Philippians was written by Paul to the church at Philippi (1:1). Philippi was a city in Macedonia. During its interesting history, it was the sight of an important battle where Brutus, one of the assassins of Julius Caesar, was defeated by Octavian, who later became Caesar Augustus. This lead to it becoming a Roman colony. Because it was a Roman colony, full citizens of Philippi were also citizens of Rome, which was a great honor and carried great privileges. Paul uses the concept of citizenship in the letter of Philippians to encourage the believers there to remember where their true allegiance and blessings lie (1:27; 3:20). However, not all residents in Philippi would have been full citizens, with all the privileges it contained. In fact, the city, and the church, was quite diverse.

The church was planted by Paul (Acts 16:11–40) during his second missionary journey (Acts 15:36–18:22). The first converts mentioned in the book of Acts were very different people. Lydia was a wealthy merchant, quite possibly providing significant financial resources for Paul and the church, and likely

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hosting the church in her home (Acys 16:15, 40). The Philippian jailer and his family, on the other hand, were not wealthy, and in a city where social standing was important, Lydia’s family and the jailer’s family were likely not in the same social position. Finally, it is quite possible that the slave girl from who Paul exorcised a demon ( Acts 16:16–18), also converted to Christianity. In either case, the church at Philippi was made of people from very different walks of life.

The diversity of the church from its early days provides a reminder that the unity Paul is speaking of throughout the letter is not a unity based in social status, economics, or shared interests; rather, it is a unity grounded in something far more comprehensive: the gospel.

Paul is writing the letter from prison (Philippians 1:12–13), though whether he is writing from Rome, following the events at the end of Acts (Acts 28:30–31), from Caesarea, during his two year imprisonment there (Acts 24:1–27), or from a different location during another imprisonment is uncertain. He wrote the letter in response to both blessings and challenges in the Philippian church. The Philippians had sent Paul a gift through Epaphroditus, which proved to be a great

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blessing to Paul while he was in jail. However, there were also some concerns about the church, as Judaizers were beginning to make inroads into the congregation, teaching that Gentile converts needed to follow the Mosaic Law to be saved. Finally, there were concerns over disunity among members of the church. As a result, Paul wrote the letter of Philippians to thank the Philippians, honor the messenger they had sent, encourage them, and address the concerns that they were facing.⁷

Exegesis

General Outline of the Book:⁸

1:1–2–Greetings
1:3–11–Thanksgiving and Prayer
1:12–2:18–The advance of the gospel
  1:12–26–Paul's imprisonment and the advance of the gospel
    1:12–18a–Paul's imprisonment
    1:18b–26–Paul's expectation of release
  1:27–2:18–The Philippians' lives and the advance of the gospel
    1:27–30–Live worthy of the gospel
2:1–11–Pursue unity in Christ
  2:12–18–Live for Christ before a lost world
  2:19–30–The godly examples of Timothy and Epaphroditus
3:1–21–False teachers and true maturity
  3:1–11–Pursuing Christ rather than false teachers
  3:12–21–Pursuing maturity and the final goal
4:1–9–Final exhortations
4:10–20–Thanksgiving for the Philippians gift
4:21–23–Closing greetings

Outline of the Passage:

Vs. 1–4 contain Paul’s exhortation to the Philippians to pursue unity. Paul bases this on the Philippians’ common experience in Christ (vs. 1) and then helps them understand how it is that they are to pursue unity (vs. 2–4). Vs. 5 is transitional, preparing to give the Philippians an example of how they are to think (the concern of verses 1–4) and then pointing them to Christ (vs. 6–11). Verses 6–11 are doctrinally rich, but their placement in the letter is not meant to simply teach about Christ's nature, but to instruct the Philippians on how to live. In other words, the rich doctrines of Christ’s incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension form the foundation for Paul’s exhortation to the Philippians. The verses fall into two parts: verses 5–8 focus on Christ’s humility, while verses 9–11 focus on his exaltation. Both are important for understanding Paul’s exhortation to the Philippians to pursue unity. It is essential to see that Paul surrounds the call to unity (vs. 2–5) in the doctrine of the person and work of Jesus (vs. 6–11) and the Philippians’ experience of his person and work (vs. 1).

