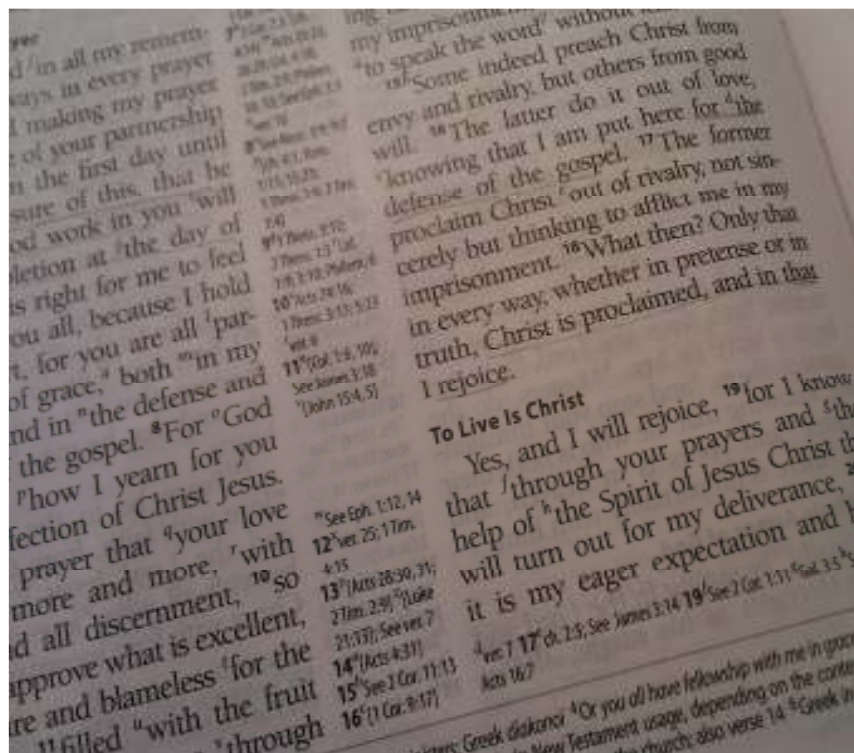


The Gospel Community:

A Basic Expository Commentary on Philippians

By Justin Childers



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The Gospel Community: An Exposition of Philippians

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Paul's letter to the Philippians is about the gospel of Jesus Christ that creates and shapes a community of believers. In this friendly letter, we encounter the supremacy of Jesus Christ. The person and work of Jesus Christ is the dominant subject of Philippians. However, there is nothing abstract or out of touch about this presentation of Christ. In Philippians, Jesus Christ transforms and informs our lives and relationships with each other. In Philippians, Jesus Christ captures our attention in such a way that joy is possible even in the midst of great suffering. Philippians is a practical book about the very center of the Christian faith.

Background Study

Author:

Philippians has generally been accepted as written by Paul. Paul states his authorship (1:1), everything in the letter fits with what we know about Paul (circumstances; friends; purposes), the language is consistent with Paul's other writings, and we have extensive external evidence from early church fathers.¹ However, as usual, there are some (like F.C. Baur) who contest Pauline authorship. One argument Baur uses to support his argument is the mention of overseers and deacons in 1:1. Baur claimed that this is proof of organization in the church which could not have been there in the first century.

Philippians was written by the apostle Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Date and Place of Writing:

Paul was clearly in prison as he wrote this letter. He says, "my imprisonment in the cause of Christ" (1:13; also: 1:7; 1:14; 1:17). The traditional interpretation is that Paul was in his first Roman imprisonment in the early 60's AD (along with Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon). In Philippians, Paul mentions the praetorian guard (1:13) and Caesar's household (4:22), which are fairly clear references to Rome. He implies that he is facing a trial that will either end in life or death (1:20). This leads us to believe that Paul is in Rome because anywhere else he could have appealed to his Roman citizenship. We also have external evidence: Marcion mentions that Paul wrote this letter from prison in Rome in his prologue about 140 AD.

Many have suggested that Paul was in prison in Ephesus, Corinth, or Caesarea.² Factors in this debate include: (1) the distance from the place of writing to Philippi (the question has to do with the number of trips the letter implies; Philippi is 800 miles from Rome; Caesarea is 1200 miles from Rome); (2) the fact that other cities had praetorian guards and Caesar's household could have been outside Rome (Acts 23:35); (3) Paul's missionary plans (he says he hopes to visit the Philippians [2:24], but in Romans, he says he hopes to go to Spain); and (4) the fact that Timothy is with Paul (1:1).

¹ Peter T. O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 9.

² Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco: Word Books, 1983), xliii.

Paul implies these trips to and from Philippi in this letter:

- ⇒ Someone sent a message to Philippi informing the believers of Paul's imprisonment (4:14).
- ⇒ Epaphroditus brought the love gift from Philippi to Paul (4:18).
- ⇒ News of Epaphroditus' sickness was sent back to Philippi (2:26).
- ⇒ Paul and Epaphroditus received word that the Philippians had received the news of Epaphroditus' condition (2:26).

Paul implies these future trips:

- ⇒ Epaphroditus will bring the letter to Philippi (2:25, 28).
- ⇒ Timothy will travel to Philippi (2:19).
- ⇒ Then Timothy will return to Paul (2:19).
- ⇒ Paul will travel to Philippi after his release (2:24).

Most of the debate regarding provenance has centered around the distance factor. Many scholars cannot adopt Roman origin for the letter to the Philippians because the distance is too great from Rome to Philippi (about 800 miles). However, it is very possible to reduce the distance argument. The Philippians could have heard about Paul's imprisonment before Paul actually got to Rome. Epaphroditus could have even been waiting in Rome for Paul to get there. Also, Epaphroditus could have gotten sick on the way to Rome and the Philippians could have heard about his illness before he even got to Rome. Finally, it is obvious that all of these implied trips could have happened during the two year Roman imprisonment. The distance argument should be disregarded. While we cannot be sure, Paul probably wrote Philippians from a Roman prison around 61 AD.

Philippi/Recipients:

Philippi was named after Philip of Macedon (Father of Alexander the Great) in 356 B.C. Philip embraced the area of Philippi because of the abundance of natural resources he found there. Rome took over Macedonia about 168 B.C. In 42 B.C., Mark Antony and Octavian (Augustus Caesar) defeated the Roman Republican forces of Brutus and Cassius, the assassins of Julius Caesar.³ Philippi is located in a very strategic position on the Macedonian coast of the Aegean Sea. It was located on the Via Egnatia, a major road built by the Romans to aid them in transporting military equipment and personnel. In fact, the Via Egnatia divided Philippi into two parts: upper and lower. According to Luke, Philippi was, "the leading city of that district of Macedonia" (Acts 16:11).

Luke also says that this city was a Roman colony (Acts 16:11). Augustus Caesar used Philippi as a retirement city for soldiers who fought in his army. Thus, Philippi would have been a very loyal Roman colony. Philippi's high status in the Roman Empire would have given the Philippians many privileges and given them much pride. This may explain the type of suffering the Philippians were enduring.⁴ Several statements from the letter lead us to believe their suffering was caused by their obedience to God above Rome:

1. Paul is writing this from a Roman prison and he says they are, "experiencing the same

³ O'Brien, 4.

⁴For more on this topic see: Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 29. "Opposition and Suffering".

conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me” (1:30).

2. Nero was emperor during this time and we know him as a great persecutor of Christians. The emperor was called “lord and savior.” Every public event during this time would have been in honor of the Roman emperor and every event would have called the citizens to allegiance to Rome. A true Christian could never call a human the Lord and Savior. In Philippians, Paul calls Jesus, “Lord” (2:11) and “Savior” (3:20). Christians are citizens of a heavenly Kingdom (3:20) and are urged to live as citizens worthy of the gospel (1:27).
3. Paul tells the Philippians that the gospel is advancing through his imprisonment so much so that the purpose of his imprisonment (“for Christ’s sake”) has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard (1:13). Also, some from “Caesar’s household” send greetings with Paul (4:22).

If suffering was the situation outside the church, division was creeping up inside the church.

This explains Paul exhortations to unity throughout the entire letter (see ‘Unity’ under Themes).

Acts 16:6-40 contains the history of the founding of the church at Philippi during Paul’s second missionary journey (51-53 AD). God directed Paul to cross into Macedonia and into the city of Philippi. On the Sabbath, Paul and his companions went to a riverside where some women had gathered for prayer. This is evidence that there was not much of a Jewish population in the city because there was no synagogue. God opens a business woman’s (Lydia) heart and she becomes the first known convert in Europe. Paul and Silas are beaten and thrown into jail for casting a demon out of a slave-girl who brought profit to her masters. In jail, Paul and Silas sang hymns of praise to God and God sent an earthquake to free them. The Philippian jailer and his whole family believed on the Lord Jesus after hearing the truth of the gospel from Paul.

Purpose:

There are several very clear purposes discernable in the letter to the Philippians:

(1) Paul wanted to thank the Philippians for their financial support. Evidently, Epaphroditus was sent by the Philippians to bring Paul a financial offering the church had collected. Paul calls Epaphroditus, “your messenger and minister to my need” (2:25). Epaphroditus came close to death, risking his life, “to complete what was deficient in your service to me” (2:30). Paul says, “I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God” (4:18). Paul also says, “no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs” (4:15-16).

(2) Paul writes to inform his friends about his present circumstances. After a traditional introduction, Paul begins, “Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel” (1:12). It is interesting to note that Paul views this as good news. He tells them about his circumstances with a rejoicing attitude. The Philippians would have probably liked to have heard that he was released from prison and that he was free from the fear of execution. However, the good news is that God is using Paul, even in a Roman prison. Paul also hopes that he can visit the Philippians again, if he is released (2:24).

(3) Paul also wrote as a pastor to warn his friends of the opponents of the gospel. Paul urges them to in no way be alarmed by their opponents (1:28). He warns them to, “beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision” (3:2). These opponents are “enemies of the cross of Christ,” and their end is destruction (3:18-19). Some have equated these

opponents with the Judaizers connected with the letter to the Galatians.⁵ However, it seems as if there is more than one group of “opponents” in Philippi that Paul addresses.

(4) Another purpose relates to the theme of unity. Paul wrote to correct the division that existed in their midst (4:2). Paul wrote to urge the Philippians to be united under the gospel.

Themes:

(1) Christ (about 60 times in 104 verses), some examples:

- Paul and Timothy are introduced as “servants of Christ” (1:1).
- Righteousness comes through Jesus Christ (1:11).
- Paul’s imprisonment is for the cause of Christ (1:13).
- Paul rejoices that Christ is proclaimed (1:18).
- Paul’s ambition is for Christ to be exalted in his body (1:20).
- “To live is Christ” (1:21).
- The best thing is to “be with Christ” (1:23).
- It is for Christ’s sake that we believe and suffer (1:29).
- We are to have the attitude of Christ (2:5-11)
- Every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (2:11).
- True believers glory in Christ (3:3).
- Paul counts everything as loss in view of the surpassing value of Christ (3:7-8).
- Paul’s aim is to know Christ (3:10).
- We are waiting for the return of Christ (3:20).
- Paul can do all things through Christ (4:13).

(2) Suffering

- Paul is writing this letter from prison (1:7; 1:13; 1:17).
- Suffering is a grace gift from God (1:29-30).
- Epaphroditus has suffered for the cause of Christ (2:30).
- Paul has suffered the loss of all things (3:8).
- The Philippians have shared with Paul in his affliction (4:14).

(3) Joy/Rejoice (about 16 times)

Particularly worth noting is the fact that this joy is against the backdrop of suffering and persecution. One must understand the background of Paul’s imprisonment and the Philippians’ situation to understand what this call to rejoice means.

3 Greek words used: (1) χαρά (noun, “joy,” 5x); (2) χαίρω (verb, “rejoice,” 9x); (3) συγχαίρω (verb, “rejoice with,” 2x).

- Paul is able to rejoice even while in a Roman prison (1:18).
- Paul rejoices in: Christ proclaimed (1:18), future deliverance (1:18-19), unity (2:2), his sacrifice (2:17-18), the Philippians (4:1), and the Lord in response to the financial gift (4:10).
- The Philippians are commanded to rejoice (2:18; 3:1; 4:4).

⁵ See O’Brien, 26.

(4) Gospel (9 times)

- Paul's and the Philippians' relationship is described in terms of "partnership in the gospel" (1:5; 4:15).
- Paul is in prison "for the defense and confirmation of the gospel" (1:7, 16).
- Paul's imprisonment is for the "greater progress of the gospel" (1:12).
- Paul's concern for the Philippians is for their own "advance/progress in the faith" (i.e. the gospel - 1:25).
- The Philippians are urged to live lives worthy of the gospel (1:27).

