

PHILIPPIANS, THE HYMN THAT SEEMS TO SAY JESUS IS GOD

Paul wrote in what is thought to be a hymn that though he was in the form of God Jesus did not count equality with God but emptied himself to become a servant and was born as a man and because he obeyed to death he is now exalted to the right hand of God and gets the role of Lord.

Christians say, "Jesus is described as being in the form of God which means he is God because form of God signifies that Jesus was what God was and had his form (see page 126, Some Modern Faiths for example). Therefore, Jesus has all that constitutes God as God for it says later that Jesus took the form of a servant that he took all that makes a servant a servant. Moreover, it says that he put away his equality with God. So being equal to God and having the nature of God, Jesus must be God. In the form of God does not mean just that Jesus was spiritually like God in his goodness and love because the text says he emptied himself to take the form of a servant meaning that he gave up his divine powers or his powers from God to be like a servant so he was not going to give up his goodness and love to become a servant. He was exalted to a state similar to God's and given supernatural powers and glory. He took on the form of a servant voluntarily. He was still the creature who is next to God and God."

If Jesus was in the form of God and that means he was really God then he was not really a servant and we are told he took the form of a servant. So at least one of the in the form of is not literally saying that Jesus was what he was linked to. If it is the in the form of a servant then Jesus was not a literal servant for if he is God he cannot be a servant even if he just refuses to use his powers – he is still playacting. If it is the in the form of God then Jesus was not literally God. Perhaps both are non-literal? At any rate the passage cannot show that Jesus is definitely God.

So then in his servant state he was still the ruler if he was God or a pre-existent Son of God who was enthroned at God's right hand and enjoying Godlike power before coming to earth. Strictly speaking he was not a servant at all for in helping others he was gaining people to rule. A servant is an inferior and Jesus was never that - but he was just playacting. Paul did not believe that Jesus was a servant in the proper sense for he said that he was the Christ, a king. If the expression "in the form of" which appears twice has the same sense as Christians suppose then Paul did not say that Jesus was literally God just that Jesus was godlike. Paul used in the form of loosely and not strictly so it does not prove that Jesus was God. If he came close to verbally saying that Jesus was God and backed off how could Jesus be really God?

The context is about power and giving up that power so equal to God most probably means that Jesus was given equal power to God. But God would still be the holder of the power and strictly speaking Jesus would have no power of his own for God only uses the power as Jesus wills and Jesus only wills what God wills. The Prime Minister can be equal to the king when the king gives him lots of power but the power is still really the king's. So they are equal and yet the king is superior at the same time.

Paul tells us that Jesus did not take equality with God though it was a thing to be grabbed or grasped. This makes it clear that he was not already God or equal to God.

Jesus put away his glory and power to become a man and in this sense only did he cease to be equal to God. He emptied himself in this way. Jesus could not have been God for God cannot change according to the scriptures which Paul was so familiar with. Christianity says God could take on an additional nature, a human nature, but he would not be laying aside his majesty because in Heaven he would still have it all. In fact since God's majesty is really just love, his becoming man would be adding to the majesty if that were possible. Paul applauded the scriptures so he believed that Jesus could not abandon his glory if he was truly divine. Jesus was not equal to God in the sense that he was God but in the sense that all God's power was his to use. If God has power and gives it to Jesus that makes Jesus his equal even though Jesus is dependant on him.

Some say that the text says nothing about glory but only power. But is there any difference in reality? God's power is his glory. His love is his power and his glory. He is not like a king who needs glitter and paraphernalia to be glorious.

But if Jesus had godlike power he had to have glory and majesty for these things are not just fancy robes and halos but making others awestruck regarding your power. The angels would have had inferior glory to him and been his servants.

The text does not prove Jesus' pre-existence when it says that Jesus laid aside his equality with God to take the form of a servant. Jesus could have been a man with godlike powers who was granted these powers some stage during his life and who never used them but gave them up at the start of his ministry or more probably to be arrested and be executed on a

cross.

Some say that since the text says that Jesus received the name of Lord which is the highest name and makes him Lord of Heaven and earth and all that is in them that Paul is declaring that Jesus is God for he has God's own name (page 13, Jehovah's Witnesses). But the context eliminates that interpretation as we have seen. He is the highest under God. What Paul actually said was that Jesus was exalted and given the highest name so that at the name of Jesus every knee in Heaven earth and underneath the earth would bend at his name and confess him as Lord to the glory of the Father. But if Jesus was God he could not be exalted to receive this entitlement for he would already have it. And to imagine that Jesus became God at that point would be inane. Paul has a God who cannot absorb persons to make them become him.

If you reject the possibility that Philippians said Jesus was in the form of God and was a slave are both non-literal then the following would be true. The simplest way to prove that Philippians did not declare Jesus to be God is to realise that when it says that Jesus became a servant, actually a slave according to the original Greek and many translations, he became as all men are. Now how could God be a slave? A slave is a person who works for nothing and who is somebody else's property. Jesus could not be God's property if he is God. And Jesus could not work for nothing if he was God. The sense of the hymn is totally lost if you hold that Jesus was God and was destined to rise again from the dead to have everlasting glory for that is payment. Jesus is a slave in the sense that he worked for God without being sure he would remain faithful enough to get the reward of resurrection and exaltation and everlasting glory.

