

# Philippians 2:6 Commentary

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Philippians 2:6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped ([NASB: Lockman](#))

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**Greek:** [tos en morphe theou huparchon](#) ([PAPMSN](#)) [ouch harpagmon hegesato](#) ([3SAMI](#)) [to einai](#) ([PAN](#)) [isa](#) [theo](#)

**Amplified:** Who, although being essentially one with God and in the form of God [possessing the fullness of the attributes which make God God], did not think this equality with God was a thing to be eagerly grasped or retained ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**KJV:** Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:

**Barclay:** for he was by nature in the very form of God, yet he did not regard existence in equality with God as something to be snatched at ([Philippians 2 Commentary](#))

**Lightfoot:** Though existing before the worlds in the Eternal Godhead, yet he did not cling with avidity to the prerogatives of divine majesty, did not ambitiously display his equality with God

**Phillips:** For he, who had always been God by nature, did not cling to his prerogatives as God's equal, ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** Who has always been and at present continues to subsist in that mode of being in which He gives outward expression of His essential nature, that of Deity, and who did not after weighing the facts, consider it a

treasure to be clutched and retained at all hazards, to be equal with Deity (in the expression of the divine essence)

**Wycliffe:** "Though in His pre-incarnate state he possessed the essential qualities of God, he did not consider his status of divine equality a prize to be selfishly hoarded"

**Young's Literal:** Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal to God,

#### WHO ALTHOUGH HE EXISTED IN THE FORM OF GOD: *hos en morphe theou huparchon* (PAPMSN):

- Isa 7:14; 8:8; 9:6; Jer 23:6; Mic 5:2; Mt 1:23; Jn 1:1, 1:2, 1:18 ; 17:5; Ro 9:5; 2Co 4:4; Col 1:15; 1:16 1Ti1:17; 3:16; Titus 2:13; Heb 1:1, 1:3 1:6 1:8; Heb 13:8
- See Torrey's Topic [The Humility of Christ](#)

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Now Paul proceeds to describe the humiliation of the Son so that we might understand what it means to **'Have the mind of Christ.'** He begins by emphasizing that Jesus Christ possessed the essence of God's nature from all eternity.

**John** wrote that before time began, Christ was already in existence with God "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. (John 1:1, 2, 3)

**Paul** affirms His divinity writing that Jesus "is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities-- all things have been created by Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. (Col 1:15, 16-note; Col 1:17-note)

The writer of **Hebrews** adds that Jesus "is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (Heb 1:3-note)

**Wuest** paraphrases Phil 2:6 this way "Who has always been and at present continues to subsist in that mode of being in which He gives outward expression of His essential nature, that of Deity, and who did not after weighing the facts, consider it a treasure to be clutched and retained at all hazards, to be equal with Deity (in the expression of the divine essence) ([Philippians Commentary - Verse by Verse Comments Online](#))

**Lightfoot** has a lengthy "paraphrase" writing that "Though existing before the worlds in the Eternal Godhead, yet he did not cling with avidity to the prerogatives of divine majesty, did not ambitiously display his equality with God; but divested himself of the glories of heaven, and took upon him the nature of a servant, assuming the likeness of men. Nor was this all. Having thus appeared among men in the fashion of a man, he humbled himself yet more, and carried out his obedience even to dying. Nor did he die by a common death: he was crucified, as the lowest malefactor is crucified. But as was his humility, so also was his exaltation. God raised him to a preeminent height, and gave him a title and a dignity far above all dignities and titles else. For to the name and majesty of Jesus all created things in heaven and earth and hell shall pay homage on bended knee; and every tongue with praise and thanksgiving shall declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, and in and for him shall glorify God the Father "

**David Jeremiah** - If anyone had the right to be self-centered, it was Jesus Christ. He had existed throughout eternity. The word used here for **"being" (existed)** occurs fifty-nine times in the New Testament, and every time it has reference to prior existence. If we are to understand the greatness of Christ's sacrifice, we must try to comprehend the lofty position He held before He was made man. Not only had Christ existed eternally, but He had existed eternally as God. (Count it All Joy)

Notice Paul does not say that Jesus "came to exist" or "entered into existence." He has always existed as God!

**Existed** (5225) ([huparcho](#) from [hupó](#) = under + [árcho](#) = begin or [arche](#) = beginning) means literally to begin under and then to exist, be present or be at hand. It denotes the continuance of a previous state or existence. To live, to behave or to continue to be. To be in existence. Vine says [huparcho](#) means to be in existence and in a secondary sense to belong to with the article signifying one's possessions (the things which one possesses, which exist so to speak). **BDAG** says "the basic idea: come into being fr. an originating point and so take place; gener. 'inhere, be there'" **Huparcho** involves continuing to be that which one was before (cf translated as "being" and "exist"). **Huparcho** denotes the continuance of a previous state or existence. It stresses the essence of a person's nature, that which is absolutely unalterable, inalienable, and unchangeable. There is another sense ([see note below](#))

meaning to be at one's disposal (possessions, property; means, resources). Our "citizenship is (huparcho in [present tense](#) = continually exists) in heaven" = it is a present reality! Hallelujah!

**Mounce** says **huparcho** "is a multifaceted term ranging in meaning from the verb "to be" (see be), to being used as the noun for "possessions" (i.e., to describe things being at one's disposal; see possess, possessions), to being translated as "exist." In Lk 7:25, Jesus says that those wearing nice clothes "exist" (NASB, "are found") in palaces, in contrast to John the Baptist, who lived in the desert (cf. also Lk 9:48; 16:23; 23:50). ....**huparchō** is a multifaceted term ranging in meaning from the verb "to be," to being used as the noun for "possessions" (i.e., to describe things being at one's disposal; see possess, possessions), to being translated as "exist." Acts uses **huparcho** extensively to describe people "being" a certain nationality, such as Greek (Acts 16:3), Jewish (16:30), or Roman (16:37). It is used to attribute certain qualities to individuals, such as "being" lame (3:2), "being" full of the Spirit (7:55), "being" baptized (8:16), and "being" children of God (17:29), and it is used of God "being" Lord of heaven and earth (17:24; cf. 21:20; 22:3; 27:13). **huparcho** is used in a theologically significant sense in Phil 2:6, which explains the nature of Jesus, "who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped." Those who "are" children of God are instructed to follow Jesus' example and consider others more important than themselves (Phil 2:4–5).....**(In another note Mounce has this description -- with some duplication) huparcho** is used in Scripture to denote "possessions" or "things being at one's disposal." One's possessions often get in the way of an individual's relationship with Jesus. For example, in Matthew Jesus implores the rich young ruler to sell all of his "possessions," give them to the poor, and follow him (Mt. 19:21; cf. 24:47; 25:14). In fact, Jesus states that no one can be his disciple unless he gives up all his "possessions" (Lk. 14:33). Yet Scripture also teaches that it is not possessions that God desires but our hearts. For example, Zacchaeus promises to give only half of his possessions, but that is nevertheless accepted by God because it came from a heart of gratitude. Likewise, Joanna and Susanna do not sell all their possessions but rather use them in godly fashion to support Jesus' ministry (Lk. 8:3). Some early churches did willfully give up their earthly possessions because of severe persecution, but they did so in favor of a "better and enduring possession" (Heb. 10:34). (Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words)

**MacArthur** on **huparcho** in Phil 2:6 - **Existed** translates a present active participle of the compound verb **huparchō**, which is formed from hupo ("under") and archē ("beginning") and denotes the continuance of a previous state or existence. It stresses the essence of a person's nature, that which is absolutely unalterable, inalienable, and unchangeable. William Barclay comments that the verb refers to "that part of a [person] which, in any circumstances, remains the same" (Daily Study Bible). Jesus Christ eternally and immutably existed, and will forever continue to exist, in the form of God.

