

in a condition which comport with that existence. Christ Jesus existed in the form of God; He was in the condition of being equal with God. The word μορφή means "that body of characterizing qualities which makes anything the particular thing it is -- in a word, its specific character" (Warfield); "morphē implies not the external accidents but the essential attributes" (J. B. Lightfoot); "μορφή = the form native to the essence." (Lenski)

The second part of verse 6 may be rendered "did not consider his being equal with God a thing of snatching" (Lenski); or "did not regard equality with God as booty to be clung to" (Buswell). Employing a term used a little further on in the passage, we may say that Christ existed in the specific character, the essential attributes of God (μορφή), which He outwardly expressed (σχῆμα) by being equal with God. Paul says, however, that Christ did not regard this outward expression of equality a ἄρπαιγμός. What does this mean? One possibility is that "He did not regard equality with God as something to snatch, to obtain by robbery." That this is not the correct understanding may be shown by noting the fact that, by virtue of possessing the essential attributes of God, Christ was already equal with God. Equality was something which He already had, and therefore it would make no sense to say that He wanted to snatch it, to obtain it by robbery. The other possibility of meaning is that "He did not regard equality with God as something to cling to, as booty, or as a thing prized." This understanding not only fits with the emphasis in the first part of the verse; it also fits with the movement of thought in the passage as a whole, from the preincarnate state of glory to the incarnate state of humiliation, by means of a temporary laying aside (temporary because of the following state of exaltation) of the outward expression of equality with God and an assumption of the form (μορφή) of a human bond servant, and the outward expression (σχῆμα) of a man. Equality was something which He already had, which He did not regard as a prized thing to which to cling. Rather, He voluntarily gave up equality with God (not essential equality with the Father, which He possessed by virtue of identity of attributes, but the outward expression of equality) in order to run the race of redemption, endure the suffering and despise the shame, finish the course with joy, and receive the greater prize of the benefits of the Covenant of Grace, both those which rightfully accrue to Christ as fulfiller of the covenant conditions, and those which by grace accrue to those who are Christ's as recipients of the covenant of blessings.

The verb ἐκένωσεν in verse 7 has occasioned much controversy. Kittel, in TDNT, states that κενόω means "to make empty," "to deprive of content or possession," "to nullify, destroy;" but asserts that the meaning "he negated himself, deprived himself of his worth, denied himself" is ruled out of verse 7. Arndt and Gingrich propose that verse 7 means that "he emptied himself, divested himself of his privileges"; and they explain this by saying that Christ "gave up the appearance of his divinity and took on the form of a slave." The advocates of the Kenosis theory take the word as indicating that Christ emptied himself of some or all of His divine attributes in order to become incarnate and to enter the state of humiliation. The meaning common to all of these expressions is that of Christ's "emptying himself". And the question, obviously, is, Of what? What did Christ lay aside? Of what did Christ empty himself?

Many answers have been given to this question. Several of these (together with critiques) follow.