

## **The Exaltation of Christ On Philippians 2:9-11**

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### **Introduction**

I do not believe that it would be an exaggeration for me to say that Philippians 2:5-11 is the greatest christological passage in the Scriptures. In studying this text, I have come to appreciate more greatly what Thomas Manton meant when he said of the Scriptures, "The Spirit of God rides most triumphantly in His own Chariot."<sup>1</sup> This is an incredibly majestic text that has a very "Take your shoes off" grandeur.<sup>2</sup>

It is so grand in fact, that it may present a problem when studying it. That is, it becomes very easy to lose sight of Paul's point in writing it. Like an animal spellbound by the headlights of an approaching car, it is possible for us to get caught up in the brilliance of the passage and forget that Paul has written it to illustrate his point that we are not to be self-centered but united, serving one another in humility (Phil. 2:1-5).

Remember the Greek myth about the handsome young man Narcissus? He fell in love with his own reflection in a pool and stared at it, not willing to leave until he died! He was so in love himself that nothing mattered but his enjoyment and admiration of himself. Today we use the term "narcissistic" to describe someone who is incredibly self-centered, someone who adores himself.

But in real life, people like that do not go off to admire themselves. Instead, they usually seek admiration from other people. Narcissistic individuals may pretend that they do not care about other people's feelings, but they still seek to find their status from other people. They desire recognition, acceptance and/or admiration from others.<sup>3</sup> It is what drives and thrills them. I came upon a statement by one of my favorite guitarists that I think sums up the idea quite vividly. Recalling a particular performance before thousands of people, he said,

For me, the best part came when we were a couple of songs into the second half of the show. The band had been totally bricked in; the audience was left to confront a vast blank barrier. As Roger sang, he

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<sup>1</sup> Manton, Thomas. *A Puritan Golden Treasury*, p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> In the Exodus 3:5-6 sense, not in the Beverly Hillbillies' sense!

<sup>3</sup> Mark Horne, "*Why Was Jesus Justified?*"

appeared nothing more than a tiny figure on stage right. Then, a trick of the light, and there I was, 30 feet up on top of the wall with the heat of four enormous spotlights at my back, throwing my shadow as far as I could see over the audience while I belted out the [guitar] solo to one of the best pieces of music I had ever written...The sensation was incredible!<sup>4</sup>

Analogously, we are not to position ourselves in such a way that others are dimmed in the shadow of our pretended glory. Rather, by a humility that demonstrates the selfless character of Christ, we esteem others better than ourselves (Phil. 2:3). In pursuing this goal, we are going to look at the example of Christ as given by Paul, particularly in terms of Christ's exaltation. Our humility is to be furthered by a consideration of the Person exalted, the position to which he is exalted, and the purpose of his exaltation.

And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:8-11).

### **The Exalted Person**

It has become somewhat of a proverb to say that "what goes up must come down," but what we learn by the example of Christ is exactly the opposite. It is not what goes up that comes down, but rather what comes down is what goes up. This is a consistent teaching of Scripture: "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up" (Jam. 4:10).

In terms of either pride or humility, it is the proud that God resists that the humble that he exalts. That is what is so dramatically illustrated here by Paul for our imitation. This is not something that Jesus simply taught; he demonstrated it in a profound way by

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<sup>4</sup> David Gilmour of the band Pink Floyd, describing the "glory" of performing before tens of thousands. His bandmate Roger Waters had a decidedly different take on the experience: "In a rock band, you find yourself in a much envied and privileged position. It is apparently the stuff that dreams are made of. You have lots of power, you earn lots of money, and there's all the spurious glamour. You get easily addicted to these things and when you choose to forget all the concomitant negative elements, you become comfortably numb. In order to remain in the dream, that is the required condition." Roger's use of the phrase "comfortably numb" is perhaps intentional, as it is the name of the song that David calls "one of the best pieces of music I had ever written," and was in fact what he was playing at the time.

his personal humiliation. As a result, we are told, "Therefore, God has also highly exalted him."

Now, just pause over this thought for a moment, Did Jesus exalt himself? No. He humbled himself, and God exalted him! Jesus was not like Satan, who declared,

I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High (Isa. 14:13-14).

There was no self-elevation to the throne of majesty. The Son of God made himself of no reputation, and the Father "super-exalted"<sup>5</sup> him. This is the first point that must be kept close to heart. In light of the mocking, abuse and murder of the Son of God by the sons of Adam, God exalted him! In light of everything that men could do to manifest their disdain and hatred of the Perfect One who was gentle and lowly of heart (Matt. 11:29), the Father has set a table before him in the presence of his enemies (Ps. 23:5,6)! Have you ever faced opposition because of your faith? Do people still mock Jesus through you?

