

SPECIAL STUDIES NUMBER THREE

Philippians 2:6

Philippians 2:5-8 reads as follows:

"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."

This text in *The American Standard Version* reads thus:

"Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: 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, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross."

This portion of scripture is another that deals with the preexistence of the Son of God. A number of people who deny the deity of Christ believe in the preexistence of Christ, yet they also teach that at some point He did come into existence. We have shown that He created "all things," not "all other things" as if He himself was an exception, that is, one of the "things" created. Since He created "all things," He preceded "all" creation. Since He preceded "all" creation, He is uncreated. Since He is uncreated, He is eternal. Since He is eternal, He is God. Therefore, He not only preexisted, but had no existence.

Prior to the incarnation, we have shown that the second person in the Godhead did appear in various forms in the Old Testament, such as

human and angelic, and conversed with various individuals. The words of Philippians 2:6-8 take us back to a time before human history. As we study these words, one point of main concern, and controversial, is just what was involved in the words "emptied himself." To some, these words suggest that He completely divested Himself of all divine attributes. This I do not believe. As we study, there are three ideas that I would ask you to think about:

1. "The form of God";
2. The condescension;
3. And, "the form of a servant."

What was Paul's purpose in bringing out this truth? The purpose was something practical to the Philippians, not something they did not believe. What is said of Christ in verses 6-8 was designed to constrain God's children to live by the rule involved, which Christ demonstrated. But what is the rule? It is our Lord's attitude of humility, and self abnegation, solely for the benefit of others. Thus, "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others" (Philippians 2:4). To do this is to "let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus," verse 5, which is illustrated by what Christ did in verses 6-8. Paul simply singles out those qualities of our Lord in order to teach the Philippians a lesson they needed. See verses 2, 3 of Philippians 2, ". . . be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves."

We are accustomed to think of "the glory of deity," but it is very difficult for the finite mind to fully comprehend "the humility of deity." It is mind boggling to think of deity in "the form of a servant." Our Lord was often weary (John 4:6), yet He invited the weary to come to Himself for rest (Matthew 11:28). He was hungry (Matthew 4:2), yet He was the bread of life (John 6:35). He thirsted (John 19:28), yet He was the water of life of which one could drink and never thirst (John 4:13, 14; 6:35). He was in agony (Luke 22:44), yet He healed all manner of sickness, and soothed all pain (Matthew 4:23, 24). He often prayed (Matthew 26:39), yet He answered prayer (Matthew 15:25-

28). He slept on a pillow in the hinder part of the ship, yet He awoke and stilled the storm (Mark 4:38, 39). He walked two days journey to get to Bethany, yet He knew that Lazarus was dead long before He arrived there (John 11:6, 14). He inquired, "Whom do men say that I the Son of Man am?" (Matthew 16:13), yet He knew all men, and what was in man (John 2:24, 25). He wept at Lazarus' tomb, yet He summoned the dead to live (John 11:35, 43). What an apparent paradox!

In Philippians 2:6 the word "being" is an interesting word. This word is from the Greek "huparchon." Of this word, W. E. Vine gives us a comment on the meaning which it conveys as follows:

"Being . . . the present participle of huparcho, to exist, which always involves a pre-existent state, prior to the fact referred to, and a continuance of the state after the fact. Thus in Phil. 2:6, the phrase _who being (huparchon) in the form of God, _ implies His pre-existent Deity, previous to his birth, and His continued Deity afterwards" (end quote, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, "Being," page 116).

This word, therefore, is not from the usual verb of "being" in Greek, but is from a word which refers to an antecedent condition which is protracted into the present. In other words, our Lord's "being in the form of God" was true of Him before He appeared as man, which tells us that in taking upon Himself humanity, with its limitations, yet without sin, He lost nothing of His intrinsic deity, its attribute, or its prerogatives. If in the incarnation, God ceased to be God, and became solely a man, the surrender is incomprehensible. But, if He retained His deity, which I believe, yet allowing certain manifestations of that deity to be veiled for a brief moment in time in accordance with the will of the Father which He came to do, the surrender is more easily comprehended. Remember Vine's testimony of this word "being" that it "always involves a pre-existent state, prior to the fact referred to, and a continuance of the state after the fact" (end quote). The verb does not convey the thought of an estate which once was, but ceased to be, or no longer is.

