

## The Form of God (Philippians 2:6, 7)

"Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men."

### Problem:

Great stress is placed on "morphe" (the Greek word for form) by trinitarians and others like the J.W.'s who teach that Christ had a pre-human existence. It is argued that "in the form of God" means that Christ had the *nature* of God before his birth, and it was this which he sacrificed in coming to the earth to live as a human.

### Solution:

1. If "in the form of God" means the very nature of God, then Christ could not have been "Very God" while on earth, as trinitarians assert, since this is what he is said to have sacrificed and left behind in coming to the earth.
2. The Greek word "morphe" (translated "form") does not refer to "essential nature" as the trinitarian cause requires. This is proven by the following:
  - a. "Eidos", not "morphe" is the Greek word which conveys the idea of "essential nature". As Liddell and Scott point out in their lexicon, "morphe" means form, shape, fine, beautiful form or shape, figure, fashion, appearance, outward form or semblance. It is opposed to "eidos" which means "true form".
  - b. In the context of this passage, it is stated that Christ "took upon him the form of a servant" (vs. 7). But what is the form of a servant (Grk. "doulos", a slave)? The "essential nature" of a slave is the same as that of any other human being. The form, therefore, must refer to the semblance or demeanour of a slave as the distinguishing characteristic.
  - c. "Morphe" occurs in only one other place in the N.T. - Mark 16:12, and here it clearly does not mean "essential nature". Jesus appeared "in another form", but this could not refer to a change of his essential nature since the reason why he appeared to be in another form was because the disciples' "eyes were holden". (Luke 24:16 cf. vs. 31). Not even a trinitarian or a J.W. would be prepared to say that Christ's essential nature was changed after his resurrection and glorification.
3. How was Christ in the form of God? He had the semblance and demeanour of the Father mentally and morally. His character was the express image of his

Father's person. (Heb. 1:3).

4. Sometimes trinitarians stress that Christ was *originally* in the form of God - i.e., "being" in the form of God is taken to mean that he was in fact "Very God" before his "incarnation". The Greek verb "huparchon" refutes this position since it is in the imperfect tense which expresses action yet, or still in course of performance. Time signified by an imperfect tense is of a continual, habitual, repeated action, so that "*being* in the form of God" means "being, and continuing to be in the form of God". Christ never ceased to be in the form of God since in semblance and demeanour from his birth he habitually exemplified his Father's character. Note the use of "huparchon" in the following passages:
  - a. Acts 2:30 - "Therefore *being* a prophet does not mean "being originally before birth a prophet", but rather a prophet and continuing to be such.
  - b. 1 Cor. 11:7 - "Forasmuch as he *is* the image and glory of God" does not mean "being originally before he was born the image and glory of God", but rather being the image of God and continuing to be.
  - c. Gal. 2:14 - "If thou *being* a Jew" does not mean "being originally before his birth as a Jew", but rather if you from the start and continuing to be a Jew.
5. "Thought it not robbery to be equal with God" is generally acknowledged to be a poor translation. The R.S.V. reads as follows: "He did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped." Unlike Eve who grasped after the fruit which was to be desired to make one like God (the "elohim") to know good and evil, Jesus refused to take the kingdoms of the world without the crucifixion of the flesh and the declaration of the righteousness of his Father. In the Garden of Gethsemane he subjected his will to his Father's, not arrogating to himself prerogatives that rightly belonged to his Father. (Matt. 26:39).
6. How did Christ take the form of a servant (slave)? Two passages supply the answer:
  - a. "If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet." (John 13:14).
  - b. "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered. And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him." (Hebrews 5:8, 9).

Although Christ was in the form of God in his semblance and demeanour, he took on him the semblance and demeanour of a slave.

7. "He humbled himself"; "he emptied himself" R.S.V. (vs. 8), refers to Christ's deliberate choice to submit his will to that of his Father. Christ was worshipped (Matt. 8:2; 9:18), performed the works of God (John 10:37-38), and forgave sins (Matthew 9:2), but he never arrogated to himself authority which had not been delegated to him by the Father. In so doing his example was a powerful lesson in humility to the Philippians. But if Christ "being originally, before his birth, while he was in heaven in the form (essential nature) of God thought at his birth, when he descended into the womb, not to be equal with God, but left the form of God",<sup>1</sup> where is humility demonstrated?

---

**Footnotes:**

1. This is the way in which Phil. 2:6 is read by trinitarians. See A.B. Bruce, *The Humiliation of Christ*, (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clarke, 1889), pp. 1-23. [Return](#)