

Philippians: The Unconquerable Gospel

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Lesson 1: Introduction, Background, and Outline

A Map of Philippi and Surrounding Regions



The City of Philippi and the Origin of the Church There

The city of Philippi, as one can see from the map, is located in north eastern Greece (Macedonia). The city was already ancient by the time Paul arrived there around 49 CE (Acts 16:11-40). In fact, its beginnings go back to the fourth century BCE when it was occupied by the Thracians. In 356 BCE, however, Philip II of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great, took over the city and named it after himself. He eventually established it as a military stronghold in order to protect the lands he had already acquired and the nearby gold mines which yielded him yearly a thousand talents. It was also important as a land route across Asia.¹ In 168 BC Philippi became part of the Roman empire when the latter defeated the Persians at the battle of Pydna and Macedonia was divided into four districts, Philippi belonging to the first.

Philippi is famous for one particular event. In 42 BCE Mark Antony and Octavian defeated Brutus and Cassius, the assassins of Julius Caesar, in a battle at Philippi. Later in 31 BCE when Octavian defeated Antony and Cleopatra at Actium, he assumed the name Augustus and rebuilt the city of Philippi. He placed retired soldiers there to ensure loyalty to Rome and established it as a military outpost. He also gave the new colony the highest privilege obtainable by a Roman provincial municipality—the *ius italicum*. Colonists could buy, own, or transfer property and maintained the right to civil lawsuits. They were also exempt from the poll and land tax.²

When Paul came to the city around 49 CE, Philippi was an urban center at the eastern end of the plain, a few miles northwest from Neapolis. The people there were both Romans and Greeks and spoke predominantly Greek even though Latin was the official language.³

¹ See Peter T. O'Brien, *Philippians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 3.

² Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, WBC, ed. Ralph P. Martin, vol. 43 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), xxxiii.

³ See Gordon D. Fee, *Philippians*, NICNT, ed. Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 26.

The church in Philippi was founded by the apostle Paul on his second missionary journey, recorded in Acts 16:1-40. Paul originally went to Macedonia because of a night vision described for us in Acts 16:9. In it Paul saw a man of Macedonia standing and asking that he come over to help them. Paul responded and so the gospel went triumphantly westward beginning in Philippi as the first city to be evangelized in Europe.

When Paul arrived in the city of Philippi he stayed there several days (Acts 16:12). The religious life of those in Philippi was marked by very syncretistic practices including the worship of the emperor (Julius, Augustus, and Claudius), the Egyptian gods Isis and Serapis, as well as many other deities. When the Sabbath came Paul went outside the city to the river looking for a place of prayer. The Greek text of Acts 16:13 is somewhat uncertain, but it seems that there were not enough men (i.e., 10) practicing Judaism in Philippi to have a synagogue. This being the case, Paul probably went to the Gangites River (or the Crenides river), approximately 1.5 miles away, in hopes of finding a Jewish “meeting place.” Perhaps it was near a river so that water was accessible for Jewish ritual purifications,⁴ though this is uncertain.

Paul spoke to the women who had gathered there, including a woman named Lydia (or perhaps the Lydian lady) who was a dealer in purple cloth and a proselyte to Judaism (Acts 16:14). She had probably converted to Judaism (since her name is a Gentile name) when living in Thyatira and brought her faith with her to Philippi. As she listened to Paul speak, the Lord opened her heart to respond. Evidently her entire household responded as well, since all of them were baptized together (Acts 16:14-15). Both the reference in Acts 16:15 to “the members of her household” and the fact that Paul and his companions stayed with her, together may indicate that Lydia was a woman of some means. This, then, is the rather auspicious beginnings of the Philippian church.

