

'He Humbled Himself'

Don Fortner | Added: Jul 04, 2024 | Category: Theology

It is my prayer that the Lord will enable us to enter into the meaning of these words, 'he humbled himself'. Someone once asked me the question, 'If Jesus was Mary's Son, how could he also be her God?' To the human mind, that appears to be a most reasonable question. Scoffers and sceptics have ridiculed the gospel of Christ for two thousand years, because human reason can find no suitable answer to that question. It is a snare by which Satan has taken many to hell. Many heretical and damnable religious cults have been established with the basic idea that it is not reasonable to believe that Jesus Christ is both Mary's son and Mary's God.

The fact is, this question, 'If Jesus was Mary's son, how could he also be her God?' cannot be answered upon terms of human wisdom. Volumes of books have been written by well-learned and well-meaning men, in an attempt to answer this one question. But to human wisdom, it still remains a mystery. But our faith is not built upon human wisdom. Faith takes God at His Word. Faith believes the record God has given concerning His Son. Faith does not always understand God, either His Word or His ways. How can it be true that Jesus Christ is both Mary's son and Mary's Lord? For the believing heart, three words answer the question sufficiently: 'He humbled himself'. Faith needs no further explanation, nor does she desire more.

Christ is God, the eternal Son, who in the fulness of time, Paul tells us, 'being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross' (Philippians 2:6-8).

The Lord Jesus Christ is 'God manifest in the flesh'. He is 'over all, God blessed forever'. He is our God, the sovereign, eternal Creator, glorious, and majestic. In order to redeem us and save us, He has taken upon Himself our nature. He is the God-man.

We worship the Triune God, as He is revealed in Holy Scripture, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (1 John 5:7). We worship Jesus Christ the Lord as God (John 1:1-3, 14; Hebrews 1:1-3). We rejoice to know this God humbled Himself to assume our nature, in order to redeem us from our sins (Galatians 4:4, 5). He who is our Saviour is, and must be, both God and man. He is as truly God as though He were not a man, and as truly man as though He were not God.

Paul's purpose in this chapter of Philippians is to unite the people of God in bands of holy love. In order to do so he takes us immediately to the cross. Paul knew that in order to create unity, you must first promote humility. Men do not quarrel with one another when their ambitions have come to an end. When each is willing to be the least, when everyone desires to place his brother higher than himself, there is an end to strife, schism, and division. Now, in order to create this lowliness of mind, under the teaching of the Holy Spirit, Paul spoke about the humiliation of Christ. He would have us to humble ourselves, so he tells us how that our Lord and Master humbled Himself. In order to redeem us, save us, and reconcile us to God, the Lord Jesus Christ 'humbled himself'.

What Christ has done

'Being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.' As we look at this verse, we will take the words just as they stand. Here the Apostle Paul lays before our hearts the facts of our Lord's humiliation. He shows us four steps of that ladder by which the Lord of glory descended into the depths of His infinite humiliation. We cannot begin to measure the extent of our Saviour's humiliation. But if God the Holy Spirit will just allow our hearts to realise our limitations and enter into it nevertheless by faith, our souls shall be greatly profited by it. Let us remove our shoes from off our feet for we are about to tread on 'holy ground'.

First, 'Being found in fashion as a man'. Behold, the Son of God is now the Son of Man! If we stopped here, and said no more, this is humiliation enough to astonish the angels (Genesis 3:15; Isaiah 7:14).

Our Lord assumed not the nature of angels, but the nature of fallen man (Hebrews 2:17). His human nature was incapable of sin, and did no sin. Yet, it was a real human nature. He is a real man. He veiled His Godhood in this world as a child. He lived in poverty. He laboured as a carpenter. For thirty-three years, He lived in silent humility as a man. As a man, He was tempted of Satan. As a man, He suffered weakness, hunger, and thirst. As a man, He had many inward struggles that drove Him to prayer (Hebrews 5:7).

'Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed? For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall

see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him' (Isaiah 53:1, 2). Yet, this is only the beginning of our great Redeemer's humiliation. Our text says, 'Being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself.' That is to say, after assuming our nature, the Lord Jesus Christ continued to humble Himself, as a man.

Second, as a man in this world, our Lord 'became obedient'. Here is the rule of our Lord's humiliation, obedience. In all things, our Saviour was voluntarily submissive to the will of his Father (Psalm 40:7, 8; Isaiah 50:5-7; John 10:17, 18).

As a man, the Lord Jesus Christ learned obedience (Hebrews 5:8). He learned obedience through the Scriptures, by the direction of the Holy Spirit, and through prayer. That which He knew to be His Father's will, He carried out with precise determination. This is true humility. It is a willing submission and obedience to God.

Third, Paul goes yet further and tells us that as a man, the Lord of glory became 'obedient unto death'. The Lord Jesus Christ laid down his life particularly for His own elect and accomplished our eternal redemption by His obedience unto death as our Substitute. Wonder of wonders, God the eternal Son willingly lays down His life in obedience to His Father's will. Surely, there could be no greater depth of humiliation than this! But there is ...

Fourth, as a man, the Son of God, 'became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross'. Here is the deep, infinite abyss of humiliation to which our great God voluntarily descended, so that He might redeem His people. This was the great object of the incarnation. Jesus Christ was born at Bethlehem that He might die at Jerusalem as the sinner's Substitute. It is not enough that He assume our nature, live in righteousness, endure temptations and trials, and perfectly obey God's law as our Representative. If He would save us, the Son of God must be 'obedient unto death, even the death of the cross'. Death alone is not sufficient. Immanuel must die the death of the cross!

What does this mean, 'the death of the cross'? It was a violent death. It was an extremely painful death. It was an ignominious, shameful death. It was a penal death, reserved for slaves and the basest of criminals. It was a specifically cursed death. It was the death portrayed by the brazen serpent, and prophesied in the Old Testament Scriptures, 'And they shall look upon me whom they have pierced' (Zechariah 12:10). And the death of our Lord Jesus Christ was a substitutionary death for all who were chosen in Him before the world began. 'For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God' (1 Peter 3:18).

Why Christ humbled Himself

Our Lord Jesus Christ humbled Himself to establish righteousness in the

earth. He humbled Himself that He might put away sin. And He humbled Himself to justify the guilty. The Lord Jesus Christ actually accomplished the redemption of all His elect and secured their eternal salvation when He died upon the cursed tree. What He intended to do, He has fully done! Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law and put away the sins of His people. 'Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus' (Romans 3:24-26). Our dear Saviour voluntarily took on Himself our sins and died in our place, because of His great love for us!

The effects of Christ's humiliation

What effects should the humiliation of Christ have upon us? It should give us a great firmness of faith in our Lord's sin-atoning sacrifice. It should create within our hearts a holy hatred of sin. It should teach us obedience. It should inspire us to self-denial and self-sacrifice for Him. 'For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich' (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Our Saviour's humiliation should cause us to hold all human honour and praise in contempt. It should inspire our hearts with an ever-increasing love for the Lord Jesus Christ. Our Lord's humiliation ought to inflame our souls with a desire to honour Him.

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