In the expression "in the form of God" in verse 6, the word "form" is from the Greek word "morphe." This is also the same word "form," verse 7, in the expression "the form of a servant." A. T. Robertson speaks of this word in our text as follows:

"Morphe means the essential attributes as shown in the form.

In his preincarnate state Christ possessed the attributes of God and so appeared to those in heaven who saw him" (end quote, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Volume IV, "Epistle to the Philippians," page 444).

This statement wets the appetite because it presents something often missed. Notice again: "In his preincarnate state Christ possessed the attributes of God and so appeared to those in heaven who saw him" (end quote). One of the absolute attributes of God, those attributes which respect the inner being of God, things involved in God's relations to Himself, is spirituality. Spirit is not some kind of a refined form of matter, but an immaterial substance, invisible, uncompounded, and indestructible. Thus, in scripture, God is said to be "spirit" (John 4:24), "invisible" (Colossians 1:15), and "incorruptible" (Romans 1:23). Since "in his preincarnate state Christ possessed the attributes of God," and one of which is spirituality, yet He "so appeared to those in heaven who saw him," then "morphe" has no reference to shape. In other words, in heaven, in eternity past, before man was created, Christ existed "in the form of God," and pure spiritual intelligences perceived Him to be so although "spirit . . . invisible . . . and incorruptible."

Kenneth S. Wuest testifies of "morphe" as follows:

"The Greek word has no reference to the shape of any physical object . . . the . . . word . . . refers to that outward expression which a person gives of his inmost nature. This expression is not assumed from the outside, but proceeds directly from within . . . This expression of the essence of His deity which our Lord gave in His preincarnate state, was given through a spiritual medium to spiritual intelligence,

the angels. Human beings in their present state of being cannot receive such impressions, since they are not equipped with the spiritual sense of perception which the angels have. What Peter, James, and John saw on the Mount of Transfiguration was an outward expression of the essence of Deity, but given through a medium by which the physical senses of the disciples could receive the expression given" (end quote, *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament*, Volume II, "Philippians," pages 62, 63, 64).

Marvin Vincent similarly testifies of "morphe" thus:

"Form (morphe). We must here dismiss from our minds the idea of shape . . . As applied here to God, the word is intended to describe that mode in which the essential being of God expresses itself. We have no word which can convey this meaning, nor is it possible for us to formulate the reality. Form inevitably carries with it to us the idea of shape. It is conceivable that the essential personality of God may express itself in a mode apprehensible by the perception of pure spiritual intelligences; but the mode itself is neither apprehensible nor conceivable by human minds. This mode of expression, this setting of the divine essence, is not identical with the essence itself, but is identified with it, as its natural and appropriate expression, answering to it in every particular. It is the perfect expression of a perfect essence. It is not something imposed from without, but something which proceeds from the very depth of the perfect being, and into which that being perfectly unfolds . . . To say, then, that Christ was in the form of God, is to say that He existed as essentially one with God. The expression of deity through human nature (ver. 7) thus has its background in the expression of deity as deity in the eternal ages of God's being. Whatever the mode of this expression, it marked the being of Christ in the eternity before creation. As the form of God was identified with the being of God, so Christ,

being in the form of God, was identified with the being, nature, and personality of God. This form, not being identical with the divine essence, but dependent upon it, and necessarily implying it, can be parted with or laid aside. Since Christ is one with God, and therefore pure being, absolute existence, He can exist without the form. This form of God Christ laid aside in His incarnation" (end quote, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, Volume III, "The Epistle to the Philippians," pages 430, 431).

