

"LET THIS MIND BE IN YOU"

An Exposition of Philippians 2:5-11

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This profound Christological passage is found in the midst of a practical portion of the Philippian Epistle. The Apostle Paul first exhorts believers to humbleness, to a way of life which does not seek its own interests (vv. 1-5). Following this exhortation he then sets forth Christ as the supreme example of such a life (vv. 6-11). This latter section is not without interpretive difficulties, however, for it treats of the mystery of the Incarnation, self-emptying, humiliation and eventual exaltation of Christ. If we are to understand Paul's argument, we shall need to examine each word and phrase very carefully.

THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST

His Pre-existent Godhood. "Who being in the form of God, thought not his existing in a manner equal with God a prize to be held on to tenaciously" (2:6). If we are to truly appreciate the depths of humiliation to which the Son of God stooped in His Incarnation, we must contrast His earthly existence with that of His heavenly. This the apostle does for us in a few masterly strokes of His Spirit-inspired pen. It should be noted that this swiftly moving panoramic view of the life of Christ commences where it alone must--eternity past.

(1) From an essential standpoint Christ is declared to be "in the form of God." The "who" (hos) refers back to "Christ Jesus" (2:5) and the order of the divine names here is in perfect harmony with the exposition following. Christ (the eternally 'Anointed One') is seen entering into the temporal realm of history as Jesus ('the Savior').

Grammatically the phrase "in the form of God" (en morphe theou) may be legitimately construed either as a single or double predication. The former view would understand the phrase to be descriptive exclusively of Christ. Under this position the primary reference would be (and rightly so) to those divine attributes in the exercise of which intelligent beings may know that Christ is God. It might also include, as some suggest, the idea that Christ was Very God manifesting Himself in some external and visible form both to the inhabitants of heaven and earth. The latter view, however, understands the word "form" (morphe) to be as much a predication of the other members of the Trinity as the whole phrase is of Christ. The anarthrous use of morphe would seem to support such conclusion. In this case morphe could not be taken in a physical sense, for God is spirit (John 4:24). But (and this should be carefully noted) an entity need not be physical to possess form. "It is conceivable that the essential personality of God may express itself in a mode apprehensible by the perception of pure spiritual intelligences; but the mode itself is neither apprehensible nor conceivable by human minds."¹

Morphe is one of the crucial terms of the passage. A study of the three Biblical occurrences of the word (Mark 16:12; Phil. 2:6-7) will verify the conclusion of reputable lexicographers that

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morphe always speaks of the matter of outward expression as indicative of inward essence. "Morphe theou means the form of God as the expression of the divine essence...."² It implies not the external accidents but the essential attributes. It "does not apply to the outward semblance only as it strikes the eye of the general observer, but it applies to the aspect that distinguishes its reality from all others."³

Accepting the 'double predication' view we discover the following theological ideas either implicitly or explicitly contained in the clause. In the realm of His existence prior to the beginning of time, Christ was as to His inward essence God of very God. This inward essence externally and mutually manifested itself toward the other members of the Godhead and that in a spiritual form. But this outward and real manifestation of Deity reciprocally experienced between the members of the Triune God was of such a nature (spiritual rather than physical) that man could never have perceived even in the least degree the outward appearance of God. In this fact we have pointed out one of the necessities for that of which we read in the verses immediately ensuing, namely, the Incarnation.

"Being" (huparchon) is a present participle from huparcho meaning, "exist (really)...as a widely used substitute in H. Gk. for einai."⁴ Examining the etymology of the word we discover that it is akin to arche 'beginning' and hupo 'under'; hence it points to that existence which was original and fundamental.⁵ The present tense of the participle specifically denotes 'prior existence' and 'continuing existence' in 'the form of God.'⁶ It does not necessarily indicate 'external existence.' The latter idea may be legitimately read into the passage from the context however; for, as we have already indicated, the phrase "form of God" clearly points to Christ's absolute Deity and hence His Eternity (cf. John 1:1).

