

Exegesis Paper Focused on Philippians 2:1-11

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Introduction

This exegetical paper on Philippians 2:1-11 is an attempt to identify and resolve the key interpretive issues found in this text for the purpose of greater understanding and in turn more effective preaching. To accomplish this end, first the historical and literary contexts were considered. Next, the passage was translated from the original language in order to better connect Paul's flow of ideas. The translation was compared to numerous standard translations in print today¹, with justification provided where the author's translation differed significantly in terms of meaning. Three key interpretive issues were then identified and reasoned through. In the process of working through these interpretive issues, the works of seven different theologians, whose lives span nearly the entire era of church history, were consulted.² The three interpretive issues addressed in the paper, all of which are Christological in nature, are:

1. What did the apostle Paul mean when he said that Christ was "in the form of God" (evn morph/l qeou)?
2. What is the reader to make of Christ not considering "equality with God something to hold onto" (a`rpagmo.n h`gh,sato to. ei=nai i;sa qew)?
3. How is the reader to understand Christ "making Himself of no effect" (e`auto.n evke,nwsen)?

¹ The standard translations consulted include, in no particular order, the King James Version, the New King James Version, the English Standard Version, the New International Version, the New American Standard Bible, the New Living Translation, and Young's Literal Translation.

² The commentators consulted were John Chrysostom, John Calvin, Matthew Poole, Handley C.G. Moule, J.B. Lightfoot, William Hendriksen, and F.F. Bruce.

Having resolved these key interpretive issues, the paper moves on to discuss how the passage is to be preached. The exegetical paper then concludes with final thoughts on Philippians 2:1-11 and the undertaking as a whole.

Historical and Literary Context of Philippians 2:1-11

The apostle Paul's first visit to the Roman colony of Philippi occurred sometime in the early 50s A.D., while he was on his second missionary journey. Although his time there was brief, Paul and his companions (at a minimum, Silas, Timothy, and Luke) saw multiple conversions, baptized two households (those of Lydia and the Philippian jailer), and established a church that most likely met at Lydia's house. This newly found church at Philippi provided support to Paul on his second missionary journey, as well as during his third. As Paul's third missionary journey was coming to a close, the Philippians sent him off with a generous gift for the Jerusalem church. The church at Philippi was the last church Paul visited before that fateful return to Jerusalem. Paul would never make his way back to Macedonia to visit his friends at Philippi, but they had built a relationship filled with prayer and love for one another that would last until the end of Paul's ministry.

At the time of Paul's writing of this epistle, he was imprisoned (most believe in Rome). The beloved church at Philippi had sent Epaphroditus to him with a generous gift. Paul had then returned this affectionate letter to the Philippian saints by the hand of Epaphroditus. Paul knew that his impending trial could very well result in execution, and he was quite aware of that fact as he penned these words. Although Paul could be sentenced to death, as a Roman citizen under the jurisdiction of Roman law, he was not allowed to be crucified. How humbling it must have been to Paul, to know that he was

exempt from the very curse His Lord and Savior Jesus Christ willingly took upon Himself.

Paul, a Jew, was writing to a mostly Gentile church immersed in the culture of a miniature Rome of sorts. With regard to the content of the letter itself, after a typical Pauline greeting, Paul begins his letter by affectionately sharing with the Philippians how thankful and prayerful he is for them. Their relationship was approaching the span of a decade, and Paul expresses the joy he has experienced in his fellowship with the Philippians during this time, and offers great comfort to them. He assures them that he is in chains for the gospel, and that despite all outward appearances, the gospel is being proclaimed boldly as a result of his imprisonment. Paul expresses his desire to visit the Philippians again, and warmly exhorts them to let their manner of living be worthy of the gospel of Christ. Paul then goes on to discuss the passage at hand, urging unity among the Philippian saints. The letter overall is one of joy and great rejoicing, meant to encourage the Philippians and exhort them to unity in Christ. It is Paul's most encouraging letter, which only serves to further demonstrate his affection for the saints in Philippi, given that he wrote it while in chains for Christ.

Translation of Philippians 2:1-11

Below is a verse-by-verse translation of Philippians 2:1-11. The Greek text used was drawn from Bibleworks 6.0's Bibleworks Greek LXX/BNT, and represents the United Bible Societies' Fourth Revised Edition of The Greek New Testament. The translation seeks to connect the flow of ideas from one verse to the next, presenting a sustained and cogent argument for the correct meaning of the passage, and includes

only as much commentary as is necessary in order to do so. Interacting with outside commentaries has been reserved for a later section of the paper. The four textual variants of the passage are addressed as they arise.

^{BGT} **Philippians 2:1** Ei; tij ou=n para,klhsij evn Cristw/l(ei; ti paramu,qion avga,phj(ei; tij koinwni,a pneu,matoj(ei; tij spla,gcna kai. oivktirmoi,(

“Whoever therefore has any encouragement in Christ, whoever has any comfort of love, whoever has any fellowship in the Spirit, whoever has any affection and compassion,”

The first verse, in the Greek, is a verbless clause. The encouragement in Christ, the comfort, the fellowship, the affection and the compassion are the subjects (all nominative nouns), and thus the thrust of the first verse is to gain the attention of the Philippian saints who have experienced any of these. In English, in order to show possession of these characteristics, it is necessary to add “has” in multiple places (i.e. if anyone *has* encouragement), with the present tense seeming to be the most natural choice. To get the correct sense of possession and include everyone that Paul meant to, it is necessary to add “any” to each of the series of phrases also (i.e. if anyone has *any* encouragement), showing that if someone has any part of even one of these benefits in Christ, then what follows applies to him. Additionally, it seems better to render “if anyone” (Ei; tij) as “whoever,” as it is not an abstract thought that Paul is really questioning whether or not somebody actually possesses these things, but rather assuming that each of the Philippians, if they are in Christ, possess them in some measure.

