

## The Letter to the Philippians

### Lesson 10: The Model for Spiritual Unity

### Philippians 2:5-8

This lesson builds off of the last one, by taking the formula that Paul has just given the Philippians, and displaying it, as it is lived out perfectly in Jesus Christ. As we ended the last lesson by talking about the necessity of dying to selfish pride and worth and living in light of the surpassing worth of knowing and serving Jesus Christ; this lesson will show us how Christ lived in selfless submission to the Father's plan. Christ, who came to be the suffering servant, to meet, not His own needs, but the needs of His people.

I have a lengthy portion of C.S. Lewis' writing that I would like to share with you, that I think will be helpful for us as we transition lessons here. He wrote, *"In the Christian story God descends to reascend. He comes down; down from the heights of absolute being into time and space, down into humanity; down further still, if embryologists are right, to recapitulate in the womb ancient and pre-human phases of life; down to the very roots and seabed of the Nature He has created. 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 snooping 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 mid-air, then gone with a splash, vanished, rushing down through green and warm water into black and cold water, down through increasing pressure into the death-like region of ooze and slime and old decay; then up again, back to colour and light, his lungs almost bursting, till suddenly he breaks the surface again, holding in his hand the dripping, precious thing that he went down to recover. He and it are both coloured now that they have come up into the light: down below, where it lay colourless in the dark, he lost his colour too.*

*In this descent and reascent everyone will recognise a familiar pattern: a thing written all over the world. It is the pattern of all vegetable life. It must belittle itself into something hard, small and deathlike, it must fall into the ground: thence the new life reascends. It is the pattern of all animal generation too. There is descent from the full and perfect organisms into the spermatozoon and ovum, and in the dark womb a life at first inferior in kind to that of the species which is being reproduced: then the slow ascent to the perfect embryo, to the living, conscious baby, and finally to the adult. So it is also in our moral and emotional life. The first innocent and spontaneous desires have to submit to the deathlike process of control or total denial: but from that there is a reascent to fully formed character in which the strength of the original material all operates but in a new way. Death and Rebirth—go down to go up—it is a key principle. Through this bottleneck, this belittlement, the highroad nearly always lies.*

*The doctrine of the Incarnation, if accepted, puts this principle even more emphatically at the centre. The pattern here is there in Nature because it was first there in God. All the instances of it which I has mentioned turn out to be but transpositions of the Divine theme into a minor key. I am now not referring simply to the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ. The total pattern, of which they are only the turning point, is the real Death and Rebirth: for certainly no seed ever fell from so fair a tree into so dark and cold a soil as would furnish more than a faint analogy to this huge descent and reascension in which God dredged the salt and oozy bottom of Creation.*"<sup>49</sup>

Philippians 2:5 becomes the transition verse between the two lessons, **"Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus."** What we have just learned from verses 1-4, this is the mind that we are to have, which is the mind that is ours because of our unity with, and in, Jesus Christ.

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<sup>49</sup> Lewis, Clive Staples, *Miracles* Zondervan, 1947 (p. 179-181)

This selfless love is not a character trait that we are born with, but it is a character trait that we are reborn with. This selfless love is one visible sign to the watching world that we are indeed related to our Father because of the family resemblance. **“We love because He first loved us”**, the Apostle John tells us in 1 John 4:19. We learn to love from His Word, and the indwelling Spirit within us. Paul Rees writes, *“Don’t forget,” cries Paul, “that in all this wide universe and in all the dim reaches of history there has never been such a demonstration of self-effacing humility as when the Son of God in sheer grace descended to his errant planet! Remember that never—never in a million aeons—would He have done it if He were the kind of Deity who looks ‘only to his own interests’ and closes His eyes to the ‘interests of others’! You must remember, my brethren, that through your union with Him, in living, redemptive experience, this principle and passion by which you are moved.”*<sup>50</sup>

### An Ongoing Debate

Although the scope of this lesson will be verse 5-8, there is much debate concerning the interpretation of the entire text of 6-11. There are some who argue that 6-11 was actually written as poetry, and sung as a hymn by those early Christians. The argument is that this hymn is doctrinal, as the content of those verses speak of the Incarnation, the death and resurrection of Christ, and His exaltation and right place of glory. Therefore, the argument is that these verses are doctrinal, and worship inducing. The point of the argument being that this is not a list that believers are to emulate, but to praise God for.

The flip side of the debate is that these verses provide for us the example of humility and servant love for others, found in Jesus Christ. Quite honestly, I don’t know why there has to be a debate, I can see both sides in the same text. Textually, I see all of the doctrinal truths of the first argument, and contextually, I see not only the example of Christ, but the reason for its placement at this point in the letter, falling directly after Paul’s mandate for selfless Christian love in unity.

Verse 5 says for the Philippians to **“Have this mind among yourselves.”** For us to avoid perhaps a common mistake in interpretation, we should understand ‘yourselves’ to be referring to the Church, and not to the individuals. While certainly each individual must adhere to the command to think this prescribed way of unity, the point of the passage is of togetherness, and so the command is for the entire Church to have this same mind.

