

Fact Sheet for “The Empty Passage” Philippians 2:1-11

Pastor Bob Singer
08/23/2015

The Theology

Philippians 2:1-11 is such a famous a passage in theology that it has its own title. Most passages are known by a reference (John 3:16 for instance). This one is also known by a word... “kenosis”. That word is taken from the Greek word for “emptied” in verse 7.

ESV Philippians 2:5-7 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

“form” – essential nature

“likeness” – outward appearance

You have heard that Christ is fully God and fully man. That confused me for a long time because I thought, “How can Jesus be 100% God and 100% man?” That makes 200%! But what this means is that Christ, Who has always been fully God, *added* to that divine nature everything that was necessary to be man. From Mary’s conception on He has had two natures.

This brings us to another theological term, “hypostatic union”. Hypostatic union (from the Greek: *ὑπόστασις* hy-po’-sta-sis, *substantial nature, essence, actual being, reality*) is a technical theological term that describes the union of Christ’s humanity and divinity, His two natures.

Emptied?

What did this actually mean for Jesus? Did He give up being God for a time? No! He never gave up being God! He did not *change* natures. He *added* humanity to His divine nature. But “emptied”? The best way to put it is that for a time He chose to lay aside the free exercise of many of His divine qualities... omniscience, omnipresence, etc. How can Jesus, God the Son, increase in wisdom (Luke 2:52)? How can God learn obedience (Hebrews 5:8)? These came from that emptying. Now here’s a question to wrestle with. Could Jesus have sinned? What would have happened if God the Son had sinned? If it had been impossible for Jesus to have sinned then it would blunt Hebrews 4:15. I think too of the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:44). Jesus’ struggle was real. Did He *not* sin because He has a divine nature, or did He not sin because He chose obedience from His human nature? This is a much broader discussion. As you engage that discussion you will find that Jesus, from His humanity, chose not to sin while relying on the same two things we have available to us... the Word of God and the indwelling Holy Spirit. Is it possible to have victory over sin? You bet it is!

Why Did Paul Write This?

Now here’s a question. Why did Paul write these words? On the one hand even though Paul was the human author, it was God who was superintending the writing of Paul’s letter to the Philippians. In the final analysis God wanted this passage in the NT! But these words for Paul were only an *illustration* of something else that was vitally important for the Philippian Christians to get a hold of. Observe two things for a moment. 1. Paul does not mention the dual nature of Christ before this or after this in his letter. This is not Paul’s main point. 2. Verses 5-8, from which we get all this theology, are only one sentence in Greek. This is not Paul’s emphasis! It is something else. Consider Paul’s flow of thought in the book. There is a huge change beginning in 1:27. Immediately before that Paul is speaking of his own circumstances. Now he writes...

Philippians 1:27-30

²⁷ ¶ Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, ²⁸ and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. ²⁹ For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, ³⁰ engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

He is connecting back to his own circumstances, but he is now directing his thoughts to the Philippians. And, you will find similar thoughts in chapter 4. This is Paul's emphasis. His next words echo the same thing.

Philippians 2:1-4

^{ESV} ¹ ¶ So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, ² complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

^{KJV} **Philippians 2:3** Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.

Wow! Same mind... same love... full accord... one mind... this is Christian unity! *This doesn't come from ignoring differences in the way people believe or act.* Paul's letters are full of exhortations (compare 2 Timothy 3:16-17). *Christian unity will never be achieved by a declaration of faith.* It will not be secured by joining all churches in Cottage Grove into one. And it will not be found if only the other person changes!

Philippians 2:3-4

³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Christian unity depends on me. It depends on you (singular). The real question is how we relate to others. If they are doing something that wrong, rude, non-productive, etc. how do I interact with them? Do I irritate them? Do I shame them? Do I give them ultimatums? Do I stir up strife? Or do I approach them lovingly? Do I seek their best? Do I esteem them better than myself? Do I look to their interests? This is the way to Christian unity. Paul then illustrates this in Christ's choice to empty Himself for us.

Philippians 2:5-8

⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Then Paul writes of the Father's resulting blessing on the Son.

Philippians 2:9-11

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

And think about it. Isn't there the implication here that if we take Paul's advice that God will also bless us? Thinking of others first is how to achieve unity among believers. Esteeming others before ourselves is not natural, but it is the way of God's blessing in our lives.