

12_IF JESUS WAS GOD, HOW COULD HE PRAY TO GOD?

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Philippians 2:1-10

1 *If there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, 2 complete my joy by*

– *being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.*

– 3 *Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.*

– 4 *Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

5 *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours **in Christ Jesus, 6 who,***

– *though he was (uparchon) in the form (morphe) of God,*

– *did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,*

– 7 *but emptied himself, by taking the form (morphe) of a servant,*

– *being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form,*

– *he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*

9 **Therefore God**

– *has highly exalted him and*

– *bestowed on him the name that is above every name,*

– 10 *so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,*

– 11 *and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

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1. The subject of these verses 5-8 is Christ, whereas the subject of verses 9-11 is God.

2. **“*Though he [Jesus] was* (uparchon) in the form (morphe) of God”**

2.1. The verbe *uparchon* (“*Though he was*”) is in the participle present, i.e. the tense which denotes an action or a state which is pursued through the actions described afterwards (as in the sentence “*Driving he listened to the radio, answered the phone, ate a sandwich*”).

2.2. All the others verbs (*did not count, emptied himself, taking the form of servant, being born, being found*) are in the aorist, i.e. the tense which expresses the mere occurrence of an action in the past.

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3. The participle *uparchon* is the equivalent of a clause of time, manner, means, cause, purpose, opposition or concession, condition.
 - 3.1. This is similar to what happens in English. The sentence quoted above “Driving he listened to the radio, answered the phone, ate a sandwich” can mean several things
 - i. “Although he was driving he listened to the radio, answered the phone, ate a sandwich”.
 - ii. “While he was driving he listened to the radio, answered the phone, ate a sandwich”.
 - 3.2. In this sentence as well the participle can have several meanings:
 - i. the translators’ most frequent option is for a concession: “who, though he was in the form of God”.
 - ii. But it is equally possible to translate “who, because he was in the form of God”.
 - iii. In the first case (concession) what follows is opposed to the fact that Jesus is in the form of God;
 - iv. in the second case (cause), what follows is made possible by the fact that Jesus is in the form of God.
4. “*Though he was (uparchon) in the form (morphe) of God*”
 - 4.1. *Morphe* means ‘form’, ‘shape’, ‘the outward aspect of something’ (cf. ‘metamorphosis’, or ‘anthropomorphic’)
 - 4.2. the same word in verse 7: “[Jesus] emptied himself, by taking the form (*morphe*) of a servant”
 - 4.3. However Paul uses ‘form’ with the meaning of an inner reality inseparable from its proper external manifestation.
 - i. The first ‘form’ is something in which Christ ‘exists’ or ‘carries on existing’, the second form is something ‘he took’ at one point.
 - ii. The “form of a servant” is ‘taken’: it is a temporal reality, it is the ‘aspect’, the ‘condition’, the ‘destiny’, the ‘status’ of a servant.
5. “[Jesus] did not count equality with God **a thing to be grasped** (*arpagmon*)”
 - 5.1. the meaning of ‘arpagmon’ is ‘grasp’, ‘seize’, ‘snatch’.
 - 5.2. Jesus is someone who did not seek to usurp divine status, which suggests a contrast with someone who did that.
6. “[Jesus] did not count **equality with God a thing to be grasped**”
 - 6.1. It means that Jesus did not consider the fact of being treated with the honor of God something to be claimed, grasped, seized upon – even though he had the *right* to do so since he had always been in the ‘form of God’, and therefore the divine prerogatives belonged to him.
7. z “*But [Jesus] emptied **himself**, by taking the form (morphe) of a servant,*
 - 7.1. It is essential to notice the “himself”:
 - i. it was not the Father who deprived him of his divine prerogatives,
 - ii. but it was the Son/Jesus who freely ‘emptied’ himself or them.

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8. “[Jesus] humbled **himself** by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross”
 - 8.1. Again, the “himself is crucial: “He humbled himself, not ‘he was humbled’.
9. Second half of the hymn:

Therefore **God**

 - has highly **exalted** him and
 - bestowed on him the **name** that is above every name,
 - [10](#) so that at the **name** of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
 - [11](#) and every tongue confess that **Jesus Christ is Lord**, to the glory of God the Father.
10. Sudden change of subject: everything is now performed by God
11. Christ’s exaltation is described here as enthronement: there is something like the act of mounting the throne (although here it is the result of the Father’s action); the proclamation of the new dignities, the worship and the acclamation.
12. “The **name** of Jesus”
 - 12.1. In the Bible a name has meaning and is charged with power.
 - 12.2. The confession is that Jesus is the “Lord” (‘Kurios’)
 - 12.3. This echoes the proclamation of Peter in the Acts:

Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified. (Act 2.36)
 - 12.4. But also the profession of faith of early Christianity:

I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says “Jesus is accursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit. (1 Cor 12:3)

“If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9)
 - 12.5. ‘Kurios’ (Lord) was the regular Greek equivalent of Yahweh. This sentence is evidently modelled on Isaiah

Turn to me and be saved,
all the ends of the earth!
For I am God, and there is no other.
By myself I have sworn;
from my mouth has gone out in righteousness
a word that shall not return:
To me every knee shall bow,
every tongue shall swear allegiance. (Is 45:22f)
 - 126 Interestingly, Paul uses a text which denies that there is any God but Yahweh to say that God has given the name of “Lord” to Jesus.
 - 127 This confession also is echoed in Acts:

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Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified (Acts 2:36).

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13. So what we are told is that Jesus did not claim his divine prerogatives and humbled himself not *despite* the fact that he was God but *because* he is God
 - 13.1. We think that ‘to be God’ is to have power
 - 13.2. Whereas we are told that ‘to be God’ is something to be received as a gift, not just once but constantly
 - 13.3. This happens in the life of Jesus as a manifestation of what happens in the ‘life’ of God:
 - i. The Father does not hold on to his prerogatives but gives them to the Son
 - ii. The Son receives these divine prerogatives as a gift and gives them back to the Father
 - iii. They are not ‘possessed’ but constantly given and received.
 - 13.4. In the same way, Jesus in his human ‘form’ waited for God to exalt him – waited for the divine name to be granted to him as a gift even though it had always belonged to him because this is what he was.
14. This is the context which explains why Jesus prays.
 - 14.1. Jesus does not pray *despite* the fact that he is God, as a concession to the human condition he has taken through the Incarnation.
 - 14.2. Jesus prays *because* he is God. Prayer is the highest and most telling expression of what it means to be God, to be the Son of God
15. To be God, to act as God is something Jesus never takes for granted, never considers as possessed, understood, fulfilled once for all
 - 15.1. he needs to learn constantly what it is to be God, how to behave as God in his human nature.
 - 15.2. this is no diminution of the divinity Jesus because *this is what it is to be God*, not only in the human form Jesus has taken in the Incarnation, but already in the eternal life of the Trinity where to be Son is not something received once for all from the Father, but
 - i. the Father in the constant act of giving his life, his love, his Spirit to the Son
 - ii. and the Son exists as Son precisely by constantly receiving this life, this love, the Spirit from the Father and giving it back to him
 - 15.3. Jesus’ kenosis and prayer are the highest human “translation”, so to speak, of the life of his eternal relation with the Father – as the Prologue of the Gospel of John says:

No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known (in Greek *esegetato*, as in ‘exegesis’, ‘interpretation’, ‘explanation’) (John 1:18).