

God exalts the humble

Taking on Christ's attitudes as ours, but how?

The driving force in Paul's life as a Christian was this: "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead," **Philippians 3:10-11**.

It involved a clear goal, first of all: "attaining the resurrection from the dead." It also involved a clear method by which that goal could be attained: "becoming like Jesus in his death."

But why become like Jesus in his death? Because it was Jesus' death that got Jesus himself resurrected, **Philippians 2:8** - "And being found in appearance as a man, Jesus humbled himself and became obedient to death - even death on a cross" - the result of which was **verse 9** - "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name." God raised Jesus to the highest heights because Jesus humbled himself.

What Paul then saw in this was the key to *his own* resurrection from the dead. If he became LIKE Jesus in his death, he too would be resurrected as Jesus was. But *how* was Paul going to become like Jesus in his death? In **verse 5** we have his answer: "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus." That's the clue: we become like Jesus in his death by taking on the same attitude Jesus had. And what was at the heart of Jesus' attitude? He "humbled himself."

But how did Jesus humble himself? Paul explains that in some detail, fortunately, in **verses 6-7**:

First of all, Jesus was "made in human likeness." That included being born to a human mother, growing up as a child, having to work at a job, obeying his parents, doing family chores, getting tired, having to sleep and having to get along with difficult people. He would see through human eyes, feel as humans feel, experience the power of hormones and human nature, be tempted, and have to go through all the religious rituals of a growing Jewish lad, most of which he was, in fact, the fulfillment of himself, so he didn't have to do any of them - but he did them anyway. Why? So he could relate to us at our level, as one of us. It's a key point of humility, to be willing to come in the likeness of those we mix with.

It's like an adult being willing to relate to a toddler by getting down on the floor so they're at eye-level together. Why? Because it makes it easier for the child. The child can relate so much easier to an adult who enters his world, sees with a child's eyes and takes an interest in his childish things. And that was Jesus'

motive in being made in human likeness, too. It would make it easier for us to relate to God when God was just like us.

Jesus could have come in *God's* likeness instead, full of blazing glory and thunderbolts, just like he did when he descended onto Mount Sinai in sight of the Israelite camp. It certainly impressed the Israelites, but it also scared them enough to not want God to meet them like that again.

But as God in the flesh, Jesus came as an ordinary Jew. He grew up as a carpenter's son, and one of a string of kids in a large family. He went to school, attended the synagogue, kept the Sabbath, and no one felt any need to take any special notice of him all the way up to his 30th birthday. To the humans who knew him, he was just another human. He was one of them.

It perfectly defines the attitude of humility that Paul knew *he* needed if he too was "to attain to the resurrection from the dead." It would mean mixing with people and relating to people on their level, just like Jesus did. That must have been difficult for Paul though, because he was a deep thinking, religious-minded, self-disciplined, seminary-trained, highly intelligent man, so imagine him trying to relate to someone who was only interested in talking hockey! But Paul learnt to come in the likeness of others too, **1 Corinthians 9:22** - "[To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.](#)" It made it easier for people to relate to God when Paul came in their likeness, as one of them. So Paul humbled himself and did it. Why? Because Jesus did. It was part and parcel of "becoming like him in his death."

Secondly, Jesus took on "[the very nature of a servant.](#)" That's humbling too, because a servant is the lowest position there is. It requires viewing and treating everyone else as your superior, or "[better than yourselves,](#)" **Philippians 2:5**. And a servant always has his eyes peeled for the needs of those he's serving. A butler in the olden days, for instance, was constantly aware of his master's wishes, and some became extremely good at it, anticipating the needs before they arose, and he was ready with hat and coat before his master even knew he needed them!

So was Jesus. Before the beginning of time he anticipated our need before we even existed. God's incredible plan of adopting humans into his family would clearly require someone paying the penalty for human arrogance and rebellion, so Jesus willingly became "[the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world \(Revelation 13:8\).](#)" Before a human being had even been created, Jesus already had our greatest need met, and by his own choice, too: "[I lay down my life...of my own accord \(John 10:17-18\).](#)"

That's why Paul could say, "[Each of you should not only look to your own interests, but also to the interests of others \(Philippians 2:4\),](#)" because that's

exactly what Jesus did. His mind was geared to our interests before our universe even existed! But that was Jesus.

It became Paul, too. “As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her children. We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us...we worked night and day not to be a burden to anyone (**1 Thessalonians 2:7-9**).”

Just like Jesus, Paul laid down his life of his own accord in service to God's people. His mind, just like a butler's, was constantly anticipating their needs. “My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love (**Colossians 2:2**).” He was always thinking of what would keep the church in good spirits, because in that atmosphere it would make learning so much easier (**verse 2**). It was Paul's love of life seeing the churches flourish.

It was Timothy's, too. “I have no one else like Timothy,” Paul wrote in **Philippians 2:20-22**, “who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel.” Timothy loved to serve, not as a duty but “as a son with his father.” So did Epaphroditus, who nearly died in his eagerness to serve (**verse 30**).

