

“Work Your Way Down the Ladder” (Philippians 2:5–11)

In Lewis Carroll’s famous book, *Through the Looking Glass*, Alice steps through the mirror in the living room to find a world on the opposite side where everything is backwards: Alice wants to go forward, but every time she moves, she ends up back where she started; she tries to go left and ends up right; up is down and fast is slow. Similarly, Christianity is a kind of looking glass world where everything works on principles opposite to those of the world around us. To be blessed, be a blessing to others. To receive love, give love. To be honored, first be humble. To truly live, die to yourself. To gain the unseen, let go of the seen. To receive, first give. To save your life, lose it. To lead, be a servant. To be first, be last.¹

In Philippians 2:5–11, Paul will explain that *the way up is down*. That’s right: Down is up, up is down. The way to be great is to go lower. *The way up is down*. The logical flow of Philippians has been building up to this great truth. After addressing the church as a unified whole (1:1–2), Paul offers a prayer for them to achieve this unity (1:3–11). He then gives his own life as a model (1:12–26; cf. 4:9) and urges the church to live lives of humility and unity without (1:27–30) and within the church (2:1–4).² Finally, Paul arrives at a crescendo and turns his attention to the powerful example of Christ Himself in 2:5–11.³ This is one of the most important passages in the entire Bible.⁴ Many scholars believe that this is the best passage in the Bible to defend and explain that Jesus Christ is God.⁵ However, this sermon will not be a systematic theology lesson because it is found in a context that stresses the need for unity in the local church.⁶ In these verses, Paul issues two commitments to living an upside-down life.

1. Imitate Christ’s model of humility (2:5-8). The way that you can imitate Christ’s example is by giving up your “rights.” Paul begins this section with a command to **“Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus.”** Verse 5 builds a bridge between 2:1–4 and 2:6–11.⁷ It serves as a transition from Paul’s exhortation to his illustration.⁸ The word “this” (*touto*) refers back to 2:1–4,⁹ particularly 2:3 where Paul encourages believers to have “humility of mind.” To “have this attitude”¹⁰ means “to develop an attitude based upon careful thought.”¹¹ Paul is inviting you to rethink your attitude based upon Christ’s attitudes (2:6) and actions (2:7–8). Mark Twain once said, “Few things are harder to put up with than the annoyance of a good example.”¹² I think we’ve all felt this way from time to time. Obviously, living up to the attitude of Christ is not easy. It’s a pursuit that humbles every believer to dust; nevertheless, we are commanded to pursue this lofty goal. How is your attitude today? Does it line up with Jesus Christ or with your natural tendencies and inclinations?

Scientists have succeeded in causing chickens to sound like quail. Researchers took tissue from parts of the quail brain thought to control the bird’s call and implanted it in the brains of five chicken embryos. The experiment worked! The hatched chicks sounded like quail rather than chickens. When you believed in Christ, God implanted His mind into yours and you become a new creation (2 Cor 5:17). However, unlike the chickens who sound like quail forever, you will not sound and act like Christ for the rest of your life without continually fostering and putting on His mind (Rom 12:2). This can be done through daily Bible reading, listening to praise and worship music or an audio Bible, fellowshiping with other Christians who encourage you in your walk with the Lord, and spending time getting to know Christ Himself through prayer. Though there are a variety of things you can do to renew your Christlike mind, the key is to do something every day.¹³ I think it’s easy to make the mistake of trying to accomplish too much too soon. Of course, when we fail to achieve our goals, it’s tempting to want to quit because we feel like a failure. However, God’s heart is that you and I would take baby steps and make forward progress each day. In other words, don’t try to cram; instead, just do at least one thing to cultivate the mind of Christ. Today, you can grow in grace and truth by asking God to give you an attitude adjustment. Perhaps you need to acknowledge a bitter and vindictive attitude? Maybe you are a chronic complainer who needs to see God’s perspective for your suffering and trials? Regardless, every Christian can benefit from an attitude tune-up. Ask God to search your heart today and reveal the attitudes that grieve Him.¹⁴

