

IMITATING CHRIST: AN EXEGETICAL STUDY OF PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11

By Hyun-Gwang Kim

Introduction

Philippians 2:5-11 is one of the most debated passages of the New Testament.¹ It is also considered among scholars “the most difficult in Philippians to interpret.”² We can find many books and articles dealing with various issues regarding this passage. In this paper, however, I do not intend to discuss the literary form, background, or authorship of the text. Rather, my focus shall be on some key exegetical and theological issues directly relevant to the meaning of the text. In this paper, Philippians 2:5-11 will be interpreted from the perspective of imitating Christ. It is hoped that this exegetical study will provide a better understanding of the passage.

An Exegetical Analysis of Philippians 2:5-11

Philippians 2:5-11 falls into three parts: verse 5, verses 6-8, and verses 9-11. Verse 5 functions as a transition from verses 1-4 to 6-11.³ Verses 6-8 address the emptying of Christ, and verses 9-11 show the exaltation of Christ.⁴

Verse 5: Transition

Does the word τοῦτο point backward or forward? Gordon Fee rightly understands it as pointing backward, in this case, to verses 2-4.⁵ Τοῦτο is the object of φρονεῖτε (“this think”). Paul exhorts the Philippians to think on what he has mentioned in verses 2-4.⁶ The relative pronoun ὃ καὶ (“which also”) is related to τοῦτο (“this”). Thus, verse 5 can be rendered in this way: “Think this [i.e., vv. 2-4] . . . which also [was] in Christ Jesus (ὃ καὶ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ).”

However, some scholars such as Moisés Silva understand the words ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ to refer to the believer’s union with Christ rather than Christ’s attitude. Moisés Silva understands ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ as a reference to the Philippians’ relationship to Christ and thereby interprets the verse as follows: “Be so disposed toward one another as is proper for those who are united in Christ Jesus.”⁷ Thomas Schreiner, supporting Silva, also insists that “the phrase *in Christ Jesus*

¹Gordon D. Fee mentions that this passage is “one of the most exalted, most beloved, and most discussed and debated passages in the Pauline corpus.” Gordon D. Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 192.

²Peter T. O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 188.

³Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 199.

⁴Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul: Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 171.

⁵Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 199.

⁶Schreiner states that “the main verb in Philippians 2:5, *think* (φρονεῖτε), joins Philippians 2:5 to the preceding context because the same verbal form appears twice in Philippians 2:2. It is natural, then, to detect a link between the exhortation to unity in Philippians 2:1-4 and the example of Christ in the succeeding verses.” Schreiner, *Paul: Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ*, 169-170.

⁷Moisés Silva, *Philippians*, 2nd ed., Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 95.

designates what is true of believers in light of their union with Christ. Thus, the phrase should be translated ‘which is also yours in Christ Jesus.’”⁸ He consequently paraphrases this verse in the following manner: “Adopt the mindset of humility, because this mindset is yours by virtue of your union with Christ Jesus.”

This position seems to be too much influenced by the Pauline formula ἐν Χριστῷ itself, without doing proper justice to the context and structure of the passage. Although the ἐν Χριστῷ formula has a significant meaning in Pauline theology, not all occurrences of ἐν Χριστῷ can be understood to be referring to human beings’ corporate union with Christ.⁹ In the current passage the focus of Paul’s narration is not on the relationship between the Philippians and Christ; rather, Paul presents Christ as an example to follow and encourages the Philippians to do the same things as Christ did. After Paul exhorts the Philippians about unity, love, and humiliation among themselves in 2:2-4, he once again emphasizes this admonition in 2:5, “think this among you,” by presenting Jesus Christ as an example who already did what Paul mentions in 2:2-4. Put in other words, Paul seems to say that “what I mentioned in 2:2-4 was also in Christ Jesus. Therefore do them among you as Christ did.” Regarding the words ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ in verse 6, Robert Strimple correctly says that “ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ is not here a reference to our incorporation into Christ but a reference to Christ’s own thought or attitude.”¹⁰

Verse 5 functions not only as pointing backward but also pointing forward to what follows. This fact also can be suggested as a reason for reading verse 5 as “think this [i.e., vv. 2-4] . . . which also [was] in Christ Jesus.” It should not be overlooked that whereas τοῦτο (“this”) points backward to verses 2-4, ὃ καὶ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ (“which also [was] in Christ Jesus”) points forward to what follows.¹¹ Verses 6-11 demonstrate what was in Jesus Christ. Paul explains Christ’s self-giving love, humiliation, obedience and exaltation. Therefore, τοῦτο (“this”) and ὃ καὶ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ (“which also [was] in Christ Jesus”) in verse 5 make a parallel between verses 2-4 and verses 6-8. With this parallel Paul effectively exhorts the Philippians to be united and be humble among themselves (ἐν ὑμῖν) by looking at Christ as their example.

