

Portrait of Humility

Humble Unity Part 7
Philippians 2:5-8 4-3-2016

Summary: Four aspects of humility: appearance (Jesus went from a form that brought him glory to a form that brought him shame, suffering, and death), selflessness (Jesus gave up the glories of heaven), servanthood (he was a free man but looked like a slave), and obedience (next week).

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Philippians 2:5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in the very form of God, did not consider that equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the very form of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross! 9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Introduction

The Staggering Reality of the Incarnation

There is an old, fictional story about an angel who was mentoring a lesser angel, and the mentor was showing his understudy around all the glories of the universe. And he sees the innumerable whirling galaxies and the vast distances and exploding, burning suns with sizes that boggle even the angels' minds, and finally they drew near to one of the galaxies and zoomed into a tiny little nondescript star inside that galaxy. And then as they got really close they could see what looked like some little specks of dust orbiting around that star. And the senior angel pointed to one of the smaller specks of dust and said, "That's the one I wanted to show you."

"That one?"

"Yes, I want you to watch that one particularly."

You're kidding, right? After all those amazing galaxies and supernovas, you're telling me there's something special about that little pebble?"

"Yes. That is the *visited planet*."

“Visited? What is that... Wait a minute. You don’t mean visited by...”

“Yes. That little blue ball, humble as it is, has been visited by the Prince of glory.”

And at those words, the student caught his breath and bowed in reverence at the mention of the Name. Then the mentor angel goes on to take the other one through a series of revelations about what took place on this visitation that leaves him stunned and incredulous. That’s just a made up story, but I tell it just to help us remind ourselves of something of the incomprehensible magnitude of the reality that is spoken of in these verses. Because it wasn’t just a visitation. That would be staggering enough, for the Creator to simply visit our planet. But it went beyond visitation to incarnation – Almighty God actually taking on human flesh and entering his own creation as a man.

It is the most staggering conceivable reality, and it’s put here as a mere illustration of an ethical principle. You see that a lot in Scripture – huge motivations to support our tiny, little ethical responsibilities.

Review

The ethical responsibility I’m referring to is the command for us to achieve unity in the church through humility.

Philippians 2:2 ...make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others more important than yourselves. 4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Then he goes on to give an illustration of that kind of humble attitude. Jesus humbled himself, and as a result, God the father exalted him to the highest place. That is that principle that appears again and again everywhere in Scripture.¹ And of all the many, many passages in holy Scripture that teach that, the greatest of all of them is Philippians chapter 2. This passage is one of the most thoroughly studied passages in all of Scripture. Many people get doctoral degrees on the strength of their analysis of this passage. It is not only one of the theological deep points in the New Testament, but it is also written in a very beautiful, poetic structure.

Here’s a literal translation:

**5 have this attitude which also in Christ Jesus 6 Who,
in the form of God existing,
did not consider it a thing to be grasped
to be equal with God,
7 but himself nullified,
the form of a slave taking,
in the likeness of human becoming.
And in appearance being found as a man
8 humbled himself
becoming obedient as far as death,
death on a cross.**

¹ James 4:6 Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

Luke 1:52 he has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.

Matthew 23:12 whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.

1 Peter 5:5 ... clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." 6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.

Psalm 18:27 You save the humble but bring low those whose eyes are haughty. Also Pr.15:33, 18:12, 29:23, Isa.2:11, 2:17, Lk.14:11, Ez.17:24, and Lk.6:20-26. And all of the beatitudes. And two different parables devoted just to this point - Lk.14 and Lk.18. It is an absolute, unalterable law. If you humble yourself, God will lift you up. He will do it in his own time, but he will do it.

That is the greatest portrait of humility ever painted, because the model who sat for the portrait was none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. And in this portrait we see that humility can be described under four headings: Appearance, Selflessness, Servanthood, and Obedience. We'll only get to the first three today.

Appearance

The very first thing he says about Jesus in this passage is that he was **in the form of God**. The NIV unfortunately tries to interpret that for you, so instead of translating it literally (**form of God**), they say **being in very nature God**. All the other major translations just translate it literally, with the word **form** instead of **nature**, and I think that's a good decision.² The Greek word just simply refers to the form of something – the way it looks. External appearance. And if we try to make it mean something other than that, we are going to miss the point that Paul is making. All through this section the focus is on Jesus' appearance – how he looked.³

Here's the significance of that: What happens when you are in heaven and you look like God? How do all the angels and heavenly beings respond when they look at the one seated on the throne, high and lifted up and gloriously exalted?