We saw this model of humility at the washing of the disciples’ feet during the Last Supper. Everyone at the table knew that it was the lowest servant’s duty to wash the feet of those in the house. And therefore, everyone knew that it wasn’t the place of Jesus Christ to be the one washing. (John 13) Everyone seated at the table was there just a few days earlier when large crowds gathered to greet Jesus at His triumphal entry with palm branches, crying out, **“Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!”** (John 12:13) At that time, the disciples may not have understood what that meant (John 12:16), but Jesus surely did. John 13:3 tells us that Jesus knew **“that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going back to God,”** and yet we still see that He **“rose from supper. He laid aside His outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around His waist. Then He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around Him.”** (3:4-5)

Now compare that divine humility with the foolish pride of the disciples in Luke 22:24, **“A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest.”** Quite the opposite of the self-promoting, prideful attitude of the disciples, Jesus did not count His equality with God a thing to be grasped, and He emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant. (Phil. 2:6-7) [I believe that as Paul

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<sup>50</sup> Rees, Paul *The Adequate Man: Paul in Philippians* Revell, 1954 (p. 43)

wrote this portion of the letter, he had this account from John 13 in mind.] After Jesus finished washing their feet, He dressed Himself again and resumed His place at the table, and then He gave a lesson on humble servant-leadership, so that we might have His mind among ourselves. Jesus said in John 13:12ff, **“Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.”**

This type of humble, servant-leadership was off the radar in that day in terms of leadership, even within the realm of religion. And as you may have noticed, servant-leadership isn’t exactly what is taught in business school these days, nor is it standard in many churches. Jesus described the Pharisees by saying in Matthew 23:4-7 that, **“They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger. They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi by others.”**

The Pharisees had an aura about them, it was quite a spectacle to see. They were highly thought of, and reverentially feared. They would draw much attention to themselves by their dress, and their conduct. I liken it to my childhood in the Roman Catholic Church. The priest would always carry himself in such a pious way that the common church-goer would nervously smile at him, and would be sure to walk on eggshells in his presence in the fear of displeasing him, and all would think of him as above sin. I can even remember the tone of the voice of so many of the priests that I knew in those years. They all spoke in a soft voice that sounded almost robotic and rehearsed, so other-worldly. My point is that I always thought of their presentation as a show. But this is the leadership of the world. And typically the leadership position is the most coveted position by all the people under it. People crave the respect of having the highest and the strongest and the richest and the most powerful position. Paul’s point in our text in Philippians is, that that was the position that Christ left. Christ, our Lord, left that lofty position, He emptied Himself. And that is the pattern for all Christians who would lead others after Him.

This certainly wasn’t the Messiah that people were expecting. They were looking for a conquering King! The Lion from the tribe of Judah! They figured that the Messiah would come from a rich family, in an influential area, with political power and a golden tongue. But He didn’t, and therefore many missed His coming. Jesus was born a carpenter’s son in a small village. He lived a humble life with humble means. And when He began His ministry, He chose ordinary men who had little education, skills, or prominence to be His disciples.

This wasn’t exactly the formula that Forbes would have endorsed. If we were looking to make an impact for the gospel in our culture, we might have been inclined to recruit rich politicians, or famous movie stars or professional athletes. Those are the people who not only have the money to make it happen, but they would already have the ear of the people when they speak. But that wasn’t the plan of God. Christ didn’t choose any of those people to spread the gospel, he picked out people just like us.

Christ left His throne where He rightfully sat as Ruler and Creator and Judge, where He was worshipped in purity by the Heavenly beings, and He humbly came to Earth for the purpose of being the sacrifice for our sins because He loved us. He came to a people who hated Him, and who spit on Him, and humiliated Him. And through every trial and hardship He never stopped seeking what was best for His people. He could have retaliated when unjust speech came His way, He could have fought back when violence came

upon Him, He could have demanded immediate justice and swift judgment, but instead He submitted to the plan of God and carried on toward the cross. In summary, the highest of all, the most supreme being, chose to become to lowest of all. What a remarkable thing to consider. We are commanded to emulate Christ in this way. Obviously we cannot emulate the deity of Christ, but we can emulate His example of servant leadership in His life. Jesus continues in Matthew 23:8ff by saying, **“But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers. And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ. The greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.”**

In Philippians 2:5, Paul tells us to have this mind among ourselves, which is ours in Christ, and then Paul continues in verse 6, **“who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.”** It’s important that we pick out a few things concerning the expression ‘form’ in this passage. First, notice in verse 7 that the word is repeated, speaking of Christ ‘taking the form of a servant’. This word in the Greek literature of that day spoke of the shape, the nature, the character, and the external appearance, in summary, what could be seen and interpreted by someone. IOW, Christ took the form, nature, character, and external appearance of a slave, an image that the people of that time would have been all too familiar. But just in the same way, He was before **“in the form of God”**, He *existed as God, He was God by every definition*. As God the Son, He shared every trait of deity with the Father and the Holy Spirit, and although He had every right to continue sharing that equality with God, He chose to condescend and take the form of a servant.

