

VII. Lesson 7 The Mind of Christ/Name Above Every Name – Phil. 2:5-11

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Aim: To come to a better understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Genuine unity among Christians, according to Paul, depends on humility. In a piece of magnificent exposition, Paul expounds the humility and the exaltation of the Son of God. The Christological hymn in 2:6-11 is thought to be an early Christian confession. It can be arranged as a hymn of six stanzas:

1. Being in the form of God,
He considered it not a thing to be seized
To be equal to God.
2. But emptied Himself,
By taking the form of a slave
Coming in human likeness.
3. And appearing on earth as Man,
He humbled Himself,
Becoming obedient unto death (indeed, death on a cross).
4. Wherefore God exalted Him,
And bestowed on Him the name
That is above every name;
5. That in the name of Jesus
Every knee should bow,
In heaven, on earth, and under the earth,
6. And every tongue confess:
'Jesus Christ is Lord,'
To the glory of God the Father.

A. The Mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5-8)

1. Have the Same Mind (2:5)

Paul says, 'Develop this mind-set (*phroneite*) in your fellowship, which is the only consistent mind-set for those who are in Christ Jesus.' For a church harassed by strife, Paul needed to exhort them to humility within their fellowship. The greatest example which Paul could give them to imitate was the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul is urging us to live out our fellowship with our humble Savior in practical ways in our lives. Over and over again in his letters Paul employs a basic formula which he fleshes out in many different ways: we are in Christ; we are, therefore, to become more and more like Christ. The imitation of Christ is not an activity we engage in out of our own resources, but depending on the graces of Christ Himself.

2. The Self-Humbling of the Lord (2:6-8)

a) *Eternal God*

Paul takes us through three stages of our Lord's experience and to the very heart of redemption.

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Being in the form of God. The first stage is Christ's glory before coming to this world. Paul looks back to our Lord's pre-temporal existence as the Second Person of the Trinity. He was 'in the form (*morphe*) of God' (v. 6), or 'in very nature God.' The English word 'form' usually refers to the outward shape of an object; Paul uses it in that way when he speaks of those who have 'a form of godliness' but deny the power of it (2 Tim. 3:5). But we can also use the word in a much more comprehensive way. When Paul speaks of Jesus being 'in the form of God', he certainly means to convey far more than the idea that He had the outward shape or likeness of God. In fact, Paul means that Christ possessed 'equality with God' (*cp.* Col. 1:15, 17; Heb. 1:3; John 1:1-2, 14).

Equality with God something to be grasped. Jesus never thought that His divinity should be clutched hold of in a selfish way. The Son did not 'grasp' (*harpagmos*, Latin *rapinam*) or jealously guard His rights as Son of God. Instead He was willing to come to our fallen, helpless world on our behalf. A lesser man might well have used such privileges to promote himself, just as many candidates for political office seem to do; Jesus thought only of others and their needs. He did not assume His equality with God was something to be exploited, or taken advantage of for His own ends.

In His pre-existent state Christ already had as His possession the unique dignity of His place within the Godhead. It was a vantage-point from which He might have exploited His position and, by an assertion of His right, have seized the glory and honor of the acknowledgement of His office. At this point He made His pre-incarnate choice. He considered the appropriation of divine honor *in this way* to be resisted, and chose rather to be proclaimed as equal with God as the 'Lord' by the acceptance of His destiny as the incarnate and humiliated one.

b) *Earthly Humiliation*

Made Himself of no reputation. Thus, Jesus 'made Himself nothing' (v. 7) or 'emptied Himself' (*heauton ekenosen*). Of what did Christ empty Himself? Charles Wesley says He 'emptied Himself of all but love' (from *And Can It Be That I Should Gain*). Many have concluded that the hymn-writer meant that when Christ came to this earth He gave up His divinity completely and all He retained was some vague ability to love. The Greek phrase has given its name to the so-called 'kenosis' theory of the incarnation: that at the incarnation Christ divested Himself of the 'relative' attributes of deity, omniscience, omnipresence and omnipotence, but retained the 'essential' attributes of holiness, love and righteousness. However, there is no scriptural basis for any division of Christ's attributes.