**Wuest** on **huparcho** in 2 Peter 1:8 (**are** [huparcho in [present tense](#)] yours) - huparchō. The word refers to an antecedent condition protracted into the present. It speaks of possession. **Vincent** says: "In the sense of being the verb is stronger than the simple einai 'to be'; denoting being which is from the beginning, and therefore attaching to a person as a proper characteristic, something belonging to him, and so running into the idea of rightful possession as above." Thus, the possession of the Christian virtues by the believer is a natural, expected thing by reason of the fact that he has become a partaker of the divine nature. And they are not a spasmodic possession either, present one day and absent the next. Indeed, if they were not present in the life, one could well discount the person's claim of being a child of God." (Wuest's Word Studies)

**Guzik** on existed (huparcho) - This is from the ancient Greek verb *huparchein*, which "describes that which a man is in his very essence and which cannot be changed. It describes that part of a man which, in any circumstances, remains the same." (Barclay)

**Wuest** on **huparcho** in the phrase in 2 Peter 3:11- "what sort of people ought you **to be** (in [present tense](#)) in holy conduct and godliness." - "Ought" is dei (δεῖ), "it is a necessity in the nature of the case." "**To be**" is huparchō (in [present tense](#)), "to be" in the sense that an antecedent condition is protracted into the present. That is, saints are obligated to maintain the holy life of separation in which they started in the Christian life. "Holy conduct" is "holy manner of life." The Greek word "holy" (hagios), means basically, "set apart for the service of God." Thus, a holy life is a separated life, separated **from** the world and **to** God. "Godliness" is eusebeia, "piety toward God."

**Vine** on **huparcho** - primarily, "to make a beginning" (hupo, "under," arche, "a beginning"), denotes "to be, to be in existence," involving an "existence" or condition both previous to the circumstances mentioned and continuing after it. This is important in Philippians 2:6, concerning the deity of Christ. The phrase "being (existing) in the form (morphē, the essential and specific form and character) of God," carries with it the two facts of the antecedent Godhood of Christ, previous to His incarnation, and the continuance of His Godhood at and after the event of His Birth (see Gifford, on the Incarnation, pp. 11, sqq.). It is translated "exist" in 1 Corinthians 11:18, RV, for AV, "there be." Cp. Luke 16:14; 23:50; Acts 2:30; 3:2; 17:24; 22:3 etc. In Phil 2:6 the present participle of huparcho, "to exist," which always involves a preexistent state, prior to the fact referred to, and a continuance of the state after the fact. Thus in Philippians 2:6, the phrase "who being (huparchon) in the form of God," implies His preexistent Deity, previous to His birth, and His continued Deity afterwards. ([Expository Dictionary](#))

**Zodhiates** - Morphē in Phil. 2:6–8 presumes an objective reality. No one could be in the form (morphē) of God who was not God.

However, morphē is not the shaping of pure thought. It is the utterance of the inner life, a life that bespeaks the existence of God. He who had been in morphē Theou, in the form of God, from eternity (John 17:5) took at His incarnation the morphēn doúlou (doúlos [1401], servant), a form of a servant. The fact that Jesus continued to be God during His state of humiliation is demonstrated by the pres. part. hupárchōn, “being” in the form of God. **Hupárchō** (5225) involves continuing to be that which one was before. Nothing appeared that was not an objective reality from the beginning. In His incarnation, Jesus took upon Himself the form (morphē) of a servant by taking upon Himself the shape (schéma) of man. The schéma, shape or fashion, is the outward form having to do not only with His essential being, but also with His appearance. The eternal, infinite form of God took upon Himself flesh (John 1:1a, 14a).....(Commenting in another place on) the verb **hupárchō** (5225), to be, which we must consider here. When used in the pres. part. as in Phil. 2:6 in regard to the person of Jesus Christ, “who, being [hupárchōn]” it asserts that Christ’s present existence was (and still is) simply a continuation of His preexistence. What He came to be in His incarnation did not involve the giving up of what He was previously, i.e., God. It confirms that the Lord Jesus continued to be, in addition to His assumed manhood, what He always was, namely, Deity.

#### **Vine on huparcho** in Phil 2:6-

who,—the pronoun points to Him as the One who, known to the readers under this Name, is thus contemplated, not merely as having accomplished something in the days of His flesh, but as having done something in a condition of existence spoken of as “being in the form of God.”

being—the verb huparchō conveys much more than the simple verb to be. Used, as here, in the present participle (huparchōn), it points to the existence of a person previous to what is stated of him. Thus David, being already a prophet, foretold the resurrection of Christ, Acts 2:30. Abraham, “being about a hundred years old [i.e., having already reached that time of life and so existing as having attained to that advanced age], waxed strong through faith,” Romans 4:19. Forasmuch as man “is [huparchōn, being, by his original creation] the image and glory of God,” he ought not to have his head veiled, 1 Corinthians 11:7. Titus, “being [huparchōn, characteristically, by his nature] himself very earnest, went forth ... of his own accord,” 2 Corinthians 8:17. “If thou, being a Jew [huparchōn, being a Jew by birth, a Jew to begin with] livest as do the Gentiles,” Galatians 2:14. Christ, “being [existing previously] in the form of God ... emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant”; that is, His was a state preexistent to the time when He emptied Himself. But the grammatical construction likewise implies a continued existence in respect of what is stated. Joseph of Arimathaea, being (huparchōn) a councilor, continued in that capacity after what is recorded of him in Luke 23:50ff. So with the continuation of the circumstances mentioned above regarding Abraham and Titus. Accordingly, that which is described as “the form of God” was not only a preexistent state, but continued after Christ “emptied Himself.” Bengel’s comment is, “In that form of God the Son of God was existing from eternity: nor did He cease to exist therein when He came in the flesh.”

in the form of God,—the morphē denotes the special or the characteristic form of a person. What Gifford, in his book on “The Incarnation,” remarks is worth quoting: morphē is “properly the nature or essence, not in the abstract, but as actually subsisting in the individual, and retained as long as the individual itself exists ... morphē Theou [the form of God] is the divine nature actually and inseparably subsisting in the Person of Christ ... it includes the whole nature and essence of deity, and is inseparable from them ... it does not include in itself anything accidental or separable, such as particular modes of manifestation, or conditions of glory and majesty, which may at one time be attached to the ‘form,’ at another separated from it.”

Thus far, therefore, the phraseology establishes the fact of the preexistent and unoriginated deity of Christ previous to His birth, and its continuity subsequently.

(Another Note by Vine on Phil 2:6, “existed” in [present tense](#)) - the word huparchō carries with it a twofold idea, firstly, that what is predicated of this person characterized Him in a special manner both before and at the time referred to, and, secondly, that He continued so to be characterized after the particular event stated of Him. To take an illustration, “Joseph who was (huparchōn, being) a councilor ... went to Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus” (Luke 23:50, 52). He did not cease to be a councilor after his request from Pilate. So Christ did not cease to be “in the form of God” after becoming man. (Collected Writings of W E Vine)

**Vine on huparcho** in Ro 4:19 (he being - The word “being” is, in the original, not eimi, the verb “to be,” but huparchō, which always suggests more than the mere fact of being; the suggestion here is that he was confessedly that age; that is to say, the fact was recognized by himself; and has received general recognition. This is a fundamental fact in the circumstances. The reference is to Genesis 17, an event thirteen years later than the birth of Ishmael.

**MacArthur on huparcho** in Acts 7:55 (“**being** [in [present tense](#)] full of the Holy Spirit,”) - Stephen was full of the Holy Spirit. Amid the storm of fury that howled around him, Stephen remained calm, totally yielded to the Spirit’s control. **Huparchō** (being) “properly

[expresses] continuance of an antecedent state or condition" (G. Abbott- Smith, A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1977], 457), a meaning reinforced by its use here in the present tense. Being filled with the Spirit was a way of life for Stephen (cf. 6:3, 5; Eph. 5:18). Consequently, he didn't have to make any adjustments in his life when his time came to face death.