The apostle Paul has spelled out to the Philippian saints exactly who needs to take to heart what he is about to say, and that is anyone that has experienced any of these tangible or intangible benefits in our Lord and Savior Christ Jesus. His intent was clearly to capture the attention of all of the saints of Philippi, and after having done so, to give them further instruction. He is very pastoral and affectionate, appealing to them as one who has personally shared these emotions with them during his second and third missionary journeys, and now continues to share them while writing from his imprisonment.

Philippians 2:2 plhrw,sate, mou th.n cara.n i[na to. auvto. fronh/te(th.n auvth.n avga,phn e;contej(su,myucoi(to. e]n fronou/ntej(

“fulfill my joy that you might think the same, having the same love, united in spirit, of one mind,”

Paul addresses his second person plural, aorist active imperative verbal command (plhrw,sate,) to “fulfill my joy” to the Philippian saints he affectionately appealed to in verse one. The Philippian saints themselves now become the subject of discourse. The nature of the verb Paul uses suggest that he had already experienced great joy on behalf of the Philippians (elsewhere Paul attests to this, for example in Philippians 1:4), but now he is asking them to fill that joy up...to make it complete. Paul’s connects the imperative command to “fulfill his joy” with a present active subjunctive verbal condition (i[na to. auvto. fronh/te...) that the Philippian saints “might think the same...” Paul is saying, in essence, that if the saints at Philippi fulfill his joy, if they do what is necessary to bring about his happiness, they will be united in mind, love, and spirit.

The order of Paul's imperative to the Philippians and the conditions he sets forth after issuing the command appear to be reversed to the English-speaking reader. It seems it would make more sense for Paul to give the commands for them to be of one mind, having the same love, and united in spirit, so that his joy might be complete. Paul, however, has already given them a command in chapter one, verse 27 to "conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel (NAS)." It is easy to see the parallels in the latter half of verses 1:27 and 2:2, as the conditions following the imperative commands both speak of the Philippian saints being of one mind and of one spirit. It is not necessary to try and directly equate the command to "conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ" from 1:27 with "fulfill my joy" from 2:2, although one can readily ascertain that Paul sees them as one and the same. The obvious structural parallelism is enough to show that Paul commonly uses this construction, and the translator can thereby leave the straightforward rendering of verse two intact, and not try to rearrange it in a way that makes more sense to the modern English mind. Paul is simply restating what he's already written in chapter one, verse 27, in order to add emphasis and more fully develop the idea to lead into what will follow.

Philippians 2:3 mhde.n katV evriqei,an mhde. kata. kenodoxi,an avlla. th/l
tapeinofrosu,nhl avllh,louj h`gou,menoi u`pere,contaj e`autw/n(

"neither according to selfishness nor according to deceit, but in humility considering one another as being better than yourselves,"

This verse naturally builds on verse two, further expounding just how the Philippians are to be of the same mind, love, and spirit. Paul uses a strong adversative (avlla.) to contrast the wrong way to do this, which is according to selfishness (evriqei,an) or deceit (kenodoxi,an), with the right way, which is by considering (h`gou,menoi, a present middle participle, masculine nominative plural) one another as being better than (u`pere,contaj, a present active participle, masculine accusative plural) yourselves. The Philippian saints are still the subject, but Paul now introduces as the object “one another,” thus shifting their focus from themselves to each other. Paul’s words aren’t meant to suggest that the Philippian saints believe others are of more innate value to God than themselves, but rather, knowing that all men are created in the image of God, they are to consider others more important than themselves in their daily living. If the Philippians will practice love in this way, they will be of one mind and united in spirit, and they will thus fulfill Paul’s joy in them. With no verbs present, participles again provide the only action in the sentence (h`gou,menoi,, u`pere,contaj). Paul’s writing style seems to rely heavily on participles up to this point, and it will continue to be the case in the rest of the passage.

Philippians 2:4 mh. ta. e`autw/n e[kastoj skopou/ntej avlla. Îkai.Đ ta. e`te,rwn e[kastoiÅ

“not being concerned about yourselves, but each other.”

Paul here is simply expounding on the end of the previous verse. Practically speaking, how are the Philippians to consider one another as being better, or of more value than, themselves? They are to be concerned about their neighbor’s welfare, and not their own. Paul again relies on the participle (skopou/ntej, a present active participle,

masculine nominative plural) to communicate the action of paying attention to one another's needs, with the Philippian saints remaining the subject and each other the object.

Philippians 2:5 Tou/to fronei/te evn u`mi/n o] kai. evn Cristw/l Vlh sou/(

“Have this in mind among you, which was also in Christ Jesus,”

The demonstrative pronoun (Tou/to) to open verse five doesn't look back to what has preceded it, but rather to what Paul is about to say regarding Jesus Christ. In order to convey this idea in English, it seems best to bump it forward in the sentence. The author has inserted it in the thought of the present active imperative, second person plural verbal command to “have in mind” (fronei/te), thus rendering it “have *this* in mind.” Paul commands the Philippian saints to have the mind that their Lord Jesus Christ had, which he develops further in verses six through nine. The latter half of the verse contains no “to be” verb, which it needs in English and has been supplied in the author's translation above. The simple past tense seems to fit best, as what Paul will go on to refer to are Christ's actions in His Incarnation and earthly ministry.

