

Philippians 2:5-8

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. NASB

The Greek Text

1. Verse 5

τουτο	φρονειτε*	εν	υμιν	ο	και	εν	χριστω	ιησου	ος
Have this mind	in	you (pl.)	which/that	also	in	Christ	Jesus	who	

* Variant manuscript readings.

Most translations add the word "was" to verse 5 to have it read, "which also **was** in Christ Jesus" or "which was also in Christ Jesus." This makes the verse appear as if the Philippians were to have the same mindset as Christ had at some point in the past. However, the verb "was" is not there in the Greek text. Indeed, Young's Literal Translations adds the word "is" rather than "was." Some translations, such as the NASB, compound the problem by also translating the present participle *hyparcho* in the past tense.

The difficulty here is determining Paul's true intention. Was he instructing the Philippians to have the same mindset Jesus once had at sometime in the past? Or, was he instructing the Philippians to have this mindset in themselves which mindset they are to also have as believers "in Christ." This understanding is reflected by the ESV and RSV translations. The language is ambiguous enough that it could be taken either way by modern readers of the Greek text.

2. Verse 6

εν	μορφη	θεου	υπαρχων	ουχ	αρπαγμον	ηγησατο	το	ειναι	ισα	θεω
in	form	of deity	being	not	a plunder	did he regard	the	to be	equal to	deity

The Greek word *harpagmos* is a noun form of the verb *harpazō*, to snatch up, to seize up. The word is used to refer to a plunder, a booty, prize. It is something which one snatches up or seizes upon to take for himself as one does a plunder or booty. The verb "regard" is a negative. In verse 6, Paul is not telling us what Jesus did; he is telling us what Jesus did not do. Paul never tells us what Jesus regarded/considered; he tells us what Jesus did not consider/regard. Jesus did not regard/consider/deem/esteem a plunder. What is the plunder in question? The plunder is to be equal to God. He did not regard a plunder to be equal to God. This was something Jesus did not do and Paul is about to tell us what Jesus DID DO in contrast to what he DID NOT DO.

Note: This is important to clearly understand since many layperson Trinitarians imagine that Jesus was up in heaven deliberating (considering) between what he should do or not do and they suppose he DID consider doing what Paul mentions in verse 6 but didn't do it. However, nothing like this is even mentioned here. The text does not suggest Jesus was thinking about two different choices as if he DID consider doing something which he ultimately didn't do. However, we are told just the opposite; we are told what he did not consider doing. In other words, in verse 6 Paul is telling us that **Jesus never entertained** - he did not consider/regard. Put another way, unlike the deliberating Jesus of Trinitarian imagination, we are not being told what Jesus was thinking about (considering); we are being told what he did not think about.

The verbal expression containing the infinitive *einai* is marked by the Greek article *to* ("the"). Basically, this means that the verbal expression following the article is to be treated like a noun, the "something." The "something" in question is a certain equality - to be equal to God, the state or condition of being equal with God.

This equality with God is anaphoric and refers back to the "form of God."

3. Verse 7

αλλα	εαυτον	εκενωσεν	μορphen	δουλου	λαβων	εν	ομοιωματι	ανθρωπων	γενομενος
rather	himself	he emptied	form	of a slave	taking	in	likeness	of humans	becoming

Verse 6 tells us what Jesus did not do in contrast to verse 7 where we are told what Jesus did do. This contrast between what he didn't do, and what he did do, is marked by the word "rather." We are being told what Jesus rather did instead of considering a plunder to be equal to God. Jesus did not regard a *harpagmos* to be equal to God. He did something else. He emptied himself. The verb here may also be translated as "he made himself nothing" or "he nullified/voided himself." In other words, Jesus denied himself just as he taught his disciples to do. The Philippians are to do the same.

This self emptying is further qualified by the words, "taking the form of a servant." Rather than regarding a prize/plunder to be equal to God, Jesus did something else. He chose to assume the position of a servant and serve God. A plunder involves taking something for one's self. To be in the form of God means to be noble and rule but to be in the form of a servant means to be humble and serve rather than rule. Serving involves giving not taking as one takes a plunder for himself.

