

A Christ-Centered Mindset Philippians 2:5-11

Last week, I (Tony) went in a store to grab a bottle of water, and the cashier asked, "Where are you from? You don't look like you're from here." I said, "I live in North Carolina." He said, "You look like Pitbull. You know him?" I said, "No." He went on to describe this pop icon. Then he asked, "Are you married?" I said, "Yes, happily." He said, "Why you married? How old are you?" "I'm thirty-seven" I answered. He said, "You're too young to be married. You need many women." I said, "No, that's so overrated, man." He said, "Really? I think you need many women." I said, "I think you need Jesus, and you need a wife." I said, "I've gotta run, but you need to rethink your outlook on life."

In Philippians 2, Paul exhorts the Philippians to adopt Jesus' death as their central outlook, their central mindset, for life. Instead of living to get and get and get – more women, more praise, more money, etc. – the Christian is called to imitate Christ, who came to give and give and give.

Philippians 2:5-11 is one of the most amazing passages in the Bible. We are on holy ground here. It appears to be an early hymn or poetic creed, perhaps used liturgically in ancient worship. It seems to have a unified structure, starting with God in eternity, and ending in the same way, but hinging on verse nine. Think V shape, with verse nine being the bottom angle - "even death on a cross." Some propose that it was written by an early Jewish community in Jerusalem and sang during the Lord's Supper. One could certainly spend a whole book on this passage; our approach here is more telescopic than microscopic. This text is both doctrinal and ethical in nature. It emphasizes the stunning humility of Jesus, who became a servant, and died on behalf of sinners to the glory of God. As a result of his cross-work and resurrection, He is now exalted as the true King. He is our Savior and our example.

D.A. Carson points out that the cross can be viewed from five perspectives. From *God's perspective*, Jesus died as a propitiation for our sins (1 Jn 2:2). He absorbed God's wrath, and turned away God's anger from us. From *Christ's perspective*, Jesus obeyed His Father perfectly, saying, "not my will but your will be done." He carried out His assignment to "give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). This text in Philippians highlights Christ's perfect obedience (also a major theme in John's Gospel). He "became obedient to death, even death on a cross" (2:8). From *Satan's perspective*, the cross means the accuser's defeat (cf., Rev 12:11). From *sin's perspective*, the cross is the means by which our debt is paid. Finally, from *our perspective*, while acknowledging all of these truths, treasuring the love and justice of God, and the substitutionary life and death of Jesus, and His victorious death over Satan and sin, we must also note that the cross has another effect. The cross serves "as the supreme standard of behavior" (Carson, 42). It's the primary point that Paul makes here in Philippians 2:5 (Ibid.).

We need to notice where this passage is located in the Philippians. It looks back to the previous verses (specifically 2:1-4), and it also looks ahead through 2:18. In 2:1-4, Paul tells the Philippians to avoid rivalry and conceit, and to instead pursue humility and self-less care for the

interests of others. Then in verse 5, he draws their attention to the attitude and actions of Jesus, as their supreme example of thinking about the needs of others in humble love. There are several word links with verses 2:1-4 and 2:5-11, such as these: “like-minded and one mind/mind,” (compare 2:2, ESV with 2:5, ESV); “consider” (compare 2:3 with 2:6); “humility/humbled himself” (compare 2:3 with 2:8). Jesus gives the perfect example of mindset we need, the humility we should pursue, and the ultimate picture of considering the needs of others.

So while Philippians 2:6-11 is filled with theological hot points that we must consider closely, we must remember that Paul’s purpose for penning it isn’t to stimulate debate. It’s not here for argumentation, but to stimulate adoration and emulation, so that the church may be unified in Christ. Unity isn’t the result of preaching on unity; it’s the result of people adoring and emulating Jesus. The more we behold His glory, and imitate His character, the more unified we will be as a church.

Additionally, this hymn reminds us not only of the pattern we have to follow; it also reminds of the power we have to emulate Christ. We need not only Jesus' example; we need His death and resurrection also. We fail to serve God and others perfectly, but Christ died for self-absorbed, self-glorifying people like us. He rose on our behalf, and now empowers us to follow His example. (cf., Phil 2:12-13)

Let's look at this passage in two parts, and then collect some points of application. Consider (1) The Mind of Christ, and (2) The Hymn to Christ.

