

Outline of the Letter to the Philippians

1. Greetings, thanksgiving, and joyful intercession (1:1–11)
 - Senders, receivers, and greeting (1:1–2)
 - Thanksgiving (1:3–8)
 - Intercession (1:9–11)
2. Paul's captivity as exemplary (1:12–26)
 - How Paul's chains advance the gospel (1:12–18a)
 - Facing the future (1:18b–26)
3. A call to conduct worthy of the gospel (1:27–2:4)
 - The thesis: strive together to be faithful citizens of the Lord's commonwealth (1:27–30)
 - Qualities required for a Christian community to live that way (2:1–4)
4. The best example of all: Christ's self-emptying and service (2:5–18)
 - Christ's example celebrated: the "Hymn" (2:5–11)
 - Christ's example applied to Christian living (2:12–18)
5. Two more examples: Timothy and Epaphroditus (2:19–3:1a)
 - The incomparable Timothy, "slaving" for the gospel (2:19–24)
 - Epaphroditus, faithful "unto death" (2:25–3:1a)
6. Paul himself as an example of the joy of "faithful citizenship" in Christ (3:1b–4:1)
 - Rehearsing a familiar issue to illustrate the source of Christian freedom and joy (3:1b–7)
 - Paul's righteousness from God and the faithfulness of Christ (3:8–11)
 - We are, each and all, a work in progress (3:12–16)

- Our identity, our citizenship, our goal: conformation to *our* Lord and Savior, Christ (3:17–4:1)
7. A Final call to unity and joy: Reconcile! Rejoice! Pray! (4:2–9)
 - Euodia and Syntyche, Reconcile in the Lord! (4:2–3)
 - Rejoice in what is good, true, beautiful! (4–9)
 8. Thanks and final greetings (4:10–23)
 - A delicate thank you (4:10–14)
 - Further thanks, greetings, and a blessing (4:15–23)

Chiastic Outline of the Letter to the Philippians

This outline is from the recent study by John Paul Heil.¹

- A Grace from the Lord Jesus Christ to the holy ones (1:1–2)
- B My prayer that you abound and be filled to glory and praise of God (1:1–11)
- C I rejoice and I will be joyful (1:12–18)
 - D Death in my body is gain but remaining is for your faith (1:19–30)
 - E Joy in humility for the day of Christ who humbled himself to death (2:1–16)
 - E' Rejoice with those who neared death for the work of Christ (2:17–30)
 - D' Gain in faith in the death of Christ and the body of his glory (3:1–21)
- C' Rejoice in the Lord, rejoice (4:1–5)
- B' Glory to God who will fulfill you as I am filled and abound (4:5–20)
- A' Greeting from holy ones and grace from the Lord Jesus Christ (4:21–23)

Greeting, Thanksgiving, and Joyful Intercession

Philippians 1:1–11

Paul begins this letter with the standard Greek format we met in the Letter to Philemon—first, the identification of the senders; second, the naming of the intended recipients; and third, a greeting. Then comes the expected thanksgiving. As in the Letter to Philemon, Paul invests these ordinary elements with Christian language that prepares his readers for the message he intends to convey. Already in these preliminaries the careful, clever writer we met in that shorter letter shows his skills and affection once again.

Senders, Receivers, and Greeting (1:1–2)

'Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus, to all the holy ones in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the overseers and ministers: ²grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

OT: Dan 7:18

NT: Rom 1:1

Mentioning the name of Timothy prepares the way for Paul's reference to him later in the letter (2:19–24), where he will serve as one of several examples of self-giving service according to the mind of Christ. When Paul characterizes himself and Timothy as slaves of Christ Jesus, that term for their subservience to Jesus as Lord and Master would carry a powerful resonance for a community that

1. Heil, *Philippians*, 30.

1. "This is God's doing" (1:28). That is, a local church is an *ekklēsia*, a group that exists only because people have literally been "called out" by God and have responded in faith to something God is doing among them.
2. The group experiences the gift of the Spirit of God as he empowers them to relate to one another in love and compassion (2:1-2).
3. God's calling has made the faith community a kind of alternative homeland or commonwealth (3:20).
4. Citizenship in this commonwealth means relating to others in the way of Jesus, which differs from the way of the world in that one looks out for others' interests more than one's own (2:3-4).