All four scholars, Vine, Robertson, Wuest, and Vincent speak essentially the same thing about Philippians 2:6, and their comments in explaining words such as "being" and "form" give us some insight into the great truth contained in this text. In summary, some of the main features pointed out in their testimonies are as follows:

1. "Being . . . always involves a pre-existent state, prior to the fact referred to, and a continuance of the state after the fact."
2. The word "form" has "no reference to the shape of any physical object . . . the . . . word . . . refers to that outward expression which a person gives of his inmost nature. . . This expression of the essence of his deity . . . in His preincarnate state, was given through a spiritual medium to spiritual intelligences."
3. "This form, not being identical with the divine essence, but dependent upon it, and necessarily implying it, can be parted with or laid aside."

The Philippian text is often referred to in religious circles as "the Kenosis" passage, speaking of the self-emptying of the Son of God as became incarnate. The word "kenosis" is simply the Greek word meaning "to empty." The question is: What did He "empty" Himself of? I believe that He "laid aside" one "form" for another "form." The A. S. V., quoted earlier in this article, reads thus:

"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."

The word "robbery" in verse 6, or "a thing to be grasped," has more than one meaning. When a word has more than one meaning, the rule is to take the one that agrees with the context. Consider this word as meaning two entirely different things, and apply the rule of choosing the one that best fits the context. The two meanings are as follows:

1. A thing unlawfully seized;
2. And, a treasure to be clutched and retained at all hazards.

The context of Philippians 2:3-5, as illustrated by the example of Christ in verses 6-8, deals with humility, self abnegation. If our Lord did not consider it "a thing" to be "unlawfully seized" to be "equal with God" in the expression of the divine essence, then He would be asserting His rights to that "form" of expression. But, that cannot be the true sense because to assert one's right is contrary to the idea of humility and self denial, which the context dictates. Therefore, we rule out that idea. But, if our Lord did not consider the expression of the divine essence, in His preincarnate state, "a treasure to be clutched and retained at all hazards," then He was willing to waive His rights to that "form" of expression, if the necessity arose. This idea fits the subject matter in the context.

Well, in God's eternal plan, the necessity would arise for Christ to lay aside one "form" of expression for another "form" of expression. When our Lord and Saviour was marked out as the Lamb for sacrifice in the eternal ages before the universe was created, and when He was exercising His divine prerogative of giving expression to the glory of His deity, He did not, at that time, consider that equality with God to be such a treasure that its exercise would keep Him from setting aside that "form" for the time being, so as to change His mode of expression from that of the glory of deity in eternity past to the humility of deity in time, veiled and incarnate in humanity. "The Lord of glory," the creator of "all things," was willing to step down to the "form" of a bonds slave.

In Kenneth Wuest's work, *The New Testament, An Expanded*

Translation, he tries to capture all of the thoughts expressed by the Greek words in Philippians 2:6, 7, and translates them thus:

"Who has always been and at present continues to subsist in that mode of being in which He gives outward expression of His essential nature, that of absolute deity, which expression comes from and is truly representative of His inner being [that of absolute deity], and who did not after weighing the facts, consider it a treasure to be clutched and retained at all hazards, this being on an equality with deity [in the expression of the divine essence], but himself He emptied, himself He made void, having taken the outward expression of a bondsman, which expression comes from and is truly representative of His nature [as deity] . . ." (end quote, pages 462, 463).

In Philippians 2:7, the words "made himself of no reputation," or "emptied himself," do not mean that He "emptied himself" of deity and became solely man, no longer God. The word "being" itself in verse 6, according to W. E. Vine, "always involves a pre-existent state, prior to the fact referred to, and a continuance of the state after the fact" (end quote). Moreover, during the incarnation, the attributes of God were possessed by the Lord Jesus Christ. We have already written on the attributes of God, and showed them to be possessed by the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, at this point, we simply say if He ceased to be God in the incarnation, the idea is completely contrary to what God Himself is said to be. Moreover, He demonstrated the attributes of God during the incarnation, which is an utter impossibility if He was not absolute deity. He possessed "omnipresence" (John 3:13; Matthew 18:20). He possessed "omniscience" (John 2:24, 25). He possessed "holiness" (Mark 1:24; Acts 3:14). He possessed "immutability" (Hebrews 1:10-12; 13:8). He possessed "eternality" (John 1:3; 8:58), etc. Thus, it is concluded that if attributes represent the elements of being, and the attributes of God are those distinguishing features of deity, and every attribute of God is ascribed to the Lord Jesus Christ, then He is deity in the highest sense in which the idea can be understood.

