

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

717 North Stapley Drive, Mesa, AZ 85203 Phone: (480) 833-7500

Series: Exposition of Romans
Number: 179
Text: Romans 12:1-2; Philippians 2:5-11
Date: March 3, 2013 a.m.

Pastor/Teacher
Gary L.W. Johnson

The Mercies of God and the Deity of Christ (Part II)

The decade of the 1990s witnessed a veritable flood of books about the person of Jesus of Nazareth. A. N. Wilson, a British journalist and novelist, gave us a book, which was meant to shock the world, with the simple title *Jesus*. This work was heralded by talk show hosts and print journalists alike. Turns out there is actually nothing new here, just old retreaded rejections of Christianity regurgitated in modern dress. And what American has not seen or heard the radical opposition to the Jesus of Christian confession made by retired Episcopal Bishop John Shelby Spong? In his book *Born of a Woman*, Spong claims that the doctrine of the virgin birth helped to foster the oppression of women. Spong completely remakes the Biblical understanding of Jesus, both His person and His work. The Jesus of Bishop Spong cannot be the Savior, because his Jesus is not the Jesus revealed in the New Testament. Over the last decade things have not improved. A number of the people associated with the infamous *Jesus Seminar* continue to churn out books repudiating orthodox Christology. John Dominic Crossan recently published *Jesus A Revolutionary Biography*, a more popular and readable version of his densely-packed academic work, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*, but the original itself sold more than 50,000 copies. Marcus Borg, in frequent demand as a lecturer, recently published a popular work, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time*, which stems from his scholarly work, *Jesus, A New Vision*. Last year, HarperCollins and the Trinity Institute sponsored a discussion between Borg, Crossan, and another Jesus scholar.¹ Of course, any time one of the TV networks does a special on Jesus, this is the crowd that they consult for the latest *scholarly* opinion! Especially bad (and in my opinion far more dangerous) is the heretical teaching about Christ that comes from the stable of Charismatic preachers that parade across the TBN network of Paul Crouch. Kenneth Copeland is surely one of the worst. Copeland relates a message he claims to have had from Jesus Christ himself: “Don’t be disturbed when people accuse you of thinking you’re God. They crucified me for claiming I was God.” Here Copeland seems to come very close to placing himself on the same plane as Jesus Christ, claiming the same divine authority for his actions. Copeland relates how in the same vision he heard Christ speak these words to him: “I didn’t claim that I was God; I just claimed I walked with him, and that he was in me. Hallelujah! That’s what you’re doing.” The uniqueness of Jesus Christ is thus denied: Christ was just someone who walked closely with God, like others, including Copeland himself. The ontological gap between Christ and Christians, so vital a safeguard against irresponsible leadership and the more vexing theological developments normally linked with the New Age movement, is thus denied. And as Jesus Christ is unable to make personal television appearances, get on the lecture-tour circuit or deliver personalized sermons, those who claim to have authority on the same level as his would seem to have a significant advantage over him in this respect. Indeed, one of the most troublesome features of some sections of modern evangelicalism is irresponsible leaders willingness to allow a blurring of the vital distinction between the will of God and the will of the charismatic Christian leader.²

REVIEW: The immediate context of our passage centers on Paul’s ethical call to have *humility of mind*. It is when we display selfish or boastful attitudes that strife and friction bring disharmony into our fellowship. True humility, however, sets aside whatever *rights* or *privileges* we have in order to serve others. This is the key to understanding the text. In order to illustrate that point the Apostle presents the great change that was displayed in the incarnation. The one who possessed and displayed in every way imaginable the very nature of God—a state that was always His, nevertheless, voluntarily undertook to accomplish His Father’s will by entering in a *different* form. This is the thrust of the passage. The Son did not descend from an *inferior* status, but from one of *equality* with the Father.

I. **WDJD: WHAT DID JESUS DO?**

- A. **Negatively.** Phil. 2:6 says He “did not consider equality with God something to be grasped.” (NIV) The word trans. “grasped” is HARPAGMOS lit. “to reach out and seize”. The word has either an active sense “robbing” or a pass. sense “prize gained through robbery.” the meaning is that Christ did not use His equality with God in order to snatch or gain power and dominion, riches, pleasure, worldly glory. He did not reach out of His favored place and grasp at authority.³ What is clear from the text is that if Christ was not co-equal with the Father but was in some sense inferior to the Father, Paul’s illustration is to none effect. Equally mistaken is the decidedly unbiblical notion that Christ aspired (or was tempted to do so) to be equal to God since He knew He was not co-equal. Rather the whole of the NT unites in affirming Christ’s self-abrogation. He had no guilt, but He bore it (Jn. 1:29). He had no sin, but He was made sin on our behalf (II Cor. 5:21). He was rich but became poor for us (II Cor. 8:9). He laid aside His eternal glory to accomplish his mission (John 17:4).
- B. **Positively.** “He made Himself nothing.” (ESV) The KJV has “he emptied himself.” The word here is KENOŌ lit. “to empty.” This, in biblical studies, is referred to as the Kenosis of Christ. Does this mean that Christ ceased to be what He was, that He gave up His Deity? No, not at all. To begin with the word itself is never used by Paul in a literal sense (cf. Rom. 4:14; I Cor. 1:17; 19:5; II Cor. 9:3). It is used in all of these texts in a figurative or a metaphorical sense Warfield has convincingly argued, the word should never be translated “emptied.”⁴ What did Christ do then? Moise’s Silva helpfully remarks, “we can and should recognize that the phrase “he emptied himself” may well have evoked a larger network of associations, and those would be part of the “total” meaning. Particularly intriguing is the possible connection with Isa. 53:12, where the Servant of the Lord (cf. DOULOS in Phil. 2:7) is said to have “poured “out Himself (lit. His soul) unto death.” The fact that Phil. 2:11 quotes Isa. 45:23 increases the probability that we may have an allusion to Isa. 53:12. But an allusion is not a direct reference. To say that the Christ-hymn is primarily an attribution to Jesus of the Servant of the Lord description seems to me to be an overstatement; much less is it acceptable to argue that “He emptied Himself” actually means, “He suffered the death of the Servant of the Lord.”⁵
- C. **The Mind of Christ**
The expression “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ” is parallel to what Paul said in I Cor. 2:16 – “We have the mind of Christ. The Greek word mind, *NOUS* is often used to translate the Hebrew word RUAH, which ordinarily means “spirit”, which fits the context of I Cor. 2:12-16. The emphasis is on thinking like Christ did in His incarnation. In what way is this being stressed by the Apostle? Murray captures it best. “The thought is simply that Christ Jesus did not make his own self the all-absorbing and exclusive object of interest, concern, and attention. He became absorbed in concern for others... The humiliation of Christ is here appealed to in support of considerate, unselfish regard for others. ‘Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.’ It is on the supreme example of our Lord that the basic virtues of the Christian life are nurtured. It is significant that what was unique in Jesus’ undertaking is the pattern. There can be no repetition or duplication of what he has done. To have the mind that was in Christ Jesus is not mimicry of his action. It is to be animated in our vocation and in our relations to others by that mind exemplified by him in his inimitable commitment. Our Lord’s incomparable self-humiliation accords to the humble mindedness required of us the highest sanction. ‘It is enough for the disciple to be as his master, and the servant as his lord’.”⁶