The Mind of Christ (2:5)

Paul opens by saying:

Make your own attitude that of Christ Jesus, (2:5)

This verse is translated in various ways (my emphasis):

*Have this **mind** among yourselves, which **is yours** in Christ Jesus (ESV)*

*You must have the same **attitude** that Christ **Jesus had**. (NLT)*

*Have this **attitude** in yourselves which **was also in Christ Jesus** (NASB)*

Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself (The Message)

*In your relationships with one another, have the same **mindset as Christ Jesus** (NIV)*

Whether you say “this mind,” “mindset,” “frame of mind” (Witherington), or “attitude,” it’s essentially the same thing. The main exegetical question is which verb should be supplied after this first phrase: “Have this mind among yourselves...” (ESV). We are left with varying renderings of the latter clause, literally translated, “which also in Christ Jesus.” The ESV translates it: “which *is yours* in Christ Jesus, but provides a footnote, “Or which *was also* in Christ Jesus.” But there’s a difference in “is yours and “was in Christ” One gives a theological

interpretation ("is yours"), emphasizing our position in Christ; and the other gives an ethical interpretation, emphasizing emulating Jesus' example ("was also in Christ").

While "is yours in Christ Jesus" makes sense theologically, I concur with others who say that many interpreters overreact to "idealized ethic" of following Jesus' example, and they overlook the context, namely, that we're dealing with an analogy of Christ as our example. The fact that Paul doesn't detail the stages of Christ's exaltation (like his resurrection) also adds to the argument that he intended to use this hymn as an example for Christians to follow. More likely, Paul intended his readers to supply the verb "was," rendering it, "Have this mind among yourselves which *was* also in Christ Jesus." I think this latter view, "the ethical interpretation," fits better than the former view. Paul is commending the attitude that Jesus had in order to stimulate humility and unity among the congregation.

But we must point out that both options are true. And it is the fact that we are *in* Christ Jesus that we can live out this ethical exhortation. We are united with Christ, and must now walk after Him.

Notice also that there's a corporate element to this example. Some translate it as "yourselves" and others give more a dynamic equivalent of paraphrase, "in your relationships with one another" (NIV). Paul isn't simply speaking to the private experience of individuals. He is writing about unity in the church, which comes through adopting a humble, Christ-like mindset. He wants to see "a community mindful of Christ" (Hanson, 118).

To summarize, Paul exhorts the Philippians to pursue the attitude and actions of Jesus. As we prepare to look at the hymn to Christ, keep this point in mind. As you reflect on it, ask yourself, "Is this my attitude/mindset individually?" "Is this my way of life?" Do I seek to "get, get, and get, or to give, give, and give?" And ask: "Is this our mindset as a community?" "Are we known for humility and compassion?"

Philippians has a theme of imitation. Later in the chapter, Paul holds Timothy and Epaphroditus up as examples worthy of honor and emulation (2:19-30, esp 2:20-21, 30). In chapter 3, Paul tells the church to follow his example, and to "observe those who live according to the example you have in us" (3:17). While we may have many role models in life, we must remember that Jesus is the *example par excellence*. The following verses unpack His humility, His perfect life, His crucifixion, and His exaltation.

