

**Christ: Systematic Summary of Christology, III**

One of my goals when we study the doctrine of Christ is to work with the classic passages, the great Christological passages in the New Testament, which are John 1, Colossians 1, Hebrews 1, and Philippians 2. Let us go to Philippians 2 because it does very plainly affirm the Incarnation in the midst of affirming other good things as well.

We have said that the Bible teaches the pre-existence of Christ and the Incarnation of the Son of God. We are now going to sample one passage that teaches the Incarnation. Let us work briefly with the context in Philippians 2:1-11. Philippians 2:1-2 says, “If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from His love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.” Paul is so wise here; I do not want to diminish the Holy Spirit’s role in his wisdom, but the whole passage to me seems to be structured around the idea of unity. In fact, the whole chapter seems to center around the idea of unity. He seeks to promote unity by first working with incentive or motivation. Motivation is so important, and if we ever find ourselves lacking incentive, we are in trouble. Philippians 2:1 is the great incentive to Christian unity. Now the congregation at Philippi is much healthier than that at St. Corinth or the ones in Galatia, but they are not perfect. The diversity in these early churches makes me chuckle when somebody says, “We want to be a New Testament church,” and I think to myself, “Be careful which one you pick.” I understand what they mean and I agree. The Philippian congregation was very healthy, but not perfect. For instance, Philippians 4:2. Ladies, how would you like to have your names written in the Bible? You may think, “That would be good,” and it would be if it was in a place like Hebrews 12. But Philippians is not the best place to get one’s names in holy writ. Philippians 4:2 says, “I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord.” These are important women servants and they are at odds. I would say it is embarrassing. Would they be spiritual enough to rejoice that they could be used as bad examples? I leave that one to you, ladies and gentlemen. “Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the Gospel along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers whose names are in the book of life.” So he does praise them as hard workers. But he directly pleads with them to get together, to be in harmony. I would submit to that you there is more than potential division; there are problems in the church. I am not saying it is raging or filled with factions the way the church in Corinth was, based upon 1 Corinthians 1 and 2, but there are problems. He already has hinted in 1:27 where he writes, “I know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the Gospel.” He desires to know that in the context. He desires to know their unity, so 2:6-11, the great passage about Christ, is in a context in which the apostle is seeking to promote unity to a congregation that is at least having some problems there. First, incentive—the great incentive to unity here—is that they themselves have known the love of the Lord for their own souls. He says it in three or four different ways: “If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from His love”—I am going to make a sanctified guess and say perhaps it is the Father’s love. We have a reference to the Son, the Father, and we certainly have the Son and the Spirit—“If any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being unified,” verse 2. So basically he says this: if you have known the fellowship with the Trinity that makes you a believer, then burn with the desire to be one with other Christians. Their own experience of the love of God and of God’s grace is their incentive to be unified.

Secondly, he moves from giving motivation to giving areas in which unity is needed. I will just touch on these: by being likeminded, having the same love, and being one in spirit and purpose. He is not arguing for a bland sameness. We are not to be little cookie-cutter Christians. Like-minded does not mean that they all have exactly the same gifts, age, and gender; it is impossible. No, they had gender and age

differences, they had different levels of spiritual maturity, and they had different spiritual gifts. What Paul does mean is that they put their minds on the things of God, they have the same love of God in their neighbor, they are one in their attitudes, and they work for common goals. Of course there are sub-goals that vary. They need to be pulling in the same direction for the glory of God, for the salvation of lost people, and so forth.