Verse five includes the first textual variant of the passage. Instead of beginning with Tou/to fronei/te, the textual variant begins with Tou/to ga.r fronei/te, sandwiching a conjunction between the demonstrative pronoun Tou/to and the imperative verb fronei/te. The ga.r, taken as “for, then,” or even as “indeed, certainly,” would only add emphasis to what the Philippians are to have in mind among them. There is no significant theological value associated with the absence or presence of the conjunction in this case.

Philippians 2:6 oj] evn morfhl qeou/ u`pa,rcwn ouvc a`rpagmo.n h`gh,sato to.
ei=nai i;sa qew/l(

“who by nature being God, did not consider (Himself) being equal with God something to hold onto,”

This verse contains what the Philippian saints are to have in mind among them, and that is the mind of Christ. Christ, as part of the Godhead, was very God Himself. As such, He had always existed with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, and would always exist with them. Jesus, however, did not consider (h`gh,sato, an aorist middle indicative, third person singular verb) His equality with God something to hold onto. Instead of remaining in the realm of eternal heavenly glory with the God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, He instead left it in order to take on human flesh. In verse three, Paul commanded the Philippian saints to not consider themselves equal with their neighbor, and to look to the needs of others before their own. He now has shown them how Christ is the ultimate example of humility in doing this, and they are to have that in their minds as they interact with and serve each other.

Philippians 2:7 avlla. e`auto.n evke,nwsen morf.h.n dou,lou labw,n(evn
o`moiw,mati avnqrw,pwn geno,menoj\ kai. sch,mati eu`requei.j w`j a;nqrwpoj

“but He made himself of no effect, choosing the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of man; and appearing as a man by nature...”

Paul is now coming down from the abstract thought of Christ not considering Himself to be equal with God, to the practical way in which He demonstrated that. Christ made Himself of no effect (e`auto.n evke,nwsen, an aorist active indicative, third person singular verb), choosing (labw,n, an aorist active participle, masculine nominative

singular) the form of a servant, being born (geno,menoj, an aorist middle participle, masculine nominative singular) in the likeness of man. Paul again relies heavily on participles to communicate the actions of Christ in His humility, which complement the main thrust of the verse communicated in the verb keno,w (to deprive of power, to make of no meaning or effect). Christ made Himself of no effect by becoming a man, and in His humiliation as a man He would serve the needs of His fellow men. Although Christ remained fully God, it is in His Incarnation, His earthly ministry, and ultimately in His death as a man that one can understand how He “did not consider (Himself) being equal with God something to hold onto.” Paul’s next thought begins at the end of verse seven and continues into verse eight. “And appearing (eu`requei.j, an aorist passive participle, masculine nominative singular) as a man by nature...”

Philippians 2:8 evtapei,nwsen e`auto.n geno,menoj u`ph,kooj me,cri qana,tou(qana,tou de. staurou/Å

“He humbled himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even death by the cross.”

In verse seven, Paul set the stage for what Christ would do after He had taken on human flesh. Paul now tells us that Christ humbled (evtapei,nwsen, an aorist active indicative, third person singular verb) Himself, suffering humiliation as God in human flesh, and He did it willingly. And if that were not enough, He did it by becoming (geno,menoj, an aorist middle participle, masculine nominative singular) obedient to death, even the excruciating death of crucifixion on a cross. The apostle Paul, as a Roman citizen, could not even be subjected to the kind of death that His Lord willingly endured. No form of death, either in the eyes of a Roman or in the eyes of a Jew, was

more despised than death by the cross. No doubt Paul's mind comprehended this as he humbly wrote this letter to his beloved Philippian saints.

Philippians 2:9 dio. kai. o` qeo.j auvto.n u`peru,ywsen kai. evcari,sato auvtw/l to. o;noma to. u`pe.r pa/n o;noma(

“For this reason God raised Him to the highest position and granted Him the name above every name,”

God, because of Christ willingly going to the cross, raised (u`peru,ywsen, an aorist active indicative, third person singular verb) Him to the highest possible position. Further, God granted (evcari,sato, an aorist middle indicative, third person singular deponent verb) His Son the name that is exalted above all names, that of the Lord God Himself.

Verse nine includes the passage's second textual variant. The article (to.) preceding the neuter accusative singular noun “name” (o;noma) is not present in some versions. There is no significant theological value associated with the absence or presence of the Greek article in this case.

Philippians 2:10 i[na evn tw/l ovno,mati Vlhsou/ pa/n go,nu ka,myhl evpourani,wn kai. evpigei,wn kai. katacqoni,wn

“that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth...”

As significant as the highly exalted name that God granted to His Son is, that is not the subject of this verse (although it will be in the following verse). The subject is every knee, and the action of every knee in God's creation with regard to the name of Jesus is that it should bow (ka,myh, an aorist active subjunctive, third person singular

verb). Although Paul uses the subjunctive, the force here is that every knee will in fact bow to King Jesus as Lord. There is no degree of uncertainty in Paul's mind. It would certainly be easy to see the name "Jesus" itself being the name that God the Father highly exalted and granted to His Son. It is significant that the text reveals it is the "name of Jesus," and not the "name Jesus." God granted the Son His own Name, that of Lord, as will be discussed in verse eleven.