In this vein, one may want to think more about the passage before agreeing with Schreiner when he maintains that “the second part of this verse [ὃ καὶ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ], however, should not be understood as a call to imitate Christ. The words ὃ καὶ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ should not be rendered ‘which was also in Christ Jesus.’”¹² By saying “which also was in Christ Jesus,” however, Paul seems to emphasize the necessity of doing the things he exhorts in 2:2-4 because Jesus also did them. He addresses what Jesus Christ did in the following verses, i.e., 2:6-11. Therefore, it does not seem illegitimate to think that Paul uses the words ὃ καὶ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ to encourage the Philippians to imitate Christ. This parallel between verses 2-4 and 6-8 made by verse 5 shows that the theme of this text is the imitation of Christ.

⁸Schreiner, *Paul: Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ*, 170. The italics are original.

⁹For the usage of the expression “in Christ” in Pauline letters, see Mark A. Seifrid, “In Christ” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), 433-36. Seifrid states (“in Christ,” 433) that “while Paul sometimes joins the expression ‘in Christ’ with the image of Christ as an inclusive figure, body or building, it is not derived from or limited to a ‘corporate’ idea.”

¹⁰Robert B. Strimple, “Philippians 2:5-11 in Recent Studies: Some Exegetical Conclusions,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 41 (1979): 254.

¹¹In this respect, Peter T. O’Brien rightly rejects W. Michaelis’ opinion that v.5 cannot be understood as the introduction to a new section. O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, 204.

¹²Schreiner, *Paul*, 170.

Verses 6-8: Christ's Self-humiliation

Christ's attitude and actions have been described in these verses. Therefore, Christ is the acting subject of all the verbs. If one knows who Christ is, he could understand the significance of what Christ has done for the people. So, Paul mentions who Christ is in the first part of verse 6. Jesus Christ is depicted as "being in the form of God." With the words "being in the form of God" does Paul think of the time before Jesus was born or when he was born? Howard Marshall introduces two possible interpretations.¹³ If Paul thinks about the time *before* Jesus was born, we must think Jesus Christ was *originally* in the form of God before he was born. If Paul thinks about Jesus *when* he was born, it is possible that Paul is mentioning that Jesus was made in the image of God, as Adam was created in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26). James D. G. Dunn takes the second possibility by saying that "μορφῆ θεοῦ probably refers to Adam having been made in the image (εἰκὼν) of God."¹⁴ Which one is the proper interpretation between these two possibilities? In order to answer this question, we need to determine first the meaning of μορφῆ θεοῦ.

The Meaning of "in the Form of God" in Verse 6

Since the words μορφῆ θεοῦ are found only here in the New Testament, their meaning has been highly debated among scholars. The following are the several suggested meanings of μορφῆ θεοῦ:

(1) Εἰκὼν ("image") of God. As we have seen above, this interpretation has been supported by James Dunn. Although Hawthorne does not agree with this position, he explains it quite clearly, saying, "As the first Adam was in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26-27), so Christ, the second Adam, existed in the image of God (Phil 2:6)."¹⁵ This position interprets the current passage in terms of the Adam-Christ contrast.

(2) Glory of God. Wanamaker contends that μορφῆ θεοῦ means the visible divine glory.¹⁶ In the Old Testament God is known by his glory. The glory of God refers to the radiant light that accompanied God's physical manifestations (Exod 24:17; Ezek 1:26-28; 10:4).

(3) Mode of Being. In this interpretation, μορφῆ does not mean "the individual entity as a formed whole, but a mode of being in a specific direction, such as, for example, being in divine substance and power."¹⁷

(4) "Status" or "Position." Ralph P. Martin, relying on E. Schweizer, regards μορφῆ θεοῦ as "Christ's original position vis-à-vis God."¹⁸ Howard Marshall also says "the *form of God* is primary to be associated with having the status of God, namely sovereignty, which was exchanged for the status of a slave."¹⁹

¹³Howard Marshall, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, Epworth Commentaries (London: Epworth Press, 1991), 50.

¹⁴James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 115.

¹⁵Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 43 (Waco: Word Books, 1983), 82; Timothy B. Savage also states that "μορφῆ θεοῦ is the near equivalent of εἰκὼν θεοῦ." Timothy B. Savage, "Philippians 2:6-7: The Image of God and the Cross of Christ," in *Interpreting the New Testament Text: Introduction to the Art and Science of Exegesis* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006), 411.

¹⁶C. A. Wanamaker, "Philippians 2.6-11: Son of God or Adamic Christology?," *New Testament Studies* 33 (1987): 185-87.