If all men speak ill of thee, lift up thy head, and say, "Man never exalted my Master; I thank him that he does not exalt me either. The servant should not be above his master, nor the servant above his lord, nor he that is sent greater than he that sent him."<sup>6</sup>

Christ is indeed exalted, but consider who it is that is exalted. If I were to tell you that God himself has been exalted to glory as a result of his humiliation, I think we would all smile and rejoice in the splendor of that rightful acknowledgement of his proper due. But what we must come to terms with in this passage is that this exaltation is even more remarkable than that. It is the man Christ Jesus whom the Father exalted!

The significance of this is seen in comparison to his humiliation. What is so profound about the humiliation is that it is God who humbles himself. On the other hand,

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<sup>5</sup> "Highly exalted" (Phil. 2:9). The Greek preposition *hyper* is used here as a prefix. We get the English words "hyper" and "super" from it. This is intended to magnify or express excess, not position. Therefore, for Christ to be "highly exalted" means that God exalted him to the highest possible degree.

<sup>6</sup> Spurgeon, Charles. *Sermon Nov. 2, 1856*. First sermon preached after the disaster at the Royal Surry Gardens Music Hall, in which seven people lost their lives after some enemies of the truth purposely started a panic while Spurgeon was preaching.

what becomes so profound about the exaltation of this divine person is that God has raised to his right hand and glorified the man Jesus.<sup>7</sup>

Jesus is God manifest in the flesh, that is, God perfectly united to humanity everlastingly. This was an eternal union of God and man, and when the Father exalted him, he placed a man in the highest seat of all authority and honor, namely the Lord Jesus Christ.

I suspect that many of us are probably much more comfortable with the deity of Christ than we are with frank statements concerning his humanity. There is something about speaking plainly in terms of his humanity that leaves us fearful for the integrity of his divinity. We are much more comfortable with him being God than we are with him being man. And yet, we must realize that his humanity is our salvation.<sup>8</sup> He did not come in the likeness of angels, but was made lower than the angels, in the likeness of men, to redeem us. He is therefore the perfect mediator, God and man united forever!

The best way to reconcile two disagreeing families is to make some marriage between them; even so, the word became flesh, and dwelt among us in the world that he might thereby make our peace, reconciling god to man and man to God. By this happy match the son of God has become the son of man and the sons of man have become the sons of God.<sup>9</sup>

This is your King. He should never be reduced in our thinking to an abstract concept; Jesus is not simply the means by which God accomplishes salvation. He himself is our salvation as God revealed in humanity!

That has profound implications on what you and I can expect as redeemed humanity. In him, on our behalf, is joined in one person the most perfect and deepest reverence towards God and equality with God. All that was necessary to be done in order to save has been done. Only God could accomplish it, and only man was required to suffer it. Jesus has known intimately our temptations and struggles. He bore our sin, shame and condemning guilt upon the cross. He has risen from the dead and has gone

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<sup>7</sup> It is not humility that is proper for deity, but rather exaltation and glory. And what is more proper to humanity than humility before God? Yet, in the text, it is the perfect union of Creator and creature in one person that is both humbled and glorified! Amazing love, amazing grace!

<sup>8</sup> The early church father, Gregory of Nazianzen, put the issue with force and clarity: "That which he has not assumed he has not healed; but that which is united to his Godhead is also saved" (*NPNF*, Series 2, Vol. 7, p. 440). If Christ did not assume humanity, then humanity has not been saved.

<sup>9</sup> Boys, John. Quoted in C.H. Spurgeon's commentary on Psalm 19:5 in *The Treasury of David*, Vol. 1 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson), p. 283.

before us as the first resurrection,<sup>10</sup> and has been exalted to the highest degree and given a Name that is above all names.

## The Position of Christ

It was Juliet who asked, “What’s in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would still be as sweet.”<sup>11</sup> That makes great poetry, but the fact of the matter is that we put a lot of stock in names. People do not generally ask for acetaminophen when they have a headache. If one of my sons gets a cut, I do not look for the “bandaged adhesive strips,” or ask for the “facial tissue” to wipe his tears. We are usually looking for Tylenol, Band-aids and Kleenex.

Names mean things for us. They represent quality. Advertising only goes so far; in the end there has to be some substance behind the claim. If there is, then you have a name that can rise above all other competitors. Jesus far outstrips all pretended competition, and the name given to him by the Father conveys supreme quality. It is a name that describes his very nature, a name that every tongue must confess and every knee bow to: “Lord.”

The word “Lord” does not seem to carry much weight today.<sup>12</sup> This was not so in Paul’s day. This was the imperial title that all of Rome would acknowledge as belonging to Caesar alone. But it only belonged to him after a religious ceremony in which he was deified. Once he was “deified”, the loyalty of people everywhere was determined by their willingness to declare that “Caesar is Lord.”