(5) Unity

Paul seems to be very concerned with the unity in the Philippian church. There most likely was some division going on inside the church.

- Paul wants to hear that they "are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together" (1:27).
- They are urged to be "united in spirit, intent on one purpose" (2:2).
- They are urged to humility by regarding each another as more important than themselves (2:3).
- Paul urges two women (Euodia and Syntyche) to live in harmony (4:2).

(6) "Think"

Paul uses the verb "φρονιεν" 10 times in this short letter (1:7; 2:2 [2x]; 2:5; 3:15 [2x]; 3:19; 4:2; 4:10 [2x]). Many translations use different words to translate this one Greek word.

Outline of Philippians:

- I. (1:1-11) Introduction
 - A. (1:1-2) Greeting
 - B. (1:3-8) Prayer of thanksgiving
 - C. (1:9-11) Prayer of intercession
- II. (1:12-26) Paul's Imprisonment for Christ
 - A. (1:12-18a) Paul's joy in prison (Present)
 - B. (1:18b-26) Paul's thoughts of life and death (Future)
- III. (1:27-2:18) Be like Christ: Radical Humility
 - A. (1:27-30) An appeal to live worthy of the gospel
 - B. (2:1-11) An appeal to live with the attitude of Christ
 - C. (2:12-18) An appeal to live out salvation in an ungodly world
- IV. (2:19-30) Timothy and Epaphroditus: Workers for Christ
 - A. (2:19-24) Timothy: a kindred spirit
 - B. (2:25-30) Epaphroditus: messenger and minister
- V. (3:1-21) Christ is Greater than All; Therefore, Press On Toward Him
 - A. (3:1-6) Paul's possible reasons to boast in the flesh
 - B. (3:7-11) "Jesus is valuable"
 - C. (3:12-21) Run with all your might toward the goal
- VI. (4:1-9) Stand Firm in Christ
- VII. (4:10-20) Paul's Contentment in Christ and his Thankfulness for the Philippians' Gifts.
- VIII. (4:21-23) Conclusion

Exposition

I. INTRODUCTION (1:1-11)

A. Greeting (1:1-2)

Paul and Timothy. This letter is obviously written by the apostle Paul himself (52 first person references) but he includes Timothy's name in the greeting. This most likely means that Timothy was with him at the time and that Timothy's seal of approval is on everything Paul has written. Also, the Philippians knew Timothy and Timothy was coming to them shortly (2:19). Paul includes others in the greeting in seven of his thirteen letters.⁶ There have been six other reasons given as to why Paul would include Timothy in this introduction: (1) Timothy is in prison with Paul, (2) Timothy is the co-author of this letter, (3) Timothy is the secretary, (4) Timothy was the co-founder of the church, (5) Paul is just being kind to include Timothy, and (6) Paul includes Timothy to teach the church a lesson about humility.

Servants of Christ Jesus. Everything in this letter is about Jesus Christ. Here, at the very beginning, we learn that Paul and Timothy are bond-servants (δουλοι) of Christ Jesus. He is their Master and everything Paul writes is under His Lordship. "Bond-servants" is about more than just forced labor. A bond-servant was someone who was set free by the master but chose to remain with the master, instead of moving on to other things. A bond-servant was such by choice not by force (see Exodus 21:1-6). Jesus was so valuable to Paul that he was willing to forsake all the other pursuits in life to just be a humble servant of Christ. Notice that Paul does not play the "apostle" card in this letter like he does in many others. This is probably because the Philippians know Paul and his apostleship is not in question in Philippi.

To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi. Paul is unashamed in his letters to call the people of God, "saints." The word literally means "holy ones." God's people are set apart for His purposes and for His glory. The people of God are to strive for holiness in everything they do. Notice that the people of God are holy not based on their merit but because they are, "in Christ Jesus." They are "in" Christ "at" Philippi. Christians have been redeemed by Christ but remain in their location to labor for Christ.

With the overseers and deacons. Paul's mention of the overseers and deacons is very interesting. This gives us evidence of early leadership in churches that Paul established. Notice that this reference also implies a plurality of leaders in the Philippian church.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the traditional Pauline greeting and these words are related to the traditional greetings of that day. "Peace" is important here because of the possible disunity in the church at Philippi. Grace and peace come from God the Father and God the Son. Christ is the source of grace and peace.

B. Prayer of Thanksgiving (1:3-8)

Basically, this prayer of thanksgiving and the prayer of intercession are both "prayer-reports." Paul is telling his friends why he thanks God for them and what he prays for them. Paul told the Thessalonians to, "rejoice always, pray continually, and give thanks in all circumstances" (1 Thessalonians 5:14-16). Here, Paul shows us that he follows all three of these commands.

⁶ 1 and 2 Thessalonians (Timothy and Silas); 1 Corinthians (Sosthenes); 2 Corinthians (Timothy); Philemon (Timothy); Colossians (Timothy); and Philippians (Timothy).

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you. This sentence is in the present tense denoting that Paul continually thanks God for the Philippians. He also tells them of the frequency with which he prays for them: every time he remembers them. He proceeds to give three reasons he thanks God for them: (1) His own feelings toward them, (2) Their participation in the gospel, and (3) God's good work in them.

Always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy. Paul's thanksgiving is expressed in prayers to God on the Philippians' behalf. This prayer is characterized by great joy. The Philippians were a constant source of joy for Paul (2:17-18; 4:1). Notice that Paul prays with thanksgiving and joy for "you all." Paul continues to include the entire church in order to stress the idea of unity, which is a major theme of this letter.

Because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. One of the reasons Paul gives thanks to God always and prays continually for the Philippians is because of their partnership in the gospel. They have not only shared their finances with Paul but they have labored with him to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ (1:7). The word translated "participation" is the Greek word "κοινωνία," meaning "intimate fellowship." The deepest connection between Paul and this church is the person and work of Jesus Christ.

And I am sure of this. It seems most likely that Paul's confidence rests in what he is about to say rather than what he has just said. "That" is the connector indicating the content of what he is confident about. This verb is in the perfect tense indicating a certainty. There are three realities Paul is certain about: (1) Past: "He began a good work," (2) Present: He is in the process of perfecting the good work, and (3) Future: "He will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus."

That He who began a good work in you. It is important to note the sovereign initiative of God here. God is the one who began a good work in the Philippians. We can take no credit for the work of God in our lives. We did not begin this good work and we cannot complete this good work. Later in this letter, Paul says, "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who is at work in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (2:12-13).

Will bring it to completion at the day of Christ Jesus. Not only is salvation God's initiative, it is also His to complete. It is the sovereign faithfulness of God to keep us until the day when Christ returns. Notice again the past, present, and future dimensions of Paul's confidence: God started the work in us (past), God is in the process of completing the work (present), and He will complete the work until the day of Christ Jesus (future). How many things have I started and never finished? God always completes what He starts! Paul rebuked the Galatians by saying, "Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh" (Galatians 3:3)? God began the work in them, but they were trying to complete the work on their own. God is not finished with us yet. He is in the process of perfecting His good work in us. God will never abandon His own. He will preserve us to the end.

It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. Paul is gospel-centered and thus Christ-centered, because the gospel is all about Christ. Paul believed that his feelings were right for the Philippians because they have stood by him in his imprisonment and in his ministry of the gospel. "Feel" is not a very good translation of the Greek word, "φρονεῖν." This word literally means, "to think." It involves head and heart. "φρονεῖν" is used 10 times in this letter and at least once in every chapter. "Partakers" is translated from a compound verb meaning "to fellowship with"

(συγκοινωνούς). Christians should have deep affections for one another. We are to hold one another in our hearts.

For God is my witness. Paul often calls God as his witness. The idea is that even God knows about Paul's affections for them. This is a strong phrase that heightens the intensity of what he is about to say.

How I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. Literally, Paul says that he longs for them with the inner parts (σπλάγχνοις) of Christ. He loves them so much that his insides are moved by his affection. The affection is Christ's because everything Paul is and does is all about Jesus Christ. The believer is to have no yearnings apart from his Lord. Christ has demonstrated affections for us and we are to demonstrate those same affections for others. This is one of the purposes of this letter. Paul wanted to communicate his great love for the Philippians. The glory of Christ is clearly seen in Paul's affections for the church at Philippi. Paul was a hater and persecutor of the church. Paul wanted nothing more than that the church of Jesus Christ be killed out of existence. But, now he deeply loves the church of Jesus Christ and lives to serve her. Only through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ can such a change take place. Christ has radically changed Paul. When Christ saves a person, He gives them His very own affections.

C. Prayer of Intercession (1:9-11)

One aspect of the importance of the gospel in the Christian life that is rarely explored is the relationship between the gospel and our prayers. Christian prayer is prayer informed and empowered by the truth of the gospel. Christ redeems our prayers. God the Father would not hear us apart from the work of the Savior.

And, our prayers should reflect gospel priorities. In other words, what we pray for and about (the content of our prayers) should be for the truth of the gospel to bear fruit in our lives and in the lives of those for whom we pray.

One of the ways we see Paul's gospel-mindedness in Philippians is in the content of his prayers for them. Paul prays for the advance of gospel-realities in the church at Philippi. He prays for the evidence of gospel fruit to be worked out in their lives. This is a gospel-driven prayer. Meaning, it is informed by the priorities of the gospel and it is concerned with the advance of the gospel in the life of the Philippian church. Paul prays for the gospel to penetrate deep down into the core of their lives.

And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment. Paul's primary prayer of intercession is for their love to grow and abound. This could be a foreshadow of the theme of unity in this letter. Paul prays for their love to grow in real knowledge and discernment. He acknowledges that they have love and he prays for deeper love. He prays for this developing love for two reasons: (1) that they might make godly decisions, and (2) that they might manifest godliness in their lives.

So that you may approve what is excellent. When love grows in real knowledge, we are able to realize the excellent things in life. "So that" could be a result clause indicating the outcome of an increased amount of love. Paul is praying that they will be able to choose the best things in life and not just the good things. He prays for the discernment and wisdom to make godly decisions.

And so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ. When love abounds and we are able to discern the worthy things in life, we become sincere and thus blameless. "Sincere" carries

the idea of “tested” or “held up to the light for inspection.” Sometimes pottery would crack and a store owner would fill in the cracks with wax. The only way to tell if a piece of pottery contained wax was to hold it up to the sunlight. We are to be “without wax.” “Blameless” carries the idea of “above reproach” or “faultless.” This word also contains the idea of not causing others to stumble. When love abounds and we are able to discern the most excellent things in life, we are characterized by sincerity and blamelessness until the day of Christ. “The day of Christ” is most likely a reference to the second coming of Christ at the end of this age. Paul always lived in view of that day when Christ would be revealed.

Filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ. Paul’s concern is that on the day of Christ the Philippians will be filled with the fruit of righteousness. In other words, he is praying that they will live their lives righteously until Jesus comes. The only way anything good happens in our lives is if we have the righteousness of Jesus Christ imputed to us. This is a perfect tense participle denoting a completed action that has abiding results. We have been filled with the fruit of righteousness and we are filled with it. Godly living only comes through Jesus Christ. Jesus said, “apart from me, you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

To the glory and praise of God. Everything is to be for the glory of God. Paul’s prayer would be in vain if he was asking it for any other reason than the glory of God. The glory of God must be the aim and focus of everything in life. Jesus said that He answers prayer for the glory of the Father (John 14:13).

Themes present in this introduction that appear throughout the rest of the letter:

1. The supremacy of Christ in everything.
 - Paul and Timothy are bond-servants of Christ (1:1).
 - The saints are in Christ (1:1).
 - Grace and Peace come from Christ (1:2).
 - “The day of Christ” is anticipated (1:6, 10).
 - Paul longs for them with the affection of Christ (1:8).
 - righteousness comes through Jesus Christ (1:11).
2. Paul’s joy in the midst of suffering.
 - Paul offers prayer with joy for the Philippians (1:4)
3. Paul’s passion for the gospel.
 - Paul thanks God for the Philippians participation (fellowship) in the gospel (1:5)
 - They are partakers of grace with Paul in his defense & confirmation of the gospel (1:7).
4. Paul’s plea for unity in the church.
 - He writes to “all” the saints in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons (1:1).
 - Paul offers prayer for “you all” (1:4).
 - They “all” are partakers of grace with Paul (1:7).
 - Paul prays that their love will abound (1:9).