Isaiah 6:1 ...I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. 2 Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. 3 And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."

Philippians 2:5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in the very form of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the very form of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross!

When you are in heaven and you look like God, you are honored as God. But then what happened?

6 Who, being in the form of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing,⁴ taking the very form of a slave

What happens when you are on earth and you look like a slave? You are marginalized, despised, ignored, humiliated, stepped on, and abused. That is the significance of all these words having to do with appearance. Appearance is important, because your appearance is a huge factor in determining how people treat you and think about you.

Imagine a five star general who outranks everyone, but comes to an military event in the uniform of a person who just enlisted, because that is required for him to meet some need of his men. Over the course of time he has to endure all kinds of hazing and mistreatment. In fact, they single him out particularly as one to pick on. They strip him of every dignity, and out of sheer hatred and contempt for his lowliness, they despise him and take away from him every last remnant of honor. That is exactly what happened to Jesus because when he came into this world, he showed up in the form of a slave rather than the form of God. This one before whom the heavenly beings and angels had to cover their faces in his presence to

² It is true that some philosophers in classical Greek used this word to refer to intrinsic nature, but that definition cannot be supported in common use. There is a word for nature Paul could have used (*phusis*). he uses that word a dozen times, but not here.

³ In fact, the term **likeness** in verse 7 emphasizes external form even more. It is the word used in **Romans 8:3 For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering.**

⁴ The word here literally means to make empty. Theologians debate about exactly what it was that Jesus emptied himself of. But that debate may miss the point. The phrase seems to mean to nullify or make of no effect. The same phrase is used in Romans 4:14 - **For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless.** Faith is made empty. But we would not ask, "Emptied of what?" Empty in the sense that it is nullified, or brought to nothing. So the NIV translation is correct – Jesus made himself nothing.

protect themselves from his awesome glory descended into a realm in which he was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering.

Still God

Now, does that mean Jesus somehow gave up his deity while he was on earth? Verse 6 says that he was equal with God to begin with, but was he still equal with God even after he was born into this world? Absolutely.

John 5:18 For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

The cults teach that when it says Jesus was equal with God, that means he was a little bit less than God. I'm no math major, but I think I'm on pretty safe ground insisting that "equal" is not "less than." So, during those 30 some years Jesus was on earth, the Trinity was not down to two members. Jesus never ceased to be God even for a moment.

John 8:24 ... if you do not believe that I AM, you will die in your sins.

John 14:9 Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.

When Jesus took on a human nature, he never gave up his divine nature – not even a little bit. It's not like Jesus was 50% man and 50% God. He was and is 100% God and 100% man.

Humility Disregards Appearance

So Jesus was still God, but he didn't look like God anymore – that's the point. If you want to know what humility is all about, it has a lot to do with your attitude about your appearance – how other people see you. Pride is always consumed with making sure people see you in a positive light. Humility is willing to let go of that for the benefit of others. Proud people put a great deal of energy into making sure people aren't looking down on them, and they are fine with helping someone in need, just as long as they come out looking good. They are fine with being kind and giving to others and sacrificing and all that, just as long as their dignity doesn't take a hit.

You see, it's one thing to stoop from your high position down to a low position. But it's another thing to do it without letting anyone know where you started. Sometimes we are willing to humble ourselves, but even then we usually want the person to know exactly how much we are sacrificing.

"Uh, that was mine...but, I guess you can have it."

A secretary calls one of the guys over and says, "Can you grab a mop and clean up this mess, please." And the guy says, "Just so you know, I'm the CEO of this company you work for. But, no problem, I'll get the mop." I'll go ahead and take the lowly position, but first I need to let you know that I really don't belong down here.

Jesus could have been born with a halo. He could have walked around with an entourage of glorious angels. But he lowered Himself so low that he was absolutely indistinguishable from all the other humans. Almost all his life everyone thought he was just another nobody.

In fact, he appeared so human, so ordinary, that they couldn't accept his teaching. When he taught, they had the feeling they were listening to the mind of God Himself, but then they would shake that feeling off when they took a good look at Him.