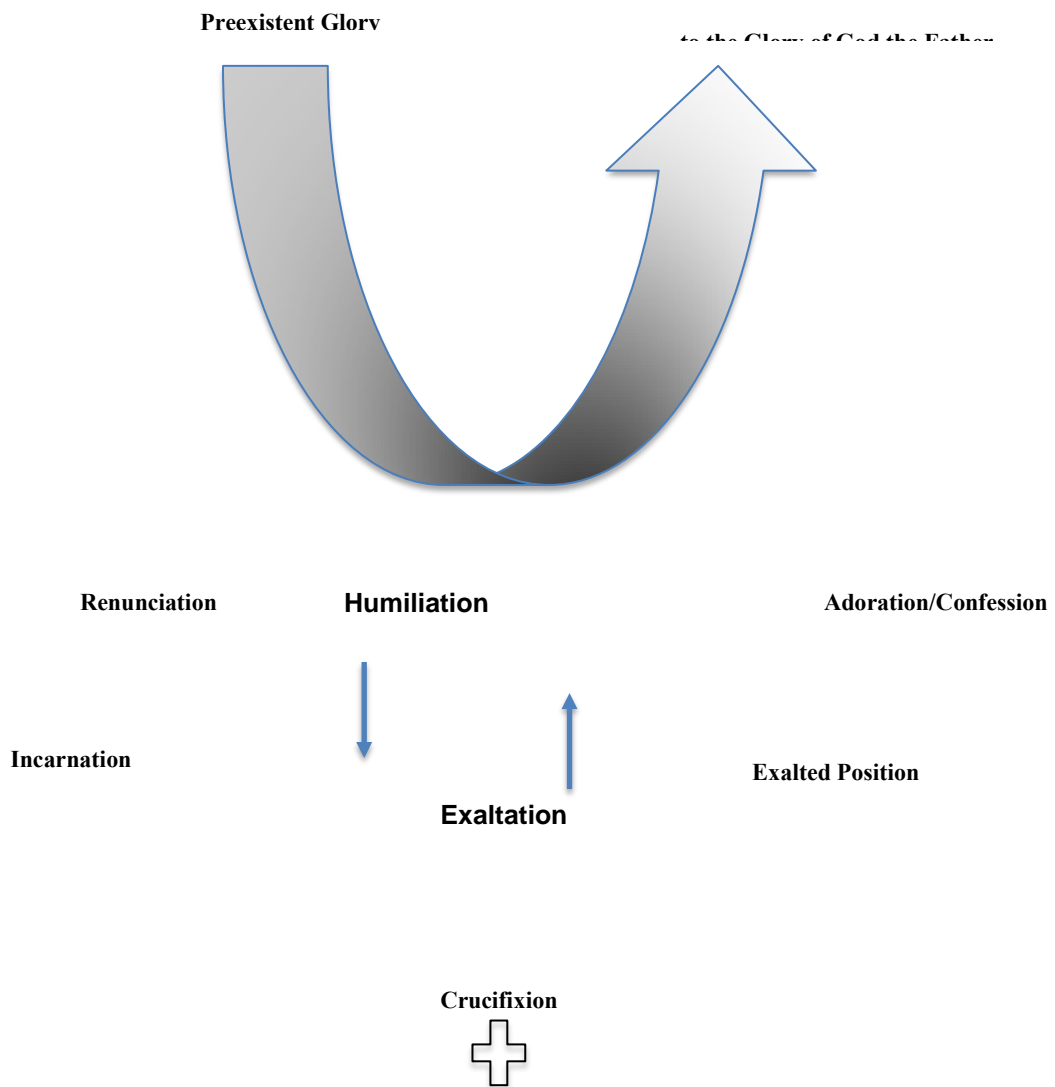
Most teachers break down the text into two main stanzas, Christ's humiliation (6-8) and Christ's exaltation (9-11). Paul says:

*who, existing in the form of God,
did not consider equality with God
as something to be used for His own advantage.
Instead He emptied Himself
by assuming the form of a slave,
taking on the likeness of men.
And when He had come as a man*

*in His external form,
He humbled Himself by becoming obedient
to the point of death—
even to death on a cross.*

*For this reason God highly exalted Him
and gave Him the name
that is above every name,
so that at the name of Jesus
every knee will bow —
of those who are in heaven and on earth
and under the earth —
and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father. (2:6-11)*

The following image is intended to illustrate the nature of this hymn:



In verses 6-8, Paul speaks of the incredible humility of Jesus. He set aside the His divine prerogatives, and incarnated Himself, being obedient to the Father, all the way down to the cross. But God exalted Him. One day every knee will bow and tongue confess that Christ is Lord. Jesus accomplished His work, and was exalted, “to the glory of God the Father.”

The Humility of Christ (2:6-11)

Let’s consider the humility of Christ in three parts: (1) humble renunciation, (2) humble incarnation, and (3) humble crucifixion. Allow these truths to lead you to adoration and emulation.