Verses 3 and 4 of Philippians 2 give the Lord's way to achieve unity. Negatively, "[d]o nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility [...]." In a word, the biblical way to unity is humility. How different from the world where unity is achieved by those who are in dominance stomping on the people under them and making them conform. No, "You are to be servant leaders," Jesus told His disciples, and "If anyone wants to be first in the Kingdom of God, let him be last and he who would be leader, let him be the servant of all, for even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many." Some have said this is almost a commentary on that passage from the synoptic gospels. Then he somewhat describes humility in two different ways; he does not let us get away with just saying the right things. We all need to be more humble, and if we are more humble, we will achieve unity in these areas. Let us go on. But no, he does not let us escape like that. He specifies here what humility means. It is "consider[ing] others better than yourselves." What he is asking Euodia, Syntyche, and their fellows to do—and you and me—is on Sunday morning to look around in the church at our fellow sinners saved by grace, our fellow saints, and to ask the question, "Do we really consider those people as more important than ourselves?" If we are honest, I am afraid we will not say yes. At least that is not the natural thing to do. It would be supernatural to do that, and that is exactly what Paul is calling them to. Euodia should look at Syntyche and all the other brothers and sisters and she should, as an act of her will and the power of the Holy Spirit, consider them as more important than herself. By nature, she and the rest of us look out for ourselves. Do the unnatural thing, do the supernatural thing, as Paul says: "Consider others better than yourselves." Another way of saying it, from verse 4, is "Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others." It is natural and part of self-preservation to be concerned for ourselves. It also can easily become selfish. Do the unselfish thing, he says, and humble yourselves and be concerned about others. What does all this have to do with the great teaching about Christ? You thought we were going to study His Incarnation. We are, but remember my abiding interest in the purpose of doctrines is asking why the Bible teaches what it teaches. Here, the great truth about Christ is given to promote church unity; your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus. That is 2:3 and 4. Philippians 2:5 gives the greatest example of humility the world will ever know: the Lord Jesus Christ. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus. So chiefly in Philippians 2:6-11, Paul presents Christ as an example. That is how he uses the teaching about Christ in this context, as an example. Before I break the verses down and go through them verse by verse, do not miss the fact that this is the greatest passage in the Bible on the topic of Christ's two states. We will be doing this in a systematic way soon. The two states pertain to the Incarnation. They are two chronological phases through which the Son of God passes in accomplishing salvation: the state of humiliation followed by the state of exaltation. To give a complete history of the Son of God, we have got the state of glory before the Incarnation, then a state of humiliation—it was a humbling thing for God to enter a virgin's womb, a humble thing for Him to be born, and a humble thing for Him to live among sinners, to suffer, to be hungry, to be cursed, and to be rejected by His own family members. It was a humble thing for God to die. You may say, "God cannot die." It is true that God in heaven cannot die, but according to Philippians 2, God became a human being exactly so He could die and He did. God cannot die, but the one who died was God; the God-man died. It was a humble thing for God to be buried. It is the God-man and I am saying God for effect, but the God-man is buried. All that shows a state of humiliation. Praise God and His plan that that was not the end! There is the state of exaltation that follows: His resurrection, His return to the Father, His sitting at God's right hand, His reigning now

as Prince, and His second coming; all of that is part of His state of exaltation. Philippians 2:6-8 describes the state of humiliation. Philippians 2:9-11 describes the state of exaltation. So there are two states.