Matthew 13:54 Coming to his hometown, he began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed. "Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?" they asked. 55 "Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? 56 Aren't all his sisters with us? ... 57 And they took offense at him.

He was just some local. The moment their souls started to wake up to the fact that his teaching was not human in origin, they just fell back on, "No wait – I know him. I saw him playing in the dirt when he

was a kid. I saw him go crying to his mom when he got hurt. I remember he had trouble with his Greek grammar when he was in third grade. I've seen him get so tired he had to stop and take a nap. I don't know where he got this teaching, but I know – he's nothing special. Just look at him. Does that look like some special prophet to you? He looks more like a slave!"

Was Jesus God by nature? Yes. Was he human by nature? Yes. But that's not the point. The point is his appearance. Looking like God in heaven gets you glory and honor. Looking like a slave on earth gets you spit upon, beaten, mistreated, marginalized and ultimately killed.

And for over three decades Jesus was willing to walk around looking like that.

What about you? Do you have to make sure people aren't thinking ill of you? Do you have to make sure they know you were in the right? Do you have to have credit for the good things you've done? Do you have to make it known when you know the answer and no one else does? Do you have to be somebody? Every time there is some kind of strife in the church, trace it back and what do you find? You find somebody who is a somebody. You don't find a nobody, you always find a somebody. You find someone whose opinions must be heard. Someone whose gifts must be appreciated. Someone whose importance must be recognized - regardless of what needs someone else may or may not have. Someone who is the exact opposite of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The more energy you put into making sure everyone knows how amazing you are, the less observant you are going to be about the needs of the people around you. If it's true – if you really are that amazing – God will make that clear soon enough. But your promotion of your own amazingness now isn't going to do anyone any good. It's not going to benefit anyone, including you, so why do it? Why not just be like Jesus, and be content to be thought a nobody so that we can focus on serving people and meeting their needs, and wait for God to lift us up in his timing?

Selflessness

So that is one aspect of humility – appearance. Another key aspect is selflessness. And by selflessness, I mean the attitude we saw back in verse 3 - your well-being is more important than my own comfort or preferences. If I can do something that will improve your ultimate well-being by giving up some comfort or preference – that decision is a no-brainer. That is selflessness, and the greatest example of selflessness ever given is described right here in what Jesus did. He let go of what was precious to him.

Let Go of What Was Most Precious

6 though he was in the form of God, he did not consider that⁵ equality with God a thing to be grasped

All of the benefits that were rightfully his, that he would no longer have access to when he became a man – he willingly gave all that up. He didn't think of that as something to be grasped or clutched. He let go of it for our sake.

2 Corinthians 8:9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

What kind of riches did Jesus have in heaven that he gave up when he came to earth?⁶

⁵ There is an article in front of the word **equality** that refers back to the **being in the form of God**. So literally, the sentence reads this way: **Although He was in the form of God, He did not consider that equality with God something to be grasped**. See arguments in Fee for this, arguments in Wallace against it.

⁶ One popular interpretation of this passage is that Jesus emptied himself of the independent exercise of his divine attributes. But that does not match up with the accounts we have of the life of Christ. The gospel accounts set Jesus in stark contrast to the Old Testament miracle workers, who are dependent upon God for their power. They prayed to God and asked Him to do the miracle, and they all made it clear that it was God, and not them. But Jesus was different. You don't see Jesus praying, "Father, please let this person be raised from the dead." Jesus had all the power of the Godhead available to him at every moment, and could use it at will. He had the attributes of God. He could command the wind and the waves, he walked on water, he could raise the dead, he knew the future, he could read men's hearts, he lived a perfect, sinless life, he created bread and fish and wine out of nothing, he

The Blessedness of God

It was everything required to make him infinitely, eternally happy. This is the doctrine theologians refer to as the eternal blessedness of God. On Judgment Day, when God separates the sheep from the goats, he says to the sheep: **Come and share your master's happiness!** God is infinitely happy. Before Jesus came into this world, he enjoyed infinite, eternal happiness. Happiness and joy beyond anything we have ever experienced or could possibly imagine. Our greatest, most ecstatic, exuberant pleasures absolutely zero out when placed next to this. Our capacity for pleasure now is so small that there can be no comparison.

God has infinite power so nothing can constrain him from doing that which he most desires. He is infinitely energetic with absolutely unbounded and unending enthusiasm for the fulfillment of His delights. And not only is he infinitely happy, but he has infinite capacity to enjoy that happiness.