It's this love of serving that lies at the heart of humility. It was certainly at the heart of Jesus' humility, “For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth,” **Romans 15:8**. Jesus didn't come as “King of the Jews” like that ridiculous sign they put over the cross, he came as “Servant of the Jews,” the complete opposite. Jesus wasn't the least bit interested in anything but serving his people, which is why Paul could say in **verses 1-3**: “We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbour for his good, to build him up. For even Christ did not please himself.”

Jesus' eyes were always focused outwards to the needs of others, and because of it God lifted Jesus to the highest heights. And exactly the same principle applies to us, **Mark 9:35**: “If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all.”

Thirdly, Jesus “made himself nothing.” It certainly wasn't his idea, then, to be portrayed in movies as a blue-eyed European, a full head's height above his Jewish countrymen, dressed in white with a serene look on his face. Instead, he was so like his fellow Jews he could slip away undetected in a hostile crowd (**Luke 4:30**).

Of all the designs he could have chosen for himself, Jesus chose a human shell that would easily disappear in a crowd. He had no desire to make himself just a little better or more special than other people to give him a slight edge. He didn't want a special charisma, or talents either, that would make people admire him.

But imagine actually choosing **Isaiah 53:2-3**. “He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.” It's the absolute opposite of what most people would choose. People will pay anything to make their bodies and skin look more desirable, and they'll cheat, kill and lie to get power. And who would deliberately choose to be rejected and despised, or have to suffer all their lives?

But that was the life Paul sought, and got, too. He was “hard-pressed, perplexed, persecuted and struck down,” **2 Corinthians 4:8-9**, but what carried him through it all was that “we know the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus (**verse 14**).” Paul knew from Jesus' example that God raised despised nothings. It didn't matter, then, if his reputation was shattered, or people turned their backs on him, or his image took a beating, or people wrecked his life with their stupidity and false accusations, because it all happened to Jesus and look what God did for him eventually.

Fourthly, Jesus “did not consider equality with God something to be grasped.” And here we get to the real guts of Jesus' humility because he was “in very nature God.” He was on the same level as God, but it wasn't a position he felt any need to defend or hang onto at all costs. He was quite willing to give it up, even lose it all. Equal ranking at all times wasn't something he sought. He could actually give up being God!

Now what human would do that?! Once you've got to the top, you don't give it up, you fight for it. You deserve it. But Jesus didn't feel that way at all. Position and rank meant nothing.

And our attitude should be the same?! But it's probably the toughest thing we could ever be asked to do, because we're driven by pride. We have this awful and constant need to be admired, desired, followed, complimented and looked up to. It drives people to become rich, drive snazzy cars, climb the greasy pole at work, dress like a fashion model, bully others into submission, and create Empires. “**Selfish ambition and vain conceit (verse 3)**” drove Lucifer into grasping equality with God, too. It's deadly. It's our worst enemy.

It infects Christians too, who think that becoming Christian suddenly lifts them several notches above the rest of humanity, when in fact, “becoming like Christ in his death” humbles us to the same level as Jesus, who didn't seek to be above or equal to anybody.

Nor did Paul. He demonstrated that in the extraordinary statement he made in **Romans 9:3-4**, talking of his fellow Jews: “[For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel.](#)” Paul was willing to give up everything, even his eternal life if that’s what it took, to help his people. He’d trade his position for theirs if he could.

But that’s exactly what Jesus did. He was utterly willing to give up his position as God and all that went with it, for our sake. So Paul had clearly picked up on Jesus’ attitude even to this extraordinary extent. How difficult that must be for Christians today, though, who are going through all their rituals and obeying all their rules and doctrines to seal their position in heaven.

The driving force behind Jesus and Paul, though, wasn’t to grasp salvation and eternity for themselves, it was to save others. To become like Christ in his death, then, is to take on the same attitude. Yet there are whole sections of Christianity (including ourselves at one time) who believe God has to reward us for our obedience, as though our obedience puts us on his level, that having obeyed we’re now in the position of expecting God to cough up with our reward.

But that’s what drives religion. It’s about grasping for oneself, and putting God (or the gods) in the position of having to reward us with more than our fellow humans get, because we worked for it; we deserve it. That never entered Jesus’ mind in all the obedience and sacrifice he did, though.

But how on earth can we become like him?

Fortunately, Paul talked about that too, in **Philippians 3:10**, when he spoke of “[knowing the power of Jesus’ resurrection.](#)” Paul knew that the only way he could become like Christ in his death and share the same suffering and humbling that Jesus himself went through, was [to experience the same power Jesus had.](#)

That’s why we Christians make such a big deal out of Christ’s resurrection, because it’s “[being united with him in his resurrection \(Romans 6:5\),](#)” that enables us to be like him. Not only, then, can we “[know Christ \(Philippians 3:8\)](#)” as he was in his humility as a human being, we can also know Christ as he is right now, as we experience him in his resurrected state creating the same humility he had in us.

Result? **Colossians 3:4** - “[When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.](#)” When Christ is our life, he creates the same humility in us that he had, so that one day God will lift us to lofty heights with him.

No wonder, then, the driving force in Paul’s life was to “[know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death](#)” - because if he humbled himself in the same way Jesus did, God would exalt him, too.