

"A PATTERN FOR CHRISTIANS TO FOLLOW"

**I. Introduction**

- A. This is one of the richest and most beautiful passages dealing with the doctrine of Christology, the branch of theology concerned with the person and work of Christ.
- B. The irony is that Paul's primary purpose here is not to teach Christology, but to show how Christ exemplified the unselfishness to which he is calling his readers.
- C. This is evident in how the passage begins, as Paul tells the Philippians that he wants them to pattern their lives after what he is going to say about Jesus in the following verses.
- D. This is what he means when he says, "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus."
- E. Paul is using this glorious description of Jesus in his office as the one mediator between man and God as the ultimate illustration of what it means to look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

**II. Christ's Estate of Humiliation**

- A. As Paul begins his description of Christ in his mediatorial office, he says a couple things that allude to Christ's preexistence.
  - 1. Because Jesus is God, his conception in the womb of Mary did not mark the point when he came into existence.
  - 2. While we come into existence at the point when we are conceived, this was not the case with Jesus.

3. Prior to being made in the likeness of men, Jesus eternally existed as God the Son.
  4. He has always been in possession of the divine essence, and one of the attributes of that essence is eternity.
  5. This is made clear in our text when Paul says that Jesus “was in the form of God.”
  6. As B.B. Warfield explains, “‘Form’ is a term which expresses the sum of those characterizing qualities which make a thing the precise thing that it is.” [*The Person and Work of Christ*, 39]
  7. Christ possesses the fullness of attributes that make God God.
  8. Paul also expresses this by describing Christ as having “equality with God.”
  9. In saying this, Paul both identifies Jesus as God and implies that there is a distinction in persons in the Godhead.
  10. As God the Son, Jesus fully participated in the divine essence all the way back into eternity past.
  11. In the language of the Nicene Creed, he is “of one substance with the Father.”
- B. After alluding to Christ’s preexistence, Paul focuses on Christ’s estate of humiliation.
1. When we speak of Christ’s “estates” or “states,” we are referring to the two phases that he went through in his office as mediator, his humiliation and his exaltation.
  2. The way Jesus entered into his state of humiliation was by not counting “equality with God a thing to be grasped.”

3. That is, Jesus did not consider his divine glory a thing to be held onto for his own advantage.
  4. He was willing to let his glory be hidden so that he could take the form of a servant by becoming a man.
  5. Christ did not cease to be divine when he became man.
  6. Instead, at his coming into the world he did not manifest himself to be what he really is.
  7. He let the things that manifest his divine glory be hidden under his human nature.
  8. We might imagine a king who temporarily forsakes the outward emblems of his majesty — his scepter, his crown, his robe, his throne, his attendants — so that he can carry out some special purpose.
  9. In setting those things aside, the king does not cease to be king.
  10. In a similar way, Jesus did not cease to be God when he became man.
- C. Paul continues to explain this by saying that Jesus “emptied himself” when he became a man.
1. This might sound like Paul is saying that Jesus divested himself of his divine nature, and some have mistakenly concluded just that.
  2. However, a closer look shows that that is not at all what Paul means.
  3. Paul is the only New Testament author who uses the verb that the current edition of the ESV translates here as “emptied.” (older editions had “made himself nothing”)

4. All four of Paul's other uses of this term are metaphorical, indicating something being made valueless or void (see Rom. 4:14; 1 Cor. 1:17; 9:3, 15).
5. This is how the term is being used in our text.
6. Paul's meaning is aptly expressed in the King James Version, which translates the verb by saying that Jesus "made himself of no reputation" when he became a man.
7. That this is what Paul means is confirmed by the fact that he says that the way Jesus "emptied himself" was by "taking the form of a servant."
8. That is, he added a human nature to his divine nature.
9. When we speak of something being *added* to something else, we do not mean that the original thing is done away with.
10. This tells us that the thing that changed at the incarnation was not Christ's participation in the divine essence, but the form in which that essence was manifested.
11. Prior to his incarnation, his essence and form were in perfect agreement with one another.
12. But at his incarnation, he took something new upon him — a human nature.
13. And prior to the point when his human nature was glorified, it did not manifest Christ's divine essence.
14. Herman Bavinck explains it this way: "before His incarnation Christ was equal with the Father not alone in essence and attributes, but He had also the form of God. He looked like God, He was the brightness of His glory, and the expressed image of His person. Had anyone been able to see Him, he would immediately have recognized God. But this changed at His incarnation. Then

He took on the form of a human being, the form of a servant. Whoever looked at Him now could no longer recognize in Him the Only-Begotten Son of the Father, except by the eye of faith. He had laid aside His Divine form and brightness. He hid His Divine nature behind the form of a servant. On earth He was and He looked like one of us." [*The Wonderful Works of God*, 306]

- D. Paul's focus in these verses is not upon what Jesus emptied himself *of*, but upon what he emptied himself *into*.
1. Jesus took the form of a servant.
  2. He was born in the likeness of men.
  3. The One through whom the world was created stooped down and became a creature, and he did this without losing his original nature as God.
  4. As Augustine puts it, "Christ added to himself that which he was not; he did not lose what he was." [cited in Hyde, *God with Us*, 34]
- E. The phrase "form of a servant" calls our attention to the fact that, in becoming a man, Jesus subjected himself to the demands of God's law.
1. Paul expresses this in Galatians 4:4 by saying that Jesus "was born under the law."
  2. Though he is Lord over all, he willingly obligated himself to fulfill the law of God in our place.
  3. In John Calvin's words, "The Lord Jesus Christ took our nature upon himself, that he might live a life of obedience to God for our sake." [*Sermons on Galatians*, 371]
  4. The word "obedience" sums up the work that Jesus came into the world to accomplish.

