts in all the New Testament. It describes the condescension of the second person of the Trinity into human incarnation. It is the single greatest New Testament passage on God becoming man.

Apparently, from study of the Greek language of this passage, it was a hymn. Very likely these verses were sung by the early church. No other New Testament passage could so completely, and with so much detail in its presentation, focus on the event of God becoming man. It is what theologians have called a Christological gem, or a Christological diamond that sparkles brighter than perhaps any other passage in the New Testament. It is unparalleled in the New Testament in its strong statement about the incarnation of God in Christ.

But listen carefully. As strong as it is theologically, as profound as it is theologically, as unfathomable as it is theologically, the passage is first and foremost ethical. It has to do with motivation for Christian living more than just facts of theology as great as those facts are. Follow me as I read verses 5-8. "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

As I said, the theological richness of the passage is really beyond our ability to grasp or explain. But as theologically profound as it is, you will note from verse 5 that its purpose is as an illustration of a proper attitude. And the writer in even looking at the incarnation of Jesus is not viewing the incarnation for its own sake, but as an illustration of humility. And therein is the ethical implication here.

The main point here is not to identify that God became man, but to show that in God becoming man you have the supreme illustration of humility, an illustration which we are called to follow. Here you

see self-sacrifice. Here you see self-denial. Here you see self-giving. Here you see humble love. The key to understanding the ethical nature of the passage is verse 5, "Have this attitude in yourselves." What attitude? What attitude are you talking about, Paul? “I'm talking about the attitude I just described in verses 3-4.” And what attitude is that? Look at it. "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests but also for the interests of others." “Have this attitude in yourselves” - this self-effacing, self-sacrificing, self-denying, self-giving, humble attitude.

And why are we to have this attitude? Verse 2, "in order that the church may be of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, and intent on one person." For the sake of the unity of the church. And why should we be motivated to the unity of the church? Verse 1, "Because of all the encouragement Christ has given you, because of all the consolation of love He has given, because of all the fellowship you enjoy in the Spirit, because of all His affection and compassion toward you." Well, why is it important to the Holy Spirit? Because He is the Spirit of unity. Why is it important to Christ? Because He is the One who prayed that they may be one.

The flow is obvious here. It is of deep concern to Christ, it is of deep concern to the Spirit that the church be one. That unity is defined in verse 2. The means to that unity is given in verses 3-4, and it has to do with an attitude of humility, where you look on others as more important as yourself, and where you are as concerned about their needs and their interests as you are your own. Unity in the church comes out of humility, and humility is nothing more than considering others and their needs more important than you and yours.

And so the principle comes in verses 3-4, and the illustration in 5-8. If you want a model to look at, to see how this humility works, then “have this attitude in yourselves which was also in” - Whom? – “Christ Jesus.” He's the model. He's the perfect ethical illustration of humility. The fact is, and you know it as well as I do, that He is the pattern for us to follow in every area of life - not just in the matter of humility - but in every area of life. First John 2, verse 6, John says, "the one who says he abides in Him" - that is, in Christ - "ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked." We are to pattern our life after Him. The apostle Paul certainly made that very clear in 1 Corinthians 11:1 when he said, "Be followers of me, as I am of Christ." In 1 Thessalonians 1:6, when he said essentially the very same thing. It is exactly what Paul had in mind when he wrote in Romans that we are to look to our neighbor's need. And then he says in Romans 15, "For even Christ pleased not Himself, but His neighbor for edification," is the idea.

Christ is the model of humility as He is the model of everything for us. That's why in Matthew 11:29 Jesus said, "Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly." “Learn humility from Me.” That's why in John 13 He says, after having washed the disciples’ feet, "Love one another as I have loved you." And how had He loved them? By self-sacrificing, humble service in washing their dirty feet.

So Paul is drawing on Christ as the model of humility, which is the means of unity. He Himself said He was the model of humility in Matthew 11:29 when He said, "learn of Me." He said He was the model of humility in John 13 when He washed the feet and said, "That's how I want you to love each other in the same sacrificial way." And so Paul literally follows the lead of Christ Himself and says He's the model of humility. And then he chronicles in verses 6, 7, and 8 the descent of Christ. And here you have as if He comes from heaven to earth in a series of steps, climbing down, as it were, the various factors of the descent of Christ to humiliation that is the model for us.

There has never been such a clear demonstration of the character of humility as there is in the Son of God coming to this earth to die. And so Paul points us to Christ. Frankly, we can't copy His deity; we never will. We cannot emulate His incarnation. We cannot copy His perfection. We cannot copy His miracles. We cannot copy His redemptive work. But we are called to pattern our lives after His humility.

