

## CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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<b>Series:</b>	<b>The Nicene Creed</b>		Pastor/Teacher
<b>Number:</b>	<b>20</b>		Gary L.W. Johnson
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### CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN FOR OUR SALVATION

There is a famous medieval treatise written by Anselm, one of the great theologians of the church, which is called, *Cur Deus Homo* ("Why Did God Become Man?"). The answer to that question was that the sin of man, the total depravity of a fallen world, so insulted and damaged the honor of the great and infinite God that it had to be repaired if man was not to pay the eternal price of his transgressions. This had to be done by God, since it had to be of infinite value. But since God is incapable of dying, how could the sacrifice be made unless God became man and died in the flesh? Anselm said correctly that the sacrifice could only be made by Jesus, the God-man.<sup>1</sup> The late John Gerstner relates how as a student at Westminster Theological Seminary he heard the renown professor of systematic theology, John Murray, lecture on the atonement and in particular the importance of Anselm's contribution. "After Anselm had developed that doctrine, the great Aquinas, on the whole a great and splendid theologian, showed a certain weakening at this point. Murray talked about what he called "the antecedent, absolute necessity of the atonement" and observed that, alas, Thomas Aquinas had defected slightly from this, saying that the atonement was necessary indeed, absolutely necessary to salvation, but consequently (not antecedently) necessary. He meant that since God had chosen mercifully to send his Son to be the Redeemer of the world, it is absolutely necessary that if anyone should be saved he should believe on him, but not that Christ's death was so absolutely necessary that if anyone should be saved he should believe on him, but not that Christ's death was so absolutely necessary that even God could not have saved the race in any other way. That was not enough for Anselm, and that was not enough for John Murray. They taught that Christ's death is not only necessary consequentially (because God has done it that way) but necessary antecedently (because even God could not redeem the souls of men except by that infinite sacrifice which only Christ could perform). From Thomas Aquinas' slight defection, suggesting that the atonement of Christ was necessary only because God made it, inevitable steps followed. Later medievalists said, "God could have accomplished the same with an angel." Someone else, presumably to rub the point in, suggested that a donkey would suffice. The end of that line is with the Socinians of the past and the liberals of the present, who say that nothing is needed. As a matter of fact, they say that no sacrifice is possible; for if God forgives, he cannot be paid, and if he is paid, he cannot be said to forgive. What such persons do not realize is that the forgiveness is full and free for us because the forgiver paid the price. As has been observed, the atonement was made by the Son of God in the power of the Spirit of God to the Father-God. God paid the price so it could be free for us. We say: "Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling."<sup>2</sup> Like Colossians 1:15-20 that we looked at last week, Philippians 2:5-11 is a type of hymnic literary genre. (See sermon notes No. 19 for details.) The KJV has "he emptied himself" and in recent times some have taught that this means that Christ gave up his divine nature or attributes. We must *first* realize that no recognized teacher in the first 1,800 years of church history, including those who were native speakers of Greek, thought that "emptied himself" in Philippians 2:7 meant that the Son of God gave up some of his divine attributes. *Second*, we must recognize that the text does not say that Christ "emptied himself of some powers" or "emptied himself of divine attributes" or anything like that. *Third*, the text does describe what Jesus did in this "emptying" - he did

not do it by giving up any of his attributes, but rather by “taking the form of a servant,” that is, by coming to live as a man, and “being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross” (2:8). The context itself interprets this “emptying” as equivalent to “humbling himself” and taking on a lowly status and position. Thus, the NIV, like the ESV, instead of translating the phrase, “He emptied himself,” translates it, “but made himself nothing.” The emptying includes change of role and status, not essential attributes or nature. A *fourth* reason for this interpretation is seen in Paul’s purpose in this context. The early Church Father Marius Victorinus (290 AD–364 AD), wrote, “Above he has given two injunctions, first that they should delight in humility, then that they should think not only of their own affairs but of those of others. Then he says, *Have this mind among yourselves that was in Christ Jesus*. Which of these two then do we take to have been manifested in Christ Jesus? One or the other or both? For the first, his humility, is manifest, since Christ humbled himself and assumed the character of a slave. But the second injunction could be here as well, since he bore this for others and thought of others rather than of himself.”<sup>3</sup>

**I. CHRIST’S HUMILIATION.**<sup>4</sup> Our Lord’s divine nature is clearly affirmed in the expression “form of God” and “equal with God.” The humiliation that is described in this text speaks of something He took *voluntarily* upon himself. What did this involve?