There is an antithetical parallelism found in verse 6 and 7 that I’d like to make clearer to you, being as it is rather obvious by a plain reading of the text. The question is: What does it mean that Christ *was in the form of God*? While I just spoke of it as being God in every definition, I would like to refine the argument and build the case that Christ was the ‘external appearance’ of *the glory of God*. Consider this case from a quick glance through the scriptures:

**“And as soon as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the people of Israel, they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud.”** Exodus 16:10

**“The glory of the LORD dwelt on Mount Sinai.”** Exodus 24:16

**“Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.”**  
Exodus 40:34

**“And Moses said, “This is the thing that the LORD commanded you to do, that the glory of the LORD may appear to you.”** Leviticus 9:6

**“And Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting, and when they came out they blessed the people, and the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people.”** Leviticus 9:23

**“So that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD.”** 1 Kings 8:11

**“The heavens declare the glory of God.”** Psalm 19:1

**“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!”** Isaiah 6:3

**“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and His glory will be seen upon you.”** Isaiah 60:1-2

**“Like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness all around. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard the voice of one speaking.”** Ezekiel 1:28

**“And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was coming from the east. And the sound of His coming was like the sound of many waters, and the earth shone with His glory.”** Ezekiel 43:2

**“Then he brought me by way of the north gate to the front of the temple, and I looked, and behold, the glory of the LORD filled the temple of the LORD. And I fell on my face.”** Ezekiel 44:4

The glory of God is seen by people in these verses, and it is always something marvelous to behold, something overpowering. We see the glory of the LORD filling the tabernacle, the temple, the land, the whole earth, and the heavens. This glory is the form of God that Christ was before he took the form of a servant. But before we continue, let us examine some more texts linking ‘the form of God’ with ‘the glory of God’ in the NT.

In Romans Paul writes, **“Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God (something they could exchange, therefore see) for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.”** (Romans 1:22-23) How can people see God these days, in order to reject Him, and exchange Him for a cheap substitute? Paul answered that in 1:20, **“For His invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.”**

The glory of God is Jesus Christ. The natural man is blind to this truth although it is plainly visible for him to see. Only God can open the eyes of man to see His glory and behold it. The God who created the Sun which gives us light, has open our eyes to see the light of His Son. Paul wrote, **“For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”** 2 Corinthians 4:6

The ‘form of God’ that we see in the OT is the pre-incarnate Christ, the glory of God. God’s glory is manifest (made evident to see—external appearance) to us through His power, His revelation in creation, redemption, and His character. The ‘form of a servant’ that we see is the God-man Jesus Christ. So many have altogether missed the point of these verses because they’ve failed to see the similarities between the two ‘forms’. They argue that there is glory in being God, but no glory in being a slave. Where the error has been made is the failure to stare at the differences between the ‘forms’. The two forms stand antithetical to each other. The form of God is glory, the form of a servant is humiliation. Jesus Christ left His glory (but not cease to be God), and came in complete humility to serve His people and die for their ransom.

There are those critics of Christianity who deny the deity of Christ and say that nowhere in the Bible does it ever claim that Jesus is God. I believe that this text of ours this morning is one of those passages that affirms His deity. Jesus Christ pre-existed in the ‘form of God’, He is the glory of the LORD. The glory of God *is* the being of God. It says about Jesus in Hebrews 1:3, **“He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature, and He upholds the universe by the word of His power. After making the purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.”**

My conclusion is that the expression that Christ was ‘in the form of God’ means that Christ pre-existed as the second person of the Trinity, being God. He wasn’t different from God, or less than God, or like God, He was God. But there was an *emptying* in which He *took the form of a servant*. He ceased being in glory, but He never ceased being God. We can better understand this shift in appearance by examining

the Greek word for *form* (*morphe*). The word refers to an outward manifestation of an inner reality. But William Barclay has been very helpful with his explanation of the choice of Greek wording in these verses, he said, “*Morphe* is the essential form which never alters, *schema* is the outward form which changes from time to time and from circumstance to circumstance. For instance, the essential *morphe* of any human being is humanity and this never changes; but his *schema* is continually changing. A baby, a child, a boy, a youth, a man of middle age, an old man always have the *morphe* of humanity, but the outward *schema* changes all the time.” While His outward appearance may have changed in the incarnation, the essence of His being was still God.

The scriptures teach us the truth that Jesus Christ was man and yet God. Paul said, “**He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.**” (Colossians 1:15) The Gospel of John begins, “**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God...And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.**” (John 1:1-2, 14) “Jesus said to them, “**Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.**” (John 8:58) Jesus later prayed, “**And now Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed...Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.**” (John 17:5, 24)

MacArthur wrote, “*In light of the profound reality of Jesus’ full and uncompromised deity, His incarnation was the most profound possible humiliation. For Him to change in any way or to any degree, even temporarily by the divine decree of His Father, required descent. By definition, to forsake perfection required taking on some form of imperfection. Yet without forsaking in a way that is far beyond human comprehension, the Creator took on the form of the created. The Infinite became the finite, the Sinless took sin upon Himself. The very heart of the gospel of redemption is that the Father “made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21). Although that infinitely marvelous and cardinal gospel truth is impossible to understand, it is necessary to believe.*”<sup>51</sup>