We must also note the rather lengthy section Luke devotes to Paul’s encounter with the slave girl in Philippi and the events that ensued. In Acts 16:16-18 Paul encountered a slave girl with a demonic spirit which could foretell the future and by which she earned her masters a great deal of money. Paul eventually rebuked the spirit and it left her. As a result she also lost the ability to foretell the future which created no little anger on the part of her owners. So they took Paul and Silas and brought them before the magistrates (Philippi was like a “little” Rome), charging that the missionaries were forcing them, as Roman citizens, to follow customs which were unlawful. The result was that Paul and Silas were thrown into prison after being stripped, beaten, and severely flogged (Acts 16:20-24). Around midnight there was an earthquake and all the prison doors flew open. Paul and Silas did not flee, but instead stayed and shared the gospel with the jailer who subsequently—both he and his entire family—came to the Lord (Acts 16:25-34). After Paul had made a point about his Roman citizenship⁵ to the magistrates who were wishing simply to release them, the missionaries went to the home of Lydia (Acts 16:35-40) and then departed for Apollonia and Thessalonica (Acts 17:1). We are uncertain as to the exact amount of time Paul stayed and ministered in Philippi on this first visit, but it is clear, nonetheless, that he had developed a deep love for them (cf. Phil 1:7). Thus we have Luke’s description of the events of the mission in Philippi—a strategic inroad for the gospel in Europe.

Authorship

There has never been any serious doubt as to the authorship of the letter to the Philippians. Paul claims to have written it (1:1; on the relationship of Timothy to the writing of the letter see, “Lesson 2: The Greeting”) and when compared to say Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Galatians, all the internal characteristics of language, style, and historical facts, confirm this. The early church also speaks consistently about Pauline authorship and authority. Hawthorne comments:

Echoes of Philippians may be heard in the writings of Clement (*ca.* AD 95), Ignatius (*ca.* AD 107), Hermas (*ca.* AD 140), Justin Martyr (d. *ca.* AD 165), Melito of Sardis (d. *ca.* AD 190) and Theophilus of Antioch (later second century). Polycarp of Smyrna (d. *ca.* AD 155) addresses himself to the Philippians and directly mentions Paul as having written them (3.2). Irenaeus (d. *ca.* AD 200). Clement of Alexandria (d. *ca.* AD 215), Tertullian (d. *ca.* AD 225) and the later fathers not only quote from Philippians, but assign it to Paul as well. Philippians appears in the oldest extant lists of NT writings—the Muratorian Canon (later second century) and the special canon of Marcion (d. *ca.* AD 160). There

⁴ See I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. R. V. G. Tasker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 266-67; Richard N. Longenecker, “Acts” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 460.

⁵ It is not certain as to why he did not make these rights known earlier since they would have protected him from being tried, beaten, and imprisoned by the Philippian magistrates. In any case he eventually appealed to them, probably in the hope of protecting Lydia, the jailer, and the new Philippian church from legal action taken by the magistrates.

apparently never was a question in the minds of the Fathers of the Church as to the canonical authority of Philippians or about its authorship.⁶

The authorship of the book, then, according to most scholars is fairly certain: Paul wrote it. There are, however, questions about whether the letter as a whole is unified or a composite of Pauline letters sent to the Philippian church and later grouped together by an editor. These literary questions are complex and cannot be delved into here. Suffice it to say that no two scholars agree on what the various letters are within the “letter.” And, if the seams are indeed as noticeable as one would expect (e.g., there is a disjunction of sorts between 3:1 and 2) why didn’t the so-called redactor or editor do a better job of smoothing them out. In an intensely personal letter—of the sort like Philippians—there is nothing to suggest that a composite is necessary. This commentary will proceed according to the conviction that while there is some disjunction in the letter it is nonetheless a literary whole and makes good sense as such.

Date and Place of Writing

The particulars surrounding the place of writing, and also the date, are not as straight forward as the question of authorship. It is, however, obvious on a casual reading of Philippians that Paul is in prison (1:7, 13, 17) and that the Philippians know where this is since they had sent Epaphroditus to him (4:18). But the question remains as to what imprisonment is being referred to. Typically, one of three solutions is advanced: (1) Rome; (2) Ephesus; or (3) Caesarea. Once we have answered this question with a reasonable degree of certainty we can postulate a date for the book.