Paul now fleshes out his fundamental command in 2:6–8 by using Jesus as his illustration/model. In 2:6, he writes, “...**although He [Jesus] existed in the form of God, [He] did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped...**” Before Christ invaded this planet, He existed in the form of God. Notice Paul does not say that Jesus “came to exist” or “entered into existence.” Instead, he uses a present tense participle translated “existed” to indicate ongoing existence. Since the time frame of the passage is clearly eternity past, Paul asserts that Jesus Christ existed eternally “in the form of God.” The English word “form” can be misleading here because it suggests shape or outward appearance. Yet, the Greek word translated “form” (*morphe*) refers to the essential nature of something or someone.¹⁵ In this context, Paul is saying that Jesus’ nature and character corresponds with God.¹⁶ 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. We do something similar today when we wet a rubber stamp with ink and then stamp it on a piece of paper. The impression on the paper is the exact image of what is on the rubber stamp. Paul says, “That’s the relationship Jesus Christ bears to God the Father. Jesus is the exact representation of who and what God is. Jesus has never been a junior partner to God, but rather a full-fledged member of the Godhead, equal with the Almighty Father in every way, shape, and form, from eternity past. So when you and I talk about Jesus Christ, we are not talking about someone less than God. We are talking about someone who is the “express image” of God.¹⁷

Though Jesus was fully God, He “did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped.”¹⁸ Jesus was not grasping to get something; He already possessed deity. However, He did not regard being equal with God something to be used for His own advantage.¹⁹ Though equal with God or equally God, Jesus did not seize this as an opportunity to further His own interests at the expense of the Father.²⁰ Jesus willingly released all of His personal rights. Some have suggested that the expression is identical to the phrase “in the form of God.”²¹ More likely, however, the expressions differ. “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.”²² 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 from April of this year (2009) reveals that 22% of Christians strongly agreed that Jesus Christ sinned when He lived on earth, with an additional 17% agreeing somewhat.²³ 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.²⁴ 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.

Instead of holding on to His personal rights, 2:7 explains that Jesus “**emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant being made in the likeness of men.**” Jesus came down from heaven to earth in the greatest stoop of all time. Instead of climbing the ladder, Jesus stepped down, one rung at a time.²⁵ But this leads to a question: What does the phrase “emptied Himself”²⁶ mean? We can be sure of one thing: This phrase doesn’t mean that Jesus emptied Himself of any of His divine attributes (emptying by subtraction). If Jesus did such a thing for even one moment, He would cease to be God.²⁷ Fortunately, the next clause in 2:7 explains the meaning of “emptied Himself”—“taking the form of a bond-servant being made in the likeness of men.” Jesus’ act of “emptying” Himself was in His act of “taking” on a human nature. It was emptying by addition. In other words, Jesus, being God, “emptied Himself” by *adding* humanity.²⁸ Thus, the phrase “emptied Himself” is only a metaphor, just like when Paul says, “I am being poured out like a drink offering” (2 Tim 4:6). Similarly, Paul is not suggesting that Jesus’ internal organs or His human attributes were poured out like liquid from a bottle. The point that he is trying to make is that Jesus Christ practiced self-denial and self-sacrifice for our sake and became “God-in-a-bod!” What an astounding, unfathomable thought. Jesus left the glory and splendor of heaven and came to dwell on earth to serve others. He understood *the way up is down*.