In the life of a parish, we nurture these realities especially in the celebration of the Sunday Eucharist, in which we leave behind all worldly markers of status and act simply as the body of Christ, thanking God the Father for what he has done in creation, in his covenant with Israel, in the incarnation of his Word in Jesus of Nazareth, and in his presence with us now through the Spirit. We respond to these divine initiatives by joining in Jesus' self-offering to the Father in the power of the Spirit. Then, having been nourished at the table of Word and sacrament, we move back into our ordinary life to carry into the world the divine love and grace we have experienced in the liturgy. This entails concrete acts of friendship, forgiveness, mediation, reconciliation, visiting the sick, offering hospitality, lending a hand to disabled neighbors, contributing to committee work, and the like. In these ways, we grow as a community that reflects the supernatural vision of the Church in Paul's teaching.

The Best Example of All: Christ's Self-Emptying Love and Service

Philippians 2:5-11

We come now to the Christ hymn, the famous [†]*Carmen Christi* that has nurtured the prayer and the theology of the Church in a special way for two millennia. As we will see, whatever history this poem might have had as a freestanding composition prior to the writing of the letter, this celebration of Jesus' incarnation, life, death, and exaltation to glory is for Paul very much part of his communication to the Philippian Christians. Indeed, a good case can be made that Paul himself composed it. Here Jesus is presented as the primary model of the behavior Paul has been advocating.

The Christ Hymn (2:5-11)

⁵Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus,

⁶Who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God something to be grasped.

⁷Rather, he emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
coming in human likeness;
and found human in appearance,

⁸he humbled himself,
becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.

⁹Because of this, God greatly exalted him
and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,
¹⁰that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹and every tongue confess that
Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

OT: Isa 45:23

NT: John 1:1–2; 1 Cor 8:6

Catechism: prayer, 2641, 2667; the Word become flesh, 461; Jesus as our model, 520; Jesus the Lord, 201, 449; life in Christ, 1694, 2842; Christ is God and man, 472, 602, 705, 713, 1224, 2812; Docetism, 465

Lectionary: Passion (Palm) Sunday; For Unity of Christians; Triumph of the Cross; Votive Mass for the Holy Name (during Easter season)

2:5 Have among yourselves the same attitude refers to the attitude described in the previous four verses. The second half of the verse, which points ahead to the Christ story that Paul is about to unfold, is more clearly rendered, “that was” also in Christ Jesus. The verb for having an attitude (*phroneō*) is the same one used twice in 2:2. Christians are to not only imitate but also assimilate into themselves Jesus’ way of thinking.

2:6 Paul begins the story of Christ by describing him as the one who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped.

This verse, along with the following one, has been interpreted in two very different ways: (a) as a reference to the eternal Son choosing to become incarnate, or (b) as a reference to Jesus in his human existence refusing to yield to the temptation of Adam and Eve to be godlike (Gen 3:6). The solution to this dilemma hangs mainly on the meaning of two words—*harpagmon*, rendered by the NAB as “something to be grasped,” and *morphē*, which the NABRE renders as “form.”

Harpagmon is the most challenging word to translate since it can mean two quite different things. 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. Since the English word “grasp” can mean “seize” as well as “hold on to,” the NABRE translation “something to be grasped” is open to either interpretation. However, recent scholarship has revealed that the ancient Greek usage of the phrase “to consider something as *harpagmon*” means to consider the thing already