Summary of the introduction:

1. Paul’s thanksgiving report (1:3-8)

Why Paul thanks God for the Philippians:

- (1) His own feelings for them.
 - He offers prayer with joy (1:4)
 - He has them in his heart (1:7)

- He longs for them with the affection of Christ Jesus (1:8)
- (2) Their fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now.
 - They are “fellow partakers/partners.” (1:5, 7)
- (3) God’s good work in them. (1:6)
 - Past: “He who began a good work in you” (Sovereign initiative).
 - Present: “Will complete it” (This is a process of His Sovereign faithfulness).
 - Future: “Until the day of Christ.”

2. Paul’s prayer-report (1:9-11)

What Paul prays for the Philippians:

- Their love may abound and grow more and more.
 - (1) that they might make the best decisions possible.
 - in real knowledge and all discernment.
 - They may approve the things that are excellent.
- (2) that they might be the best people possible.
 - Sincerity and blamelessness.
 - filled with the fruit of righteousness to the glory & praise of God.

II. PAUL’S IMPRISONMENT FOR CHRIST (1:12-26)

A. Paul’s joy in prison (Present) (1:12-18a)

I want you to know, brothers. This phrase signifies one of the major purposes for this letter. Paul wants the Philippians to know about his circumstances because they have heard he is in prison. The case could even be that Epaphroditus expressed a major concern from the Philippians when he brought Paul the love gift from the church. Paul could be troubled that his friends in Philippi are troubled over his imprisonment. This section may also have a teaching element in it: here is how one for whom Christ and the gospel are uppermost responds to adversity.⁷ “Brothers” (ἀδελφοί) is a term of endearment and is used 133 times by Paul.⁸

That what has happened to me. Paul does not give any details of the sufferings he has been experiencing. But, we know from Acts that Paul has been beaten, falsely accused, shipwrecked, and is now waiting to stand trial to see if he will live or die. Paul does not focus on what has happened to him. He focus on what his sufferings are accomplishing. What he is saying about these circumstances is amazing.

Has really served to advance the gospel. Here is Paul’s aim: the greater progress of the gospel. Everything else in Paul’s life had importance only to the degree that it affected the progress of the gospel. Paul is not bitter about his circumstances because his circumstances are helping advance the mission of his life (Acts 20:24). What is the secret to joy in the midst of suffering? The secret is to believe that your suffering is advancing something greater than just the physical circumstances. This belief is not just a “hope.” God has promised that He will cause all things to work together for our good if we love Him and are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28). This phrase could also be translated, “has helped the progress of the

⁷ Fee, 109.

⁸ Hawthorne, 34.

gospel.”⁹ Suffering is a servant and a help to the gospel!

Notice the word “really.” It is as if the Philippians would have expected that Paul’s circumstances have hindered the gospel. The gospel messenger is chained up. However, what has “really” happened is that God is using what has happened to Paul to advance the gospel.

So that it has become known...that my imprisonment is for Christ. Listen closely to Paul here. His imprisonment is for a cause. His suffering is not meaningless in his mind. He is suffering for the cause of Christ in two ways: (1) He was living for the cause of Christ when he was imprisoned and (2) He is seeking to live for the cause of Christ while in chains. He has a passion to make Christ known in his suffering.

“Known” is better translated “clear” or “manifest.” The purpose of Paul’s imprisonment is clear. In other words, no one doubts why Paul is in chains. His imprisonment is so much for Christ that everyone knows it clearly. Is Christ clearly seen in your life and suffering? One cannot help but notice Paul’s “rejoicing tone” as he writes about the effect of his sufferings.

Throughout the whole imperial guard. The purpose of Paul’s imprisonment is not just known to Christians who understand the purpose of suffering, but also to the soldiers guarding Paul. It was customary for the prisoners of Rome to be constantly chained to Roman soldiers. Luke tells us that Paul had a soldier guarding him even in the place he lived (Acts 28:16). Peter had 16 soldiers guarding him at one point (Acts 12:4). The “imperial guard” was an elite group of Roman soldiers trained to protect the emperor and other leaders.

And to all the rest. Everyone knows the purpose of Paul’s imprisonment. This could be a reference to other people who had access to Roman political life. God was using Paul’s imprisonment to spread the gospel to people who would have never visited the house churches of Rome. In His sovereignty, God has chained his apostle up so that thousands could hear the life-giving message of Jesus Christ.

And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment. There are people trusting in the Lord *by* Paul’s suffering. Paul sees this with eyes of faith and is able to rejoice that his suffering is serving the cause of Christ. Believers are being awakened to the cause of Christ *because* of Paul’s chains. God often uses the suffering of His people to embolden His church. He wakes us out of our slumbers of indifference by the example of others (see Piper’s *Let the Nations Be Glad*, pp. 90-91).

Are much more bold to speak the word without fear. God uses the suffering of His saints to give courage to the church to proclaim the Word of God. Often, just a hint of persecution breathes a fresh awakening to the timid. Notice something about Paul’s attitude: Paul is more concerned with the gospel (Christ) being proclaimed than about his own personal role in proclaiming it. It’s not about Paul. It’s about Christ!

Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former proclaim Christ out of rivalry, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. Paul is not blind to the fact that many have selfish motives in preaching the gospel. However, it is important to note that he includes these in the term, “brothers” in verse 14. “Envy” is the displeasure of others doing well. They preach out of a sense of competition. How do we reconcile Paul’s attitude here with his attitude elsewhere, where he condemns those with false motives? Most likely, these are people who know Christ but for some reason do not like Paul. They are not anti-Christ, they are anti-Paul. Paul does not care if he is liked, he only cares that Christ is proclaimed. The gospel is more important to Paul than his personal role in proclaiming

⁹ USB GNT Dictionary for ἐρχομαι.

it. Three times we are told that these brethren are preaching Christ: (1) verse 15, “preach Christ,” (2) verse 17, “the former proclaim Christ,” (3) verse 18, “Christ is proclaimed.”

Philippians 1:15-18: “2 Groups preaching Christ”

1. Some preach Christ from envy and rivalry.
 - preach out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives
 - preach thinking it will cause Paul distress
 - preach in pretense (“just for a show”)
2. Some preach Christ from good will
 - preach out of love
 - preach knowing the purpose of Paul’s imprisonment
 - preach in truth

What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Here is a glimpse at the large heart of Paul. His one concern is with Jesus Christ. He only cares that Jesus Christ is being made known because of his imprisonment. He rejoices in Christ being proclaimed. Jesus is his treasure.

B. Paul’s thoughts of life and death (Future) (1:18b-26)

In this passage, we have the apostle’s heart laid bare. As he reflects on his current situation, he is reminded that his life could end soon. So, he expresses his deepest longing: for Christ to be honored whether he lives or dies. Paul was a man consumed with a singular passion. And, this text is not recorded so that we could admire Paul’s example. Here is a picture what every Christian should be obsessed with. Our lives should be dominated by Christ.

Yes, and I will rejoice. Not only is the present for Paul a cause of rejoicing (the gospel is advancing and Christ is being preached), but the future is also a cause to rejoice. Paul is reflecting now on the trial that awaits him. Paul’s upcoming trial will either lead to his release (life) or it will lead to his execution (death). There is nothing in the future that will take Paul’s joy in Christ. He is rejoicing and he will rejoice no matter what happens. Verses 19-20 explain why Paul continues to rejoice (notice the explanatory “for” in verse 19).

For I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Paul’s confidence rests in the means of the deliverance. Paul believes that the Philippians are praying for him and that the Spirit will supply the deliverance he needs. Paul does not view the Christian life in isolation from others. The Philippians are intimately involved in his ministry through their prayers.

“Help” or “provision” is a rich word, meaning, “supply, support, or strengthen.” Paul’s confidence is that the Spirit will help him in his weakness. Jesus promised that in our hour of need, the Spirit will help us: “When they arrest you and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but it is the Holy Spirit” (Mark 13:11; Luke 12:12; Matthew 10:20). This should give us great confidence to be risk-takers for God. The Spirit will support us and supply for us! Notice that the Spirit is the “Spirit of Jesus Christ.” The presence of the Spirit is the presence of Jesus Christ.

This will turn out for my deliverance. There is some question as to what “this” refers

to. It is most likely that Paul is referring to his present situation as a whole. The idea is that the result of it all (the gospel advancing; believers being emboldened to speak the Word of God; Roman guards hearing the gospel; Christ being proclaimed; etc.) will be deliverance. There is also some question as to what “deliverance” means. Is Paul speaking about ultimate deliverance at the judgment seat of Christ or is he speaking simply about his release from prison?

There are several reasons as to why Paul is speaking about ultimate deliverance in relationship to Christ.¹⁰ (1) The Greek word used is σωτηρίαν which literally means “salvation” and is usually used by Paul to refer to people’s relationship to God.¹¹ (2) Paul does not know whether or not he will be released or executed. (3) This is probably a direct quote from Job 13:16 (LXX). Job is being accused by his friends that some sin in his life has caused the judgment of God to fall upon him. Job is sure that this suffering is not a judgment of God and confidently says that it will result in his final salvation and vindication. Paul, who knows the Old Testament well, associates his position with Job’s, and confidently says, “I know that this will turn out for my deliverance.” In other words, God sees and knows my heart. He will see to it that I am delivered, even if this upcoming trial results in death for me. Paul is not sure if the Roman court will vindicate him but he knows that he will be vindicated in the presence of God. In 2 Timothy 1:12, Paul told Timothy from a Roman prison, “I am not ashamed for I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day.”

Paul’s mind is not on the Roman judicial system. His thoughts are directed to a higher court. Paul is contemplating his situation in light of the pure judgment of God. Paul is confident that God will vindicate him.

As it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body whether by life or by death. Paul’s deliverance is according to his earnest expectation and hope. The content of his expectation and hope is introduced with the ὅτι (“that”) clause. His passion is expressed in two ways, one negative and one positive: “that I will not be put to shame in anything,” and “that Christ will be exalted in my body.” “That I will not be put to shame in anything” is also (like his deliverance) in relation to God. Paul would be shamed if he did not magnify Jesus in his life and death. Being put to shame is in contrast to bringing glory to Jesus in life and death. Those who magnify something or someone other than Jesus are put to shame before God. Jesus said, “Whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels” (Mark 8:38 – See also 2 Tim 1:8,12).

Paul has sought to live his life for the glory of God (“as always”) and now that he is faced with execution or release from prison, he wants Christ to be magnified. Paul does not know how his trial will turn out. He knows that he will be vindicated in the presence of God but he does not know if that will be sooner or later. Whatever the Emperor decides, Paul wants Jesus to be seen and praised in his body. The word “honored” (μεγαλυνθήσεται) is literally translated, “to make large or to magnify,” and derives from μέγας, meaning “great.”

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. Paul now shifts focus to talk about the benefits of life and death for him and the church in Philippi (1:21-26). He also spells out what it means to magnify Christ is living and dying. You magnify Christ by making Him your treasure.

¹⁰ Contra Hawthorne, 40.

¹¹ O’Brien, 109; Fee, 128, note 7.

John Piper has said, “the key to praising Christ is prizing Christ.” “To live is Christ” means that Christ defines life. Life has no meaning apart from Jesus Christ. Jesus is the object, motive, inspiration, and goal of all that Paul does.¹² Since Jesus is so valuable to Paul, “to die is gain,” because death will mean more of Jesus (see verse 23). Paul does not view death as gain because it would mean escaping his pain and suffering. Rather, death is gain because death ushers him into total union with Christ. Paul continues to define what he means in the following verses (See 3:7-8, where the word “gain” is used again, to learn more about what this statement means).

If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. If Paul is released by the Emperor, it will only mean more missionary activity. It will only mean that Jesus will be proclaimed to more people and that many more will come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. “Fruitful labor” will be the result of Paul’s life. The fruit of righteousness comes through Jesus Christ (1:11). Is your life characterized by “fruitful labor” for the Lord? Paul is torn as he thinks about the possibilities of life and the gain of death. I do not think he actually has a choice here when he says, “I do not know which to choose.” He is merely pondering the possibilities of both and he is divided as to which is better. He is pondering the gain of dying versus the fruit of living. He knows God is sovereign and will not let anything happen to him that will not be for his ultimate good (Romans 8:28). He will say in the following sentences that death seems better for him but to go on living would be better for the Philippians.

