

Have this attitude in yourselves, which was also in Christ Jesus, who emptied himself, who humbled himself, who became a bondservant, who became obedient to the death, even death of a cross –

Summarized theme of Philippians from chapter 2 verses 5-8.

During the introduction we discussed the structure of Philippians as having one major theological point. The letter is set up with examples and challenges for the Philippian saints to have the mind of Christ.

The Mind of Christ

The main focus of Philippians 2 is that the mind of Christ is humble.

Overview of Philippians 2:1-11

The intensity and doctrinal peak occur in these eleven verses.

The model is Jesus Christ in His humanity, His humility.

We are going to slow down and pull out as much as possible from these verses.

Method of study

For Philippians 2:1-11, we will look at each phrase and possibly every word will be examined for understanding. At various intervals we will summarize a section though retranslation or rendering in an expounded understanding. The purpose is to remove ambiguity and mystification so that we know exactly what is expected from believers in relation to the character and attributes of Jesus Christ.

1. Vocabulary
2. Grammatical considerations
3. Historical references of the person of Jesus

Review of verse 1-2

Based upon the construction of verse 1 using “if any (εἴ τις),” this does not speak to attributes that are of an absolute nature but of the potential of believers to demonstrate these principles.

The admonishments, although in a different form, are found in verse 1, but they also go back to 1:27-30.

“Therefore, with the view of our position in Christ, there are grounds for, and believers should encourage one another understanding that true encouragement is sourced in Christ. Believers should positively and gently speak to someone who is in need that is done to demonstrate the desire for the benefit of the other that is selfless and unconditional. Believers should have spiritual fellowship. Believers should have affection and pity for one another.”

Verse 2 gives the intended results of adhering to the admonishment of 1:27-2:1. The audience would completely fill Paul’s joy by acting as good citizens of heaven, standing fast in one spirit, striving together with one soul for the faith of the gospel, being frightened in nothing by those who oppose, encouraging one another in Christ, consoling one another with love, having spiritual fellowship, and having affection and pity for one another.

The results of the completion of these goals are (so that) you would think the same thing (unity of thought), having the same love (unity of love patterned after God’s demonstration of love), co-souled (unity of passion and purpose), while thinking the one thing.

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Verse 2 should not be over thought. In the lightest sense possible, we understand this to be Paul speaking in terms that say the same thing in a different way to make a stronger point (a tautology). But the Holy Spirit inspired each phrase because it is important. The goal is total, complete, and doctrinally accurate unity.

Why? What is the purpose of unity?

1. Protection from within - If we are in agreement in content and attitude, then there is no believer left out. Each has his part and each one is content in his role. If one of us steps out of doctrinal consistency, we have a support system that checks the error and lifts up the brother.
2. Protection from the outside - When attacked by the world, we have a support system to encourage and protect the mind of the believer using Scripture to encourage and love.
3. As a witness to the world - Often times it is our love for one another that is attractive to the outside world. When asked why we support each other, we can share the love of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Verse 3

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit

“μηδὲν κατ’ ἐριθείαν μηδὲ κατὰ κενοδοξίαν” – “nothing according to selfishness and empty self-glory.”

There is no verb, so the translations add an implied “do.” This is where I question the translation. Not that they are wrong, but why “do?” The content of this passage is not about action. Usually when a verb is implied it is “*eimi*.” This would indicate “be nothing that is selfishness or useless self-glorifying.” But what is the main idea in this context? Think. “Think nothing according to selfishness and empty self-glory.”

Nothing is a number, “no one, nothing.” In the neuter from the most consistent understanding is “not at all, by no means.” This translation needs no implied verb. “Nothing from selfishness and empty self-glory.” The function of verse 2, with the function of verses 3-8, is all about the state of mind, thought, or mental attitude.

From is translated from the preposition “κατά kata.” This preposition does not indicate source. With the accusative, this means “according to” or “in accordance with.” The difference is that the admonishment is not to check the motivation but to evaluate the action or thinking.

“ἐριθεία eritheia” – there is a disagreement as to the meaning of this word. The translations of this word in the NASB is *selfish ambition*; in the KJV, it is *contention*. The ancient Greek use of this word by Aristotle is “a self-seeking pursuit of political office by unfair means.” The root of this word is “discord,” but the use of this word, either explicitly or implied, has the idea of a self-serving mental attitude.

Outside of Philippians the word is used five times. In two of these instances, it is in a list (2 Corinthians 12:20; Galatians 5:20). These passages do not add contextual information to help us understand the word. Romans 2:8 has the same translational issue – some have this as *contentious*; others have this as *selfish ambition*. James uses this word twice in 3:14-17. Looking at this context, the surrounding words in 14 and 16, as well as the contrast in verse 17, the idea of discord and selfish ambition fit. The conclusion, then, is that this word encapsulates both ideas based upon definition and usage.

Closely tied to *selfish ambition* is *empty conceit* “κενοδοξία kenodoxia.” This is the only use of this word in the New Testament, but the root words are common. This is a compound word that means “to empty” (the same root as in verse 7) and the word for “glory.” In classical Greek, this noun primarily denotes “a person with excessive ambition based on personal vanity, groundless self-esteem, and selfish pride.”

Both words seem to lean heavily upon the concept of unchecked pride, self-serving, selfishness, self-glorifying. Self-serving discord and empty self-glorifying are the epitome of someone who is full of himself.

The next word is “*ἀλλά* *alla*,” a strong contrast. These two words are placed in direct opposition with humility of mind.

With humility of mind

“τῇ ταπεινοφροσύνῃ” – the mental humility. “ταπεινοφροσύνῃ *tapeinophrosunē*” is a compound word combining *humble* and *mind*. The word for *humble* is one of the more interesting words.