Glory

What was He so happy about? His own glory. He was that happy before anything was created because the members of the Trinity take infinite delight in one another. That's how great God is – so great that he can satisfy all of the appetites and desires of ... even God – forever, without him getting bored. When Jesus was up on the Mount of Transfiguration, and a tiny portion of His glory was revealed, God the Father saw it and said, “This is My Son in whom I delight.” And if He delights in that tiny, limited, finite display of glory, imagine His joy being exposed to the full blast of Jesus' glory in heaven.

And the Son has that same delight in the glory of the Father.

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was (pros – toward) God, and the Word was God.

That's a relational idea. The Son was not only present with the Father for eternity past, but He was oriented toward Him. He was beholding him - enjoying him – enthralled with him. In the book *The Pleasures of God*, John Piper writes this: “God the Father has always been the landscape of the excellencies of divine glory and the panorama of God's perfections, so that from all eternity God the Son has beheld, with indescribable satisfaction, the magnificent terrain of his own radiance as seen in the Father.”⁷ And when Jesus nearing the end of His time on earth, you can just hear the longing He had to return to that blessedness.

John 17:5 And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

Love for God

In addition to experiencing glory, there is also love. The greatest joys of life involve love relationships. If you think back to the moment of your greatest happiness, it most likely had to do with your love toward someone. And the more intimate the relationship and the more precious the object of your love, the greater the joy in loving. The intimacy between the members of the Trinity is a closeness of affection that is incomprehensible to us.

Matthew 11:27 No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son...

John 1:18 No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side (lit. upon the Father's chest), has made him known.

forgave sins, and he raised himself from the dead.

⁷ John Piper, *The Pleasures of God*, 48.

Love for Us

Add to all that the joy God derives from loving us. He did not need us in any way, but delighted to create us and then love us. C.S. Lewis: “God, who needs nothing, loves into existence wholly superfluous creatures in order that he may love and perfect them.”

Psalm 147:11 the LORD delights in those who fear him

Zephaniah 3:17 ...He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing.

Isaiah 62:5 as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you

Freedom

Another aspect of the riches that Christ enjoyed throughout eternity past is infinite freedom. He was never constrained or forced by any inner deficiency or external pressure to ever do anything he didn't want to do. When Ephesians 1:5 says that He acts according to the good pleasure of His own will, it means that nothing outside of God's own pleasure drives His choices or deeds.

Psalm 135:6 The LORD does whatever pleases him, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths.

Creation

Another chest of riches was the pleasure he derived from the creation. Psalm 104:31 talks about God rejoicing in all his works. As human beings, we are limited in our ability to understand and appreciate the creation. But in heaven, God the Son had full appreciation of all of the wonders of every single thing he created. There are so many amazing things in the creation that only God can see. Ultimately, it was for God's own pleasure that he created everything. Hebrews 2:10 refers to God, for whom and through whom everything exists

Colossians 1:16...all things were created by him and for him.

Romans 11:36 For from him and through him and to him are all things.

Isaiah 43:21 the people I formed for myself

Revelation 4:11 ... you have created all things, and for your pleasure they are created.

Others

And that is just a sampling. The Bible also talks about the great joy and rejoicing of God over his name, over election, over the obedience of His children, over justice being carried out, over the Gospel and the revelation of the Gospel, over the work of redemption, over the prayers of the saints, over giving us the kingdom, over little children - he literally rejoices in all his works. All that is a very brief summary of the blessedness of God. That is what it was like for Jesus before he came to earth. So when 2 Corinthians 8:9 tells us that Christ was rich, folks, I hope you understand Christ was rich. And that is what he gave up to come meet our need.

Shock

The degree of difficulty of any suffering is related to what you are used to. I remember the first time I heard of a car with power door locks, I made fun of it. I said, “Good grief – how lazy have we become?”

But then I got a car with power locks. And one day the fuse blew, and they didn't work. And I couldn't believe what an intolerable hardship it was to lock all my own doors manually.

And we can imagine the same principle on a larger scale. If you have lived at the poverty level for the last ten years, then seeing something in a store and not being able to afford it is no big deal to you. But if your whole life you have lived as a millionaire, and then you are suddenly reduced to poverty, it would seem almost unbearable.