Paul does not mean that He evacuated Himself of the power of deity. Any explanation of these words which diminishes Christ's divinity is erroneous. It is crucial for us to understand that in doing this He did not cease to be God. God cannot cease to be God! His 'kenosis' or self-emptying was in laying aside the glories and riches of heaven and adding our humanity to His deity so He was at one and the same time fully God and fully man. Lord of glory though He was, he emptied Himself, not by subtraction of His divine attributes, but by the assumption of human nature. His two natures remain distinct from each other, yet He is the God-man. If He was not God He would not have the power to take away sin; and if He was not a perfect man His sacrifice for sin would not have been effective.

An alternate interpretation of 'Christ emptied Himself' is that it is equivalent to Isaiah's statement that 'He ... poured out His soul unto death' (Is. 53:12). In other words, this expression used in Philippians 2:7 refers not to the incarnation, but to the surrender of Jesus' life upon the

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cross. In this view, the verse is removed completely from the theology of the incarnation and concentrates all attention upon the cross as the price He paid in obedience to the divine will for our redemption.

Form of a bondservant. Jesus took ‘the form of a servant (*doulos*)’ (v. 7). Here we have an echo of the great prophecy of the suffering Servant of Isaiah 52:13-53:12. This same Christ, who was in the form of God took the form (*morphe*) of a bond-servant. Although though Jesus was, and still is God, yet He became a servant to accomplish His mission of salvation! Even though the Lord underwent much deprivation and suffering, He never ceased to be divine. In His essential being He had the very nature of God. Not for one moment did He lay aside His Godhead.

Likeness of men ... appearance as a man. No one doubted that Jesus was a real man (*anthropos*). When people saw Him they did not immediately fall down before Him and acknowledge that He was God. Instead they sometimes told Him to ‘clear off.’ They would never have treated Him like that if they had recognized His deity. Jesus was immediately recognizable as a human being, because He looked like a man. But His likeness and appearance were more than just similarity. He was fully and completely human. In order to die, He had to become truly a man.

The greatness of our Lord’s self-humbling is measured by how low He was prepared to stoop from the great heights which were His natural and rightful environment. If anyone ever had the right to insist on his rights, it was the Lord Jesus. But His concern for others (those whom the Father had given Him) was such that He refused to insist on His rights. He did not cling to His divine prerogatives, but willingly laid aside all the trappings of His glory and took our humanity.

Humbled ... obedient ... death ... cross. It would have been an act of stupendous humility if the Lord Jesus had done nothing more than take to Himself our humanity. At one level, the humility of Christ does refer to His entire life upon earth and its devotion to the Father and the acceptance of our human lot. But He did much, much more. In that humanity, he died. It was not that Jesus found Himself trapped in such a way that He could not escape, of that He was put to death against His will. No, He humbled Himself and ‘became obedient to death (*thanatos*).’

His obedience is a sure token of His deity and authority, for only a divine being can accept death as *obedience*; for ordinary people it is a necessity. He alone as the obedient Son could choose death as His destiny; and He did so because of His love, a love which was directed both to His Father’s redeeming purpose and equally to the world into which He came (Heb. 10:7).

Dying itself would have been astonishing humility, but there is even more: his death was like no other. It was ‘the death of the cross (*stauros*).’ Crucifixion was especially invented by the Romans as an extremely painful way to execute traitors and would have elicited strong feelings of revulsion among the populace.

However, for the Jews, it meant something else, in addition to the humiliation of being branded a Roman traitor. Anyone who died on a cross was under the curse of God (Dt. 21:23; Gal. 3:13). The victim was outside the pale of Israel, under a ban of excommunication from God’s covenant. This is why no other death on a cross compared to His: there He became the sin-bearer for His people, standing in their place and receiving the wrath of God instead of them. The death of Christ was nothing less than Christ experiencing hell for His people so they would never have to experience that hell themselves.