#### Did not count **equality with God** a thing to be grasped

It is important that we get a good grasp on this verse, so that we not lose sight of the fact that Jesus Christ was the perfect God-Man. Paul uses the plural word *isa*, literally “equalities” when speaking of the character of Christ, which suggests to us that Paul may have been referring to the complete character of Christ in equality with God. Throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus was not passive about affirming His deity. He was quite clear to affirm His Sonship to the Father in scripture, a few examples of this are:

“**But Jesus answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I am working.” This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because not only was He breaking the Sabbath, but He was even calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.**” John 5:17-18

“**I and the Father are one...But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.**” John 10:30, 38

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<sup>51</sup> MacArthur, John, *New Testament Commentary: Philippians* Moody, 2001 (p. 123)

**“Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?” John 14:9**

**“When Jesus had spoken these words, He lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify You.” John 17:1**

**“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as You, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one.” John 17:20-22**

**“Eight days later, His disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” Then He said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” Thomas answered Him, “My Lord and my God!” John 20:26-28**

Jesus not only reaffirmed His Sonship to the Father while on earth, but He also affirmed His power and authority to give eternal life:

**“Since you have given Him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given Him.” John 17:2**

I want you to understand that Jesus Christ was God on earth. He kept His deity and held His power and authority, yet He **did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped**. What the text is saying is that Jesus did not use His power in an abusive way, or for His own personal gain or advantage. Do you remember at the betrayal and arrest of Jesus, when the large crowd came against Him? Peter took matters into his own hands and lopped off the right ear of the servant of the high priest. Do you remember how Jesus responded? He said, **“Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and He will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?”** (Matthew 26:52-54) Let us also consider the temptation of Jesus from [Matthew 4:1-11](#). Jesus could have played things out much differently for Himself, but He didn't. He submitted Himself to the plan and purpose of His Father, and the plan was for Him to come in humiliation and become the suffering servant for His people.

MacArthur wrote, *“That was the choice that set the Incarnation into motion. He willingly suffered the worst possible humiliation rather than demand the honor, privilege, and glory that were rightly His. Nor did He use the powers of His undiminished sovereign deity to oppose the purpose of His Father because the price was too high.”*<sup>52</sup>

There is a great lesson for us to learn and apply from this text. We should all, like our Lord, be seeking to empty ourselves of those things in our lives that we could rightly hold onto without sinning. There are those things that we could devote ourselves too that are noble and right, but they serve to no benefit to those around us. It would have been good and right and sinless for God the Son to have remained in glory. He wouldn't have ceased to be God, or to be good, but humanity certainly would have no hope. We are the beneficiaries of the love of God in condescending to serve us. And there are many within our

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<sup>52</sup> MacArthur, John, *New Testament Commentary: Philippians* Moody, 2001 (p. 125)

circles of influence, those whom we rub shoulders with every day, who could be the beneficiaries of us pouring our lives into them.

### Digging Deeper Than Ever (maybe)

It's at this point in our study where I was brought face to face with the humanity of Christ. And I must admit, I didn't have all too much to say. We speak all of the time about the Deity of Christ dwelling in a human body, and the necessity of there being a human substitute for sin. But I wonder how much we have really considered what it meant for Jesus Christ to be 100% man? We talk about the hypostatic union (how Christ is 100% God and 100% man), but I think we explain away too much of what we see in the life of Christ by speaking of His deity, and miss the glaring truths of His humanity. It has taken me two months, a few books, many e-mails and phone calls with Mike to get to this next paragraph, and I hope that my findings will encourage you.

Bruce Ware wrote in his excellent book that all should read: The Man Christ Jesus, *“The single most important application from these reflections has to do with our heart responses to Jesus. Before we talk about “living like him”, let’s realize just what it meant for him to do what he did in coming to earth, taking on our human nature, and suffering an agonizing death on the cross to pay for our sin. Without comprehending the profundity of the purpose of the incarnation, as Paul describes it here in Phil. 2:5-9, we will inevitably trivialize what it means to do “what Jesus would do”, or to “live like Jesus”. How trite, until we see the heights from which he came and the depths to which he descended in coming as the suffering servant who would bear our sin. We will belittle the magnitude of what Jesus has done if we fail to see the kind of obedience he rendered and the extent to which he was willing to go in ensuring that he fulfilled the will of his Father. The antidote to such trivializing and belittling is found in deep and prolonged meditation on the magnitude of the humble obedience and agonizing suffering of our Lord. May we take up the banner of “living like Jesus” only when we first have come to understand something more deep and profound about just what that life was like. May our minds be granted greater comprehension so that our hearts may be filled with deepened affection. Only then will we move in the direction we need to go in falling on our faces before this servitude, this obedience that surpasses all others in all of time.”*<sup>53</sup>

### Did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped

When I think of the word ‘grasp’, I think of movie scene where the person has accidentally fallen over a cliff, ready to fall to their death. When suddenly, a voice from a by-stander yells, “Grab my hand!” With a surge of desperate eagerness the one in trouble stretches upward and grasps the hand of the helper to safety.

Maybe your initial thought when you hear that word is a little less dramatic than mine. But there is an error in my definition of ‘grasp’, if I apply it to this verse. In my above example, the one in trouble is reaching to gain something it never had before, the help of the other. Maybe in your definition, the word meant something like ‘understanding’, for example, “It was hard for me to grasp the concept.” In this example, once the person did grasp they would have finally gained an understanding that they once lacked. This example again is erroneous when applied to this verse.

