

A Sermon for Palm Sunday

Philippians 2:5-11

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Christ An Example Of Love

Phi 2:5-11

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

1. Here Paul again presents to us as a powerful example of the celestial and eternal fire, the love of Christ, for the purpose of persuading us to exercise a loving concern for one another. The apostle employs fine words and precious admonitions, having perceived the indolence and negligence displayed by Christians in this matter

of loving. For this the flesh is responsible. The flesh continually resists the willing spirit, seeking its own interest and causing sects and factions. Although a sermon on this same text went forth in my name a few years ago, entitled "The Twofold Righteousness," the text was not exhausted; therefore we will now examine it word by word.

"Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

2. You are Christians; you have Christ, and in him and through him all fullness of comfort for time and eternity: therefore nothing should appeal to

your thought, your judgment, your pleasure, but that which was in the mind of Christ concerning you as the source of your welfare. For his motive

throughout was not his own advantage; everything he did was done for your sake and in your interest. Let men therefore, in accord with

his example, work every good thing for one another's benefit.

”Who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant.”

[”Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant.”]

3. If Christ, who was true God by nature, has humbled himself to become servant of all, how much more should such action befit us who are of no worth, and are by nature children of sin, death and the devil! Were we similarly to humble ourselves, and even to go beyond Christ in humility – a thing, however, impossible – we should do nothing extraordinary. Our humility would still reek of sin in comparison with his. Suppose Christ was to humble himself in the least degree – but a hair's breadth, so to speak – below the most exalted angels; and suppose we were to humble ourselves to a position a thousand times more abased than that of the devils in hell; yet our humility would not compare in the least with that of Christ. For he is an infinite blessing – God himself – and we are but miserable creatures whose existence and life are not for one moment secure.

4. What terrible judgment must come upon those who fail to imitate the ineffable example of Christ; who do not humble themselves below their neighbors and serve them, but rather exalt themselves above them! Indeed, the example of Christ may well terrify the exalted, and those high in authority; and still more the self-exalted. Who would not shrink from occupying the uppermost seat and from lording it over others when he sees the Son of God humble and eliminate himself?

5. The phrase ”form of God” does not receive the same interpretation from all. Some understand

Paul to refer to the divine essence and nature in Christ; meaning that Christ, though true God, humbled himself. While Christ is indeed true God, Paul is not speaking here of his divine essence, which is concealed. The word he uses – ”morphe,” or ”forma” – he employs again where he tells of Christ taking upon himself the form of a servant. ”Form of a servant” certainly cannot signify ”essence of a real servant”-possessing by nature the qualities of a servant. For Christ is not our servant by nature; he has become our servant from good will and favor toward us. For the same reason ”divine form” cannot properly mean ”divine essence”; for divine essence is not visible, while the divine form was truly seen. Very well; then let us use the vernacular, and thus make the apostle's meaning clear.

6. ”Form of God,” then, means the assumption of a divine attitude and bearing, or the manifestation of divinity in port and presence; and this not privately, but before others, who witness such form and bearing. To speak in the clearest possible manner: Divine bearing and attitude are in evidence when one manifests in word and deed that which pertains peculiarly to God and suggests divinity. Accordingly, ”the form of a servant” implies the assumption of the attitude and bearing of a servant in relation to others. It might be better to render ”Morphe tu dulu,” by ”the bearing of a servant,” that means, manners of such character that whoever sees the person must take him for a servant. This should make it clear that the passage in question does not refer to the manifestation of divinity or servility as such, but to the characteristics and the expression of the same. For, as previously stated, the essence is concealed, but its manifestation is public. The

essence implies a condition, while its expression implies action.

7. As regards these forms, or manifestations, a threefold aspect is suggested by the words of Paul. The essence may exist without the manifestation; there may be a manifestation without the corresponding essence; and finally, we may find the essence together with its proper manifestation. For instance, when God conceals himself and gives no indication of his presence, there is divinity, albeit not manifest. This is the case when he is grieved and withdraws his grace. On the other hand, when he discloses his grace, there is both the essence and its manifestation. But the third aspect is inconceivable for God, namely, a manifestation of divinity without the essence. This is rather a trick of the devil and his servants, who usurp the place of God and act as God, though they are anything but divine. An illustration of this we find in Ezekiel 28, 2, where the king of Tyre is recorded as representing his heart, which was certainly decidedly human, as that of a god.