I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. There is an intense pressure on Paul as he thinks about these things. He is being hemmed in from both directions. Both options (life and death) have advantages. For Paul, the best option (most desired option) would be to die (“to depart”). Why? Dying is the best option for Paul because dying means to be with Christ. The intimacy between a believer and Christ is so strong that even death cannot break it. Paul is very clear here that departing (dying) brings instant communion with Christ. There is not some waiting period (soul sleep) between death and being with Christ. If there were some sort of delay or wait, departing would not be “very much better.” “To be absent from the body is to be at home with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8). Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ, not even death (Romans 8:38). Notice Paul’s feelings about being with Christ: “that is *far* better.” Here Paul uses an adjective (much), and two comparatives (greater and better). Literally, πολλῶ μᾶλλον κρείσσον is “much greater better.” Nothing in all the universe is as good as being with Christ. To think about heaven without Christ is to think about hell.

But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. Paul is not only thinking about his own desires as he contemplates life and death. In chapter two, he will urge the Philippians to “consider others better than yourselves,” and here he does just that. Paul is willing to delay crossing the finish line in his own race in order to serve the needs of the believers in Philippi. These thoughts are pressing in on Paul because it would be better for the Philippians to get to see Paul again and it would be better for them if Paul was to have some more “fruitful ministry” among them. This shows that Paul made decisions not just based on what is best for him personally, but on what was best for the body of Christ as a whole.

Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith. Paul is convinced that for him to live and have more fruitful ministry is better for the Philippians. He also says that he knows he will remain (continue to live). This is a striking statement, considering that Paul has been pondering the benefits of both options for several verses. He said, “I am hard pressed from both directions,” and now he is

¹² O’Brien, 120.

saying that he is positive he will be released. It is hard to say exactly why Paul seems to have shifted. He describes his pastoral responsibility with them as their, “progress and joy in the faith.” He wants them to advance forward in their faith and he wants their advancement to be in joy. This is a glimpse into a pastor’s heart.

So that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again. It is important to note that the proud confidence is ultimately in the sphere of Christ. The boasting happens “in Christ Jesus.” Paul knows that his presence with the Philippians will be a cause of great rejoicing.

III. BE LIKE CHRIST: RADICAL HUMILITY (1:27-2:18)

A. An appeal to live worthy of the gospel (1:27-30)

Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ. This verse begins a new focus in the letter. Paul has been describing his situation and how it relates to the gospel and to the Philippians. Now Paul turns to speak directly to the Philippians in the imperative mood (commands). To live worthy of the gospel of Christ is the overarching command of the Christian life (Ephesians 4:1; Colossians 1:10; 1 Thessalonians 2:12). Every other command falls under this one command. Specifically, the commands contained in 1:27-2:18 explain what it means to live worthy of the gospel of Christ. The adverb, “only” (μόνον) has been translated, “just one thing.”¹³ Paul uses this adverb to make it clear that to live worthy of the gospel is of supreme importance. “Let your manner of life be worthy” is a very interesting and rich phrase. It literally means, “to be a citizen.” Philippi was a Roman colony and boasted in its privileged position in the Empire. Because the citizens of Philippi had such a privileged position, Rome expected them to live worthy of the Roman Empire. Paul is appealing to their dual citizenship when he appeals for them to, “live in the Roman colony of Philippi as worthy citizens of your heavenly homeland.”¹⁴ Paul will do this same thing in 3:20 when he says, “Our citizenship is in heaven.” Christians are to live “worthy” of the gospel, meaning that our lives are to balance out with the gospel.

So that whether I come and see you or am absent. In the previous verses, Paul seemed very confident that he would be released and be allowed have more fruitful ministry for the Philippians’ progress and joy in the faith (1:24-26). However, the command to live as worthy citizens of the gospel of Christ is to be fulfilled no matter what happens. Whether Paul lives or dies, the Philippians have a divine calling to conduct themselves in a way that brings glory to Christ.

I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel. This begins Paul’s official appeal for unity in the church. He wants them to stand firm, “in one spirit.” There is some debate as to whether this is the Holy Spirit or whether this is some common bond between humans. Gordon Fee gives several reasons as to why this must be talking about the Holy Spirit.¹⁵ Peter T. O’Brien does not

¹³ O’Brien, 145.

¹⁴ Fee, 162.

¹⁵ Fee, 164.

think this is an explicit reference to the Holy Spirit.¹⁶ “With one mind,” is literally “with one soul.” “Striving together for the faith of the gospel” is not a causal command. Paul is telling them to fight for their lives together. The picture is of an army who fights to the death side-by-side. We are to strive with fellow believers for the faith of the gospel.

And not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. We should not be alarmed that there are opponents to the gospel. Jesus told us that the world will hate us just like it hated Him (John 15:20). However, this word probably means something deeper than just “frightened.” This is most likely an exhortation not to allow the opponents to deter them from their faith. When this kind of steadfastness in the face of opponents happens, it is a sign for both them and the Philippians. For the opponents, it is a sign of destruction. It is a proof of their rejection of the gospel. However, for the Christian who resists in the face of opposition, it is a sign of salvation. Notice that it does not earn salvation, but is a “sign” or “proof” of salvation. In other words, one of the assurances God gives us of our salvation is the grace to resist the persecution that comes our way. Certainly, everything is from God, but Paul makes sure the Philippians understand that this is from God.

For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake. This has to be one of the most challenging verses in the entire Bible. Everyone knows that “to believe in Him” is a grace-gift for the sake of Christ. There is no way we could have believed in Christ on our own merit. He turned our unbelieving heart into a heart full of faith for His cause. However, the second half of this verse is not as easy to swallow. God has “graced” you to suffer for His sake. Suffering is a gift from the hand of a loving God for the sake of Christ. Peter said, “If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed” (1 Peter 4:14). He also said that we suffer according to the will of God (1 Peter 4:19). FF Bruce wrote,

It is taken for granted throughout the NT, and nowhere more so than in Paul’s letters, that suffering is inevitably incurred by Christian existence in the present world. There was nothing surprising in this: Christ had suffered, and his followers—those who were “in Christ”—could expect nothing else. Paul himself, throughout his career as an apostle, knew what it meant to suffer for Christ’s sake, and he prepared his converts for similar suffering. Indeed, he encouraged them with the assurance that suffering for Christ’s sake proved the genuineness of their faith.¹⁷

Engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have. The Philippians are suffering in the same manner as Paul is suffering. This could mean that the suffering in Philippi is as a result of some sort of allegiance to Rome and to the emperor. “Conflict” is a word that means, “intense fighting.” The Philippians saw this conflict in Paul when he was in Philippi (see Acts 16), and they now hear about the conflict in Paul’s life.

B. An appeal to live with the attitude of Christ (2:1-11)

In this passage, Paul continues his appeal for unity through humility. He bases the

¹⁶ O’Brien, 150.

¹⁷ F.F. Bruce, *Philippians*, New International Biblical Commentary, (Peabody, MA: 1989), 56.

exhortation to unity (verse 2) in the historical example of Jesus Christ. Jesus humbled Himself by becoming a man, a slave, and dying on the cross. Therefore, we should live with the attitude of Christ.

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy. Paul is assuming the reality of these four things. The “if” does not imply uncertainty. Rather, “if” could be translated “since.”¹⁸ This sentence serves as a reminder of the blessings of being a Christian. This sentence also serves as the basis (ground or motivation) for the appeal for unity and humility that follows. Knowing the reality of these blessings should help empower us to fulfill the commands that follow. We do not pursue unity in our own strength according to our own resources. Rather, out of the overflow of the blessings of the gospel, we pursue unity in the community of God.

Complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Knowing that his partners were living worthily of the gospel brought great joy to the apostle Paul. He urges them to intensify his joy in the gospel by being united. He lived to hear that his friends were honoring the Lord Jesus. The Philippian church was evidently dealing with some sort of internal strife. Paul has heard that there are divisions beginning in the church, so he directly appeals to them to be united. “Being of the same mind,” “having the same love,” “being in full accord,” and “of one mind” all speak about a group of people who are unified for the cause of the gospel. They have the same passions and ambitions. There is no doubt that the “one purpose” we are to be intent on is the advancement of the gospel (1:12; 1:27).

Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. This command could not be any clearer. Do “nothing” from selfishness or vain conceit. Pride is the enemy of true unity. What would the world think about the Lord Jesus and about Christianity as a whole if we really lived this command? Selfishness and empty conceit are obstacles and hindrances to true unity in the body of Christ. We are to count ourselves as the least important people we know. Everyone we meet is to be considered more significant than ourselves.

Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.. This command seems to modify and further define the command in verse three. That is, the way you regard others as more important than yourself is to look out for their interests just as much as you look out for your own. The Christian is not to be self-centered but God-centered. To be God-centered involves being others-centered. We are to “look out” for the interests of others. This implies deliberate, careful, and intensive denying of ourselves to help others. Mainly, we are to not just pursue our own joy and spiritual maturity. We are to look out for the joy and spiritual maturity of others. We are to lay down our preferences for the good of others. Basically, Paul is restating the command of Jesus to love our neighbor as we love ourselves.

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus. Paul has given the command and now he gives an example. We should in humility count others more significant than ourselves because it was the practice of Jesus Christ Himself. Jesus is our supreme example in this life. “This mind” points back to the appeal to humility in verses 2-4.

Philippians 2:5-11 is a very important passage in Paul’s letters. More secondary material has been written about this passage than any other. The discussion on this passage in Peter T. O’Brien’s commentary is about 100 pages (555 total pages). There is considerable debate about a number of issues regarding this passage. Gordon Fee does not believe this passage is a hymn,

¹⁸ O’Brien, 165.

however, most scholars do believe that this is a pre-Pauline hymn that Paul incorporated into his argument. Fee views this passage as a narrative about the person of Christ. The important point to make here is that Paul uses this hymn here in Philippians 2 for a very specific reason. Whether Paul wrote this himself or whether he is simply quoting a hymn or piece of poetry is beyond our knowledge. God chose to incorporate this passage in His Word, and therefore, it is authoritative. Also, the purpose of it in this context is clear: Jesus Christ is used as the primary example of humility.

This is a majestic hymn that shows us the self-humiliation of Christ and the super-exaltation of Christ by the Father. The passage takes us on a breath-taking journey from the highest of heights in the eternal counsels of God to the lowest of lows and the agony of the cross and back up again to the most supreme place in the universe.

Who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped. This passage begins with the pre-incarnate mind of Christ. Jesus, “who existed in the form (μορφή) of God and shared his glory, did not regard his equality with God as something to be used for his own advantage.”¹⁹ Jesus Christ existed “in the form of God.” Many interpretations have been raised regarding this phrase.²⁰ It is most likely that “form” here simply means “image” or “radiance” of God. Hebrews 1:3 says, “He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power.” To be in the form of God is to share God’s nature and attributes. Also, it is very likely that “equality with God” is synonymous with “in the form of God.” In other words, although Jesus existed as equal with God, He laid down the advantages of being equal with God in the incarnation.

The word “grasped” (ἄρπαγμόν) has also been given various meanings and interpretations. The difficulty of this word has a lot to do with the fact that this is its only occurrence in the New Testament. “Grasped” seems to imply that He was reaching for something that He did not already have. A better translation could be, “clutched,” which implies that He already contained equality with God but did not hold onto it. Jesus did not use His deity to His advantage. In other words, Jesus is the supreme example of humility because He could have stayed in heaven with all its glories and enjoyed His privileges and rights as God. However, He humbled Himself by becoming a man. He did not use His deity to become an earthly king and rule over nations. He came as a carpenter and as a suffering servant to redeem sinners. This interpretation fits with the context of the passage and the letter most fully.

But made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. I take these three phrases together because it is most likely that the last two define the first one. That is, the way Christ emptied Himself (made Himself nothing) is that he took the form (μορφή) of a servant and He was made in the likeness of men. There have also been various interpretations of this verse. The most radical view on this verse is that Jesus actually “gave up” some of the attributes of deity in the incarnation. However, we must understand this as a “giving up” of privilege and status not essential attributes or nature. This interpretation fits best with the context and with Biblical Christology (How could Jesus be 100% God if He gave up essential attributes of God?). John 13 is a great example of how Jesus became a servant. He was the King of all kings and He stooped down to wash the dirty feet of His disciples. The loss of glory and status that Jesus endured in becoming a man is beyond our grasp. He humbled Himself so much that He emptied Himself to become a servant and a man. Christ emptied Himself by “taking the

¹⁹ O’Brien, 205.

²⁰ See O’Brien, 207-211 for five of the various interpretations.

form of a servant and being born in the likeness of men.” Christ’s self-emptying was accomplished not by subtracting from but by adding to.