¹⁷Ernst Käsemann, "A Critical Analysis of Philippians 2:5-11," *Journal for Theology and the Church* 5 (1968): 60.

¹⁸Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians*, New Century Bible (Greenwood: Attic Press, 1976), 95-96.

¹⁹Marshall, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, 50.

(5) Essential nature and character of God. According to Hawthorne, μορφῆ θεοῦ means the “essential nature and character of God.”²⁰ Christ existed in possession of all the characteristics and qualities belonging to God.

Among these suggestions, seeing μορφῆ θεοῦ as the “mode of being” is criticized by Moisés Silva, because it is primarily based on the Gnostic “heavenly man” myth.²¹ The suggestion of “Glory of God” is also rejected by Hawthorne who thinks that the meaning “glory” “cannot be applied equally to the parallel phrase μορφῆν δούλου in v. 7,” because, then, it would have the meaning of “the glory of a slave.”²² Understanding μορφῆ θεοῦ to be the image of God relying on the Adam-Christ contrast can not be warranted, because, as Peter O’Brien correctly says, it is very doubtful that the apostle intended to draw the Adam-Christ parallel in this passage.²³ Moreover, when we consider verse 6 as a whole, it can be immediately detected that the verse does not make sense if we read μορφῆ θεοῦ as the “image of God.” In verse 6 μορφῆ θεοῦ is used by Paul as the ground on which Christ could be regarded as being equal with God.²⁴ It is doubtful, however, that Paul thought the fact that Adam was created in the image of God was the reason for Adam being considered as being equal with God. Therefore, James Dunn’s argument is not convincing when he says “μορφῆ θεοῦ probably refers to Adam having been made in the image (εἰκὼν) of God.”²⁵ Consequently, Paul is not mentioning that Jesus was made in the image of God as Adam was created in the image and likeness of God, since it is not likely that Paul is speaking of Jesus’ birth when he uses the words “being in [the] form of God.”

Then, what is the meaning of the “form of God”? Μορφῆ θεοῦ can be understood as the “essential nature and character of God.” Christ possessed all the characteristics and qualities belonging to God. “Being in the form of God” is tantamount to participating in the essence of God. F. F. Bruce similarly says that possession of the form implies participation in the essence.²⁶ Therefore “being in the form of God” implies Christ’s pre-existence.²⁷ Christ pre-existed, as the essential nature and character of God.

Μορφῆ θεοῦ can also be understood as “status” or “position.” Although Hawthorne, referring to *TDNT* 4.742-49, points out the problem with this interpretation, that such an understanding of μορφῆ does not appear in Greek literature,²⁸ Tobit 1:13 can be provided as an example of this kind of usage.²⁹ Moisés Silva also says that “the combination of *morphēn doulou* in verse 7 and plus the parallel in 2 Cor. 8:9 strongly suggest that connotation [“condition” or “status”].”³⁰ Christ shared the status of God which is expressed in supreme sovereignty.³¹

²⁰Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 84.

²¹Moisés Silva, *Philippians*, 100.

²²Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 82.

²³O’Brien, *Philippians*, 209.

²⁴Moisés Silva rightly pointed out that being “in the form of God” is equivalent to being “equal with God.” Silva, *Philippians*, 101.

²⁵Dunn, *Christology in the Making* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 115.

²⁶F. F. Bruce, *Philippians*, A Good News Commentary (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983), 45.

²⁷So also N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 95.

²⁸Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 83.

²⁹O’Brien, *Philippians*, 210. Tobit 1:13: “the Most High gave me favor and good standing with Shalmaneser, and I used to buy everything he needed (καὶ ἔδωκεν ὁ ὑψιστος χάριν καὶ μορφῆν ἐνώπιον Ενεμεσσαρου καὶ ἤμην αὐτοῦ ἀγοραστής)” (NRSV).

³⁰Silva, *Philippians*, 102.

³¹Marshall, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, 50.

Although we do not regard μορφή as “glory” in verse 6, it is also true that “being in the form of God” implies the glory of God. Strimple explains this fact clearly when he says “verse 6 refers to Christ’s eternal δόξα not because μορφή *equals* δόξα but because the μορφή θεοῦ is δόξα.”³² Christ’s pre-existence, which is implied in “being in the form of God,” is related with glory in John 17:5: “Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was” (NASB). Schreiner also points out that “to say that Jesus ‘was in the form of God’ emphasizes the splendor and glory of his position.”³³ Jesus Christ was in the form of God before he was born and he shared the glory of God.