**Vine on huparcho** in Gal 1:14 - being—huparchō, lit., "to be from the beginning," i.e., naturally, and hence "confessedly"; the fact was acknowledged by all who knew him.

**Thayer** - 1. properly, to begin below, to make a beginning; universally, to begin; (Homer, Aeschylus, Herodotus, and following). 2. to come forth, hence, to be there, be ready, be at hand

**Friberg** - (1) exist, be present, be at hand, be (found) (Acts 19:40; 1Cor 11:18); (2) as equivalent to eimi followed by a predicate noun = be (Lk 8:41) or to the participle on followed by a predicate noun = who is, because he is (Acts 2:30; Gal 1:14); (3) neuter plural *ta huparchonta* as a substantive = what one has at one's disposal, property, possessions (Mt 19:21; Lk 8:3)

**BDAG** - 1. to really be there = exist, be present, be at one's disposal 2. to be in a state or circumstance (substitute for the present infinitive of eimi - see <[1510](#)>)

**Huparcho** in the **present tense** (continuous) clearly signifies that Jesus continually existed in the form of God. Nothing appeared that was not an objective reality from the beginning.

This is a clear statement of the **deity of Christ**. In His pre-incarnate state Christ possessed the attributes of God and so appeared to those in heaven who saw Him. He was and had always existed as God before He became man for "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yes and forever." (Heb 13:8-note)

**Huparcho** - 60x in 60v - **NAS Usage**: been(2), being(9), belonging(1), exist(1), existed(1), gone(1), live(1), owned(1), possess(1), possessions(11), private means(1), property(1).

Matt. 19:21; Matt. 24:47; Matt. 25:14; Lk. 7:25; Lk. 8:3; Lk. 8:41; Lk. 9:48; Lk. 11:13; Lk. 11:21; Lk. 12:15; Lk. 12:33; Lk. 12:44; Lk. 14:33; Lk. 16:1; Lk. 16:14; Lk. 16:23; Lk. 19:8; Lk. 23:50; Acts 2:30; Acts 3:2; Acts 3:6; Acts 4:32; Acts 4:34; Acts 4:37; Acts 5:4; Acts 7:55; Acts 8:16; Acts 10:12; Acts 16:3; Acts 16:20; Acts 16:37; Acts 17:24; Acts 17:27; Acts 17:29; Acts 19:36; Acts 19:40; Acts 21:20; Acts 22:3; Acts 27:12; Acts 27:21; Acts 27:34; Acts 28:7; Acts 28:18; Rom. 4:19; 1 Co. 7:26; 1 Co. 11:7; 1 Co. 11:18; 1 Co. 12:22; 1 Co. 13:3; 2 Co. 8:17; 2 Co. 12:16; Gal. 1:14; Gal. 2:14; Phil. 2:6; Phil. 3:20; Heb. 10:34; Jas. 2:15; 2 Pet. 1:8; 2 Pet. 2:19; 2 Pet. 3:11

If you study **huparcho** the results can be a bit confusing because the King James Versions gives a distinct Strong's Number [5224](#) to the derivative word "**ta huparchonta**" (derived from **huparcho** - [5225](#)). *Ta huparchonta* means 1) possessions, goods, wealth, property and originates from the neuter plural of present participle active of **huparcho** - [5225](#) and is used as if it were a noun (even though technically in Greek it is a verb participle). In the KJV *ta huparchonta* occurs 14x and is translated as "goods 7, that (one) has 4, things which (one) possesses 2, substance 1." Matt. 19:21; Matt. 24:47; Matt. 25:14KJV; Lk. 8:3KJV; Lk. 11:21KJV; Lk. 12:15KJV; Lk. 12:33KJV; Lk. 12:44KJV; Lk. 14:33KJV; Lk. 16:1KJV; Lk. 19:8KJV; Acts 4:32KJV; 1 Co. 13:3KJV; Heb 10:34KJV.

**Zodhiates on huparcho** -

(I) Generally and in an absolute sense, to exist (Acts 19:40; 27:21; 28:18; 1 Cor. 11:18). Followed by the dat. of person, to be present with someone, implying possession, property (Acts 3:6, "Silver and gold have I none"; 4:37; 28:7; 2 Pet. 1:8; Sept.: Job 2:4). The pl. pres. part. *tá hupárchonta* <[5224](#)> has the same meaning, used as a subst., things present, in hand, possessions.

(II) To be, the same as *eimí* <[1510](#)>, to be, logically connecting the subj. and predicate.

(A) With a subst. as predicate (Luke 8:41; 23:50; Acts 2:30; 4:34; 16:3, 20, 37; 17:24, 29; 21:20; 22:3; 1 Cor. 11:7; 12:22; Gal. 1:14; 2:14; 2 Pet. 2:19).

(B) With an adj. as predicate (Luke 9:48; 11:13; 16:14; Acts 3:2; 7:55; 14:8; 27:12; Rom. 4:19; 1 Cor. 7:26; 2 Cor. 8:17; 12:16; James 2:15; 2 Pet. 3:11).

(C) As forming a periphrasis for a finite tense of the same verb (Acts 8:16, "only they were baptized").

(D) With an adv. as predicate (Acts 17:27, God, being not far).

(E) With a prep. and its case as predicate. En <[1722](#)>, in, with the dat. where *hupárchei* then implies a being, remaining, living in any state or place. En with a dat. of condition (Luke 7:25; 16:23; Acts 5:4; Phil. 2:6). En with the dat. of place (Acts 10:12; Phil. 3:20). Prós <[4314](#)>, toward, with the gen. (Acts 27:34). (Complete



**Huparcho** - 100x in the Septuagint -

Gen. 12:5; 13:6; 14:16; 24:59; 25:5; 31:18; 34:23; 36:6-7; 39:5; 42:13,32; 45:11,18; 46:6; 47:18; Exod. 14:11; 22:3; 32:24; Num. 32:4; Deut. 20:14; 21:16; Jos. 4:6; 5:12; 7:24; Ruth 2:21; 4:9; 1 Sam. 9:7; 1 Chr. 27:31; 28:1; 2 Chr. 15:17; 20:33; 26:10; 31:3; Ezr. 6:8; Est. 3:8,13; 8:1,7; Job 2:3-4; 15:29; 17:3; 18:7,17; 20:20,29; 21:19; 38:26; 42:17; Ps. 37:10; 39:13; 55:19; 59:13; 69:20; 72:12; 73:25; 103:16; 104:33,35; 109:11-12; 146:2; Prov. 5:17; 6:7,31; 8:18; 11:14; 17:16-17; 19:4; 29:7,18; Eccl. 5:19; 6:2; Isa. 59:10; Jer. 4:14; 5:13; 7:32; 46:19; 50:20; Lam. 1:2; 5:3,7; Ezek. 16:49; 26:12,21; 28:19; 38:11; Dan. 2:5; Joel 1:18; Amos 5:5; 6:10; Obad. 1:16; Mic. 5:4; 7:1-2; Hab. 3:17; Zeph. 3:6; Hag. 2:3; Zech. 8:10; Mal. 1:14;

**Gilbrant** on **huparcho** in **Classical Greek** and **Septuagint** uses - Huparchō occurs as early as Homer (Eighth Century B.C.) with the meaning "begin, initiate." In classical Greek it developed other specialized shades of meaning, e.g., "an existing property, current price, proper nature, subsistence of a quality (in philosophy)" (*Liddell-Scott*). The Koine papyri exhibit the following meanings; "be, exist; have, possess," or, as a participle, "possessions" (*Moulton-Milligan*). **Septuagint Usage** The word occurs over 150 times in the Septuagint. It has the same variety of meanings as in the classical literature. Frequently huparchō appears as a plural participle with the sense "possessions." Thus, Genesis 12:5 notes that Abram took all his possessions from Haran. As a finite verb huparchō can mean "possess": "Whom **have** I in heaven" (Psalm 73:25). It can also be used to denote existence. In Genesis 42:13KJV the sons of Jacob state that Joseph "is not," i.e., he no longer exists; he is dead. (Complete Biblical Library Greek-English Dictionary)