In the incarnation, the Lord Jesus Christ possessed the attributes of God because God cannot cease to be God. But, He did give up the independent exercise of those attributes. Moreover, when He "emptied himself," He gave up one "form" of expression for another "form" of expression. In the one "form" there was the glory of deity. In the second "form" there was the humility and self-abnegation of deity. Remember, the word "form" refers "to that outward expression which a person gives of his inmost nature." In the first "form" of expression, without the idea of shape, or physical object, the Lord was perceived to be God by purely spiritual intelligences in His preincarnate state. His rightful, natural desire as deity was to be glorified, to give expression of His being to the angels. This "form," however, is not identical with the divine essence, but dependent upon it, can be parted with, or laid aside. Since Christ is one with God, and therefore pure being, absolute existence, He can exist without the "form."

In Philippians 2:7 we have the statement that He "took upon him the form of a servant."

Kenneth Wuest writes:

"The word 'took' is an aorist participle. A rule of Greek grammar says that the action of an aorist participle precedes the action of the leading verb. The leading verb here is 'emptied'. That means that the act of taking preceded the act of emptying. That, in turn, means that the act of taking upon Himself the form of a servant preceded and was the cause of the emptying. The translation . . . 'emptied Himself, having taken the form of a bonds slave.'" (end quote, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, Volume II, "Philippians," page 66).

The word "form," as we have previously stated, speaks of "the outward expression one gives of his inward being." The outward expression is that of a "bonds slave." The words "having taken" reveal that such an outward expression was not true of Him before, but since "the outward expression" is of one's "inward being," then the desire to

serve existed before the "form" in view was assumed.

In Matthew 17:2 we read, "And was transfigured before them (Peter, James, and John, verse 1): and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light." The word "transfigured" here is from the same word "form" in our text, only with a prefixed preposition signifying a change. Here, the order is the reverse of Philippians 2:6, 7. In Philippians, the Lord's "outward expression" changed from that of deity to that of a "bondslave." In Matthew, it changed from that of a "bondslave" to that of deity.

Our Lord did not cease to be God when He became incarnate. Philippians 2:8 reads as follows:

"And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

The word "form" in verses 6, 7 is from "morphe." The word "fashion" in verse 8 is from "schema." Now, of these two, the word "fashion" refers to an outward expression that is assumed from the outside, and does not come from within. Therefore, this word is contrasted to the previous word "form," which refers to an outward expression that came from one's inner nature. The expression of His deity was not assumed from the outside, but came from His inmost nature, "form." Also, His outward expression as a "bondslave" came from His inmost nature, "form." But, the expression of His humanity came, not from His inmost nature, but was assumed in the incarnation, "fashion."

The contrast here is between what He was in Himself, deity, and what He appeared in the eyes of man. The word "fashion," therefore, referred to that which is purely outward, and appeals to the senses. His humanity was real. He was in that sense really a man, but He was not a real man in the sense that He was like others of the human race. He was always, in His incarnation, more than man -- a single personality with a dual nature, "yet without sin." In Hebrews 10:5 we read, ". . . a body hast thou prepared me." One ought to be able to distinguish between "a body" and the "me." The "me" was not "prepared, but "a body" was "prepared me." In the two natures, the human and the divine, there was only one personality. But why? Because God took into union with

Himself, not an individual man with an already developed personality, but "a body," human nature which had no separate existence before its union with the divine. The human nature was called "that holy thing" (Luke 1:35). The flesh, in which He "dwelt among us" (John 1:14), was complete submissive to the divine nature. This is why the conflict which Paul described in Romans 7:15-24 was never characteristic of the Son of God during His earthly sojourn.

