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Phil 2:5-11 New Living Translation (NLT)

⁵You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.

⁶Though he was God,^[a] he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to.

[Phil. 2:6-11](#) This is the classic Christological passage in the NT, dealing with the incarnation. It was probably sung as a hymn in the early church (see *note on [Col. 3:16](#)*).

[Phil. 2:5](#) Christ is the ultimate example of selfless humility (cf. [Matt. 11:29](#); [John 13:12-17](#)).

[Phil. 2:6](#) he was in the form of God. Paul affirms that Jesus eternally has been God. The usual Greek word for "was" or "being" is not used here. Instead, Paul chose another term that stresses the essence of a person's nature—his continuous state or condition. Paul also could have chosen one of two Greek words for "form," but he chose the one that specifically denotes the essential, unchanging character of something—what it is in and of itself. The fundamental doctrine of Christ's deity has always encompassed these crucial characteristics (cf. [John 1:1](#); [3-4](#); [14](#); [8:58](#); [Col. 1:15-17](#); [Heb. 1:3](#)). equality with God. The Greek word for "equality" defines things that are exactly the same in size, quantity, quality, character, and number. In every sense, Jesus is equal to God and constantly claimed to be so during his earthly ministry (cf. [John 5:18](#); [10:33](#); [38](#); [14:9](#); [20:28](#); [Heb. 1:1-3](#)). grasped. The Greek word originally meant "a thing seized by robbery." It eventually came to mean anything clutched, embraced, or prized, and thus is sometimes translated "held onto." Though Christ had all the rights, privileges, and honors of deity—which he was worthy of and could never be disqualified from—his attitude was not to cling to those things or his position but to be willing to give them up for a season. See *notes on [John 17:1-5](#)*.

⁷Instead, he gave up his divine privileges^[b]; he took the humble position of a slave^[c] and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form,^[d]

[Phil. 2:7](#) made himself nothing. From this Greek word comes the theological word “kenosis”; i.e., the doctrine of Christ’s self-emptying in his incarnation. This was a self-renunciation, not an emptying himself of deity nor an exchange of deity for humanity (*see notes on v. 6*). Jesus did, however, renounce or set aside his privileges in several areas: 1) heavenly glory—while on earth he gave up the glory of a face-to-face relationship with God and the continuous outward display and personal enjoyment of that glory (cf. [John 17:5](#)); 2) independent authority—during his incarnation Christ completely submitted himself to the will of his Father (*see note on [Phil. 2:8](#); cf. [Matt. 26:39](#); [John 5:30](#); [Heb. 5:8](#)*); 3) divine prerogatives—he set aside the voluntary display of his divine attributes and submitted himself to the Spirit’s direction (cf. [Matt. 24:36](#); [John 1:45–49](#)); 4) eternal riches—while on earth Christ was poor and owned very little (cf. [2 Cor. 8:9](#)); and 5) a favorable relationship with God—he felt the Father’s wrath for human sin while on the cross (cf. [Matt. 27:46](#); *see note on [2 Cor. 5:21](#)*). form of a servant. Again, Paul uses the Greek word “form,” which indicates exact essence (*see note on [Phil. 2:6](#)*). As a true servant (*see note on [1:1](#)*), Jesus submissively did the will of his Father (cf. [Isa. 52:13–14](#)). the likeness of men. Christ became more than God in a human body, but he took on all the essential attributes of humanity ([Luke 2:52](#); [Gal. 4:4](#); [Col. 1:22](#)), even to the extent that he identified with basic human needs and weaknesses (cf. [Heb. 2:14](#); [17](#); [4:15](#)). He became the God-Man: fully God and fully man.

8 he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross.