This is the biblical way to distinguish Christ's life on earth from His life now. It is not biblical to say "He was a man, but He is not a man anymore. He is not a human being anymore." You better be very careful; the Incarnation is permanent and Christ is still the God-man. You say, "But He is not the same as He was on earth." You are right; He is no longer subject to weakness, insult, and degradation. He is exalted, but He is the same person. We account for the difference by distinguishing the states. We do not say, "He shed His humanity." No, that is actually a heresy. The two states, humiliation and exaltation, correspond to Philippians 2:6-8 and 9-11. Let us work through these carefully and we will think through the verses together. "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus." Can you hold the historical context in your mind: disunity? The doctrine is worth considering on its own, but it needs to be related to that context that we might get the application the apostle intended. "Who, being in very nature God [...]" There is a play on words in the passage. The same word is used in verses 6 and 7, "very nature" or "form," but the words that go with those same words, "very nature" or "form," are radically different. As a matter of fact, they are jarringly different. Here in verse 6 it says, "He was in very nature God," and in verse 7 it says, "He took the very nature of a bond slave, a servant." These things do not go together. All I can say is that they do in the plan of God. Right away Euodia and Syntyche are squirming in their seats. They are about to burst into tears and hug each other and get this thing the way it is supposed to be. The Lord of Glory became a bond slave and here Euodia is already thinking something like "And I am exalting myself above my sister; I should not be doing that," and that is exactly the point of the passage. We just read these words and already conviction just comes to us if we dare exalt ourselves above other Christians. The reason we are Christians in the first place is that He who was in the very nature of God took on the nature of a *doulos*, a slave or bondservant. "[...] who being in very nature God,"—so He begins as God—"did not consider equality with God something to be grasped." If we took the whole teaching of the Bible into account, we could say that this refers to things like giving up His glory, giving up His position with His Father in Heaven, relinquishing that intimate fellowship that He enjoyed unhindered with the Father without these disciples and all these unbelievers around, and people saying He has a demon and all this kind of terrible stuff. Imagine yourself in the worst situation in your life in terms of working with unsaved people or being in contact with them and them not appreciating you one bit. How uncomfortable was it? You wanted to let your little light shine for Jesus, but they wanted to put it out as quickly as possible. It was difficult for you. We cannot even begin to conceive what it was like for the Son of God to live with His disciples alone and with their sins and unbelief, let alone with those who would ultimately nail Him to a cross. We cannot even imagine His offense and the pain of His holy soul in that situation. But, I do not think any of those meanings are given here. If you ask me from this context what it means that He did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, the other things I said were all true biblically, but it is not here. Either we are intended to read those kinds of ideas—which I think perhaps not—or from the passage itself we are to figure out what was intended. I think the latter is a safer course. From the verses that deal with the state of exaltation, Philippians 9-11, I conclude this (I am not being original, but I am following Ralph Martin who has written the best book on this, which is called *Carmen Christ: A Hymn About Christ*. I do not agree with everything he says in that book, but it is a big book based upon this passage, verses 6-11. It is a wonderful work that gives a history of interpretation and it is his personal study). He argues, and I agree, that either we are to bring in from elsewhere the meaning of what He gave up or we are to conclude something like this: Jesus did not consider equality with God something to be grasped in this sense. With the Father and Holy Spirit in heaven it would have been within the rights of the Son of God to say, "Father, I want my rights. I want every knee to bow to me, and I want every tongue to confess my lordship." That was the Son of God's right; I am talking about in heaven before He became a human. That was His divine prerogative because He was Lord. The Scripture indicates different proclamations

of His lordship. In Romans 1, He was shown to be the Son of God with power by His resurrection from the dead. He did not begin to be the Son of God then, but demonstrated His lordship. It is the same in the Book of Acts: God demonstrated He was Lord by raising Him from the dead, by bringing Him back to His right hand—by Him sitting down. If you put all of what the Bible says together, you have got all these different places associated with His state of exaltation in these different aspects. The meaning is He who was always Lord is now openly proclaimed Lord by the Father. It is especially powerful in Acts, because people gave their verdict and they crucified Him, but God raised Him from the dead and demonstrated what He thought of His beloved Son. In any case, my understanding of verse 6 is that although He was in very nature deity, He did not demand that which was His right, the universal acknowledgement of His lordship: “Father, I want every knee to bow and every tongue to confess that I am Lord.” It was His right, but He gave it up. He did not reach out and grasp what was His, but rather He emptied Himself. Verse 7 has unfortunately at times been literally rendered. Those Kenotic Christologies used this verse as a proof text for their false teaching that He relinquished some of His divine attributes as in emptying a pitcher of lemonade. It is not to be taken literally as if He divested Himself of some qualities. This is figurative language. I say that because the participle that follows explains what it means: “But He emptied Himself by taking the very nature—or the form—of a bond slave.” The passage does not indicate He gave up any attributes. It tells us in what way He emptied Himself. Rather than say, “Emptied Himself,” I prefer saying something like the NIV says: “Made Himself nothing.” His making Himself nothing is just as literal as His emptying Himself. But it is not literal; it is figurative. He made Himself of no reputation; He made Himself nothing; He emptied Himself. Understand this means He greatly humbled Himself. He who could have claimed divine prerogatives laid aside that rightful claim and instead humbled Himself, served tremendously, and took the very nature of a servant and was made in human likeness. “And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!” For the purposes of our notes, it is verse 7 that speaks of the Incarnation. He who existed from all eternity in the very nature of God took upon Himself the very nature of a servant, of a slave. This is incredible: God humbled Himself and was made in human likeness.

