

Matthew Poole's Commentary

[Philippians 2:6](#)

Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:

Who, i.e. relative to Christ Jesus, the eternal Son of God by nature, very God extant with his Father before the beginning, [John 1:1](#) [Galatians 4:4](#) [1 Timothy 3:16](#) [6:14-16](#) [Titus 2:13](#); the express image and character of his Father's person, which implies a peculiar subsistence distinct from the subsistence of his Father, [John 8:42](#) [2 Corinthians 4:4](#) [Colossians 1:15](#) [Hebrews 1:3](#); concerning whom, every word that follows, by reason of the Socinians, and some Lutherans, is to be well weighed.

Being; i.e. subsisting, in opposition to taking or assuming, [Philippians 2:7](#); and therefore doth firmly prove Christ pro-existing in another nature to his so doing, namely, his actual existing of himself in the same essence and glory he had from eternity with the Father, [John 1:1,2](#) [17:5](#) [2 Corinthians 8:9](#) [Revelation 1:4,8,11](#).

In the form of God; to understand which clearly:

1. The word

form, though it may sometimes note somewhat outward, and so infer the glory of Christ's miracles, yet we do not find it any where so used in Scripture: it is true it is once used there for the outward visage, [Mark 16:12](#), which had excelling splendour and beauty, giving occasion to conceive majesty in the person, [Matthew 27:2](#) [2 Peter 1:16](#), (however, his resplendent garments could not be accounted *the form of God*,) yet being, Luke saith, [Luke 24:16](#), the eyes of the persons which saw were holden, that for a time they could not acknowledge him, it argues that the appearance Mark speaks of noted only an accidental form.

2. Whereas the

being or subsisting Paul here speaks of, respects (what the best philosophers in their most usual way of speaking do) the essential form, with the glory of it, since the verbs, in other scriptures of the same origin, signify somewhat inward and not conspicuous, [Romans 12:2](#) [2 Corinthians 3:18](#) [Galatians 4:19](#); especially when there is a cogent reason for it here, considering *the form of God*, in opposition to *the form of a servant* afterward, and in conjunction with equality to God, which implies the same essence and nature, [Isaiah 40:25](#) [46:5](#), it being impossible there should be any proportion or equality between infinite and finite, eternal and temporal, uncreate and create, by nature God and by nature not God, [Galatians 4:4,8](#), unto which the only living and true God will not suffer his glory to be given. Neither indeed can he *deny himself* who is *one*, and besides whom there is no other true God, or God by nature, [Deu 4:35](#) [6:4](#) [2 Timothy 2:13](#); *who only doeth wondrous things*, [Psalm 72:18](#):

for to all Divine operations a Divine power is requisite, which is inseparable from the most simple essence and its properties.

Being, or subsisting,

in the form of God, imports not Christ's appearance in exerting of God's power, but his real and actual existence in the Divine essence, not in accidents, wherein nothing doth subsist: neither the vulgar nor learned do use to say any one doth subsist, but appear, in an outward habit; why then should any conceit the apostle means so? The Gentiles might speak of their gods appearing; but then, even they thought the Deity was one thing, and the habit or figure under which, or in which, it appeared was another [Acts 14:11](#): so that *subsisting in the form* intimates in the nature and essence of God, not barely, but as it were clothed with properties and glory. For the apostle here treats of Christ's condescension, proceeding from his actual existence, as the term wherein he is co-eternal and co-equal to God the Father, before he abated himself with respect unto us. For he says not the form of God was in Christ, (however that might be truly said), that the adversaries might not have occasion to say only there was somewhat in Christ like unto God; but he speaks of that wherein Christ was, viz. *in the form of God*, and so that form is predicated of God, as his essence and nature, and can be no other thing. None can rationally imagine that God was an external figure, wherein Christ was subsisting. For subsistence implies some peculiarity relating to the substance of a certain thing, whence we may conclude the Son to be of the same (not only of like) substance with the Father, considering what significantly follows. He

thought it not, esteemed, counted, held (so the word is used, [Philippians 2:3](#) [3:7,8](#) [1 Thessalonians 5:13](#) [2 Thessalonians 3:15](#) [1 Timothy 1:12](#) [1 Timothy 6:1](#) [Hebrews 10:29](#) [11:26](#)), it not

robbery, it being his right by eternal generation; i.e. he did not judge it any wrong or usurpation, on that account of his *being in the form of God*, to be equal to his Father, being a subsistent in the same nature and essence with him. From openly showing equal majesty with whom he did not for a time abstain, in that he could reckon this robbery, as if such majesty were that which did not agree to his nature, ever presupposing this inherent right, to his great condescension, or abasing himself, which follows as the term to which: or, he resolved for a time not to show himself in that glory which was his own right, but freely condescended to the veiling of it. He did not really forego (neither was it possible he should) any thing of his Divine glory, being the Son of God still, without any robbery or rapine, equal to his Father in power and glory, [John 10:33](#) [1Jo 5:7,20](#).

