

Comments on Philippians 2

Paul encourages the ecclesia at Philippi to have a Christian attitude of service, love and sacrifice (v. 1-5), following the example of Jesus (v. 5-11).

¹ If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, ² Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. ³ Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. ⁴ Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. ⁵ Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:

⁶ Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: ⁷ But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: ⁸ And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. ⁹ Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: ¹⁰ That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; ¹¹ And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

v1-11 The ideal Christian attitude of service, love, and selflessness. Paul holds up Jesus Christ as an example of one who was God (v. 6) and to whom all will bow (v. 9-11), and yet he debased himself to be the servant of all and to die for all (v. 7-8). Thus, his followers ought to be like him (v. 5) and debase themselves, humbly serving one another (v. 1-4).

v4 The KJV is obtuse. Some better translations:

And look out for one another's interests, not just for your own. (GNT)

Do not *merely* look out for your own personal *interests*, but also for the *interests* of others. (NASB)

Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. (RSV)

Paul is saying, "Don't be selfish, love your neighbor."

v6-11 These verses are an antithetical inverted parallelism, centering on the phrase "even the death of the cross" in v. 8, as follows:

⁶ Who, being in the form of God,
thought it not robbery
to be equal with God:

⁷ But made himself of no reputation, and
took upon him the form of a servant, and
was made in the likeness of men:

⁸ And being found in fashion as a man,
he humbled himself, and
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¹¹ And that every tongue should confess that
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Some modern translations recognize the poem and present it as such (e.g., [GNT](#), [ISV](#), [NRSV](#)). N. T. Wright highlights this poem in his [Paul: A Biography](#) (pg. 273) as exceptional.

Paul's presentation of a condescending Lord who lets go of everything made available to Him, to suffer an ignominious death, and then be raised from the dead and exalted with all of His Father's power is an extraordinary theological statement to a relatively new ecclesia likely composed entirely of Gentiles. His purpose in doing so is to contrast the example of Jesus' exceptional humility in mortality against the pride and worldliness of the Judaizers whom Paul is warning the ecclesia against. Naturally, Paul is encouraging the ecclesia to follow Jesus' example in humility, and reject the pride and worldliness of the Judaizers.

The statement of "the death of the cross" as the center of the poem serves to explain Paul's view of the cross. It is not simply "Jesus died for your sins", it is more of "Jesus had all power in heaven and earth as God and let go of it all, humbly subjected Himself to suffer everything the Father gave to Him, suffered a humiliating death and was therefore exalted by His Father."

Using himself as an example in ch. 1, Paul tells the disciples they too must be willing to let go of everything they have and similarly suffer whatever the Father subjects them to, and they too will be exalted for it.

With respect to [theodicy](#), Paul just demolished it. He is saying the humility required to submit ourselves to suffering is a necessary part of discipleship and essential for exaltation.

v6 "thought it not robbery", a poor translation in the KJV. Modern translations render it something like "something to be grasped", in the sense of "clung to" or "grabbed hold of", refusing to let go of it. Jesus willingly relinquished His power as the Lord of Israel to enter mortality and die on the cross.

v8 "even the death of the cross", this form of death was particularly humiliating for a Jew, thus emphasizing how willing Christ was to submit himself to the task at hand. Being killed by Gentiles, in this case Romans, was a humiliation in and of itself and is a common covenant curse, cf. Lev. 26:17. Even worse, being lifted up publicly in death is explicitly a curse, cf. Deut. 21:22-23.

v9-10 These two verses summarize the thesis of Hebr. 1.

v10 "every knee should bow", Paul is quoting Isa. 45:23, and in doing so equates Jesus with the Lord of the Hebrew Bible.

He then paraphrases Isa. 44:23 in stating all Creation will bow to Christ including everything in heaven (Greek: [epouranios](#)), earth (Greek: [epigeios](#)), and hell (Greek: [katachthonios](#)). This forms a merism, an all-inclusive statement of above, at and below; similar to celestial, terrestrial and telectual.

¹² wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. ¹³ For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

¹⁴ Do all things without murmurings and disputings: ¹⁵ That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; ¹⁶ Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain. ¹⁷ Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all. ¹⁸ For the same cause also do ye joy, and rejoice with me.

v12-18 Paul exhorts them to do what he just described in v. 1-11, to have a godly walk by not giving in to complaining and contention, and to be good examples to the worldly people around them (v. 12-15). Then, when they are all united in the afterlife they will rejoice together because Paul did not labor

in vain over them since he poured out his life for the cause of Christ's ecclesia. Thus, he hopes they will all ultimately rejoice together (v. 16-18).

v12 "work out your own salvation", for those who focus solely on the "saved by grace, not by works" this passage contradicts such a narrow approach.

v17 Paul is using the symbolism of a drink offering (cf. Lev. 23:13) being poured out upon the sacrificial altar to represent the possibility that he may end up being executed as a martyr for the Christian cause.

¹⁹ But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheus shortly unto you, that I also may be of good comfort, when I know your state. ²⁰ For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state. ²¹ For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's. ²² But ye know the proof of him, that, as a son with the father, he hath served with me in the gospel. ²³ Him therefore I hope to send presently, so soon as I shall see how it will go with me. ²⁴ But I trust in the Lord that I also myself shall come shortly.

²⁵ Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellowsoldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants. ²⁶ For he longed after you all, and was full of heaviness, because that ye had heard that he had been sick. ²⁷ For indeed he was sick nigh unto death: but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. ²⁸ I sent him therefore the more carefully, that, when ye see him again, ye may rejoice, and that I may be the less sorrowful. ²⁹ Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness; and hold such in reputation: ³⁰ Because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me.

v19-30 Paul says he hopes to send Timothy to them soon because they all know he is completely trustworthy (v, 19-20, 22-23), unlike some other self-promoters within the ecclesia (v. 21). And, he hopes that things turn out so that he himself can visit them soon as well (v. 24).

He is also sending Epaphroditus because he is eager to see them after their concern over his recent illness (v. 25-28). And Paul encourages them to hold men like Epaphroditus in high regard because they are genuine servants of the Lord willing to sacrifice their own lives in His service (v. 29-30).

v21 A reference to the prideful Judaizers, who were apparently the leadership of the ecclesia before they split off. Paul sends Timothy and Epaphroditus to shepherd the ecclesia in his

absence, because there is nobody else there that they can trust. The reader would assume the split in the ecclesia was a relatively recent event and the presence of outside leadership was intended to be a temporary stabilizing force to get them through the internal shakeup.

v25 "fellovsoldier", perhaps [Epaphroditus](#) is a retired Roman centurion who has joined the ecclesia? Or, perhaps the title is just being used figuratively for someone who had been through a lot of suffering, given his grave illness (cf. v. 27). The name literally means "belonging to Aphrodite", but meant "beautiful" or "charming" because of her divine patronage, so clearly a Gentile name. Aside from the little bit commenting on him in this letter, we know nothing about him. Paul uses the identical Greek term for one other person in Philemon 1:2, also a likely Gentile.

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