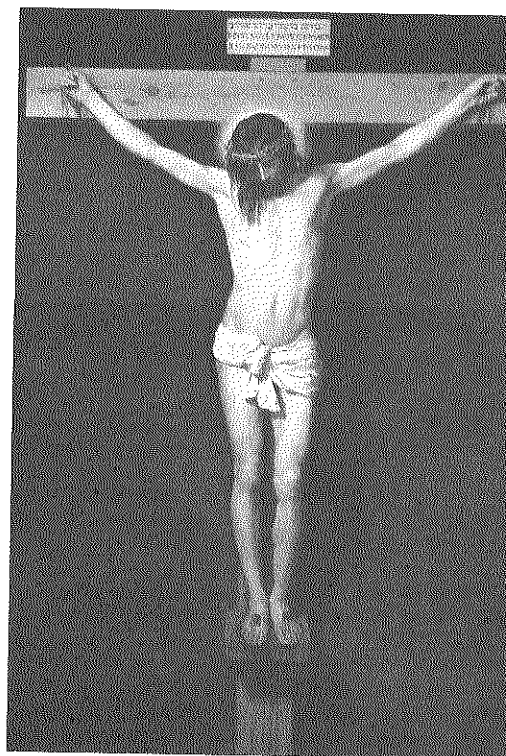


Fig. 7. This painting of Christ crucified by Diego Velázquez (1599–1660) catches the utter dereliction and denigration of a victim of this form of Roman capital punishment.

possessed as something to be used to one’s advantage. This meaning is expressed in the NRSV: “did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited.”¹ This understanding supports the traditional interpretation of verses 6–7 as referring to Christ’s incarnation. In this interpretation the eternal Son, who eternally possesses equality with God the Father, empties himself by becoming man. But precisely *what* the eternal Son emptied himself of depends on that other difficult word, *morphē* (“form”).

The ordinary meaning of *morphē* is “outward appearance” or what we usually mean by “form” in English.² “God,” as is usual in the New Testament, means God the Father. Since

Scripture asserts that God is invisible (“No one has ever seen God,” John 1:18; see also Exod 33:20), “the form of God” is a puzzling concept. God’s form, then, must mean the visible *manifestation* of his holiness and power through his mighty deeds, or what the Old Testament means by God’s “glory.”³ By becoming man the Son emptied himself of the glory, majesty, and privilege that belong to him as divine.

1. The same interpretation is reflected in the Jerusalem Bible paraphrase: “yet he did not cling to his equality with God.”

2. *Morphē* means “external appearance” in the only other place it appears in the New Testament, Mark 16:12, where the risen Jesus “appeared in another *form* to two of them walking along on their way to the country” (apparently referring to the Emmaus episode of Luke 24:13–32). We find the same meaning of *morphē* in the Septuagint: for example, in Job 4:16 (“there was no form before my eyes”), Isa 44:13 (a wooden idol is carved “in the form of a man”), and Dan 5:6, 9, 10; 7:28 (“countenance”).

3. One recent interpretation takes *morphē* as an allusion to the “image” of Gen 1:26–27 and reads “emptied himself” as a reference to the earthly life of Jesus. That is, in his incarnation the Son took on the image of God by assuming human nature, but he refused to succumb to the temptation of Adam and Eve, to grasp for equality with God (“You will be like gods,” Gen 3:5). That understanding may resonate with the idea of Jesus as the New Adam, which appears in other letters of Paul (e.g., Rom 5:12–21), but it does not really fit the language of this poem. If the Christ hymn had intended an allusion to Gen 1:26–27, it would have used *eikōn*, the Septuagint’s word for the “image” of God in Gen 1:26–27, not

The Fathers Ponder the Hymn

Like many Christians after them, the patristic writers found much to ponder in this passage. Eusebius of Vercelli found in it an expression of the atonement.

How then did he *empty himself*? When the *form of God accepted the form of a slave*, when he who is preeminently the Lord deigned to take on himself what belongs to a slave. The Word was made flesh by bearing and doing what was beneath him in his indulgence and compassion toward us. All that he possessed by nature is emptied into this his person. Having been made obedient as a man in the true *fashion of humanity*, he has restored to our nature by his own humility and obedience what had perished through disobedience in Adam.^a

The Fathers had no trouble understanding that the self-emptying of the eternal Son was a model to be imitated by mere humans. For example, here is Ambrosiaster.