The traditional answer is that Paul wrote Philippians from **Rome** during his imprisonment there (cf. Acts 28:30). While there are many factors which contribute to a Roman provenance for the letter, there are difficulties with this solution. Indeed, some scholars feel, on the basis of these difficulties, that another solution should be sought. The problems revolve around the length of time Paul was in Rome (2 years) and the number of visits to and from Philippi during that period—not to mention the visits Paul was planning, according to Philippians. For example, there must be enough time to have: (1) someone sent from Paul to inform the Philippians that he was in prison; (2) the Philippians send Epaphroditus to Paul with their gift for him (2:25); and (3) someone dispatched to Philippi with the report about Epaphroditus’s health. There are also three other visits mentioned in letter: (1) Epaphroditus takes the letter to Philippi (2:25); and (2) Timothy is to make a round trip to Philippi and back to Rome (2:19)⁷. Some scholars argue that in the ancient world this itinerary would have been impossible to complete in two years.

Motivated in part by the problems with a Roman provenance and the difficult travel schedule this creates, some scholars have argued that the letter was written from **Ephesus** during Paul’s ministry there (Acts 19:1ff). First, it seems that the Philippian church had helped Paul financially at the outset of his ministry around 49 CE (Phil 4:15-16). If the letter had been written from Rome, then over ten years had passed since they’d helped him again, which seems a bit long according to some scholars—especially for a church that shared such a good relationship with him (see Phil 4:10ff). Thus, they argue, it is unlikely that it was during the Roman imprisonment of 60-62 CE that Paul wrote the letter. But just because Paul mentions their *renewed* interest in giving (i.e., in 4:10) does not necessarily entail the idea that they had not helped him over the previous ten years.

Other scholars also argue that Paul’s desire to send Timothy with the hope of receiving him back with news from the Philippians (2:19)—even though he believes there will be a verdict soon that might end his life—is a bit strained because of the distance between Rome and Philippi. Paul’s words make more sense, scholars argue, if Timothy was to be sent from Ephesus. But this really presents no problem for the Roman imprisonment since Paul, even though he knew that there was the possibility of death, actually believed that he was going to live and be freed (Phil 1:25).

Another objection raised by certain commentators is that Paul’s opponents in 3:1-3 are most likely Judaizers—a fact which lends itself more easily to the Ephesian imprisonment where Paul is known to have had problems with the Judaizers (cf. Acts 19:8-9, 33). But as Guthrie points out, there were undoubtedly pockets of resistance sometime after the main issues were settled in Jerusalem.⁸ Though Paul mentions the fact that he had been in prison on many occasions (2 Cor 11:23), there is no record in Acts that he was ever imprisoned in Ephesus. Finally, against the Ephesian imprisonment is the lack of reference in Philippians to the collection for the poor in Jerusalem, though it is mentioned in every letter known to have been written around the time of Paul’s Ephesian ministry (Rom, 1 and 2 Cor). This is strange, and even more so,

⁶ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, xxviii.

⁷ Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 548.

⁸ Guthrie, *Introduction*, 553. A late date for Galatians would prove this to be true.

when one considers the fact that Paul was, on the other hand, willing to receive financial assistance from the Philippians. It seems better to interpret Phil 4:10 and the Philippians' renewed interest in giving to Paul as a reference to their desire to help him after they had given to the saints in Jerusalem.

Other scholars have argued for a **Caesarean** imprisonment. Paul was imprisoned, according to Acts 24:27, for two years in Caesarea and there is the chance that the palace guard mentioned in Phil 1:13 may be the same as that mentioned in Acts 23:35, i.e., Herod's palace guard. But the chief problem of the Caesarean view is the fact that it too, like Rome, is a considerable distance from Philippi. Apart from the fact that we know that Paul was actually imprisoned there, there is little else to commend this view.

