

Handout: Philippians Lesson 2

The four “if” clauses in 2:1 do not suggest that Paul doesn’t have confidence in the Philippian community:

1. *If there is any encouragement in Christ*
2. *[if] any solace in love*
3. *[if] any participation in the Spirit*
4. *[if] any compassion and mercy*

Paul has already praised them and gave thanks for the “good work” God began in them, and he acknowledged the joy their partnership in grace gave him (1:5-6).

In 2:2, Paul expresses his desire for the continued progress of the community:

1. being of the same mind,
2. with the same love,
3. united in heart,
4. thinking one thing.

In the first and fourth phrases, Paul uses the verb *phroneo*, meaning “to think, form/hold an opinion, judge,” “set one’s mind on, be intent on,” “be minded/disposed.” Paul often refers in his letters to doctrinal unity as essential to a community (see Rom 16:17; Gal 1:8-9; Eph 4:13-14). However, here the “sameness” he refers to has more to do with a unity of spirit than with ideas and concepts. The two middle phrases also point us to his desire that they have unity of spirit in Christ.

In 2:3, Paul clarifies his statement in verse 2 with a negative followed by a positive in emphasizing attitudes and behaviors that damage unity followed by urging them to act with right behaviors:

1. Do nothing motivated by selfish desires or ego.
2. Act with humility toward others, placing their needs and interests above yours.

2:5 completes the exhortation that began in 1:27 and is a bridge to the Christ-hymn in 2:6-11. The “same attitude” as Christ in verse 5 refers to the attitude described in the last four verses. In verses 6-11, St. Paul gives a profound exposition of the true nature of Jesus Christ. The passage contains some of the most profound Christological verses in the New Testament. Christology is the branch of Christian theology relating to the person, nature, and role of Christ in salvation history. See the chart on Paul’s three great Christological passages in Philippians, Colossians, and Hebrews in the lesson.

The Fathers of the Church interpreted verse 6 in two different ways:

1. It is a reference to God the Son who chose to become incarnate (enfleshed) as a man.
2. It is a reference to Jesus in His human existence who refused to yield to Adam and Eve’s temptation to be god-like when He was tempted by Satan (see Gen 3:6).

That Jesus *did not regard equality with God something to be grasped* supports the traditional view that Paul is referring to Christ’s incarnation. Becoming human, the Son of God concealed the glory of His divinity, majesty, and privileges that belong to Him as fully divine.

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There are several interpretations of the phrase *something to be grasped* because the Greek word *harpagmos*, translated “grasped,” is a rare term and only found here in this passage in the New Testament. Ancient and modern Biblical scholars express four leading interpretations:

1. A number of the Latin Fathers took it to mean “something seized” and that Jesus did not consider equality with God something he had aggressively acquired for Himself since it belonged to Him by nature and right.
2. Several Greek Fathers understood it to mean “something held fast” in that Jesus did not regard His divine prerogatives as a prize possession to which He needed to hold on to at all costs.
3. Others preferred the interpretation “something to be seized that is not already possessed.” Suggesting that Jesus, as a man, did not see the prerogatives of God as something He should reach for or seek to acquire.
4. Still others interpret the term as part of a Greek idiom that means “something to be exploited for personal gain.”

The fourth interpretation is probably the most popular among modern scholars.

In 2:10 Paul lists three parts of creation that will give glory to Christ:

1. The angels and saints in Heaven.
2. Humans and animals on earth.
3. The dead in Sheol/Hades/Purgatory.

And all these will ¹¹ ... *confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.* What they “confess” is an oath of belief in Jesus Christ who bears the name “Lord,” the substitution for the Divine Name, Yahweh, in the Greek Old Testament text.

12 So then, my beloved, obedient as you have always been, not only when I am present but all the more now when I am absent, work out your salvation with fear and trembling.

In verse 12, Paul warns that a confession of belief followed by baptism is only the beginning of one’s journey to Heaven. The Christian must make the continuing effort to demonstrate the Gospel in their words and deeds and strive to pursue a heavenly reward. The term “fear and trembling” in verse 12 is an Old Testament expression indicating the seriousness of committing oneself to God’s service (see Ex 15:16; Judt 2:28; Ps 2:11; Is 19:16). Our initial salvation has nothing to do with our works and is a gift of God’s grace (Eph 2:8-9). However, our final salvation depends on:

1. a lifetime of keeping the faith (2 Tim 4:7-8)
2. following the commandments (Mt 19:17; Jn 14:15)
3. persevering in good works (Mt 25:31-46; Rom 8:13)
4. striving for a life of holiness (Mt 5:8-9; Heb 12:14)
5. maintaining a relationship with Christ through prayer (Eph 6:18; 1 Thes 5:17)
6. resisting the forces of evil (Mt 6:13; Rom 13:12; Eph 6:11-12)
7. resisting the selfish and destructive demands of the flesh (Rom 8:13; 13:14; 1 Cor 9:24-25)