Philippians 2:11 kai. pa/sa glw/ssa evxomologh,shtai o[ti ku,rioj Vlh sou/j Cristo.j eivj do,xan qeou/ patro,j

"and every tongue should confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Not only should every knee bow at the name of Jesus, but every tongue should confess (evxomologh,shtai, an aorist middle subjunctive, third person singular verb). Again, Paul uses the subjunctive but the force of the passage is not that it might happen, but it will indeed happen. God the Father has so highly exalted Jesus as Lord that at the last day, every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess Him as Lord, and all unto the glory of God the Father.

The string of nominative nouns at the end of the sentence (ku,rioj Vlh sou/j Cristo.j) has been translated as "Jesus Christ is Lord." It is the name of Jesus as Lord that has been exalted, and it is the name of the Lord that every tongue will one day confess. The language here is undoubtedly eschatological in scope. At Christ's second coming all will confess King Jesus as Lord.

This verse contains the last two textual variants of the passage. Skipping the third for now, the fourth (and final) textual variant of the passage has to do with the string of nominative nouns (ku,rioj Vlhsou/j Cristo.j) in the middle of the verse. Other manuscripts attest to three other variations in this chain of nouns, with one saying (ku,rioj Vlhsou/j), another (ku,rioj Vlhsou/j ku,rioj), and yet another (Cristo.j ku,rioj). All of these contain the noun Lord (ku,rioj), which is the name that God has granted to His Son and that all of creation will confess Jesus as upon His return. None of the variants alter the meaning of the text in an appreciable manner.

The other textual variant in this text is of a more significant nature. The verb evxomologh,shtai comes from the root evxomologe,w. The basic nature of the verb conveys the idea of agreeing or consenting. Here, it is used as an aorist middle subjunctive, third person singular verb. As a middle, the meaning shifts a bit from agreeing or consenting to confessing, admitting, acknowledging, praising, and/or thanking. So, Paul is saying "...and every tongue might confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord..." Paul has used the subjunctive here, although there seems to be little if any doubt in his mind that at the last day, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess Jesus Christ as Lord.

A significant number of manuscripts, however, attest to the verb evxomologh,setai, a future middle indicative, third person singular. This removes even the possibility of any uncertainty in Paul's thought, as "...every tongue *will* confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord..." Although it is tempting to embrace the verb as a future middle indicative, before doing so it is prudent to ask the following question. Is there any

difference in Paul's thought between every knee bowing and every tongue confessing to King Jesus?

Given there is no textual variant on the former, the reader can be confident that Paul is comfortable using the subjunctive to describe as certain the bowing of every knee to Christ as Lord. In view of this, there seems to be no necessity to adopt the latter phrase as a future middle indicative instead of as an aorist middle subjunctive. Nothing seems to be gained, as clearly Paul is using the subjunctive in a way that is all but identical to the future indicative. That does not mean, of course, that the future middle indicative could not have been Paul's original choice. But the literary and theological differences between the two, in this case, seem to be null and void. That being said, the author agrees with the United Bible Societies' decision in favor of the aorist middle subjunctive. It is more heavily attested to in the manuscripts. Literarily, it also just seems to make sense that Paul would use the subjunctive for both every knee bowing and every tongue confessing, as the thoughts are sequential in nature and parallel in thought.

Final Translation of Philippians 2:1-11 Compared to Today's Standard Translations

This section includes the translation in its entirety and seeks to compare it to various standard translations. The translations considered are, in no particular order, the King James Version (KJV), the New King James Version (NKJV), the English Standard Version (ESV), the New International Version (NIV), the New American Standard Bible (NASB), the New Living Translation (NLT), and Young's Literal Translation (YLT). Any significant differences from these translations are addressed in order to justify the

translations rendered above. The final translation of Philippians 2:1-11 (along with the Greek text it is based upon) is below:

Philippians 2:1-11 ^{BGT} Ei; tij ou=n para,klhsij evn Cristw/l(ei; ti paramu,qion avga,phj(ei; tij koinwni,a pneu,matoj(ei; tij spla,gcna kai. oivktirmoi,(² plhrw,sate, mou th.n cara.n i[na to. auvto. fronh/te(th.n auvth.n avga,phn e;contej(su,myucoi(to. e]n fronou/ntej(³ mhde.n katV evriqei,an mhde. kata. kenodoxi,an avlla. th/l tapeinofrosu,nhl avllh,louj h`gou,menoi u`pere,contaj e`autw/n(⁴ mh. ta. e`autw/n e[kastoj skopou/ntej avlla. Îkai.Đ ta. e`te,rwn e[kastoiÅ ⁵ Tou/to fronei/te evn u`mi/n o] kai. evn Cristw/l Vlh sou/(⁶ o]j evn morf h/l qeou/ u`pa,rcwn ouvc a`rpagmo.n h`gh,sato to. ei=nai i;sa qew/l(⁷ avlla. e`auto.n evke,nwsen morf h.n dou,lou labw,n(evn o`moi w,mati avnqrw,pwn geno,menoj\ kai. sch,mati eu`requei.j w`j a;nqrwpoj ⁸ evtapei,nwsen e`auto.n geno,menoj u`ph,kooj me,cri qana,tou(qana,tou de. staurou/Å ⁹ dio. kai. o` qeo.j auvto.n u`peru,ywsen kai. evcari,sato auvtw/l to. o;noma to. u`pe.r pa/n o;noma(¹⁰ i[na evn tw/l ovno,mati Vlh sou/ pa/n go,nu ka,myhl evpourani,wn kai. evpigei,wn kai. katacqoni,wn ¹¹ kai. pa/sa glw/ssa evxomologh,shtai o[ti ku,rioj Vlh sou/j Cristo.j eivj do,xan qeou/ patro,jÅ

¹Whoever therefore has any encouragement in Christ, whoever has any comfort of love, whoever has any fellowship in the Spirit, whoever has any affection and compassion, ²fulfill my joy that you might think the same, having the same love, united in spirit, of one mind, ³neither according to selfishness nor according to deceit, but in humility considering one another as being better than yourselves, ⁴not being concerned about yourselves, but each other.

