

THE BELLEVILLE MESSENGER

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Jesus Emptied Himself: A Basic Approach

That Jesus "emptied himself" is not a debatable issue (Philippians 2:6-7). Of what he emptied himself, or exactly what that phrase means, has been an ancient debate. What I have to offer here may not solve any controversies, but I hope it will give some food for thought.

1. Any position which effectively destroys the deity of Jesus is wrong. This is the effect of the position that teaches Jesus gave up his divine attributes and characteristics. Those who teach this need to explain how Jesus could remain God while giving up the nature of God. The nature of something is the attributes and characteristics that make it what it is. If Jesus did not have the nature of God, he was not God (see Galatians 4:8).

2. The text does not say that Jesus emptied himself "of " anything. When we add "of " to the phrase, and then start enumerating upon what all he supposedly gave up to come to earth, we are not being faithful to the text. We are reading into the text what it does not say. As opposed to being "full of " himself (a modern idiom), he "emptied himself." He did not empty himself "of " a bunch of things.

3. To insist that "emptied himself" should be taken literally to mean that Jesus had to dump something out of himself before he could take something else on is a misuse of the text. The text says, "*He emptied himself, taking the form of a bond-servant.*" That is self-explanatory.

His taking on servant hood was a self-emptying act.

4. A good comparison can be made with Isaiah 53, a text describing the suffering Servant. Note in verse 12 the phrase, "*He poured out himself to death.*" Does that not have a striking resemblance to "*emptied himself,*" and "*humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death*" (Philippians 2:7-8)? As the suffering Servant, he emptied himself, poured himself out even to death.

5. The context of Philippians 2 itself shows what it means by the phrase "emptied himself." Paul's point of the text is to urge the brethren to be of the same mind, to be united and intent on one purpose (v. 2). To accomplish this, he instructs: "*Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others*" (vv. 3-4). These are the instructions, but how does one do this? "*Have this attitude in your-selves which was also in Christ Jesus*" (v. 5). To reach the point of selflessness, one must look to Jesus. Why? Because he is the perfect example of these instructions. Though he himself is God, while on earth he did not grasp after his godhood by trying to exercise his own independent will apart from the Father ("*did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped*"). Rather, he "emptied himself," which is the perfect phrase to describe the attitude of verses 3-4.

So what does it mean that Jesus "emptied himself"? Jesus Christ, in his role of the Servant, did nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but in lowliness of mind he regarded others as more important than himself. He looked out for the personal interests of others. How did he do this? Ultimately, by dying on the cross.

So, Paul's point is that, as Jesus emptied himself, so must we all empty ourselves. It is simply another way of saying that we need to deny ourselves (Luke 9:23), for this is what Jesus did when he fulfilled his mission for a lost world. He set himself aside so that everything he did was selfless. Mark says it this way: "*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many*" (Mark 10:45). These passages say the same thing.

6. The idea that Jesus emptied himself of attributes and characteristics is completely foreign to Paul's argument. He points to Jesus as our example of self-humiliation. If Jesus emptied out of himself a bunch of attributes, then how can we follow this example? We can't divest ourselves of our human nature any more than he could divest His divine nature. The line of reasoning that Paul uses to say that we should be selfless becomes meaningless through such an interpretation. It is an attitude that he is teaching.

7. Very simply, then, the text tells us that we should empty ourselves. We should deny ourselves, doing nothing out of selfishness. We do this by taking the attitude of Jesus, the supreme example of self-denial. He emptied him-self. As a servant, he completely submitted to the Father and poured out himself unto death. Afterwards, he was exalted. If we, too, will humble ourselves in like manner, God promises that we will be exalted (James 4:10).

✍ Doy Moyer



A Few Make History

Some brethren assume the continuity of a faithful, visible, functioning church, from the first Pentecost after Christ's resurrection until now. It must be "assumed" — it can not be proven — nor do I believe either is essential. But on that assumption, there is a "necessary inference" that should shake us up a bit.

If there has always been a "faithful few" it is because there has always been a few who acted independently of the majority — who thought for themselves — who refused to go along with the elders or the preacher "for the sake of peace." History is filled with proof of continual change which constituted apostasy from the divinely ordained standard. Such changes (we do not refer to changes of no scriptural consequences) had to be resisted — by people who knew the difference in essentials and non-essentials, and who refused to accept as a matter of faith or standard for fellowship anything for

which there was no divine authority.

In every generation there had to be a few who endured the name "Anti" or its equivalent, and went about the business of maintaining a small (minority) scriptural church regardless of how this affected their secular business and social relations.

The key was, of course, independent Bible study, which directed dedication to Christ rather than to the "party" or popular opinion. The faithful few knew both who and what they believed (2 Timothy 1:12-14), and on this basis they both spoke and acted (2 Corinthians 4:13). They had convictions — vital, personal, motivating convictions.

But the folk today who rest their hope upon party affiliation, and seem most anxious to assume the historic continuity of such a party; are often the least informed, and less likely to have strong convictions based upon independent Bible study.

Had you lived in the "dark ages," would you have been among the "faithful few"? We all like to think that we would have been; but the truth can be read in our present day record. Do we stand with the "faithful few" today, regardless of consequences?

✍ Robert Turner

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Schedule of Services

Sunday Bible Study	9:30 a.m.
Sunday Morning Worship	10:30 a.m.
Sunday Evening Worship	5:00 p.m.
Wednesday Bible Study	7:00 p.m.

Evangelist

James Hahn	(317) 443-1938
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