If ‘grasping’ meant that Jesus was making an effort to gain something that He previously lacked, not only would that make Him something less than God, it also would completely contradict the verse at hand.

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<sup>53</sup> Ware, Bruce A. , *The Man Christ Jesus* Crossway, 2013 (p. 27)

Jesus, as we have spent the last pages discussing, was God! The Son was completely equal with God. There was nothing that He needed to grasp for, as far as adding to His deity. Instead, the definition of grasp means to cling on to. Jesus possessed all of the rights and privileges of God, but He did not cling onto them. When Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness, He was without a doubt very hungry, and yet He refused to turn the stones into bread in order to feed Himself. Matthew 4:3-4 record, **“And the tempter came and said to Him, ‘If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.’ But He answered, ‘It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”** If you remember our study of typology from our Biblical Theology class, you see the connection between this event and the event in Garden of Eden. Satan wanted Christ to fail because of food, just as he tricked Adam to fail God’s will over fruit. Jesus could have used His power to make food for Himself during His temptation, proving His deity at that moment and tending to His physical needs, but He didn’t. What was of the utmost importance was that Jesus obey His Father’s plan and will. Even in John 4:34, the disciples were urging Him to eat, and Jesus took that opportunity to teach them the priority of obeying God the Father above physical sustenance. **“Jesus said to them, ‘My food is to do the will of Him who sent me and to accomplish His work.’”** Satan desired that Jesus violate that plan and care for His own needs outside of the Father’s will. Satan desired that Jesus grasp His equality with God and take care of Himself, but Jesus did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped. This event really proved to be a shadow of what would come at the crucifixion of Jesus. Later in his gospel Matthew records, **“And those who passed by derided Him, wagging their heads and saying, ‘You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.’”** So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked Him, saying, **“He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in Him. He trusts in God; let God deliver Him now, if He desires Him. For He said, ‘I am the Son of God.’”** (27:39-43) It’s the same temptation again at the crucifixion. Those children of the evil one had the same motive, whether it was intentional or not. They wanted Christ to usurp His Father’s plan and display His glory and majesty by lifting Himself up off of the cross. They even tried to convince Jesus that by coming down off of the cross, He would convert them to followers of Him. But that isn’t how conversion works, that wasn’t the plan of God.

In John chapter 12, we’re given an insight into the depravity of our hearts, and our ability to believe in God. John 12:37 says, **“Though He had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in Him, so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: ‘Lord, who has believed what he heard from us, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?’”** Therefore they could not believe. For again Isaiah said, **“He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them.”** Conversion is the work of God, not man. Those who believed are none other than those who have had the truth revealed to them by God. It is God who blinds eyes and hardens hearts. A truth that many hate, but a truth nonetheless, a truth that we should wholeheartedly believe. Christ had gone through His entire earthly ministry, performing many miracles in the plain sight of large crowds, and still the masses walked away unbelieving and seeking to kill Him. Why would subverting the crucifixion be any more proof to them for belief?

The purpose of not grasping His equality with God at the crucifixion was because of His servant attitude towards those He came to save. Surely He had the resources at His disposal to stop His own death, but without His death and resurrection, there would be no resurrection of the dead, no bride of Christ. It is this humble, servant submission to God that we see in His prayer in Gethsemane in Matthew 26, **“And going a little farther He fell on His face and prayed, saying, ‘My Father, if it be possible, let this**

**cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will...Again, for the second time, He went away and prayed, “My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, Your will be done.”** (39, 42) Jesus sought the greatest needs of those whom He loved, even at His own expense. It’s not that He couldn’t care for His own needs, He just trusted that God would take care of Him as He followed the Father’s will. He fed the five thousand using His divine ability (Matt. 14), and He fed the four thousand the same way (Matt. 15), but He refused to grasp His divine equality with God when it came to feeding Himself. His Father would tend to His every need, up to the moment that His sacrificial death would come. We are to follow that same example. The more careful we are to obey the Word of God, the more danger and opposition may come upon us. The blood of many Christians has been spilt over their faithfulness to God. Yet we are encouraged by Paul at the end of this letter to the Philippians that, **“My God will supply every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.”** (Phil. 4:19)

### **But Emptied Himself (v. 7)**

This is one of the most widely debated texts in the Bible. It becomes a more difficult task for a man like me who is not seminary trained to sift through the minds of those that I read and deliver to you the truths that I conclude with conviction. The text says that Jesus ‘emptied Himself’, and without much imagination you could see how many could take that text and conclude many things that are nothing more than blasphemous. There are a variety of conclusions that people have drawn from ‘but emptied Himself’, but for the purpose of brevity (whatever that means) we will attempt to draw out the biblical one.