⁵Have this in mind among you, which was also in Christ Jesus: ⁶who by nature being God, did not consider being equal with God something to hold onto, ⁷but He made himself of no effect, choosing the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of man; and appearing as a man by nature, ⁸He humbled himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even death by the cross. ⁹For this reason God raised Him to the highest position and granted Him the name above every name, ¹⁰that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue should confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Each of the standard translations listed above (save Young's Literal Translation) seems to weaken Paul's exhortation to the Philippian saints in verse four. Verse four includes Îkai.Đ in the United Bible Societies Fourth Revised Edition text, with the

brackets signifying that the presence or position of the conjunction kai in this text being regarded as disputed. Instead of rendering the latter half of the verse as something like “look to the needs of each other,” the translations have chosen instead to imply that the Philippians are to “look *also* to the needs of each other.” Given that the kai is disputed and may very well have been included in Paul’s autograph, at first glance this rendering seems feasible. The first half of the verse, however, does not contain the thought of “not looking *only* upon your own needs,” the sense the translations have chosen in order to contrast it with their rendering of the second half of the verse, but rather just “not looking upon your own needs.” In other words, was Paul saying that the Philippian saints were to take care of their own needs and also meet the needs of others, or to trust God to meet their needs and to be used by God as His instruments to meet the needs of others? The difference is slight, but the author thinks the latter is more in line with Paul’s line of thought here in this passage. Christ did not consider His own needs when He became man and willingly went to the Cross, but rather the will of the Father and the needs of others.

In verse six, the translations are split between the notion of “not counting equality with God a thing to be grasped” (ESV, NASB, NLT) and “thought it not robbery to be equal with God” (YLT, KJV, NKJV). The NIV takes a different approach with “did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage.” Although the idea of equality with God will be discussed more in the section on interpretive issues, briefly, the idea Paul is conveying seems to be one of Christ leaving what He had with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit in heaven. With the Incarnation of Christ the main thrust of verse seven, what Paul seems to be getting at is Christ’s willingness to

not hold onto His equality with God, to not grasp after it so tightly that He is unwilling to mask it in His humiliation. The notion of thinking it “not robbery to be equal with God” can aptly be applied to Christ generally and supported by various Scriptures, but it does not seem to be as directly tied to the Incarnation. The NIV’s rendering, although similar to the ESV, NASB, and NLT, also seems to miss the mark with regard to tying the thought to the Incarnation of Christ present in the verse that follows.

With regard to verse seven, of all the translations, only the New Living Translation retains the last clause in verse seven itself. The other six translations have bumped it forward into verse eight. The author has retained the clause in verse seven.

The New American Standard Bible chooses to render verse ten as “so that at the name of Jesus every knee *will* bow,” and the parallel clause in verse eleven as “and that every tongue *will* confess.” Although certainly a valid rendering of verse eleven, in verse ten it seems forced to express the subjunctive in this way, as well as unnecessary. The thoughtful reader understands full well that Paul is not expressing an event that is at all improbable, but rather a certainty that is as fixed in his mind as the return of Christ Himself. The author sees no need to render the subjunctive conditions in verses ten and eleven in a future middle imperative sense.

Significant Interpretive Issues in Philippians 2:1-11

Although several interpretive issues arise upon a careful study of Philippians 2:1-11, the most significant are found in verses six and seven. Not surprisingly, they are all Christological in nature. In verse six, what did the apostle Paul mean when he said that Christ was “in the form of God” (evn morphē/ qeou)? Also in verse six, what is the

reader to make of Christ not considering “equality with God something to hold onto” (a`rpagmo.n h`gh,sato to. ei=nai i;sa qew)? And lastly, in verse seven, how is the reader to understand Christ “making Himself of no effect” (e`auto.n evke,nwsen)? Seven different theologians, spanning nearly the entire era of church history, will be referenced in the paragraphs below as the author attempts to address these significant Christological questions.

evn morph/l qeou. What exactly did the apostle Paul mean in verse six when he said that Christ was “in the form of God” (evn morph/l qeou)? Upon closer study of the Greek word morph/l, one finds that it can be used to represent either the form or nature of what something truly is (its essential nature), or merely its outward appearance. So which did Paul mean here? Was Christ truly God in His essential form, or did He just outwardly appear to be God?

It is significant to look at the participle that Paul used in connection with this phrase, that of u`pa,rcwn (a present active participle, masculine nominative singular). u`pa,rcwn comes from the verb u`pa,rcw, meaning “to be” or “to exist.” In the phrase o]] evn morph/l qeou/ u`pa,rcwn, which in the author’s translation is rendered as “who by nature being God,” Paul employed the present tense participle to convey the notion of continuous being. So, whatever is meant by this “form” or “nature” of God (morph/l qeou), it is attributed to Jesus Christ as what He has always been and still was at the time of Paul’s writing. Paul leaves no possibility to conceive of Christ as ever being anything less than in the “form” or “nature” of God, either in His pre-incarnate state or while He was incarnate.