So verse 5, then, is a transition from exhortation to illustration. It takes us from the exhortation of verses 3-4 to the illustration, who is none other than Christ. And listen, as deep as the passage is theologically, I say again, it was intended as a practical illustration of an exhortation to humility. So what we're going to do this morning is look at it in that light. And then next Lord's day we'll go back through the passage and look at it theologically, because we can't ignore the theology of it. But we have to do that after we've understood the implications of it practically, because that was the writer's primary intention.

Let's follow the steps. Verse 6, it begins with this statement: “He existed in the form of God,” “He existed in the form of God.” That's where it all began. And that means to say He is God. The word "form," as we will see in our further study next week, has to do with nature, essence, innate being. He is God. He existed in the form of God. Before the incarnation He preexisted as God. And this emphasizes the point from which His humiliation began. He is by nature fully God. Jesus possessed the very being of God. And this is the high point from which He stoops. He descends, as you can well see, from a level which we will never know or experience, for we will never be as God.

But He gives us a pattern to follow, because He comes down from a lofty, lofty level - the highest in the universe, God. But there's a pattern even for us in this. Are we not the children of God? Are we not the sons of God and the daughters of God? Are we not “blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus”? Are we not the chosen? Are we not the beloved out of the world? Are we not the anointed by the Holy Spirit? Are we not those special people who have been given the promise of heaven's eternal glory? Are we not priests? Are we not chosen vessels? Are we not the ambassadors of Christ? Do we not possess as Christians an exalted position as sons of God indwelt by the Spirit of God? And so our humiliation, too, begins from a lofty level.

It starts with a recognition of the fact that we have been lifted up by God's grace, and we too must begin our humiliation from a lofty starting point. Notice the descent now. The second statement, "Although He existed in the form of God, He did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped." Here's the second step. “He...did not regard equality with God” which, by the way, explains the phrase "the form of God." We conclude that “the form of God” means the same as “equal with God.” *Isos*, the Greek word, means “exactly equal.” But He “did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped.”

Now notice, please, humility begins with a recognition of a lofty calling, and the first step down is an attitude. And the attitude is that this loftiness of My calling is not something to be clutched. It is not “something to be grasped.” It is not something to be seized and kept. It is not something to be selfishly held on to as such a prized possession that it is only to be exploited and never set aside for anyone else.

That wasn't Jesus' attitude. As God He had all the rights and privileges of God, which He deserved and for which He had every right and from which He could never be disqualified. But He did not have an attitude that selfishly *clutched* all of His privileges. And that's the first step down when you begin to loosen your grip on the possessions and privileges that you have as a believer that provide that exalted identity, and you become willing to start the process down. Think of Christ as God in a favored position with unimaginable privileges. That position was infinitely perfect, infinitely fulfilling. He was infinitely worthy of it and could never be disqualified from it. But He didn't have an attitude to cling to it if by letting go of it He could serve someone else. That's where humiliation begins.

Sure, we see ourselves as called and set apart from the world and lofty and high and lifted up in a spiritual sense, but we have to hold that lightly for the sake of the needs of others. Anyone who stoops begins with that kind of attitude. I will not clutch my privileges, possessions, rights, blessings,

no matter what my elevated position might be.

The next step down in the descent of Christ and the pattern for us, verse 7, says, "but emptied Himself." Now the attitude becomes an action here. The attitude becomes an action. The attitude said, “I won't hold on to these things; I don't clutch them; I am ready to let go of them if for the sake of others I must stoop.” The attitude, then, led to the action and “He emptied Himself.” This is a profound statement. We will try to plumb some of its depths next time. All you need to know for this morning is that He divested Himself in some way of His privileges. He let go of some things in the process of coming down.

He didn't cease to be God; that's abundantly clear from the New Testament. He even claimed while on earth to be God, saying things like, "If you've seen Me, you've seen the Father." He was still God, but He had set aside and emptied Himself of some of His privileges. Why? To come all the way down for the sake of unworthy sinners because their need was so desperate. That's how humility works. Starts at a lofty point, has an attitude that doesn't clutch what it possesses, and releases those things, emptying oneself and coming down to meet the needs of others.

What did He give up? Have you ever thought about it? What did Jesus give up? For one thing He gave up heavenly glory. In John 17 He prays to the Father in verses 4-5, and He says, "Father, restore Me to the glory I had with You before the world began," which means He must have given up His heavenly glory. He did, He did. He longed for that *pros ton theon*, as John calls it, that face-to-face communion with God. That's why He went so often to the Mount of Olives to pray, because He loved that intimate communion with the Father that He had in heavenly glory, but He gave it up.

Secondly, He gave up the independent authority that He had as God, the second person. He gave up that independent authority, and Hebrews 5:8 says that “He learned obedience.” I don't think He had ever known obedience prior to that time. He operated independently as God operates independently, even within the Trinity. But He learned obedience as a Son. And He said in John 5:30, "I have come to do what the Father wants Me to do, and I resign Myself to His will."