**The Kenotic Interpretation:** If even five of you in this room are familiar with this word, or even hold to this interpretation, I would be confident to say that you all hold slightly different positions than each other. The basic definition of ‘Kenosis’ is that Christ ‘emptied’ Himself by divesting Himself of His divinity. IOW, He was God the Son in all deity, and He became Jesus in all humanity. We need to be careful at this point of the lesson to avoid bringing our philosophies and lifelong thoughts and traditions about Jesus to the forefront. It is our knee-jerk reaction to scream “Heresy!” at the Kenotic interpretation, because we know that Jesus is the God-Man, so any talk of Jesus becoming ‘less-than-God’ sounds blasphemous. But was Jesus omnipresent? We know that He wasn’t, and that is a Divine attribute, yet we know that Jesus remained God. Was Jesus omnipotent? We see Christ so exhausted that He was in a deep sleep in a boat during an intense storm! So we know that He wasn’t omnipotent, and that is a Divine attribute, yet we know that Jesus remained God. What about omniscience? Matthew 24:36 says, **“But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.”** We see there an example of Jesus not knowing something, which could mean He was not omniscient during His earthly ministry. (I know red lights are shining, that’s good, let’s keep going)

The reason why the Kenotic interpretation is so debated is because people land in so many different categories with it. From denying all divine attributes in the life of Christ, to denying certain attributes, to affirming that He held every attribute, there seems to be a great deal of debate about whether Christ diminished His divine attributes, or completely had them removed for His earthly ministry. I believe the battle for the validity of this interpretation lies in the grammatical construction of 2:6-7. I hate grammar. A lot. I’m not good at grammar, as this sentence, and the previous 71 pages have proven. But in order for me to present this interpretation biblically as I see it, I have to attempt to show you the flaws in the grammatical interpretation that many have made along the way.

Christ has 'emptied Himself' (v.7) of 'the form of God' and His 'equality with God' (v.6). That's a fact. But we need to get to the root of what that means. What does it mean that Jesus Christ pre-existed in the form of God but took on 'the form of a servant'? A major problem that many have with this interpretation (and you might be one of them), is the interpretation of all the divine miracles, and the apparent omniscience of Christ during His earthly ministry. How could Christ have known all about the woman at the well if He divested Himself of His omniscience at birth? But there are some important observations that will be helpful to consider.

We know from the entirety of Scripture that Jesus Christ is God. So, we can eliminate any notion that this passage is somehow teaching that He ceased to be God during His earthly ministry. So, if He didn't give up being God in order to become a man, than what did He give up, and just how much like us did He become? I argue that Christ 'emptied' Himself by adding humanity to Himself. We see the explanation of this in the word "by" in verse 7. "But emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant." 'But' separates the verb 'emptied' from the text before it, and 'by' links the verb to what comes directly afterwards. Christ therefore subtracted 'emptied' as we see in verse 7, by 'taking' or 'being born' or 'becoming'... from where we get addition.

**The Incarnation:** Christ 'emptied' Himself by leaving Heaven and becoming a man in the form of a slave. Verse 7 says that Christ emptied Himself by 'taking the form of a servant', and 'being born in the likeness of men'. In other words this is describing the incarnation, the fusion of the God-Man Jesus Christ. **"For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger."** (Luke 2:11-12) The point of Philippians 2:6-7 is the addition of the full humanity of Christ, which means that he 'took the outward appearance of a servant'. He had 'the outward appearance (form) of God', but in His incarnation He added, as a covering, the outward appearance of a servant.

There is something to be said regarding the contrasting images of being in the form of God, and then in the form of a servant. As the second person of the Trinity, the Son was the exact representation of the glory of God, He sat in His full glory and reigned high above all. He was rightly worshiped as the Creator, Sustainer, and Sovereign Ruler of all. But by taking on the form of a servant, He willfully took on the polar opposite of His external appearance. He took on the form of one who had no position, no rights, and no power. Where we need to be so careful in our interpretation and application of this passage is in using the word EXCHANGE. At the incarnation, the Son was not exchanged for Jesus Christ. Jesus didn't trade His divinity for poverty. Rather He added the latter to the former.

I don't want to belabor the point, but I will anyways. Bruce Ware has attempted to explain this important interpretation using the following analogy: *"Imagine now a great and glorious kingdom that is ruled by a strong and wealthy king. This king has every privilege one can imagine, and he possesses the finest of everything money can buy. He eats each day from the choicest cuisine, he wears the most elegant and exquisite of clothes, he is cared for by the highest educated and most skilled doctors in the land, and he is protected by an impenetrable force of royal soldiers. Yet, one day, as the king was taken on a short journey to another portion of the royal city, he passed an area he seldom had seen. Before him on the streets he observed several beggars, and he could not get these poor men out of his mind. On his return to the palace, he thought to himself, "I wonder what it is like to live life as a beggar," and he could not remove this question from his mind. So, with a determination to find out just what such a life is like, he decided to move out of the royal palace and onto some of the impoverished streets of his city. And instead of wearing the fine clothes from his wardrobe, he put on the tattered, smelly clothes of a beggar. In every way he could, he acquired the day-to-day life and limitations of beggarly life, when the king was hungry,*

*although he could have called for the royal chefs to bring him a choice meal, in order to live life as a beggar he instead learned what it was like to go hungry or beg food. And when the king grew ill from the disease surrounding him, while he could have called for a highly trained doctor to attend to him, in order to live life as a beggar he accepted being sick with little if any help for his illnesses. And when insulted and mistreated by mean-spirited passersby, although he could have called for the royal guard to defend him and bring justice to bear against this cruelty, in order to live life as a beggar he accepted with no retaliation the mistreatment and insults foisted upon him.*