1: The Philippians experience of God’s love in Christ as the basis of their unity
2–4: The call to be unified by pursuing unity, humility, and consideration
5: The call to be unified by looking to Christ
6–11: The example of Christ’s humility and exaltation

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10 Sinclair B. Ferguson, Let’s Study Philippians (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1997), 38.
Commentary:

Philippians 2:1

Verses 1–4 are connected to the previous section through the word “therefore” (“So” in the ESV; untranslated in the 1984 NIV). Paul is continuing his exhortation to pursue lives worthy of the gospel from 1:27.11 1:27–30 was specifically an encouragement to pursue unity, standing firm in one Spirit (1:27), even in the face of opposition (1:28) because of the conviction that suffering is in fact a gracious gift from God (1:29–30). Paul then turns to give a further exhortation about pursuing unity in chapter 2. In the first verse of chapter two and presents four conditions (“If…”) for the Philippians. Paul does not doubt that these are true for the Philippians, but by putting them as conditional statements, they serve to draw the Philippians (and modern readers and hearers) into a personal evaluation: “Are these statements true in my life?” As Christians, the answer to each of them is “Yes!,” because they each focus on spiritual realities experienced by those who have been saved.

“If there is any encouragement in Christ.” Encouragement in Christ is almost certainly a reference to salvation, and could therefore be affirmed by every believer in Philippi (See 1:3–6).12

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“If there is any comfort from love.” The love here is likely Christ’s love, building on the first conditional statement above. The comfort may refer particularly to the comfort that comes in the midst of persecution, as Paul mentioned in 1:29–30.13

“If there is any participation in the Spirit.” While the Greek word for “spirit” can refer to the Holy Spirit or to the human spirit, it is best understood as the Holy Spirit here, as Paul is focusing on the blessings experienced by Christians in salvation. The “fellowship of the Spirit” then is probably the idea that Christians all share in the same Spirit (compare with Ephesians 4:4).14 Peter O’Brien writes, “The apostle takes it as a commonly accepted truth, which can be verified by personal experience, that these believers know this κοινωνία [koinōnia, fellowship] with the Holy Spirit in all his gracious ministry to their hearts and lives.”15

“If there is any affection and sympathy.” While the phrase could refer to the believer’s affection and sympathy for one another, which is certainly important, in keeping with the previous phrases this most likely speaks of affection and sympathy from God, particularly in the preaching of the gospel.16 In this case, it would be the most experiential of the four

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13 Ibid., 171–72.
14 Ibid., 173–74.
15 Ibid., 174.
16 Ibid., 175–76.
phrases, and is fitting to be placed at the end. Believers may be sure of their salvation, the love of Christ, the presence of the Spirit, but struggle with grasping God’s marvelous affection and sympathy for them, words that speak to his compassionate and merciful care for his people (O’Brien translates them as “Tender mercy and compassion”). The first word is splagchnon, a word that refers to the bowels and inner parts, and speaks of deep feelings. Paul has already spoken of Christ’s tender mercy in 1:8, and this word is often used of Jesus in the gospels (Matt 9:36; Mark 1:41; Luke 7:13). The second word, oiktirmos, is a common word and comes from the Greek translation of the Old Testament, almost always speaking of God’s compassion for his people. Indeed, it is one of terms God uses when declaring his character to Moses in Exodus 34:6. By placing this phrase at the end, it prepares the reader and hearer to affirm the statement as being true, regardless of our struggles: there is affection and sympathy from God! Our salvation is evidence that God cares deeply about us.

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17 Ibid., 174.
18 Ibid., 71–72.
19 Ibid., 175.
O’Brien sums up Philippians 2:1 nicely:

The fourfold basis of Paul’s exhortation is grounded in divine certainties: the Philippians know God’s comfort and salvation in Christ. They have experienced the consolation that Christ’s love for them has brought in their sufferings and dangers. Theirs is a participation, a common sharing, in the Holy Spirit, and they have been blessed through his gracious ministry to their hearts and lives. When God began his good work in their midst through the preaching of the gospel, they were recipients of his tender mercies and compassion. Since they have been blessed with such riches in a magnificent way, let them hear Christ’s exhortation through their beloved apostle.\(^{20}\)

**Philippians 2:2–4**

After four “if” statements, Paul gives the concluding, “then” statement. If the four previous statements are true (and Christians should be able to say “yes” to them all), then Paul tells them to complete his joy. The realities of Christ’s work in our lives form the foundation for Paul’s encouraging words for how to live.\(^{21}\) The main verb in vs. 1–4 is “Make complete” in vs. 2. However, Paul’s primary concern is not his own joy, but the Philippians unity, “being of the same mind” (ESV).\(^{22}\) Paul has already mentioned the joy he has in the Philippians because of their salvation (1:3–5). Now he shows his great pastoral care by demonstrating his own affection and sympathy towards them in longing to see the Philippians

\(^{20}\) Ibid., 176.

\(^{21}\) Ferguson, *Philippians*, 38.

grow to maturity (1:9–11). It should be every pastor's and indeed every Christian's joy to see fellow believers (especially those we minister to) grow up in Jesus Christ. Specifically, Paul's concern is for their unity. Unity is one of the major themes in the book of Philippians, and for Paul this is never a generic unity, but a unity in the gospel and a unity for gospel (see the "Theological Frame" section below for more comments on unity in the book of Philippians).