The Meaning of ἄρπαγμός

The meaning of ἄρπαγμόν is also difficult to discern because “it appears nowhere else in the Greek Bible and occurs only rarely in secular Greek. Its few secular occurrences carry the meaning ‘robbery’ or ‘rape.’”³⁴ Therefore, the KJV renders verse 6b as “[Christ] thought it not robbery to be equal with God.” This sense is called *res rapta* in Latin, which means that Christ did not regard his divine equality as something obtained by snatching, because he regarded it as being his by eternal right.³⁵

The word ἄρπαγμόν is also understood by some scholars, including Fred Craddock, as “to be grasped.”³⁶ The NASB’s rendering is that “[Christ] did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped.” N. T. Wright introduces two passive senses of ἄρπαγμόν: (1) *res retinenda*: “something to be clung on to” and (2) *res rapienda*: “something to be grasped.”³⁷ *Res retinenda* implies that Christ already possessed equality with God, whereas *res rapienda* implies that he did not possess it.

Regarding the notion of ἄρπαγμόν, Schreiner’s explanation is useful. He introduces three suggestions:

- 1) “Jesus *already possesses equality with* God and willingly surrenders his position for the sake of the salvation of human beings”;
- 2) “*even though Jesus is not equal to God*, he does not make it his goal to grasp after such a position”;
- 3) “Roy Hoover, in a careful lexical study, maintains that the word *harpagmon* should be rendered ‘take advantage of.’ The relevant clause would then read, ‘[Jesus] did not consider equality with God as something to be taken advantage of.’”³⁸

Among these, Hoover’s suggestion is most persuasive. Roy Hoover convincingly proposes that ἄρπαγμόν means “take advantage of” by providing an example from Eusebius’ writings:

³²Strimple, “Philippians 2:5-11 in Recent Studies,” 261. The emphasis is original.

³³Schreiner, *Paul*, 171.

³⁴Frank Thielman, *Philippians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 116.

³⁵For detailed explanations for this concept and others, see N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant*. 63-69.

³⁶Fred B. Craddock, *Philippians*, Interpretation (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985), 41.

³⁷Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant*, 65-69. See also Ralph P. Martin, *A Hymn of Christ: Philippians 2:5-11 in Recent Interpretation & in the Setting of Early Christian Worship* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997), 137-43. This book is originally published under the title of *Carmen Christi* by Cambridge University Press in 1967. N. T. Wright evaluates Martin’s summary of the meaning of ἄρπαγμόν.

³⁸Schreiner, *Paul*, 171. Italics are original.

ὁ Πέτρος δε ἄρπαγμὸν τὸν διὰ σταυροῦ θάνατον ἐποιεῖτο διὰ τὰς σωτηρίου ἐλπίδας

(“And Peter considered death by means of the cross *harpagmon* on account of the hope of salvation.” *Comm. in Luc 6*).³⁹

Hoover insists that “this statement cannot mean that Peter considered death by crucifixion to be a robbery, or something seized or to be seized by a violent self-assertion, or a treasure to be held fast.”⁴⁰ According to Hoover’s understanding, Peter considered crucifixion not a horror to be shunned, but an advantage to be seized.⁴¹ Hoover’s suggestion is quite convincing and is accepted by Thomas Schreiner as well as N. T. Wright.⁴² If we accept Hoover’s suggestion, verse 6b can be rendered in this way: “[Jesus] did not consider equality with God as something to be taken advantage of.”⁴³ Therefore ἄρπαγμὸν does not refer to the act of acquiring something nor to the act of clinging on to it.⁴⁴ Hoover’s position supports the fact that Jesus already possessed equality with God. As N. T. Wright mentions, one cannot take advantage of something one does not already have.⁴⁵

The Pre-existence of Christ

Since one cannot take advantage of something one does not already have, Christ can be understood to have possessed equality with God when Paul testifies in verse 6 that Christ did not consider his equality with God as something to be taken advantage of. Christ’s equality with God proves the pre-existence of Christ. As we have seen, Christ is “in the form of God,” which means that Christ possessed the essential nature and character of God. Therefore, he is equal with God. In other words, “equality with God” is the essential nature of Christ. Richard Melick understands that “equal” shows how Christ existed.⁴⁶ Therefore, “being in the form of God” and “equality with God” refer to Christ’s state of existence.⁴⁷ Christ’s equality with God in terms of existence demonstrates the pre-existence of Christ. Schreiner also supports this position as follows: “Equality with God is something Jesus possessed before his incarnation, and thus the verse clearly teaches (contra James Dunn) the preexistence of Christ. The parallelism of the text also indicates that ‘being in the form of God’ involves ‘equality with God.’”⁴⁸

If one accepts ἄρπαγμὸν as grasping, he may understand verse 6 as “even though Jesus is not equal to God, he does not make it his goal to grasp after such a position.” In this case, Christ’s pre-existence could be denied. However, if we understand ἄρπαγμὸν as “taking advantage of,” verse 6 clearly shows Christ’s deity and pre-existence. Although Christ was equal with God, he did not consider his equality with God as “something to use for his own advantage.”⁴⁹ In this respect, Paul encourages the Philippians to imitate Christ, who set aside his

³⁹Roy W. Hoover, “The Harpagmos Enigma: A Philological Solution,” *Harvard Theological Review* 64 (1971): 108.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 109

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 109.

