

# First the Cross, Then the Crown

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PHILIPPIANS 2:9-11

The word “wherefore” defines the connection between this sentence and the preceding one. The Greek conjunction *dio* is formed by combining the preposition *dia* (on account of) and the relative pronoun *ho* (which); hence, “on which account” (GT) or “for this reason” (AG). On account of the self-renunciation and obedience of Christ Jesus (vv. 5-8) “God highly exalted him.”

Christ Jesus had existed in the form of God, the Lord of the universe, on an equality with God, but did not look upon this exalted status with the greedy eyes of a robber considering his booty. He was not grasping and greedy, endeavoring at all costs to hold on to what was his, but “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, . . . (and) humbled himself, becoming obedient” even to the extent of humiliating and tortuous public execution on a cross. For that reason “God highly exalted him,” so that he became the outstanding illustration of his own often repeated statement: “And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be humbled; and whosoever shall humble himself shall be exalted” (Matt. 23:12; cf. Luke 14:11; 18:14). The exalted status that he would not selfishly cling to or greedily seek became his as a gift from God. The way of self-surrender, the way of the cross, is the way to the crown.

How did Jesus attain the thing he would not cling to or selfishly reach out for? God bestowed upon him as a gift of grace (Grk verb *charizomai* as in 1:29) “the name which is above every name.”

What name is intended? Some think of the name Jesus (v. 10); others of the title Lord (v. 11). But (1) the name referred to was bestowed as the consequence of his humiliation; (2) Lightfoot points out it is not the name Jesus in v. 10 but the name *of* Jesus (explaining the genitive case as indicating possession rather than apposition); and (3) both the name Jesus (Acts 7:45; Heb. 4:8) and the title Lord (Grk *kurios* in Acts 16:30, 25:26, Eph. 6:5, 9, *et al*; *kuriotes* in Eph. 1:21, *et al*) are applied to others than Jesus. It seems clear that more is involved than the mere application of a word to Jesus. Consider whether “name” may not stand for all that Jesus is.

Names were significant in Hebrew usage—not in terms of the sound of the name, but primarily in terms of the meaning of the name. For a few examples see Genesis 17:5; 32:27f; 41:51f. The name of a person is who he is—that by which he is known. GT says “the name is used for everything which the name covers, everything the thought or feeling of which is aroused in the mind by mentioning, hearing, remembering the name.” (Cf. John 17:6, 25f, where the name of God is interchanged with God himself. His name refers to that by which God is known; all that he has revealed of himself.)

With the exaltation of Jesus his name was filled with new content that takes one’s mind far beyond the lowly babe of Bethlehem. The name of Jesus refers to one who holds first place over all the creation of God (Col. 1:15–18); “the ruler of the kings of the earth” (Rev. 1:5; cf. 19:16); the Lord of even angels (1 Pet. 3:22).

The divine purpose in this exaltation of Jesus is defined in verses 10–11: “that in the name of Jesus (i. e., within the sphere covered by this name, perhaps tantamount to ‘when the name of Jesus is mentioned,’ AG) every knee should bow.” The bowing of the knee, kneeling before him, is worship or homage, an acknowledgment of his Lordship (cf. 1 Kings 19:18; Ps. 95:6; Is. 45:23; Matt. 17:14; Mark 1:40; 10:17; Luke 22:41; Acts 7:60; 9:40; 20:36; 21:5; Rom. 11:4; 14:11).

Who all are included in the elaboration of “every knee”? Saints in heaven? Angels? Living and dead? Demons? Enemies? I cannot decide about some of the terms. But surely all these are included, if not by the thought here, then in other passages (1 Cor. 15:25 with Josh. 10:24; 1 Pet. 3:22). Perhaps the closest parallel is Revelation 5:13, which has “every created thing which is in the heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and on the sea, and all things that are in them” worshipping the Lamb (cf. Ps. 148).

God intended that the Lordship of Jesus be acknowledged not only by kneeling, but also verbally—“that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.” The Old Testament parallel to which allusion is made has “that unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear” (Is. 45:23). Perhaps here also we should think of an “oath of fealty.” And since Jesus is God’s Messiah, carrying out the divine purpose, this acknowledgment is “to the glory of God the Father.”