**A. He became man.** He was man “found in fashion as a man;” “made in the likeness of men.”<sup>5</sup> That was humiliation. It would have been humiliation under the most ideal of human and earthly conditions, humiliation because of creator/creature distinction. It was not, however, into an ideal world that Jesus came. It was into a world of sin, of misery, and of death. He came in the likeness of sinful flesh, in the likeness of sin-cursed humanity, though himself without sin (2 Corinthians 5:21).

**B. He took the form of a servant.** Again, the word “form” (*morphē*) points to the reality and fullness of his servanthood. It was not merely that he became a servant; he became a servant with all the subservience and obligation that subjection to the will of another entails. It is true that Jesus devoted himself to the service of men. But it is not his service of men that defines “the form of a servant.” Jesus did not subject himself to the will of men. To have taken the form of a servant in reference to any human will or authority would have contradicted his dignity and mission. It was to God the Father that he assumed this relation and it was to the will of the Father that he surrendered himself in the fullness of subjection and obligation (John 6:38; Isaiah 42:1; 49:3, 6; 52:13; 53:11). It was this office of unreserved commitment to the Father’s will that he voluntarily undertook. Because it was the Father he served, there was humiliation but no degradation. R. R. Melick makes this helpful observation: “Physical eyes cannot see spiritual realities, only spiritual eyes can. Given the context, it would not be uncommon to use the term to state that he actually *appeared as God* to those who could see him. Nothing in the context requires that human eyes see the form. Similarly, the *very nature of a servant* does not require that human eyes be able to see that form, although with spiritually enlightened eyes one sees it. The question is whether he had that form. Surely the actions described of him here are appropriate to the servant role, and they appear in his death on the cross. The word *form* means an outward appearance consistent with what is true. The form perfectly expresses the inner reality.”<sup>6</sup>

**C. He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.** This is the extent of Jesus’ humiliation. Death for our Lord was an act of obedience and it was the grand climax of his commission as Servant. It was not mere death; it was the accursed death of the cross. It was death in the unspeakable anguish of damnation vicariously borne, death in the experience reflected in the most mysterious cry that ever ascended from earth to heaven, *My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me?* It would have violated all divine propriety; it would have shaken the foundation of God’s throne, justice, and judgment, if this were not damnation vicariously borne. For Jesus was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners, and in the very ordeal of

laying down his life on the accursed tree he was rendering the supreme act of obedience to the Father, an obedience that has no parallel and will never be duplicated. Berkouwer writes, "Paul points out that Christ did not merely die, but that he died *in this manner* to show that God's curse was laid on him. And that is what the Jewish people wanted. The cross was the culmination point in the action of men, the converging point of historical and psychological lines which seemingly were very arbitrarily drawn; but this arbitrariness is assimilated by and made subservient to God's action. In all of Christ's suffering, we plainly see the thread of God's providence. For crucifixion was not a Jewish form of punishment. Blasphemy was to be punished by stoning, not by hanging. In their bitter opposition to Christ the Jews called upon the Romans to crucify Christ, a form of punishment which the Romans in turn had adopted from elsewhere. The Jewish people asked specifically for this heathenish punishment because they knew what *hanging on a tree* implied according to their law (Matthew 27:23, 26; John 19:6). Christ's *passio magna* is determined by the raging passion of the opposition. By demanding and inflicting this form of punishment it was not only Israel that got even with Christ, but according to their religious concept also the God who made this law, and they gladly accepted the responsibility for this execution. They openly rendered Christ's whole Messianic dignity an absurdity. To Israel, Christ's death on the cross was their greatest victory. But all these factors are, so to speak, only the *inside* of God's powerful doings which manifest, in the anti-messianic desire for Christ's crucifixion, the reality of the curse when this curse was laid on him whom God *made to be sin* (2 Corinthians 5:21) to reconcile the world unto God. But in this curse the *blessing* is revealed: *that upon the Gentiles might come the blessing of Abraham in Christ Jesus* (Galatians 3:14)."<sup>7</sup>