Here Paul gives five ways that the Philippians are to pursue their unity. All five of these phrases are grammatically dependant on Paul's statement to "be of the same mind." Many English translations simplify the grammar by creating a series of short sentences made up of commands. While this generally captures the idea, it takes away from the connection that all of these phrases are directed towards how the Philippians are to actually build unity. Being of one mind involves not just agreeing with each other, but having their lives directed in the same way. It does not just refer to similar beliefs, but a united purpose of life and united relationships. Melick notes that Paul's encouragement is focused on a pursuit of unity (2:2), humility (2:3) and consideration of others (2:4).

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23 O'Brien, Philippians, 177.
24 Ibid., 178.
25 Melick, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, 94–95.
“having the same love”: The first three clauses are very closely related to each other and are focused directly on a pursuit of unity.²⁶ Paul speaks of the “same” love. This most likely refers to the love he just mentioned in 2:1, God’s love in Christ. Paul is therefore encouraging the Philippians to love one another with the same love that they receive from Christ.²⁷ O’Brien notes that in the context, it has a focus on caring for the needs of others in their church.²⁸

“being in full accord”: This clause consists of just a single word, **sympsychoi**. Some commentators join it with the clause that comes after it,²⁹ but it is best understood as making a separate point, even if it is short and related. It is similar to Paul’s command in 1:27 to be of “one spirit” and calls for inner unity among the Philippians.³⁰

“being of one mind”: The wording is almost identical to the earlier statement in verse 2 of “being of the same mind.” The phrase could also be translated as, “thinking one thing.” This “one thing” is the gospel. This entire section in the book of Philippians (1:27–2:18) is focused on the

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²⁶ Ibid., 94.
²⁷ Ibid.
²⁸ O’Brien, Philippians, 178.
³⁰ O’Brien, Philippians, 178–79; Silva, Philippians, 91.
advance of the gospel, and unity in the pursuit of spreading gospel is a major theme of the book of Philippians (1:5, 18, 27; 4:2–3, 15).31

“doing nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility counting others more significant than yourselves”: Unity is pursued not only by having a united purpose, but by having humility.32 The word for “conceit,” kenodoxia, carries with it the idea of worthless glory, that is, pursuing our own glory rather than Christ’s, or even pursuing our own glory rather than the good of others.33 That Christians should pursue humility will form a connection with Christ’s humility in vs. 8. The term for humility, tapeinophrosunē, is related to the word for “thinking” and “considering” used throughout the passage, phroneō. Our pursuit of unity, thinking the same thing, demands that we think properly. Proper thinking is humble thinking: we must be “humble-minded.”34 It may be that there was a specific problem in Philippi that Paul is addressing here. The culture in the city was very socially aligned, with people belonging to their particular social class. Paul might be directing this charge to the Philippians to stop thinking of each other and acting in a way that was based on their social

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31 O’Brien, Philippians, 179.
32 Melick, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, 94; O’Brien, Philippians, 179.
33 O’Brien, Philippians, 180.
class, but instead to focus on their Christian unity.\(^{35}\) What Paul makes clear here is that having the same goal is not enough; Christians must also not be in competition with each other, or think of themselves more highly than each other, as this will detract from the goal of seeing Christ exalted and the lost saved.

“each one looking not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.” This exhortation is similar to the previous one, but has the more active sense of not just thinking highly of others, but acting towards that end, looking to meet their needs. Paul wanted the Christians to be concerned for the overall welfare of their brothers and sisters in Christ.\(^ {36}\) This cannot take place when believers are selfishly focused on their own interests.\(^{37}\) Paul does not forbid believers from addressing needs in their own lives, but rather indicates that they must “look out for” the interests and needs of others, a word that indicates giving solid attention to something.\(^ {38}\) Further, there cannot be picking and choosing of who gets our attention. O’Brien says that Paul here is emphasizing the care of

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\(^{36}\) Melick, *Philippians*, *Colossians*, *Philemon*, 95.


others in such a way that he indicates “each and all.”\textsuperscript{39} No one is to be left out.

**Philippians 2:5**

Paul repeats the main verb from verse 2, \textit{phroneō}. By doing so, he draws our attention to the fact that the “this mind” that they are to pursue is an elaboration of what he said in vs. 2–4. In other words, the rich doctrinal discussion about Jesus Christ that Paul is about to launch into is pointing us to Christ, just as Paul did in vs. 1.\textsuperscript{40} Here Jesus is the model for how we are to pursue unity.\textsuperscript{41} We do not truly have right doctrine if we can discuss the nature of Christ’s deity and incarnation and exaltation as set forth here and yet are not in the process of living out the implications of that doctrine in our lives.\textsuperscript{42} Ferguson writes, “. . . we are in Christ; we are, therefore, to become more and more like Christ.”\textsuperscript{43} The New American Standard Bible and NIV are better here than the ESV. Paul’s encouragement is to think in the same way that Jesus did, with vs. 6-11 demonstrating what Christ’s attitude was.