And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Jesus was in fact 100% man and 100% God at the same time. Christ’s humility is not only seen in the fact that He left the glory of heaven and became a man (even a servant), but also that He was obedient to the point of death, “even death on a cross.” This point serves as sort of an exclamation point on Paul’s exhortation to humility. Jesus Christ submitted Himself to the cruelest form of execution known to man: crucifixion. Jesus Christ was humble in obedience even to the point of agonizing on the cross. The author of life (John 14:6) humbled Himself to death. The cross was not only physically painful, but it was also looked upon as a curse. To the Jewish mind, a person hanging on a cross was cursed by God. The cross was a picture of separation from God (Galatians 3:13).

Notice that none of this happens to Jesus. Jesus willingly makes Himself nothing. Jesus willingly humbles himself. No one took Jesus’ life from Him. He voluntarily gave His life in obedience to the Father. He obeyed to the utmost.

No greater contrast can be imagined than the contrast between, “existing in the form of God” and “death on a cross.” The One who is in very nature God, suffered death on a cruel Roman cross. Hallelujah, what a Savior!

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name. Because of the humility and obedience of Jesus to the point of death, He is exalted to the supreme place in the universe. God has “highly exalted” Jesus. The Father has super-exalted Jesus. Jesus’ name has been placed above all others. “There is no other name under heaven by which men can be saved” (Acts 4:12). Jesus is Lord of the universe with comprehensive authority over everything in the cosmos.

So that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth. This point would have been precious to the Philippian believers. The thought that their opponents, the Roman officials, and Nero himself would one day bow to Jesus must have brought a smile to their faces.

And every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Not only will every knee bow at the name of Jesus, but every tongue will openly confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Romans would call the emperor “lord” and “savior.” However, there will be a day when only One is called “Lord.” Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess “to the glory of God the Father.” Verses 10-11 are a direct allusion to Isaiah 45:23: “that to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear allegiance.” By applying this Isaiah passage to Jesus, Philippians 2 boldly declares that Jesus is to be worshipped as God. Jesus is to be the intentional object of our adoration and praise.

C. An appeal to live out salvation in an ungodly world (2:12-18)

Therefore, my beloved. In response to the example of Jesus, Paul is now continuing his exhortation to live worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ (1:27). “Therefore,” is a very clear indicator that the command now given directly relates to the previous passage. The following appeal to work out our salvation is to be done in response to the message of the gospel. The gospel provides the basis and foundation for our pursuit of sanctification.

Paul addresses the Philippians gently as “my beloved.” In many of Paul’s letters he asserts his authority as an apostle of the Lord. However, here he appeals based on the loving

relationship he has with this church (1:8). There is a time to be tough and there is a time to be tender. Paul was a master (along with Jesus) at knowing the difference.

As you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence. Paul appeals to the Philippians' past faithfulness. The apostle praises them for their faithfulness when he was with them and for their continued obedience in his absence. It was Paul's great joy to hear that his converts were living for Jesus. This praise for the Philippians' faithfulness serves as a motivator for the next imperative. The appeal to obedience (ὁπηκούσατε) is in response to the obedience (ὁπήκοος) of Christ (2:8).

Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. It is very clear from the context of Philippians that Paul is not speaking about earning or achieving salvation. Paul does not say "work *for* your salvation" or "work *at* your salvation." Gordon Fee says, "Everything about the sentence and its context indicates that Paul with this imperative is not referring to the "salvation" of individual believers, but the salvation that God has wrought in making them a people of God for his name in Philippi."²¹ Paul is urging his friends to live a life that is worthy of the gospel and to press on in their obedience for the cause of the gospel. To "work out your salvation" is to continue in obedience and faithfulness. The word "salvation (σωτηρίαν)" is the same word translated "deliverance" in 1:19. We are to live out our salvation in this world, "with fear and trembling." In other words, we are to recognize that we are in great need of the Lord Jesus. He is the One before whom every knee will bow one day. He is worthy of fear and trembling in His presence. This is not a slavish fear that dreads the master's punishment, but it is a reverence and awe in the presence of a holy God.

For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. This sentence serves as a qualifier for the previous one (Notice the "for"). Without verse 13, verse 12 would be incredibly discouraging for sinners. We are to work out because God works in. Everything we do "for" God is a gift "from" God. We cannot do even a single loving act without His sovereign working in our lives (See also: Colossians 1:29 and 1 Corinthians 15:10). Hebrews 6:1 commands us, "let us press on to maturity." Two verses later, Hebrews 6:3 says, "And this we will do, if God permits." Notice why God works in us: "for His good pleasure." In other words, God enjoys working in His people.

Verse 13 tells us three things about our God: (1) His Person – He is the great Energizer; (2) His Presence – He is "in you;" and (3) His Pleasure – He works in us "for His good pleasure." Verses 12-13 give us a picture of the true Christian life. We are to pursue obedience to God with all our might. We are to run as hard and fast as we can for the prize of pleasing the Lord Jesus. However, as we pursue we must realize that God is supplying the power to do everything. We run recognizing the working of God in our lives. While believers work out, God works in! This truth (Everything we do "for" God is a gift "from" God) should set us free to live radically for the Kingdom.

John Murray's comments on these two verses are worth quoting in full:

No text sets forth more succinctly and clearly the relation of God's working to our working (Philippians 2:12-13). God's working in us is not suspended because we work, nor our working suspended because God works. Neither is the relation strictly one of co-operation as if God did his part and we did ours so that the conjunction or co-ordination of both produced the required result. God works in us and we also work. But the relation is that *because* God works we work. All working out of salvation on our part is the effect

²¹ Fee, 236.

of God's working in us, not the willing to the exclusion of the doing and not the doing to the exclusion of the willing, but both the willing and the doing. And this working of God is directed to the end of enabling us to will and to do that which is well pleasing to him. We have here not only the explanation of all acceptable activity on our part but we have also the incentive to our willing and working. What the apostle is urging is the necessity of working out our own salvation, and the encouragement he supplies is the assurance that it is God himself who works in us. The more persistently active we are in working, the more persuaded we may be that all the energizing grace and power is of God.²²

Do all things without grumbling or questioning. In verses 14-18, Paul lays out the practical ways the Philippians are to "work out their salvation with fear and trembling." In verse 3, Paul said, "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit." Here he says, "Do all things without grumbling or disputing." These two commands give a positive and a negative way to think about our attitudes. Gordon Fee views this positive command as an allusion to Israel's grumbling in the wilderness (Exodus 16:12; Numbers 14:2).²³ Grumbling and complaining must be one of the most common sins of Americans. We murmur about everything and God is calling us to complain about *nothing*. The only way this is possible is if our hearts are completely satisfied with the Lord Jesus. When He is the treasure of our hearts, there is no reason to grumble about life here on earth. At its very core, grumbling is not trusting in the promise of Romans 8:28. "Questioning" may be a reference to arguing and disputing in the church.

That you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation. "That" indicates the purpose of not grumbling or questioning. We want to be "blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach." "Blameless (αμωμος)" is used in the LXX²⁴ to refer to the absence of defects in sacrificial animals (Exodus 29:1). In Ephesians 1:4, election in Christ is so that believers would be holy and blameless (αμωμος). Being above reproach means living in such a way that no one could even find something to blame you for if they tried. We are called to this kind of living "in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation." This is precisely why these commands are hard to obey: No one else is living this way.

Among whom you shine as lights in the world. Here is the main reason to live without grumbling and questioning. Paul has in view the spreading of the gospel in Philippi. If Christians are grumbling and complaining about everything and fighting all the time, the world will not love and listen to the gospel. We are to live in such a way that the gospel is seen in our lives. This may be a reference to Daniel 12:3. Jesus told the disciples, "You are the light of the world" (Matthew 5:16).

Holding fast the word of life. It is clear by this phrase that Paul has an evangelistic goal in mind. He wants the Philippians to live blamelessly so that they will be lights in their depraved world, as they hold out the word that gives life. However, Paul also wants the Philippians to defend and preserve the gospel message. We are to hold tightly to the truth of the gospel so that we have something to share with the unbelieving world.

So that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in

²² John Murray, *Redemption-Accomplished and Applied*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 148.

²³ Fee, 243.

²⁴ The Septuagint (LXX) is the Greek translation of the Old Testament.

vain. All this (living blamelessly and holding fast to the word of life) is so that Paul's labor will not turn into nothing on the day of Christ. Paul wants to see the fruit of his labor for the glory of Christ. He wants Jesus to be glorified in his life and labors in Philippi. The Philippians' faithfulness is Paul's trophy. Paul does not want to waste His life. He constantly lived in light of that day.

Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. This metaphor comes directly from the sacrificial system. When a sacrifice was offered in the temple, it was usually accompanied with a drink offering that would be poured on top of the sacrifice or beside it (Numbers 28:24). Paul is the drink offering being poured out on the Philippians' faith. This is most likely a reference to Paul's sufferings and his upcoming martyrdom. No matter what the situation, Paul is rejoicing and sharing his joy with fellow believers.

Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me. The theme of rejoicing dominates this letter filled with suffering. Suffering and joy are closely related. This is not only a statement of joy but a command to rejoice.

IV. TIMOTHY AND EPAPHRODITUS: WORKERS FOR CHRIST (2:19-30)

A. Timothy: a kindred spirit (2:19-24)

I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. Paul is encouraging the Philippians by letting them know of his plans to send Timothy to them soon. This would have caused great expectation in their hearts as they waited for Timothy to come. Paul is not necessarily sending Timothy for their sakes (although it will certainly benefit them as verse 20 says) but for his sake. Paul is sending Timothy so that he may be encouraged (εὐψυχέω²⁵ - cheered) when he hears about their situation.

For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. These verses serve as a letter of commendation for Timothy. Paul describes Timothy in a manner that is very much like what he has already urged them to do (2:3-4). This is certainly intentional. Paul is giving them another real life example of what he is calling them to be. Paul is sending Timothy because of Timothy's "kindred spirit." In other words, Paul is sure that Timothy will take care of the Philippians like he himself would.

For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. Timothy's attitude is contrasted with others who seek after their own interests. The implication is that Timothy is a great example of one who seeks after the interests of Jesus Christ above his own interests. Another implication is that seeking the interests of Jesus involves being genuinely concerned for other's welfare. When we care for each other, we are working out our salvation for the glory of Jesus.

But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel. Paul appeals to their prior knowledge of Timothy's character. Timothy served with Paul in the furtherance of the gospel on several missionary journeys. In other words, Timothy had one passion: to see the gospel advance (1:12). Timothy was submissive to Paul as he served like a child serving his father. Timothy is a model of the humility and servant hood

²⁵ O'Brien, 317, mentions that this is the only occurrence of this word in the NT. Forms of this word were found on Hellenistic gravestones and in letters of condolence. It means "be it well with you soul" or "have courage."

displayed by Christ in 2:5-8.

I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me. This verse serves to define what Paul meant in verse 19 by “soon.” Paul is going to send Timothy when he finds out about the outcome of his upcoming trial (1:19-26). We see two main reasons for sending Timothy to Philippi: (1) so that Paul may be cheered when he learns of their conditions and (2) so that the Philippians will hear as soon as possible about the outcome of his trial.

And I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also. Paul has already expressed his confidence that he will be released and that he will be able to visit the Philippians again (1:24-26). However, even if Paul does not come, the Philippians are to live lives worthy of the gospel of Christ (1:27). Paul again expresses confidence that the Lord will have him released. He hopes to be able to visit the Philippians shortly.

B. Epaphroditus: messenger and minister (2:25-30)

I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need. Epaphroditus was most likely the bearer of this letter to the Philippians. Paul has sent Epaphroditus back as soon as possible. The question has to do with why Paul feels the need to commend Epaphroditus to the Philippians when they knew him well and even chose him to deliver their gift to Paul. The answer is that Paul wanted to charge the Philippians with honoring Epaphroditus for his faithful service for the Lord (2:29). Epaphroditus is described by five images: (1) my brother, (2) fellow worker, (3) fellow soldier, (4) your messenger, and (5) your minister. The rest of this paragraph describes why Paul thought it was necessary to send Epaphroditus back to the Philippians.

For he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. Somewhere between Philippi and Rome or while ministering to Paul in Rome, Epaphroditus became very sick. In verse 30, Paul says that his sickness was a direct result of him risking his life for the cause of Christ. The Philippians got word that their messenger, Epaphroditus, was very sick and they were distressed. They sent Epaphroditus for a very specific purpose and they expected him to come home and bring a word of success. Epaphroditus wanted to return to Philippi so that they would know about his situation.

Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. Epaphroditus was “near to death.” This was not just a minor sickness. Paul actually thought that the sickness would end in death. However, God intervened and showed mercy to Epaphroditus. We do not know how God healed Epaphroditus but Paul just praises God that he did heal him. The mercy was not just to Epaphroditus but also to Paul. Paul’s “sorrow upon sorrow” would have been to hear that Epaphroditus died while trying to complete what was lacking in the Philippians’ gift to Paul.

I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice in seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. Paul is very concerned about the Philippians joy in the Lord. He is constantly urging them and encouraging them to rejoice and be full of joy. He sent Epaphroditus to them so that they may rejoice in seeing and hearing about God’s deliverance and triumph. Paul also sent Epaphroditus back to the Philippians because Paul trusted him. Paul would be less concerned about the Philippians’ faith and joy if he knew that his friend Epaphroditus was among them.

So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men. Here is another command to rejoice and have joy. Certainly, Paul does not have to remind the Philippians to

rejoice but he wants to make sure they receive Epaphroditus in a manner that honors the Lord. Verse 30 defines the second command of this verse. What kind of men are we to hold in high regard?

For he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me. We are to hold people who risk their lives for Christ in high regard. The grammar of this sentence leads us to believe that the “work of Christ” Epaphroditus risked (‘gambled’) his life for was the bringing of the gift from Philippi to Paul in Rome. What was lacking in the Philippians service to Paul? They had taken a monetary offering for Paul but Epaphroditus “completed” the service by delivering the gift directly to Paul. Where is the sense of risk in our day? Who is actively risking their very life for the work of Christ in our world?

V. CHRIST IS GREATER THAN EVERYTHING; THEREFORE, PRESS ON TOWARDS HIM (3:1-21)

A. Paul’s possible reasons to boast in the flesh (3:1-6)

Many have proposed that Philippians as we know it was actually two letters (or three) that were combined by someone other than Paul. This is proposed because of the sudden shift in these first couple verses of chapter three. The proponents of this view point to the “finally” and propose that Paul meant to wrap things up with one last command to rejoice in the Lord. The proponents also cite the fact that 2:19-30 seems like the end of a letter.

However, there is good evidence that this is one letter written at the same time by the apostle Paul. Notice the similarities between the first half and the second half of the letter: (1) both are Christ-centered, (2) both emphasize participating in the sufferings of Christ, (3) both have an eschatological orientation, and (4) many of the same commands are given.

Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you. “Finally” signifies that Paul is about to set forth the last matters he wants to write about. This word is used in other places to signify a transition and can be translated, “furthermore,” or “in addition.”²⁶ Once again, the imperative is to rejoice in the Lord (2:17-18). Paul is serious about us pursuing our joy in Jesus. Paul is not afraid to write the same things over and over because this command is so important. Good teachers repeat the most important commands over and over. A wise person is not one who knows a little bit about a lot of things. A wise person is one who knows the most important things well. Paul says it is “safe” for the Philippians to hear this command again. Rejoicing in the Lord is a place of security and stability.

Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. This verse is filled with rebuke toward false teachers who sought to influence Paul’s churches. “Look out for” (Beware) is translated from ‘βλεπετε’ which is a present imperative repeated three times. It could literally be translated, “Continually be on the lookout for.” In the Greek, the three things Paul urges the Philippians to watch out for (dogs, evildoers, and those who mutilate the flesh) all start with the letter kappa (‘κ’). “Dogs” would have brought the concept of uncleanness to the Jews’ minds (Matthew 7:6). The Gentiles were so despised that they were sometimes called dogs (Psalm 22:16; Revelation 22:15). Paul turns this phrase on

²⁶ Homer A. Kent, Jr, “Philippians” in *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, vol. 11, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 138.

those who use it. “Evildoers” gets at the heart of the accomplishments of these false teachers. They only work evil. Many Jewish missionaries called themselves “good workers.” However, Paul commands the Philippians to beware of these “evil” workers.²⁷ The most shocking title for these false teachers is “those who mutilate the flesh.” This is a very clear attack on the Judaizers who proclaimed that Gentiles must become circumcised in order to be saved. Circumcision, as a means of right standing with God, is nothing more than mutilating one’s flesh.

For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh. Paul calls these Gentile Christians “the circumcision.” In other words, those of faith are children of Abraham. Only trust in Jesus Christ makes one the true circumcision (regardless of physical circumcision – Gal. 6:15). Those who are true Christians (true circumcision) are further defined by three behaviors: (1) we worship by the Spirit of God, (2) we glory (boast) in Christ Jesus, and (3) we put no confidence in the flesh. These are the marks of true Christians. True Christians worship in the Spirit of God (John 4:23). True Christians boast only in Jesus because it was Jesus who bought all good things for us at the cross (Galatians 6:14). True Christians put no confidence in the flesh because the Lord is the only one worthy of putting our confidence in (Psalm 118:8; Jeremiah 9:23-24). Notice the Trinitarian structure of this verse.

Though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else things he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more. Christians are those who put no confidence in the flesh. However, if anyone could have put confidence in fleshly realities, it was the apostle Paul. The Judaizers could not even compare with Paul as far as credentials; however, they were putting confidence in their flesh. In verses 5-6, Paul lays out what those credentials were that could have been a cause for self-sufficiency. He lists seven total advantages: the first three were inherited privileges, the middle one is sort of a transition because it was both a privilege and an achievement, and the last three were personal achievements. The ultimate reason for laying out these fleshly realities is to exalt the treasure he has found in Jesus (3:7-11). All of these personal advantages are nothing compared to the worth of Jesus Christ.

Circumcised the eighth day. Circumcision was a sign of the covenant made by God to His people. The Jews took great pride in their circumcision and looked down on anyone who was not circumcised as unclean. Paul was circumcised according to the commands of the Law (Genesis 17:12; Leviticus 12:3; Luke 1:59) unlike those who became Jews by circumcision later in life.

Of the people of Israel. Literally, Paul is saying that he was born into the nation of Israel. The Judaizers proclaimed that Gentiles could become part of the nation of Israel if they would become a Jew by circumcision and Law-keeping. Paul was not one of the converts; he was born into the privileges of Israel.

Of the tribe of Benjamin. This advantage is more specific than the previous one. Not only was Paul born into the nation of Israel, but he could trace his lineage back to the tribe of Benjamin. The tribe of Benjamin was the most respected of all the tribes in Paul’s day. Benjamin was the son of Jacob’s favorite wife Rachel, and was the only son of Jacob’s born in the land of promise (Genesis 35:16-18). The tribe of Benjamin gave Israel its first king, Saul (1 Samuel 9:1-2). Paul’s parents most likely named him after this famous king. The tribe of Benjamin also remained loyal to the house of David after the disruption of the monarchy (1 Kings 12:21). The tribe of Benjamin was also looked upon favorably because its territory

²⁷ O’Brien, 356.

contained Jerusalem and the temple mount.²⁸

A Hebrew of Hebrews. This claim means that Paul was a Hebrew (rather than a Hellenist, even though he was born in the Dispersion), that he spoke Hebrew (including Aramaic) as did his parents before him, and (possibly) that he was protected from the paganizing influence of Hellenism.²⁹ This is most likely a claim to Paul's purity. He did not defile himself with the world. He was a Hebrew of Hebrews (the best of the best). Gordon Fee calls this advantage the "swing term" which sums up the first three and sets the stage for the final three.³⁰

As to the Law, a Pharisee. The Pharisees were an elite group who devoted themselves to the strict observance of the Law and all of the rabbinical traditions. 'Pharisee' literally means, "separated one." Paul had separated himself early in life to observing the Law with reckless abandon. This would have been a personal achievement to be proud of. Paul knew exactly what the Judaizers believed and were teaching.

As to zeal, a persecutor of the church. Paul was not just an ordinary Pharisee and Law-follower. He proved his zeal for God (so he thought) by relentlessly persecuting the church of God (Galatians 1:13). Zeal for God, for His house, and for His Law was highly praised in the Old Testament. David said, "Zeal for your house consumed me" (Psalm 69:9).

As to righteousness under the Law, blameless. This last statement is the culmination of all seven reasons Paul could boast in his flesh. Paul had devoted himself to following the Law of God with great precision, and in his mind he attained it. Certainly, this righteousness is not the right relationship with the Lord that we desire. Paul was in disobedience to God during this time. This is the righteousness which is in the Law. This was a righteousness that Paul made up in his own conscience. It is absolutely amazing that Paul could say this. If anyone had reason to boast in their own privileges and accomplishments, it was Paul!

B. "Jesus is valuable" (3:7-11)

This paragraph is one of the clearest declarations of Paul's obsession with the value of Jesus Christ. Paul had seen Christ as so beautiful that he was ruined for every other pleasure. In this passage, Paul makes clear how vitally important the resurrected Jesus is to him. The risen Jesus is absolutely everything to him. Notice how dominated this section is with the worth of Jesus Christ.

But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Before Christ changed his life, Paul viewed his privileges and achievements as real gains. Paul thought that his heritage and his hard work made him right before God and thus they were viewed as valuable (gain). The word "gain" (κέρδη) is an accounting term that Paul used in 1:21 when he said, "to die is gain." It is the list in verses 5-6 (all that he once thought of as gain: spiritual heritage and personal achievements) that Paul has counted and now counts as loss for Christ's sake. "I have counted" (ἥγημαι) is in the perfect tense signifying a completed action that has abiding effects. Paul's initial counting of his fleshly advantages as loss came on the Damascus road in Acts 9. Notice that it is "for the sake of Christ" that Paul considers his earthly accomplishments as loss (ζημίαν). In other words, the value of human privileges and accomplishments pales in

²⁸ O'Brien, 370-371.

²⁹ O'Brien, 372.

³⁰ Fee, 307.

comparison to Jesus Christ. This verse contains the essence of saving faith. Saving faith is relinquishing all of the things we trust in to get us to God and clinging to the worth of Christ.

Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. Verse eight serves as an expansion and explanation of verse seven. This expansion is highlighted by three things: (1) the introductory “Indeed.” This is actually a string of conjunctions that is difficult to translate into English. Paul seems to be saying, “If you think what I said in verse seven is amazing, wait until you hear this.” (2) Paul shifts from the perfect tense to the present tense. “I count” (ἡγοῦμαι) is the same verb used in verse seven, but it is now used in the present tense signifying continual action. The Christian life is not just about a point in the past where we make a decision for Christ. The Christian life is about a continual treasuring of Christ so much that everything else is viewed as loss. (3) Paul shifts from counting everything that was “gain” as loss to counting “everything” as loss. In verse seven, Paul said he had counted those seven advantages of verses five and six as loss for the sake of Christ. In verse eight, it is not just those seven advantages but “everything” that Paul counts as loss. “In view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” is the key phrase in this entire passage. This knowledge is not just about facts but refers to intimate knowledge. Where can we get the power to count all things as loss for the sake of Christ? The answer is that we must see the beauty of Christ. Jesus is a treasure. Knowing Him will transform worldly values.

For his sake I have suffered the loss of all thing and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ. Paul’s reckoning everything as loss for the sake of Christ was not just a mere academic exercise. Paul actually “suffered the loss of all things.” Paul has gladly given up all the earthly treasures and advantages that were his before Christ changed his heart. Once again, Paul tells the Philippians that he counts all things to be loss for Christ’s sake. However, instead of using “loss” again, he uses the word “rubbish” (σκύβαλα) for added emphasis. This word is used only here in the New Testament and literally means, “dung, excrement, or refuse.” This word would have served as a vivid picture of what Paul thought of everything in comparison to the value of Christ. The vulgarity of this word is attested to by the fact that some early Church Fathers weakened its meaning to avoid embarrassment.³¹ It is possible that Paul is alluding to the saying of Jesus in Matthew 16:26, “What shall it profit a man if he gains (κερδήσῃ) the whole world and loses (ζημιωθῇ) his own soul?” Paul counts all as refuse *so that* he may gain Christ. The implication of this phrase is that only in reckoning all things as refuse compared to the value of Christ can we gain (know) Christ.

The parable of Matthew 13:44 is a vivid picture of what Paul is saying in verse eight. “The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all he has and buys that field.” Jesus said, “none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions” (Luke 14:33).

And be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith. Paul considers all as rubbish so that he may gain Christ, “and be found in Him.” This verse serves to explain what it means to “gain Christ.” Paul contrasts two different kinds of righteousness in this verse. The first kind of “righteousness” is derived from self and is based on following the Law. This is the righteousness Paul spoke of in verse six. However, Paul wants the true righteousness that is through faith in Christ³² and is from God. This is the

³¹ O’Brien, 390, and Hawthorne, 139.

