**EXALTED BY GOD AS LORD OF ALL**

***9Therefore*** ***God exalted him to the highest place  
    and gave him*** ***the name that is above every name,  
10******that at the name of Jesus***

***every knee should bow,  
    in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
11and every tongue confess***

***that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
    to the glory of God the Father.***

**Philippians 2:9-11 (NIV)**

Paul believed that Christ’s self-emptying and death by crucifixion revealed true equality with God. His Philippian readers needed to understand, not only that this is how the life of Christ in them would express itself ‘naturally,’ but that an eschatological vindication awaited them. For a suffering community whom Paul repeatedly reminded regarding the absolute centrality of Christ in everything, both present and future, the truths in these next verses were vital. Believers in Christ, even in suffering, are in Christ ‘already.’ But there is a ‘not yet.’ Already they know and own Him as Lord of all but they have not seen all things brought under His subjection. In these verses is the reminder of who and whose they are.

Although neither the resurrection or ascension are specifically mentioned, both are specifically presupposed by the opening ‘*Therefore.’*  God’s exaltation of His Son is not a reward but a divine vindication of Christ’s emptying Himself and humbling Himself in obedience by dying on a cross. ‘*Therefore*,’ (in consequence of His obedient submission to death), ‘*God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name’* (2:9). Although expressed as a two-fold action, Paul more than likely intends both verbs to point to a single reality: that God highly exalted Jesus Christ by gracing Him with ‘the name.’

In saying God has ‘*exalted’* Christ, Paul uses a compound of the verb for ‘exalt’ with the proposition ‘*hyper’* whose usual meaning is ‘above.’ Some see in the term that Christ has been rewarded for His humiliation by being given a higher position than He had before the incarnation. Others see a victory over the ‘powers’ but the verb implies neither of these. Paul uses *hyper* compounds frequently in his writings where in the vast majority of cases they mean ‘excess’ and not position (e.g. Romans 8:37 we are *‘more than* *conquerors’* in Christ doesn’t mean we are raised beyond being conquerors but that we are raised to the highest possible degree of being conquerors). God has ‘highly exalted’ Christ by exalting Him to the highest possible degree.

Christ being given ‘*the name that is above every name*’ can be understood two quite different ways, depending on whether ‘*the name’* He has been given is ‘Jesus’ or ‘Lord.’ If the reference is to His earthly name ‘Jesus,’ (supported by the next phrase: ‘*that at the name of Jesus’*), Paul is saying that God has bestowed on the name of Jesus a significance that excels all other names. Further ‘Jesus’ is a name while ‘Lord’ is a title.

The more likely option though is that the bestowing on Him of the name ‘Lord,’ as the equivalent of Yahweh, is how Jesus has been exalted to the ‘*highest place*.’ If it were not for ‘that at the name of Jesus’ which immediately follows, there would be no question that ‘*Lord’* was what Paul had in mind. In favour of ‘Lord’ is the second part of 2:11 that every tongue will confess that ‘*Jesus Christ is Lord*.’ Further, the two-fold ‘result’ clause of 2:10 and 11 is a direct borrowing of the language of Isaiah 45:23 where Yahweh (the Lord) says that *‘Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear. They will say of me,* *‘In the Lord alone are righteousness and strength.*’ This scripture is clearly in Paul’s mind. What is said of Yahweh is now said of Jesus Christ. Yahweh is ‘*the Lord’* and alone deserves obeisance. Paul uses the Greek word for ‘*Lord’* and says this name has now been bestowed on Jesus and He deserves the identical obeisance.

The declaration of Jesus as ‘*Lord’* would not be lost on believers in a city whose inhabitants are Roman citizens and who declare Caesar ‘lord.’ And not forgetting that Paul is writing these words as a prisoner of the Emperor to Christians suffering at the hands of Roman citizens.

He who stooped so low is now lifted to the highest place – to a supreme place that was always His by right but which He never clutched at as His personal possession. The elevation is not in regard to His nature or inherent place within the Godhead. It is to a place though that could only be His after the submission and sacrifice of His earthly life and relates specifically to His lordship as King of the universe.

The result of God’s exaltation of Jesus is expressed in two clauses taken directly from Isaiah 45:23. Both stress that the whole creation will give Him submission and worship (presumably at His return).

‘*That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth*’ (2:10). ‘Bowing the knee’ was a common expression for honour and submission because of the authority of the person to whom the act was directed. Paul is replacing ‘*before me’* in Isaiah 45:23 (‘*Before me every knee will bow’*) with ‘*at the* *name of Jesus*’ where the ‘me’ is Yahweh the God of Israel. In the Isaiah passage Yahweh is declared to be God alone over all He has created embracing all nations and every other so-called god. Yahweh, while offering salvation to all declares that ‘before me every knee will bow’ (Isaiah 45:23). Paul now says that through Christ’s resurrection and at His ascension God transferred this right to receive worshipful submission to His Son. He is the Lord to whom every knee will bow, even by those who refused to on earth.

Paul says further that this worshipful submission will be given by every created being ‘*in heaven and on earth and under the earth*’ (2:10). A little earlier in the Isaiah passage, God was described as the One ‘*who created the heavens … who fashioned and made the earth*’ (Isaiah 45:18). Paul draws on this thought by declaring Christ’s sovereignty over every created being: those of ‘*heaven’* (angels and demons), those of the ‘*earth’* (all humans) and those *‘under the* *earth’* (probably all who die before Christ’s return but who will be raised to acknowledge His Lordship).

Not only shall all created beings bow the knee and offer worshipful submission due to Christ’s name, but ‘*every tongue’* shall ‘*confess that Jesus Christ is Lord’* (2:11). In Paul’s writing this expression always takes the form ‘the Lord is Jesus’ but here he adds ‘Christ.’ For Paul this confession separated the believer from the unbeliever (Romans 10:9). In 1 Corinthians 12:3 Paul argued that this confession can only come through the indwelling Spirit. This confession in Romans 10:9 is linked with a clear conviction that Christ has been raised from the dead. When at the consummation all creation sees the risen Jesus, they will declare that He is Lord, this Jesus who was crucified by man and who Christians have always worshipped. This confession will become a realisation too late for many.

We come back to Paul’s reason for this passage. He writes to the suffering Christians in Philippi to firstly, have them focus on Christ; and secondly, to point to Him as the ultimate model of the self-sacrificing love to which he is calling them. In the next passage Paul will call on them to ‘obey,’ just as the self-abasing One obeyed the will of the Father.

Without direct referencing these studies have drawn, sometimes heavily, on:

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*The Prison Letters* (Paul for Everyone) by Tom Wright (SPCK, London, 2004)

*Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* by W. E. Vine (Thomas Nelson, Nashville, TN, 1996)