The question still remains, then, is this meant to be understood as Christ's essential nature, or merely outward appearance? The testimony of Christ Himself quickly answers this inquiry. Claims such as "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30, NASB), "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works" (John 14:10, NASB), and, "that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one" (John 17:21-22, NASB), clearly demonstrate that Christ thought of Himself as of the same essential nature or substance of God the Father. Paul, if he is faithful to Christ's own testimony, has no choice but to word his epistle to the Philippians in a manner consistent with this understanding of Christ's divine nature. There is no room to casually assert that Christ was merely the outward appearance of God the Father. Orthodox commentators from the patristic period up until the modern day are in consistent agreement on this, as is shown below.

J.B. Lightfoot, in his commentary *St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians*, asserts that Paul's use of *morph* here "implies not the external accidents but the essential attributes."³ He further explains that it "must apply to the attributes of the Godhead. In other words, it is used in a sense substantially the same which it bears in Greek philosophy."⁴ Handley C.G. Moule, in his *Philippian Studies*, defines *morph* as "*reality in manifestation*." He translates the phrase in verse six as "who in God's manifested Being

³ J.B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zoncervan Publishing House, 1953), 110.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 132.

subsisting,' *seeming* Divine, because He was divine, in the full sense of Deity."⁵ William Hendriksen, in his *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Philippians*, similarly comments that Paul's use of *morfh* in Philippians 2:6 "*refers to the inner, essential, and abiding nature of a person or thing.*"⁶ He sums up what Paul is saying with "*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.*"⁷

John Calvin, in his commentary on Philippians, similarly remarks that "the *form of God* means here his majesty...Christ, then, before the creation of the world, was in the form of God, because from the beginning he had his glory with the Father, as he says in John xvii. 5." He goes on to say that "being such as he (Christ) was, he could, without doing wrong to any one, *shew himself equal with God*; but he did not manifest himself to be what he really was, nor did he openly assume in the view of men what belonged to him by right."⁸

Matthew Poole, a post-Reformation voice in England, concurs with the above theologians in saying that "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."⁹ He further says that "*being, or subsisting, in the form of God*, imports not

⁵ Handley C. G. Moule, *Philippian Studies: Lessons in Faith and Love* (London, England: Pickering & Inglis), 92.

⁶ William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Philippians* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1953), 104.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁸ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1979), 55.

⁹ Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible, Volume III: Matthew-Revelation* (McLean, Virginia: MacDonald Publishing Company), 687.

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."¹⁰ According to Poole, "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,)...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."¹¹ F.F. Bruce words only echo those of Poole and others when he said that "possession of the form implies participation in the essence."¹²

John Chrysostom's famous sermons from the late fourth century only strengthen the reasoning and logic presented by the theologians listed above. In preaching on Philippians 2:5-8, with regard to *morfh/l qeou*, he said that "the form of God, is the nature of God."¹³ He expounds on the thought later in the sermon when he says that "*the form of a servant* means, Man by nature, wherefore *the form of God* means, God by nature."¹⁴ Although the Greek word *morfh* can, in certain contexts, signify merely external appearance, the overwhelming evidence from Scripture and the near-unanimous opinion of orthodox theologians throughout the ages is that Christ was indeed in the form of God, as very God Himself.

¹⁰ Ibid., 688.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² F.F. Bruce, *Philippians: A Good News Commentary* (San Francisco, California: Harper & Row Publishers, 1983), 45.

¹³ John Henry Parker, ed., *The Homilies of S. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the Epistles of St. Paul the Apostle to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians* (Oxford, England: J. G. F. and J. Rivington, MDCCCXLIII), 62.

¹⁴ Ibid., 63.

a`rpagmo.n h`gh,sato to. ei=nai i;sa qew. So, given that Christ was indeed God in form, what is the reader to make of Christ not considering “equality with God something to hold onto” (a`rpagmo.n h`gh,sato to. ei=nai i;sa qew)? How can Christ, who is by very nature God and yet distinct from God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, still be equal with God? Poole aptly states that “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 equal, and therefore one.”¹⁵ Thus, the previous thought of Christ “being in the form of God” (morph/l qeou) and the current consideration of His “equality with God” (to. ei=nai i;sa qew) come in perfect harmony, the latter naturally building on the former.

What then is the reader to make of Christ not holding onto this equality, by Christ not grasping after it? How is one meant to understand a`rpagmo.n h`gh,sato? Translations range from “thought it not robbery” (KJV) to “did not regard...something to be grasped” (NASB) to my rendering above, “did not consider...something to hold onto.” Calvin, arguing from the notion of “thought it not robbery,” says that “there would have been no wrong done though he had shewn himself to be *equal with God*.”¹⁶ Furthermore, he adds that “where can there be *equality with God* without *robbery*, excepting only where there is the essence of God?” To Calvin, Christ’s “eternal divinity is clearly set forth in these words.”¹⁷ Poole’s train of thought only echoes Calvin’s, as he

¹⁵ Poole, 688.

¹⁶ Calvin, 55.

¹⁷ Ibid., 56.

pushes the assertion that Christ subsisted in the same nature and essence of the Father, and can therefore be God by nature, and not by usurpation.¹⁸

Hendriksen and Lightfoot, however, consider both the ideas of “thought it not robbery,” and of “did not consider...something to hold onto,” and each side with the latter. Hendriksen asks if the noun *ἀρπαγμοῦ* should “be taken in the active sense – an act or robbery or usurpation – or in the passive sense – a *prize* to be held on to, a treasure to be clutched? Is it *an action* or is it *a thing*?”¹⁹ Both he and Lightfoot posit that the majority of the Latin fathers take it in its active sense, while the preponderance of the Greek fathers in its passive sense.