Taking the form of a slave. He indeed was taken captive, bound and driven with blows. His obedience to the Father took him even as far as the cross. Yet throughout he knew himself to be the Father's Son, equal in divine dignity. Yet he did not make a display of this equality. Rather he willingly subjected himself. This patience and humility he teaches us to imitate. We are to refrain from making a display of our claims to equal dignity, but even more so we are called to lower ourselves into service as we follow the example of our Maker.^b

For Eusebius of Caesarea, the hymn celebrates the Son's solidarity with humanity as a whole.

Read the record of his compassion. It pleased him, being the Word of God, to *take the form of a slave*. So he willed to be joined to our common human condition. He took to himself the toils of the members who suffer. He made our human maladies his own. He suffered and toiled on our behalf. This is in accord with his great love of humankind.^c

continued on next page

The phrase "equality with God" clarifies Paul's meaning. Translated more literally, it is "*the equality with God*"; "the" signals that the phrase picks up what has already been said. In other words, "equality with God" is synonymous with "being in the form of God." A similar phrase appears in the Gospel of John, where the Jewish leaders accuse Jesus of "making himself equal to God" (John 5:18).

Rather, he **emptied himself**. Paul's assertion here mirrors the prologue of the Gospel of John: "The Word became flesh" (John 1:14). The next lines, especially

morphē ("form"). Moreover, the tempter in Eden promises Eve that the couple will be "*like gods*," not that they will be "equal to God."

With his special sensitivity to language, John Chrysostom focuses on the doctrinal implications.

He was not only human, which is what he appeared to be, but also God. . . . We are soul and body, but he is God, soul, and body. For this reason Paul says *in the form*—and so that when you hear of his emptying you may not suppose that he underwent change, degradation and some sort of annihilation of his divinity. Rather remaining what he was he assumed what he was not. Becoming flesh, he remained the Word of God. So it is in this respect that he is *in the likeness of men*, and for this reason he says *and in form*. His nature was not degraded, nor was there any confusion [of the two natures], but he entered a *form*.^d

If "in human likeness" seems to compromise Christ's full humanity, Theodoret has a clarification.

He says of the divine Word that, being God, he was not seen to be God but wore a human appearance. Yet the words *in the likeness of men* are appropriate to him, for the nature that he assumed was truly human, and yet he was not [merely] a man, though he at first glance appeared to be only a man.^e

a. *On the Trinity*, quoted in ACCS 8:245.

b. *Epistle to the Philippians* 2.8.1–2, quoted in ACCS 8:246.

c. *Demonstrations of the Gospel* 10.1.22, quoted in ACCS 8:246–47.

d. *Homily on the Philippians* 8.2.5–11, quoted in ACCS 8:248.

e. *Epistle to the Philippians* 2.6–7, quoted in ACCS 8:248.

"coming in human likeness," make clear that Paul has in mind the [†]incarnation, rather than Jesus' deportment during his earthly life. This way of speaking about the eternal Son's incarnation also parallels Rom 8:3, where Paul writes of God "sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh."

Taking the form of a slave may seem an unlikely denigration of human nature, but the point is not the lowliness of human nature in itself. Rather, the hymn contrasts the vast difference between divinity and humanity. In the cultural context of the Roman colony of Philippi, social pecking order was a matter of great interest. If Paul is promoting the countercultural Christian virtue of humility, as he surely is in verses 1–4, and if he is now presenting Jesus as the supreme model of humility, then his point is the stunning contrast between being "in the form of God" (a status Roman citizens ascribed to the emperor) and being "in the form of a slave" (the very bottom of the social status scale). In this context "form," "likeness," and "appearance" allude to the realm of social status, not metaphysics—although the implications regarding Christ's preexistence and divinity are metaphysical indeed.