The information we have makes it impossible to be dogmatic on this question, but the strongest view may still be Rome. If the journeys described in Philippians can be fitted in the two year imprisonment⁹ there is evidence that (1) there was a palace guard in Rome (Phil 1:13); (2) Paul was free to send and receive friends (Phil 2:19-30; Acts 28:30); (3) the reference to "Caesar's household" fits well with a Roman imprisonment (Phil 4:22); (4) "most of the brothers in the Lord" (Phil 1:14) may indicate a well established church which fits well with the Roman church (and not so well with what we know about the church in Caesarea); (5) the fact that Paul was faced with the possibility of death fits best with Rome since had he been elsewhere he could have always appealed to Caesar; (6) the Marcionite prologue indicates that Rome was the site for the writing of the letter.

If the place of writing is indeed Rome, the date of the letter is probably sometime between 60-62 CE, perhaps toward the end of his imprisonment since he seems to allude to a speedy release (Phil 2:24).

The Purpose of Philippians

There is no need to assume up front that there must have been only one purpose in the writing of Philippians. In fact, as we read the letter, several objectives seem to be in the mind of the apostle. First, it is clear that Paul wanted the church to know how things were going for him in his imprisonment (1:12-26) and what his plans were should he be released (Phil 2:23-24). Second, there appears to have been some discord and division in the church and so the apostle writes to encourage humility with a view toward unity (2:1-18; 4:2-3). Third, Paul, the pastoral theologian, writes to head off the negative teaching and consequences of certain false teachers (3:2-3ff.). Fourth, Paul wrote to commend Timothy to the church as well as to give the church a report about the health and plans of Epaphroditus (2:19-30). Fifth, Paul also wrote to thank the church for their concern for him and the gifts they had given (4:10-20).

Outline of Philippians

- I. (1:1-11)
 - A. Salutation 1:1-2
 - B. Thanksgiving and Prayer 1:3-11
 - 1. Thanksgiving (1:3-8)
 - 2. Prayer (1:9-11)
- II. Paul's Circumstances and Encouragement for the Church (1:12-2:30)
 - A. Paul's Circumstances and Attitude (1:12-26)
 - B. Paul's Encouragement for the Church (1:27-2:30)
 - 1. Concerning Humility and Obedience (2:1-18)
 - a. A Call to Humility (2:1-4)
 - b. The Example of Christ's Humility (2:5-11)
 - c. A Call to Obedience (2:12-18)
 - 2. Concerning Timothy (2:19-24)
 - 3. Concerning Epaphroditus (2:25-30)
- III. Warnings Against the False Teaching of the Judaizers (3:1-4:1)
 - A. The Warning: Steer Clear of the Judaizers and Their Legalism (3:1-2)
 - B. The Solution: Follow the Example of Paul (3:3-4:1)
- IV. Final Exhortations (4:2-9)

⁹ For example, Epaphroditus may have been dispatched before the news of Paul's imprisonment ever reached them, simply because the Philippians had heard that the apostle was going to Rome.

- A. Concerning Disputes (4:2-3)
 - B. Concerning Joy and Prayer (4:4-7)
 - C. Concerning How to Think and Live (4:8-9)
- V. A Word of Thanks (4:10-20)
- A. Paul's Contentment (4:10-13)
 - B. The Philippians' Gift (4:14-20)
- VI. Final Greetings and Closing (4:21-23)

Outline of Series

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Lesson 2: The Greeting (1:1-2)

I. Introduction

In his letter to the Philippians Paul introduces himself and Timothy as “servants of Christ Jesus.” That this was a truly apt title is correct, but we will learn in this lesson why it was not one of Paul’s more common ways of designating himself in a greeting. We will also see why he uncharacteristically includes Timothy with himself under the title “servants of Christ Jesus.” Further, most people run right past the greetings in the New Testament letters and it is our hope that after this study that you will see how integral they are to the content of the rest of the letter; they introduce themes that are developed later and, therefore, we ought to diligently reflect upon them. Finally, there simply is not space enough to comment on everything, but we hope that what is said will be helpful to you in understanding the letter to the Philippians and living out the truths you uncover.