8. Similarly, the form, or bearing, of a servant may be considered from a threefold aspect. One may be a servant and not deport himself as such, but as a lord, or as God; as in the instance just mentioned. Of such a one Solomon speaks (Prov 29, 21), saying: "He that delicately bringeth up his servant from a child shall have him become a son at the last." Such are all the children of Adam. We who are rightly God's servants would be God himself. This is what the devil taught Eve when he said, "Ye shall be as God." Gen 3, 5. Again, one may be a servant and conduct himself as one, as all just and faithful servants behave before the world; and as all true Christians conduct themselves in God's sight, being subject to him and serving all men. Thirdly, one may be not a servant and yet behave as one. For instance, a king might minister to his servants before the world. Before God, however, all men being servants, this situation is impossible with men; no one has so done but Christ. He says at the supper (Jn 13, 13-14): "Ye call me, Teacher, and, Lord: and ye say well; for so I am," and yet I am among you as a servant. And in another place (Mt 20,

28), "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister."

9. From these explanations Paul's meaning must have become clear. His thought is: Christ was in the form of God; that is, both the essence and the bearing of Deity were his. He did not assume the divine form as he did that of a servant. He was, I repeat it; he was in the form of a God. The little word "was" expresses that divinity was his both in essence and form. The meaning is: Many assume and display an appearance of divinity, but are not themselves actually divine; the devil, for instance, and Antichrist and Adam's children. This is sacrilege- the assumption of divinity by an act of robbery. See Rom 2, 22. Though the offender does not look upon such conduct as robbery, it is none the less robbing divine honor, and is so regarded by God and angels and saints, and even by his own conscience. But Christ, who had not come by divinity through arrogating it to himself, but was divine by nature according to his very essence, did not deem his divinity a thing he had grasped; nor could he, knowing divinity to be his very birthright, and holding it as his own natural possession from eternity.

10. So Paul's words commend Christ's essential divinity and his love toward us, and at the same time correct all who falsely assume a divine form. Such are we all so long as we are the devil's members. The thought is: The devil's members all would be God, would rob the divinity they do not possess; and they must admit their action to be robbery, for conscience testifies, indeed must testify, that they are not God. Though they may despise the testimony of conscience and fail to heed it, yet the testimony stands, steadfastly maintaining the act as not right-as a malicious robbery. But the one man, Christ, who did not assume the divine form but was in it by right and had a claim upon it from eternity; who did not and could not hold it robbery to be equal with God; this man humbled himself, taking upon him the form of a servant – not his rightful form – that he by the power of his winning example, might induce them to assume the bearing of servants who possessed the form and character of servants, but who, refusing to own them, appropriated the

appearance of divinity upon which they had no claim, since the essence of divinity was forever beyond them.

11. That some fail to understand readily this great text, is due to the fact that they do not accept Paul's words as spoken, but substitute their own ideas of what he should have said, namely: Christ was born true God and did not rob divinity, etc. The expression "who, existing in the form of God" sounds, in the Greek and Latin, almost as if Christ had merely borne himself as God, unless particular regard be given to the words "existing in," which Paul contrasts with the phrase "took upon him." Christ took upon himself the form of a servant, it is true, but in that form was no real servant. just so, while dispensing with a divine appearance, behind the appearance chosen was God. And we likewise take upon ourselves the divine form, but in the form we are not divine; and we spurn the form of servants, though that is what we are irrespective of appearance. Christ disrobes himself of the divine form wherein he existed, to assume that of a servant, which did not express his essential character; but we lay aside the servant form of our real being and take upon ourselves, or arrogate to ourselves, the form of God to which we are not fitted by what we are in reality.

12. They are startled by this expression also: "Christ thought it not robbery to be equal with God." Now, at first sight these words do not seem to refer solely to Christ, since even the devil and his own, who continually aspire to equality with God, do not think their action robbery in spite of the testimony of their conscience to the contrary. But with Paul the little word "think," or "regard," possesses a powerful significance, having the force of "perfect assurance." Similarly he says (Rom 3, 28), "We reckon therefore that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law"; and (1 Cor 7, 40), "I think [deem] that I also have the spirit of God." But the wicked cannot boast it no robbery when they dare take upon themselves the form of God; for they know, they are satisfied in themselves, that they are not God. Christ, however, did not, nor could he think himself not equal to God; in other words, he was

confident of his equality with God, and knew he had not stolen the honor. Paul's words are chosen, not as an apology for Christ, but as a severe rebuke for those who arrogate to themselves the form of God against the protest of conscience that it is not their own but stolen. The apostle would show how infinitely Christ differs from them, and that the divine for they would take by theft is Christ's by right.