His Humble Renunciation (6)

Jesus enjoyed His preexistent exalted position, but He laid it aside. Paul says:

*who, existing in the form of God,
did not consider equality with God
as something to be used for His own advantage. (2:6)*

“Who existing in the form of God” (6a). Notice in these opening phrases, some very important doctrinal points. When Paul uses the phrase, “who existing in the form of God” (6a), he touches on both the *preexistence* of Jesus, as well as the *divine nature* of Jesus. The divinity of Jesus is also expressed in the second half of the verse “he did not consider *equality with God* as something to be used for His own advantage” (6b, my emphasis). John writes that Jesus was “calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God” (Jn 5:18b, ESV).

Other biblical writers highlight Jesus’ preexistence in many different passages (cf., Col 1:15; Jn 1:1-2; 14; Heb 1:2-3; Jn 8:58; John 17:5). There never was a time that Jesus didn’t exist. He had no point of origin. He is Alpha and Omega. John says, “He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made” (Jn 1:2-3). He is creator; He wasn’t created. We differ from many cults and religions on this fundamental point.

Regarding His divine nature, Paul says Jesus existed in the “form” of God. He isn’t saying that Jesus only “appeared as God.” He is saying that Jesus continues being in the very nature or essence of God. *Morphe* (“form”) doesn’t speak of external appearance or outward shape but of

the essential attributes and the inner nature of Jesus. Paul uses the same word in verse 7, “morphe,” to say that Jesus was in very nature a “slave.” He was fully human and fully divine.

Church history is littered with debates over the nature of Jesus. In 325, we read of the famous “Council of Nicea.” Arius believed that Jesus was the first and greatest created being, but Athanasius would win the day, defending the biblical position that Jesus is fully God, being of the same essence as the Father. Today we still confess this incredible creed adopted in this historic debate:

[We believe] in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made.

Indeed, there have been many alternative positions through the years. Ebionism denied of the divine nature of Christ. Arianism denied the fullness of the deity of Christ. Docetism denied the humanity of Jesus. Apollinarianism denied the full humanity of Jesus. Nestorianism denied the unity of the natures in one person. Eutychianism denied the distinction of the natures. In 451, leaders in Chalcedon wrote a creed affirming both Jesus’ fully humanity and His full deity, united in one person. In so doing, they rejected all six of these Christological heresies.

In every generation, we must contend for the biblical view of the person and work of Christ. We still hear things like “He was a prophet,” “He was a good man,” “He was a fine example,” “The idea of Jesus is what matters.” Like Athanasius, we must boldly defend the glory of Christ. We must also teach these things to our children, who are growing up in a world that is fine with a phantom Christ, or Christ as a mere man, or as a funny, religious sage. In the spirit of Deuteronomy 6, as you sit down, walk, and lie down, teach your kids about the person and work of Jesus.

“[He] did not consider equality with God as something to be used for His own advantage” (6b). This phrase highlights the astonishing giving nature of Jesus. He did not consider being God as grounds for getting but for giving. “For Christ did not please himself” Paul says to the Romans (Rom 15:3). In that context, like Philippians, he encourages the church to follow the example of Jesus’ service in their relationships with one another.

I like the translations that use the phrase, “a thing to be grasped.” He could have clutched His rights, His blessings, and His benefits as King of glory. But he lived open-handedly, showing us what benevolent generosity and service looks like. Do you have a hard time letting go of your possessions? Do you find it hard to relinquish your rights to be mad at someone, for the good of preserving a relationship? If we applied this mindset to marriage and other relationships, imagine what our lives would be like. Jesus shows us the way to live here.

Our fallen nature wants to snatch, not offer. Stop and think about the difference between Adam and Christ:

Adam	Jesus
Made in God’s image	Was and is the very essence of God

Wanted to be like God	Was made in the likeness of man
Wanted to exalt Himself	Emptied Himself
Was discontent at being God's servant	Took the form of a servant
Arrogantly rejected God's Word in sinful disobedience	Humbly submitted to God's Word in perfect obedience
Succumbed to temptation	Overcame temptation; crushed the Tempter
Brought the curse on the world	Took the curse for the world
Was condemned and disgraced	Was exalted by the Father

How can you go from being a “grasper” to a “giver?” How can you adopt a mentality of downward mobility instead of upward mobility? You need the Gospel. You need the second Adam, Jesus. Through His perfect life, and atoning death, He gives Adam's race forgiveness, and new life, empowering us to live like Him.