Not only so, but He humbled Himself to the point of death. He obeyed His Father to the point of death, and not just any death, but the terrible death on a cross from which Roman citizens were exempt. It was a death for criminals, for runaway slaves and so forth. It was a terrible degradation to hang naked in public view, to die a slow and tortured death in that regard. Here is the Son of God in His state of humiliation. By this time Euodia and Syntyche have made up. (I am using a little sanctified imagination here.) The message is plain. Dear sisters, Paul writes—and not just to pick on them—every member of the church in Philippi, every Christian of all ages, do you understand what I am saying? Do you understand that your very existence as Christians depends on the fact that the Son of God humbled Himself for you? How dare you exalt yourselves above your fellow believers; humble yourselves under Christ and then under your fellow believers. Do you not understand that He humbled Himself, which means on the cross He considered you better than Himself? (From verse 3.) We are not better than Him, but He did not die on the cross for His sake; He considered us more important than Himself. On the cross He was not serving His own personal interests. This message is designed to break their hearts and their pride and bring them to repentance. On the cross He was looking out for our interests and not His own, or He would not have been on the cross. Thanks be to God for the great word, “therefore,” in verse 9 that indicates the transition from the state of humiliation to the state of exaltation. Am I playing here on the purpose of the doctrine in context: Jesus is the greatest example of humility? He is more than that, of course—He is God and man—but He is the greatest example of humility imaginable and if our Lord humbled Himself like that then we have to humble ourselves before other Christians; there is no other way to it. We have to take His posture. That is, we must not reach for the crown but instead reach for the towel and get down on our knees and wash the feet of disciples, which utterly shocked them.

Verse 9 says, “Therefore, God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name”—be careful; the principal of close proximity often rules in interpretation, and if you work that way, you would have that name in verse 10 identified as Jesus—“that at the name of Jesus”—but it is not the name of Jesus; it is the title, Lord, in context—“every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” To understand this passage we need to understand Isaiah 45, the Old Testament context to which Paul is alluding. Here is one of those places, as McGrath has pointed out, where the apostles take Old Testament passages speaking of God and directly apply them to the Son of God. Let me show you the speaker in Isaiah 45:18. “For this is what the LORD says—He who created the heavens, He is God [...] ‘I am the LORD, and there is no other.’” That is sufficient to establish that this is the true and living God. Furthermore, “I am the LORD” is Yahweh again. The end of 19 says, “I, the LORD, speak the truth.” This is the Lord speaking. Verses 21-24 say, “There is no god apart from me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none but me. Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other. By myself I have sworn, my mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked: before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear. They will say of me, “In the Lord alone are righteousness and strength.”” This is very significant in the context. Look at the end of 24, because people abuse Philippians 2 and they teach universalism from it. They teach that since that bowing of every knee is every knee—which I think it is—everybody will come to know the Lord in the end. That is wrong. Isaiah 45:24b says, “All who have raged against Him will come to Him and be put to shame. But in the LORD all the descendants of Israel will be found righteous and will exult.” Paul takes these words—I do not know of any Philippians scholars who do not uniformly agree that this is what he is appealing to. He takes an Old Testament passage—everybody will bow before me and will confess—and says that of the Lord Jesus Christ. “At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth.” That is comprehensive language, I do agree. It is literally every human being and every tongue confessing that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Thus the name in verse 9 is the name of Lord. He was the Lord on earth as in 1 Corinthians 2 when Paul says, “They crucified the Lord of glory.” But it is an ironic reference—the glorious Lord was put to death. The rulers of this world thus demonstrated their utter folly; they thought they were so wise and strong, but how foolish they are. Jesus was the Lord but His acknowledgment as Lord awaited His resurrection and even His enthronement. We will see Hebrews 1 is an enthronement, almost psalm, whereby Jesus is crowned and sits down at God’s right hand in heaven and receives His title of Son and Lord, which He has always had, but now they are openly acknowledged.

Therefore, on the basis of His humble obedience unto death on the cross, God exalted Him to the highest place. In teaching this passage to young people, I use the image of a roller coaster. He came from heaven; He came down, He became a human being, and surely if God became a human being He would be at least a prince or a king, right? No, He became a bond servant. And He was obedient and humbled Himself. We are going down, down, down to death—the very bottom of the roller coaster ride is the cross, death, Paul says. Then we start up. God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him that name of Lord, which is above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow—those who know Him and those who do not will acknowledge that He is Sovereign Lord and Redeemer. It will be too late for them to be redeemed; they will be those whom Isaiah 45 speaks of as those “who have raged against Him” and indeed they will be put to shame and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. In the plan of God, the Son will thus receive the glory and honor and praise that are due Him. He did not reach out to claim it in heaven as He could have before the Incarnation, but instead He followed the way of the cross. God did exalt Him and He will yet publicly—universally—declare Jesus to be who He is and all humanity will agree, for they will have no choice. They will bow at the knee. Praise God that we, by God’s grace, have willingly bowed the knee in this life. There are many