**D. The exaltation is the highest conceivable.** "Highly exalted him and given him the name which is above every name." Paul's words here are stunning in their implications, especially in light of Isaiah 45:18-25. This constitutes one of the most obvious affirmations of Christ's Deity in all of Scripture. As Moule points out, "God, in the incarnation, bestowed upon the one who is on an equality with him an earthly name which, because it accomplished that most God-like self-emptying, and has come to be, in fact, the highest of names, because service and self-giving are themselves the highest of divine attributes. Because of the incarnation, the human name, *Jesus*, is acclaimed as the highest name; and the Man Jesus thus comes to be acclaimed as Lord, to the glory of God the Father."<sup>9</sup> He is exalted "far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come" (Ephesians 1:21).

**II. THE EXALTATION BESTOWED.** The contrasts are eloquent. The divine dignity Christ Jesus possessed. The humiliation was undertaken. But the exaltation is bestowed. "God hath highly exalted him." This is the action of the Father. There are three features to be particularly noted.

**A. The exaltation is the reward of humiliation.** "Wherefore" establishes this connection. Here is obedience that merited reward, the only obedience that has this intrinsic quality. The obedience of the saints will be rewarded. Each "will receive his own reward according to his own labour" (1 Corinthians 3:8). But this is the reward of grace, not of merit. In the obedience of Christ we have obedience that divine propriety must reward.

**B. The exaltation is the guarantee that Christ Jesus perfectly fulfilled the commitment given to Him by the Father.** In Paul's teaching, this is the echo of our Lord's own prayer to the Father: "I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was" (John 17:4, 5).

**CONCLUSION:** B. B. Warfield, in a marvelous sermon entitled *Imitating The Incarnation*, declared: "We perceive, then, that the exhortation of the apostle gathers force for itself from the deity of Christ, and from

the nature of the transaction by which He, being God, was brought into this sphere of dependent, earthly life in which we live by nature. It is altogether natural, then, that he sharpens his appeal by reminding his readers somewhat fully who Christ was and what He did for our salvation, in order that, having the facts more vividly before their minds, they may more acutely feel the spirit by which He was animated. Thus, in a perfectly natural way, Paul is led, not to inform his readers but to remind them, in a few quick and lively phrases which do not interrupt the main lines of discourse but rather etch them in with a deeper colour, of what we may call the whole doctrine of the Person of Christ. With such a masterly hand, or let us rather say with such an eager spirit and such a loving clearness and firmness of touch, has he done this, that these few purely incidental words constitute one of the most complete statements of an essential doctrine to be found within the whole compass of the Scriptures. Though compressed within the limits of three short verses, it ranks in fulness of exposition with the already marvelously concise outline of the same doctrine given in the opening verses of the Gospel of John. Whenever the subtleties of heresy confuse our minds as we face the problems which have been raised about the Person of our Lord, it is preeminently to these verses that we flee to have our apprehension purified, and our thinking corrected.”<sup>10</sup>

