

Focus on Philippians 2:1–13

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” David L. Bartlett

What is clear is that the hymn has two verses, and the movement of the second exactly reverses the movement of the first. In the first strophe, Christ Jesus starts out being in the form of God, humbles himself to descend to earth, and then is further humbled by death, cast down below the earth to Sheol. In the second strophe, Christ is raised from Sheol and raised to highest heaven while winning the allegiance of every sphere through which he has passed—those in heaven and on earth and underneath the earth. The name that is above every name is surely *kyrios*—“Lord.”

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” William Greenway

When found in human likeness (*homoīōmati*, v. 7), Jesus Christ remains true to divine nature—to the death. Contrast Adam, who *grasped after* autonomy and power, assuming a form diametrically opposed to the divine form (the disobedience of Eden). Jesus Christ, by contrast, presents in human likeness the true nature of God, manifests truly the *imago Dei* in the flesh. “Even death on a cross” (v. 8). What is the passion of Passion Week, the passion of Jesus Christ? It is the passion of Immanuel, of love, of *kenōsis* [self-emptying], a passion for justice and joy, an absolute sensitivity to the vulnerability, need, and suffering of others.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Gilberto Collazo

Christian living is a process. God’s timeline for each one of us is unique, and only God knows what the final product is going to look like. We do not expect an instantaneous transformation of our life’s attitudes and actions, but rather an ongoing process of change that results from the ever-growing awareness of our need to be at a different place if we are to be true Christ followers. The process begins with our conscious decision to become reflections of Christ in our actions and reactions to life.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,”
Mike Graves

Following Paul’s lead, we then move to his exhortations. Although repeated and rephrased in a variety of ways, ultimately the call is to empty oneself for the greater good of the church body, to practice humility. It is nearly impossible in our day to recognize how radical this word was in the first-century Mediterranean world. Lists of vices and virtues were standard fare, not just in the church but in the larger culture, often nearly identical in nature. It was a given that love was superior to hate, harmony better than fighting. However, humility was seen as a weakness in the ancient world, whereas Paul listed it as a virtue. Of course Christians today recognize humility as a virtue to be emulated, but it is much easier to *recognize* it than to *practice* it.

A Song of Christ's Humility

Philippians 2:6–11

6 Who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,
7 but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
8 he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.

9 Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name that is above every name,
10 so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
11 and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