Some commentators disagree that vs. 5 should be understood as pointing to Christ’s example. Hansen argues that a better translation is, “Think this way among yourselves which also you think in Christ Jesus.” Verses 6–11 are then

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{40} Silva, \textit{Philippians}, 92; O’Brien, \textit{Philippians}, 205.
\textsuperscript{41} Ferguson, \textit{Philippians}, 38.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 40.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 43.
understood not as ethical, but doctrinal.⁴⁴ However, the idea of being forced to separate doctrine from ethics is not helpful and misses Paul's point. Paul is being both doctrinal and ethical, and has included such rich doctrine precisely because it is the foundation for the proper living that Paul is addressing.⁴⁵ Even Hansen recognizes that ultimately the section has an ethical function.⁴⁶ Ferguson makes the same point, noting that however verse 5 is translated, the purpose is to provide a model for the Philippian believers in the rich doctrine of Jesus' incarnation, death, and ascension.⁴⁷

**Philippians 2:6–7**

Verses 6–11 are likely poetic, as the editors of the NIV and HCSB make clear in the way they lay them out. Much discussion of these verses centers on whether they were written by Paul, or whether they are an earlier Christian hymn that Paul is using. Some commentators argue that "It is meaningless to ask whether this is a pre-Pauline or a Pauline topic."⁴⁸ This is probably overstated, since it could have historical value in understanding early Christianity, but the truth of the point is that arguing about the origin of the words obscures the fact that they are

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⁴⁵ Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, 98–99. Melick has a very helpful discussion of the different options and why a separation between ethics and doctrine doesn’t work.
⁴⁶ Hansen, *Philippians*, 121.
⁴⁷ Ferguson, *Philippians*, 43.
inspired by virtue of their inclusion in the canon and that their richness and purpose can be overlooked if one is only interested in their history.\(^{49}\)

The fact that Jesus is in the “form,” of God is a clear statement of his divinity. It parallels the statement in vs. 7 that Jesus took the “form” of a servant. The idea is not focused on what he “looked like,” but that he was truly God, just as he truly became a servant. Verse 6 also speaks of Jesus being “equal” with God, which parallels his “being in the form of God” and further highlights the fact that there is no difference in divinity between God the Father and Jesus, who is God the Son.\(^{50}\)

One of the most challenging interpretations of this section is the meaning of “a thing to be grasped,” which translates the single Greek word *harpagmos*, particularly regarding whether it has a positive or negative meaning. Silva argues that two points are decisive. First, it is contrasted with verse 6, where Jesus empties himself. Second, there is a parallel between verse 6 and verse 3, which both speak of “counting” something. Verse 3 says, “but in humility count others more significant than yourselves,” while verse 6 says that Jesus, “did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.” The idea of verse 6 is that “Christ


refused to act selfishly.” The idea then is that Christ, who is glorious and exalted because he is God, nevertheless acted humbly in setting aside his rights as God by becoming a man in order to serve his creation.

This interpretation also helps in understanding the nuance of the word “being” in vs. 6 (see the NIV, “Who, being in very nature God” or the HCSB, “who, existing in the form of God”). It could be translated “because” or “although.” The latter is preferable, as it fits to context of Paul drawing a comparison between what Christ did not do (act selfishly) and what he did do (humble himself). This is how the ESV and NASB understand the verse: “who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped” (ESV).

“But” in verse 7 draws a strong contrast with verse 6. The main verb in verse 7 is “empty,” kenoō. There is a significant question about what it means for Christ to “empty” himself. A more detailed discussion is found below, in the “Theological Frame” section dealing with the incarnation of Jesus Christ. What is important to note is that Paul does not say that Jesus emptied himself of something. Rather, the emptying is described through what he added to himself, “by taking the form

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51 Silva, Philippians, 103, emphasis original. Ferguson, Philippians, 43; Hendriksen, Philippians, 105–6.
52 O’Brien, Philippians, 214.
53 Hendriksen, Philippians, 103; Ferguson, Philippians, 43; Silva, Philippians, 113; Melick, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, 102; ESV, NASB.
of a servant, being born in the likeness of men” (ESV).\(^{54}\) Jesus did not give up the form of God in taking the form of a slave, but made known the form of God (John 1:1, 18; 14:7–9) in becoming a slave.\(^{55}\) O’Brien describes it this way:

Christ voluntarily chose the path of obedient humiliation that led to his incarnation and death. He who was God and never ceased to be otherwise humbled himself in the incarnation. He emptied himself by taking the form of a slave (thus having no rights whatsoever) and by being born like other human beings. Not that he ‘exchanged the form of God for the form of a slave, but that he manifested the form of God in the form of a slave’ (). Divine equality meant sacrificial self-giving.\(^{56}\)

The verb “taking” expresses the means by which Jesus Christ emptied himself.