⁴²Schreiner, *Paul*, 171; Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant*, 78-82.

⁴³Schreiner, *Paul*, 171.

⁴⁴Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant*, 78.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 82.

⁴⁶Richard R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, The New American Commentary, vol. 32 (Nashville: Broadman, 1991), 101.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 102.

⁴⁸Schreiner, *Paul*, 171.

⁴⁹Hoover, “The Harpagmos Enigma: A Philological Solution,” 118.

own interest for the sake of others. Since Paul exhorts the Philippians in verse 4 to look not only to one's own interests but also to others' interests, verse 6 presents Christ as a perfect example of this kind of life. Although Christ was in the form of God, he did not regard equality with God as something to be taken advantage of, rather, he emptied himself for human beings.⁵⁰

The Concept of "Emptying Himself" in Verse 7

Paul explains the nature of Christ's humiliation in verse 7. Christ emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in the likeness of men, and being found in appearance as a man. What does the concept of "emptying (ἐκένωσεν) himself" mean? The kenotic theory of the incarnation maintains that Christ gave up his divinity in becoming man. However, "emptying himself" does not mean that Christ emptied himself of any divine attribute.⁵¹ Thielman has observed that "the verb 'empty (*kenoo*)' appears only four times elsewhere in the New Testament. All of these occurrences are in Paul's letters, and all use the term, not literally to refer to emptying something of qualities it possesses, but figuratively of nullifying something, making it of no account."⁵² Rather than Christ emptying himself *of something*, he emptied *himself*. The two participles which modify the main verb ἐκένωσεν describe how Christ emptied himself. Christ emptied himself *by* taking the form of a slave and *by* taking on the likeness of man.⁵³ Schreiner paradoxically explains Christ's "emptying himself" by saying, "The *emptying* of Christ, then, consisted of an *adding*. He emptied himself by becoming fully human." Further, Schreiner correctly points out that "the text does not say that he emptied himself by surrendering his deity."⁵⁴ Christ emptied and humbled himself by taking the form of a slave.

As Ralph Martin notes, there is a suggestion that Christ took the role of Isaiah's Servant.⁵⁵ N. T. Wright also finds the echoes of Isaiah 40-55 in this passage.⁵⁶ Does Paul intend to refer to the obedient Servant of the Lord in Isaiah 40-55 by saying "Christ emptied himself by taking the form of a slave"? The connection between Philippians 2:7 and Isaiah 42-53, however, should not be overemphasized, since, as Gordon Fee mentions, the context of Philippians 2:7 "does not lie on Jesus' messianism or on his fulfilling the role of the Servant of the Lord. Rather it lies primarily on the servant nature of Christ's incarnation."⁵⁷

Furthermore, if we accept "taking the form of a slave" as referring to the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah, the contrast between "the form of God" (v.6) and "the form of a slave" (v.7) does not stand. Brendan Byrne points out this problem quite clearly.⁵⁸

⁵⁰The word ὑπάρχων should be understood as concessive, although MacLeod regards it as causative. David J. MacLeod, "Imitating the Incarnation of Christ: An Exposition of Philippians 2:5-8," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158 (2001): 316. For the concessive sense, see Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 634-635.

⁵¹Thielman, *Philippians*, 117.

⁵²Ibid., 117. He refers to Rom 4:14, 1 Cor 1:17, 2 Cor 9:3, and 1 Cor 9:15.

⁵³Schreiner thinks that "both of these participles should be understood instrumentally." Schreiner, *Paul*, 172.

⁵⁴Ibid., 172.

⁵⁵See, Martin, *A Hymn of Christ*, 182-190.

⁵⁶Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant*, 60-61; idem, *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 69.

⁵⁷Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, 212.

⁵⁸Brendan Byrne, "Christ's Pre-Existence in Pauline Soteriology," *Theological Studies* 58 (1997): 317, n. 41

Attempts to take the Greek words *doulos* here in the less pejorative sense of servant and so find a reference to the Servant figure of Isaiah 42:1-7; 49:1-7; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12 are not on the whole convincing. Apart from linguistic problem, the most positive note attaching the role of such a servant figure gravely weakens the contrast (divine condition/slave condition) which the logic of the hymn requires.