His Humble Incarnation (7)

Paul speaks of Jesus' coming in the flesh saying:

*Instead He emptied Himself
by assuming the form of a slave,
taking on the likeness of men.
And when He had come as a man
in His external form (2:7)*

“Instead He emptied Himself” (7a). Some render this as, “he made himself nothing” (NIV). Christ emptied himself not of deity, but of the exercising of divine functions. He refused to hold on to His divine rights and prerogatives. He veiled His deity, but He did not void His deity (Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, 22). Sometimes we say, “remaining all that He was, He became what He was not.” He added humanity; He didn't surrender deity. And His divine nature was also *permanently* united to His human nature. Jesus will remain fully God and fully man, yet one person, forever” (Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 543).

O'Brien says that in four of the five NT occurrences of the verb [*kenoo (emptied)*], it bears a metaphorical sense; the balance of probability lies in favor of a figurative connotation at Phil. 2:7 as well (217). Here is a good comparison: “For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be *emptied* of

its power” (1 Cor. 1:17, ESV, my emphasis). Christ didn’t empty Himself literally of His deity, but figuratively. Some translate the text this way to convey the idea: “He made himself nothing.”

Our beloved hymn “And Can It Be” should be tweaked. The phrase, “he emptied Himself of all but love” presents some problems. It seems to imply that Jesus emptied Himself of other attributes. If He did, He wouldn’t be God. Perhaps we should sing, “He emptied Himself in humble love...” Jesus didn’t relinquish His deity; He surrendered His rights and prerogatives.

Bryan Chapell illustrates the idea of Jesus’ “emptying himself” by relaying a story from an African missionary. Let me paraphrase it. In this particular part of Africa, the chief is the strongest man in the village. As the chief, he also wears a very large headdress and ceremonial robes. One day a man carrying water out of the shaft of a deep well fell and broke his leg, and lay helpless at the bottom of the well. To get down to the bottom, one would have to climb down, using the alternating slits that go all the way down the deep well, and then climb back up. Because no one could carry the helpless man up like this, the chief was summoned. When he saw the plight of the man, he laid aside his headdress and his robe, climbed all the way to the bottom, put the injured man on himself, and brought him to safety. He did what no other man could do. That’s what Jesus has done for us. He came to rescue us. And He laid aside His heavenly glory, like the chief did with his headdress, in order to save us. Now, did the chief cease being the chief when he laid aside his headdress? Of course not. Did Jesus cease being God when He came to rescue us? Of course not. (Bryan Chapell, *Using Illustrations to Preach with Power*, 11-12)

“By assuming the form of a slave” (7b). The slave in Greco-Roman world was deprived of most basic rights. So Jesus gave up His sovereign rights and became a slave. The Sovereign creator made Himself nothing. He identified Himself with the lowest of society. Christ came not “to be served, but to serve” (Mark 10:45; cf., Jn 13).

In John 13, we have a powerful illustration of Jesus’ servant mentality. John writes:

Jesus knew that the Father had given everything into His hands, that He had come from God, and that He was going back to God. So He got up from supper, laid aside His robe, took a towel, and tied it around Himself. Next, He poured water into a basin and began to wash His disciples’ feet and to dry them with the towel tied around Him. (Jn 13:3-5)

While the disciples jockeyed for positions in the coming kingdom, comparing themselves to one another in rivalry, the One with all authority, began to wash their feet.

You can imagine what the disciples would have said if asked to do this task (which was reserved for slaves). “I’m not watching Peter’s feet. Look at these feet!” “I’m not washing John’s feet; He never washed my feet.” “I’m not washing any of any of their feet; whenever we buy the fish sandwiches, I always pay for them. I’ll let someone else wash feet.” “I’m not washing Philip’s feet. I’m so sick of Philip and all his dumb questions.” But Jesus, in the very nature of God, begins to wash the feet that He made, with the water that He made. He humbled Himself, taking the form of a slave. Let this attitude be in you!

Imagine what would happen to the Philippian church if Eudias and Syntyche would empty themselves, and give up their rights and preferences for the good of the church. Imagine what would happen if we all took this posture in the church. If each person sought not to be elevated to higher positions, but to humbly serve others like Jesus.