**Barclay** adds that **huparcho** "is not the common Greek word for *being*. (Huparcho) describes that which a man is in his very essence and which cannot be changed. It describes that part of a man which, in any circumstances, remains the same. So Paul begins by saying that Jesus was essentially and unalterably God. ([Philippians 2 Commentary](#))

Prophesying of the coming Messiah, Micah spoke of Messiah's eternal existence writing "His goings forth are from long ago, **from the days of eternity**." (Mic 5:2)

Although a bit more technical, it is worth noting that the verb **existed** is not the usual verb of "**being**" (eimai), but is the "stronger" verb, **huparcho** which refers to an antecedent condition which is protracted into the present. That is, our Lord's being in the form of God was true of Him before He became Man and was true of Him at the time of the writing of this epistle, which tells us that in taking upon Himself humanity with its limitations yet without its sin, He lost nothing of His intrinsic deity, its attributes or its prerogatives.

**Jesus** speaking to His Jewish audience made an indisputable claim reminding them that "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad." The Jews therefore said to Him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?" Jesus said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, **I am**. (**present tense**) Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself, and went out of the temple." (John 8:56 57 58, 59)

Why did the Jews pick up stones to stone Jesus? They recognized that He had made an unmistakable absolute emphatic declaration "**I am**" (**ego eimi**) which the Jews clearly understood as a reference to (Exodus 3:14), when Moses asked God His name and received the reply: "I AM THAT I AM." (see study on **Jehovah**)

So just as God had taught Moses, now Jesus informed the Jews that He was the eternally existent One. Jesus says that He existed even before Abraham "**was**" ("came into existence") and thus the inescapable conclusion is that Jesus is God, Yahweh or **Jehovah** of the Old Testament. And thus here in Philippians 2, Paul is affirming that Jesus existed from all eternity as God, not merely resembling God, but as God in the truest sense of the word. Jesus existed continually in the form of God.

Just before His crucifixion, He prayed to His Father again testifying that He had always "existed" - "Glorify Thou Me together with Thyself, Father, with the glory which I had with Thee **before the world was**." (Jn 17:5)

Here is a simple distinction between two important terms Paul uses in Php 2:6-8 - **Morphe**, "**form**", in Php 2:6,7 denotes a permanent expression of essential attributes, while **schema**, "**appearance**" (Php 2:8), refers to outward appearance that is subject to change.

**Keith Krell** - "**The form of God**" speaks of Jesus' essence or nature as God, whereas **'equality with God'** speaks of the glories or prerogatives of God. Together the two expressions are "among the strongest expressions of Christ's deity in the New Testament." Therefore, it is imperative that I emphasize to you that Jesus Christ is God. Perhaps you're saying, "Isn't that a given?" It may have been in years past, but this can no longer be assumed...even in evangelical churches. Research (Barna) from April of 2009 reveals that 22% of Christians strongly agreed that Jesus Christ sinned when He lived on earth, with an additional 17% agreeing somewhat. This is tragic! Jesus Christ claimed to be God and He demonstrated that He was and is God! If Jesus is not

God, then life has no purpose and salvation is a farce. We might as well go party! Fortunately, the Bible is clear that we can stake our present life and the life to come on the deity of Jesus and the salvation that He offers. ([Work Your Way Down the Ladder](#))

**Form** ([3444](#)) (**morphe**) refers to the nature or character of something and emphasizes both the internal and external form. In other words **morphe** refers to the outward display of the inner reality or the essential form of something which never alters.

Our English word **form** can be misleading for it suggests shape or outward appearance. But as explained below the Greek word translated "form" (*morphe*) refers not so much to the outward appearance but to the essential nature of something or someone. In Paul's day, the word *morphe* was used of a Roman stamp. Official government documents were sealed with wax. While the wax was still hot, they would press a ring or stamp into it bearing the emperor's insignia. The impression made in the wax was an exact representation of the insignia on the ring. That's the relationship Jesus Christ bears to God the Father. Jesus is the exact representation of who and what God is.

**Morphe** - 3x in 3v - Mark 16:12; Phil 2:6, 7

Mark 16:12 And after that, He appeared in a different **form** to two of them, while they were walking along on their way to the country. (cp Lk 24:16, the full account of this appearance is Luke 24:13-32)

**Comment: MacDonald** "To Mary He had appeared as a gardener. Now He seemed like a fellow-traveler. But it was the same Jesus in His glorified body." **Wuest** essentially agrees "The Greek word "form" is the same as that used in the account of the Transfiguration, but Swete says that there was clearly nothing in the Lord's appearance to distinguish Him from any other wayfaring man."

**Walvoord** "This could mean that He took on a form different from that in which He appeared to Mary Magdalene or, more likely, that He appeared to them in a form different from that in which they had previously recognized Him as Jesus." ([Philippians 2 At the Name of Jesus Every Knee Should Bow](#))

**Morphe** stresses essence of one's nature and specifically denotes the essential, unchanging character of something—what it is in and of itself. **Morphe** does not speak of external appearance or outward shape but of the essential attributes and the inner nature. When Paul says Jesus Christ was "**in the form of God**," The Son is one in nature, one in attributes, one in character with the Father.

**Guzik** - Wuest explains that the ancient Greek word translated form is very difficult to translate. When we use the word form we think of the *shape* of something; but the ancient Greek word had none of that idea. It is more the idea of *amode* or an *essence*; it is the essential nature of God, without implying a physical shape or image. "Thus the Greek word for 'form' refers to that outward expression which a person gives of his inmost nature."

As **John MacArthur** states **morphe** means that...

The idea is that, before the Incarnation, from all eternity past, Jesus preexisted in the divine form of God, equal with God the Father in every way. By His very nature and innate being, Jesus Christ is, always has been, and will forever be fully divine. ([MacArthur, J. Philippians. Chicago: Moody Press](#))

**Morphe** contrasts with "**schema**" (Phil 2:8) which denotes the outward which changes from time to time and from circumstance to circumstance.

For example, **morphe** of any human being is his or her humanity and this never changes. On the other hand, his or her **schema** is continually changing (no, you are aren't getting any younger!). 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. The **morphe** never alters; the **schema** continually does. Does this help you understand this important distinction?

Paul in using **morphe** is clearly teaching that Jesus Christ in His preincarnate state Christ possessed all the attributes of God and so appeared to those in heaven who saw Him. Thus **morphe** refers to the outward display of the divinity of the preexistent Christ (see Vincent below).

**Hebrews** affirms the deity of Christ writing that Jesus...

"is the radiance of His (the Father's) glory and the exact representation of His (the Father's) nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (He 1:3-note)

Paul wrote that "Christ...is **the image of God**" (2 Cor 4:4), specifically that

**He is the image of the invisible God**, the Firstborn of creation, for by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things

have been created through Him and for Him. (Col 1:15, 16-note)

## Existed in the form of God

**Morphe** ([Adapted from Wuest](#)) presumes an objective reality. No one could be in the form (**morphe**) of God who was not God. **Morphe** is the essential form which never alters which contrast with the similar word **schema** which describes the outward form which changes from time to time and from circumstance to circumstance. The derivative Greek word **metamorphoo** is found in Mt 17:2 where Jesus "was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light." (Mt 17:2) where the prefixed preposition **meta-** in a composition signifies a change and thus is translated "**transfigured**" or a change in form and could be rendered, "His mode of expression was changed before them."