The third thing He gave up were the prerogatives of His divine nature. He limited His own divine attributes. In Matthew 24:36 He said He didn't even know the time that the Father had in mind for the setting up of His kingdom. He said “no man knows...not even the Son.” And so He willingly set aside some of the exercise of His divine attributes. He limited, in that case, His omniscience.

The fourth thing He set aside were His eternal riches. It would be impossible for me to explain how rich He was, but I know what 2 Corinthians 8:9 says. It says “He was rich, but for your sakes He became” - What? – “poor.” And He was so poor He said “the foxes have holes, the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head.” I always think about John's gospel where it says, "And every man went to his own house, and Jesus went to the Mount of Olives." Why? He had no house. Poor.

He gave up heavenly glory, intimate communion with the Father. He gave up independent authority as God. He gave up the prerogatives of His divine nature. He gave up personal riches. And here's one - He gave up a favorable relationship with God. What do you mean by that? Hear His words: "My God, My God, why have You” - What? – “forsaken Me?” He gave up a favorable relationship with God for an unfavorable one. Alienated from the very God of whom He was part. Second Corinthians 5:21 puts it this way: "He became sin for us, and He was the one who knew no sin."

He gave up a lot. But that's what humility does. And that's what Paul is saying here. Humility recognizes its rights and its privileges as a child of God but doesn't clutch those things. But rather, because it sees the need of another, is willing to divest itself and stoop.

How far does it go? Let's follow it down. It says in verse 7, "He emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant." It comes all the way down to slavery. There's no condescension apparent in this because Jesus is an illustration of One who literally became a *doulos*, “a bond-slave” - all the way down, all the way down - from King to slave. And may I say to you, this is not theatrical? This is not a Halloween costume. He didn't put on the garment of a slave; He became one. It says in verse 6 that He was “in the form of God,” and in verse 7 that He took “the form of a bond-servant.” Whatever "form" means in verse 6 it means in verse 7, and in verse 6 it means “essential character,” and in verse 7 it means the same thing. He literally took on the essential character of a slave. This was not theatrical, this was reality. He said, "I am among you as one who serves" (Luke 22:27). Matthew 20:28, "the Son of Man didn't come to be served, but to serve, to give His life." You see, He waived the exercise of His rights as God and did only what God asked Him to do. Came all the way down, emptied Himself, and became a slave. And He served men as One who was a slave.

He even went to the point where it says in Isaiah 53:6 that God laid all our iniquities on Him. Slaves carry burdens, and He carried the greatest burden any slave could ever carry - the burden of sin for us. You can ask a slave to carry a lot of things, but only God could ask Christ, His slave, to carry the burden of your sin, which He carried. What a servant, and what a model - what a model.

His service to sinners took the form of total identification, total identification. Look at the next step down. Verse 7, "being made in the likeness of men." He became like us. He had all the attributes of humanness. He became a genuine man, really the Second Adam, truly human. He was not a reasonable facsimile. He was a man.

I want to say something to you that I don't want you to misunderstand. When God became man in the form of Jesus Christ, He did not become man as man was pre-Fall. You understand that? He did not become man as Adam was in his innocence. He became man in the sense of partaking of the results of fallenness. You say, "What do you mean by that?" Well, ask yourself some simple questions. “Did He feel pain?” Yes. “Did He feel sorrow? Did He weep? Did He have strong crying and tears? Did He ever hunger? Did He thirst? Was He weary? Was He weak?” And here's the final one, “Did He die?” Death was the result of - What? - the Fall. This is not a, this is not God taking on the unfallen character of humanity, this is God taking on the fallen character of humanity with one significant element eliminated. What is it? Sin. "Being in all points tempted as we are," Hebrews 4:15, "yet *without* sin." Never sinning but feeling the results of the Fall He became one of us. Otherwise how could He be “in all points tempted like as we are”? How could He suffer and be a sympathetic high priest if He had a pre-Fall humanness? Because He wouldn't have anything to sympathize with. No, He went all the way down to walk in our skin, as it were, to sympathize and empathize, and he says that's the model, that's what humility does.

Humility realizes its rights and privileges but humility starts down. First step down it holds very loosely to those privileges, doesn't clutch them. It empties itself when necessary. It comes all the way down to serve, and it even gets into the skin of those it serves. Total empathy, sympathy, compassion. These are the steps of humiliation that are the model for us.

