


St. Therese Catholic Church

St. Paul's Letter to the Philippians
Chapter 2

May 2, 2023

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Chapter Overview

Philippians 2	
Plea for unity and humility	VV. 1- 5
Christ Hymn	VV. 6 – 11
Obedience and service to the World	VV. 12 – 18
Timothy and Paul	VV. 19 – 24
Epaphroditus	VV. 25 – 30

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Short Review

- Typical of Greco-Roman letters, Paul identifies himself and his co-worker, Timothy, right away.
- He extends not health and well-being but rather grace and peace (total well-being) to the Philippians.
- He offers thanksgiving to God for the prayers and financial support of the Philippians.
- He prays that the Philippians will discern what is of value and that they will be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.

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Short Review

- He then turns to his current situation, i.e., he is in prison and tries to help them see things from God's perspective. In short, his imprisonment is advancing the gospel.
- He accepts with peace whether God allows him to continue in his earthly ministry or that his departure is at hand.
- Regardless, he encourages the Philippians to be of one spirit and one mind as they struggle for the faith of the gospel. As Paul struggles, they will struggle. Both suffer for Christ, who is their salvation.

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Importance of Unity

- Sometimes, the chapter breaks are unfortunate as they disrupt the flow of thought.
- Speaking of one spirit and one mind, Paul exhorts them to be the same mind, with the same love, united in heart, thinking one thing (Phil. 2:2).
- In the first four verses, Paul uses the verb *phroneō* meaning to think, form/hold an opinion, judge,” “set one’s mind on, be intent on,” “be minded/disposed” (Hamm, 93).
- For Paul, a common outlook (worldview) on Christian living and a common vision for Christian unity is critical (Hahn, 18).

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Importance of Unity

- **Humblly:** For Greek and Roman culture, humility is not a virtue. The magnanimous man is should be proud of his ability, wealth, and status. Not so from a Christian point of view.
- **Key:** Paul is going to bring in a hymn highlighting Christ’s radical *humility* as the model for all Christians.
- **Not for your own interests:** Christians are to do what is humanly unheard of: to regard everyone else as more important than themselves and to put everyone else’s interests ahead of their own (Hamm, 95).
- **Note:** Modern culture says look out for your own interests before others. *You* come first!


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Christ Hymn (Phil. 2:6– 11)

- Phil. 2:6-11 may possibly be a Christian hymn wherein Christ is the focus of meditation. The hymn can be divided into two parts:
- **Vv. 6 – 8:** Christ’s humility (incarnation, slave, death on a cross)
- **Vv. 9 – 11:** Christ’s exaltation (Resurrection, Ascension, Lord)
- **Key:** The hymn reveals a pattern of descent (vv. 6 – 8) and a pattern of ascent (vv. 9 – 11). Humility leads to exaltation!
- The hymn presents Christ as the model for Christian thinking and living. Christ the servant is meant to inspire us to be servants to one other. The hymn is the blueprint for living out Christian life.


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Christ Hymn (Phil. 2:6– 11)

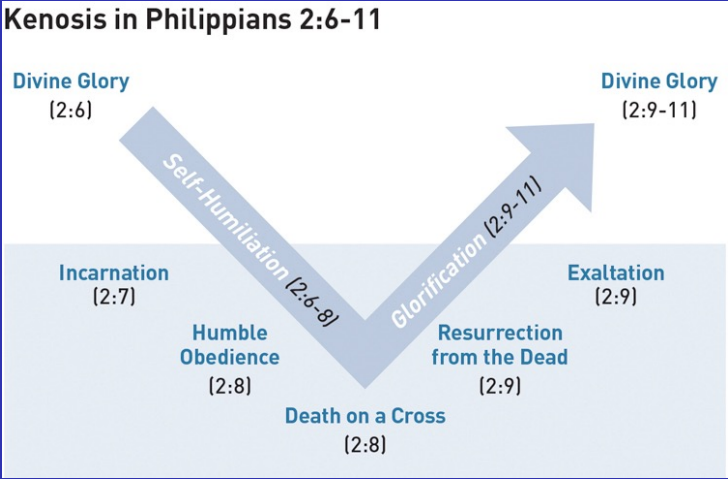
Stanza 1 (Descent)	Stanza 2 (Ascent)
[It is he] who was in the form of God, Yet he did not regard it as a prize to be equal with God;	So therefore God highly exalted him, And graced him with the name high above all names,
But he emptied himself, Being born in human likeness;	That at the name of Jesus, Every knee should bow
And disclosing himself in human appearance, He humbled himself, becoming obedient to death [even death on a cross].	And every tongue acknowledge That “Jesus Christ is Lord” [to the glory of God the Father].