Our Lord's usual mode of expression as a Man was that of a bond-slave. That was an expression which came from His innermost being as the One who came not

"to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45)

But for a moment in (Mt 17:2) the mode of His expression was changed. He gave expression to **the essence of His deity** in which He is a co-participant with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. The splendor and majesty of His deity (He 1:3-note) shone through the "clay walls of His humanity", and by means of a medium discernible to the physical eyesight of His astounded audience.

The **form of God** in Philippians 2:8 speaks of an expression of His glory not discernible to our physical vision, although His resurrection glory will be for

when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is and everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure." (1Jn 3:2-note, 1Jn 3:3-note)

Peter affirms that

"though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory" (1Pe 1:18-note)

Thus our Lord in His preincarnate state manifested the glory of His deity to the holy angels in an outward mode of expression discernible to these spiritual intelligences.

The **KJV Bible Commentary** explains that **morphe** "signifies the mode in which He expresses His divine essence. Form (Greek morphe) "always signifies a form which truly and fully expresses the being which underlines it" (H. A. A. Kennedy, The Epistle to the Philippians, p. 436) No creature could exist in the form of God, but Lucifer aspired to this (Isa 14:12, 13, 14). To give expression to the essence of deity implies the possession of deity. What Peter, James, and John witnessed on the Mount of Transfiguration was a glimpse of the outward expression of His deity (Mt 17:1, 2). Christ's own eternal self-manifesting characteristics were shining forth from His divine essence. ([Dobson, E G, Charles Feinberg, E Hindson, Woodrow Kroll, H L. Wilmington: KJV Bible Commentary: Nelson](#))

### **Kenneth Wuest on morphe -**

The Greek word has no reference to the shape of any physical object. It was a Greek philosophical term. Vincent has an excellent note on the word. In discussing it, he has among other things, the following to say: "We must here dismiss from our minds the idea of shape. The word is used in its philosophical sense to denote that expression of being which carries in itself the distinctive nature and character of the being to whom it pertains, and is thus permanently identified with that nature and character ... As applied to God, the word is intended to describe that mode in which the essential being of God expresses itself. We have no word which can convey this meaning, nor is it possible for us to formulate the reality. Form inevitably carries with it to us the idea of shape. It is conceivable that the essential personality of God may express itself in a mode apprehensible by the perception of pure spiritual intelligences; but the mode itself is neither apprehensible nor conceivable by human minds. "This mode of expression, this setting of the divine essence, is not identical with the essence itself, but is identified with it as its natural and appropriate expression, answering to it in every particular. It is the perfect expression of a perfect essence. It is not something imposed from without, but something which proceeds from the very depth of the perfect being, and into which that being unfolds, as light from fire."

Thus the Greek word for "form" refers to that outward expression which a person gives of his inmost nature. This expression is not assumed from the outside, but proceeds directly from within. To illustrate: "I went to a tennis match yesterday. The winning player's form was excellent." We mean by that, that the outward expression he gave of his inward ability to play tennis, was excellent The expression in this case took the form



of the rhythmic, graceful, swift, and coordinated movements of his body and its members.

Our Lord was in the form of God. The word "God" is without the definite article in the Greek text, and therefore refers to the divine essence. Thus, our Lord's outward expression of His inmost being was as to its nature the expression of the divine essence of Deity. Since that outward expression which this word "form" speaks of, comes from and is truly representative of the inward being, it follows that our Lord as to His nature is the possessor of the divine essence of Deity, and being that, it also necessarily follows that He is absolute Deity Himself, a co-participant with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit in that divine essence which constitutes God, God.

The time at which the apostle says our Lord gave expression to His essential nature, that of Deity, was previous to His coming to earth to become incarnate as the Man Christ Jesus. But Paul, by the use of the Greek word translated "being," informs his Greek readers that our Lord's possession of the divine essence did not cease to be a fact when He came to earth to assume human form. The Greek word is not the simple verb of being, but a word that speaks of an antecedent condition protracted into the present. That is, our Lord gave expression to the essence of Deity which He possesses, not only before He became Man, but also after becoming Man, for He was doing so at the time this Philippian epistle was being written. To give expression to the essence of Deity implies the possession of Deity, for this expression, according to the definition of our word "form," comes from one's inmost nature. This word alone is enough to refute the claim of Modernism that our Lord emptied Himself of His Deity when He became Man.

This expression of the essence of His Deity which our Lord gave in His pre-incarnate state, was given through a spiritual medium to spiritual intelligences, the angels. Human beings in their present state of being cannot receive such impressions, since they are not equipped with the spiritual sense of perception which the angels have. What Peter, James, and John saw on the Mount of Transfiguration was an outward expression of the essence of Deity, but given through a medium by which the physical senses of the disciples could receive the expression given. But when believers receive their bodies of glory, they will be equipped to receive the expression of Deity which the angels received, and through a like spiritual medium.

Now, at this time, in the eternity before the universe was created, Paul says that our Lord "thought it not robbery to be equal with God." The word translated "thought" refers to a judgment based upon facts. The word "God" is used again without the article. Had the article preceded it, the meaning would be "equal with God the Father." The word "God" here refers to Deity, not seen in the three Persons of the Godhead, but to Deity seen in its essence. Equality with God does not refer here to the equality of the Lord Jesus with the other Persons of the Trinity. Nor does it refer to His equality with them in the possession of the divine essence. Possession of the divine essence is not spoken of here, but the expression of the divine essence is referred to, although possession is implied by the expression. Equality with God here refers to our Lord's co-participation with the other members of the Trinity in the expression of the divine essence. This is a very important point, for when we come to consider the fact that our Lord laid aside something, we will see that it was not the possession but the expression of the divine essence. ([Philippians Commentary - Verse by Verse](#))

**Marvin Vincent** has a lengthy more technical theological discussion on **morphe** explaining that

"We must here dismiss from our minds the idea of shape. The word is used in its philosophic sense, to denote that expression of being which carries in itself the distinctive nature and character of the being to whom it pertains, and is thus permanently identified with that nature and character.

Thus it is distinguished from **schema = fashion**, comprising that which appeals to the senses and which is changeable.

**Morphe** or form is identified with the essence of a person or thing:

**Schema = fashion** is an accident which may change without affecting the form...As applied here to God, the word is intended to describe that mode in which the essential being of God expresses itself.

We have no word which can convey this meaning, nor is it possible for us to formulate the reality.

**Form** inevitably carries with it to us the idea of shape. It is conceivable that the essential personality of God may express itself in a mode apprehensible by the perception of pure spiritual intelligences; but the mode itself is neither apprehensible nor conceivable by human minds. This mode of expression, this setting of the divine essence, is not identical with the essence itself, but is identified with it, as its natural and appropriate expression, answering to it in every particular. It is the perfect expression of a perfect essence. It is not something imposed from without, but something which proceeds from the very depth of the perfect being, and

into which that being perfectly unfolds, as light from fire.

To say, then, that **Christ was in the form of God** is to say that He existed as essentially one with God. The expression of deity through human nature ([Phil 2:7](#)) thus has its background in the expression of deity as deity in the eternal ages of God's being.

Whatever the mode of this expression, it marked the being of Christ in the eternity before creation. As the **form** of God was identified with the **being** of God, so **Christ, being in the form of God, was identified with the being, nature, and personality of God**. This **form**, not being identical with the divine essence, but dependent upon it, and necessarily implying it, can be parted with or laid aside. Since Christ is one with God, and therefore pure being, absolute existence, He can exist without the form. This form of God Christ laid aside in His incarnation. ([Philippians 2: Greek Word Studies](#))

The word "**God**" does not have the article "the" in Greek (anarthrous), which stresses the quality or essence.