II. Philippians 1:1-2

1:1 From Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the overseers and deacons. **1:2.** Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ! (NET Bible)

III. Outline: Introductory Greetings (1:1-2)

- A. The Senders (1:1a)
- B. The Recipients (1:1b)
- C. The Greeting (1:2)

IV. Introductory Greeting (1:1-2)

A. The Senders (1:1a)

While the text mentions both Paul and Timothy as the senders of the letter to the Philippians, the authorship is undoubtedly reserved specifically for **Paul**.¹ Paul was born in Tarsus in Cilicia into a family which apparently maintained a large measure of their Jewish faith and way of life despite their Gentile environment. Thus Paul was thoroughly Jewish and a “citizen of no mean (i.e., important) city” as he refers to it (Acts 21:39), possessing on top of that Roman citizenship (Acts 22:25). Though he left Tarsus for Jerusalem where he was brought up, he probably also maintained substantial family contacts with Tarsus and was not unfamiliar with the ways and practices of Gentile people in that town (cf. Acts 9:30). In Jerusalem he received his formal education in Judaism under the famous teacher Gamaliel (Acts 22:3) who himself was the grandson of one named Hillel. Hillel was significant in that he had developed many interpretive rules to govern the Jews’ reading and application of Scripture. Jesus may have been referring to some of these interpretations and rules in the sermon on the Mount when he commented, “You have heard that it was said....”

In any event we can see many of these rules and variations of them in the writings of Paul. This should cause us pause. I remember when I was in college in the early 1980’s. It was a constant refrain, like the monotonous clank of water dripping off an icicle onto a piece of metal flashing, that people would complain about their courses. I remember their grumblings: “Why do I have to study that...*I’ll never use it.*” But when God calls us to a particular task like studying in university, he calls us to all that *that* entails—unless of course something is obviously immoral or otherwise. When God called Paul to be a primary spokesman for Christianity in a Gentile context, his background and connections to a pagan city (Tarsus) as well as his Jewish training all came into play. He undoubtedly understood Gentile thinking and had

¹ The letter describes Paul’s imprisonment (1:12-26), *his* being with the Philippians (2:12), his plans for Timothy and Epaphroditus (2:19-30) and the values and goals of his own life (3:1-21). He also uses the first person on several occasions referring to himself. This would indicate that Timothy was not involved in the actual authorship of the work.

recourse, in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, to use the interpretive skills he had honed during those long and arduous hours with his mentor—when he was not a Christian. God wastes nothing. He uses it all for his purposes. Remember that God refers to Paul as his “chosen” instrument indicating in the least that He had uniquely qualified him for his apostolic role of preaching to Jews and Gentiles. For those of you who feel that you are required, for whatever reason, to do things that just don’t seem to be of any value, just remember that God will use it all to his glory.

In summary, then, Paul was brought up in a religiously observant Jewish home and trained with strictness in the Pharisaic sect (Acts 22:3). When we get to chapter 3 we will learn more about his Jewish heritage, commitment to certain traditions, and zeal for God. By the time he was imprisoned in Rome in 60-62 AD and wrote this letter to the Philippians he was about 60 years old—and still going strong!!!