Man is subject to death because of sin (Romans 5:12; 6:23). That which truly lives is without sin. Hence, there is a correlation between sin and death, and life and holiness. The Son of God was absolutely without sin. Read John 14:30, II Corinthians 5:21, I Peter 2:22, Matthew 27:4, 19, John 19:6, Luke 23:41, I Peter 1:18, 19, Hebrews 9:14, I Peter 3:18, Hebrews 7:26, and Acts 3:14 in proof. Therefore, He truly lived because the cause of death was not in Him. He dies only because He willed it. Since the moral image of God, in human nature, has been lost by sin, Christ, the exact image of God, after which man was originally made, restores that lost image by uniting Himself to humanity, and filling it with divine life and love. Christ took human nature, yet without sin, and bore the consequence of sin.

Let us now look at several passages that illustrate the divergence between "form" (morphe) and "fashion" (schema) as follows, and remember that:

One is the outward expression one gives of his inward being;

And the other is an outward expression that is assumed from the outside, and does not come from within.

"Morphe"

Rom. 8:29, "Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son." The noun "morphe" refers to the outward expression of an inward essence.

Thus, in the process of sanctification, the saint is transformed in his inner heart life to resemble the Lord Jesus, which inner change results in a change of outward expression

"Schema"

I Cor. 7:31, "the fashion of this world passeth away." Though the universe is not destroyed as to its inner essence, the schema, or outward aspect of things is rapidly changing. Change and decay are characteristic of this world.

II Cor. 11:14, "Satan fashions himself into an angel of light." He cannot change his

that reflects the beauty of the Lord.

Gal. 4:19, "until Christ be formed in you." Paul is not satisfied with mere beginnings.

He wants to see the complete image of Christ in the inner life and character of the Galatians.

Rom. 12:2, "Be ye transformed." See comment on the same verse in the other column.

inner life, but can and does assume the garb of a good angel. He masquerades.

I Pet. 1:14, "Not fashioning yourselves according to former lusts." Those addressed must show that their scheme of life - words, habits, actions, dress, etc., - is not suggestive of the passions that were formerly in control. Conduct should harmonize with the new life.

Rom. 12:2, "Be not conformed." Stop adopting the external customs of the world. There must be an abiding inner change, a metamorphosis.

In the phrase "fashion as a man," scholars point out that the indefinite article should not be in the translation. Wuest states, ". . . He was not found in fashion as a man. The indefinite article should not be in the translation. He was found in outward guise as man, not a man. He was not a man, but God, although He had assumed human nature yet without its sin" (end quote).

"He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

Notice now, two different ideas:

1. "Obedient to death";
2. And, "obedient unto death."

The word "unto" is from a word which means "up to the point of." He, therefore, was not obedient "to" death, as if death was His master. He was always the master of it. It held no power over Him. He died as no other individual ever died. He died of His own volition. He died because He willed it. He dismissed His own spirit. The point is: He was ever the master of death, but "obedient" to His Father, "up to the point of" dying, "even the death of the cross."

Scholars point out that the definite article "the" is not in the original before the word "cross." The absence of the article calls attention to the character of His death. It was the death of a cross, a death of ignominy and degradation. It was painful. It was shameful. It was the kind of death meted out to criminals, and only to those who were not citizens of the Roman Empire. Wuest translates as follows:

"And being found to be in outward guise as man, He stopped very low, having become obedient to the extent of death, even such a death as that upon a cross" (end quote).

This very God entered life by means of a virgin, thus proving that God was His Father. He lived on the earth some 33 years, and exhibited Himself to be without sin. He gave His life in death in order to take the place of sinners. There was value to His death solely because of who He was, God manifest in flesh. In His person and death, fallen man, under the sentence of death, is given a perfect and acceptable substitute. His death completely satisfied what the justice of a holy God demanded as payment for sin, and on the basis of justice satisfied, God is able to be merciful to sinners. Accept His person, and work, through faith, without works, and be saved for time and eternity (John 6:47, 54; Romans 4:5; 5:1, 2, 9; Ephesians 2:8, 9).