“Taking on the likeness of men. And when He had come as a man in His external form” (7c). This phrase, “taking on the likeness of men,” doesn’t mean that He merely became *like* a human being. Rather, He, who always was God, became what He was not, a human being.

The simple point in the hymn is that when people saw Jesus they saw a man. People recognized Him as a human. Jesus was not some alien. In fact, if it were not for the testimony of Scripture, His own words and works, few would have believed that he was God. He didn’t have some silly halo over His head, or a glow about Him. He was like us, yet without sin. (cf., Heb 4:15)

With that said, the language, “became a man in His *external form*” (7c, my emphasis, Paul uses *schema* instead of *morphe* as in 6-7a). It’s rendered in ESV as “And being found in human form” (8a.). It may be intended to leave some room for the idea that there was more to the story that Jesus’ humanity. Jesus often left people asking questions like, “What sort of man is this?” (Mark 4)

His Humble Crucifixion (2:8)

Paul now takes us all the way down in this text, saying:

*He humbled Himself by becoming obedient
to the point of death—
even to death on a cross. (2:8)*

“He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death” (8a). Christ’s whole life was marked by humility. Look at His birth. He wasn’t born an influential city like Alexandria, Rome, Athens, or Jerusalem. He was born in an animal trough in Bethlehem. He lived for thirty years in relative obscurity. Then in His earthly ministry, He was known for loving unlovable people, and humbly serving others. At His death, He was nailed to a cross, alongside two criminals.

It’s important to notice that Christ humbled Himself voluntarily. Neither Herod, Pilate, or the Romans humbled Him. No one can humble Jesus. Jesus humbles us. He chose to empty Himself. Don’t look at this passage and feel sorry for Jesus, as if He is to be pitied. Jesus stands over you; you don’t stand over Jesus. He humbled Himself. We must humble ourselves now before Him.

We too must choose humility. In the New Testament, the act of “humbling yourself” is active. (Mt 18:4; 23:12 (twice); Lk 3:5, 14:11 (twice); 18:14 (twice); 2 Cor 11:7, 12:21; Phil 2:8, 4:12; Jas. 4:10; 1 Pet. 5:6). This is the way of the kingdom.

“Even death on a cross” (8b). Paul adds that he demonstrated this humility by becoming obedient to the point of death, and that death was the most vile of all, crucifixion. This phrase serves as the rock bottom of Christ’s humility, and the most gripping part of His obedience.

Romans couldn’t be subjected to death, and Jews believed one was cursed if he died in such a way (Gal 3:13). For some, the cross was a total embarrassment. Paul goes on to say that some live as “enemies of the cross” (3:18). Yet, here is Jesus, the preexistent one, the Lord of glory, dying on the cross for sinners. He endured the physical agony of the cross, the abandonment, the shame, and received the wrath of God in place of sinners.

It’s quite possible that the servant song of Isaiah 53 loomed in the background of this hymn. He came having “no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him” (53:2b, ESV). He went to the cross, taking our place, “and the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all” (53:6b, ESV). He “poured out his soul to death” (Isa 53:8). In this most degrading of all deaths, we find the hope of salvation. Peter says, “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed” (1 Pet 2:24, ESV).

In C.S. Lewis’ book *Miracles*, he says that the central miracle asserted by Christians is the incarnation (143). He explains the descent and ascent of Christ vividly:

In the Christian story God descends to re-ascend. He comes down; down from the heights of absolute being into time and space, down into humanity.... But he goes down to come up again and bring the whole ruined world up with Him. One has the picture of a strong man stooping lower and lower to get himself underneath some great complicated burden. He must stoop in order to lift, he must almost disappear under the load before he incredibly straightens his back and marches off with the whole mass swaying on his shoulders. Or one may think of a diver, first reducing himself to nakedness, then glancing in midair, then gone with a splash, vanished, rushing down through green and warm water into black and cold water, down through increasing pressure into the deathlike region of ooze and slime and old decay; then up again, back to color and light, his lungs almost bursting, till suddenly he breaks surface again, holding in his hand the dripping, precious thing that he went down to recover. (148)

Having considered Christ descending down, down, down, let’s consider how the Son ascends up to the highest place.