Questions about how Jesus Christ, being fully God and fully man, used or did not use divine attributes (such as omnipresence and omnipotence) are likely not touched upon directly here. What Paul makes clear here is twofold: first, Jesus is fully God and became fully man. Second, in becoming man he humbled himself. The glorious and exalted eternal Son of God became a man and a slave!\(^{57}\) Verse 8 will further develop the humility of the Son.

\(^{56}\) Ibid., 216.
\(^{57}\) Ibid., 223–26.
Verse 8 builds on verse 7, giving not just a second example of Christ's emptying, but the ultimate example of his humility: his death on a cross.\textsuperscript{58} The NIV says, “and became obedient to death,” however, this is not to be understood as Jesus obeying death, but rather that he obeyed God fully, even to the point of dying. The ESV, NASB, and HCSB all make this explicit. Ferguson notes that not only is there a contrast between who Jesus is by nature as God and how he humbled himself, but also between the first Adam, who grasped at being like God and in his sin failed and brought death, and the last Adam, who though he was equal with God, nevertheless humbled himself and obeyed unto death, bringing life and righteousness.\textsuperscript{59} It is also important to note that Jesus was not emptied and humbled, but that he emptied \textit{himself} and humbled \textit{himself}.\textsuperscript{60} The actions of the Father and the Son are not at odds with each other. Jesus’ death was both his willing action, as well as the will of the Father, whom Jesus perfectly obeyed.\textsuperscript{61} Finally, Jesus did not just die, but he died on a cross, a punishment that was forbidden to Roman citizens and considered a sign of God's curse by the Jews in accordance with Deuteronomy 21:23.\textsuperscript{62}

\addcontentsline{toc}{section}{References}

\begin{enumerate}
\item Ibid., 227–28.
\item Ferguson, \textit{Philippians}, 44–45.
\item O’Brien, \textit{Philippians}, 228.
\item Ibid., 229–30; Melick, \textit{Philippians, Colossians, Philemon}, 105.
\item Melick, \textit{Philippians, Colossians, Philemon}, 105.
\end{enumerate}
Philippians 2:9–11

Paul builds to the climax of the discussion of Jesus’ example by focusing on his exaltation by God the Father. It is important to remember that verses 9–11 are still related to verse 5. In other words, Paul is both teaching glorious doctrine about Jesus as well as setting him forth as an example. The exaltation of Christ is therefore supposed to form our example of what our mindset should be as we follow Christ in pursuing unity. We can humble ourselves because we trust the Father, looking to Christ, that He will exalt us and that He will one day be glorified with him to our great joy. Thus the Gospel is at the center of our unity—the love of Christ and the example of Christ, both in His humility and exaltation for God’s glory. When we act in faith, trusting God that what is best for my brothers and sisters, to love and humbly serve them, is best for me and brings glory to God, unity is fostered in the body in a remarkable way. Silva makes an important point regarding this fact: God’s gracious glorification of Christ in response to his humility is not an example in encouraging us to earn our salvation; rather, it is an example as believers pursue sanctification and look forward to the promised reward (Philippians 3:13–14).

The first word of vs. 9, “Therefore,” indicates that the exaltation of Jesus is because he humbled himself. This point is made strikingly clear in John 17,
especially verses 1–5. Here in Philippians the focus changes from the actions of Jesus (2:6–8) to the actions of God the Father towards Jesus as a result of his humility (2:9–11). When Paul says that God “exalted” Jesus, he uses a word that occurs only here in the New Testament, and could be translated as “super-exalted” or “highly exalted.” It is not that Jesus is being exalted to a place higher than before the incarnation, but that he is being exalted to his rightful position as Lord, supreme above all creation. This highlights Jesus uniqueness and makes it clear that in becoming man he did not cease to be God.