Paul is making a clear contrast between “the form of God” and “the form of a slave” in this passage. Although Christ is equal with God, he humbled himself to the extent of being in the form of a slave.

“Taking the form of a slave” means that Christ adopted the “characteristic attributes” (μορφή) of a slave.⁵⁹ The phrase “emptying himself by taking the form of a slave” does not mean that “Christ *exchanged* the form of God for the form of a slave.”⁶⁰ As Morna D. Hooker is well aware, Christ did not cease to be “in the form of God” when he took the form of a slave.⁶¹ Here again we can affirm the fact that “emptying himself” does not mean that Christ emptied himself of any divine attribute. “Emptying” here is “adding.” Christ added the form of a slave to the form of God. To use F. F. Bruce’s expression, “[Christ] displayed the nature (or form) of God in the nature (or form) of a servant.”⁶² Bruce provides us with John 13:3-5 as an illustration of this. At the Last Supper, Jesus, who knew his divine origin and destiny, washed his disciples’ feet and dried them with the towel he had tied round his waist.

Christ emptied himself by becoming in the likeness of men. According to Fee, “likeness” implies both the similarity and the dissimilarity of Christ to men.⁶³ The similarity of Christ lies with his full humanity. The dissimilarity can be found in his deity and his being sinless. Christ had not only humanity but also deity.

The expression “being found in appearance as a man (σχήματι εὑρεθεὶς ὡς ἄνθρωπος)” can be understood to refer to the outward guise of Christ as it appeared to human observation.⁶⁴ Thielman explains that the word σχήματι is related to Christ’s outward appearance which is recognizable to anyone else as a man.⁶⁵

Christ’s Obedience and Death on a Cross

In verse 8, Paul says that Christ humbled himself to the extent of death on a cross. Death on a cross is the lowest state that Christ reached because of his obedience to God. In verse 8, Paul emphasizes not only Christ’s humiliation but also his obedience. After Paul exhorts the Philippians to be humble toward one another in verse 3, he presents Christ as an example of humiliation in verses 6-8. Now he emphasizes Christ’s obedience, which made it possible for him [Christ] to be humble to the point of death on a cross. Seemingly, Paul thinks that in order to follow what he has said in verses 2-4 (including humiliation), the Philippians also need to be obedient. After Paul mentions Christ’s obedience as an example in verse 8, he calls the

⁵⁹Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 86.

⁶⁰Markus Bockmuehl, *The Letter to the Philippians*, Black’s New Testament Commentary, vol. 11 (London: A & C Black, 1997), 133-134. The italics are his.

⁶¹Morna D. Hooker, *The Letter to the Philippians*, in vol. 11 of *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck et al. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 508.

⁶²Bruce, *Philippians*, 46.

⁶³Fee, *Philippians*, 213.

⁶⁴Marvin R. Vincent, *Epistle to the Philippians and to Philemon*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1979), 60.

⁶⁵Thielman, *Philippians*, 118, n.24.

Philippians to obedience in verses 12 and 13.⁶⁶ Paul encourages the Philippians to continue to be obedient, even in his absence (v.12), to God, who wills and works on behalf of his goodwill (v.13). Since the Philippians already have seen what God did for Christ, who obeyed God unto death in verses 9-11, Paul's call for obedience of the Philippians in the very next verses, i.e., verses 12-13, is powerful.

Regarding the object of Christ's obedience, Craddock thinks that "while Christ's obedience is, in final analysis, unto God, very likely the statement refers more immediately to all the forces and powers that determine human life."⁶⁷ Although it is true that Christ was under all the conditions of the human lot as Craddock says, it is still doubtful as to whether Christ can be considered to be obedient to "*principalities, powers, angels, thrones, dominions, and elemental spirits*."⁶⁸ Concerning Christ's obedience, John Calvin simply puts in his commentary that "he nevertheless [i.e., the Lord of life and death] became obedience to his Father."⁶⁹ N. T. Wright understands this obedience as referring specifically to the obedience "to the divine saving plan."⁷⁰ By becoming obedient to God, Christ endured the cruelest death--death on a cross. Therefore God exalted him as we can see in verses 9-11.

Christ's Exaltation by God in Verses 9-11: The Grace of God or the Reward of God?