The Exaltation of Christ (9-11)

Christ's humility follows the spiritual principle, "whoever humbles himself will be exalted." His incomparable self-humiliation leads to His super-exaltation. Paul writes:

*For this reason God highly exalted Him
and gave Him the name
that is above every name,
so that at the name of Jesus
every knee will bow —
of those who are in heaven and on earth
and under the earth —
and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father. (2:9-11)*

Let's look His exaltation in two parts: (1) His Exalted Position, and (2) Everyone's Adoration and Confession.

His Exalted Position (9)

"For this reason God highly exalted Him and gave Him the name that is above every name" (9). This verse begins by showing the results of Christ's humility. Some translations begin with "Therefore" (NIV, ESV) or "For this reason" (HCSB, NASB) to show the link. As a consequent of Christ's work, the Father "highly exalted Him" (9a). The phrase "highly exalted" means to "super-exalt." No one is exalted like this. Jesus is in an exalted class by Himself. He reentered the glory that He enjoyed with the Father before the world existed (Jn 17:5). And for all eternity, we will join the millions in giving Him praise.

The phrase, "and gave Him the name that is above every name" raises the question, "What name?" Some say it's *Jesus*, but the majority of commentators say it refers to *Lord* (or *Yahweh*). The former say that *Jesus* fits the context better (see Silva, 110-11). The next verse begins: "so that at the name of Jesus" (10a). Some in this camp say that the name of *Jesus* took on a new significance after His exaltation.

But others are unconvinced for a variety of reasons. Let me point out four of them. First, the name *Jesus* doesn't fit the upward shift of this passage, which climaxes in verse 11, where Christ is declared *Lord*. Second, *Jesus* was His name at birth, but this seems to be a new name. Hanson says, "At the incarnation, the name *Jesus* was given; when God exalted Jesus he then gave him the name *Lord*" (162). Gordon Fee points out that Jesus was "graced" with a name, which implies that he didn't previously have it (*Pauline Christology*, 396). Third, there's an apparent inter-textual connection with Isaiah 42:8, "I am the LORD [Yahweh]; that is my name; my glory I give to no other" (ESV) with Phil 2:11, "Jesus Christ is Lord." Some point out that

God's personal name *Yahweh* is in view in Philippians 2:11, which in the Greek version of the Old Testament is translated as "Lord." They also point out the connection between Isaiah 45:23 and Phil 2:10-11, "To me every knee shall bow, every tongue should swear allegiance" (Isa 45:23b). Finally, *Lord* carried deeper meaning to the Philippians. To hear that someone other than Caesar is Lord would be shocking (Hanson, 162-63).

If forced to pick, given the aforementioned reasons, and the following argument from Piper, I would side with "Lord." Piper says:

What name did Jesus receive after his resurrection that he did not have before? Not "Jesus." Jesus is precisely the name of the humble Servant who went to Calvary. In Acts 2:36 Peter says, "Let all the house of Israel know assuredly that *God has made him both Lord and Christ*, this Jesus whom you crucified." It was his *lordship* and *Messiahship*—his messianic lordship—that was bestowed on him at his exaltation. Not that he wasn't Messiah and Lord before his resurrection. He was. But he had not fulfilled the mission of Messiah until he had died for our sin and risen again. And therefore, before his death and resurrection, the lordship of Christ over the world had not been brought to full actuality. The rebel forces were yet undefeated, and the power of darkness held the world in its grip. In order to be acclaimed Messiah and Lord, the Son of God had to come, defeat the enemy, and lead his people out of bondage in triumph over sin and Satan and death. And that he did on Good Friday and Easter.... The name that is above every name, therefore, is *Lord*—the Lord victorious over all his enemies; the Lord who has purchased a people from every tribe and tongue and nation. ("And All the Earth Shall Own Him as Lord," my emphasis)

Even if you aren't persuaded to see the name as "Lord," the point is the same essentially. Jesus has the same exalted Lordship as the Father (11). He went all the way down to the cross, and all the way up as King of all. To the Ephesians, Paul says that Christ was exalted "above every name that has been named, not only in this age but in the age to come" (1:21b, ESV). In Peter's Pentecost sermon, Peter tells us that following Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension, Christ was "exalted at the right hand of God" (Acts 2:33, ESV). The fact that Jesus is exalted means that He rules reigns over all (cf., Heb 1:3). He has universal Lordship. Jesus is Lord, not Caesar, and everyone must give an account to Him.

