

THE HYMN OF CHRIST Philippians 2:5-11

Philippians 2:5-11 is called THE HYMN OF CHRIST, because scholars tell us that this passage records an actual hymn that was sung in worship by the early church. This hymn is a part of a larger conversation about Christian unity. In verses 1-4, Paul issues a call to spiritual unity. The rest of the chapter gives four models of the selfless humility needed for spiritual unity: Jesus Christ, Paul himself, Timothy, and Epaphroditus. The supreme example of the Lord Jesus, which is first and foremost, is gloriously celebrated in the hymn of Christ. Verse 5 says, "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus." The NKJV "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." Verses 6-11 explain the mindset of Christ. This explanation of the selfless humility of Christ simultaneously explains the gloriously majesty of Christ. It is one of the most important CHRISTOLOGICAL passages in the New Testament. It is a vital statement about the divine nature, redemptive work, and sovereign authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. The text makes this statement about Christ in two parts.

I. THE HUMILIATION OF CHRIST

Philippians 2:5-8 explain the humiliation of Christ by contrasting the eternal deity and the human life of the Lord Jesus. First, verse 6 teaches...

A. JESUS CHRIST IS ETERNALLY GOD.

The Bible is clear and consistent in teaching that Jesus Christ is God. Yet the deity of Christ has been under constant attacked in church history. Other doctrines of Christ have attacked to undermine Christ's deity. For instance, there are those who reject the historical fact of his physical resurrection, not because there is no credible evidence for it, but because to affirm the resurrection would be to acknowledge the deity of Christ. The deity of Christ is constantly and vehemently attacked because it is essential to the historical Christian faith. Simply, Christianity is Christ and Christ is God. So if you can undermine the deity of Christ and make him merely a good teacher or a great prophet, you render Christianity impotent. All of our hopes rest on the fact that Jesus Christ is God.

First of all, the Pre-incarnate Christ was God by NATURE. Verse 6 describes Christ as being "*in the form of God.*" This statement refers to the eternal nature of Christ before he came into the world as a human being. He was "*in the form of God.*" The word *form* speaks of the internal reality of a thing being expressed in its external appearance. John 1:1 says, "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*" Likewise, the Pre-incarnate Christ was God in his STATUS. Verse 6 says that he had "*equality with God,*" meaning that the Pre-incarnate Christ totally shared the fullness of God's nature. Christ must never be

placed in any category below or less than God. God the Father and Jesus Christ equally share the nature, authority, and glory of God. Jesus Christ is eternally God.

B. JESUS CHRIST BECAME FULLY HUMAN

Verse 6 says *“though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.”* The word *grasped* translates a Greek term that is used only here in the New Testament. It speaks of plunder, a prize, or anything to be seized or greatly desired. It is used here to speak of the attitude of Christ toward the perfect will and redemptive plan of God the Father. Every privilege of deity belonged to Christ, because he is God. Yet he did not hold on to the glory of his deity, like a robber clutching his stolen loot. Christ, who had every reason to put his rights first, did not. He did not view his divine glory as something that he must hold on to at all costs. Verses 7-8 affirm this humiliation of Christ in two ways: The Incarnation and the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

THE INCARNATION. Verse 7 says Christ *“but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.”* The phrase *“but emptied himself,”* means to empty, make void, drain out, abase, or neutralize. Christ, who by nature and status was God, made himself nothing when he came to earth as a human being. G. CAMPBELL-MORGAN wrote: **“He was the God-Man. Not God indwelling man. Of such there has been many. Not a man deified. Of such there has been none save in the myths of pagan systems of thought; but God and man, combining in one personality the two natures, a perpetual enigma and mystery, baffling the possibility of explanation.”** Think about it.