Paul fleshes out this concept further by stating that Jesus took “the form of a bond-servant being made in the likeness of men” (2:7b). Paul could have said that Jesus took on the form of a human being. That would be humiliation enough for God. There is a general Greek word for humanity that Paul could have used here, or he could have used a word that means a male as opposed to a female. But Paul uses neither of these. Instead, he chooses the more specific term *doulos*, which means “slave” or “bond-servant.” In other words, Jesus became a particular kind of man, a slave, the lowest position a person could become in the Roman world. He wasn’t born in a mansion or a king’s palace, but in a dirty stable among the animals. The Almighty God appeared on earth as a helpless human baby, needing to be fed and changed and taught to talk like any other child. The King of the Universe, the Lord of glory, voluntarily became a pauper for our sake. He had to borrow a place to be born, a boat to preach from, a place to sleep, a donkey to ride upon, an upper room to use for the last supper, and a tomb in which to be buried. He created the world but the world did not know Him. He was insulted, humiliated, and rejected by the people He made.²⁹ The more you think about it, the more staggering it gets. Nothing in fiction is so fantastic as this truth of the Incarnation. Jesus went as low as He could possibly go. This means no matter what you go through, no matter how low you may get, you can never sink so far that Jesus cannot get under you and lift you up. He can identify with you in any situation, no matter how hard: poverty, loneliness, homelessness, rejection, you name it.³⁰

Jesus descended the ladder and arrives at the bottom rung in 2:8. Paul writes, **“He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”** This verse reminds us that Jesus “humbled himself.” No one humbled Jesus; He willingly and graciously offered Himself to death. The implication is that you and I should do the same. As you read this verse, it is easy to sense Paul’s astonishment. He can’t believe that Jesus—God Himself—died! But to think that He experienced “even death on a cross” is mindboggling! The Romans reserved the agonizing death of crucifixion for slaves and foreigners, and the Jews viewed death on a cross as a curse from God.³¹ Crucifixion was a horrible way to die. The weight of the victim’s body hanging from his wrists caused his joints to dislocate as he tried to push up on his feet to breathe and keep from suffocating. Eventually, the victim was no longer able to push himself up and finally suffocated. Jesus endured that horrible trauma, not to mention the spikes through His wrists or the pain of the cross’ rough wood scraping against His back, shredded from the beating He had received with a cat-of-nine-tails. Jesus suffered as no one else, but it wasn’t the physical pain that caused Him the most suffering. Neither was it the taunting and humiliation He endured from His enemies as they watched Him die. The agony Jesus endured on the cross was the abandonment He suffered as God the Father turned His back on His son (Matt 27:46). The price that Jesus paid for humankind is staggering. Paul urges you to ponder the wonder of Jesus. As you reflect upon Him today, may you be overwhelmed by all this great God has accomplished for you. *The way up is down.*

Athanasius (296–373), Bishop of Alexandria, noted that crucifixion was the only death a man can die with arms outstretched. He said that Jesus died like that to invite people of all nations and all generations to come to Him.³² Today, will you believe in Jesus Christ as your Savior? Will you transfer your trust in yourself to Jesus perfect person and His perfect work? The moment you do, you will cross over from death to life and spend eternity with God (John 5:24; 1 John 5:9–13).

Interestingly, the primary thrust of this passage is not evangelistic. Instead, it is written with the express purpose of motivating believers to be humble and unified. Today, do you need to die so that a relationship can live? What does your wife want or need from you? What does your husband desire from you? What do your children need from you? Leaders are not to abuse their power and position to further their own interests, but to pursue the best interests of others.³³ Instead of grabbing for their “rights,” they begin to give to relationships. Instead of using others as means to their own ends, they serve others as ends in themselves. In your work life, instead of striving for upward mobility, why not pursue downward mobility?³⁴ Remember, *the way up is down.*

After reflecting on Jesus' downward mobility culminating with His death on the cross, you may declare, "Lord, I would die for You or for someone I love." As Fred Craddock has said, "To give my life for Christ appears glorious. To pour myself out for others...to pay the ultimate price of martyrdom—I'll do it. I'm ready, Lord, to go out in a blaze of glory. We think giving our all to the Lord is like taking a \$1,000 bill and laying it on the table—here's my life, Lord. I'm giving it all. But the reality for most of us is that He sends us to the bank and has us cash in the \$1,000 for quarters. We go through life putting out 25 cents here and 50 cents there. Listen to the neighbor kid's troubles instead of saying, 'Get lost.' Go to a committee meeting. Give up a cup of water to a shaky old man in a nursing home. Usually giving our life to Christ isn't glorious. It's done in all those little acts of love, 25 cents at a time. It would be easy to go out in a flash of glory; it's harder to live the Christian life little by little over the long haul."³⁵ Yet, there are no shortcuts in the Christian life. If you want to follow the model of humility, you must take the high road, which requires getting low for others! It requires continually serving regardless of personal cost. This is how you imitate the model of humility. *The way up is down.*