Hendriksen sees conflict in taking it in its active sense (robbery). To him, “this meaning is in conflict with *the words that precede* (see Phil. 2:1-4). The apostle has just exhorted the Philippians to be humble and not always to be insisting on their own rights but to be thoughtful of others. Surely, in such a context the idea that Christ *asserted* his rights – ‘thought it not robbery to be equal with God’ – does not fit.”²⁰ As the author argued above (see section on “Final Translation of Philippians 2:1-11 Compared to Today’s Standard Translations”), Hendriksen also thinks the “thought it not robbery” rendering “does not do justice to *the words that follow*. The conjunction *but* suggests a direct contrast. The demand is satisfied only when the clause ‘he emptied himself’ is preceded by something like ‘he did not cling to,’ or as the text actually reads, ‘He did not count his existence-in-a-manner-equal-to-God something to cling to.’”²¹

¹⁸ Poole, 688.

¹⁹ Hendriksen, 129.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Hendriksen, 129.

Lightfoot similarly considers the different senses that may be assigned to the word ἀπαγορεύω. “In the one the prominent idea is the *assertion*, in the other the *surrender*, of privileges. The one lays stress on the *majesty*, the other on the *humility* of the Lord.”²² Lightfoot looks at the clauses that immediately precede and follow οὐκ ἀπαγορεύω ἡμῶν. To Lightfoot, a “thought it not robbery” rendering “neglects the foregoing words. For the Apostle is there enforcing the duty of humility, and when he adds ‘Have the mind which was in Jesus Christ,’ we expect this appeal to our great Example to be followed immediately by a reference, not to the right which He *claimed*, but to the dignity which He *renounced*.”²³ To Lightfoot, “the act expressed by οὐκ ἀπαγορεύω ἡμῶν is brought forward as an example of humility, and can only be regarded as such, if the expression τοῦ ἐνανθίμου refers to rights which it was an act of condescension to waive.”²⁴

John Chrysostom proclaimed from his pulpit that “this equality with God He had not by robbery, by as His own by nature.”²⁵ His preached word is again consistent with the reasoned writings of orthodox theologians throughout the ages. Christ was, in His essence, equal with God, yet He did not consider that something to hold onto, but willingly gave it up.

ἐὰν αὐτὸν ἐκένωσεν. The last significant interpretive issue to be discussed is how exactly is the reader to understand Christ “making Himself of no effect” (ἐὰν αὐτὸν ἐκένωσεν)? What does it mean that Christ emptied Himself?

²² Lightfoot, 133.

²³ Ibid., 134.

²⁴ Ibid., 137.

²⁵ Parker, 77.

Christ made Himself of no effect by “taking the form of a man” (morph.n dou,lou labw,n). A careful reading of the text nowhere suggests that Christ traded His nature as God for the nature of a man. It says that Christ, who is God, took on the form of a man in addition to His being God. Calvin comments that “Christ, indeed, could not divest himself of Godhead; but he kept it concealed for a time, that it might not be seen, under the weakness of the flesh. Hence he laid aside his glory in the view of men, not by lessening it, but by concealing it.”²⁶

Poole agrees that Christ’s divinity was veiled by His human flesh, but also explains Paul’s use of e`auto.n evke,nwsen as a matter of comparison. Poole wrote, “considering the disproportion betwixt the creature and the Creator, he, in the eyes of those amongst whom he tabernacled, appeared to have nothing of reputation left him.” Poole goes on to explain that “it is not said the *form of God* was cut off, or did empty itself; but he who did suffer *in* the form of God, made himself of no account, did empty, abase, or abase himself...he lessened himself for the salvation of his people.” With regard to the nature of this self-abasement, Poole says that “his condescension was free, and unconstrained with the consent of his Father.”²⁷ Poole summarizes his thoughts later when he says that Christ “emptied himself, not by ceasing to be what he was before, equal with his Father, or laying down the essential form of God, according to which he was equal to God; but by taking *the form of a servant*, wherein he was like to men, i.e. assuming something to himself he had not before, viz. the human nature.”²⁸

²⁶ Calvin, 56-57.

²⁷ Poole, 688.

²⁸ Poole, 689.

Lightfoot concurs with both Calvin and Poole, stating that *ἐκένωσεν* should be understood to mean that “He divested Himself, not of His divine nature, for this was impossible, but of the glories, the prerogatives, of the Deity. This He did by taking upon Him the form of a servant.” Lightfoot sees Christ’s “voluntary, self-imposed” act of humility in taking on human flesh as that which “emptied, stripped Himself of the insignia of majesty.”²⁹ Hendriksen’s thoughts are along similar lines, albeit more detailed.

According to Hendriksen, “Christ emptied Himself of his existence-in-a-manner-equal-to-God.”³⁰ The effect of this, to Hendriksen, was fourfold in that Christ “gave up his favorable relation to the divine law, he gave up his riches, he gave up his heavenly glory, and he gave up his independent exercise of authority.”³¹ Bruce’s explanation does not break rank when he says that “he ‘emptied himself’ or ‘divested himself’ specifically in that he took the nature of a servant... This does not mean that he *exchanged* the nature (or form) of God for the nature (or form) of a servant: it means that he displayed the nature (or form) of God *in* the nature (or form) of a servant.”

Chrysostom’s words to his eager hearers are of the same substance as Calvin, Poole, Lightfoot, and the like. Let his exhortations ring still today, how “the Son of God feared not to descend from His right, for he thought not Deity a matter of robbery, He was not afraid that any would strip Him of that nature or that right, wherefore He laid it aside, being confident that He should take it up again. He hid it, knowing that He was

²⁹ Lightfoot, 112.