Paul also mentions **Timothy** in the address of this letter. Timothy had ministered with Paul in Macedonia and helped establish the churches there and in Achaia as well (cf. Acts 16:3; 17:15; 18:5; 20:4). Timothy stuck with Paul through his rocky relationship with the Corinthians and in the mind of the apostle was a good representative of the latter’s way of life and teaching. During a difficult period, Paul sent him to work with the Corinthians, referring to him as his son whom he loved (1 Cor 4:17). Indeed, he was side by side with Paul in the ministry at Corinth (cf. 2 Cor 1:19) and also in the ministry at Philippi (Phil 2:22). It is fairly rare in life that one can find such a good friend and trusted confidant, but Paul had it in Timothy. In keeping with Paul’s relationship with Timothy and indeed the entire spirit of the letter to the Philippians, we ought also to lift up our heads and look around at the people God has placed beside us in the ministry. Let us not take them for granted or despise the work they do. We ought to seek first to uphold them in their burdens as Christ upholds us in ours (cf. Gal 6:2). I once heard a story of a young man who was working with an older man in the ministry. The young man, who incidentally is now fairly old, commented that the only time the older man had anything to say to him was when he (i.e., the young man) had made a mistake—then, and only then, would the old man speak, and then only to criticize! That’s a shame and totally unnecessary (that’s not to say, though, that the younger man didn’t learn anything or grow in Christ during that period). We must remember that Paul was a driven person and focused on a goal, while Timothy appears to have been somewhat more cautious and timid (cf. 2 Tim 1:7).² The fact that Paul eventually gave Timothy charge over Ephesus, a major center for Gentile outreach and mission, indicates that Paul did not defeat his young disciple, but developed him (1 Tim 1:3). The letters to Timothy are proof of this! Timothy must have “caught on” to ministry because he appears to have acquired the same selfless love for the Philippians that Paul also had (cf. Phil 1:7-8 with 2:20-21). More is caught than taught! So when we are working with others in ministry, let us purposely and regularly invest time thinking about how we can *intentionally* help them in their walk with Christ. If we did that, we’d have a much lower attrition rate in leadership. We’d also experience more of the joy and unity the letter to the Philippians talks about (cf. Phil 2:2).

Paul refers to both himself and Timothy as **servants** (douloi) of **Christ Jesus**. While he calls himself a “servant” in the introduction to two of his other letters, namely, in Romans 1:1 and Titus 1:1 (though in the latter case he calls himself the “servant of God”), his general practice is to refer to himself as an “apostle.” This is true in 1 Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 1:1; Gal 1:1; Eph 1:1; Col 1:1; 1 Tim 1:1; 2 Tim 1:1. We note also that even in Rom 1:1 and Titus 1:1, where he calls himself a “servant” or “slave,” he nonetheless refers to himself as an apostle in those introductions as well.³ The idea of a “servant” is a broader category than “apostle,” that is, all apostles were servants of Christ, but not all servants of Christ were apostles (at least in the technical sense of “apostle”; cf. 1 Cor 9:1-2; see also 2 Tim 2:24). A more significant observation, however, is that the term “servant” connotes humility, while the term “apostle” generally connotes authority and “the right to speak and act” on behalf of another. In the case of Paul it often expresses his authority derived from Christ and his right to speak and act as one so commissioned by the Lord. What is striking in this context, is that in contrast to any other occasion, Paul includes his coworker, i.e., Timothy, in the designation “servant.” The answer as to why this is so is in part dependent on the background of the term “servant.” Is it to be found in the OT concept of the “servant of Yahweh” or in the Greco-Roman idea of “servants” or “slaves”?

² It seems that Timothy avoided the conflict in Philippi since only Paul and Silas are mentioned as those thrown into prison (Acts 16:19, 25, 29). This may have been due to his unobtrusiveness. The fact that Paul has to reaffirm his qualifications in Phil 2:19-22 also suggests that he was perceived as somewhat unimpressive. So Gerald P. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 43, ed. Ralph P. Martin (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 4.

³ The fact that he most often refers to himself as an apostle when his authority is or could be an issue, and the fact that he does not refer to himself as such in 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and Philemon, may be due to the strong bond of friendship he had with the former (see 1 Thess 2:7-8, 17-20; 3:1-10) and the delicate situation of the latter. See Moisés Silva, *Philippians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary, ed. Moisés Silva (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 39-40.

