

Philippians 2:5–8 (NKJV)

5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, 7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

What does it take for this little body of believers here in Oakland Maryland to have unity?

Really, how hard can it be?

How do we do what Paul commanded us to do in verses 2-4?

Philippians 2:2–4 (NKJV)

2 fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. 3 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. 4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

Surely we can do this by our will power and good intentions can't we? Surely we are **good enough people** that we can do this simple thing? Can't we all just get along like civil human beings? Won't that suffice?

We need to understand that what Paul has already **told us to do** is very different than what you will see in a social club or a work place.

Paul is telling us to have an **unworldly attitude** toward **others** in our church and our world.

We have talked about needing to have an **other-world perspective**. We must be looking **higher** than our own little self. Paul has already held up **his** attitudes as something **we can model**. He has told us that in **his** life experience, existence is for the **sake** and **interests** and the **service** of Christ. And death is the reward of all rewards.

So we have a human model.

But Paul is aware of how hard this unity really is to maintain. He knows how hard it is to maintain a Kingdom perspective, a heavenly mindset. He knows that he is calling us to something that **will not happen** due to us being on our **best behavior**. He is talking about a miracle in the world of human interactions. He is talking about humans not acting solely for **their own** best interest. In fact he is talking about people who are **quick** to pay a price **they are not required to pay** to benefit those who are likely to **never repay** our efforts.

How does that happen? How can we, in our heart of hearts be inspired to raise to this level. What can Paul tell us to inspire us to take that next step? What fuel can he give our minds to cause this to happen?

Those are really the questions we should **come** to our passage today **with**. **How can we think in such a way that will lead us to be a body of Christ that will carry out the attitudes of Christ to fulfill the will of Christ?**

Now we are ready to read our text again. Because this is what the text is intended to show us.

Philippians 2:5–8 (NKJV)

5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, 7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

Who in life deserves the greatest worship from human beings?

Who in the church of Christ is worthy to be the most honored and served?

Whose authority should never be questioned or obedience to His commands never be delayed?

Who deserves us to serve at His feet and bring Him even the least thing He might desire?

Whose motives should we never question and His wisdom at what He brings our way never be doubted?

We could go on, but I think we get the point. It is Jesus Christ.

He more fully deserves to be served by human beings than any person who has ever existed.

Then there is us. How much do we deserve to be worshipped? How much do we deserve to be honored or served? How much authority do we hold? Do we deserve that anyone should serve at our feet? How much should people question our motives or wisdom?

I think the point is made. We may deserve some things to a minimal degree, in terms of human relationships. But the degree is **tiny** compared to what Christ deserves.

And that brings us to our first verse.

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

It is important to understand right off the bat that the mindset should be in **you plural**. In other words, this should be the predominant mindset in our body. While it must be applied individually, it should be evident corporately. This is how **the church**, when it is **really** the church, thinks.

Now note that we are to copy the attitude that the most deserving person in human history had. We should copy the mindset of that person who deserved way better than we will ever deserve. We should take upon ourselves the mindset of our King and Savior and Lord.

And what was it?

6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, 7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

Jesus had the **right** to everything that **our flesh** could ever crave for. And He laid it all aside for the good of those He loved.

He deserved praise, adoration, respect, a good reputation, attention, service, being ministered to, having others do His work for him, recognition, being the center of attention, appreciation, pleasure, ease, authority to make any human do what He said.

Anything that we allow ourselves to **fixate upon** and **be miserable** if we **do not get it**, Jesus had the **perfect right** to every single one of those things.

And what did Jesus do with those absolute rights that He had? He gave them up for **YOU!** If you are in Christ He gave them up **for YOU!** And not because you were so lovely. You were His enemy. But Jesus, being in the form of God gave up all the benefits of His position **for You**.

And Paul tells us, **THIS** is how unity is maintained in the body of Christ. **Maintain the attitude of Christ where everything you want, or feel you have a right to, is able to be sacrificed for the higher good of Christ and His people.**

That is, simply put, the mind of Christ Paul is appealing to.

Do you see how that is much more demanding, much more challenging than having a **code of ethics** with which we live with **one another**? This is way more than going by a bunch of rules. We **need** the rules so we know how to discern the will of God. This is not **LESS** than that. It is infinitely **more** than that.