#### John Walvoord...

The expression "being in the form of God" (Note: The Greek **being** is not the usual verb on (to be), but huparchon in the form of an imperfect participle, meaning continued existence, emphasizing the fact that Christ had always been and still is in the form of God. The imperfect tense is in contrast to the aorist verbs used in reference to the incarnation which describe acts in time.) means not only that Christ is God, but that He always was God and that He existed as God, not simply because He possessed all the attributes of God, but because these were manifested outwardly and He had the appearance and glory of God. Being thus from eternity past all that God is both in substance and in manifestation, He did not consider His being on equality with God something that needed to be retained by self-effort, but rather "made himself of no reputation," literally, "emptied Himself," taking on the form of a servant.

Three Greek words are used to describe the outer appearance of Christ: (1) **Morphe** (form), referring to divine nature and attributes in their manifestation. The form of God is in contrast to the form of a servant (v. 7) or the manifestation of Christ in the substance and attributes of a servant. (2) **Homoiomati** (likeness), meaning that Christ was made like other men in His essential attributes and manifestation as a genuine man (v. 7). (3) **Schemati** (fashion), referring to outer manifestation and more transient characteristics of humanity (v. 8). The use of the three words together affirm that Christ was from eternity past all that God is in substance, attributes, and manifestation. Becoming incarnate He was all that was necessary to genuine humanity apart from sin. In appearance he looked like a man and acted like a man. In His incarnate state Christ continued to be all that God is though appearing in the form of man. After His ascension and glorification He continued to be all that man is apart from sin, limitation, and human characteristics that pertain only to this life. ([Philippians 2 At the Name of Jesus Every Knee Should Bow](#))

**DID NOT REGARD EQUALITY WITH GOD A THING TO BE GRASPED: ouch harpagmon hegesato (3SAMI) to einai (PAN) isa theo:**

- Ge 32:24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30; 48:15, 48:16; Ezek 8:2, 3, 4, 5, 6; Jos 5:13, 14, 15; Hos 12:3, 4, 5; Zec 13:7; Jn 5:18; 5:23, Jn 8:56, 57, 58, 59; 10:30; 10:33, 10:38, 14:9; 20:28; Rev 1:17, 18; 21:6

Who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped (ASV)

Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal to God (Young's Literal)

#### **Let Earth and Heaven Combine**

He laid His glory by,  
He wrapped Him in our clay;  
Unmarked by human eye,  
The latent Godhead lay;  
Infant of days He here became,  
And bore the mild Immanuel's Name.

Remember that what Paul is doing in the deeply theological passages is exhorting the saints at Philippi to manifest a humble attitude motivated by the perfect example of our blessed Lord. Paul knows that if they manifest a "mind of Christ" attitude, this will ensure

unity in their local body.

Christ thought of others, not Himself. Unlike the first Adam, who made a frantic attempt to seize equality with God (Gen 3:5), Jesus, the last Adam (1Cor 15:47), humbled himself and obediently accepted the role of the Suffering Servant for the sake of Adam's spiritually dead progeny. This is the example Paul sets before the saints at Philippi.

**Regard (2233)** (**hegeomai** = the middle deponent of the verb **ágo** = to lead) primarily means to lead and thus to "lead the mind" through a reasoning process to a conclusion. The idea is to think about something and come to a conclusion. **Hegeomai** is consideration which involves careful thought and not quick decision. It involves a conscious judgment resting on deliberate weighing of the facts. It is translated "**esteem**" in Phil 2:3 (note)

**Spurgeon on equal with God** - You and I can have no idea of how high an honor it is to be equal with God. How can we, therefore, measure the descent of Christ, when our highest thoughts cannot comprehend the height from which He came? The depth to which He descended is immeasurably below any point we have ever reached, and the height from which He came is inconceivably above our loftiest thought. Do not, however, forget the glory that Jesus laid aside for a while. Remember that He is very God of very God, and that He dwelt in the highest heaven with His Father. Yet, though He was thus infinitely rich, for our sakes He became poor, that we, through His poverty, might be rich.

**Equality (2470)** (**isos**) defines things exactly same in size, quantity, quality, character or number. Thing of your geometry class when you learned about an "**isosceles**" triangle, one having two sides of equal length. That is the picture of the Greek word **isos**". In becoming a man, Jesus did not in any way forfeit or diminish His absolute equality with God.

**Equality of God** - It wasn't that Jesus was trying to *achieve* equality with the Father. He *had it*, and chose not to cling to it. Jesus' divine nature was not something He had to seek for or acquire, but it was His already. (Guzik)

**Pritchard** - He was truly "**equal**" with God, which makes the next statement all the more remarkable. He did not regard his position as God as something "to be grasped." He didn't try to hold on to his glory but willingly laid it aside. He did not assert his rights although he had the right to claim his rights. This forms the foundation for everything else Paul will say about him. It also tells us what Jesus was thinking before he was born in Bethlehem. There was no compulsion, no argument, no claiming his prerogatives, no pleading with the Father to "send someone else." He voluntarily traveled the distance between heaven and the bloody cross. He did it willingly, gladly, without hesitation. ([Sermon](#))

**Grasped (725)** (**harpagmos** from **harpazo** = to seize upon with force) originally meant "a thing seized by robbery" and eventually came to mean anything snatched, clutched, embraced, or prized, thus is sometimes translated "grasped" or "held onto" as a treasure is clutched and retained.

Given this definition we can paraphrase this verse "Christ did not regard His equality with God as a treasure to be clutched and retained at all costs."

Jesus refused to selfishly cling to His favored position as the divine Son of God nor view it as a prized possession to be used for Himself.

The **KJV Bible Commentary** explains that "This word (harpagmos) has two distinct meanings. One, a thing unlawfully seized, and two, a treasure to be clutched and retained. Christ did not cling to His prerogatives of His divine majesty, did not ambitiously display His equality with God. Christ waived His rights to: (1) express His deity; (2) display His divine attributes; and (3) demonstrate His equality with God. He did not regard His position as equal with God as something to be held onto, but as something to be relinquished for the redemption of man. He gave up His throne in glory for a cross of shame and suffering. ([Ibid](#))

**Wuest on harpagmos** - We must now consider carefully the word "robbery." The Greek word has two distinct meanings, "a thing unlawfully seized," and "a treasure to be clutched and retained at all hazards." When a Greek word has more than one meaning, the rule of interpretation is to take the one which agrees with the context in which it is found. The passage which we are studying is the illustration of the virtues mentioned in Phil 2:2-4, namely, humility, and self-abnegation for the benefit of others. If our Lord did not consider it a thing to be unlawfully seized to be equal with God in the expression of the divine essence, then He would be asserting His rights to that expression. He would be declaring His rightful ownership of that prerogative. But to assert one's right to a thing does not partake of an attitude of humility and self-abnegation. Therefore, this meaning of the word will not do here. If our Lord did not consider the expression of His divine essence such a treasure that it should be retained at all hazards, that would mean that He was willing to waive His rights to that expression if the necessity arose. This is the essence of humility and of self-abnegation. Thus, our second meaning is the one to be used here. ([Philippians Commentary - Verse by Verse](#))

In his classic book "The Incarnation" **E H Gifford** (published about 1896) explains this mysterious divine transaction as...

Thus it is not the nature or essence . . .but the mode of existence that is described in this second clause ["did

not consider it robbery to be equal with God”]; and one mode of existence may be changed for another, though the essential nature is immutable. Let us take St. Paul’s own illustration, 2Cor 8:9

“Though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.”

Here in each case there is a change of the mode of existence, but not of the nature.

When a poor man becomes rich, his mode of existence is changed, but not his nature as man. It is so with the Son of God; from the rich and glorious mode of existence which was the fit and adequate manifestation of His divine nature, He for our sakes descended, in respect of His human life, to the infinitely lower and poorer mode of existence which He assumed together with the nature of man.