If the phrase **in human likeness** seems to dilute the full humanity of Jesus, it may help to consider again the parallel with Rom 8:3, "sending his own Son

in the likeness of sinful flesh." There "flesh" (*sarx*) refers to the humanity of Jesus, just as in John 1:14, "the Word became flesh." "Likeness" allows for the fact that the Son's enfleshment did not include sinfulness (see 2 Cor 5:21). Similarly, "coming in human likeness"—literally "born in the likeness of human beings"—asserts that Christ is fully human but also allows that he is different, in that he is also divine. Paul is not slipping into an early ⁴docetism!

And found human in appearance, or "being in every way like a human being" (NJB), or still more literally, "in appearance found to be like a human being"—is virtually a paraphrase of the previous phrase, "coming in human likeness." As the Letter to the Hebrews puts it, Christ "had to become like his brothers in every way" (Heb 2:17)—he ate, drank, worked, laughed, wept, and suffered like all human beings. At this point, Paul moves from focusing on what the preexistent Christ has done as God (becoming human) to how he lived out his human life.⁵ The Son, who had already emptied himself of divinity, **humbled himself, becoming obedient to death**. Since "obedient to death" could seem to describe death as Christ's master, a clearer translation is that of the NRSV: "obedient to the point of death." This obedience to the Father as a humble servant characterizes the whole earthly life of Jesus (see Mark 10:45).

Even death on a cross is not an addendum but the very climax of the statement. In Paul's world, death on a cross was the ultimate extreme not only of pain but also, and especially, of humiliation.⁶ Paul is, after all, expanding on the self-abasement of Jesus. First came his self-emptying in the incarnation; then came his self-humbling in his human life, which culminated in the most humiliating death of all, the gruesome form of Roman execution reserved for criminals who were noncitizens of the empire, especially slaves. If the city of Philippi was filled with inscriptions posted by citizens boasting of their accomplishments in the Roman honors race, Paul counters this mind-set with his acclamation of Jesus Christ's self-emptying humility—to which God the Father responded by bestowing the supreme honor that is about to be described.

4. Docetism is the heresy of holding that Jesus Christ only *appeared* to be human.

5. The word for "appearance," *schēma*, is quite rare in the Bible, occurring only once in the Greek Old Testament (Isa 3:17, meaning outward form or shape) and one other time in the New Testament (1 Cor 7:31, "The world in its present form is passing away"). It seems reasonable to take it as synonymous with "form" as we are understanding *morphē* in this passage.

6. The New Testament writers focus more on the *shame* than on the pain involved in Jesus' crucifixion. The author of Hebrews writes, "For the sake of the joy that lay before him he endured the cross, *despising its shame*" (12:2). In Acts, when the Sanhedrin has the apostles flogged and orders them to stop speaking in the name of Jesus, again it is the shaming that Luke highlights: "So they left the presence of the Sanhedrin, rejoicing that they had been found worthy to *suffer dishonor* for the sake of the name" (Acts 5:40-41).

At verse 9 there is suddenly a complete reversal. Because of this, God greatly **exalted him**. The Greek verb for "greatly exalt" (*hyperypsoō*) means in effect to "hyper-exalt."⁷ Though the hymn surely alludes to Jesus' resurrection, the emphasis here is on the lofty status to which he has been raised.⁸ Jesus' exaltation is not a matter of being raised from the human to the divine, since he already possessed "the form of God" and "equality with God." Rather, it was the Father's public vindication of the supremely honorable human life of the Son. Christ is now, *in his human nature*, exalted to divine glory and enthroned as Lord of the universe. This reversal from humiliation to exaltation evokes Isaiah's fourth servant song, where God foretells that his suffering servant shall "be exalted and glorified exceedingly" (Isa 52:13 LXX). The humiliated one is glorified!

God **bestowed on him the name that is above every name**.⁹ Obviously, this clause calls for clarification: what name? Given that Jews even today sometimes refer to YHWH or the Lord God simply as "the Name" (*hashem* in Hebrew), the phrase points to the name of God. The next phrase, however, **at the name of Jesus**, raises the possibility that "Jesus" is the name in question; but the incarnate Son has already had that name since infancy. Rather, Paul's assertion is that the proper name of Jesus is "Lord," in its full sense of divinity.¹⁰ The hymn carefully builds toward this proclamation.