*So, while all of the qualities of his kingship were retained fully by this king-become-beggar, the expression or manifestation of many of the rights and privileges he had as king could not be made, since he had chosen to live life as a beggar. Or again, while the king possessed all of the qualities that are his as king, in taking on the life of a beggar, many of those “kingly” qualities could not be expressed while at the same time living fully and with integrity the life that a beggar lives.”*

#### Application: How the Humanity of Jesus gives us the model for Spiritual Unity

We’ve come a long way in the last ten pages. I think we’ve gone down a few necessary rabbit trails, and I feel the urge to take you down a few more, but I also want you to grasp my over-arching point in this lesson. In Philippians 2:3-4, Paul has told us to **“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”** If the emptying of Christ meant that He grasped His complete deity, how would that example be one that we could follow? The answer is that Jesus Christ did not hold onto his form of God, but He willfully came as a man to serve. We follow Christ in His model as a servant, by letting go of those things that we could rightly hold onto, and going forward serving the Lord, seeking the best interest of others.

My final conclusion is that Jesus Christ was the God-Man, but our application will come from what we find in His humanity. When Jesus Christ was born, he was a sinless baby. And as a person He grew in physical stature, as well as in all knowledge and wisdom. (Luke 2:52) He faced hunger (Mark 11:12), and weariness (John 4:6). He was tempted in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11). In fact, Hebrews 4:15 tells us that Jesus is one who “[able] **to sympathize with our weaknesses**, (because He was one who) **in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.**” (Hebrews 4:15)

It is in the humanity of Jesus that we recognize just how far down He came to serve. Just as Adam was a man who was to live in a perfect unity with God yet who failed at every point when tempted with sin, Jesus Christ was just as much a man who overcame sin at every same point when tempted. Jesus Christ was the perfect man. And as the perfect man, He obeyed the Father perfectly, as perfect as we will one day in glory while not being God. He prayed fervently, and perfectly, and had a perfect relationship with the Father, just as we will one day relate to the Father in sinlessness while not being God.

My challenge to you is to consider how necessary the Divine attributes of Christ were for all of His miracles to happen? We tend to explain the perfection of Christ by bringing up His deity, as though He automatically had to be sinless *because* He was God. When if we consider His humanity, we recognize that His sinlessness was the sum total of every conscious choice He made to do the very thing that pleased the Father, while facing the real temptation to go in the other direction. I believe that we not only undervalue the humanity of Christ when we consider Him to have lived His life on ‘easy-mode’, or on

'auto-pilot' (as Mike will teach you in the near future) but we also miss the beauty of this passage in Philippians 2:5-8 if we undervalue what it meant for Jesus to be 100% man. If we explain the perfect obedience of Christ away by highlighting His deity, than we have gone too far and lost the sense of Him becoming a man. If Christ was a man on earth in outward form only but not inwardly, if His obedience was impossible without His deity, than in what sense is He like us? How could we be commanded to follow the example of Christ in His obedience and dependence upon the Father if it were impossible for us to do so? How is Christ properly called the 'Second Adam' if He were nothing more than a robotic version of the first Adam who really shared none of his internal qualities or difficulties?

Perhaps some of unsure about having a theology where Christ has emptied Himself of His equalities with God and become the perfect suffering servant. Maybe you're thinking, "*What about His miracles? How could He perform them if He had no divine power?*" Was it His deity that caused Him to walk on water? Peter walked on water, was he God? Peter trusted in God, He walked on water until his faith failed and then he began to sink. Could we not conclude that the reason why Jesus walked on water was because of His perfect faith in His Father?

Maybe you're thinking of the woman at the well, "*Was it His deity that caused Him to know all about the woman's life?*" Ask yourself this question: How did Daniel interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2? We wouldn't ever consider that Daniel were omniscient, we would attribute the Holy Spirit revealing this knowledge to Daniel at the appointed time, to further God's appointed purpose. So, as much as we've trained ourselves to explain everything Jesus did positively to His deity, is it not possible that the Holy Spirit (in accordance with the eternal plan of the Father) revealed specific things to Jesus at specific points of His ministry? I not only think this is possible, but I also believe this does not remove from His eternal deity, but it does underscore His real humanity.

What about the miracles of raising people from the dead? Or casting out demons? Or the healings? These are all the examples that we've been taught from our youth to be the very things that show the deity of God. And yet the apostles did all those very same things, and we never point to them as sub-gods! So my point is that we need to be careful how much we attribute to the deity of Christ, when perhaps the lesson to be learned from the entirety of the Life of Christ is the perfect obedience, the perfect trust, and the perfect fellowship with His Father. I'm convinced that Jesus was not using hyperbole when he said, "**If you (sinners) have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you.**" (Matthew 17:20) Jesus believed that, and so should we.

If our text in Philippians were more concerned about the deity of Christ in His life, than how could Paul possibly mean for us to "**Have this mind among yourselves**" in 2:5? If Christ came to earth in His deity, and everything that He did was done in His deity, so that none of His life would have been possible without his deity, how in the world could we ever share in His mind among ourselves?