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Anselm’s argument goes like this: God made mankind in order that he might have eternal life, but man’s sin intervened to make it impossible for him to gain eternal life unaided. So if man is going to have eternal life, God will have to do something about it. God, contrary to the wishes of many people, cannot just pretend that sin doesn’t exist or dismiss it as unimportant. In ordinary life, an offence against a person can be forgiven, provided that some sort of compensation is given for the offence. Anselm refers to this compensation as a “satisfaction.” For example, a man might steal a sum of money from his neighbor: in order to meet the demand of justice, he would have to restore that sum of money, plus an additional sum for the offence given by the theft in the first place (cf. the law of Restitution Lev. 5:16; 6:4, 5; 22:14; Num. 5:7) – and this additional sum of money is the “satisfaction.” Anselm then argues that sin is an offence against God, for which a satisfaction is required. As God is infinite, an infinite satisfaction is required. But as man is finite, he can’t pay this satisfaction. And so it seems impossible that man shall ever have his eternal life. Anselm then makes the following point. Although man ought to pay the satisfaction, he cannot; and although God is under no obligation to pay the satisfaction, he clearly could if he wanted to. And so, Anselm argues, it is quite clear that a God-man would be both able and obliged to pay this satisfaction. Therefore, he argues, the incarnation and death of Jesus Christ may be seen as a means of resolving this dilemma. As man, Christ has an obligation to pay the satisfaction; as God, he has the ability to pay it. And so the satisfaction is paid off, and man is able to regain eternal life. Anselm’s theory was important because it showed that a good case could be made for involving the death of Christ in the scheme of the divine forgiveness of sin without contravening justice. Cf. Alister McGrath, *Understanding Jesus: Who Jesus Christ is and Why He Matters* (Zondervan, 1987), p. 165.

<sup>2</sup>J. H. Gerstner, “The Atonement and the Purpose of God” *Our Savior God: Studies on Man, Christ and the Atonement*, ed. J. M. Boice (Baker, 1980), p. 111.

<sup>3</sup>As cited in the *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament VIII*, ed. M. J. Edwards (IVP, 1999), p. 236.

<sup>4</sup>Robert Schuller’s distortions of the Gospel even extend to Christ’s humiliation. In his bold, even brazen, translation of Christian concepts into the argot of pop psychology, Schuller explicitly criticizes traditional theology for being overly pessimistic. He dismisses “negative theologians” who dwell on the humiliation of Christ in the Incarnation and suggests that pastors instead should accentuate the positive: “The Incarnation was God’s glorification of the human being.” Cf. his *Self-Esteem: The New Reformation* (Word, 1982), p. 100, and the critique of K. H. Sargeant, *Seeker Churches: Promoting Traditional Religion in a Nontraditional Way* (Rutgers Univ. Press, 2000), p. 102.

<sup>5</sup>The RSV has “being found in human form” but the word for “form” is not *morphē* as in 2:6. This is the word *schema* and refers to “the eternal appearance of the incarnate Son as he showed himself to those who saw him in the days of his flesh.” Alec Motyer, *The message of Philippians* (IVP, 1984), p. 115.

<sup>6</sup>R. R. Melick, Jr., *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon: The New American Commentary* (B&H Publishing, 1991), p. 101.

<sup>7</sup>G. C. Berkouwer, *Studies in Dogmatics: The Work of Christ* (Eerdmans, 1965), p. 161.

<sup>8</sup>Although “confess” is the rendering most common of phil. 2:11, the sense of *exhomologoumai* would be improved if the phrase were rendered, “every tongue shall praise because Jesus Christ is Lord.” Lightfoot long ago observed the meaning of *exhomologoumai* here is praise or thanksgiving, for this secondary sense has in the LXX (the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew OT) almost entirely supplanted the primary sense, especially in the very passage of Isaiah which Paul adapts. Cf. J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians* (rpt. Zondervan, 1975), p. 115, and Nigel Turner, *Christian Words* (Nelson, 1981), p. 338.

<sup>9</sup>C. F. D. Moule, “Further Reflections on Philippians 2:5-11 in *Apostolic History and the Gospel: Biblical and Historical Essays Presented to F. F. Bruce on His 60<sup>th</sup> Birthday*, eds. W. W. Gasque and R. P. Martin (Eerdmans, 1970), p. 270.

<sup>10</sup>B. B. Warfield, *The Person And Work of Christ* (rpt. P&R, 1950), p. 565.