The Father's exaltation of Jesus is such that at the very mention of his name, **every knee should bend . . . and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord**. "Lord," then, is the name or title "that is above every other name." The wording alludes to a rich text from Isaiah that teaches how we are to hear that name. Isaiah 45:18-25 is one of the fullest expressions of Israelite monotheism, as the following partial quotation demonstrates:

¹⁸I am the LORD, and there is no other. . . .

²²Turn to me and be safe,
all you ends of the earth,
for I am God; there is no other!

²³By myself I swear,
uttering my just decree,
a word that will not return:

7. The term appears only here in the New Testament, although "exalt," or "raise up" (*hypsōō*) occurs with some regularity, often as the opposite of "to humble," as in 2 Cor 11:7: "I humbled myself so that you may be exalted."

8. Indeed, the entry for the word in BDAG is "to raise to a high point of honor" (1034).

9. The superiority of Jesus' name to all others is similarly emphasized in Eph 1:21; Heb 1:4.

10. In biblical languages "name" can refer to a title as well as a proper name.

To me every knee shall bend;
 by me every tongue shall swear,
²⁴Saying, "Only in the LORD
 are just deeds and power.
 Before him in shame shall come
 all who vent their anger against him.
²⁵In the LORD all the descendants of Israel
 shall have vindication and glory."

Paul's words echo verse 23 of this passage. Listeners who heard the echo would have recalled that the passage is an oracle of the Lord God speaking as the sole creator of the universe and the savior of Israel, asserting his absolute uniqueness over against the idols of the nations. The passage foretells that one day all nations will assemble and "every knee will bend and every tongue confess" that the God of Israel is the one God and Lord of all. That Paul can take this absolute declaration of monotheism and apply it to Jesus of Nazareth would have been astounding in the context of the Judaism of his day. But for Paul, as for the rest of the New Testament writers, the proclamation of Christ's divinity is in no way contrary to the biblical revelation that God is one, as we will see below.

From Paul's quotation of Isa 45 both here and in Romans we know how important this prophetic passage was to him. In Rom 14:10–12 he uses it to evoke Isaiah's image of God gathering the Gentiles as a prelude to the final judgment: "Come and assemble, gather together, you fugitives from among the gentiles!" (Isa 45:20). Here too, in writing to the mainly Gentile church at Philippi, Paul would surely have been attentive to the end-time implications of his writing. God's gathering of the Gentiles—that is, gathering them to faith in Christ—is a sign that the final judgment is near. Paul is keenly aware that with the resurrection of Jesus the expected age to come has already dawned, and the gathering of the Gentiles in response to the gospel is a sign that humanity is now moving toward the final judgment, no matter how far in the future it may yet be.

Paul's listing of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth ensures that "every knee" and "every tongue" refers to every personal entity in the cosmos—angels and demons, living human beings, and dead people yet to be raised.¹¹ The sovereignty of Jesus embraces the full extent of creation, as described in Isa 45, over which the Lord God is sovereign. This way of referring to all creation also

11. "Those in heaven and on earth and under the earth" reflects the three-level cosmos of Gen 1 and Exod 20:4 ("You shall not carve idols for yourselves in the shape of anything in the sky above or on the earth below or in the waters beneath the earth").

occurs in the commandment against idolatrous images in Exod 20:4 and Deut 5:8: "You shall not carve idols for yourselves in the shape of anything in the sky above or on the earth below or in the waters beneath the earth."

In the NABRE (and all English translations known to me), Paul's next words are translated **that Jesus Christ is Lord**. But the Greek particle "that" often functions simply as a quotation mark, so the sentence could also be rendered, "and every tongue confess, 'Jesus Christ is Lord.'" This acclamation is the simplest and most basic confession of Christian faith: He is Lord! In the Greek Old Testament, the title "the Lord" (*kyrios*) is used in place of YHWH, the unspeakable name of God. Those who do not hear the echo of Isaiah 45 will still get the point, but those who do catch the echo will hear more powerfully and clearly that the final verses of the poem proclaim nothing less than the divinity of Jesus Christ: "Jesus Christ is Lord!" Now it is out. The name given to Jesus is "Lord" (*kyrios*)—the very name of God.