who will not bow in this life who will bow against their wills in that life and that is so sad. We need to try to reach out to unsaved people. Think of cultists and all their religious zeal and all their effort to oppose the person of Christ. If only they would bow now and acknowledge Him as Lord and Savior lest they bow in that day. There is no option. They are going to bow; it is just a matter of when. Thank the Lord that we know, love, and serve Him.

This is a great Incarnation passage. Let me do just one more thing to tie Philippians 2 together in a big bow, if you will, because in studying this passage over the years I have seen how the passage continues on the theme of unity and now I am pursuing the idea of examples. The greatest example, of course, is Christ, and that is what we just saw. (This is all Philippians 2:6-11.) Now Paul gives other examples himself, such as Timothy and then Ephaphroditus. Paul's line of thinking may have been something like: "Some in the congregation might say, 'But Paul, the example of Christ is too exalted for us; it is too high and we cannot attain unto it.' Okay," Paul says, as it were by way of concession, "then follow my example." Verse 17 says, "Even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you." Paul contemplates his death, friends. He says, "Praise the Lord if that is going to result to the glory of God, if that is what my service to you means." Paul is considering them more important than himself. He is not looking out for his own personal interests but for their interests. He is practicing what he is preaching to them. "Yes, but Paul, you are an apostle; we cannot handle that one. You are too high an example for us." Okay, in verse 19 and 20 and following he uses the example of Timothy: "I hope to send Timothy to you soon. I have no one else like him who takes a genuine interest in your welfare." This next verse really led me to the thesis that I am spinning out now. What I am saying is the example of unity does not stop at verse 11, but rather it keeps going and here is why I say that. "For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ"—that is an echo from verse 4—"But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the Gospel." Timothy regards others' interests and not merely his own and he considers others to be more important than himself. "Oh yeah, but he is an apostolic delegate." All right, Paul saves an argument to end that argument for good: He gives high words of praise to a member of their own congregation in verses 25-30. This is no apostolic superhero, but he is a superhero. This guy was sent by the Philippians to Paul to bring a financial gift to him. Verse 25 says, he is "[...] my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is your messenger, whom you sent to care for my needs. For he longs for all of you and is distressed"—not because he was so sick that he almost died—"because you heard he was ill." This guy almost died and he was not overcome with thoughts about himself? He was hurting, but he was more concerned about causing them grief. "Indeed he was ill and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. Therefore, I am all the more eager to send him so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor men like him"—these are high words of praise—"because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me." Ephaphroditus is the epitome of what Paul has been talking about from 2:1. Ephaphroditus considered them more important than himself. I know he did. The man was about dead and he was concerned for their welfare and he put their interests ahead of his own. You see how the chapter just holds together that way, around this theme of unity. The more that I study the New Testament the more I see an underlying purpose of many of the New Testament documents. First Corinthians is to foster unity as is 2 Corinthians. It is not often noticed, but Romans is the same way and here Philippians, which is a healthy church with one problem, which is hinted at and more than hinted at with the ladies being named in Chapter 4. Churches are going to have a tendency toward disunity. We need the Bible. The best medicine is preventative medicine. Use these passages and these whole books to foster unity in the Sunday school class, the ladies' Bible study, from the pulpit, and so forth. We can hardly talk too much about the need to cherish and strengthen the unity that we possess already. The Incarnation is what separates Christianity from the religions of mankind. It

is not a religion that starts from below and people aspiring to heaven. It is a religion that started in heaven and that culminated in God becoming a human being. If that is not from above down to below, I do not know what is. God became a human being, lived a sinless life, died in our place, rose again, and went back to heaven that we might be with Him. Praise the Lord for His grace. That is exactly what Paul says grace is in 2 Corinthians: “The grace of Christ consists in this, that though He was rich, He became poor for your sakes that you through His poverty might be made rich.”