CONCLUSION: “Self-denial for its own sake,” wrote Warfield, “is in its very nature ascetic, monkish. It concentrates our whole attention on self--self-knowledge, self-control--and can therefore eventuate in nothing other than the very apotheosis of selfishness. At best it succeeds only in subjecting the outer self to the inner

self, or the lower self to the higher self: and only the more surely falls into the slough of self-seeking, that it partially conceals the selfishness of its goal by refining its ideal of self and excluding its grosser and more outward elements. Self-denial, then, drives to the cloister; narrows and contracts the soul; murders within us all innocent desires, dries up all the springs of sympathy, and nurses and coddles our self-importance until we grow so great in our own esteem as to be careless of the trials and sufferings, the joys and aspirations, the strivings and failures and successes of our fellow-men. Self-denial, thus understood, will make us cold, hard, unsympathetic, —proud, arrogant, self-esteeming.--fanatical, overbearing, cruel. It may make monks and Stoics, —it cannot make Christians. It is not to this that Christ's example calls us. He did not cultivate self, even His divine self: He took no account of self. He was not led by His divine impulse out of the world, driven back into the recesses of His own soul to brood morbidly over His own needs, until to gain His own seemed worth all sacrifice to Him. He was led by His love for others into the world, to forget Himself in the needs of others, to sacrifice self once for all upon the altar of sympathy. Self-sacrifice brought Christ into the world. And self-sacrifice will lead us, His followers, not away from but into the midst of men. Wherever men suffer, there will we be to comfort. Wherever men strive, there will we be to help. Wherever men fail, there will be we to uplift. Wherever men succeed, there will we be to rejoice. Self-sacrifice means not indifference to our times and our fellows: it means absorption in them. It means forgetfulness of self in others. It means entering into every man's hopes and fears, longings and despairs: it means many-sidedness of spirit, multiform activity, multiplicity of sympathies. It means richness of development. It means not that we should live one life, but a thousand lives,—binding ourselves to a thousand souls by the filaments of so loving a sympathy that their lives become ours. It means that all the experiences of men shall smite our souls and shall beat and batter these stubborn hearts of ours into fitness for their heavenly home. It is, after all, then, the path to the highest possible development, by which alone we can be made truly men. Not that we shall undertake it with this end in view. This were to dry up its springs at their source. We cannot be self-consciously self-forgetful, selfishly unselfish. Only, when we humbly walk this path, seeking truly in it not our own things but those of others, we shall find the promise true, that he who loses his life shall find it. Only, when, like Christ, and in loving obedience to His call and example, we take no account of ourselves, but freely give ourselves to others, we shall find, each in his measure, the saying true of himself also: "Wherefore also God hath highly exalted him." The path of self-sacrifice is the path to glory."⁷

ENDNOTES

¹ <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/jesus/tikkun.html>

² As cited by Alister McGrath, *Evangelicalism & the Future of Christianity* (IVP, 1995), p. 71. For extensive documentation of this type of charismatic heresy cf. Hank Hanegraff *Christianity In Crisis* (Harvest House, 1993), and *The Agony of Deceit: what Some TV Preachers are Really Teaching* ed. M.S. Horton (Moody, 1990).

³ Cf. F. Rienecker and C. Rogers, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* (Zondervan, 1982), p. 550.

⁴ *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield* III (rpt. Baker, 1981), p. 375. He added that Christ is "not a shriveled God; and no Christian heart will be satisfied with a Christ in whom...there was no Godhead at all while He was on earth, and in whom (we may add) there may be no manhood at all now that He has gone to heaven. It really ought to be clear by now that there cannot be a half-way house erected between the doctrine that Christ is both God and man and the Christ is merely man."

⁵ M. Silva *Philippians: The Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary* (Moody, 1988), p. 185.

⁶ *Collected Writings of John Murray* III (The Banner of Truth, 1982) p. 238, 241

⁷ B.B. Warfield, *The Saviour of the World* (rpt. The Banner of Truth, 1990), p. 182.