The “name that is above every name” is most likely “Lord,” as found in verse 11, with all its connotations of authority, including the fact that it represents the divine name, Yahweh. Hendriksen discusses at length the comfort that this must have brought to the Philippians in their suffering. He writes, “It must have imparted sweet comfort to Paul, the prisoner awaiting a verdict! It must have strengthened the Philippians in all their struggles and afflictions. Not the earthly emperor but Jesus Christ is the real Ruler!” All creation will worship his name. Melick says, “Wherever Jesus’ name (and character) has authority, he will be worshiped. Since he is authoritative everywhere, as the next phrase indicates, he will be

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65 Melick, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, 106.
66 Ibid., 105; O’Brien, Philippians, 232–33.
67 Hendriksen, Philippians, 113.
69 Melick, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, 106; Silva, Philippians, 109–111; O’Brien, Philippians, 237–38; Hendriksen, Philippians, 115–16; contra Ferguson, Philippians, 46–47, who suggests it is “savior.”
70 Hendriksen, Philippians, 116, emphasis original.
worshiped everywhere." The fact that every knee will bow before Jesus, including those "under the earth," a reference to both men and demons under God’s judgment and wrath, does not mean that they will submit with remorse. Rather, their submission will be to one who has authority over them despite their desires. Paul is citing Isaiah 45:23 in this verse, which looks forward to God’s ultimate triumph. By applying this text to Jesus, Paul once again makes explicit the fact that Jesus is God.

Finally, in the last clause, Paul highlights the ultimate goal of Christ’s humility and exaltation, and therefore of our own pursuit of unity: that God would be glorified.

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71 Melick, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, 107.
72 Hendriksen, Philippians, 115; Silva, Philippians, 111; O’Brien, Philippians, 243, 245.
73 O’Brien, Philippians, 241–42.
74 Ibid., 250–51; Hendriksen, Philippians, 118.
Theological Frame

Unity

One of the major themes in the book of Philippians as a whole is “unity.” For Paul however, and specifically in Philippians, unity is not generic, but is centered in the gospel. Paul perceives unity as being doctrinal (unity based in the gospel) and missional (unity for the gospel). Note the following passages:

1:5–Partnership in the gospel.
1:7–partakers (co-sharers) of grace, both in imprisonment and defending and confirming the gospel.
1:19–The Philippians shared in Paul’s ministry by praying.
1:27–Standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving for the gospel
1:30–engaged in the same conflict as Paul
2:1–A common experience of God’s salvation
2:2–Have the same mind, love, soul, and purpose
4:2–A plea for unity for sisters who were co-laborers in the gospel, along with all Paul’s fellow workers.

In the passage at hand, Paul has just finished encouraging the Philippians to be committed to the common purpose of the gospel, and now his central concern is that Christians in Philippi would pursue unity on the basis of the gospel, both its reality in their lives and the common purpose they have in advancing it.
The Deity of Jesus

Jesus’ deity is one of the central doctrinal affirmations in Philippians 2:6–11. Verse six stresses that Jesus was God. He was “in the form of God” and had “equality with God” that he did not use selfishly. It further highlights the fact that Jesus had this equality before he was born as a man. That is, he was preexistent. He has always been in the form of God. Hendriksen offers a helpful summary when he writes, “What Paul is saying then, here in Phil. 2:6, is that Christ Jesus had always been (and always continues to be) God by nature, the express image of the Deity. The specific character of the Godhead as this is expressed in all the divine attributes was and is his eternally.”

Ferguson notes that Jesus’ deity is presented in 2:9–11 in three ways: through attributing to Jesus an Old Testament quotation that speaks of God (Isaiah 45:23), by calling Jesus Lord, which was the commonly used word in the Greek Old Testament to translate the divine name Yahweh, and by noting that Jesus’ exaltation to the highest place is to the glory of God (2:11), showing that God’s glory is not diminished when Jesus receives the praise of all creation. Any idea that Jesus is in some measure less than fully divine, such as the teachings of Jehovah’s Witnesses, must be expressly rejected.

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75 Silva, Philippians, 103; Melick, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, 101.
76 Hendriksen, Philippians, 103 n. 82; Melick, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, 101–3.
77 Hendriksen, Philippians, 105, emphasis original.
78 Ferguson, Philippians, 47–48.
The Incarnation of Jesus

Philippians 2:6–11 not only affirms the deity of Christ, but also his humanity. Not only was he “in the form of God,” but he took on “the form of a servant” and was “born in the likeness of men.” Just as the former language highlights the fact that he was truly God, the latter language highlights that he was truly a man. And just as any idea of Jesus being less than God must be rejected, so must any idea that Jesus is somehow less than human, that he only appeared to be human.