[Jesus' humiliation is not the end of the story. God raised Jesus up from the grave of His humanity and exalted Him in heaven as the God-man. Thus, the second commitment that Paul gives is...]

2. Appropriate Christ's lordship of creation (2:9–11). True biblical humility occurs when one recognizes the greatness of Jesus Christ. Paul explains: "**For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that³⁶ at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father**" (2:9–11). The phrase "for this reason"³⁷ shows a cause-effect relationship between Christ's self-humbling (2:8) and His exaltation (2:9). First, there was the cradle, then the cross, and then the crown. In these verses, Paul imparts two significant blessings to the humble Christ.

- **First, God exalted Jesus to the loftiest height (2:9a; cf. Ps 2).**³⁸ The word translated "highly exalted" (*huperupsoo*) is used only here in the New Testament and can be literally rendered "super exalted." In other words, Christ received the highest exaltation—in a class by itself.³⁹
- **Second, God gave Jesus the name, which supersedes all other names (2:9b; Heb 1:4).**⁴⁰ In contemporary Christian circles the common misinterpretation of this passage is that the reference to the "name" (*onoma*) means specifically the name Jesus.⁴¹ But, it is the name given to Jesus that is the issue here. Here, God bestows on Jesus the name "Lord" (*kurios*).⁴² At this great name, "every knee will bow"⁴³ and "every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord." This statement is taken from Isaiah 45:23. The context of the quotation from Isaiah is taken up with the uniqueness of "Lord" (*Yahweh*) in contrast to lifeless idols.⁴⁴ In the Isaiah passage, *Yahweh*, and *Yahweh* alone, is unique and the only One who creates, redeems, and sustains (45:17–18). Thus, the passage is a powerful statement about *Yahweh's* supremacy. It is precisely this supremacy, which is conferred on Jesus in 2:10–11. Note again the process, though. While on earth His name was often despised and He had no great titles. He was called "a friend of sinners," and a "blasphemer." Because He did not conform to the world of His day, He did not have an important title beside His name, distinguishing Him. Yet because He did not live to make His name great on this earth, God has made His name supremely exalted in the world to come.

The three regions described in 2:10 seem to be heaven, earth, and hell. The beings in heaven that Paul refers to are angels and believers who have died and whose spirits have gone into the Lord's presence. Those on earth are people still alive on the earth. Those under the earth are unbelievers awaiting resurrection and Satan and his angelic beings. All will acknowledge Jesus' lordship one day (1 Cor 15:27; Eph 1:20–21).⁴⁵ The whole purpose of the working out of salvation is the glory of God the Father. The end is attained when men yield to His will and acknowledge Christ as Lord.⁴⁶

These great verses are a reminder that worship is a choice for us now, but one day, every human being and spirit being will worship God for all time. There are no atheists or agnostics in hell. The world may not bow or confess to Jesus today, but it's going to bow sooner or later. On that day, it won't matter what anyone thinks, because every person is going to recognize that God sent Jesus to die for Him. There are two ways of honoring Jesus' name: voluntarily or involuntarily. Those who do it now, show faith at work; those who do it on the last day, will do it by sight.⁴⁷

Again, I must press you to believe in Jesus Christ as your Savior, if you have never done so. Please don't postpone this decision. There is no guarantee that tomorrow will come. Today is your opportunity to bow the knee and confess with the tongue. Fix this thought clearly in your mind. Jesus will have the last word! He will be vindicated before the entire universe. Even His enemies will bow before Him. In the end no opposition against Him will stand. This is not universal salvation, but it is universal confession. Not all will be saved but all will confess that Jesus is Lord. Here is your choice: Trust Him today as your Savior from sin and spend eternity with God and with those who love Him, *or* confess⁴⁸ Him when you stand before Him as the Lord of creation and spend eternity separated from Him.