Thought it not robbery; Paul doth not say, (as the Arians of old would pervert his sense), he robbed not, or snatched not, held not fast equality with God; or, (as the Socinians since), Christ thought not to do this robbery to God, or commit this rape upon

God, so as that he should be equal to him, but acknowledged he had it of the free gift of God, chopping in the adversative particle, *but*, where it really is not: whereas we read not in the sacred text, he *thought not to do this robbery*, but, he *thought it not robbery* to be equal to God; which two are vastly different, even as much as to have the Godhead by usurpation, and to have it by nature. In the former it is, q.d. Christ did not rob or snatch away the equality; in the latter, the equality which Christ had with God, he thought it no robbery; he reputed not the empire he might have always continued in the exercise of, equal with the Father, as a thing usurped, or taken by force (as one doth hold that he hath taken by spoil, making show of it). For when he had said he had subsisted in the form of God, he could (before he condescended) say also, he was equal to God, i.e. the Father, without any robbery, rapine, or usurpation. And if Socinus urge that it is absurd and false in any sense to say, God thought he had robbed, or taken by robbery, the Divine essence; then this contradictory, God thought not he took by robbery the Divine essence, is rational and true; as when it is said, God cannot lie, or God changeth not, as [1 Samuel 15:29](#) [Isaiah 55:8](#) [Malachi 3:6](#). What things are denied of God, do not imply the opposites are affirmed of him. The particle *but*, which follows in its proper place before *made himself of no reputation*, may be fairly joined with this sense. For if Christ should know that by rapine and unjust usurpation he was equal to God, (as likely the attempt to be so was the sin of our first parents, which robbery of theirs Christ came to expiate), he had not emptied himself, nor vouchsafed to abase himself.

To be equal with God; neither is Christ said to be equal to God only in respect of his works, (which yet argue the same cause and principle, [John 5:19,21,23,26,27 10:37](#)), but absolutely, he thought it not robbery to be altogether equal with God, as subsisting in the same nature and essence, the original phrase connoting an exact parity. All the things of Christ (though he chose to have some of them veiled for a time) are equal to God; so some expound the neuter plural emphatically, (as usual amongst the Greeks), to answer the masculine singular foregoing, to express the ineffable sameness of the nature and essence of the Divine subsistents. It may be read: He counted it no robbery that those things which are his own should be equal to God, i.e. the Father; or rather, that he himself should in all things be equal or peer to God. For had Christ been only equal by a delegated power from God, why should the Jews have consulted to kill him, for making himself equal with God? Which with them was all one as to make himself God, [John 5:18 10:33](#). But that he spake of his eternal generation, as owning him for his own Father, with whom he did work miracles, even as the Father did in his own name, by his own power, of himself, for his own glory: neither will the evangelist's saying: *The Son can do nothing of himself*, [John 5:19](#), infer an inequality with the Father, when what he doth is equally perfect in power and glory with the Father's, whence, as son, he hath it by nature. For (looking lower) though every son receives from his father human nature, yet he is not less a man than his father, or his father more a man than he; the son having a being of the same perfection which is naturally in both. However the Father, to whom Christ is in subordination as the Son, and in office a

servant, undertaking the work of mediation, may be said to be greater than the Son, that can only be understood with respect to the order of their working, if we compare texts, [John 14:28](#) **16:13-15**. Neither, when Christ accounted it not robbery to be equal with God, is he said (as the adversaries urge) to be equal to himself, but to another person, viz. God the Father. Things may be equal which are so diverse, that yet they may be one in some common respect wherein they agree: wherefore when Christ is said to be equal with the Father, he is distinguished from him in person and subsistence, yet not in essence, wherein it is his due to be his equal, and therefore one.