This teaching was solidified in church history in the council of Chalcedon, which began in October of 451. The central affirmation of the council of Chalcedon was that Jesus was one person who, as a result of the incarnation, had two natures, divine and human. The council was seeking to deal with heresies that made Christ to have but one nature in some manner. The central statement of the council speaks of,

one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ ... truly God and truly man; ... one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only-begotten, acknowledged in two natures which undergo no confusion, no change, no division, no separation; at no point was the difference between the natures taken away through the union, but rather the property of both natures is preserved and comes together into a single person and a single subsistent being; he is not parted or divided into two persons, but is one and the same only-begotten Son, God, Word, Lord Jesus Christ.⁷⁹

Typically, a Chalcedonian theology has led to interpreting passages of scripture that speak of Jesus’ limitations as referring to limitations in his human nature but

not his divine nature. So Calvin, writing on Matthew 24:36, where Jesus says that the Son does not know the hour of his return, but only the Father, writes,

As to the first objection, that nothing is unknown to God, the answer is easy. For we know that in Christ the two natures were united into one person in such a manner that each retained its own properties; and more especially the Divine nature was in a state of repose, and did not at all exert itself, whenever it was necessary that the human nature should act separately, according to what was peculiar to itself, in discharging the office of Mediator. There would be no impropriety, therefor in saying that Christ, who knew all things, (John 21:17) was ignorant of something in respect of his perception as a man; for otherwise he could not have been liable to grief and anxiety, and could not have been like us, (Hebrews 2:17.)\(^80\)  

A traditional Chalcedonian view of Philippians 2:6–8 understands that Christ empties himself not of his deity, or some aspect of his deity, but by becoming a servant. It is emptying by addition. Ferguson writes, “Lord of glory though he was, he emptied himself not by subtraction of his divine attributes but by the assumption of human nature. He was Immanuel, God truly with us, fully God and yet truly man.”\(^81\)  

A second viewpoint that has arisen, while not rejecting the Chalcedonian creed, nevertheless understands Philippians 2:6–8 differently. This viewpoint is known as the “Kenotic” view, based on Philippians 2:7a, where the word used to speak of Christ “emptying” himself is kenoō. A Kenotic view of Philippians 2:6–8 views


\(^{81}\) Ferguson, *Philippians*, 44.
Christ as emptying himself of something, specifically some form of his divine attributes. So Reicke writes, “Christ renounced the divine fullness and omnipotence that belonged to Him as the Son of God and instead dispossessed Himself (2:7a).”\textsuperscript{82} It is important that for a kenotic understanding of Christianity to be viable, it must hold that Christ both voluntarily empties himself, and that he empties himself of the voluntary use of his attributes. Proponents of this view would understand that Christ can remain fully divine while temporarily and voluntarily setting aside the use of some of his attributes. Whether this is an accurate understanding of the incarnation, however, is likely not a question that can be answered based on Philippians 2.

The challenge in this discussion is that it is possible for legitimate questions to be raised from the Bible that are not specifically addressed in a passage. In other words, there is a really big challenge in understanding how Jesus can be fully God and fully man. Passages such as Matthew 24:36 make it clear that in some way, for at least some period of time, Jesus did not know certain things. And yet on the other hand, passages such as Hebrews 1:3 do not give the impression that Jesus ceased to uphold the universe during his incarnation. In seeking to understand Philippians 2:7, it is probably best to not try to have the passage answer questions it is not trying to answer, and it seems likely that Paul is not fully developing an answer to what it means for Christ to be fully God and fully

\textsuperscript{82} Reicke, “Philippians,” ISBE 3:840.
man in relation to his divine attributes. This does not mean that Philippians 2 should not be used in seeking to formulate a systematic understanding of the incarnation of Jesus, but rather that much care must be taken in how they are used in building the doctrine of the incarnation. What the verses do clearly teach are that Jesus is really, truly, and fully God, and that he became really, truly, and fully man. If one does understand the passage according to a kenotic viewpoint, it is important that it is formulated in such a way so that it does not reject the clear biblical teaching and historic understanding of the dual natures of Jesus Christ.

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Practical Application

Pursue unity based on the gospel. We must recognize that we have been united in Jesus because of what God has done for us. We must also recognize that we have the same goal: fulfilling the Great Commission by seeing the lost saved and the saved built up to maturity. There are plenty of other places we can find unity (social status, ethnicity, musical preferences, age, gender, hobbies, etc.), but those very same issues can also be sources of division. The only true way to pursue unity is to look to the objective realities of who God is, what he has done for us (and continues to do!), and what he has called us to do.

Think deeply about the person and work of Christ! Pursuing unity requires hard work in our relationships, but it also requires having a deep understanding of Jesus, whose life, death, resurrection, and ascension help us understand what kind of lifestyle and mindset we should pursue. Thinking about the example of Christ should not only involve his death, but his confidence that God would exalt him. We can suffer and serve in this life because we know we are following Jesus both in his humiliation and his glorification.

Think deeply about the value of others. We need to think of others from God’s standpoint. People are not competition, problems, or tools, but men and women made in the image of God. Moreover, in the church they are our brothers and sisters in Christ. When we view people first as problems, tools, or competition, we need to repent and return to the Scriptures, reading about the work God has
done on their behalf and praying that our hearts and minds would be transformed so that we can humble ourselves and consider them as greater than ourselves. It should be the growing desire in our hearts to know how we can serve and build others up, rather than thinking of how we can advance ourselves.
**Illustration**

*Unity:*

The 2004 Olympics US Men’s Basketball Team.