But if we interpret this passage rightly (as I see it) to say that Christ gave up his equalities with God (although He did not cease being God), and came to earth as the sinless, suffering substitute for sin, only then can we understand what it means to give up all that serves our own interests. Only then can we empty ourselves and likewise become suffering servants ourselves, who live in a single-minded devotion to serving others and pleasing the Lord, even possibly unto our death.

Consider 2 Corinthians 8:9, "**For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.**" MacArthur

comments, “Although many commentators have interpreted His “poverty” as a reference to His earthly economic condition, it has nothing to do with that. The point is not that Christ gave up earth’s riches, but that he gave up heaven’s riches. As already noted, He forsook the adoration, worship, and service of angels and the redeemed in heaven, because “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.” (Matt. 20:28)<sup>54</sup>

**Perfect Obedience – “And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” (2:8)**

Hansen writes that, “Christ was found in every respect to be fully human. The word found here indicates that the reality of Christ’s humanity was discovered intellectually through reflection, observation, examination or investigation. The word expresses the truth that this fact could be seen by anybody. Solid empirical evidence led all who observed Christ to conclude that He was an authentic, not a counterfeit, human being. Here again the Greek word anthropos is best translated as human being, since the point of the text is not Christ’s male gender, but His humanity.”<sup>55</sup>

There is a logical progression that flows out from verse 7 and continues on in verse 8. We can note the incarnation in 7b, “**by taking the form of a servant**”, and the logical flow of being born a human baby, is to grow into a human being, 7c, being born “**in the likeness of men.**” The flow continues in verse 8, not just that He was a human, but that others fully understood that by the totality of their experience (empirical evidence says Hanson), they found Him in, verse 8 “**human form.**” They did not find Him to be an alien version of humanity, someone with a fleshly outer appearance, yet with an inner glow of some unidentifiable sort.

Verse 8 continues, “**He humbled Himself.**” We’ve been examining what it means that Christ humiliated Himself by leaving His present reality as the Son, the Second Person of the Trinity, and descending into our world as a baby, giving up His Divine rights and privileges, not counting His equality as something to be grasped, but coming instead to serve His own. But His humiliation did not end at just becoming an authentic human being, He even chose to become a humble man. It’s the decision to come into humanity through humble means, into a middle class family that caused the Jews to reject Him entire as the Messiah. The Jews were looking for the “Lion from the tribe of Judah”, and instead came “The Good Shepherd.” If anyone could have come to earth as one who had military prowess, alongside all of the highest riches and honors it would have been Christ. But that’s His second coming, not His first, He chose to humble Himself at the incarnation.

But His humiliation did not end just at being born in a stable to a young carpenter and his wife in an obscure town. While it certainly began there, we see example after example of Christ not seeking the accolades of Messiahship, but to do the will of the Father. We hear the testimony of the people in His community who knew Him and His entire family, who are astonished at His knowledge! They say in Mark 6:3, “**Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us? And they took offense at Him.**” Christ wasn’t making a point to assert His divine dominance in His life, he lived in humble means, so humble that when His ministry began, no one saw it coming. Even in Mark 1:44, after He cleanses the leper, he says, “**See that you say nothing to anyone.**” If Jesus was looking for all the pomp and fadom of being the conquering

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<sup>54</sup> MacArthur, John, *New Testament Commentary: Philippians* Moody, 2001 (p. 128)

<sup>55</sup> Hansen, G. Walter, *The Letter to the Philippians* Eerdmans, 2009 (p. 153-154)

Messiah, He certainly would have wanted the leper to spread His fame as far as it could go. But Christ didn't come to gain fandom and establish His throne on earth. Jesus Christ came to live a fully human life, in perfect obedience to and in perfect dependence on His Father, and He did this to fulfill the eternal plan of the Father to become our perfect High Priest who offers the once and for all sacrifice for His people.

**“He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”** It's important that we not miss the point that Christ is the one who humbled Himself. Even in John 10:17-18 Jesus says, **“For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”** So when we consider the life of Christ, God the Son taking on human flesh, we can only conclude that Christ willingly submitted to the Father in perfect obedience, and that no one had the power to derail the plan of God. When we think of what it means to be obedient to the point of death, we should be careful to recognize that we're not speaking of an obedience at a particular moment in time (His last hours). Rather, we're considering the degree of Christ's obedience. Hansen writes, *“The point is not so much how long, but how much Christ became obedient. Jesus' obedience took him to the nth degree, to death itself.”*<sup>56</sup>

The humiliation of Son of God from His eternal reign in Heaven above, to taking on flesh, and living a perfectly obedient life unto a brutal and tortuous death on the cross, is the exact model of humility that Paul was pointing too. Philippians 2:3-5, **“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.”** Jesus Christ did not come to live for Himself. He did not come seeking selfish gain, puffed up with conceit. Instead, He considered you and I to be more significant than Himself. (Insert a long pause here to consider that last statement.) Considering the many pages I have taken to explain verses 5-8, let us take the application of these verses by not **“look[ing] to our own interests, but also to the interests of others.”**

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<sup>56</sup> Hansen, G. Walter, *The Letter to the Philippians* Eerdmans, 2009 (p. 156)