First the cross, then the crown. So it was for Jesus. So it must be for us. We must remember the context (v. 5), and learn his mind.

## “Work Out Your Own Salvation”

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PHILIPPIANS 2:12-13

The paragraph that begins here and runs through verse 18 completes the major hortatory section which began at 1:27. The whole body of material elucidates the leading exhortation literally translated in the ASV margin, “Behave as citizens worthily of the gospel of Christ.” [See page 40 for this analysis.] The elaboration of this basic exhortation concludes with a call for careful, earnest effort aimed at the accomplishment of salvation.

Salvation is represented in scripture as both a past experience (Tit. 3:5) and a future hope (Acts 15:11). Christians already have in hand justification, forgiveness, adoption as God’s sons. But the good work begun must be perfected (cf. Phil. 1:6). And the future salvation is conditional as the past salvation was conditional. Therefore Paul exhorts, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.”

“Work out” (Grk *katergazomai*) means to get it done—to accomplish or achieve it; it means “to do that from which something results.” “Work out your own salvation” means “make every effort to obtain salvation” (GT, 339). Man cannot earn his salvation or save himself. But Paul is referring to human cooperation with the work of God in us (cf. v. 13).

The command, “Work out your own salvation,” is at bottom a call for submission and obedience: “even as ye have always obeyed . . . work out your own salvation.” The Greek verb behind “obey” (*hupakouo*) means primarily to hear or listen, then to hearken, submit, obey. The future salvation is obtained through faith as we listen to God, trust him, submit to him. We must not rebel against God’s work in us, but cooperate, permitting him to bring us to glory. Now we are ready to understand the link between this exhortation and Paul’s previous passage.

The present exhortation is a consequence or result (“So then,” Grk *hoste*) of what Paul has just written. The previous paragraph contained the call to imitate the mind which was in Christ when he “emptied himself” and “humbled himself, becoming obedient” even to the extent of death on the cross. It was as the outcome of such

self-surrender that “God highly exalted him and gave unto him the name which is above every name.”

Now the future salvation hoped for by Christians involves deliverance from the wrath to come (1 Thess. 1:10), redemption of the body (Rom. 8:23; Phil. 3:21), *participation in the glory of Christ* (Rom. 8:17; 2 Thess. 2:14). Paul has just pointed out that the way of the cross, the way of self-surrender, submission and obedience was for Christ Jesus the pathway to glory. Now he exhorts, “So then . . . even as ye have always obeyed . . . work out your own salvation.” As for Christ Jesus, so for us, the way to glory is the way of self-surrender, submission, permitting God to finish his work in us.

Paul indicates the manner in which the obedience must be carried out (“not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence”). It was not to be in the spirit of a slave who works only when his master stands over him (cf. Eph. 6:5f). An individual, personal relation with God is involved, and even more care and earnestness was called for now that the apostle was no longer present to help.

“With fear and trembling” is emphatic in the Greek order: “with fear and trembling work out your own salvation.” “Fear and trembling” is the disposition of one who understands the stakes that are involved, the possibility of failure, and brings to the task the best effort possible, shrinking from carelessness, overconfidence or presumption. Contrast Amos 6:1, 3; Matthew 26:31–35.

Verse 13 supplies a reason for the exhortation of verse 12: “for it is God who worketh in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” See my discussion of Philippians 1:6 for how God works in us. He uses not only his powerful word (cf. 1 Thess. 2:13), but also various human agents (cf. 2 Cor. 1:3–7 with 7:5–7) and providential means such as suffering (cf. 1:29) to train us for glory. He works in us to produce not only the will but also the work (contrast Romans 7:18b) in behalf of “his good pleasure” or benevolent purpose (Grk *eudokia*)—i. e. the salvation of his people.

What powerful motivation! We must shrink from carelessness lest we frustrate the work of God in us. But what assurance! God is at work in us, and, with Paul, we can be confident that God will finish what he began (1:6), if we cooperate with his purpose. My mind overflows with wonder. God is at work in me and my obedience is simply my cooperation with his purpose to bring me to glory.