4. Verse 7-8

και	σχηματι	ευρεθεις	ως	ανθρωπος	εταπεινωσεν	εαυτον	γενομενος	υπηκοος	μεχρι	θανατου
and	configuration	being found	as	a human	he humbled	himself	becoming	obedient	until	death

Finding himself to be a human being, Jesus had no thought of exalting himself or regarding a plunder to be equal to God. Rather, he humbled himself becoming obedient to death. Recognizing his humanity, Jesus humbled himself before his God serving his God doing God's will even in the face of death on a cross.

Structure

who in **the form of God** being

he did not regard a plunder to be equal to God

rather, he emptied himself taking the form of a servant

and being found in the configuration of a human

he humbled himself becoming obedient until death, even death on a cross

wherefore, **God highly exalted him**

Preconceived Notions and Scripture Twisting

The Trinitarian interpretation of this passage is generally accomplished by imagining certain preconceive ideas into the text. First, the word "was" in most translations leads the reader to suppose Paul is talking about a past time-frame where Jesus had a certain mindset. Second, the Trinitarian imagines that Paul is talking about a pre-incarnate Son who **was** in the "form of God." Third, the Trinitarian imagines that the term "form of God" means "God" and fails to see that it makes no sense to refer God as being in the form of God. It only makes sense to refer to someone else as being in the image of God or the form of God. By definition, to be in the image of God, or the form of God, means you are not God but in the form of someone else who is God. If Paul really believed "Jesus is God" he would have said, "who being God did not regard...." Fourth, the Trinitarian imagines that Jesus emptied himself of something although he is not entirely sure of what. He usually imagines that Jesus emptied himself of some of his divine prerogatives or his positional glory in heaven or something to that effect. The pre-incarnate Son does not empty himself of "the form of God" but empties himself of something else. And so the result is that the post-incarnate Son comes to be in the form of God and the form of a servant at the same time.

Fifth, the Trinitarian interpretation of the *harpagmos* which Jesus did not regard, and the equality with God, are left as confused and debated ideas among Trinitarians. Some want to suppose that these words mean Jesus did not regard it to be a plunder to be equal to God in the sense that Jesus had no problem being equal with God. In context, this makes no sense whatsoever since Paul's point is to show the Philippians how to humble themselves and serve as Jesus served his God. Others want to spin Paul's words to say that verse 6 means that Jesus did not regard "clinging to" equality with God. However, that would mean the incarnate Jesus was not equal to God which they also deny. Rather they insist their incarnate Jesus was equal to God (see John 5:18). Others attempt to make the language of verse 6 means that Jesus did not exploit, or take advantage of his equality with God. However, that doesn't make any sense either. If Jesus already had a *harpagmos* where then are the words in verse 6 which refer to exploiting it? That being the case, these folks want *harpagmos* to somehow mean exploitation. But word *harpagmos* hardly means exploitation. It refers to something snatched/seized for one's self like a booty or plunder.

Even further, Trinitarians imagine that "taking the form of a servant" means "adding a human nature" to himself. But there is no reason to imagine such a thing. Any human being may take the form of a servant. And again, Trinitarians imagine that "becoming in the likeness of humans" necessarily means one was first not a human. This expression is likely the hinge point in most Trinitarian imaginations. But again, in view of what Paul is discussing, there is no

reason to imagine such a thing. The words "becoming in the likeness of men," or "coming to be in the likeness of men" qualify the expression "taking the form of a servant." In context, the likeness of men is being contrasted with the form of God. The Greek word here is saying that Jesus came into his existence in the likeness of humans. And further yet, the Trinitarian assumes the words "and being found as a human" somehow imply that Jesus found himself to be a human having added a human body to himself. One only has to meditate upon this notion momentarily to realize its absurdity. Why would Paul say such a thing about someone who had intentionally become a human being? Is it not clear that Paul's point is that finding himself to be a human being rather than a divine being, Jesus humbled himself? And this expression only further describes what Paul had just said - that Jesus came into his existence in the likeness of humans.