**Vincent** adds this note on **harpagmos** taking it to mean "a highly prized possession, we understand Paul to say that Christ, being, before His incarnation, in the form of God, did not regard His divine equality as a prize which was to be grasped at and retained at all hazards, but, on the contrary, laid aside the form of God, and took upon Himself the nature of man. The emphasis in the passage is upon Christ’s humiliation. The fact of His equality with God is stated as a background, in order to throw the circumstances of His incarnation into stronger relief. Hence the peculiar form of Paul’s statement. Christ’s great object was to identify Himself with humanity; not to appear to men as divine but as human. Had He come into the world emphasizing His equality with God, the world would have been amazed, but not saved, He **did not grasp** at this. But rather He counted humanity His prize, and so laid aside the conditions of His preexistent state, and became man. ([Greek Word Studies](#))

**One question that you may have pondered is if Christ did not grasp His deity, then how was He able to perform the miracles during His three year ministry?** The short answer is by totally relying on the power of the Holy Spirit! Click here for more on Jesus' power to heal, etc.

As John Bunyan has Mr. Greatheart say, in Part II of *Pilgrim’s Progress*: “He of whom I am now to speak is One that has not his fellow. He has two natures in one Person, plain to be *distinguished*, impossible to be *divided*.”

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**Pastor Steven Cole** ([Flagstaff Christian Fellowship!](#)) has an excellent sermon on Philippians 2:5-8

### Philippians 2:5-8 Supreme Humility

We live in a day when Bible doctrine is commonly despised, even among God’s people. I’ve heard people say, “We want life, not doctrine,” as if the two were in opposition to each other. A young woman once told me that the wonderful thing about her experience-oriented church was that they didn’t have any doctrines; they just had Jesus! The term “air-head” was not yet in existence, or it might have popped into my mind on that occasion. Christian people proclaim that doctrine is divisive and that what we need is unity. Often that unity is built on a common experience that people have had, supposedly through the Holy Spirit, even though these people often hold to seriously erroneous doctrine. We tend to think of theology as impractical, academic stuff that seminary students and professors like to debate. But it doesn’t have anything to do with how we live.

But when we buy into this anti-intellectual approach to the Christian life, we are forgetting that the Apostle Paul did not write his profound doctrinal sections of Scripture to theologians. He wrote Romans, Galatians, and the other great theological portions of his letters, including our text, which is one of the most profound Christological portions of Scripture, to common people--business people, working people, soldiers, housewives, and even slaves--to help them live their daily lives in a manner pleasing to God.

It is significant that Paul is not using our text to combat some heresy or theological error. He is writing about a most practical subject--how Christians can get along with one another. It applies to how we relate to one another in the church, but also in our homes. As we saw last week, at the heart of our relational problems is self. To live in harmony, we must learn to die to self and humbly live for others for Jesus’ sake. To illustrate this point, Paul sets before us the person of our Lord Jesus Christ as the example of supreme humility. Solid theological understanding about Jesus Christ is the foundation for how we can get along with one another. Paul is saying that ...

To promote harmonious relationships, we must grow in the humility Jesus modeled in His incarnation and death.

Since the early 1970’s there have been dozens of books and hundreds of articles written from a supposedly Christian perspective that tell us how to build our self-esteem, our mate’s self-esteem, and our children’s self-esteem. We have been assured by the supposed “experts” on human behavior that low self-esteem is at the root of all our emotional and relational problems. I’m sad to confess that for many years I was influenced by this teaching and even taught it myself. But I came to realize that there is not a single verse in the entire Bible that tells us that we need to build our self-esteem. There are many verses that tell us we need to

lower our view of ourselves and grow in humility (the biblical word for humility means “lowliness of mind”). How many recent books or articles have you read on how to lower your self-esteem and grow in humility? Yet that is what Paul is clearly teaching here. His teaching is built on the great doctrinal truths of the incarnation and death of Jesus Christ.

### **1. To grow in humility, we must understand the incarnation and death of Jesus Christ.**

Although many volumes have been written on these verses, the basic thought is quite simple and clear: That Jesus Christ voluntarily left the highest position in the universe and went to the very lowest position on earth in order to rescue from God’s judgment people who did not in any way deserve it. There can be no greater example of lowering oneself than what Jesus did on our behalf. If your heart is cold toward the things of God, think on who Jesus is and on what He did in leaving the splendor and purity of heaven and coming to this wicked world to be made sin on your behalf. It should fill our hearts with love and devotion and make us realize that no personal sacrifice we make, no humiliation we go through, can ever match what our glorious Savior did for us!

#### **A. To grow in humility, we must understand Christ’s incarnation, that the eternal Son of God left His glory to take on human flesh.**

When Paul states that Jesus existed in the form of God (Phil 1:6), he is referring to His preexistence before He was born of the virgin Mary. Jesus is not a created being, but rather is the second person of the triune God. As John opens his gospel, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being” (John 1:1-3). A few verses later John explains further, “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). Or, as Jesus said to the Jews who challenged His claims, “Before Abraham was born, I am” (John 8:58).

When Paul states that Jesus existed in **“the form of God,”** “form” refers to that which is intrinsic and essential to the being of God, that is, to God’s attributes (J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians* [Zondervan], pp. 132-133). Thus Paul is saying that Jesus in His preexistence shared the essential attributes of deity. He is God! Before He came to this earth, Jesus dwelled in the indescribable glory and perfection of heaven, one with the Father and the Spirit, in the blessedness of the divine being. But He willingly left that glory to come to earth!

The next phrase has been variously translated and interpreted. The King James Version reads that He **“thought it not robbery to be equal with God.”** The NASB translates, He **“did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped.”** John Calvin explains the sense: “There would have been no wrong done though he had shewn himself to be equal with God” (Calvin’s Commentaries [Baker], on Philippians 2:6, p. 55).

Lightfoot, following the early Greek fathers, gives the sense as, “Be humble as Christ was humble: He, though existing before the worlds in the form of God, did not treat His equality with God as a prize, a treasure to be greedily clutched and ostentatiously displayed: on the contrary He resigned the glories of heaven.” He goes on to observe, “For how could it be a sign of humility in our Lord not to assert His equality with God, if He were not divine? How could such a claim be considered otherwise than arrogant and blasphemous, if He were only a man?” (pp. 134, 137).

Paul goes on to say that Jesus **“emptied Himself”** (NIV = “made Himself nothing”). Clearly, God cannot cease to be God, and so Jesus **did not**, as some have asserted, give up any of His divine attributes. He limited the independent use of certain attributes and prerogatives while on this earth. And, His preincarnate glory was veiled (John 17:5), except for the brief time on the Mount of Transfiguration, and perhaps when the soldiers in the garden fell backwards after a flash of His glory (John 18:6). Paul explains the main sense of how Christ emptied Himself in the rest of Phil 2:7 and in Phil 2:8: by taking the form of a servant and being obedient to death on the cross.

When Paul says that Jesus took on the form of a bond-servant (Phil 2:7), he means that He voluntarily adopted the very nature of a servant. He did not cease to be God in any sense, but added to His divine nature a true human nature. Jesus’ human nature was exactly like ours, except that it was joined to a divine nature (not mixed or blended); and, it was without sin, although His body was subject to the results of the fall, such as weariness, aging, and death. When Paul says that Christ was “found in appearance as a man” (Phil 2:8), he means that if you had looked at Jesus, you would not have thought, “There is a superman or a god,” but rather, “There is a normal-looking man.” He was born into a family as a baby, grew to maturity as we all do, and in every other observable way was completely human.