Let me ask you, what will happen to a group of people who own this as their way of living and deciding and acting? Would it not be impossible to lack unity if we all have the mind of Christ?

That is exactly what Paul is calling for.

To maintain the attitude of Christ where everything you want, or feel you have a right to, is able to be sacrificed for the higher good of Christ and His people.

Now let's look at it backwards. What would have happened if Christ had the same attitude that **we have** toward each other? Toward our spouses? Toward our children? Toward our family?

Would Christ have done the stuff on this list if He exhibited **our** attitude? When we are living this correctly, He would have. When we are living selfishly, He would not have.

OK let's dig deeper and take it word by word.

6 who, being in the form of God

We must understand this word FORM. It is the word Morphe.

I believe the next quote is from William Barkley

Morphē is the essential form which never alters; schēma is the outward form which changes from time to time and from circumstance to circumstance. For instance, the essential morphē of any human being is humanity and this never changes; but his schēma is continually changing. A baby, a child, a boy, a youth, a man of middle age, an old man always have the morphē of humanity, but the outward schēma changes all the time. (Philippians, 35–36)

So Christ was God in essential form, in Morphe. His outward form would change. But the essence of who He was was **God** and that was not going to change at all. The way it is worded in English could be twisted to say something that it is not meant to say. But in the Greek it is exceedingly clear that this is an endorsement of the godhood of Christ.

did not consider it robbery to be equal with God,

If Christ were to declare that He was equal with God, this would **not be dishonest**. He would not be taking something that was not already his. He would not be stealing.

My cars are frequently at the garage where I get my service. Sometimes I will show up in the night, walk over to a car, and drive away in it without speaking to anyone. I do not consider it robbery to drive off in that car. It is mine. I own it. That is what is intended here. When Christ says He could have remained in heaven ruling the universe, there is **no deception** in that. He is not pretending to be someone He is not. He is not taking something that is not His.

Christ was that God.

It is so easy to **read this** and so hard to **fully grasp it**. Christ was the infinite God accepting finite limitations, for us.

7 but made Himself of no reputation,

The English Standard Versions says instead Christ Emptied Himself. This was from John MacArthur-

The Greek conjunction *alla* (but) means “not this but that,” indicating a clear contrast of ideas. Although He was absolutely “full” of deity, as it were, He emptied Himself of all of its prerogatives. Emptied is from *kenoō*, which means to empty completely. It is translated “nullified” in Romans 4:14 and “made void” in 1 Corinthians 1:17. Jesus Christ emptied Himself completely of every vestige of advantage and privilege, refusing to assert any divine right on His own behalf. He who created and owned everything forsook everything.

He also explains the following:

The Son of God emptied Himself of five divine rights.

First, He temporarily divested Himself of His divine glory.

Second, Jesus emptied Himself of independent divine authority.

Third, Jesus emptied Himself of the voluntary exercise of some of His divine attributes, though not the essence of His deity.

Fourth, Jesus emptied Himself of His eternal riches

Fifth, He emptied Himself temporarily of His unique, intimate, and face-to-face relationship with His heavenly Father—even to the point of being forsaken by Him.

John F. MacArthur Jr., *Philippians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 2001), 128.

Suppose you were a virologist who had spent your whole life in understanding viruses. Suppose you go to your local schoolboard to just bring information about the Covid virus. You begin to speak and people begin laughing at what you say and referring to stuff they read on their favorite websites about Covid, acting like **they** are experts.

Would you not want to put them in their place by humiliating them and **making much** of your credentials. Would you not want to show them the papers you had written as an expert in the field? Would you not want them to see all the awards you had received for outstanding work in the topic? Would it not be exceedingly difficult to confront **sheer ignorance** that is taking people in exactly the wrong direction, risking their lives on disinformation? Wouldn't that just get under your skin?

Would you not want to emphasize your **reputation, knowledge** about your own expertise? Of course you would. We all would.

Really think about how we have defended **our own reputations** from time to time. When people have implied some moral flaw or some theological flaw or some flaw in our motives. Isn't it so very easy to be offended? Don't we want to **set the record straight**, even though even we know our history does not deserve the moral indignation we portray?

Yet here is Christ. What is His reputation.

Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God,

Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Of the increase of His government and peace

There will be no end,

Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom,

To order it and establish it with judgment and justice

That is just one mention. There are hundreds.

And He is to **the fullest extent** every one of those things.

Yet He did not come to this earth with a single distinction that would impress people with his greatness. He set aside **His glory of who He was** for our good. He set aside the Glory of His name for us.

taking the form of a bondservant

John MacArthur does an excellent job here:

A doulos (bond-servant) owned nothing, not even the clothes on his back.

Everything he had, including his life, belonged to his master. Jesus did own His own clothes, but He owned no land or house, no gold or jewels. He owned no business, no boat, and no horse. He had to borrow a donkey when He rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, borrow a room for the Last Supper, and even was buried in a borrowed tomb. He refused any property, any advantages, any special service to Himself. Relative to His glory, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords willingly became the Bond-servant of bond-servants. The one who "was in the beginning with God" and through whom "all things came into being" (John 1:2-3) claimed as His own nothing that He had created. Among other things, a bond-servant was required to carry other people's burdens. As the supreme Bond-servant, Jesus carried the burden that no other man could carry, the sin-burden for all who would believe. As Isaiah revealed, "The Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him" (Isa. 53:6).

Christ was the Master of all things. King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He was not **required** by any moral reason to submit to anyone, or to serve anyone. He did not come to earth obeying a law. No one could look at Him and say, you are

required to do this thing or that thing. From what I can tell His Father did not even tell Him **he must**.

We all have authorities who have the right to tell us what to do within a certain sphere. We may have parents, husbands, church leaders, civil governments, or employers. We most certainly have the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and the Word of God. We must submit. And even with all those things we are required to submit to, we can do a pretty pathetic job, acting like **no one has a right to tell us what to do** unless they can do it in a way that **we like** the way they do it. And if we don't like how they are doing it, well then it must be their fault. They are doing it wrong. That really isn't submission. By our very criteria for **evaluating** our authority we are showing that it is **we** who are ultimately in charge.

But here is Christ who showed the ultimate servitude. He who was **least required** to submit showed the **most perfect submission**. Is that not the high point of irony. Yet he is our example here.

It may be good for us to examine our servanthood, our servitude. Mike used to say that the easiest way to know how good we are at servanthood is for someone to treat us like a servant. We all like to think of ourselves in glowing terms of humility until we are **ordered about**. Then we show what we really are.

and coming in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, From what I read this passage in the Greek emphasizes that Jesus was in essence God but placed in the reality of humanity. There was no game here. He did not cease being God. That could not change. But He became a man. He came in the likeness of a man. He was a man. And He was equally God.

But the second phrase, being found in the appearance of a man is basically saying that there were a whole lot of people who would come to the conclusion that He was **ONLY** a man. He came in a way that it would not be obvious that He was the **God-man**. It would appear at first glance that He was a **man-man**.

Think about this for a minute. Have you ever watched a movie where a man has the ability to dish out a great deal of harm to someone who is doing evil, but he just puts up with it when people insult him or maybe inflict minor injuries. There is something in us that wants him to set the record straight and unleash his wrath on the ignorant evil doers.

Well, when Christ walked the earth most earthlings thought He was essentially harmless and powerless. The spiritual and political leaders treated him like dirt. They thought He was just a man. Now imagine if you were Him and had a legion of angels, a single one of them could wipe out a city. What would you do when

they treated you like you were insignificant? What would you do when they insulted you and made light of your God given mission and person?

We can see that each of Paul's phrases are pregnant with meaning. They each point to what a heavy price Christ paid for our redemption. And they show us what **we must aspire to** in our attitudes as we seek to **have the same mind** that Christ had.

He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

As I looked at this I became even more aware that I have not fully presented an accurate application of humility. I have often said that humility is simply telling the truth about ourselves. I have stressed that humility has more to do with seeing ourselves as we truly are than anything else.

And I don't think that is completely wrong. To a large degree it is true. Memory does more to inspire humility in us than imagination does. All we need to do is remember everything we have done and why we have done it. No person can retain any sense of pride if they tell the truth about all their history.

But clearly this does not fit Christ. How could Christ humble himself? Christ could not bring his shame to memory and hence be humbled. He had no shame. He is the one person in history who had no regrets. So we see there is another aspect of humility, one that Christ could have. Humility is more than admitting that one's history is devoid of any status. Humility is also willing to give up **one's right of status** for the benefit of others.