(2) From an existential standpoint Christ is presented as "existing in a manner equal to God." "Equal" (isa) is used adverbially and means 'in such a manner or way.' If the apostle had desired merely to reiterate in different words the exactly identical essential emphasis of morphe theou, he would have no doubt substituted ison for isa -- 'to be equal with God.' The contrast as it stands is between Christ's equality with the other members of the Trinity essentially and then existentially conceived. As morphe He strikes 'the eye' of those in heaven as partaking of the essence of Deity. He is essentially equal with God. As isa He is existing in a manner equal to God. He is existentially equal to God.⁷ This existential equality would have involved all the enjoyment of heaven's glory together with the independent and externally unlimited exercise of the powers and prerogatives of Deity.

Christ did not consider this existential equality with Deity as something to be held on to convulsively. Harpagmon, in combination with hegesato is used to denote a much valued possession or gain, and the pregnant meaning of "robbery" has been ousted.⁸

His Historical Manhood. "But emptied himself taking the form of a servant, becoming in the likeness of men. And being found in fashion as a man he humbled himself becoming obedient unto death even the death of the cross" (2:7-8). The Christ of eternity became also the Christ of time in order that we might be lifted through regeneration and adoption into His family (Gal. 4: 4). In this passage we see the condescension, submission and humiliation of Christ Jesus our Lord.

(1) The fact of the kenosis is seen in the words, "but emptied Himself" (alla heauton ekenose). "But" (alla) marks sharply the contrast between the Incarnate and Pre-incarnate Christ.⁹ "Himself" (heauton) is emphatic stressing the voluntary nature of this act. "Emptied" (ekenose) is a first aorist indicative from kenoo meaning according to Cremer; (a) to empty in an absolute sense; (b) to empty in a relative sense, with the genitive (of contents) following the verb, and (c) to empty in a metaphorical sense, i.e. to bring to naught, to make worthless, without effect.¹⁰ The word occurs in the New Testament five times: Rom. 4:14; I Cor. 1:17; 9:15; II Cor. 9:3; and Phil. 2:7. In each case the metaphorical sense is clearly to be understood.¹¹ The A.V. renders very accurately the thought of Paul in Phil. 2:6, "He made himself of no reputation."

(2) The meaning of the kenosis is delineated in terms of the immediately preceding phrase of verse 6, "who considered not His existing in a manner equal to God as something to be greedily prized," and the subsequent phrase of verse 7, "but taking the form of a servant." There is an evident logical connection between these two clauses as marked by the ouk . . . alla.

The text neither states nor implies that Christ exchanged "the form of God" for "the form of a servant." On the contrary, it clearly indicates that though remaining "in the form of God." He assumed in addition the "form of a servant." "All the expressions selected by Paul in this statement make it quite clear that like the older theology he did not believe that in all this Jesus Christ surrendered, lost, or even curtailed His Deity. For he did it all en morphē theou huparchon, being in the form of God. . . This self-emptying and self-humbling had nothing to do with a surrender or loss of Deity."¹² "At His Incarnation He remained 'in the form of God' and as such He was Lord and Ruler over all, but He also accepted the nature of a servant as part of His humanity."¹³

Christ did not consider His existence in a manner equal to God as something to be held to convulsively. But, rather He voluntarily emptied Himself of such a level or plane of existence in order that He might become the personal revelation of redeeming Grace to lost mankind. (One might give up a certain level or plane of existence without relinquishing His essential nature or position. This is well illustrated by Mark Twain's novel, The Prince and the Pauper.) Christ emptied Himself of this particular level or plane of existence by taking the form of a servant.

"Taking" (labon) is an aorist participle denoting time simultaneous with the action of the main verb. We have here a striking divine paradox; Christ emptied Himself by taking something to Himself. Again it should be recalled that morphē speaks of outward exhibition as indicative of inward essence and thus, even as Christ was and is the outward exhibition of true Deity, so likewise He also became and will ever remain the outward exhibition of true humanity. "In the form of God" He is everlastingly displayed chiefly as Sovereign; as Man, He is temporarily viewed chiefly as the servant.