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Christ Hymn (Phil. 2:6– 11)

Kenosis in Philippians 2:6-11

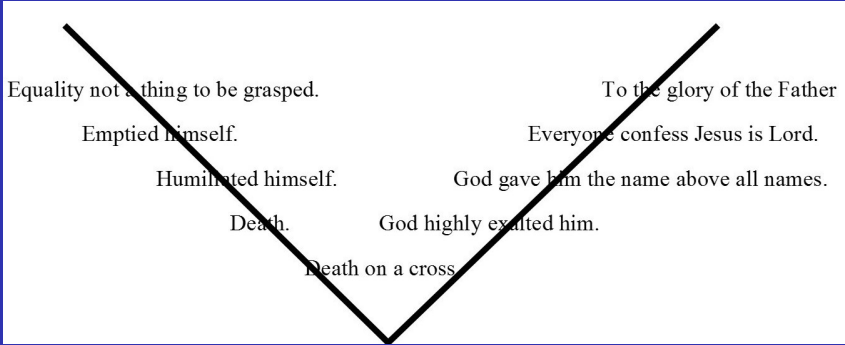


Source: <https://ericechols.net/2020/07/02/highly-exalted/>

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Christ Hymn (Phil. 2:6– 11)



Source: <https://twinoakchristianschool.wordpress.com/2019/02/03/first-things-first-the-exaltation-of-jesus-christ/>

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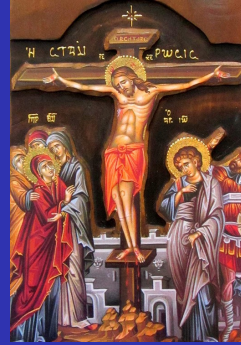
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Adam and Eve



- Grasps for equality with God
- Made in God's image and likeness
- Disobedient to God's command
- **Key:** Seek to fulfill themselves apart from God
- This is called the Ego-Drama.

Jesus Christ



- Did not grasp equality
- Coming in human likeness
- Obedient to death (on a cross)
- **Key:** Seeks to empty self for God
- This is called the Theo-Drama.

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Unique Vocabulary

- **Form:** Greek *morphē* is used only three times in the New Testament (Mk 16:12; Phil. 2:6, 7). It means "outward appearance" or the visible *manifestation* of God's holiness and power through his mighty deeds, or what the Old Testament means by God's "glory" (Hamm, 99).
- The expression, "in the form of God," may mean that Christ expresses the deepest reality of God's being or essence.
- By becoming man the Son emptied himself of the glory, majesty, privilege, that belongs to the divine (Hamm, 99).

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Unique Vocabulary

- **Grasped:** Greek *harpagmos* is only used in this case.
- On the one hand, it can mean something *not yet possessed* but viewed as something to be stolen, seized, or claimed.
- On the other hand, it can mean something *already possessed*, as something to be taken advantage of.
- The NABRE supports either one. The eternal Son, who eternally possesses equality with God the Father, empties himself by becoming a man (Hamm, 98-99).

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Summary Thoughts

- The Christ Hymn is the center piece of St. Paul's Letter to the Philippians. Keep the culture of Philippi in mind!
- The Christians at Philippi are exhorted to obey and imitate the Lord Jesus, whose path was marked out by humble obedience (2:12) given that they are "in Christ Jesus" (2:5).
- Obedience entails being of the same mind, with the same love, united in heart, thinking one thing (2:2).
- Paul and his companions, for their part, have modeled for the Philippian church the selfless conduct that fosters unity (3:17). The God of peace will be with them if they do (4:9).

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Summary Thoughts

- The Christ Hymn has a strong emphasis on humility.
 - **Pouring out of self:** Counting others better than yourself; the law of the gift: “Man cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself” (GS 24). Your being (or life) increases to the measure that you give it away. The more you live a life of self-sacrificial love, the happier you will be. The human person is called to exist “for” others, to become a gift.
 - **Obedience:** Jesus was obedient to the Father, even to death on a cross. Etymology is from Latin *oboedire* – *ob* (in the direction of) and *audire* (hear). We are saved through Christ’s *obedience* to the Father. The central thread of our salvation is obedience. It is like the main thread that holds a spider web together. A legitimate command from a legitimate superior is Christ’s will for you.