Thus the orthodox statement concerning the person of Christ is that He is undiminished deity and perfect humanity united without confusion in one person forever. To deny either the full and perfect deity of our Lord or His complete humanity is to veer into serious heresy. So what Paul is showing is that the Lord Jesus went from the highest place in the universe, as eternal God, to take on human existence, and that, not as a king or powerful warrior, but as a lowly servant. But, He went even lower:



## **B. To grow in humility, we must understand Christ's death, which was the most shameful death imaginable.**

It would have been amazing enough for the eternal God to come to this earth as a mighty king. It was even more amazing that He came as a humble servant. But it's almost beyond comprehension that He would even go lower and die. And, even more staggering, His death was not a noble death, but a horrible, ignoble death of a common criminal. For the Jew, whoever was hanged on a tree was accursed of God (Deut. 21:23). For Gentiles, death by crucifixion was the lowest, most despicable form of death imaginable. Roman citizens were exempt from crucifixion. The Roman poet, Cicero, said, "Far be the very name of a cross, not only from the body, but even from the thought, the eyes, the ears of Roman citizens" (cited by R. P. Martin, *Philippians* [IVP/Eerdmans], p. 103).

So, Paul is saying that Jesus went from the height of heights to the depth of depths. We will never begin to know what glory He gave up or what humiliation He suffered on our behalf until we are with Him in glory. But, to grow in humility, we must think about the staggering implications of what it meant for the holy, glorious, eternal Son of God to take on human flesh; and, not the flesh of a king, but of a servant; and, stooping even lower, He willingly and obediently went to the cross for our sins.

### **2. To grow in humility, we must allow the truth of Christ's incarnation and death to affect the way we act toward one another.**

In our day humility is hardly ever emphasized as a Christian virtue that we must pursue. In fact, we extol the opposite, self-love, as a healthy quality that we need to work on! I began to see how far off I was on the self-esteem issue by reading John Calvin and Jonathan Edwards. In Calvin's *Institutes* (ed. by John McNeill [Westminster] II:II:11), he mentions how Chrysostom, the church father, viewed humility as the foundation of Christianity; and how Augustine said that the precepts of the Christian religion, first, second, third, and always are humility. Calvin rightly argues that due to the fall, self-love is innate in all humans. He says that we are quick to listen with applause to anyone who extols human nature in favorable terms. Even those who take a more modest attitude and give God credit for some things, he says, "so divide the credit that the chief basis for boasting and confidence remains in themselves" (II:II:2).

Edwards, in his "A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections" (*The Works of Jonathan Edwards* [Banner of Truth], 1:294-303) points out that there is a false and inadequate sort of humility which professing, but unconverted, people can have. But, he argues that anyone who is truly converted will display what he calls "evangelical humiliation." Listen to his words:

Evangelical humiliation is a sense that a Christian has of his own utter insufficiency, despicableness, and odiousness, with an answerable frame of heart....

The essence of evangelical humiliation consists in such humility as becomes a creature in itself exceeding sinful, under a dispensation of grace; consisting in a mean [= worthy of little regard] esteem of himself, as in himself nothing, and altogether contemptible and odious; attended with a mortification of a disposition to exalt himself, and a free renunciation of his own glory.

This is a great and most essential thing in true religion. The whole frame of the gospel, every thing appertaining to the new covenant, and all God's dispensations towards fallen man, are calculated to bring to pass this effect. They that are destitute of this, have no true religion, whatever profession they may make, and how high soever their religious affections may be;..." (p. 294).

When I first read this about four or five years ago, the first thing it did was make me question my own salvation. The second thing it did was draw a line in the sand and confront me with the question, "Which side are you on? The side of Scripture (and Edwards heaps up verses to prove his case) or on the side of modern psychologized Christianity?" I realized that both cannot be truly Christian. I had to repent of my former errors.

Granted, then, that we must pursue humility, what does it look like? Christ's humility teaches us several aspects of true humility:

#### **(1) True humility is a proper attitude toward self that results in proper actions toward others.**

"Have this attitude in yourselves ...." Jesus Christ could rightly have thought, "I'm the eternal God. I'm not about to become a human being, let alone be a servant, let alone die!" I'm glad He didn't think like that!

Who are we? According to Scripture, we are rebellious sinners at heart, who have gone our own way and despised the God who created us. But, by His undeserved favor, we have become His children through faith in Christ. By grace, He has forgiven all our sins and has made us members of Christ's body. He has entrusted spiritual gifts to us to use for His kingdom and glory (not our own kingdom and glory!). As a result, we have the great privilege of serving others for Jesus' sake.

#### **(2) True humility means renouncing self for the sake of others.**

Jesus had to renounce any self-will when He came to earth and went to the cross. In the garden, He prayed, "Not My will, but Yours be done" (Luke 22:42). Of course, He had no sinful will to renounce, whereas we fight it every day. But humility means dying to self

daily so that we can do God's will.

### **(3) True humility means lowering myself to lift others up.**

That's what Jesus supremely did in giving up the splendor of His glory in heaven to hang naked on the shameful cross for our sins. It would be impossible for us to go to that extreme. But we do need to lower our view of ourselves so that we can serve others. If you ever find yourself saying, "That task is beneath me," you'd better check your pride.

### **(4) True humility yields any rights for the sake of serving others.**

Did Jesus have a right not to come to this earth in the humble way He did? Of course He did! Did He have a right not to go to the cross? Of course! But, He yielded all His rights and became a bondservant for our salvation. A bond-servant was the extreme bottom of the ladder when it came to rights, because he had none. He didn't have a right to his own time. He didn't even have a right to his own life.

This doesn't mean that we become the slaves of everyone else's whims or desires. Jesus was obedient to the Father, not to what others thought He should do. Even so, we become enslaved to do what God wants us to do. Jesus told the disciples that when a slave comes in after a day of working in the field, his master doesn't serve the slave dinner. The slave has to fix dinner and serve the master, and only then is he free to eat. Jesus concluded by saying, "So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you say, 'We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done'" (Luke 17:10). The only right I have is the right to hell. Any privileges I enjoy are by God's undeserved favor.

### **(5) True humility serves others in obedience to God, even at great personal cost.**

The cross was painful beyond description for Jesus, not just because of the physical pain, but because He who was totally without sin endured the wrath of God by becoming sin for us (2 Cor. 5:20). Any personal cost we have to bear in serving Christ is nothing by way of comparison, even if it means laying down our lives. As Isaac Watts put it, "Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all" ("When I Survey the Wondrous Cross").

## **Conclusion**

If you're experiencing friction in your relationships, whether at home or anywhere, chances are you need to grow in humility. C. S. Lewis saw this. He wrote,

... Pride ... has been the chief cause of misery in every nation and every family since the world began.... Pride always means enmity--it is enmity. And not only enmity between man and man, but enmity to God. In God you come up against something which is in every respect immeasurably superior to yourself. Unless you know God as that--and, therefore, know yourself as nothing in comparison--you do not know God at all. As long as you are proud you cannot know God. A proud man is always looking down on things and people: and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you (Mere Christianity [Macmillan], pp. 110-111).

Calvin sums up the practical application of our text: "Since, then, the Son of God descended from so great a height, how unreasonable that we, who are nothing, should be lifted up with pride!" (Calvin's Commentaries, p. 55). But, the fact is, we must fight pride all our lives. In 1985, a Spanish bullfighter made a tragic mistake. He thrust his sword a final time into the bull, which then collapsed. Thinking that the bull was dead, the bullfighter turned to the crowd to acknowledge the applause. But the bull was not dead. It rose and lunged at the back of the unsuspecting matador, piercing his heart with its horn.

Pride is like that. Just when we think we've conquered it and we turn to accept the congratulations of the crowd, pride stabs us in the back. It won't be dead before we are. Fight it by focusing on what the Savior did for you by leaving the glory of heaven and coming to die for your sins. Have that same mind in you which was in Christ Jesus: "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others" (2:3, 4). That's the way toward harmony in our church and in our homes.