While Christ is the subject of the verbs and participles in verses 6-8, God takes center stage in verses 9-11. God has exalted Christ and given him the name above all other names because he [Christ] humbled himself and obeyed God unto death. Then, is the exaltation of Christ the grace of God or the reward of God? Calvin opposes the notion of reward in the exaltation of Christ.⁷¹ Hawthorne also understands it not to be a reward, noting that διὸ καὶ in verse 9 "say in effect that the exaltation of Christ...was not so much a reward for his self-abnegation, or a gracious gift that excludes any idea of merit on Christ's part, as it was the natural or logical outcome of his humility."⁷² He insists that self-humiliation leads inevitably to exaltation, referring to Matthew 23:12, which reads "whoever will exalt himself will be humbled and whoever humbles himself will be exalted." Moisés Silva, however, does not exclude the notion of reward from this passage.⁷³ He questions whether the grace of God and the reward of God can be opposed to each other, saying "is it necessary to deny the notion of reward if we wish to do justice to the gracious element of God's act?"⁷⁴ The exaltation of Christ can be the reward of God given by the grace of God. If we emphasize the notion of reward in regard to salvation, it would go against Paul's doctrine of salvation, since salvation cannot be a reward or merit for man's works. However, in Philippians 2:5-11, as Silva correctly points out, Paul does not primarily describe a sinner's justification. He encourages the Philippians to imitate Christ's humiliation and obedience in order to be exalted by God as a reward. As Silva also observed,

⁶⁶Gordon Fee also points out this fact. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, 216.

⁶⁷Craddock, *Philippians*, 41.

⁶⁸Ibid., 41. Craddock identifies these as the forces that determine human life. The italics are his.

⁶⁹John Calvin, *Epistle to the Philippians*, Calvin's Commentaries, vol. 21 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996),

58.

⁷⁰Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 68; idem, *The Climax of the Covenant*, 95.

⁷¹Calvin, *Epistle to the Philippians*, 59-60.

⁷²Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 90.

⁷³Silva, *Philippians*, 109.

⁷⁴Ibid.

Paul himself presses on toward the goal to win the prize (Phil 3:13-14). It is sufficient to cite Schreiner's comment regarding the question of reward in this passage:

The argument Paul uses, however, is analogous: just as Christ was exalted as Lord because of his obedience, so too will believers be rewarded for their humility. They will be rewarded precisely because they are in Christ . . . what Paul emphasizes in Philippians is that believers will be rewarded with a glorious resurrection body and leave behind the body that suffers degradation because of sin (Phil 3:20-21) . . . yielding the conclusion that the believers' reward in Philippians 3:21 is analogous to Christ's reward in Philippians 2:9-11.⁷⁵

“The Name above Every Name”

God highly exalted Jesus and gave him “the name above every name (τὸ ὄνομα τὸ ὑπὲρ πάντων ὀνομα)” (v.9). Some scholars regard this “name above every name” as “Jesus,” because every one will bow “at the name of Jesus (v.10).”⁷⁶ However, Marshall finds a difficulty with this suggestion. While the name Jesus was given right after his birth, “the name above all names” was given after his humiliation and obedience to the point of death.⁷⁷ Fee thinks that this name means the name “Lord,” which is the equivalent of Yahweh.⁷⁸ Marshall also thinks, based on verse 11, that the name or title of Lord is given to Jesus.⁷⁹ However, these arguments seem to differentiate between Jesus and Lord too much. Apparently, Paul says “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow” in verse 10. Since the title of Lord is given to *Jesus*, it could be said that every knee should bow at the name of *Jesus*.

Since Paul understands Jesus to be Lord, he seems to use the name Jesus as an equivalent word to Lord in verses 9-11. It is evident that Paul proclaims Jesus as Lord in verse 11 by echoing Isaiah 45:23, where God says that “to me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear” (LXX, confess). Paul replaces “to me [God]” of Isaiah 45:23 with “at the name of Jesus” in Philippians 2:10 (“at the name of Jesus every knee should bow”), and he also replaces “to me [God]” with the name Jesus in Philippians 2:11 (“every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord”). Since Paul uses “Jesus” and “Lord” interchangeably in Philippians 2:9-11 as we have seen from his use of Isaiah 45:23, it is understandable why he says “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow” in verse 10. The name Jesus is no longer a normal name after his death and resurrection. Now the name Jesus is “the name above every name.”

Does the word ἐν in the expression “at (ἐν) the name of Jesus” (v.10) mean the medium of worship? In other words, is worship not directed to Jesus, but through him to God? If one considers it as a medium, it could be. However, the context of the sentence seems to indicate the name of Jesus as the object of worship.⁸⁰ As we have seen, Paul replaces “to me [God]” of Isaiah 45:23, which denotes the object of worship, with “at the name of Jesus.” God puts the name of Jesus as the object of worship, just as he is worshiped.⁸¹

⁷⁵Schreiner, *Paul*, 170.

⁷⁶David J. MacLeod, “The Exaltation of Christ: An Exposition of Philippians 2:9-11,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158 (2001): 442-43.

⁷⁷Marshall, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, 56.