No matter which way the Trinitarian turns, he ends up with serious problems with his "incarnation" interpretation of this passage. Numerous ideas must be imagined into the text and the words of verse 6 must be manipulated to work for the Trinitarian agenda. And for that reason, this verse is the most debated verse in Trinitarian academia.

Analysis of the Facts

1. "who in the form of God being"

The participle *hyparchōn* is a present active participle. One must understand that the tenses of participles do not function like the tenses of a verb. A present active participle could be used to refer to something in the past if the main verb is past tense referring to a past event. A present tense participle in such a case means that its action was occurring while the action of the main verb was occurring. However, participles are not necessarily contemporaneous with the main verb either. A participle like this could be referring to the goal or result of the main verb's action. In this case, it would be referring to the result of the main verb "regard." But since the verb "regard" is qualified as a negative, the participle would be expressing the result of what Jesus did not do, the result of not regarding a plunder. He is in the form of God because he did not regard a plunder to be equal to God; rather he is in the form of God because he took the form of a servant and humbly obeyed his God unto death.

There is a good reason that Trinitarian academics are still wrangling over the meaning of this verse. Nothing they ever come up with ever makes any sense because they continue to suppose the form of God is referring to the pre-incarnate Jesus of their own doctrine. But the only way this passage will ever make any sense is to understand that the "form of God" is a reference to the exalted and glorified Christ.

To suppose that *εν μορφη θεου υπαρχων* refers to a pre-incarnate son thereby means Paul is telling us that a pre-incarnate son did not regard a plunder to be equal to God. How is that ever going to make any sense? Why would Paul ever need to tell us God the Son didn't regard a plunder to be equal to God? It makes no sense whatsoever. For that reason, Trinitarians have been attempting all kinds of tactics to interpret and translate the rest of the verse, *ουχ αρπαγμα τον ηγησατο το ειναι ισα θεω*.

To suppose that *εν μορφη θεου υπαρχων* refers to Jesus "in the days of his flesh" is far less problematic but is still not without a significant problem. Jesus declared the Father (John 1:18) and so to see Jesus was to see the Father since the Father abiding in him did the works (John 14:9-10). This could easily be understood as Jesus being "in the form of God." However, the problem here is that Jesus would be in the form of God and the form of a servant at the same time (a problem which the Trinitarian interpretation does not address either). But this rudely destroys Paul's contrast. To be in the form of God is equality with God; to be in the form of a servant is to humbly subject one's self to his God.

However, if we suppose that *εν μορφη θεου υπαρχων* refers to the exalted and glorified Jesus, everything Paul says makes complete sense and it also fits perfectly with Paul's concluding words in verses 9 to 11 where he explains that God highly exalted Jesus due to his humble obedience. Jesus, who is now in the form of God, did not regard this equality with God something to plunder for himself. Jesus did something completely different; he made himself nothing and humbly served his God. "He who exalts himself will be humbled and he who humbles himself will be exalted." Jesus did not come to be in his exalted and glorified state by selfishly seeking equality with his God as one selfishly takes a plunder for himself; he came to be in this exalted state by serving his God. He emptied himself, denied himself, made himself nothing, seeking nothing but to obey and serve his God. He took the form of a servant becoming in the likeness of men rather than the likeness of deity. Men are not equal to God and the likeness of men in contrast to God is to be a servant of God. Finding himself to be a man, he humbled himself becoming obedient unto death.

2. "the likeness of men becoming"

It appears to this writer that there are three main stumbling blocks for interpreters of this passage. First, Trinitarians are simply supposing that the participle ("being") and the main verb ("regard") are contemporaneous. This is not necessarily so. Second, Trinitarians stumble here due to the fact that the main verb is qualified by a negative. This appears to be creating in Trinitarian minds a failure to see that the participle is the result of the main verb, a result of what Jesus did not do.

