

# Kenosis: The Humility of Christ

In our previous study we have seen that the apostle teaches us in Galatians 4:1-7 that we must receive and embrace the full benefits of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. In Philippians, Paul also teaches us that we must embrace the obligation of the Incarnation.

## Philippians 2:1-11

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, **2** complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. **3** Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. **4** Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. **5** Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, **6** who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, **7** but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. **8** And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. **9** Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, **10** so 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.

### I. We are obligated (v.1)

Abraham was blessed in order to be a blessing. Paul was converted in order to convert others. Paul says in Romans 1:14: "I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome" (Romans 1:14-15). We too are obligated by virtue of the many benefits that have come to us in Christ: encouragement in Christ, comfort from His love, participation in His Spirit, the affection and sympathy from God and His people, etc.

### II. We are obligated to promote church unity (v. 2)

In verse 2, Paul teaches us that we should be of one mind, one love, and one accord in Christ. Paul was in prison and in need of many things, but he claimed that his joy would be made complete if the church in Philippi would promote the unity of the body of Christ. Paul's driving concern is revealed in 1:27-28, in which he charges the Philippians to stand firm in one spirit in order to stand against the opposition of the unbelievers in their society. In order for us to promote the unity of the church, we must at least do these things:

- a. Make every effort to resolve personal conflicts within our spiritual family
- b. As is appropriate, help others to mediate their conflicts
- c. Select godly, unifying leaders as church officers, teachers, and discussion group leaders
- d. Pray

### III. We are obligated to promote church unity through our personal humility (vv. 3-4)

The ancient preacher John Chrysostom once said, "Humility is the root, mother, nurse, foundation, and bond of all virtue." Unfortunately, we naturally are just the opposite—interested in ourselves, promoting ourselves, getting our feelings hurt when others slight us. Paul teaches that the only way we can promote unity within the family is if we put ourselves under one another. Notice that he says we must "count others more significant than ourselves" and "look not only to our own interests, but also to the interests of others."

J.I. Packer once said, "The Christmas spirit does not shine out in the Christian snob." Charles Spurgeon once said, "The higher a man is in grace, the lower he will be in his own esteem."

### IV. We are obligated to promote church unity through our humility in Jesus Christ (vv. 5-11)

It is impossible for us to humble ourselves by mere self-help or self-assertion. This will always

fail. Paul gives us the answer in verses 5-11. We are “in Christ Jesus.” He not only gives us His example, but He also gives us His power, because we are in union with Him. In this great passage in verses 6-11, the apostle shows us the work of Jesus Christ in His humiliation (vv. 6-8) and in His exaltation (vv. 9-11). F.B. Meyer once said of this text, “In the whole range of Scripture, this paragraph stands in almost unapproachable and unexampled majesty.” Because Jesus Christ has gone to the lowest place—not only incarnation and servant hood, but death, even on a cross—God has exalted Him to the highest place. Jesus’ incarnation leads to absolute glory, for Him and for us. The benefits we derive from His humiliation are well-known, but the benefits we also derive from His exaltation need to be remembered: we exult in His deserved exaltation over the universe, we now have access to the throne of grace through Jesus Christ, we have received the fullness of the Holy Spirit which Christ has sent us from the right hand of the Father, and we now look forward to our own future resurrection and ascension to the right hand of God.

Indeed we are obligated to promote church unity through our personal humility in Jesus Christ.

### Discussion Questions

1. Why do we sometimes resist the idea that we are under obligation to the Lord? Why, according to Paul in verse 1, are we obligated?
2. What, in verse 2, does Paul say we are obligated to do? Why does he stress this virtue to the Philippians in particular? How can we more faithfully obey the mandate of verse 2?
3. Why is your personal humility necessary for the unity of your church? What incentives are we given in the scriptures for humility (see Matthew 20:25-28; James 4:6-8; and 1 Peter 5:5-11)?
4. Why are verses 5-11 such an encouragement to us?
5. What benefits do we receive from the humiliation of Christ (vv. 6-8)? From the exaltation of Christ (vv. 9-11)?

### Going Deeper

1. How can the humiliation and exaltation of Christ help you in your desire to imitate His humility?
2. How can you more faithfully promote the unity of the church?