- **Christ, who in eternity rested on the bosom of the Father without a mother, in time rested on the bosom of a mother without an earthly father.**
- **God, who in Eden’s garden took from a man a motherless woman, in Bethlehem’s barn took from a woman of a fatherless man.**
- **Jesus, the Ancient of Days became the infant of days – a baby as old as his heavenly Father but ages older than his human mother, Mary.**
- **Jesus, who created the angels, was made a little lower than the angels.**
- **Jesus, who said, “Before Abraham was, I am,” was born two thousand years after Abraham died.**

Historically, the church has referred to the miracle of the incarnation as the doctrine of the *KENOSIS*. The word *“Kenosis”* is derived from the verb that is translated in verse 7 *“emptied himself.”* The church formally stated this doctrine to defend this text against misinterpretation. It teaches that the incarnation was not Christ emptying himself of his deity or exchanging his deity for humanity. The Kenosis was a sovereign self-renunciation. In the Kenosis, Christ laid aside his heavenly glory and the independent use of his authority, divine prerogatives, eternal riches, and favorable position with the Father. But never in the process did he ever stop being God. The Godhead is a Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Therefore, if Christ stopped being God, God himself would cease to exist. That is impossible. God

is self-existent, eternal, and immutable. So Christ could never stop being God. But in the Kenosis, Christ became something in addition to being God without becoming something less than God. He became what he had not been in his eternal deity: a human being.

Verse 7 says he *“but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.”* Christ made himself nothing in the reality of the incarnation. But he made himself nothing by his role during the incarnation: a servant. The incarnation proves that the gospel is not something we could think up. It is inconceivable to our finite minds that God, who enjoyed eternal glory, infinite sovereignty, and unlimited power, would take on the weaknesses and limitations of humanity. Even if we could come up with the idea of the incarnation, we would have messed it up by making God a human being with great power, influence, wealth, fame, and skill. But that is not what God did. Christ *“but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.”* NATE SERVANT said it well: **“If we could just grasp the significance of the Incarnation, the word ‘sacrifice’ would disappear from our vocabulary.”**

**ASIDE HE THREW HIS MOST DIVINE ARRAY
AND HID HIS GODHEAD IN A VEIL OF CLAY
AND IN THAT GARB DID WONDROUS LOVE DISPLAY
RESTORING WHAT HE NEVER TOOK AWAY**

THE CRUCIFIXION. Verse 8 says, *“And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”* The death of Christ is mentioned twice in verse 8. These two statements describe the submissive nature and sacrificial manner of his death. First, the death of Christ was an act of SUBMISSION. Verse 8 says *“he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death.”* You and I have a date with death that we have no control over. You can diet, exercise, and live right, but death is still imminent and inescapable. But that is not the way it was with Christ. Death had no control over him. Death did not kill Jesus. He freely, willingly, and voluntarily gave up his life. The death of Christ was not the result of the plot of the religious leaders, or the betrayal of Judas, or the protest of the crowd, or the sentence of the Roman government, or the actions of the Roman soldiers. Verse 8 tells us what actually happened: *“he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death.”*

- **He could have declared that his *GLORY* was too precious to disrobe for sinners.**
- **He could have declared that his *POSITION* was too high to condescend to sinners.**
- **He could have declared that his *POWER* was too great to lay aside for sinners.**
- **He could have declared that his *HEAVENLY POSSESSIONS* were too valuable to part with for sinners.**
- **He could have declared that his *BLOOD* was too good to shed for sinners.**
- **He could have declared that his *HANDS* were too holy to be pierced for sinners.**

- **He could have declared that his *LIFE* was too sacred for him to surrender for sinners.**

But he did not do that. Thank God he did not do that!

Likewise, the death of Christ was an act of SACRIFICE. Crucifixion was the most painful form of execution in the ancient world. It was cruel and unusual punishment in which criminals were put to death by an extended process of suffocation. Death by hanging, stoning, or even burning, was considered an act of mercy in comparison to crucifixion. It was so painful that a new term was coined in Latin to describe the agony: excruciating. Crucifixion was not just execution; it was torture. When verse 8 says *“he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death,”* it declares the *totality* of Christ’s obedience. But when it goes on to say *“even death on a cross,”* it declares the *extent* of his obedience. Earth has no darker sin, history no blacker page, humanity no fouler spot, than that of the Savior’s crucifixion. But Hebrews 12:2 says that Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith *“who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”* This leads us to the second part of this hymn of Christ.