I was thinking about this this week. Paul had a right to be paid. He had the status of a minister of the gospel. The fact that he was not a perfect human being did not take that right away. So Paul telling the truth about himself would not render humility in this regard. Paul could say that because of the work I do I have a right to be paid. That is a fact. But Paul was willing to **humble himself**. He was willing not to **claim that right**, for the benefit of those He was ministering to. Paul humbled himself in such a way that he **gave up the right** of receiving payment for what he did. That was an example of humility.

How did Christ humble Himself? Well, as we have said, it was not by admitting His moral failures. That would have been dishonest. He humbled Himself by accepting a status and a mission less than He deserved. A man named Paul Rees has an excellent quote.

Look at Him—this amazing Jesus! He is helping Joseph make a yoke in that little carpenter’s shop at Nazareth. This is the One who, apart from His self-emptying, could far more easily make a solar system or a galaxy of systems.

Look at Him again! Dressed like a slave, with towel and basin for His menial equipment, He is bathing the feet of some friends of His who, but for their quarrelsomeness, should have been washing His feet....

“ ‘He humbled himself!’ “Don’t forget this,” cries Paul to these dear friends of his at Philippi. “Don’t forget this when the slightest impulse arises to become self-assertive and self-seeking, and so to break the bond of your fellowship with one another!” (The Adequate Man: Paul in Philippians [Westwood, N.J.: Revell, 1954], 45–46)

I think that is the point. Christ had **every reason** to **Not** do what He did. We have **no reason** to **not mimic** his attitude.

What keeps us from the lowly services and the lowly attitudes? Is it not our sense of what we have a right to? Look at the work we have done. Should it not be noticed? Look at the sacrifices we have made. Should they not be appreciated? Look at the difficulties I have. Should they not be accommodated. We could go on.

Oh the beauty of Christ. Oh the severe humility it would have taken to simply come to this planet, let alone to come as a helpless baby dependent upon imperfect parents. To come with **no reputation**, no day to day signal of who He really was. How wonderful is our Lord and **how worthy** He is of **us following** in His royal footsteps.

became obedient to the point of death

Do you realize that it is rare that any of us can become obedient to the point of death? I suppose a martyr can. But for most of us It is appointed to man once to die. And none of us get to choose when that appointment is set. Who of us has to choose to die at the end of our lives? None of us say, Lord, I volunteer to die. No We are destined to die. We do not obey to the point of death any more than we obey by making our hearts beat another time. Those things are all destined for us. But Christ had a choice. He could do A or B. He chose death. That is very different than our lives.

even the death of the cross.

Crucifixion had a horrible history. It was developed to make a person suffer without the benefit of unconsciousness. It was designed to make a person suffer

their death in an extended method for all to see. It is one of the most hideous civil penalties ever used en masse.

Christ chose that death for you and me. It did not just happen to Him. He said **YES** to it.

What has Christ asked you to obey that is **as hard as that**? We need to remember 2 things.

1 Christ never did a single thing that deserved the kind of punishment He received. None of us can say the same.

And 2 Christ obeyed it, not for Himself but for you and me.

I cannot think of a better motivator for us to willingly accept whatever burden Christ may have for us to carry in this life.

He was obedient.

He received terrible treatment for us.

He demands our obedience.

And He has shown us **He is worthy** of any suffering we may need to face on His behalf.

Sometimes this is easier when it is active persecution because of being a follower of Christ. But it is just as true when Christ places **suffering in our path** by His Sovereign hand that appears to be just a **price of living on a sinful planet**.

Either way He is just as worthy.

Either way He has been obedient in a life that suffered in our behalf.

Either way He commands us to reflect **His** character in **our** character as we take upon ourselves the same mindset He had when He suffered for us.

With all that we saw this morning, I have a question for us.

What reason do we have for lack of unity? Do any of our reasons stand up to the **attitude** that **Christ had** when He came to save us?

Can any of us say, but Christ, I really deserve to be treated better. Christ, I really have a better reason not to love someone than **you** did? I really deserve better treatment than you deserved? I really should not have to pay such a price for someone else?

I think that is really the point of our text.