5. This is why Paul says in his letter to the Romans, “as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.” (Rom. 5:19)
  6. In taking a human nature upon himself, Jesus put himself in the position of having to learn and render perfect obedience in that human nature.
  7. Though he is ruler of all, he made himself a servant for our sake.
- F. Paul calls our attention to the fact that Christ’s obedience culminated in his subjecting himself to death on a cross.
1. Because Jesus did everything that the law requires, his perfect righteousness can be imputed to all who look to him in faith.
  2. And after fulfilling the law in our place, he bore the curse of the law by suffering and dying on the cross to make atonement for the sins of his people.
  3. This was necessary for our salvation because, left to ourselves, we are under the law’s curse.
  4. By humbling himself and becoming a man, Jesus made himself subject to the demands and curse of the law so that he could save us from the judgment that our sins deserve.

### III. Christ’s Estate of Exaltation

- A. This brings us to the second half of our passage, which begins in verse 9.
1. The term “Therefore” at the beginning of verse 9 indicates that, because of what Christ accomplished when he was in his estate of humiliation, God raised him to his estate of exaltation.
  2. This estate began with Christ’s resurrection, which was followed by his ascension into heaven and being seated at the right hand of God

the Father.

3. And this estate will culminate in Christ's coming again to judge the living and the dead and usher in the new heavens and the new earth.
- B. As we consider what Paul says about Jesus's exaltation in these verses, two questions come to mind.
1. First, what does it mean that God bestowed on Jesus "the name that is above every name"?
  2. It does not mean that Jesus became any more divine, or that he was any more glorified as far as his divine nature is concerned.
  3. That would be impossible, because he has always existed as fully God.
  4. What it means is that after he completed the work for which he was sent, Jesus was glorified as the God-man, the covenant Mediator between God and man.
  5. That is, his human nature was transformed so that it became a suitable instrument for the revelation of his divine glory.
  6. As Louis Berkhof explains, Christ's exaltation "did not give Him any power or authority which He did not already possess as the Son of God; neither did it increase His territory. But the God-man, the Mediator, was now made the possessor of this authority, and His human nature was made to share in the glory of this royal dominion." [*Systematic Theology*, 411]
  7. This has immense significance for us, because when Jesus ascended into heaven, he brought our human nature into heaven in a glorified state.
  8. He has been given the name that is above every name as a reward for the obedience that he rendered when he took the form of a

servant.

9. And he shares the spoils of that reward with all who belong to him.

C. This brings us to the second question that arises from these verses.

1. In what sense will every knee bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord?

2. To answer this question, we need to consider what Paul means when he speaks of those who are “in heaven and on earth and under the earth.”

3. The phrase “in heaven” refers to spiritual beings, including both angels and demons.

4. The phrase “on earth” refers to the living.

5. The phrase “under the earth” refers to the dead.

6. Paul is saying that every single rational creature, whether angels or demons, just or unjust, living or dead, will one day bow their knee to Jesus and acknowledge that he is Lord.

7. Paul is not saying that all of these creatures will do this willingly.

8. He simply means that, on the day of judgment, everyone will acknowledge Jesus’s supremacy as Lord, whether they like it or not.

D. We should also note that these statements about “every knee” bowing and “every tongue” confessing are drawn from a passage in Isaiah.

1. In Isaiah 45, the Lord says, “Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other... To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance. Only in the LORD, it shall be said of me, are righteousness and strength; to him shall



come and be ashamed all who were incensed against him. In the LORD all the offspring of Israel shall be justified and shall glory.”

2. The fact that Paul is referring to that passage is significant for several reasons.
3. First, Paul took an Old Testament passage in which God explicitly declared that he alone is God, and applied that passage to Jesus.
4. In other words, Paul was saying that Jesus is fully God.
5. In addition, this Old Testament background makes it clear that Jesus is the only way of salvation.
6. We have to turn to *Jesus* in order to be saved.
7. Only in him are righteousness and strength.
8. Lastly, this passage from Isaiah conveys that even God’s enemies will be forced to acknowledge him for who he truly is.
9. Those who were incensed at Jesus, those who spent their lives in opposition to him — on the day of judgment they will appear before him and be ashamed.

#### IV. Conclusion

- A. This passage teaches us that the pattern that Christ followed in fulfilling his mediatorial office serves as the pattern for our lives as Christians.
  1. Of course, we should always remember that Christ is far more than just an example for us to follow.
  2. J. Gresham Machen stressed this when he wrote, “Jesus was not for Paul merely an example for faith; He was primarily the object of faith... Not the example of Jesus, but the redeeming work of Jesus, was the primary thing” [*Christianity and Liberalism*, 81]

3. If Jesus were merely an example, then we would be without any hope.
  4. After all, there is no one who can live up to his perfect example.
  5. Thank God that Jesus is more than our example.
  6. Thank God that Jesus is our Savior!
- B. Having said that, there was good reason for Paul to make the connection he does in this passage between Jesus as our Savior and Jesus as our example.
1. As we consider the love that Jesus has shown us in securing our salvation, we are moved to show our gratitude by living to please him.
  2. Paul makes this point in 2 Corinthians 5 when he writes, "For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised." (vv. 14–15)
  3. And as our text in Philippians shows, the way to live for Jesus is to have the same mind he had as he carried out his mission, looking not only to our own interests but also to the interests of others.