⁷⁸Fee, *Philippians*, 222.

⁷⁹Marshall, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, 56.

⁸⁰Fee, *Philippians*, 223.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, 224.

Adam and Christ

Adam and Christ can be compared in many ways. N. T. Wright finds Adam christology in Philippians 2:6-11.⁸² James D. G. Dunn also contends that “Phil. 2.6-11 is best understood as an expression of Adam christology, one of the fullest expressions that we still possess.”⁸³ According to Dunn, μορφή θεου refers to Adam, since Adam was made in the image of God. Μορφήν δούλου refers to what Adam became as a result of his fall. “Equality with God” probably alludes to Adam’s temptation, since in Genesis 3:5 we read “you will be like God.” While Adam lost the divine glory, Christ restored it as we can see in Philippians 2:9-11. N. T. Wright explains Adam christology by saying, “in contrast to Adam’s grasping at a status to which he had no right, Christ voluntarily renounced a status to which he had every right.”⁸⁴ Whereas Adam disobeyed, Christ obeyed God’s plan to the point of death. As Hooker explains, Christ reversed the effects of Adam’s fall.⁸⁵ Christ undoes the failure of Adam and brings life. Those who argue for Adam christology in Philippians 2:5-11 refer to Romans 5:2-21, 1 Corinthians 15:21-22 and 42-50, where Paul speaks of Adam, as the reason for finding Adam in Philippians 2.

As we have seen, Dunn denies the pre-existence of Christ when he compares Adam with Christ.⁸⁶ Wright argues against him that “if the God who will not share his glory with another has now shared it with Jesus (the position asserted in 2.9ff.)” and “if Paul is still a monotheist, then the assertions of 2.9-11 must mean that Jesus — or, more accurately, the one who *became* Jesus — must have been from all eternity ‘equal with God’ in the sense of being himself fully divine.”⁸⁷ Wright correctly finds “the incarnation of a pre-existent divine being” and “the subsequent glorification to divine splendour of a crucified man” in this passage.⁸⁸ Therefore, James Dunn’s argument for Adam christology is not convincing especially when he argues against Christ’s pre-existence by the Adam-Christ contrast. Furthermore, Paul is not suggesting that Jesus was made in the image of God just as Adam was created in the image and likeness of God. It is also true that the interchangeability of μορφή and εἰκὼν has been doubted.⁸⁹

Markus Bockmuehl is against finding Adam christology in Philippians 2:5-11, saying “the text nevertheless offers insufficient evidence to establish an *explicit* link, or even a deliberate allusion, to Adam.”⁹⁰ Although one could make a contrast between Adam and Christ in several respects, it is uncertain at least whether Paul intended this contrast in this passage.⁹¹

Conclusion

Paul encourages Philippians to imitate Christ, providing the attitude and acts of Christ in Philippians 2:6-11. Τοῦτο in verse 5 points backward to verses 2-4, where Paul exhorts the

⁸²Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant*, 57-62 and 90-97.

⁸³Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, 114. See also, 115-125 for his Adam christology.

⁸⁴Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant*, 88.

⁸⁵Hooker, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 504.

⁸⁶Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, 119-120.

⁸⁷Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant*, 95. The italics are original.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, 95.

⁸⁹O’Brien, *Philippians*, 263.

⁹⁰Bockmuehl, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, 133. The italics are original.

⁹¹Bruce, *Philippians*, 45.

Philippians about unity, love, and humiliation among themselves. The phrase ὃ καὶ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ (“which also [was] in Christ Jesus”) seems to point forward to what follows in order to show Christ’s attitude and behavior. Although Christ was the form of God, i.e., the essential nature and character of God, he did not consider his equality with God something to be exploited for his own self-aggrandizement. The word ἀρπαγμὸν is understood as meaning “taking advantage of.” Christ emptied himself by taking the form of a slave and by being made in the likeness of men. “Emptying himself” does not mean that Christ emptied himself of divinity in his incarnation. The climax of his humiliation was his death on a cross. This is the evidence of his obedience to God for fulfilling God’s saving plan for sinners. Therefore God highly exalted him and gave him the name above every name, so that everyone may worship him and confess him to be Lord. The exaltation of Christ is the reward for his humiliation, which is given by the grace of God. This passage shows Christ’s pre-existence by expressions such as “in the form of God” and “equality with God.” Although one could think about either the Servant of Isaiah or Adam when reading this passage, it is not clear whether Paul had either of them in mind. In this passage, Paul effectively exhorts Philippians to imitate Christ by presenting Christ’s humiliation and exaltation as an example. If Christ, who is equal with God, humbled himself and served others with self-giving love, how much more readily should Philippians do the same things among themselves?