What's astonishing for we who are believers is that we know Him! We know the King of glory. I have a friend who recently did some work for the Charlotte Hornets NBA team. He was on a conference call with the upper management, which included Michael Jordan. At one point he heard, "Hey Rodney, it's MJ." Rodney was in stunned silence. He couldn't help but marvel that M.J. knew Him. That was astonishing because M.J., should we say, is in a class by Himself. The wonder of it all, is that Jesus, The Lord of Glory, who is in a class by Himself, knows us, and He loves us.

Everyone's Adoration and Confession (10-11a)

“so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow — of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth — and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” (10-

11a). In response to Christ’s universal Lordship, everyone will bow and confess His Lordship. As in Isaiah 45, all will bow to Yahweh, and here in Philippians, all will bow to Jesus and confess that He is Lord. By giving Jesus the name *Lord*, God declared the deity of Jesus.

The phrase, “Jesus Christ is Lord” is probably the earliest Christian confession, and is shorthand for the Gospel (cf., 2 Cor 4:5; Rom 10:9). Every week that we gather for worship and encourage one another in the Gospel, we are uniting with Christians that have gone before us. And as we make our confession, we are anticipating the future, in which everyone affirms this declaration.

Paul says everyone will bow and confess His Lordship, including those “in heaven and on earth and under the earth” (10b). Melick says, “Thus the hymn includes every conceivable habitation of personal beings” (108). Some will confess Him as Lord with great joy and humility. Others will confess Him as Lord with despair and anguish. Pilate, Caiaphas, Stalin, Hitler, and every other evil dictator will confess Him as Lord. Everyone from every age will do the same.

The hymn has this already-not-yet dimension. We confess Him as Lord now, but we also look forward to the future day in which all acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus. History is not like a treadmill going nowhere. It’s all moving to this day. Sadly, it will be too late for some. If you don’t acknowledge and confess that Jesus is Lord in this life, it will be too late after death. So, bow now! Confess Him as Lord now!

To confess Jesus as Lord in the first century meant that Caesar is not Lord. And as a result of such confessions, many were persecuted and killed. The same fate exists for many today around the world, who claim that Jesus is their Lord and Savior. But those who confess Christ as Lord now, will not regret it when they see Him. Contrastingly, those who refuse to bow to Him now, will wish that they had heeded the message.

“to the glory of God the Father” (11b). Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, ascension, and exaltation brings glory to God the Father. Here we see that there’s no rivalry in the Godhead, only delight and honor. This text points out the remarkable fact that Christ doesn’t keep glory for Himself, and even in His exaltation, He remains the model of humbly honoring the Father. Paul writes elsewhere:

And when everything is subject to Christ, then the Son Himself will also be subject to the One who subjected everything to Him, so that God may be all in all. (1 Cor 15:28)

The glory of God the Father is fitting concluding phrase to this hymn. For this is what the heart was made to do: glorify God, not self. Humility involves following the pattern of Jesus, for the glory of God.

Concluding Applications

Allow me to collect a few final points of application regarding this amazing passage. It's truly a Christological goldmine.

First, memorize this passage. It's a hymn. See how important poetry, music, and creeds are. We are always in need of good writing of sound doctrine. When we write well, people can remember and rejoice in the truths of the Gospel. Songs and creeds serve as portable theology. We get to take it with us. What a gift we have in Philippians 2. It's memorable. And because it's memorable, we can dwell on it regularly. And we should dwell on it regularly.

Second, believe this passage. Do you believe that Jesus Christ is Lord? You will -- either now or later. Don't wait until it's too late. Say with the saints from all ages, "Jesus Christ is Lord."

Third, follow the lifestyle presented in this passage. This is the attitude and the lifestyle that we should pursue. Philippians contains a word about following various people, but no one gives us a better model than Jesus.

Fourth, let's tell the world about the message of this passage. Our mission is to tell the world that Jesus is Lord, and if they will confess and believe in Him as such, they will be saved (Rom 10:9, 13).

Let us adore Him. Let our minds be on Him. Let our attitude be like His. Let our actions reflect Him. All of this -- to the glory of God the Father.