³⁰ Hendriksen, 107.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 107-108.

not made inferior by so doing.”³² He goes on to say, “For lest when you hear that He emptied Himself, you should think that some change, and degeneracy, and loss is here; he says, whilst He remained what He was, He took that which He was not, and being made flesh He remained God, in that He was the Word.”³³ Building further, the thought continues with “The Word who was God did not degenerate into man, nor was His substance changed, but he appeared as a man; not to delude us with a phantom, but to instruct us in humility.”³⁴ Chrysostom’s sermons on Philippians 2:1-11 repeatedly address a host of Christological controversies, with the excerpt below serving as just one final example.

*“Being in the form of God, it is written, He thought it not robbery to be equal with God. We do not find ‘He became,’ ‘He took,’ concerning His divinity, but He emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; concerning His humanity we find He took, He became. He became the latter. He took the latter. He was the former. Let us not then confound nor divide the natures. There is one God, there is one Christ, the Son of God; when I say ‘One,’ I mean a union, not a confusion, the one Nature did not degenerate into the other, but was united with it.”*³⁵

Christ, as has been shown, made Himself of no effect by taking the form of a man. He was fully God, and thereby equal with God, yet He did not grasp onto that nature, but also took on human flesh. The difference between the Creator and creature being infinite, it is readily understood what Paul meant when He said that Christ emptied Himself (ε`αυτο.ν εϋκε,νωσεν).

³² Parker, 76.

³³ Ibid., 79-80.

³⁴ Ibid., 80.

³⁵ Ibid.

Preaching Philippians 2:1-11

How is the minister of God best suited to preach Paul's message from Philippians 2:1-11? The apostle made an affectionate appeal for unity among the Philippian saints. If they were to achieve this unity, then they must do it by imitating the example Christ Jesus Himself set before them, which was one of humility. The minister of God is best served by delivering the message in much the same way the apostle Paul did.

The minister should appeal to his hearers that are in Christ, to all who have experienced His saving work in their lives, and entreat them to strive for unity among the Body of Christ (verses one and two). He should then instruct them how that unity is to be promoted and maintained, which is through humility, considering your neighbor's needs rather than your own (verses three and four). The preacher would be well-served to then shift the focus away from the congregation and the needs of each other, to Christ Himself (verse five).

With the focus now firmly on Christ, the minister can begin to entail just how the congregation can follow Christ's example of ultimate humility. Christ was in every way equal to God, yet did not hold onto that equality for the sake of doing the will of the Father in saving, and thus serving the ultimate needs of His people (verse six). Similarly, man should not hold onto his equality with fellow man, but should instead seek to serve.

Christ made Himself of no effect, condescending to become a servant by taking human flesh (verse seven). Man should, likewise, take the form of a servant with regard to his fellow man, seeking to meet others' needs before his own.

Christ humbled Himself in His Incarnation, and continued to humble Himself in His earthly ministry by being willingly obedient to the will of the Father, even unto the most despised death known to man (verse eight). Similarly, man is to humble himself by serving others with a view to build unity among the Body of Christ, and is to continue to do so as long as the breath of life is in him.

The minister is now able to shift from Christ as an example to the motive of Christ in setting this example, which is the glory of God the Father (verses nine through eleven). The Christian serving others in Christ-like humility, with a view to promoting and maintaining unity in the Body of Christ, should also have as his primary motive the glory of God the Father.

Here is an example of a potential order of worship and preaching outline for this passage of Scripture, based on the current order of worship of my church, with acknowledgement that from congregation to congregation, the Order may change. This recognizes that this is not the only sermon which could or should be preached from this passage.

Call to Worship – 1 Corinthians 12:12-18
Opening Psalm – 119M
Prayer of Adoration
Psalm of Praise – 51F
Tithes and Offerings
Prayer of Thanksgiving
Old Testament reading – 1 Samuel 24
Psalm of preparation – 41A
Pastoral prayer
New Testament reading – Philippians 2:1-11
Sermon – Only the truly humble get to be truly great
Psalm of Response – 110
Benediction Romans 15:5-6
Doxology - 150B

Jesus, the Christ, agreed to forever alter the interactive state of His relationship to the Father by taking on a human body forever, humbling Himself beyond anything you can imagine, but He knew His personal relationship to the Father would remain as solid as ever, and this is what He wants you to learn; humbling yourself won't hurt your standing with God.

HP - Christ did not consider it robbery to humble Himself; and neither should you

1. You have been blessed by Christ
2. Now, show the love He does
3. Join your brethren to your own self-care
4. He knew He wouldn't lose His place over this
5. If you are in Christ, your position is secure too
6. Secure yourself in Christ, then lift up those around you

HP - Christ did not consider it robbery to humble Himself; and neither should you

Conclusion

Philippians 2:1-11 presents certain interpretive issues, all centering on Christology, that must be worked through in order to arrive at a proper understanding of Paul's thought. This is because the passage is so foundational to Christian truth and living. Having done that, the minister of God is well-prepared to teach this passage's truths to God's people, as well as apply it to their lives. Having a proper understanding of Christ's nature, both in His pre-Incarnate and Incarnate states, help us to more fully grasp the example of humility He set forth for us to follow. In following this example of Christ, the Body of Christ can promote and maintain the type of fellowship that leads to unity of mind, love, and spirit. This was Paul's desire for the Philippian saints, and it is God's desire for His church today.