- *With the phrase ‘even the death of the cross’ (2:8), Paul indicates the special nature of Jesus’ crucifixion. What made the death of Jesus special? Read Galatians 3:13; Romans*

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5:6-8; Hebrews 9:28; 1 Peter 2:24. Read Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53 for amazingly detailed prophecies of the cross of Christ. What do these prophecies teach about the nature of Christ's death?

c) Comparison with Adam

In these verses, Jesus is portrayed as 'Adam in reverse' (*cp.* Rom. 5:12-21). His being 'in the form of God' but not counting 'equality with God a thing to be grasped' (v. 6) reminds us of Adam's failure. He was created as the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26). But Adam 'grasped' after equality with God (Gen. 3:5). By contrast, Jesus, whose right equality with God always was, did not refuse to become 'obedient' (v. 8). Jesus did what Adam refused to do: serve God. Adam senselessly sought to grasp at equality with God, and through pride and disobedience lost the glorious image of his maker; Jesus chose to tread the pathway of lowly obedience in order to be exalted by God as Lord (vv. 9-10). Adam's disobedience brought sin and death into the world; by contrast, Jesus' obedience brings righteousness and life into it. The Son of God came to undo the disobedience of Adam and to experience the judgment of God which Adam brought crashing down on the human race. To do so he had to become obedient to His Father's will and plan.

Adam in Genesis 1 reflects the glory of the eternal Son of God who from all eternity was 'with God' (Jn. 1:1; 17:5) as the exact image of the ineffable and invisible God (Heb. 1:3). The 'act of robbery' was attempted as Adam, the son of God (Lk. 3:38) and made a little lower than God (Ps. 8:5), asserted himself to be 'as God' (Gen. 3:5, 22), *i.e.* to be lord in his own right and independently of God his maker. But he failed in this aspiration. The eternal Son of God, however, faced with a parallel temptation, renounced what was His by right, and could actually have become His possession by the seizure of it, that is, equality with God, and chose instead the way of obedient suffering as the pathway to His lordship.

Thus, a twofold contrast lies hidden in Paul's description of Jesus' self-humbling. The contrast between who He is by nature and the identity He has taken on by grace; the contrast between what the Last Adam became and what the First Adam had been.

d) The Servanthood of Christ

Let us look at three effects of Jesus' servanthood. Firstly, in heaven He was free from the burden of sin, but when He came down to this earth He was surrounded by the filth of iniquity. One of the things that happened to Him, as a consequence, was that He was tempted (*cp.* Luke 4:1-13). Jesus never had to put up with that kind of testing in heaven, but for our sakes He made Himself nothing and had to undergo such things.

Secondly, in heaven He enjoyed eternal bliss (John 17:5). However, for a time, He turned His back upon all of that and made Himself nothing (2 Cor. 8:9). Thirdly, in heaven Jesus could exercise great authority, but when He came to this earth He made Himself nothing and laid that power aside for a while. He never gave up His authority while He was on earth, but He chose not to exercise it because 'although He was a son, He learned obedience from what He suffered' (Heb. 5:8).

Since Paul tells us we are to have the same attitude as Christ (2:5), what does this mean for us? First, He means that *none of us is to behave in a boastful way*. Jesus made Himself nothing, and He voluntarily laid aside His heavenly glory. We too should acknowledge that if we have achieved anything at all in this life, then it is only by God's goodness and help that we have been

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able to rise to that position. Secondly, Jesus also showed *selfless devotion towards pleasing His Father*, and that should be our aim too. Finally, when Jesus came to this earth *He did not come to carry out His own will* (Mt. 26:39). We too are to have that same servant mentality (*cp.* John 13:14-15).

- *In verses 6-8, trace the steps in Christ's self-humbling. What does it mean for you to share this 'mind of Christ'?*

B. Name Above Every Name (Phil. 2:9-11)

Paul moves from his description of the humbling of the Son of God – making Himself nothing, taking the nature of a servant, becoming obedient to death – to a magnificent description of Jesus' exaltation. This is the third stage of Christ's experience. Paul is saying that Jesus has been publicly 'exalted' to the position which was His before His humiliation. The obedience of Christ the Son is crowned by the act of exaltation in which the Father raises His Son from the dead and elevates Him to the place of honor. In the flesh through which He identified Himself with us, His glory and majesty were normally hidden (Is. 45:15). Now, exalted at the right hand of the Father, His true identity clear, His eternal majesty is revealed. God is the only Savior; but Jesus is that Savior!

