

Deep Dive- Philippians 2:9-11

1. Literary Context: The Shape of the Christ Hymn

Most scholars see Philippians 2:6–11 as a pre-formed “**Christ hymn**” that Paul is either quoting or adapting. It has a clear two-part structure:

1. **Humiliation (2:6-8)** Christ’s self-emptying, servanthood, and obedience unto death.
2. **Exaltation (2:9-11)** God’s response, lifting Him up and granting Him the “name above every name.”

Verses 9-11 are the “**therefore**” section: God’s vindicating response to the self-giving obedience of Jesus. The whole hymn is not an abstract Christology; Paul uses it as a **pattern for the Philippian church’s life together** (2:1-5). Michael Gorman calls this Paul’s “master story”, i.e., a narrative pattern of downward, self-giving love followed by God’s exaltation.

So 2:9-11 is not just “high theology.” It is the **destination** of the story that believers are invited to inhabit: share the mindset of the crucified Christ, confident that God’s vindicating power belongs to Him.

2. Text & Structure of Philippians 2:9-11

A fairly literal rendering:

9 Therefore also God *highly exalted* Him
and *graciously granted* to 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 should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Notice the poetic parallelism:

- **God’s act** (v. 9): exaltation + gift of the name
- **The world’s response** (vv. 10-11): knees bowing + tongues confessing
- **The ultimate goal**: glory to the Father

This mirrors Isaiah 45, where the LORD swears an oath that **every knee** will bow and **every tongue** will swear allegiance to Him alone.

3. Key Greek Terms & Syntax

a. “Therefore God *highly exalted Him*” (διὸ καὶ ὁ θεὸς αὐτὸν ὑπερύψωσεν)

- διὸ καὶ “therefore also” or “for this reason also.” God’s exaltation is His *response* to Christ’s self-emptying obedience.
- ὑπερύψωσεν (*hyperypsōsen*) “highly exalted,” “super-exalted.” It’s an intensive verb: not just “lifting up,” but “lifting beyond comparison.”

Gorman notes that this exaltation is not a reversal of Christ’s self-giving character but its **vindication**. The “way of the cross” is not undone in exaltation; it is **enthroned**.

b. “Bestowed/graciously granted the name above every name” (καὶ ἐχαρίσατο αὐτῷ τὸ ὄνομα τὸ ὑπὲρ πᾶν ὄνομα)

- ἐχαρίσατο (*echarisato*) from *charizomai*: “to graciously give, to bestow as a gift.” Emphasizes grace, not merit economics.
- τὸ ὄνομα τὸ ὑπὲρ πᾶν ὄνομα literally, “the name the above-every-name one.” The double article (“the name the above every name”) marks it out as **a specific, unique name**, not just a reputation upgrade.

What is “the name”?

- Some argue “Jesus” is the name, since v. 10 says “at the name of Jesus.”
- But many evangelical scholars (e.g., Gordon Fee, N. T. Wright, Richard Bauckham) argue that the **bestowed name is “Lord” (κύριος)**, understood as a sharing in the **divine name** (YHWH), in light of the Isaiah 45 echo.

Fee, for example, concludes that Paul “attributes to Jesus the name above every name—which is clearly Yahweh,” and that the hymn shows “the transfer of every kind of divine privilege to the risen Lord.”

Either way, the point is **not** that Jesus gets a “better label,” but that He now bears **the divine identity and honor** publicly.

c. “So that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow...” (ἵνα ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ πᾶν γόνυ κάμψῃ)

- ἵνα introduces a **purpose clause**: God exalts Christ *in order that* worship and allegiance will flow toward Him.
- ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ “in the name of Jesus.” This can mean “at the invocation of His name” or “in recognition of His authority.”
- πᾶν γόνυ κάμψῃ “every knee should bow.” The verb *kamptō* is physical, bodily submission. This is **worship/action**, not just mental respect.

Paul adds the merism:

“in heaven
and on earth
and under the earth”

This threefold division expresses **total cosmic scope**: heavenly beings, earthly humans, and even the realm of the dead.

d. “Every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” (πᾶσα γλῶσσα ἔξομολογήσεται...)

- **ἔξομολογήσεται (exomologēsētai)** “to openly confess, acknowledge, profess.” Used in the LXX for praises and worshipful declarations; not a grudging admission but a public acknowledgment of allegiance.
- **κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστός** “Jesus Christ is Lord.” This is not a generic religious title; in light of the Isaiah echo, “**Lord**” is the **LXX word used to translate YHWH**.

This line ties directly to other Pauline confessions (e.g., Romans 10:9; 1 Cor 12:3) where confessing “Jesus is Lord” is the basic Christian allegiance statement.

e. “To the glory of God the Father”

Paul carefully keeps the Father-Son relationship in view:

- The Father is the One who exalts the Son.
- The Son receives universal worship.
- That worship **redounds to the Father’s glory**.

This is a deeply **Trinitarian** picture: the Son shares divine identity and honor, and the Father is honored precisely *through* the exaltation and worship of the Son.