"Who art thou" is a question that is answered according to "the record that God gave of his Son." Some thought, as it is today, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? how is it then that he saith, I came down from heaven?" (John 6:42). Others said, "And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God" (John 6:69). In the light of these two opinions concerning His identity, I ask you, "What think ye of Christ? Whose son is he?" (Matthew 22:42). John the Baptist, the harbinger of the Messiah, the one who was sent before Jehovah to prepare His way, testified of Him, "I saw and bare record . . . this is the Son of God" (John 1:15, 34). How does God class those who deny this? "Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son" (I John 2:21). To leave this life in that condition is to "die in your sins" (John 8:24). Death is

separation, and to "die in your sins" is to be separated from God. That separation is seen in the words, "Depart from me" (Matthew 7:23). That separation will never be rescinded because Christ said, "Whither I go, ye cannot come" (John 8:21).

Refuge is offered in Christ's person and death. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." To "die in your sins" with shelter available is to die as a fool dies. Trust Christ today. He is God. Know, and understand, who He is, and what He did for you in order that you might be saved. Accept the parson and message today, for "it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth."

In conclusion to this great text of scripture, I quote at length from an article in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, Volume IV, "Person of Christ," pages 2338, 2339 as follows:

"The statement is thrown into historical form; it tells the story of Christ's life on earth. But it presents His life on earth as a life in all its elements alien to His intrinsic nature, and assumed only in the performance of an unselfish purpose. On earth He lived as a man, and subjected Himself to the common lot of men. But He was not by nature a man, nor was He in His own nature subject to the fortunes of human life. By nature He was God; and He would have naturally lived as became God - 'on an equality with God.' He became man by a voluntary act, 'taking no account of Himself,' and, having become man, He voluntarily lived out His human life under the conditions which the fulfillment of His unselfish purpose imposed on Him. The terms in which these great affirmations are made deserve the most careful attention. The language in which our Lord's intrinsic deity is expressed, for example, is probably as strong as any that could be devised. Paul does not say simply, 'He was God.' He says, 'He was in the form of God, employing a turn of speech which throws emphasis upon our Lord's possession of the specific quality of God. 'Form' is a term which expresses the sum of those characterizing qualities which

make a thing the precise thing that it is. Thus, the 'form' of a sword (in this case mostly matters of external configuration) is all that makes a given piece of metal specifically a sword, rather than, say, a spade. And 'the form of God' is the sum of the characteristics which make the being we call 'God,' specifically God, rather than some other being - an angel, say, or a man. When our Lord is said to be in 'the form of God,' therefore, He is declared, in the most express manner possible, to be all that God is, to possess the whole fulness of attributes which make God God. Paul chooses this manner of expressing himself here instinctively, because, in addressing our Lord as our example of self-abnegation, his mind is naturally resting, not on the bare fact that He is God, but on the richness and fulness of His being as God. He was all this, yet He did not look on His own things but on those of others. It should be carefully observed also that in making this great affirmation concerning our Lord, Paul does not throw it distinctively into the past, as if he were describing a mode of being formerly our Lord's, indeed, but no longer His because of the action by which He became our example of unselfishness. Our Lord, he says, 'being,' 'existing,' 'subsisting,' 'in the form of God' - as it is variously rendered . . . Paul is not telling us here, then what our Lord was once, but rather what He already was, or better, what in His intrinsic nature He is; he is not describing a past mode of existence of our Lord, before the action he is adducing as an example took place - although the mode of existence he describes was our Lord's mode of existence before this action - so much as painting in the background upon which the action adduced may be thrown up into prominence. He is telling us who and what He is who did these things for us, that we may appreciate how great the things He did for us are" (end quote).