II. THE EXALTATION OF CHRIST

Verses 6-8 record the humiliation of Christ. Verses 9-11 record the exaltation of Christ. These two parts of this great hymn are connected by the first word of verse 9, *“Therefore,”* which signifies that what is about to be said is based on what has already been said. Verses 6-8 is a powerful description of how Christ, the second Person of the holy Trinity, humiliated himself when he came to earth as a man, lived as a servant, and died on a cross. Verses 9-11 describe God the Father’s sovereign response to the selfless humiliation of his only begotten Son. Verse 9 says, *“Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name.”* If you end the story of Jesus at the crucifixion, you do not have the whole story. The cross is not the end of the story, for God *“highly exalted him.”* That phrase *“highly exalted”* is emphatic in the original. It could be translated, *“God super-exalted him.”* God lifted him above everything. God exalted him to the highest place. God raised him to a position of supreme majesty.

The humiliation of Christ was fully compensated by God. In fact, it was totally reversed. *Verse 6* says he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped. *Verse 9* says that God highly exalted him. *Verse 7* says that he emptied himself. But *verse 9* says that God has given him the name that is above every name. *Verse 7* says that he took the form of a servant. But *verse 10* says that every knee shall bow at the name of Jesus. *Verse 8* says that he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death on a cross. But *verse 11* says that every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Jesus is no mere baby in a manger or great teacher or mighty prophet or miracle worker or religious martyr. We worship, serve, and trust the exalted Christ who is eternally worthy of an exclusive name, sovereign lordship, and universal worship. In John 17:4-5, Jesus prayed, *“I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your*

own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed." God answered that prayer. The Father highly exalted his Son, Jesus Christ. Verse 9-11 record the present reality and future realization of the exaltation of Christ.

A. THE PRESENT REALITY OF CHRIST'S EXALTATION

Verse 9 says, *"Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name."* God is the source of the exaltation of Christ. Christ did not exalt himself. And he was not and is not exalted by men. We often speak of exalting Christ. But in worship we only acknowledge, affirm, and adore the exaltation of Christ. We do not accomplish it. God has highly exalted him. It is a done deal. The term *"highly exalted"* is in a grammatical emphasis that means God has exalted Christ once-and-for-all. Jesus is the exalted Christ. And this exaltation is not some esoteric idea. The exaltation of Christ is rooted in three real, concrete, and historic events.

God exalted Christ through the RESURRECTION. The physical resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the bedrock of the Christian faith. It is the bedrock of our faith because the resurrection was God's validation of the Person and Work of Jesus Christ. God stamped his approval on the humiliation of Christ when he raised him from the dead. In Acts 2:32-33, Peter said, *"This Jesus God raised up, and of that we are all witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing."* Likewise, God exalted Christ through the ASCENSION. Acts 1:9-11 says, *"And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who has taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.'" This dramatic departure of the risen Christ marks again and in a greater way, the end of the humiliation of Christ and his entrance into exaltation. **Christ was not only exalted from the grave; he was also exalted over earth itself.***

Finally, God exalted through the CORONATION. The coronation of Christ tells us where he went when he left planet earth in the ascension. Ephesians 1:20-21 says that God *"raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come."* In the resurrection, Christ was exalted over sin, death, and the grave. In the ascension, Christ was exalted over time and space. But in the coronation, Christ was exalted over every name that is named. That is why verse 8 says that God has *"bestowed on him the name that is above every name."* What exactly is this *"name that is above every name"*? That is the natural question of the conscientious reader. But to ask that question is to miss the point. The word *"name"* does not refer to a title for Christ. The significance of the word *"name"* is found in the comparative phrase attached to it: *"the name that is above every name."* This is a statement of the exalted office of

infinite majesty, glory, power, dignity, and authority Jesus Christ received from God the Father. This statement is not about a proper name. It is about a glorious position of sovereign Lordship.