1. Connecting Link (2:9)

Jesus underwent all of His humiliation in order to pay the price of the sin committed by mankind. He did it all so that His redeemed people might go free. So, when Paul says 'therefore,' it implies that there is an integral connection between the humiliation of Jesus and His exaltation by the Father. First, the exaltation of Jesus fulfils prophecy (*cp.* Is. 52:13-53:12; Ps. 2:8). The exaltation and world-wide recognition of Jesus follows His humiliation simply because the Father promised it would. Second, that exaltation is also the right of the Son, because He is Himself God. He is altogether equal with God, as Paul has indicated in Philippians 2:6. His exaltation is necessary because of His divine identity. Third, He is the dear Son of His Father. The love of His Father for Him made His exaltation the inevitable consequence of His humiliation (*cp.* John. 17:1, 5).

Has all that Christ has done and become made any significant impact on our lives? Has it made us humble-minded? That is the only way in which true exaltation becomes possible. Only what goes down will go up!

2. Christ's Deity (2:9-11)

These verses are an impressive exposition of Jesus' identity and deity. The honor now conferred is expressed by the bestowal of 'the name,' *i.e.* character, which He chose to assume not by right or seizure (the *harpagmos* of v. 6), but by obedient humiliation. The name of Jesus refers to His work of redemption; it means 'Yahweh saves.'

First, Paul employs an Old Testament passage in which God as speaker gives a description of Himself which applies exclusively to Himself. Paul now applies that description to Jesus (*cp.* Is. 45:23-25). No clearer proof could be forthcoming of our Lord's pre-eminent position at the Father's right hand than the use of this Old Testament quotation in reference to Him.

Second, Paul calls Jesus 'Lord' (*kyrios*). This Greek word is used in the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament to translate the sacred Hebrew divine name *Yahweh*, and denotes rulership

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based upon competent and authoritative power. For Paul to say that ‘Jesus Christ is Lord’ is not primarily to make a statement about his personal consecration, but about his Savior’s divine identity. Paul is declaring that Jesus Christ is installed in the place which properly belongs to God Himself as Lord of all creation.

Third, Paul says that the exaltation of Jesus to heaven’s highest place is ‘to the glory (*doxan*) of God the Father (*patros*)’ (v. 11). In other words, Jesus’ exaltation, and our recognition of it, pleases God. Why? Paul has already given us the answer: our Lord ‘was in the form of God;’ equality with God is His eternal right.

We could not ask for a clear or richer statement of the deity of Christ. If the Father exalts Jesus to the highest place, He will find any lesser honor accorded to His Son intolerable. If we do not desire to see Him honored then we are at odds with the Father; the reality of our faith in His Son is very much in doubt.

- *It is claimed that verses 9-11 set out Christ’s divine identity. How would you answer someone who responded: ‘But these verses teach that Jesus became divine, not that He was always God!’?*

The universal acclamation of Jesus Christ has not yet happened. There has never been a time when everyone has bowed the knee to Jesus. So Paul must be talking about that great day towards which the whole of the Bible points and on which the whole world will be judged. When Jesus comes again, everyone will confess that He is Lord. Some will do it willingly because they know Him as their Savior and they love to confess His name. But others will do it unwillingly because they have denied the Lord of glory. However, even though they reject Him now, on that great day they will confess Him because they will have no alternative; the day of grace will be ended. No one will be absent on that day. Every knee shall bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Each one will say this, willingly or unwillingly. The question for all of us is: ‘Will I confess the Lord willingly or unwillingly?’

C. Application & Discussion Questions

- *What is the function of these verses in the context of Philippians 2?*
- *From one point of view these verses might seem to be the easiest to study in Paul’s letter. But in some ways they are the most difficult, despite being so important and so deeply loved. Can you think why this is?*
- *Christ did not ‘jealously guard His rights’ (p. 43). In a sense, however, Paul had ‘stood on his rights’ as a Roman citizen in Philippi (Acts 16:37). Was he behaving in a self-centered fashion at that point? What should the attitude of a Christian be to his or her ‘rights,’ and to ‘civil rights’?*
- *‘The love of His Father for Him made His exaltation the inevitable consequence of His humiliation’ (p. 49). Are there other NT passages which teach us about the Father’s love for His Son? What do they add to the teaching of these verses?*
- *In what ways should Paul’s teaching on Christ’s incarnation transform our lives?*

For next time: Read Philippians 2:12-18 and Ferguson chapters 13-14.