Surprisingly, the primary application of this passage is for the believer. The implication of Paul's argument is that many believers need to bow the knee and confess with the tongue that Jesus is God in every area of their lives. In the course of my Christian life, there have been areas that I have included or excluded Jesus from. What I was saying is: "Jesus, you can be God in this area, but you can't be God over this area. I want to keep this area for myself and I will be my own God." Paul's point is: One day you and I will bow the knee and confess with the tongue at the judgment seat of Christ that Jesus is God/Lord over every area of our lives. This is Paul's point in Rom 14:11 when he quotes Isa 45:23.⁴⁹ My desire is to bow now and confess now that Jesus is God over area of my life. What area of your life have you excluded Jesus from (e.g., your marriage, family, work, church, personal life)? Today, will you invite Him to take over this area of your life because He is Lord and God?

The good news of this passage is that God will exalt believers who humble themselves. In the future, God will reward a life lived now in self-denial. That is the obvious implication of Paul's illustration. Perhaps you think it is selfish to serve the Lord for a reward? Was it selfish for Jesus to endure what He did because He knew He would receive a reward? Motivation is the key. If you submit to God and to others for the glory of God rather than for selfish glory, as Jesus did, your motivation is correct⁵⁰ and He will reward you. *The way up is down.*

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Scripture References

Philippians 2:5–11

Matthew 20:20–28

Mark 10:35–45

John 1:1–3; 8:58

Colossians 1:15–16

Hebrews 2:8–18

Hebrews 4:14–15; 5:1–10

Study Questions

1. How does my attitude reflect Christ's attitude (2:5)? On a scale of 1 to 10, how would I rate myself? How would others rate me (e.g., spouse, children, grandchildren, coworkers, boss, neighbors, pastors)? Presently, in what area of my life do I have the greatest challenge in my attitude? What can I do this week to improve my attitude? Who can help me with an attitude adjustment?
2. What astonishes me the most about Jesus' humility (2:6–8)? What portions of His life and ministry really stand out to me? In what specific ways do I humble myself before others? How can I follow Christ's example and live as a "bond-servant?" Who are the most difficult people in my life to serve? This week, how can I show these people God's sacrificial love?
3. How is Jesus currently being exalted in my personal life? What am I doing to ensure that my family is exalting the Lord Jesus? How is my church seeking to exalt Jesus and point others to Him? When am I the most prone to take credit for something? How can I naturally deflect the praise to God?
4. Who do I have a relationship with who needs to hear the good news of the gospel? What can I do this week to share Christ with this individual? How can I imitate Jesus' example and use practical service to open a door for the gospel?
5. In my Christian life, how do I strive to submit to Christ's lordship (2:10–11)? What area am I presently struggling to relinquish to the Lord? How is this area holding me back in my Christian life? Who can help me submit this area to Christ?

Notes

¹ See Prov 18:12; Matt 5:3–10; 6:19–21; 19:27–30; 20:26–27; Mark 10:42–45; Luke 6:38; 9:23–24; John 12:25.

² Herrick makes some excellent linguistic connections between Phil 1:1–2:4 and 2:5–11. Greg Herrick, “Exhortation to Unity—The Example of Christ” (2:5–11) in *Philippians: The Unconquerable Gospel*: www.bible.org.

³ Many scholars believe that Paul is quoting a hymn in Phil 2:5–11. See Peter T. O’Brien, *Commentary on Philippians*. New International Greek Testament Commentary series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 186; Ralph P. Martin and Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians*. Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 43, rev., Bruce M. Metzger, ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 99. Other scholars argue that this is not a hymn, but rather a Pauline prose. See Gordon D. Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*. New International Commentary on the New Testament series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 192–97; Frank Thielman, *Philippians*. NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 110–13.