"The Kenosis, being first represented negatively, with reference to the pre-existent state, as a free determination not to hold fast equality with God, is next represented positively, with reference to the historical existence, as consisting in the assumption of the form of a servant, and in being made in the likeness of man."¹⁴ Christ "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). He who is Master of all became the slave of all. As a true servant (doulos) He resigned not the possession, not yet entirely the

use, but rather the independent exercise of the divine attributes.¹⁵ They were voluntarily, and conditionally, rendered without effect on the plane of His historical existence though continuously operative within the trinitarian relationship (Heb. 1:3). During the Son's earthly sojourn the divine attributes of omniscience, omnipotence and omnipresence remained potential or latent, existent but no longer at the center of His consciousness and in conscious exercise, but undestroyed and capable of manifestation in appropriate circumstances.

The Son of God as one Person possessed of two natures determined according to the eternal counsels of the Godhead to draw upon the attributes inherent in His divine nature only as such was clearly the will of the Father. And although "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hid in Him," He determined during the brief span of His earthly career to employ those treasures only when, where, and in a manner ordained by the Father, as mediated through the Holy Spirit, "I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things" (John 5:19). See also John 8:28; 11:15; Mark 13:32. This is the true meaning of the Kenosis.

(3) The result of the Kenosis is set forth in the phrase, "becoming in the likeness of men." "Becoming" (genomenos) second aorist middle participle of ginomai, like labon denotes simultaneousness and is opposed to the foregoing (huparchon) "being" (v. 6), marking the assumption of the new upon the old.¹⁶ Simultaneously with the "taking of the form of a servant" Christ "was made in the likeness of men." The former phrase speaks of submission, the latter of Incarnation.

On "likeness" (homoiomati) Arndt and Gingrich state: "In the light of what Paul says about Jesus in general it is safe to assert that his use of our word is to bring out both that Jesus in His earthly career was similar to sinful men and yet not absolutely like them...."¹⁷ "Paul's use of such terms as 'likeness' and 'fashion' in his reference to Christ's humanity... is the guarded language of inspiration upon a theme where a misstep may invite confusion."¹⁸

"Of men" (anthropon) is a plural and as such indicates that Christ did not take individual humanity (that is, personality) but rather the nature of universal humanity (Heb. 2:16). The person or ego of Jesus eternally originated from His divine nature. If the human had given rise to Christ's person He would have been a man-God and not a God-man. He would have been anthropotheistic and not theanthropic.¹⁹

(4) The climax of the kenosis is discovered in the words, "and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Some expositors connect these words with the preceding clause, thus: being made in the likeness of men and being found in fashion as a man; a new sentence beginning with He humbled Himself. The general sense is not altered by this change, and there is great force in Mayer's remark that the preceding thought, in the likeness of men, is thus 'emphatically exhausted.' On the other hand, it breaks the connection with the following sentence, which thus enters very abruptly. Notice 'being found.' After He has assumed the conditions of humanity, and men's attention was drawn to Him, they found Him like a man."²⁰ "And" (Kai) seems to introduce a break. The apostle is drawing a twofold picture. First he describes what the Incarnate Christ is in Himself; namely, a true servant, a genuine man and a sinless human. Now he describes what He appeared in the eyes of men. "Being found" (heurtheis) aorist passive participle from heurisko means to find or discover by means of an intense investigation (cf. Luke 6:7; 11:54). The verdict of the

world following a scrutinizing investigation of Christ was that He was "in fashion as a man." "Fashion" (schemati) had to do with "external bearing" as in distinction from "form" (morphe) which has to do with that which is "essential and permanent."²¹ The world of men observed that Christ was a man. "His outward guise was altogether human."²²

This one who is genuine Man, sin apart, is set forth as the supreme example of humility to the Church -- "He humbled Himself" (etapeinosen heautou). Etapeinosen is aorist active from tapeinoō meaning, to make low, humble. The verb corresponds to the adjective tapeinos, meaning low-lying, that which is even or level with the ground. Christ voluntarily placed Himself in a position low enough to be used; yea, even as the ground under our feet. The reflexive pronoun "himself" (heautou) emphasizes that this act of humbling was voluntary and hence of moral value. It was prompted solely by His own infinite love and began with Christ's miraculous conception and extended to His resurrection. "The estate of Christ's humiliation was that low condition, wherein he, for our sakes, emptying Himself of His glory, took upon Him the form of a servant, in His conception and birth, life, death, and after his death until his resurrection."²³