There were Christians at these times who were actually persecuted as atheists because they placed their loyalties above those that were considered owed to the state and the deified Caesar. The cry of the heathen populace in the Roman Empire against the Christians was “Away with the atheists! To the lions with the Christians!” Why? Because they would acknowledge no other Lord but Jesus.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> His resurrection demonstrates what believers may expect in their own bodies as they are conformed by the power of God into the image of Christ at the resurrection (Acts 26:23; 1 Cor. 15:20,23; Rev. 1:5).

<sup>11</sup> Shakespeare, William. *Romeo and Juliet* 2.2.47-48.

<sup>12</sup> Per A.T. Robertson (*Word Pictures in the New Testament*, entry on Philippians 2:7; see <http://www.site-berea.com/B/rwp/n11c2.html> [as of Feb. 28, 2005]), Kennedy “laments that the term Lord has become one of the most lifeless in the Christian vocabulary, whereas it really declares the true character and dignity of Jesus Christ and ‘is the basis and the object of worship.’”

<sup>13</sup> The following is an excerpt from the *The Encyclical Epistle of the Church at Smyrna Concerning the Martyrdom of the Holy Polycarp* (ANF, Vol. 1, p. 41), who was Bishop of Smyrna in the second century:

Now, as Polycarp was entering into the stadium, there came to him a voice from heaven, saying, “Be strong, and show thyself a man, O Polycarp!” No one saw who it was that spoke to him; but those of our

Why did they do that? Why would we do that today? Would we do that today? Would we be willing to cling to Christ half as earnestly as some cling to their sin? What would strengthen us to do so? What strengthened them to do so? They understood that Paul did not simply refer to some future time when all will acknowledge Jesus' lordship (that will certainly happen) but of a present universal obligation! The basis of anyone confessing and acknowledging Christ Jesus as Lord is his exaltation to that position! That is a past and completed act! He is now Lord, so that:

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brethren who were present heard the voice. And as he was brought forward, the tumult became great when they heard that Polycarp was taken. And when he came near, the proconsul asked him whether he was Polycarp. On his confessing that he was, [the proconsul] sought to persuade him to deny [Christ], saying, "Have respect to thy old age," and other similar things, according to their custom, [such as], "Swear by the fortune of Caesar; repent, and say, Away with the Atheists." But Polycarp, gazing with a stern countenance on all the multitude of the wicked heathen then in the stadium, and waving his hand towards them, while with groans he looked up to heaven, said, "Away with the Atheists." Then, the proconsul urging him, and saying, "Swear, and I will set thee at liberty, reproach Christ;" Polycarp declared, "Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never did me any injury: how then can I blaspheme my King and my Saviour?"

And when the proconsul yet again pressed him, and said, "Swear by the fortune of Caesar," he answered, "Since thou art vainly urgent that, as thou sayest, I should swear by the fortune of Caesar, and pretendest not to know who and what I am, hear me declare with boldness, I am a Christian. And if you wish to learn what the doctrines of Christianity are, appoint me a day, and thou shalt hear them." The proconsul replied, "Persuade the people." But Polycarp said, "To thee I have thought it right to offer an account [of my faith]; for we are taught to give all due honour (which entails no injury upon ourselves) to the powers and authorities which are ordained of God. But as for *these*, I do not deem them worthy of receiving any account from me."

The proconsul then said to him, "I have wild beasts at hand ; to these will I cast thee, except thou repent." But he answered, "Call them then, for we are not accustomed to repent of what is good in order to adopt that which is evil; and it is well for me to be changed from what is evil to what is righteous." But again the proconsul said to him, "I will cause thee to be consumed by fire, seeing thou despisest the wild beasts, if thou wilt not repent." But Polycarp said, "Thou threatenest me with fire which burneth for an hour, and after a little is extinguished, but art ignorant of the fire of the coming judgment and of eternal punishment, reserved for the ungodly. But why tarriest thou? Bring forth what thou wilt."

At the name of Jesus every knee should bow ... and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:10-11).

This is the very foundation of our preaching and evangelism. We do not preach the gospel because we believe that he will be acknowledged as Lord one day in the future, but because he is Lord right now! Therefore, “Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your heart,” (Ps. 94:7; Heb. 3:15) but bow the knee to him:

“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:18-19).

This is the Glory of Christ! He is the present Lord, now ruling in the midst of his enemies (Ps. 110:2), bringing everything into subjection to his glorious reign (1 Cor. 15:20-28). He is worthy of every bent knee and confessing tongue now. When we Christians sing “All hail the power of Jesus name!” we actually mean it. Everybody is to bow before him, for he is the Lord!