B. THE FUTURE REALIZATION OF CHRIST'S EXALTATION

Philippians 2:10-11 explains the intended purpose and proper response to the exaltation of Christ.

THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST WILL NOT BE DENIED. Verse 10 says, *"that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth."* The bowing of the knee pictures submission, surrender, even slavery. And this verse teaches that the bowing of the knee is the proper physical posture in response to the exaltation of Christ. When a dignitary or celebrity enters a room, people stand, applaud, even cheer. But if Christ were to walk into that same room, no one would stand. No one would be able to stand. Every knee should bow down before him. Note the extent of this mandated reverence for the exalted Christ. Paul says, *"Every knee should bow."* Then he punctuates the point by outlining the three places where the knee must bow before Christ: *"in heaven and on earth and under the earth."* The Lordship of Christ is total, absolute, and universal. The day is coming when the Lordship of Christ will not be denied. Every knee shall bow before Christ.

- **The holy angels in heaven will bow before Christ.**
- **The glorified spirits of the redeemed will bow before Christ.**
- **The Christ-followers on earth will bow before Christ.**
- **The unbelieving sinners in the world will bow before Christ.**
- **The devil, his demons, and all the lost souls in hell will bow before Christ.**

THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST WILL NOT BE DEBATED. Verse 10 sees THE PHYSICAL RESPONSE to the Lordship of Christ. Verse 11 hears THE VOCAL RESPONSE to the Lordship of Christ: *"and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."* Verse 10 emphasizes the scope of Christ's Lordship. Verse 11 emphasizes the sovereignty of it. Verse 11 states it in four words: *"Jesus Christ is Lord."* The Lordship of Christ is the initial confession of the church. Scholars tells us that this confession, "Jesus Christ is Lord," was the first Christian creed. Long before the church formally stated its convictions about the Trinity, Justification, and other important doctrines; it was clear about this essential truth: Jesus Christ is Lord. Likewise, the Lordship of Christ is the authentic confession of every Christian. Romans 10:9 says, *"If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."* And the Lordship of Christ is the ultimate confession of all creation. Verse 11 declares that there is coming a day when every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

This text does not teach UNIVERSALISM. It does not teach that every person will be saved. We are called to evangelize the lost because every person is not automatically or inevitably saved. UNIVERSALISM and the GREAT COMMISSION are mutually exclusive concepts. We are commanded to make disciples of all nations

because there will be no universal salvation for all people. But there will be a universal confession of the sovereign Lordship of Jesus Christ. The primary message of this hymn is to the church: humble yourselves and God will exalt you. But there is a secondary message here for the lost: Humble yourselves that you may be saved. Have you every asked the question: *“What is the world coming to?”* Philippians 2:9-11 answers that the world is coming to a day when every being in the created universe will recognize Jesus Christ as Lord. No tongue will be silent; no knee will be unbowed. But we are still in an age of grace. That means the promise of Romans 10:9 still stands: *“if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”*

- **To acknowledge him now is to receive his grace; to acknowledge him later is to suffer his judgment.**
- **Now you *may* bow and confess; then you *must* bow and confess.**
- **Now it may be in joy; then it will be in terror.**
- **Today you can confess him as Lord and Savior; then it will only be a Lord.**

If you have already received Christ as Savior and Lord, you can fulfill the purpose of the humiliation and exaltation of Christ. Verse 11 says, *“every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”* To God be the glory for the Lord Jesus Christ!

**ALL HAIL THE POWER OF JESUS' NAME!
LET ANGELS PROSTRATE FALL;
BRING FORTH THE ROYAL DIADEM, AND CROWN HIM LORD OF ALL;
BRING FORTH THE ROYAL DIADEM, AND CROWN HIM LORD OF ALL!**