The climactic point in Christ's estate of humiliation is that of the crucifixion--"becoming obedient unto death" (genomenos hupekoos mechri thanatou). "Obedient" (hupekoos) from hupo 'under' and akouo 'to hear' means to subject one's self in obedience to that which he has heard. Christ was an obedient servant (John 6:38). (Cf. John 8:29, 14:31; 15:10; Heb. 5:8; Psa. 40:8.) "Unto" (mechri) is used here as a degree or measure, indicating the extent to which Christ carried out the will of the Father. Perhaps it would be best translated, "as far as," or "to the length of." "The Greek... makes it plain that the Lord did not obey death but obeyed the Father so utterly as even to die."²⁴ The "death" (thanatou) spoken of here includes both the physical and spiritual aspects. It was physical in that it meant the separation of Christ's soul and/or spirit from His body (Luke 23:46). It was spiritual in that it meant the judicial separation of His person from the Father (Matt. 27:46).

"Even the death of the cross" (thanatou de staurou). "Even" (de) brings into prominence the special nature of this death. This was no ordinary death but one of intense shame and suffering (cf. Deut. 21:23; Gal. 3:13).

His Eternal Lordship. "Wherefore also God highly exalted him, and granted unto Him the name which is above every name; that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those beings who are celestial and terrestrial and infernal and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the Glory of God the Father" (2:9-11).

(1) The fact of His exaltation is declared in the words, "Wherefore also God highly exalted him." "Wherefore also" (dio kai) introduces the fact that in consequence of Christ's voluntary humiliation He is now to be exalted by the Father, and that because of His utter renunciation and complete obedience. Kai marks the correspondence between His lowliness and His exaltation by the Father. A second divine paradox is seen here; namely this, that the way up is down--exaltation follows humiliation. (Cf. Matt. 23:12; Luke 14:11). The definite article ho with "God" (Theos) indicates that Deity is not being conceived of as referring qualitatively to essence but rather quantitatively to person--here quite clearly the Father as in distinction from the Son. "Highly exalted" (hyperupsose) is an aorist indicative from hyperupsōo, made up of hyper 'above' and hupsōo 'to exalt above.' The prepositional prefix hyper intensifies the verb; hence, "super-

exalted." The aorist tense points to the resurrection and ascension of our Lord as one great historical event.

(2) The meaning of His exaltation is explained in the words, "and granted" unto Him the name which is above every name." "Granted" (echaristo) is literally 'graciously given.' Although the reading "name" (onoma) is found in various old manuscripts, "the name" (to onoma) supported by Aleph, A, B, C, must have preference. The Name and not a name is meant. There are a number of different theories as to what this name is which is said to be "above every name" (to hyper pan onoma). The major views are as follows: a. Jesus - (Robertson, Alford, Vine, Ellicott); b. Jesus Christ - (Meyer, Vincent); c. Lord - equiv. of O.T. Jehovah - (Kennedy, Muller); d. Jehovah - (Moule); e. Dignity and Honor - (Lightfoot, Johnstone, Greenway, Erdman); f. The "new name" of Rev. 3:12 - (suggested by Vine as one of the views).

In accordance with Hebraic use 'name' is probably best understood here as denoting office, rank, dignity rather than a definite appellation. (Cf. Eph. 1:21; Heb. 1:4) But if a definite name is to be implied, Lord (O.T. equiv. Jehovah) would best fit because of the context (v. 11).

(3) The purpose of His exaltation is set forth in the words, "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow..." In scapethis confession is universal. Every knee, all rational beings whether celestial, terrestrial or infernal are to bow the knee in confession of Jesus Christ as Lord. (The three adjectives, epouranious, epigeios, and katachthonion are best understood as masculine rather than neuter.)