When Christ left the glories of heaven, in our wildest imagination we could never identify with the jolt that must have rattled his very being when he went from that to being a limited, dependent, needy human being. I'm sure there are no words to describe the agonizing, jarring shock to his whole being. We can imagine, to some degree, the shock of a sudden painful reality. We can imagine, say, waking up in the morning sick with the flu, rolling out of the warmth and comfort of your bed right into a pool of ice water. (Although there is a limit on what we can feel – God made our bodies so we go into shock and are protected from things that would be too much). You could picture embracing your loved ones, and then suddenly having them ripped from your arms and put to death in front of you. As human beings, we can fathom something like having everything that is precious to you suddenly torn away, and having most of it replaced by all the things you despise. In our worst night terrors we might be able to conceive of some of that kind of pain. But none of us – even in our most mind-bending, terrorizing nightmare, ever tasted even one grain of the sand of the infinite desert of loss that God the Son suffered in leaving heaven and coming to earth.

You may be thinking, “Being a human and living on earth isn't so bad – I don't mind it.” My guess is the average fly doesn't mind being a fly. But if you had to go from being a human being with a job and family and all your relationships and work, and become a fly – and live the life of a fly, buzzing around looking for some manure to land in, all the time aware in your little fly-brain of what it was like to be a human, you would probably be one sad little bug. But the descent from being a human to becoming a fly would be a finite descent – which makes it nothing compared to the infinite loss Christ suffered in coming into this world – that infinite free fall from heaven to the manger.

We think, “I don't want to go on the mission field – there are bugs and snakes...” I'm glad Jesus didn't think that way.

“I don't want to go down there...”

And even if you forget about everything Jesus gave up in heaven – think about what his life was like. The thing that gives you the strength to keep going in life is the hope that something good will come of your life. We all have hopes and aspirations – maybe you dream of something for your future or maybe you dream of something for your kids' future. What was Jesus' life like? How would you like to live a whole life knowing that the only thing you have to look forward to in life is to eventually, in the prime of your life, come to a violent, bloody end? And that it will happen as punishment from your Father in heaven, with whom you have enjoyed nothing but unbroken perfect intimacy forever. What was it like to live a whole life with nothing but that to look forward to, and in the mean time living in poverty and being soundly rejected by the very people for whom you are doing all this?

If you had a conversation with Jesus just before he became a man, you might say, “If you do that, you're going to be laid in a feed trough. You're going to grow up in poverty,” he would've said, “That doesn't matter. My people need me to come, and so I am coming.”

“You're going to be marginalized and despised.”

“Doesn't matter.”

“You're going to be rejected and mocked and abused and beaten.”

“That doesn't matter.”

“You're going to be crucified – nailed to a cross.”

“It doesn't matter. The people I love have a need; I'm going to meet the need.”

Now back to Philippians 2 verse 6 - Christ, who, being in the form of God, (who had all the riches of deity) did not consider all that as something to be grasped... It was all rightfully his. He was infinitely worthy of it, and it was good that He had it. He owed nothing to anyone – everyone owed everything to Him. But he let it go – for us. That is what selflessness looks like. You think you have rights? You have

never had anything that was more rightfully yours than Christ's glory in heaven was rightfully his. And he traded it all for the spittle of man on His face, and a crown of thorns, and blows to the head, and mockery, rejection and death. That is our example. Do you have something that rightfully belongs to you? Be willing to let go of it. What are you rich in? Don't clutch onto it – use it to make someone else rich in some way.

The problem is, there are three big impediments that will keep us from that. The three P's - pride, preferences, and pleasantness. Sometimes I will fail to do what is necessary for your well-being because I don't want to let go of my pride. Other times it's because I don't want to give up my preferences. And other times it's just a matter of pleasantness – I want my life to be comfortable. I don't want to have to experience hardship or pain or inconvenience. If you make pleasantness a priority in your life, you will never be able to love like Christ loved. He gave up pleasantness, set aside comfort, and humbled himself, all so that he could meet our needs.

And that last part is important. He didn't just give everything up just for the sake of giving things up. There is no virtue in that. It is fine for you to enjoy your comforts and your preferences. It's just that we need to hold them loosely so that when that moment comes when there is a conflict between our comforts and someone else's highest good, we are free to serve their interests because we are not so intensely clutching to our comforts.