³² There is considerable debate as to whether this phrase should be rendered “through faith in Christ” or “through the faithfulness of Christ.” See O’Brien, 398-400 for the later view.

righteousness that comes as a gift from God apart from the Law (Romans 3:21). True righteousness is from God and based on the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ.

That I may know Him. Here is the ultimate goal of the apostle's life. Paul considers all as dung and pursues the righteousness that is by faith in Jesus so that he may know this Jesus who is unimaginably valuable. This knowledge is not head knowledge only. This is an intimate, personal relationship with the Lord of creation. Do you want to know Christ? Consider all as rubbish for the sake of Christ!

And the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death. Paul wants to know Christ is all His fullness. Paul wants to know the power of Christ's resurrection. Paul wants to know the fellowship (κοινωνίαν) of Jesus' sufferings and Paul wants to be conformed to the death of Jesus. This is very odd talk to a person of the world. However, the believer knows that it is in the valley that one experiences the presence of the Lord most fully. If we are going to know Christ in all of His glory, we must walk with Him down the Calvary road of suffering. We must follow Jesus where He goes: to the cross.

That by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Only when we count all as loss to gain Christ, trust in Him for our righteousness, and seek to know Him and His suffering will we have confidence that we will be raised with Him. Paul is constantly speaking of His future hope of being with Christ. Paul is not communicating doubt as to his future resurrection with Christ. He does not know whether he will die as a martyr, by natural causes, or whether he will be alive when Christ comes again.

C. Run with all your might toward the goal (3:12-21)

Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Paul wants to make sure his readers do not get the idea that he has already arrived. This section could point to the fact that the false teachers in Philippi were teaching perfectionism, which is the idea that a Christian can be free from sin in this life. A major question has to do with what "it" refers to in the previous section.³³ It is most likely that Paul is referring to his knowing Christ completely and fully (v. 8; 10). As Paul writes, he realizes that the surpassing value of Christ is inexhaustible. Just because Paul knows that he will never fully know Christ in this life does not mean that he is going to lie down and quit. Those who treasure Jesus "press on" toward knowing Him. It is clear in the second half of this verse that Christ's work is prior to our work. We press on in response to what He has already done. The motivation for pressing on to know Christ is that Christ has made us His own.

Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead. I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Paul restates the fact that he has not reached the ultimate goal yet. Paul has weighed the evidence and the conclusion is that he has not yet arrived. The analogy he uses is that of a runner in a race. Paul presses on toward the goal, which is obviously to know Christ in all of His glory. Three things characterize Paul's race: (1) Singleness of focus. Paul only does "one thing." He does not look back to all of the past accomplishments, failures, or to the other runners. His aim is the prize. The Hebrews writer said, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus" (Hebrews 12:2). Jesus said, "Anyone who puts his hand to

³³ It is important to note that the word "it" is not in the original text. Thus, the NASB places "it" in italics. See Hawthorne, 151 and O'Brien, 420-422 for various views on what "it" refers to.

the plow and looks back is not fit for the Kingdom” (Luke 9:62). (2) Endurance and Intense Effort. Paul “strains (reaches) forward” and “presses on” no matter what comes in his path. The Christian life is a marathon and only those who endure to the end will be saved (Mark 13:13). (3) Love for the prize. The motivating factor for finishing the race is that there is a prize at the end. There is something to be gained that is infinitely valuable: knowing Christ. The only way we will ever run with all our might is if we value Jesus Christ (3:7-10).

Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. This is the application to what Paul has just shared about himself. Paul considers all as loss compared to the worth of Jesus Christ, he makes it his aim to know Jesus Christ, and he presses on to gain the prize of Christ. The reason Paul shared this “autobiography” is so that the Philippians will have this same attitude (also, v. 17). The word translated “mature” (τέλειοι) is literally “perfect.”³⁴ Based on what Paul has just said (that he is not perfect), “mature” is a good translation. Paul is confident that if any of the Philippians do not have the attitude he has been describing, God will reveal it to them.

Only let us hold true to what we have attained. “Hold true” is translated from the Greek word ‘στοιχεῖν,’ which literally means, “to walk in line.”³⁵ The idea is that we should not slip back into the standards of the world that we have conquered through the power of God. Many Christians excel to a high level with the Lord only to fall back into old habits and sins. Paul is urging the Philippians to press forward and hold their ground. In verse 15, Paul commanded the Philippians to have a certain attitude and he encourages them that if they stray from this attitude, God will reveal it to them. In verse 16, Paul commands them not to stray from this attitude, which is the standard.

Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. After sharing his heart and passion (3:7-16), Paul urges the Philippians to join together in imitating his example. Godly examples are a powerful gift from God to help us press on to maturity in the Christian life. The only reason Paul could urge his friends to imitate him is because he knew he was imitating Christ. In fact, this is exactly what he told the Corinthians: “Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1). Paul also urges them to observe or seek out those who are living according to the pattern Paul has been describing. In chapter two, Paul wrote about two men who were living according to this pattern (Timothy and Epaphroditus).

For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. The Philippians are to take note of those who walk according to the pattern found in Paul and his companions because (“for”) there are those who do not live this way. Paul contrasts his example with that of the enemies of the cross of Christ. The identity of these opponents is a much debated issue and there is no way to be certain who Paul is referring to. Before Paul describes these people who do not follow his example, he interjects two phrases that are very personal: (1) Paul has often told the Philippians about these people. Paul does not need to elaborate because he has repeatedly mentioned them and their errors. (2) As Paul thinks about this group of people, he is weeping. Paul is so in love with Jesus that the thought of someone disgracing Jesus brings tears to his eyes. Here is undeniable proof of Paul’s singular passion for Jesus. Paul does not weep over his circumstances. He weeps over Jesus not getting

³⁴ For a complete discussion of this word see: O’Brien, 433-437.

³⁵ Cleon L. Rogers Jr. and Cleon L. Rogers III, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 456.

the honor He deserves.

In verses 18-19, we learn five things about those who do not follow the pattern of Paul: (1) They are enemies of the cross of Christ. This serves as the overarching description of their error. They add to or subtract from the finished work of Christ on the Cross.

Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory is in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. (2) Their end is destruction. This description is in stark contrast to the “prize” that awaits those who pursue knowing Christ. If you pursue Christ you get the prize, but if you oppose Christ you get destruction! “Destruction” is the same word used in 1:28. (3) Their god is their belly. Those who oppose Christ cannot see beyond this world. They order their lives around the fleeting “pleasures” here on earth. They have no higher allegiance than to their own appetites. They make a god out of their cravings. (4) Their glory is their shame. The very thing these people glory in will turn out to be for their shame. The things they ought to be ashamed of are actually delighted in. This is the way of the world. The world glories in its drunkenness and sexual immorality. However, one day their glory will turn sour and will be the very thing that condemns them. (5) They set their minds on earthly things. This description can be viewed as a summary of the others. This description is in sharp contrast to what Paul has just described about his own focus. He said that his one pursuit is toward the goal and prize of knowing Christ (3:12-14). This description is also in sharp contrast to what Paul is about say about true believers in 3:20-21.

But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul makes two conclusions. First, contrary to those whose minds are on earthly things, our minds are to be on heavenly things (Colossians 3:1-3). Second, Paul is giving the ultimate reason for following his example (3:17). Imitate those who are living as citizens of our true home. Gordon Fee believes that Paul’s mention of citizenship is a direct play on the Philippians’ privileged position of being a Roman colony and having full Roman citizenship.³⁶ As citizens of heaven, we are to live as worthy citizens of the gospel (1:27). Notice that our heavenly citizenship is a present reality. It is not that one day we will be citizens of heaven, but we are now citizens who wait for the Savior. The Savior we wait for is none other than “the Lord Jesus Christ” who was exalted to the highest place by God the Father (2:9-11). Fee also believes that Paul’s mention of Jesus as “Savior” and “Lord” is a direct play on the common titles for the Emperor at that time. There are no other saviors and there are no other lords.

Who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. When Jesus Christ comes, He will transform our suffering bodies and make them conform with His body of glory. This must have been great news to those who were suffering in Philippi! This is the reality of glorification. When we see Jesus, we will be like Jesus (1 John 3:2). Jesus Christ has absolute sovereignty and He will use that sovereignty to transform our lowly bodies. Jesus Christ has the power to subject all things to Himself, even the Emperor, Nero (2:5-11).

VI. STAND FIRM IN CHRIST (4:1-9)

Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved. The church at Philippi held a special place in the apostle’s heart. He uses 6 terms of endearment in this one verse. He calls them his brothers, he tells them he

³⁶ Fee, 378-379.

loves them, he tells them he longs for them, they are his joy, they are his crown, and he calls them his beloved. The word, “crown” is translated from a word picturing the garland placed around the neck of the victor of a race. The Philippians are Paul’s reward. They are a gift from God to him. It is easy to miss the command in the midst of these endearing words. In response to 3:1-21, the Philippians are to “stand firm in the Lord.” They are to hold their position and not drift away from the glorious gospel of Christ. It is very possible that 4:2-9 gives the exact way the Philippians were to stand firm.³⁷ Paul says “stand firm *thus* in the Lord.”

I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Throughout this letter Paul has urged the Philippians to unity and humility (2:1-4). Many scholars believe that there was some sort of internal strife in the church that prompted Paul to plead for unity. This statement is the clearest piece of evidence of disunity in Philippi. Paul does not take sides in this disagreement. Rather, he entreats both of them to take the initiative in agreeing together. We do not know who these women were or what the specific problem was. It is important to note that Paul says these women shared with him in the cause of the gospel in verse three. Euodia and Syntyche are urged to “be of the same mind.” “ὁρῶντες” is used about 10 times in this letter (1:7; 2:2 [twice]; 2:5; 3:15 [twice]; 3:19; 4:2; 4:10 [twice]).

Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life. It is very odd that Paul turns to a certain “companion” and asks for him (masculine vocative) to help Euodia and Syntyche. Gordon Fee speculates that this true companion could be Luke.³⁸ This could also be a command to Epaphroditus, who probably carried this letter to Philippi. Others have proposed that the word translated “companion” (Σύζυγος) is actually a proper name.³⁹ Hawthorne believes that Paul means to address the entire church as, “true companion.”⁴⁰ Also, the question arises as to the identity of Clement and the rest of the fellow workers. After all the speculation is given, we must ultimately accept our ignorance as to these specific people and problems in Philippi. One thing is certain: the original readers knew exactly what Paul was saying and who Paul was saying it to. Those who have struggled together with Paul for the gospel have their names written in God’s book of life (Revelation 20:15). Since we are all part of the same family, we need to pursue unity together in the Lord.

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. The letter to the Philippians is filled with very difficult commands (2:3-4; 2:14). The command to rejoice in the Lord always is one of the most difficult commands to integrate into the Christian life. Notice that this is not a suggestion. Joy in Christ is not optional, it is commanded. This joy in Christ is fueled by our vision of His value and worth (3:7-8). Notice when and how often Christians are to rejoice in Christ: ALWAYS! Paul is writing this letter from prison, facing the possibility of being publicly executed for His faith. He is writing to Christians who are suffering and being persecuted. So, joy is not dependent on circumstances. Joy is centered in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

³⁷ Hawthorne, 177.

³⁸ Fee, 394.

³⁹ See O’Brien, 480 for more on this view. However, O’Brien and Fee note that this word has never been found as a proper name.

⁴⁰ Hawthorne, 179-180. Hawthorne also lists nine other possibilities.

Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The word translated “reasonableness” is a difficult word to translate into English. It means to bear injustice submissively. It refers to humility that considers others of more importance. Basically, this is a command to be Christlike in our attitude. We are to let our gentleness be known to everyone. This would also have been a tough command for the Philippians who were being persecuted for their faith. We are commanded to be gentle even to those who hate us and kill us (like Christ).

The Lord is at hand. Why did Paul include this statement (indicative) in the midst of these commands (imperatives)? Is this a reference to the nearness of God to all His children or a reference to the nearness of the Lord’s coming? Both seem to fit the context. However, what is clear is that this would have brought great comfort to the Philippians. It is much easier to endure suffering when you know the Lord is close at hand. In fact, everything in the Christian life is easier when we realize that the Lord is close at hand. We are to live in light of His nearness.