“ταπεινός *tapeinos*” in classical usage refers to a low region or place, or of something’s “low” (physical) position. When describing persons, *tapeinos* means “humble, lowly,” and it includes the ideas of “despised, rejected, poor.” It is not without significance that classical writers invested *tapeinos* (and its cognates) with almost exclusively negative connotations. The *tapeinos* individual was “groveling, slavish and mean-spirited” according to Greek standards.

Now, in the New Testament the word takes on a positive connotation (Matthew 11:29; Luke 1:52; Romans 12:16; Ephesians 4:2; James 1:9, 4:6). Of all the contrasting ideas of the Greek philosopher and the truth in Jesus Christ, this is the greatest.

The Greeks saw humbleness as weakness. Weakness in their mind was equivalent to evil. Strength was equivalent to good. Christ coming as humble did not meet the definition of greatness or power, and to the Hebrew, the Messiah was supposed to come in power and majesty. To both groups, having a Messiah that was humble did not meet their expectations.

Regard one another as more important than yourselves

“ἀλλήλους ἡγούμενοι ὑπερέχοντας ἑαυτῶν” – this is “one another esteeming surpassing themselves.” The two participles modify the other pronoun: “esteeming” is what “themselves” is doing; and “surpassing” modifies “one another.” They are to evaluate the other person as one who is surpassing themselves.

Regard is “ἡγέομαι *hēgeomai*,” an evaluation that is not based upon feelings but upon the reality that is established by obvious data and proofs. In Scripture, we understand that having this understanding is not because the person is actually better than you but because Jesus lived his life esteeming your life as more valuable than His own. Jesus is the example.

“ὑπερέχω *huperechō*” is the word for surpassing. “*huper*” means “above,” “over,” “beyond.” This is combined with “*echo*,” to have or hold. Together, they mean to hold above, superior, better. This word is used two other times in Philippians (3:8 *surpassing value* and 4:7 *surpasses*). In 3:8, Paul esteems knowing Christ as a much better value than anything he accomplished or possessed in this life. In 4:7, God provides the means for having peace that is beyond all human understanding.

In the same way, we are to regard each other as far greater in value than ourselves. Why? Because if Jesus, who is God in the flesh, did that for you and me, then there is no one who is unworthy of that estimation. Jesus determined that the worst person in the world was worth more than His own physical life.

Do not merely look out for your own personal interests

“μὴ τὰ ἑαυτῶν ἕκαστος σκοποῦντες” literally, “not the thing of themselves each considering.”

Considering is “σκοπέω *skopeō*” and means to examine carefully (judge or philosopher), to fix one’s gaze upon with desire for and interest in. This can be rendered as “do not be consumed with your own personal interests.”

Look out for the interests of others

“ἀλλὰ [καὶ] τὰ ἑτέρων ἕκαστοι” is literally “but and the things of others each.”

This phrase borrows the verb “σκοπέω *skopeō*.” For clarity you can put it in the sentence, and it would be correct. “But consider the things of others” or “rather be consumed with the interests of others.”

This verse is about what dominates our minds as important. This verse instructs the reader to demonstrate love in his thought life. Is what dominates our thinking what we want/need or is it what others want/need?

The reason why *merely* is used is due to the “but and” construction or “but also” as some have determined that construction to mean.

We know that no person can live without attending to his own needs (food and clothing). However, the instruction is intended to be reciprocal to everyone in the group. Each person should not need to look out for his personal needs because each other person is supposed to have the other person’s best interests in mind.

Paul immediately directs their attention away from a human viewpoint mindset and directs it to Jesus Christ in verse 5.

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus

This instruction reaches back to 1:27-2:4 for its content and looks forward to 6-8 for its illustration. One important caveat needs to be addressed. This is not the only attribute of the mind of Christ. We have observed ten attributes of the mind of Christ in Chapter 1. Humility of mind is the way of thinking that is highlighted in this section of Scripture.

The literal translation is “let yourselves think this.”

As stated previously, attitude is the verb “φρονέω *phroneō*.” Remember, this word can indicate what to think. This can also indicate manner (how to think). Because we have the content and the illustration, I am convinced that both the “what” and the “how” are in view in this section.

What is the illustration? The answer is one of the great Christological passages in Scripture.

1. Jesus is equal with God and consequently is God.
2. Jesus made a conscious and deliberate decision to not hold onto the glory of God.
3. Jesus emptied Himself (to be discussed at length).
4. Jesus took on the form of a bondservant.
5. Jesus was made in the likeness of men.
6. Jesus humbled Himself by obeying the Father to the point of death, even a crucifixion.

Verse 6 begins with *who, although He existed in the form of God.*

The pronoun “ὃς *hos*” refers back to Christ Jesus in verse 5.

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Existed is the participle “ὑπάρχω huparchō.” As a participle this indicates possession. Jesus Christ possessed the form of God.

Form is the word “μορφή *morphē*” and describes the unique quality or aspect of a person or thing. To say that someone is “in *morphē*” indicates the nature is shared. Jesus shares the nature of God.

This word is also used in verse 7, *taking on the form (morphē) of a slave*. Jesus, in His humanity, shared the nature of a slave.

This word is contrasted to “ὁμοίωμα homoiōma,” which means likeness, a copy, similar but not the same. In verse 7 - *having become in likeness of men*.

This is also contrasted with “σχῆμα schema,” which means figure, shape, appearance (as opposed to what is actually real). In verse 8, Jesus was found to be in appearance of a man. This is not to discount the reality of Jesus’ humanity, but there is one major difference (Romans 8:3; Hebrews 4:15). He was made into flesh, yet without the sin nature and without any sin. Jesus is the uniquely born man.

The first part of verse 6 plainly makes the claim that Jesus is God.