Sixth, the next step down, verse 8, "and being found in appearance as a man." That is most interesting. I wish we had more time to talk about that. What that means is very much like what it says at the end of verse 7, but from another perception. Verse 7 says as a fact He was “made in the likeness of men.” This one says He appeared as a man, and it views it from the vantage point of the people who saw and experienced Him. And what it is saying is He was so much like them that they thought Him to be no different than them. And that is the supreme compliment. They didn't have any feeling that there was one condescending to them. They didn't have any feeling that this was a reluctant stooping down. They didn't have any feeling that this man did not understand them. No, what it's saying is He appeared as a man to them. They found Him in appearance as a man, so much so, by the way, that most of them didn't really know who He was, did they? So much that He appears

a man that they, they really thought Him no better than themselves. That's tragedy on the one hand but on the other hand, what an illustration of humility. They didn't even see Him as any different than them.

I've been reading a fascinating book about Calcutta, India. A man who went there and decided that if he was going to have some kind of impact on the people in the slums he would have to live there. And that's where he lives. The people in the slums - in a place called the City of Joy, which is the name of a slum - have accepted him as one of their own. From his viewpoint it was the only way that he could touch their life in a significant way.

Jesus did the same thing. He came to live in the slums like the people in the slums live, in poverty and deprivation, pain and sorrow, with everything except sin - it never touched Him; it couldn't touch Him. He so perfectly condescended, so totally identified with men, so completely gave Himself to them and their needs that they didn't know He was anything other than one of them. That's sad on the one hand, but what a picture of humility. You could say, in a sense, we have begun to fulfill verses 3-4 here, when they don't see us as any higher than they are. But follow this, He hasn't even reached yet the bottom.

There's a seventh step down. In verse 8 it says, "He humbled Himself." You say, "Wasn't it humble enough to be a man?" No. "Wasn't it humble enough to be a poor man?" No. "Wasn't it humble enough to live the way they did with a simple life? He didn't ask for a palace. He didn't ask for a chariot. He didn't ask for servants. He didn't ask for a wardrobe. He didn't ask for golden jewelry. He didn't ask for anything. He lived as one of them, appeared as one of them to them. Wasn't that enough?" No. He stepped lower, down below that. It wasn't enough just to be one of them, He went below that. Think of it. The God who made the universe standing alongside a man named Joseph, helping him make a wooden yoke in a carpenter shop in Nazareth. What condescension.

But He went even below just working alongside men. He went down further than that. How low did He go? Verse 8, He became “obedient to the point of death.” He went so low that He was willing to die for men. Now there is the epitome of humiliation. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." He didn't have to die; He volunteered. No man took His life from Him; He gave it up. It was an undeserved death. And it was a death of a humble person. He went all the way down to die. You say, "Why did He do that?" Because that was the way in which men had to be served, because there was no way to deliver them from sin apart from death. Since the wages of sin were death, somebody had to die. Since God required a sacrifice, someone had to be the sacrifice. And if He was to help man truly, He would have to die in man's place and pay the penalty for his sin.

Humility, you see, goes as far as it has to go to meet a need. It goes as far as it has to go to meet a need. What a model this is.

How far did it go? “To the point of death.” That's not even the final rung in the ladder coming down. Look at the last one: “even death on a cross.” That is the worst form of tortured death man has ever devised. I have been writing the last couple of chapters on volume 4 of the Matthew commentary, all about the death of Christ. I've been writing that over the last couple of weeks and reliving every little part of the crucifixion revealed in Scripture and recognizing the incredible pain, the unbelievable shame and nakedness and disgrace, to say nothing of the spit of people and their blows and their punches and jeers. And beyond that, the desertion of God, the guilt of sin, excruciating experience of the cross. But that's how far He went for sinners who didn't deserve it, who didn't even want it, and who still don't want it except that God in His free, sovereign grace gives it to them.

And sometimes humility is painful, and sometimes it’s unfair, and sometimes it’s misunderstood, and usually it’s very costly. But Jesus is the model; He's the example. Do you see the pattern?

You say, "Well, boy, I wish we had unity in our church." The price is high, the price is high. You say, "What's the price?" Humility, and humility is defined in the model of Christ. That's the pattern we have to follow, people. There are no shortcuts, no quick fixes. We'll have unity when we have humility. We'll have humility when we do like Christ did - we come all the way down. I hope that every time you read that passage you'll not only think about Christ but you'll compare yourself to the standard, because that's the standard of humility. I wish we had time to go to verses 9-11, because that's what God does in response to the faithful humiliation - He exalts. But we'll see that later.

Look at your own heart this morning, will you with me for a moment? Let's bow together in prayer.

Lord, we confess, right now, that we love to live on level one. We love to exist as children of God, blessed, chosen, gifted, graced, empowered, called, set apart, priests, a royal family - we love that. But, Lord, how hard it is to let go and come all the way down where we look on the things of others, not just our own, and where we consider others “more important than ourselves.” That's what You've asked us to do. Forgive us, Lord, for not doing it. Please forgive us and strengthen us that we might humble ourselves. May we see in our dear Christ the pattern for our own humility.

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