Is this proclamation of Jesus' divinity then an expression of bitheism (two gods)? To prevent such a misunderstanding, which would be contrary to biblical revelation, Paul completes the statement with the ringing phrase: **to the glory of God the Father**. Jesus' lordship is in no way that of another god in competition with the God of Israel. Rather, God freely shares his glory with the Son, who is equal to him from all eternity. The Gospel of John expresses a similar idea: God glorifies the Son so that the Son may in turn glorify the Father (see John 17:1).

Even a reader who knows no Greek can appreciate the power of expression in the final two phrases (a rhyming pair of three-beat verses) when read aloud (accented syllables italicized).

*Kyrios Iēsous christos
 eis doxan theou patros.*

This expression matches the careful phrasing of the credo of 1 Cor 8:6.

Yet for us there is one God, the Father,
 from whom all things are and for whom we exist,
 and one Lord, Jesus Christ,
 through whom all things are and through whom we exist.

Reflection and Application (2:5–11)

The passage as example. The first and best application of this passage is the one Paul himself makes in the Letter to the Philippians. The Christ hymn illustrates

the mind-set he exhorts Christians to take on in the preceding verses (1:27–2:4). Then in the verses that follow (2:12–18) he will apply the example of Christ in concrete ways to the life of the community.

The passage as a prayer of the Church. The passage has such beauty and wholeness that it lends itself to being lifted from its epistolary context and used as a freestanding text for prayer, meditation, liturgical reading, and song. Indeed, it is likely that more Christians have experienced the text in these contexts than in the context of the letter itself. In that way, it is like the three canticles drawn from the infancy narrative of the Gospel of Luke—the Magnificat (1:46–55), the Benedictus (1:68–79), and the Nunc Dimittis (2:29–32).

The passage as a source of doctrine. Paul speaks of Christ as being “in the form of God” and not considering “equality with God” as something to be taken advantage of. In all this, he refers to the preexistent, eternally divine Son of God in a way that parallels the thought of Heb 1:1–14, the prologue of John (1:1–4), the affirmation of 1 Cor 8:6, and the hymn of Col 1:15–20. It is important to notice that Paul is not teaching the preexistence of the Son as something new. He *presumes* that this is common knowledge among Christians as he moves to present first Christ's self-emptying in his “incarnation” and then the self-humiliation of his earthly life and shameful death as the pattern and standard for the life of a Christian.

While Paul is not explicitly spelling out the doctrine of Jesus as Second Person of the Trinity, his text provided some of the raw material that the Church, some three centuries later, would use to formulate the doctrine of Jesus as the eternal Son “consubstantial” with the Father.

Paul Applies the Example to Christian Living

Philippians 2:12–18

Having presented the Christ story as the ultimate paradigm for Christian living, Paul now proceeds to apply that model more explicitly to the Philippians' lives, and also to his. He makes it clear that the “working out” of salvation is both a gift of God and a communal task—one that entails sacrifice. Addressing people who live in the midst of a culture of “boasting,” Paul celebrates that the Philippian Christians' “boasting in the Lord” is his own greatest boast as their mentor.

Living the Hymn (2:12–18)

¹²So 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. ¹³For God is the one who, for his good purpose, works in you both to desire and to work. ¹⁴Do everything without grumbling or questioning, ¹⁵that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine like lights in the world, ¹⁶as you hold on to the word of life, so that my boast for the day of Christ may be that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. ¹⁷But, even if I am poured out as a libation upon the sacrificial service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with all of you. ¹⁸In the same way you also should rejoice and share your joy with me.

OT: Exod 29:38–42; Num 28:1–10; Ps 2:11

NT: Rom 8:15–17; 9:4; 12:1; 1 Cor 2:3