God’s has exalted Christ and given him the name that is above all names. But has this led us to the point where our knees are bowed and our tongues confessing? It has been said that the noblest position of man is prostrate before the living God. If that is true, then our thinking must be as Christ’s, who bowed so low before the Father, considering him worthy of all service. We must be encouraged in his great exaltation and position. We must not diminish his glory, but ascribe all value and worth to him. Here our service to one another is furthered, and a good dose of humility gained, by recognizing that Christ, and Christ alone, is the center of God’s glory, highly exalted with a name above all names:

If my views of the glory of Christ are defective, if my faith in the limitless power of Christ is constricted, there will be a consequent and corresponding fragility in the realization I have of Christ. But let my faith firmly grasp the truth that He is what He declares Himself to be — that all this honor, all this glory, all this dignity, all this power belong to Him — then, without hesitation and doubt, I can draw from His fullness, receive His assurances, walk humbly before Him, and look forward with confidence to the blessed day when Christ who is my life shall appear, and I shall appear also with Him in glory.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Winslow, Octavius. “The Glory of Christ in Heaven” in *The Fullness of Christ* (cf. a slightly different rendering in <http://www.gracegems.org/WINSLOW/The%20Glory%20of%20Christ%20in%20Heaven.htm> [as of Feb. 28, 2005]).

## The Purpose of Christ

On the night of our Lord's betrayal, before going up to Gethsemane, Jesus prayed what is often referred to as his High Priestly Prayer (John 17:1-26). In it, he prayed,

Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him... I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do" (John 17:1-4).

Consider how marvelous this is. Jesus is given this incredible exaltation, this super-exaltation to the highest position in heaven and earth. He is given the name above every name, the authority to command the obedience and worship of all creation. And what is his response? What does he do with all this privilege, glory and power? It is all for the glory of God the Father. That is the zenith of humility. That is the apex of self-surrender. Jesus' delight is to do in heaven that which he has always done perfectly here on earth: to glorify his Father in heaven (John 13:31,32; 14:13).

What about ourselves? How easily the answer to that first catechism question is memorized: My chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever! Can you see here how that is not just some teaching mechanism, but an astounding statement of what it is to have the very mind of Christ Himself? Does this statement govern our talents, our fortunes, our gifts and prospects in life? In all these things, are we upheld by the kind of motivation that sustained Christ? Can we really give all that we are to Christ and to our fellow man and be satisfied that he receives the glory?

The purpose of Christ's exaltation was the glory of the Father. We, as well, live to glorify God just as Christ our Lord has done before us. It is in him alone that we may rest assured that the glory of God the Father is perfectly upheld. That means that in my failure to think and do as I ought, the perfect, God-glorifying thoughts and behavior of my humbled and exalted Lord continue to present me faultless before the throne of his Grace, to the glory of God the Father! What future can't I face now, knowing that "the government is upon his shoulders and that there will be no end to its increase" (Isa. 9:6-7)?

What humility! What grand exaltation! What glory! What perfect redemption of the fallen sons of Adam! He humbled himself to redeem. He subjected himself to all the miseries of this life, to the wrath of God and to the cursed death of the cross to redeem. He laid himself low under the very power of death to redeem. And now he is exalted to the right hand of God. Do you know why? To redeem. And do you know what all this is for? It is for the glory of God the Father.

Do not ever think that Jesus is wrenching salvation from the hand of a reluctant and angry Father. It glorifies the Father that you are in the Son and purchased with his

precious blood and reconciled to him. This is for his glory. If you know Jesus, then you know the Father. Have we bowed the knee to the Son of God? Have you made the good confession concerning him? What is "glory" to you? May we glory in nothing but Christ alone, and in him the Father himself shall be glorified!

## Conclusion

Jesus is the perfect manifestation of God in human flesh, whose self-sacrificing love is spelled out before us in living color both to rejoice in and to emulate in our relationship to one another. Look and you will see in this passage the very reason why Paul could so unabashedly declare, "For me, to live is Christ" (Phil 1:21).

Jesus Christ our Lord; perfect humanity, undiminished deity united in one Person forever. In him the Father is most truly known. All that is humble, all that is zealous in love to save, all that is willing to extend to the utmost his grace for the "least of these" is found in Him! Are you to be found In Him? May we have this mind in ourselves that was also in Christ Jesus. And as a result, may our humility be furthered by a consideration of the person, position and purpose of our Great God and Savior, Christ the Lord.

Only, when we humbly walk this path, seeking truly in it not our own things but those of others, we shall find the promise true, that he who loses his life shall find it. Only, when, like Christ, and in loving obedience to his call and example, we take no account of ourselves but freely give ourselves to others, we shall find, each in his measure, the saying true of himself also: "Wherefore also God hath highly exalted him." The path of self-sacrifice is the path to glory.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Warfield, Benjamin. *The Savior*, p. 270.