⁴ Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 39 writes, “By anyone’s reckoning, 2:6–11 constitutes the single most significant block of material in Philippians.”

⁵ See also John 1:1–18.

⁶ Brockmuehl has likened Phil 2:5–11 to “the soaring, unanswerable language of a Bach cantata which is best understood by being heard out to the end—and then heard again.” Markus Brockmuehl, *The Epistle to the Philippians*. Black’s New Testament Commentary (London: A & C Black Limited, 1998), 105.

⁷ Probably the clearest portrait of Jesus Christ in the NT is found in Phil 2:5–11. Constable writes, “The parallels in thought and action between these verses, which describe Jesus’ humility, and John 13:3–17, which records Jesus washing His disciples’ feet, are striking.” Thomas L. Constable, “Notes on Philippians,” 2009 ed.: www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/philippians.pdf, 25.

⁸ David J. MacLeod, “Imitating the Incarnation of Christ: An Exposition of Philippians 2:5–8,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158:631 (July 2001): 310.

⁹ O’Brien, *Commentary on Philippians*, 204.

¹⁰ The word translated “attitude” (*phroneo*) refers to the mind and is used twice in Phil 2:2. *Phroneite* (“you all think”) is a present active imperative. For other forms of this word, see Phil 1:7; 2:2; 3:15, 19; 4:2, 10.

¹¹ BDAG s.v. *phroneo*.

¹² Quoted in Sam Gordon, *An Odyssey of Joy: The Message of Philippians*. Truth for Today Commentary Series (Belfast, Ireland/Greenville, SC: Ambassador-Emerald International, 2004), 76.

¹³ David Jeremiah, “Think Like Jesus,” *Turning Point Daily Devotional*, 6/17/09.

¹⁴ Ps 139:23–24: “Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way.”

¹⁵ BDAG s.v. *morphe*.

¹⁶ See NET study notes: www.netbible.org.

¹⁷ Tony Evans, *Returning to Your First Love* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 176.

¹⁸ This phrase translates one Greek word (*harpagmon*), which means “something already possessed,” and therefore, “to be clutched onto” or “held closely” so as to protect. This is a very rare word. It appears only here in the NT, never in the LXX, and very seldom in pagan Greek literature.

¹⁹ O’Brien, *Commentary on Philippians*, 215–16; Moisés Silva, *Philippians*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, 2nd ed. Edited by Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1992, 2005), 103–4.

²⁰ This passage has been debated down throughout church history. The debate centers around: was Christ merely “like” God (“of similar substance”) or was He fully and completely God (“of the same substance”)? Thanks to the courage and tenacity of Athanasius, the bishop of Alexandria, the church stood behind the true and orthodox position that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man. Undiminished deity took on perfect and sinless humanity at the incarnation. We may not be able to fully comprehend this mystery, but we must acknowledge it to be true because the Bible says so. See Bob Deffinbaugh, “The Ultimate in Humility—Leaving the Comfort Zone” (Phil. 2:3–11) in *To Live is Christ: A Study of the Book of Philippians*: www.bible.org.

²¹ E.g. Gerald Hawthorne, *Philippians*. WBC (Nashville: Nelson, 1983), 84.

²² Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 207–8.

²³ See www.barna.org/barna-update/article/12-faithspirituality/260-most-american-christians-do-not-believe-that-satan-or-the-holy-spirit-exist.

²⁴ For an excellent study on Jesus’ deity, see the various editions of C.S. Lewis classic work *Mere Christianity*: www.amazon.com/gp/seller/search.html?index=stripbooks&keywords=Mere+Christianity&x=45&y=10.

²⁵ Gordon, *An Odyssey of Joy*, 77.

²⁶ Other renderings include: “made himself nothing” (ESV, NIV) and “made Himself of no reputation” (NKJV). Paul never uses this term in a literal fashion. In the four other places where Paul uses this verb (Rom 4:14; 1 Cor 1:17; 9:15; 2 Cor 9:3), he uses it in a metaphorical, not a literal sense. Most occurrences of the word carry the meaning of making a boast “empty” or “vain.” The verb “emptied” can mean “to pour out” and this better fits the context.