[Phil. 2:8](#) in human form. This is not simply a repetition of the last phrase in v. 7, but a shift from the heavenly focus to an earthly one. Christ's humanity is described from the viewpoint of those who saw him. Paul is implying that although he outwardly looked like a man, there was much more to him (his deity) than many people recognized naturally (cf. [John 6:42](#); [8:48](#)). he humbled himself. After the humbling of incarnation, Jesus further humbled himself in that he did not demand normal human rights, but subjected himself to persecution and suffering at the hands of unbelievers (cf. [Isa. 53:7](#); [Matt. 26:62-64](#); [Mark 14:60-61](#); [1 Pet. 2:23](#)). obedient . . . death. Beyond even persecution, Jesus went to the lowest point or furthest extent in his humiliation in dying as a criminal, following God's plan for him (cf. [Matt. 26:39](#); [Acts 2:23](#)). a cross. See notes on [Matt. 27:29-50](#). Even further humiliation was his because Jesus' death was not by ordinary means, but was accomplished by crucifixion—the cruelest, most excruciating, most degrading form of death ever devised. The Jews hated this manner of execution ([Deut. 21:23](#); see note on [Gal. 3:13](#)).

9 Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names,

[Phil. 2:9](#) Therefore God. Christ's humiliation (vv. 5-8) and exaltation by God (vv. 9-11) are causally and inseparably linked. highly exalted him. Christ's exaltation was fourfold. The early sermons of the apostles affirm his resurrection and coronation (his position at the right hand of God), and allude to his intercession for believers ([Acts 2:32-33](#); [5:30-31](#); cf. [Eph. 1:20-21](#); [Heb. 4:15](#); [7:25-26](#)). [Hebrews 4:14](#) refers to the final element, his ascension. The exaltation did not concern Christ's nature or eternal place within the Trinity, but his new identity as the God-Man (cf. [John 5:22](#); [Rom. 1:4](#); [14:9](#); [1 Cor. 15:24-25](#)). In addition to receiving back his glory ([John 17:5](#)), Christ's new status as the God-Man meant God gave him privileges he did not have prior to the incarnation. If he had not lived among men, he could not have identified with them as the interceding High Priest. Had he not died on the cross, he could not have been elevated from that lowest degree back to heaven as the substitute for sin. name . . . above every name. Christ's new name, which further describes his essential nature and places him above and beyond all comparison, is "Lord." This name is the NT synonym for OT descriptions of God as sovereign ruler. Both before ([Isa. 45:21-23](#); [Mark 15:2](#); [Luke 2:11](#); [John 13:13](#); [18:37](#); [20:28](#)) and after ([Acts 2:36](#); [10:36](#); [Rom. 14:9-11](#); [1 Cor. 8:6](#); [15:57](#); [Rev. 17:14](#); [19:16](#)) the exaltation, Scripture affirms that this was Jesus' rightful title as the God-Man.

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

[Phil. 2:10-11](#) bow . . . confess. The entire intelligent universe is called to worship Jesus Christ as Lord (cf. [Ps. 2](#)). This mandate includes the angels in heaven ([Rev. 4:2-9](#)), the spirits of the redeemed ([Rev. 4:10-11](#)), obedient believers on earth ([Rom. 10:9](#)), the disobedient rebels on earth ([2 Thess. 1:7-9](#)), demons and lost humanity in hell ([1 Pet. 3:18-22](#)). The Greek word for “confess” means “to acknowledge,” “affirm,” or “agree” which is what everyone will eventually do in response to Christ’s lordship, willingly and blessedly or unwillingly and painfully.

[Phil. 2:10](#) at the name of Jesus. “Jesus” was the name bestowed at his birth ([Matt. 1:21](#)), not his new name. The name for Jesus given in the fullest sense after his exaltation, was “Lord” (see *note on [Phil. 2:11](#)*).

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

[Phil. 2:11](#) Lord. See *note on v. 9*. “Lord” primarily refers to the right to rule, and in the NT it denotes mastery over or ownership of people and property. When applied to Jesus, it certainly implies his deity, but it mainly refers to sovereign authority. glory of God the Father. The purpose of Christ’s exaltation (cf. [Matt. 17:5](#); [John 5:23](#); [13:31-32](#); [1 Cor. 15:28](#)).