In 1992, professional basketball players were first allowed to compete in the Olympics. The US team, made up of some of the greatest players in the league such as Magic Johnson, Larry Bird, Michael Jordan, and Scottie Pippen, easily won the gold medal. Four years later, the US team once again dominated the competition and won the gold medal. In 2000, however, with competition increasing internationally, the US once again won, but without the confidence found in the previous two Olympic games. In 2004, everything changed. Despite having top-notch players such as Dwayne Wade, LeBron James, and Carmelo Anthony, the US lost three games, taking home the bronze medal. Despite having talented players and a common goal of winning, the players did not play as a team effectively. They were not truly knit together and united.

*Humility:*

Social Media and Klout

The importance of self-aggrandization in our culture is evidenced in social media. In particular, it is seen in services such as Klout. Klout is a social media service which measures, ranks, and rewards users for their influence in places like Facebook, Google Plus, Twitter, and LinkedIn. It helps users grow their influence in the social media world by helping them be deliberate in their connections and
rewarding their influence. The very nature of scoring and rewarding influence encourages people to try to be better than others. It helps us to view others as means to elevate our status, rather than as people to be served and cared for.

Consideration of Others:

The Battle of Roberts Ridge

Most modern armies, and in particular special forces units, are committed to the idea of never leaving a man behind. Part of the 5th stanza of the US army ranger creed puts it this way: “I will never leave a fallen comrade to fall into the hands of the enemy. . . .” This idea was exemplified during a battle in Afghanistan in 2002 known formally as the Battle of Takur Ghar, or informally as The Battle of Roberts Ridge. As US helicopters carrying Navy SEALS were conducting a reconnaissance mission on a ridge they believed to be empty, one of the helicopters landed and was immediately hit by a rocket-propelled grenade. As it took off, Petty Officer First Class Neil C. Roberts fell out the back of the open helicopter. The helicopter was forced to crash approximately 7 miles away. A second helicopter landed and offloaded the remaining team in order to attempt to rescue Roberts. One member was immediately killed and two wounded. More forces were called in to aid in the rescue of Roberts. Over the next 12 hours an additional five soldiers were killed. The ridge was eventually secured and Roberts, who had died at some point during the attempted rescue, was
recovered as well. These soldiers risked and gave their lives in order to save one of their comrades. If members of the military lay down their lives for one another, how much more should Christians, united by a greater Lord and greater cause than any country or war, seek to care for and serve one another? (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roberts_Ridge for more details)

The Humanity of Jesus:

No Crying he Makes?

At Christmas we often sing about Jesus lying in a manger without crying: “The cattle are lowing, the Baby awakes, but little Lord Jesus, co crying he makes.” But this threatens to turn our picture of Jesus into someone less than human.  

We need to remember that Jesus was fully human, like us in every way, tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin (Hebrews 2:14–18; 4:14–16)! Susanne C. Umlauf wrote the following (stanzas 1 and 4):

Hast thou been hungry, child of mine?  
I, too, have needed bread;  
For forty days I tasted naught  
Till by thy angels fed.  
Hast thou been thirsty? On the cross  
I suffered thirst for thee;  
I’ve promised to supply thy need,  
My child, come unto me.

When thou art sad and tears fall fast  
My heart goes out to thee,  
For I wept O’er Jerusalem—  
The place so dear to me.

84 Hendriksen, Philippians, 111.
And when I came to Lazarus' tomb
I wept—my heart was sore;
I'll comfort thee when thou dost weep.
Till sorrows all are o'er. \(^{85}\)

\(^{85}\) Susanne C. Umlauf, quoted in ibid., 111–12.
Quotes

“There are several reasons [that unity among Christians is essential to be good witnesses to Jesus]. One is that the gospel is a message of reconciliation and peace with God. How can non-Christians be convinced that Christ reconciles us to God if we are not reconciled to each other? Another is that disunity always has the effect of turning a Christian fellowship in on itself, wasting energy on itself. When we devour ourselves in that way we have little energy left to be shining light and preserving salt in a needy world (Matt. 5:14–16)”\(^{86}\)

“But sometimes those who have deep commitment to the truth develop a short-sightedness about the nature of truth. They assume that to live in the truth, as the New Testament urges us to do, is only a matter of right doctrine. But to live in the truth means more than having our theology right. It means embodying its implications in lives of graciousness and humility.”\(^{87}\)

\(^{86}\) Ferguson, Philippians, 37.
\(^{87}\) Ibid., 40.
Works Cited