13. Paul does not use this expression, however, when he refers to Christ's assumption of the servant form which his, not by nature, but by assumption. The words produce the impression that Christ took by force something not his own. Paul should be expected to say: "He held it not robbery to assume the form of a servant." Why should he rather have chosen that form of expression in the first instance, since Christ did not assume the divine form, but possessed it as his very own – yes, laid it aside and assumed a form foreign to his nature? The substance of the matter is that he who becomes a servant does not and cannot assume anything, but only gives, giving even himself. Hence there is no warrant here to speak of robbery or of a disposition to look upon the matter in this light. On the other hand, assumption of the divine form necessarily involves taking, and altogether precludes giving. Hence there is warrant to speak of robbery in this connection, and of men who so view it. But this charge cannot be brought against Christ. He does not render himself guilty of robbery, nor does he so view his relation, as all others must do. Divinity is his by right, and so is its appropriate form a birthright.

14. Thus, it seems to me, this text very clearly teaches that to have divine form is simply to assume in regard to others, in word and deed, the bearing of God and Lord; that Christ meets this test in the miraculous signs and life-giving words, as the Gospels contend. He does not rank with the saints who lack the divine essence; he has, in addition to divine form, the divine essence and nature. On the other hand, the servant, or servile, form implies acting toward others, in word and deed, like a servant. Thus Christ did when he served the disciples and gave himself for us. But

he served not as the saints, who are servants by nature. Service was, with him, something assumed for our benefit and as an example for us to follow, teaching us to act in like manner toward others, to disrobe ourselves of the appearance of divinity as he did, as we shall see.

15. Unquestionably, then, Paul proclaims Christ true God. Had he been mere man, what would have been the occasion for saying that he became like a man and was found in the fashion of other men? And that he assumed the form of a servant though he was in form divine? Where would be the sense in my saying to you, "You are like a man, are made in the fashion of a man, and take upon yourself the form of a servant"? You would think I was mocking you, and might appropriately reply: "I am glad you regard me as a man; I was wondering if I were an ox or a wolf. Are you mad or foolish?" Would not that be the natural rejoinder to such a foolish statement? Now, Paul not being foolish, nor being guilty of foolish speech, there truly must have been something exalted and divine about Christ. For when the apostle declares that he was made like unto other men, though the fact of his being human is undisputed, he simply means that the man Christ was God, and could, even in his humanity, have borne himself as divine. But this is precisely what he did not do; he refrained; he disrobed himself of his divinity and bore himself as a mere man like others.

16. What follows concerning Christ, now that we understand the meaning or "form of God" and "form of a servant," is surely plain. In fact, Paul himself tells us what he means by "form of a servant." First: He makes the explanation that Christ disrobed, or divested himself; that is, appeared to lay aside his divinity in that he divested himself of its benefit and glory. Not that he did, or could, divest himself of his divine nature; but that he laid aside the form of divine majesty—did not act as the God he truly was. Nor did he divest himself of the divine form to the extent of making it felt and invisible; in that case there would have been no divine form left. He simply did not affect a divine appearance and dazzle us by its splendor; rather he served us with

that divinity. He performed miracles. And during his suffering on the cross he, with divine power, gave to the murderer the promise of Paradise. Lk. 23, 43. And in the garden, similarly, he repelled the multitude by a word. Jn 18, 6. Hence Paul does not say that Christ was divested by some outside power; he says Christ "made himself" of no repute. Just so the wise man does not in a literal way lay aside wisdom and the appearance of wisdom, but discards them for the purpose of serving the simple-minded who might fittingly serve him. Such man makes himself of no reputation when he divests himself of his wisdom and the appearance of wisdom.

17. Second: Christ assumed the form of a servant, even while remaining God and having the form of God; he was God, and his divine words and works were spoken and wrought for our benefit. As a servant, he served us with these. He did not require us to serve him in compensation for them, as in the capacity of a Lord he had a just right to do. He sought not honor or profit thereby, but our benefit and salvation. It was a willing service and gratuitously performed, for the good of men. It was a service unspeakably great, because of the ineffable greatness of the minister and servant — God eternal, whom all angels and creatures serve. He who is not by this example heartily constrained to serve his fellows, is justly condemned. He is harder than stone, darker than hell and utterly without excuse.