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. Anxiety is not a disorder, it is a sin. The believer is to be free from anxiety because the Father is absolutely sovereign. There is no need to worry if your trust is in the God who owns everything. Oswald Chambers said, “Anxiety is a species of unconscious blasphemy against God.” Anxiety is disbelief in God and is thus practical atheism. Jesus warned very strongly against anxiety (Matt. 6:25-34; Luke 12:22-34). Instead of anxiety, life should lead us to prayer “in everything.” The way to be anxious about nothing is to be prayerful about everything. Prayer is to the Christian what air is to the lungs. Our prayers, supplications, and requests ought to be characterized with thanksgiving. There is much to be thankful for in these days. The very fact that God hears our requests is enough to be thankful for.

And the peace of God, which surpasses understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. When we live free from the worries of this world and when we stay in constant communion with God through prayer, His peace guards us. This is a promise: bring everything to God in prayer with thanksgiving and His peace will guard your heart and mind. This is not just a worldly peace. The peace of God is so amazing that it cannot even be understood. It surpasses comprehension. “Guard” is a military metaphor. Paul is saying that the peace of God serves as a garrison protecting our hearts. The Philippians would have known this metaphor because Philippi housed a Roman garrison during this time.⁴¹

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Paul wraps up his series of commands with this “finally.” The command here is to dwell only on those things that are worthy of praise. The Christian is to continually fill his mind with the things of God. It is so easy to think about the things of the world and to cloud our minds with ordinary realities. Basically, this is a command to think on Christ, who is the truth and the most lovely, worthy of praise being in the universe. One of the best ways to obey this command is to memorize Scripture.

What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. Once again, Paul calls the Philippians to imitate the way of life he has revealed to them (3:17). They have “learned and received and heard and seen” in Paul exactly how to live in a manner that is worthy of the gospel. The promise is that when they do imitate Paul’s way of life, the God of peace will be with them. The

⁴¹ Hawthorne, 184.

peace of God will guard us and the God of peace will be with us. This is a great promise!

VII. PAUL'S CONTENTMENT IN CHRIST AND HIS THANKSGIVING FOR THE PHILIPPIANS' GIFT (4:10-20)

There is much question as to why Paul reserved his thanksgiving for the Philippians' gift for the end of this letter. His thankfulness seems to be one of the major reasons Paul wrote this letter in the first place. This question has even led many to speculate that the letter as we know it is actually composed of several different letters. However, it is perfectly reasonable that Paul reserved this thanksgiving for the conclusion in order to give it greater emphasis. This letter would have been read aloud to the Philippians and this thanksgiving would have been the last thing ringing in their ears. It is important to note that this letter ends on the same note it began: Paul and the Philippians' partnership in the gospel (1:3-5).

This section also raises another question: Why did Paul accept financial support from the Philippians when he refused support from other churches? Paul said to the Corinthians, "I robbed other churches by taking wages from them to serve you" (11:8). The answer probably lies in several facts: (1) Paul's policy was that he would not accept personal financial support from the church he was currently ministering to for the sake of his own integrity. It seems that the Philippians' support came to Paul after he left Philippi. (2) As Paul writes this letter to the Philippians, he is under house arrest in Rome. He has no way of making a living while under arrest. Prisoners were dependent on help from the outside in those days. The Philippians are partnering with Paul in the ministry of the gospel, and are not simply advancing Paul's personal comforts. (3) The Philippians were not just an ordinary church. As is evident throughout this letter, the Philippians held a special place in the apostle's heart. Maybe Paul felt comfortable receiving help from the Philippians because he knew they would not accuse him of greed.

I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. The Philippians' gift to Paul by way of Epaphroditus was a cause of great rejoicing. There must have been a considerable gap of time from the Philippians' last gift to this one. Paul wants to make sure they realize that he knows the lapse of time was not due to lack of concern for Paul or for the gospel. The lapse of time was due to "lack of opportunity." The word "revived" (ἀεθάλετε) was used to speak of flowers and literally means, "to blossom again." God has caused the Philippians' concern for Paul to sprout and grow.

Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. This sentence serves to qualify the previous statement, just in case someone gets the wrong idea about what Paul is saying. Gordon Fee says, "The wrong inference would be that his joy is over their gift as such, as though joy had to do with finally being able to eat again."⁴² In other words, Paul is not rejoicing because a need in his life has now been met. His rejoicing has to do with their participation with him in the cause of the gospel. Far from needy, Paul has learned to be content in any and every circumstance in life. Contentment is a difficult attitude to find these days. We live in almost a constant state of discontentment, always hoping our situation will improve. We need to follow the example of Paul, who found all his contentment in the person and work of Jesus Christ. 1 Timothy 6:8 says, "If we have food and covering, with these we shall be *content*." Hebrews 13:5-6 says, "Keep your lives free from the

⁴² Fee, 431.

love of money and be *content* with what you have.” Contentment is not based on favorable circumstances.

I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. This verse serves to define what Paul means by, “I have learned to be content in whatever situation I am.” This verse also serves as a great goal for all Christians to strive for. In whatever camp we are in (abundance or suffering need) let us strive to be satisfied (content) in Jesus. We have ample evidence of Paul’s hardships (2 Corinthians 11:23-28) but we lack specific evidence of his abundance or prosperity. By “abundance,” Paul probably means that he has enough, not that he has abundant wealth.

I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. Here is the “secret” to being content in whatever circumstances come our way. We must rely totally on Christ and it must be His strength that carries us. This reality is assumed throughout verses 11 and 12. However, Paul writes this sentence just to make sure no one thinks he is self-sufficient. Paul is Christ-sufficient. This verse has often been taken out of context to mean that we can do anything we want (especially things that bring us glory like winning athletic competitions). However, the meaning is clearly that if we are in Christ and rely on His power, we can live content in every situation of life. Contentment comes from a satisfying relationship with Jesus Christ.

Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. Even though Paul did not “need” the monetary gift the Philippians sent, it was a major blessing to him. Paul did not want the Philippians to conclude that just because he can do all things through Christ, their gift was unnecessary. Notice how Paul describes their generosity. Their gift served to share with Paul in his affliction for Christ. They are sharing with him in the work of the gospel. This note of “partnership” is noticeable throughout the entire letter.

And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. Here Paul recounts their past faithfulness to share with him in the preaching of the gospel. These two verses show us the amazing sacrifice the Philippians made to share with Paul in his ministry. There were no other churches who shared with Paul like this in the matter of giving and receiving. In 2 Corinthians 11:8-9, Paul says, “I robbed other churches by taking wages from them to serve you; and when I was present with you and was in need, I was not a burden to anyone; for when the brethren came from Macedonia they fully supplied my need.” Also, in Acts 18:5, Silas and Timothy come from Macedonia to Corinth and because of their coming, Paul was able to devote himself completely to the ministry. It is most likely that Silas and Timothy brought a monetary gift which freed Paul to spend all his time preaching instead of tent-making (Acts 18:3). F.F. Bruce says that these two references to Macedonia (2 Corinthians 11 and Acts 18) imply preeminently Philippi.⁴³ This history lesson serves to magnify Paul’s thankfulness not only for the present gift but for all the past gifts.

Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. Once again, Paul clarifies his motives just in case someone gets the wrong idea. Paul says, “The money is not what I have my heart set on.” Paul’s joy is not that he now can get some new clothes, but that the Philippians have proved their faithfulness and they will be rewarded. A content person is able to focus on the good of others. Paul doesn’t need money. Paul wants the Philippians to

⁴³ Bruce, 153.

increase their treasure in Heaven. When we give sacrificially, our heavenly “bank account” increases for the glory of God.

I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. Paul finally gets to the specific mention and thanksgiving for their gift. Paul has, “received everything in full” (ἀπέχω). ἀπέχω was frequently used as a technical term for receiving a sum of money in full and giving a receipt for it (‘Paid in full’).⁴⁴ Paul also has “abundance” (περισσεύω). Paul used this same word twice in verse twelve. Paul is also “amply supplied” (πεπλήρωμαι) by what the Philippians have sent. This could be translated, “full to overflowing” or “filled to the full.” Paul will say in verse nineteen that God will fill them to the full according to His riches. Paul turns from commercial language to sacrificial language in describing the Philippians’ gift. The gift is a fragrant aroma and an acceptable sacrifice; therefore, it is well-pleasing to God. By heaping up these sacrificial terms, Paul is drawing attention to the value of the gift in the sight of God. This would have been sweet news to the Philippians who shared with Paul in the ministry of the gospel.

And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. Because the Philippians have given generously to Paul for the gospel, God will fill them to the full with his riches in glory. Paul does not have anything to give them in response to their gift to him. However, God will see to it that *every* need they have is fulfilled because of their sacrifice. This is a great promise and a great motivator to be characterized by giving. However, BEWARE: this promise only applies to those who have given gifts that are acceptable sacrifices. Notice the phrase “according to His riches.” The reward will not be merely from God’s riches but it will be *in accordance to* His riches. In other words, the supply will parallel the glory of His riches. God’s riches are always found in Jesus. He is the source and supply of eternal riches.

To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen. Paul’s thankfulness, the Philippians generosity, and God’s faithfulness to supply every need leads Paul to break forth in doxology. In response to the greatness of God (v. 19), what else can we do but worship? God deserves the glory for His generous supply.

VIII. CONCLUSION (4:21-23)

Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar’s household. We are commanded to greet one another because of our common Savior. This is a typical Pauline conclusion except for the mention of Caesar’s household. This mention of Caesar’s household along with the mention of the Imperial Guard (1:13) are the strongest pieces that Paul wrote this letter from Rome. The mention of Caesar’s household would have served as a great encouragement to the believers in Philippi who were facing persecution because they would not bow to Caesar as Savior and Lord. There are even members of Caesar’s household who will not bow to him.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Paul began with grace (1:2) and he ends with grace. In fact, Paul ends all 13 of his letters by pronouncing the grace of God upon his recipients. From the first verse to the last verse, the focus and center of everything has been the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is worthy of all attention and admiration.

⁴⁴ O’Brien, 539-540.

Appendix:

References to Jesus in Philippians

- 1:1 – Paul and Timothy are servants of Jesus
- 1:1 – The saints are in Jesus
- 1:2 – Grace and Peace are from Jesus
- 1:6 – God will complete the work He started in us at the day of Jesus
- 1:8 – Paul yearns for the Philippians with the affections of Jesus
- 1:10 – Paul prays for them to be pure and blameless for the day of Jesus
- 1:11 – Righteousness comes through Jesus
- 1:13 – Paul’s imprisonment is for Jesus
- 1:15 – Some preach Jesus with impure motives
- 1:17 – They preach Jesus out of rivalry
- 1:18 – Paul rejoices that Jesus is proclaimed
- 1:19 – The Spirit of Jesus will help Paul
- 1:20 – Paul wants Jesus to be honored in his body
- 1:21 – For Paul, to live is Jesus
- 1:23 – To be with Jesus is far better than living on earth
- 1:26 – Paul wants them to glory in Jesus
- 1:27 – We are to live worthy of the gospel of Jesus
- 1:29 – We suffer for the sake of Jesus
- 2:1 – Encouragement comes from Jesus
- 2:5 – We are commanded to have the mind of Jesus
- 2:6 – Jesus did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped
- 2:7 – Jesus made Himself nothing, being born as a servant
- 2:8 – Jesus humbled Himself and was obedient to death on the cross
- 2:9 – Jesus has the name above every name
- 2:10 – At the name of Jesus, every knee will bow
- 2:11 – Every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord
- 2:16 – Paul looks toward the day of Jesus
- 2:17 – Paul hopes in Jesus to send Timothy
- 2:21 – Most people do not seek to glorify Jesus
- 2:30 – Epaphroditus risked his life for the work of Jesus
- 3:3 – We are to glory in Jesus
- 3:7 – Paul counts everything as loss for the sake of Jesus
- 3:8 – Paul counts everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of Jesus
- 3:8 – All must be rubbish in order to gain Jesus
- 3:9 – Righteousness comes through faith in Jesus
- 3:10 – Paul wants to know Jesus
- 3:11 – Jesus has made Paul His own
- 3:14 – Paul presses toward the call of God in Jesus
- 3:18 – Some walk as enemies of the cross of Jesus
- 3:20 – Jesus is the Lord and Savior, whom we wait for
- 3:21 – Jesus will transform our bodies by the power that enables Him to subject all things to himself
- 4:1 – We are to stand firm in the Lord Jesus
- 4:2 – We are to agree in the Lord Jesus
- 4:4 – We are to rejoice in the Lord Jesus
- 4:5 – The Lord Jesus is at hand
- 4:7 – God’s peace will guard our hearts in Jesus
- 4:13 – Paul can do all things through Jesus
- 4:19 – God will supply all needs according to His riches in Jesus
- 4:21 – The saints are in Jesus
- 4:23 – Paul prays that the grace of Jesus will be with the Philippians