Consider the nature of this confession. Exomologesetai, aorist subjunctive, is from homologeo, to speak the same thing (homos, 'same' and lego, 'to speak'), to assent, agree with. The ek prefixed intensifies the verb giving the sense, 'to openly declare in agreement with.' This confession will be an open declaration of Jesus Christ as Lord in agreement with that which the Father declares concerning the Son. It involves a recognition of the Son as the historical Saviour (Jesus), the mediatorial Servant (Christ); but most strikingly of all, as the eternal Sovereign (Lord - equiv. of O.T. Jehovah).

Finally, observe the purpose of this confession; "Unto the glory of God the Father." "Glory" (doxan) is an ascription of our declaration of what God is. "The whole purpose of the working out of salvation is the glory of God the Father. The end is attained when men yield to His operations and acknowledge Christ as Lord."²⁵ (Cf. Eph. 1:15, 12, 14; John 7:18; 8:50; 17:1).

Another interpretation of the Kenosis should be noted. H. Wheeler Robinson has suggested that "the Kenosis was properly that of the Crucifixion, though naturally involving the Incarnation."²⁶ The main thrust of the argument for this position rests in the supposed identity of Isa. 53:12, "He hath poured out his soul unto death" with that of Phil. 2:7, "He emptied Himself." Again Robinson writes, "In the Hebrew text...we find the very phrases Paul used here..."²⁷ (The verb of Isa. 53:12 in the LXX is paradidome, to hand over, deliver, entrust, give up; cf. John 19:30, "and gave up his spirit.")²⁸

The three participial clauses: "taking the form of a servant," "being made in the likeness of men," and "being found in fashion as a man" are understood as denoting action antecedent to rather than simultaneous with that of the main verb.²⁹ Though grammatically following ekenose,

they form a parenthetical bridge from the matter of Christ's eternal pre-existence to that of His death. The clause, "He emptied Himself" is then taken to be parallel in meaning with "He humbled himself"--both pointing to the crucifixion. Thus "Paul's dominant thought is as usual the death of Christ on the cross, which he is contrasting with that 'equality with God' which was accessible to His heavenly being."³⁰

In the light of this interpretation we might paraphrase the passage somewhat as follows: 'Who being in the form of God, thought not His existing in a manner equal to God a thing to be compulsively held on to, but emptied Himself to death, having taken the form of a servant, and having been made in the likeness of men, and having been found in a fashion as a man. He humbled himself becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.'

Although one cannot deny the linguistic possibility of the foregoing view, the traditional interpretation would appear to be contextually preferable. The mind of Christ which believers are to exercise is only fully seen when we consider the entire span of His earthly life--and that, not as an important parenthetical afterthought but as the major emphasis of the finite verb, "emptied." Nor is this to deny the vital importance of the death of Christ, for it is the triumphal conclusion and climactic manifestation of a truly selfless life.

Paul, it seems, desires to set forth the mind of Christ in a pyramidal perspective. Beginning with the base of the Incarnation, we see Him as one who has voluntarily emptied Himself by taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men. We are then brought to the peak of the pyramid and made to view the climax of the Incarnate Christ's servanthood. "And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." In emphasizing the importance of the substitutionary work of Christ upon the Cross for our sins, we must not minimize the importance of the exemplary life and death of Christ upon the earth as respects our walk.

Finally, it should be noted that to adopt this "Crucifixion view" would not relieve the theologian of the basic Christological problem traditionally seen here--though if adopted it would change our labeling of the problem. We could no longer legitimately speak of it as the kenotic problem.

THE EXHORTATION TO BELIEVERS

The Apostle beseeches Christians to apply the pattern of behavior laid down by Christ to their own lives. This in reality is the major burden of the entire passage. "For hereunto were ye called; because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that ye should follow his steps" (1 Pet. 2:21). Although verse 5 precedes that of which we have already written, we now treat it as psychologically most forceful at this final juncture in our exposition.

The Nature of Application. Phroneite, present active imperative is better supported than phroneistho, present passive imperative. Quite literally we might translate it, "Contemplate this in you which was also in Christ Jesus."