18. Third: "Being made in the likeness of men." Born of Mary, Christ's nature became human. But even in that humanity he might have exalted himself above all men and served none. But he forbore and became as other men. And by "likeness of men" we must understand just ordinary humanity without special privilege whatever. Now, without special privilege there is no disparity among men. Understand, then, Paul says in effect: Christ was made as any other man who has neither riches, honor, power nor advantage above his fellows; for many inherit power, honor and property by birth. So lowly did Christ become, and with such humility did he conduct himself, that no mortal is too lowly to be his equal, even servants and the poor. At the same

time, Christ was sound, without bodily infirmities, as man in his natural condition might be expected to be.

19. Fourth. "And being found in fashion as a man." That is, he followed the customs and habits of men, eating and drinking, sleeping and waking, walking and standing, hungering and thirsting, enduring cold and heat, knowing labor and weariness, needing clothing and shelter, feeling the necessity of prayer, and having the same experience as any other man in his relation to God and the world. - He had power to avoid these conditions; as God he might have demeaned and borne himself quite differently. But in becoming man, as above stated, he fared as a human being, and he accepted the necessities of ordinary mortals while all the time he manifested the divine form which expressed his true self.

20. Fifth: "He humbled himself," or debased himself. In addition to manifesting his servant form in becoming man and faring as an ordinary human being, he went farther and made himself lower than any man. He abased himself to serve all men with the supreme service – the gift of his life in our behalf.

21. Sixth: He not only made himself subject to men, but also to sin, death and the devil, and bore it all for us. He accepted the most ignominious death, the death on the cross, dying not as a man but as a worm (Ps 22, 6); yes as an arch-knave, a knave above all knaves, in that he lost even what favor, recognition and honor were due to the

assumed servant form in which he had revealed himself, and perished altogether.

22. Seventh: All this Christ surely did not do because we were worthy of it. Who could be worthy such service from such a one? Obedience to the Father moved him. Here Paul with one word unlocks heaven and permits us look into the unfathomable abyss of divine majesty and behold the ineffable love of the Fatherly heart toward us – his gracious will for us. He shows us how from eternity it has been God's pleasure that Christ, the glorious one who has wrought all this, should do it for us. What human heart would not melt at the joy-inspiring thought? Who would not love, praise and thank God and in return for his goodness, not only be ready to serve the world, but gladly to embrace the extremity of humility? Who would not so do when he is aware that God himself has such precious regard for him, and points to the obedience of his Son as the pouring out and evidence of his Fatherly will. Oh, the significance of the words Paul here uses! such words as he uses in no other place! He must certainly have burned with joy and cheer. To gain such a glimpse of God – surely this must be coming to the Father through Christ. Here is truly illustrated the truth that no one comes to Christ except the Father draw him; and with what power, what delicious sweetness, the Father allures! How many are the preachers of the faith who imagine they know it all, when they have received not even an odor or taste of these things! How soon are they become masters who have never been disciples! Not having tasted God's love, they cannot impart it; hence they remain unprofitable babblers.

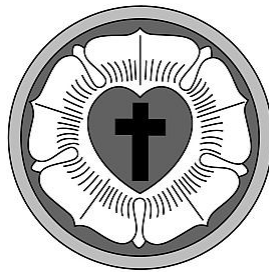
"Wherefore also God highly exalted him."

23. As Christ was cast to the lowest depths and subjected to all devils, in obeying God and serving us, so has God exalted him Lord over all angels and creatures, and over death and hell. Christ now has completely divested himself of the servant form – laid it aside. Henceforth he exists

in the divine form, glorified, proclaimed, confessed, honored and recognized as God. While it is not wholly apparent to us that "all things are put in subjection" to Christ, as Paul says (I Cor 15, 27), the trouble is merely with our perception of the fact. It is true that Christ is thus exalted in

person and seated on high in the fullness of power and might, executing everywhere his will; though few believe the order of events is for the sake of Christ. Freely the events order themselves, and the Lord sits enthroned free from all restrictions. But our eyes are as yet blinded. We do not perceive him there nor recognize that all things obey his will. The last day, however, will reveal it. Then we shall comprehend present mysteries; how Christ laid aside his divine form, was made

man, and so on; how he also laid aside the form of a servant and resumed the divine likeness; how as God he appeared in glory; and how he is now Lord of life and death, and the King of Glory. This must suffice on the text. For how we, too, should come down from our eminence and serve others has been sufficiently treated of in other postils. Remember, God desires us to serve one another with body, property, honor, spirit and soul, even as his Son served us.



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