

### A Great Christological Passage of Scripture Philippians 2:5-11

Philippians 2:5-11: *“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, **6** who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, **7** but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. **8** And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. **9** Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, **10** that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, **11** and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

#### Background Notes

Philippians 2:5-11 is one of the great Christological passages of Scripture. It has been called the “*Kenosis* Passage” because of the Greek word, *kenosis*, that is translated “emptied Himself” or “made Himself of no reputation” (v7). It is extremely important to understand that when He “emptied Himself,” the Son of God **did not in any way empty Himself of deity** when He became Man!

Notice that this great doctrinal passage is in a practical context. Look at verse 5: *“Let this mind [attitude] be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.”* What attitude is in view here? It’s the willing, humble, self-giving attitude of our Lord! The context of this wonderful doctrinal passage about the incarnation was written to illustrate the kind of attitude the Philippians should show to one another.

Think of the self-giving attitude of our Lord Jesus Christ, the blessed Son of God. He willingly left the glory and joys of Heaven to come to this earth. He willingly took on humanity. He willingly took the role of a servant. He willingly died - even the death of the cross. *“Even the death of the cross”* meant not only a horribly painful death, but also a shameful death. A cross was a place of shame and curse. But the Lord Jesus was willing to die “even the death of the cross” for us. He is the supreme example of what it means to have a humble, self-giving attitude. The Philippian believers were called to willingly have that same humility and self-giving attitude. And we are, too.

Paul stressed the need for a humble attitude to the Philippian believers because of the dispute in the church at Philippi. If the Philippians were to have a humble attitude towards one another, the problem of disunity would evaporate! Remember, we don’t know the cause of the disunity, but one thing we know for sure from this passage – if the Philippians would determine to take the same humble and self-giving attitude of our Lord Jesus, the rift would be healed.

This is the Word of God to us. If we would have this humble, self-giving Christ-like attitude towards one another, any tendency toward disunity would disappear.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. The eternal Son did not empty Himself of deity.

Verses 5-7, *“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.”*

The phrase *“being in the form of God”* conveys two truths:

#### **a. Jesus Christ is God by His very nature and essence.**

That’s what the word *“form”* means here: it means the **essential nature** of something.

#### **b. Christ never started being God and He has never stopped being God.**

Being in the form of God means that He always existed as God, and He did not stop being fully God at His incarnation. The eternal Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, always was God, and He always will be God.

Then what is the meaning of the end of verse 6 and the beginning of verse 7? He *“did not consider it robbery to be equal with God [or, He did not regard equality with God something to be grasped], but made Himself of no reputation, [emptied Himself] taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.”* Of what did our Lord empty Himself when He became Man? We’ve already seen that it could not have been His deity, because *“being in the form of God”*(v6) means that He always was God - and He always will be God.

It is very important to understand that our Lord never emptied Himself of any of His attributes of deity. **He never ceased to be God in any way!** The eternal Son did not empty Himself of deity.

Of what then did He empty Himself? The eternal Son of God stripped Himself of the **insignia of majesty** when He left Heaven to become Man. He did not hold on to, or grasp, the glories and majesties associated with deity. He willingly gave them up when He left Heaven to become Man and live on this earth.

Here’s an illustration. A king wanted to identify and relate to His subjects. So he took off his royal robes, laid aside his crown and scepter, left his throne, put on ordinary clothes, and went out and lived as an ordinary man among his people. Had he stopped being king? No! Had he lost his power as king? No! Had he given up any of his attributes as king? No! He only **temporarily** gave up the **outward display** of his majesty and **temporarily** refrained from using his **powers** as king.

In the same way, the eternal Son of God voluntarily and temporarily laid aside His outward glory and majesty, and He voluntarily and temporarily gave up the full use of His attributes when He became Man. But He did **not** empty Himself of His **deity!**

Athanasius of Alexandria was an early Christian who defended the full deity of Christ. His concise statement about the deity of Jesus Christ is classic: “**He never ceased to be what He always was, by reason of what He became.**” The eternal Son did not empty Himself of deity.

## 2. The eternal Son took on humanity.

*“...taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (v7-8).*

There’s that word “*form*” again. It means essential nature. In this verse it refers to the essential nature of humanity. The eternal Son of God took on the essential nature of humanity. **He became human without ceasing to be God.** This is the wonder of the incarnation.

The Lord Jesus was not 50% God and 50% man. He was - and He still is - 100% God and 100% Man! The eternal Son of God took on true humanity forever.

The fact that He came “*in the likeness of men*” does not mean that He only appeared to be a man, but wasn’t really a true man. No, our Lord was fully human. The word “*likeness*” was used specifically to describe the Manhood of Jesus Christ, in order to safeguard His deity and the fact that He was sinless. The Lord Jesus was fully God and fully Man - but He did not have a sinful nature.

Verse 8: “*And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.*” “*Being found in appearance of man*” means that, while He had both the essential nature of God and the essential nature of man, outwardly the Lord looked like an ordinary man – no halo, no glowing skin! He ate and spoke and dressed as a man of that time and culture. Of course He was different, in that He was perfect and sinless. However, as a Man, He humbled Himself, He served others, He went to the cross and He died in order to pay for our sin and redeem us. He had to become man in order to die. The eternal Son took on true humanity.

## Practical Applications

### 1. Bow now - or bow later!

Verses 9-11, “*Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*”

Ultimately, every knee will bow to the Lord Jesus Christ. All intelligent beings ever created will bow the knee. All angels will bow. The holy angels bow now in worship, and the fallen angels will bow later in judgment. All people will bow. Believers bow now in worship, and all unbelievers will bow later in judgment.

Sometimes when I hear people like Carl Sagan scoff at God, and when I hear outspoken radicals who want to do away with all forms of moral restraint, I must confess that it gives me a sense of satisfaction when I remember that eventually they will have to bow their knee to Jesus Christ in a coming day!

It's not that I don't want them to be saved! Of course I would love to see them turn to the Lord and bow the knee to Jesus Christ now. But I rejoice in the fact that God will be vindicated. They will have to change their minds, and they will have to bow the knee - now or later.

Have you bowed your knee to Jesus Christ yet? Have you confessed Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior yet? If you haven't become a Christian, now is the time. Receive Christ as Savior now, and bow the knee now. Bow now - or bow later!

## 2. What is the distance of our self-giving attitude?

In this wonderful passage of Scripture, our Lord is given as the supreme example of what a humble, self-giving attitude looks like. Think of the incredible downward path that He took, and the immeasurable distance He came in His self-giving attitude. He left the glory of Heaven. He came to this earth. He took on humanity. He went to the place of death - even death on a cross – and gave His life for us.

What is the distance our self-giving attitudes are willing to go? How far are we willing to go? We may say, "I humbled myself to acknowledge that brother." "I went out of my way to go speak to that sister." Big deal! How far is that, compared to the amazing, unfathomable distance our Lord was willing to go in giving Himself for us?

And Jesus Christ is now glorified as a result of his self-giving attitude and actions! "***The way up is down***" - that's the principle taught here. Do we want to be exalted? That will depend on the distance we are willing to travel in giving of ourselves.

What is the distance of our self-giving attitude?