A third problem concerns the phrase "in the likeness of men becoming" and the Greek verb *genomenos*. For many people, coming to be in the likeness of men automatically means he was not previously in the likeness of men, that is, he was not a man. In the Trinitarian mind, everything is about substance because that is the doctrine he wants to see in this verse. However, in the Jewish mind, everything is about function and that is what Paul is talking about here. He isn't talking about the acquisition of a new substance in the context of explaining to the Philippians how they are to conduct themselves by offering Jesus as an example. He is talking about function, what Jesus did, so that

the Philippians know how to follow in Jesus' footsteps. The Greek word *genomenos* is also used in the next breath when he says Jesus "became" obedient to death. Becoming in the likeness of men isn't a way to tell us a non-human being became a human being. It is a way of telling us that Jesus conducted himself as a humble human being rather than an exalted divine being. He took the form of a servant and the words "in the likeness of humans" qualifies his taking the form of a servant. How do you take the form of a servant? Notice what verse 6 is talking about. He did not **regard**.

What then DID Jesus regard? What did he esteem? He made himself nothing and emptied himself. He took the form of a servant. He did not regard equality with God; he only regarded himself as a servant of God. "Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered." Paul is showing the Philippians how to behave as Jesus did. Yes, they are sons of God but that is no reason to be high-minded. They are to humbly serve one another and regard others as higher than themselves.

Conclusions

The "form of God" is to be understood as a reference to the state of the glorified Jesus for three reasons. First, it is not, as some suppose, necessary for the present participle *hyparcho* to be contemporaneous with the main verb, "to regard." Participles will take this form when the main verb has a telic purpose, that is, when the participle describes the result of the main verb. But the main verb in this verse is a negative. Jesus did not regard. In this case, Paul does not describe how Jesus came to be in the form of God by what he did do. He came to be in the form of God by **not** regarding a plunder to be equal to God. Jesus didn't have his eyes on an exalted status for himself but upon serving his God. He who humbles himself will be exalted. And, as Paul says, he came to be in the form of God by rather emptying himself, humbling himself. Second, Paul contrasts the form of God with the form of a servant. Given the contrast Paul is making, it is not very plausible to suggest he was in the form of God and the form of a servant at the same time. Paul is making the same contrast here as he was in the preceding context. The Philippians were not to exalt themselves but to humbly serve one another. "Rather" Jesus emptied himself. Third, Paul is about to tell us why Jesus was highly exalted by God (vv.7-8). At verses 9-11, Paul refers to how God made Jesus "Lord" (cf. Acts 2:36) for that reason all will bow down to this man through whom God the Father will judge (Romans 2:6,16; Acts 17:30-31). When God raised him from the dead, He seated Jesus at His right hand above everything else in heaven and earth. In verses 7 and 8, Paul is giving us the **reason** God highly exalted Jesus. Now when this is compared with Paul's words in verse 6 and 7, it becomes even more clear. In verse 6, we are told what Jesus did not do. At the beginning of verse 7, we are told what Jesus did do instead. Moreover, the equality of verse 6 is obviously referring to the "form of God" and Paul is telling us that Jesus did not come to be in the form of God by having a mindset that saw equality with God a booty for himself. He did not have his eyes upon obtaining his own prize and treasure but esteemed only serving his God. There was no *kenodoxia* with Jesus.

Jesus did not come to be served by to serve and give his life. He learned obedience from what he suffered. As he himself taught, those who humble themselves will be exalted and those who exalt themselves will be humbled. Jesus did not exalt himself over others. Let us be reminded what Paul is teaching the Philippians - not to think of themselves as superior over others but to humbly serve them in love. Jesus is their example and as children of God, even as he was a child of God, they are to walk in his footsteps.

In the next chapter, Paul offers himself as an example. He emptied himself counting all things as loss to know Christ and to be conformed to his death.

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