²⁷ Admittedly, Jesus willingly chose to veil the full extent of His glory (Matt 17:2; 28:2–3; Mark 9:23). He also chose of His own will to limit the use of some of His divine attributes (Matt 24:36). But He did not in any way, shape, or form eliminate any aspect of His deity.

²⁸ O’Brien, *Commentary on Philippians*, 217.

²⁹ Ken Boa, *Reflections Newsletter*, May 1988.

³⁰ Tony Evans, *Who is This King of Glory?* (Chicago: Moody, 1999), 50-51.

³¹ See especially Deut 21:23 and Gal 3:13.

³² Quoted in Gordon, *An Odyssey of Joy*, 81.

³³ Deffinbaugh, “The Ultimate in Humility—Leaving the Comfort Zone.”

³⁴ This last thought comes from one of my mentors, Barry Davis, “Philippians in *Nelsons New Illustrated Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 1550.

³⁵ Preaching Today Citation: Darryl Bell, Maple Grove, MN. *Leadership*, Vol. 5, no. 4.

³⁶ It is difficult to tell whether *hina* (“so that”) should be purpose or result, both make good sense.

³⁷ The word *dio* means, “therefore, for this reason.” It is translated “therefore” in the ESV, NRSV, NIV, and NKJV.

³⁸ BDAG s.v. *huperupsoo* a.

³⁹ Hughes, *Philippians*, 91.

⁴⁰ Billy Sunday once said, “There are 256 names given in the Bible for the Lord Jesus Christ, and I suppose this was because He was infinitely beyond all that any one name could express.” Preaching Today Citation: Billy Sunday in a sermon, “Wonderful,” quoted in *The Real Billy Sunday. Christianity Today*, Vol. 33, no. 2.

⁴¹ See also Herrick, *Philippians*, 58.

⁴² O’Brien, *Commentary on Philippians*, 238 gives four reasons for this understanding: (1) in the *hina* clause (“so that”) of Phil 2:10–11, which is subordinate to the main clause in 2:9, Jesus is identified with *kurios* (*Yahweh*); (2) it is best to regard *to Iesous* and *to onoma to huper pan onoma* as juxtaposed; (3) for a Jew like Paul the superlative name was “*Yahweh*.” Since the phrase in 2:10 can mean “the name of Jesus,” it is best to understand it is referring to the name *Yahweh*; and (4) *kurios* gives symmetry to the hymn: *theos* (2:6) becomes *doulos* (2:7) and is exalted to *kurios* (2:11).

⁴³ The bowing of the knee is a symbol of submission and an act of worship (cf. Isa 45:22–23).

⁴⁴ Isa 45:14: “He [*Yahweh*] has no peer; there is no other God.”

⁴⁵ The question arises with these two purpose clauses as to whether every knee will gladly bow and every tongue gladly confess—that Christ is Lord. The answer in this passage seems to be “no.” There will be many who under the sheer weight of the obvious, will, under compulsion, acknowledge His sovereignty. They will be forced to concede His place of power and rule, but they will do so with much shame. This agrees with the Isaiah passage, especially 45:24 that says that all who have raged against Him will be put to shame.

⁴⁶ Cf. Eph 1:15, 12, 14; John 7:18; 8:50; 17:1.

⁴⁷ R.T. Kendall, *Meekness and Majesty* (Scotland: Christian Focus, 1992), 186–87.

⁴⁸ Paul uses a strong, intensified verb “confess” (*exomologeō*) that means “agree with” or “say the same thing as.” BDAG s.v. *exomologeō* 3: “to declare openly in acknowledgment, *profess, acknowledge*.”

⁴⁹ Thielman, *Philippians*, 122 n. 32.

⁵⁰ Constable, “Notes on Philippians,” 31.