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Summary Thoughts

Form of God - “*isa Theo*” (like God)

Humility

Kenosis
Slave
Obedient



Cross

Exalted

Above
Every
Other
Name

Key: Romans wanted glory and power (e.g., benefactor, winning a battle, holding an office, etc.) and Paul is telling them how to get it. You obtain it not by grasping and exploiting, but rather by suffering and pouring yourself out for God and others. If you empty yourself, God will vindicate you.

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Valley of Humility

- **St. Thérèse** once told her sister Celine:
- “You wish to scale a mountain, but the good God wants you to descend; he is waiting for you at the bottom of the fertile valley of humility.”
- St. Thérèse of Lisieux, *Counsels and Reminiscences*.



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Living the Hymn (2:12 – 18)

- After presenting Christ as the ultimate paradigm for Christian living, Paul now proceeds to apply the model more explicitly to the Philippian's lives (Hamm, 107).
- **Obedient as you always have been:** As an Apostle and their founder, Paul asks for their obedience to him, which is obedience to God.
- **Work out your salvation:** *Initial* salvation is a gift from God, while *final* salvation is cooperation with the Holy Spirit through keeping the faith, God's commandments, persevering in good works, striving for holiness, etc. Born into God's family, you must *grow up* and remain a faithful family member.

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Living the Hymn (2:12 – 18)

- **Without blemish:** Paul uses language from Leviticus and Numbers – a lamb fit for sacrifice in the temple. In other words, they are to be an *offering for God*.
- **Perverse generation:** A phrase from Dt. 32:5 where God indicts Israel for its apostasy and ingratitude during the Exodus. They were a “twisted and crooked generation.”
- **As a libation:** In ancient religious ritual, the pouring out on the ground of a liquid offering was a sacrifice. Paul sees his life as a “drink offering” poured out for God – as Christ’s life was poured out for the world.

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Living the Hymn (2:12 – 18)

- Paul encourages the Philippians to live sacrificial lives as they imitate Christ.
- Poured out like Christ, they will be a libation or drink offering pleasing to God.
- Moreover, they will experience unity and peace from God.



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Paul Honors Timothy (2:19 – 24)

- **Send Timothy:** Paul sends Timothy with the letter. His name means “one who honors God.” The person who has the letter helps explain it – Sacred Scripture and living Tradition of the Church working together.
- **Note:** Timothy was one of Paul’s trusted companions and has a proven character. The Philippians know him as he was one of the founding missionaries for the church at Philippi (Acts 16:1-40).
- **Child with a father:** Paul sees himself as a spiritual father for Timothy. Notice that Paul evangelizes with friends. We all need spiritual fathers and friends in Christ.

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Paul and Epaphroditus (2:25 – 30)

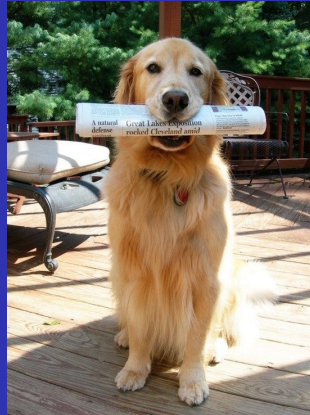
- **Epaphroditus:** He carried the Philippians’ financial gift to Paul in prison (4:18). He will update the Philippians on Paul’s situation in prison and deliver the letter.
- **Indeed ill:** He endured a near fatal sickness while visiting Paul in Rome. It was so bad that he was near death.
- **Key:** Timothy and Epaphroditus model the Christ hymn. They have “poured themselves out” for the Philippians.
- **God had mercy on him:** God’s mercy brought Epaphroditus back to health – merciful to Paul as well.

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A Faithful Servant

- **Phil. 2:28:** I send him therefore with greater eagerness, so that, on seeing him, you may rejoice again, and I may have less anxiety.
- **Phil 2:29:** Welcome him then in the Lord with all joy and hold such people in esteem.
- **Note:** People can include furry friends.



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Closing Reflection

- In contrast to the contemporary temptation of blaming others, Paul spills a lot of ink *praising*.
- He praises his addressees in the thanksgiving part of his letters, to affirm and encourage them.
- He commends the carriers of his correspondence, to ensure their positive reception.
- He praises co-workers Timothy and Epaphroditus, to highlight them as models of Christian living. He becomes the model of ministry of commendation (Hamm, 119).

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Next Time

- Tuesday, May 16th

Philippians 3	
Concluding admonitions	V. 1
Against legalistic teachers	VV. 2 - 4
Paul's autobiography	VV. 5 - 6
Righteousness from God	VV. 7 - 11
Forward in Christ	VV. 12 – 16
Wrong conduct and our goal	VV. 17 – 21