4. Intertextual Background: Isaiah 45 and the Shema

The most important background text is **Isaiah 45:22-25** (LXX):

“Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth...
To me every knee shall bow,
every tongue shall swear allegiance.”

The context of Isaiah 45 is fierce **monotheism**: YHWH insists that there is no other god, no rival, no one else who shares His glory or name.

Paul takes this **exclusive YHWH language** and applies it to Jesus:

- In Isaiah, every knee bows to **YHWH**.

- In Philippians 2, every knee bows “at the name of Jesus” and confesses “Jesus Christ is Lord,” to God’s glory.

As many scholars have argued, this suggests Paul is including Jesus **within the identity of the one God of Israel**, not putting Him alongside God as a second, lesser deity.

This lines up with 1 Corinthians 8:6, where Paul **splits the Shema**:

“One God, the Father... and one Lord, Jesus Christ...”

Gordon Fee and others see Philippians 2 as another place where Paul is essentially “re-centering” Israel’s monotheistic confession around Jesus.

So when people say “Jesus is Lord,” they are effectively standing in the stream of Israel’s confession of the one true God and saying: **“The God of Israel has revealed Himself in and through this crucified-and-exalted Jesus.”**

5. Historical Context: Christ vs. Caesar

Philippi was a **Roman colony**, proudly shaped by Roman status, citizenship, and loyalty. Imperial ideology honored **Caesar as “lord” and “savior,”** and public life involved rituals of bowing, sacrifice, and loyalty to Rome’s ruler.

N. T. Wright and others have argued that Philippians 2 has a **strong anti-imperial resonance**: it proclaims that the true exalted Lord is not Caesar but the crucified Jewish Messiah. Paul’s gospel, Wright says, inevitably confronts Caesar’s claims, i.e., if **Jesus is Lord, Caesar is not.**

- In the empire: knees bowed to Caesar.
- In Isaiah: knees bow to YHWH.
- In Philippians: knees bow to **Jesus**, and this honors the Father.

So when the early church confessed “Jesus Christ is Lord,” they weren’t merely making a spiritual statement; they were **making a public allegiance claim** that relativized every other claim to ultimate loyalty.

Jesus’ authority is **not just heavenly, not just “religious,” but public and political in the broad sense, touching every sphere of life.**

6. Theological Themes in Evangelical Scholarship

a. High Christology and the Divine Name

Philippians 2:9-11 is often cited as one of the clearest examples of **“early high Christology”**. Jesus shares:

- the **divine name** (Lord, with YHWH overtones),
- **divine honor** (universal worship),
- and **divine prerogative** (the right to receive sworn allegiance).

Fee notes that the passage shows “the transfer of every kind of divine privilege to the risen Lord.”

This is not a slow evolution centuries later; it is embedded in one of Paul’s earliest letters.

b. Cruciformity and Participation (Gorman)

Michael Gorman emphasizes that Philippians 2 is not simply a window into Christ’s status; it is also a **template for the church’s participation** in Christ. The “mind” we are to have (2:5) is the mind of the cruciform Jesus, whose path of self-giving obedience is vindicated, not reversed, by God’s exaltation.

So when we contemplate Christ’s exaltation and universal lordship, we are not just observing a distant sovereignty; we are being called into a **cruciform pattern of authority**: power expressed as self-giving love.

c. Eschatology: Already and Not Yet

The language of “every knee” and “every tongue” has a **future orientation**: the final acknowledgment of Christ’s lordship at the consummation. But the church’s confession **now** (“Jesus Christ is Lord”) is an **anticipation** of that day.

Gorman and Wright alike stress that the church is called to live as the community that already embodies the **future verdict** of the world: Jesus is Lord, and His cruciform reign defines true power and glory.

7. Tying It Back to Surrender in Every Sphere

Philippians 2:9-11 answers two big questions:

1. **Who is Jesus, finally and fully?**
 - The crucified one, now super-exalted.
 - The bearer of the divine Name.
 - The recipient of universal worship.
 - The true Lord in a world of rival lords.
2. **What does that mean for us?**
 - Our confession (“Jesus is Lord”) is not a slogan; it’s a **comprehensive allegiance statement**.
 - It relativizes all rival loyalties: nation, party, career, identity, comfort.

– It calls us to open every “room” of life to His rule: home, work, habits, money, body, speech.

If **every knee** will bow and **every tongue** will confess, then the Christian life is about learning to **bow early and confess freely**, gladly aligning all of life with the One whom God has exalted.

- Week 1: The exalted Lord has authority to **forgive your past**.
- Week 2: The exalted Lord has authority to **send you in the present**.
- Week 3: The exalted Lord has authority to **secure your future**.
- Week 4: The exalted Lord has authority in **every sphere**, and surrender means:

Not just believing He is Lord, but **living as if He really is**.

For Further Reflection / Study

- **N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*** (sections on Philipians and lordship/empire)
- **Michael Gorman, *Cruciformity and Inhabiting the Cruciform God*** (Phil 2 as “master story”)
- **Gordon D. Fee, *Pauline Christology*** and his commentary on Philipians (on “the name above every name” and divine identity)