And the greater the need, the more it calls for sacrifice. If you clean up someone else's mess so they don't have to, or if you give up some of your time to serve others, or if you do a chore when it's not your turn...that's all wonderful. But far more important than those are things that have to do with spiritual advantage. Doing that which helps the person spiritually and eternally – that is what calls for the most sacrifice. Sometimes there are things you could do to make the other person happy in the moment, but it wouldn't really be what is ultimately best for them spiritually. That's the priority – spiritual benefit. And that brings us to the third mark of humility: servanthood.

Servanthood

5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in the very form of God, did not consider that equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the very form of a servant

The translations say **servant**, because the word *slave* is politically incorrect, but the Greek word here is *doulos* – slave – someone who is owned by someone else. One who is subservient and controlled by his owner. Someone with no rights – not even the right to life. A master could kill his slave in Roman society and no one would raise an eyebrow.

So what does this mean – Jesus took on the form of a slave? That's a problem, because Jesus was not a slave; he was a free man. There were two classes of people – slaves and free men, and Jesus was free. So what are we to make of this? Some have suggested maybe this means he was God's servant – the servant of the Lord from the book of Isaiah. But I don't think that is what Paul means here, because the whole point is to show the extremes of Jesus' humiliation. And being a servant of God is actually a high title, not a low title.

The solution to this is very simple: it doesn't say Jesus *became* a slave, it says he took on the *form* of a slave. Jesus was a free man, but if you just watched him for a while, you would think, "Is that guy a slave?" You see him in the upper room the night before he died dressed like a slave – no outer garment, towel around his waist, down on his hands and knees washing the disciples' feet, and you think, "That guy looks like a slave."

Luke 22:27 Jesus said, who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.

Matthew 20:28 the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve

He looked just like a slave. He certainly wasn't rich. He had to borrow everything. He had to borrow a boat to preach from, he had to borrow a room for the Last Supper, he had no place to lay his head, and

at his, great, triumphal entry into Jerusalem as the Messiah he had to borrow an animal to ride. He was even born in a borrowed feed trough and buried in a borrowed tomb. He wasn't a slave, but he sure looked like one. Jesus lived life with the attitude that his role was to be the personal assistant to whoever needed his help.

Meanwhile we have best-selling Christian books on how to set up boundaries and protect your rights and make sure nobody takes advantage of you. We open our Bibles and we marvel at the selfless love of the Lord Jesus Christ, and how beautiful it is. And we hear him say

John 13:12 ... “Do you understand what I have done for you? ... 13 You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. 14 Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet.

And we say, “Yes, Lord.” And we close our Bibles, and not five minutes later, “It’s not my turn to take out the trash! Why do I always have to do everything...”

“I had plans!”

“This is my leisure time.”

“That’s my privilege!”

“That’s my freedom, I won’t give it up! I have my rights! I earned it!”

“I deserve a good night’s sleep!”

“I have it coming!”

“It’s my turn!”

“Treat me with some respect!”

“I’ve worked for it!”

“It’s mine!”

It’s not your turn to take out the trash. That is a benefit that “belongs” to you. But are you going to hold on to that? Are you going to seize it? Grip it? Or are you going to look to the example of Christ and loosen your grip?

Jesus took the form of a slave. He gave Himself away. That is what humility is. Humility is not thinking badly about yourself or putting yourself down. Humility is giving yourself away to meet a need.

Conclusion: The Price of Community

This is our example. This is how we attain unity and harmony in the church. You say, “Sure would be nice to have unity in the church – and be a warm, loving family.” The price is high. It doesn’t come cheap. We will have unity when we have humility, and humility is painful, and costly, and difficult, and unfair. But there is no other path for us because we are followers of Christ. So this is our example. When I have some privilege or right that I refuse to give up for others’ benefit, I am saying that that right belongs to me even more than being in the form of God belonged to Christ. And I am forgetting that I can’t give up anything for the sake of loving others without God, in his timing, reaching down and lifting me up and paying me back 100 times what I gave up.

Benediction: Romans 15:5 May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, 6 so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Application Questions (James 1:25)

- 1) Which aspect of humility comes most naturally to you? (Appearance, Selflessness/Giving, or Servanthood)
- 2) Which aspect is the most difficult for you? Do you have any idea why?
- 3) Can you think of a time when someone humbled himself or herself for your benefit? Describe the effect it had on you.