The Frequency of Application. Phroneite is in the present tense; hence, "Keep on thinking or contemplating this." We must continually hold ourselves to this frame of mind or attitude.

Only a continually disciplined mind can produce a consistently disciplined life. As we think so we act.

The Sphere of Application. This is marked by the words "in you" (en humin); that is, in the believer. Some have wrongly taken this "among you."

The Measurement of Application. "Which was also in Christ Jesus" (ho kai en Christoi Iesou). In Christ Jesus believers have, as we have seen, the perfect example of how they should behave; namely, with all humility and self-renunciation, with a view to the welfare of others.

The Meaning of Application. One should compare on this passage First Corinthians 2:16, "But we have the mind of Christ." In this Corinthian passage the Apostle is speaking of what we have by virtue of our position in Him. In the present passage he is exhorting us to allow that which is positional truth to become practical reality. We have the mind of Christ; therefore let us exercise it!

DOCUMENTATION

1. M. R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament* (Zondervan), III:431.
2. Cremer, *Biblico-Theological Lexicon of The New Testament Greek* (Zondervan), 423. Consult for further substantiation: Moulton and Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (Eerdmans), 417; Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians* (Zondervan), 127-133; Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament* (Eerdmans), 261-267.
3. Merrill C. Tenney, *Philippians: The Gospel at Work* (Eerdmans), 55.
4. Arndt and Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (The University of Chicago Press), 845.
5. Herman A. Hoyt, "Philippians" (Unpublished exegesis notes of Grace Theological Seminary, Winona Lake, Ind.), 37. (Mimeographed)
6. Jac. J. Muller, *The Epistles of Paul to the Philippians and to Philemon. The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. Stonehouse (Eerdmans), 78.
7. *Ibid.*, 79-80.
8. *Ibid.*, 79, footnote 5.
9. A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Broadman Press), 1187.
10. Cremer, *op. cit.*, 352.
11. On the Philippian text compare: Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 938; Muller, *op. cit.*, 80-81.
12. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Scribners), II, 1:516.
13. Jac. J. Muller, *op. cit.*, 82.
14. A. B. Bruce, *The Humiliation of Christ* (Eerdmans), 20.
15. Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology* (The Judson Press), 750. For a brilliant discussion see: *The Person of Christ in New Testament Teaching*, Vincent Taylor (Martin Press), 293-294.
16. Lightfoot, *op. cit.*, 112.
17. Arndt and Gingrich, *op. cit.*, 112.
18. Alva J. McClain, "The Doctrine of the Kenosis in Philippians 2:5-8." *The Biblical Review*, XIII, (Oct., 1928), 506 ff.

19. William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* (Zondervan), II, 269.
20. Vincent, *op. cit.*, III, 434. See further: Alford, *The Greek Testament*. III, 168; Kennedy, *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, III, 438; Muller, *op. cit.*, 86.
21. Moulton and Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (Eerdmans). 619.
22. Kennedy, *The Expositor's Greek Testament* (Eerdmans), III, 438.
23. *The Confession of Faith of the Presbyterian Church in the United States Together with the Larger Catechism and the Shorter Catechism* (John Knox Press), 210.
24. H. C. G. Moule, *Philippian Studies* (Pickering and Inglis Ltd.), 94.
25. Kennedy, *op. cit.*, 439.
26. H. Wheeler Robinson, *The Cross in the Old Testament* (The Westminster Press), 105. See Zimmerli and Jeremias, *The Servant of God* (A. R. Allenson, Inc.), 974.
27. *Ibid.*, 105.
28. *Septuaginta id est vetus testamentum graecae iuxta LXX interpretes*, ed. Rahlfs (Privileg. Wurth: Bibelanstalt, Stuttgart), II, 639.
29. A. T. Robertson, *Op. Cit.*, 860. Robertson gives this as the usual signification of the aorist participle though he states that "it must not be forgotten that the aorist part. does not in itself mean antecedent action, either relative or absolute. That is suggested by the context, the natural sequence of events." The aorist participle frequently denotes time simultaneous with the main verb.
30. Robertson, *op. cit.*, 105.