The word “servant” (*doulos*) in the Greek OT⁴ often times speaks of the “servant” of Yahweh in terms of men appointed by Yahweh for certain special tasks: (1) Moses is referred to as the servant of the Lord (Num 12:7; Joshua 14:7); (2) Joshua (24:29; Judges 2:8); (3) Abraham (Psalm 104:42); (4) David (Ps 88:3) and (5) all the prophets are regarded as Yahweh’s servants (Jer 25:4; Ezek 38:17). Thus there is a sense that the word “servant,” especially in terms of Moses and the prophets, refers to one who speaks on behalf of God and is invested, therefore, with his authority. There is also, then, a sense of dignity and authority associated with the expression “servant of the Lord.” This may have been Paul’s meaning here in Phil 1:1, but it is unlikely. While there are struggles in the church (2:3-4; 4:2), the church on the whole seems receptive to Paul and his coworkers, so that a reference to his “authority from the Lord” or his prestige as a “servant of the Lord” seems somewhat out of place. Also, had this been the case, we would have expected Paul to refer to himself as an “apostle” and to separate himself from Timothy in the introduction.

There is another context for the term other than the Greek OT. It is the culture in which Paul lived. The term “servant” (*doulos*) in Paul’s Greco-Roman context referred to a class of people who were at the bottom of the social order. They became slaves, for example, through war, debt, capital convictions, and simply being born from a slave mother. In any case there were slave dealers who acquired them and sold them as property. Slaves had no rights, privileges, or freedoms in any sphere of society outside the family to which they belonged, though some of them, including doctors and accountants, were more educated than their owners. With this background in mind, Paul’s use of the term in Phil 1:1 could indicate that he and Timothy are servants of Christ Jesus in the sense that both he and Timothy are owned by Christ and have been bound over to him to do his will—and his will only. It could be a comment about the Christ owning them and their humble service to him. In speaking about a Christian’s salvation, Paul says a similar thing in 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20:

6:19 Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? **6:20** For you were bought with a price. Therefore glorify God with your body.

We originally asked the question of why Paul included Timothy with himself under the title “servants of Christ Jesus.” This seems evident now. The term “servant” conveys not the sense found in its Jewish background concerning one’s authority and special place in a task commanded by God, but its Greco-Roman sense of humble servitude. The latter is much more in keeping with the letter’s theme of humility (cf. 2:1-11). Paul’s inclusion of Timothy beside himself in the introduction, then, is to provide a *model* for the Philippians of true Christian humility, that even though he was a great apostle and invested with authority directly from the Lord, he was first and foremost a servant of Christ Jesus, just like any other Christian, including Timothy (Phil 4:9). Both of them worked shoulder-to-shoulder for the Philippians and Paul regarded his relationship to Timothy as equal under the Lord.⁵ Many pastors and Christian leaders intent on building their own kingdom could take a lesson from Paul and Timothy here. So also the rest of us. As someone once said, “We’re just a bunch of nobody’s running around trying to exalt a somebody!” We would do well to balance our agendas with such a thought.

Paul’s service to the Lord was expressed in terms of helping others come to know Christ and grow in that faith. Specifically in the book of Philippians his service included praying for the church (1:3-11), providing a model for them (1:20-21; 3:1-21; 4:9), teaching them, providing people to help and instruct them (2:19-30), etc. Paul also provides an excellent model for us today regarding the training and encouragement of young believers.

B. The Recipients (1:1b)

Having introduced both himself and Timothy *together* as servants of Christ Jesus, Paul now addresses the recipients of the letter. The letter is addressed not to a select few brilliant people in the church, but to **all the saints** (*hagiois*) **in**

⁴ You may remember that many Jews lived outside Palestine because of the deportations by Assyria and Babylon in the 8th and 6th centuries before Christ. Many of them were still there centuries later. In the fourth century the Greeks, led by Alexander the Great, conquered much of the territory in which the Jews found themselves and the latter were soon obliged to learn the Greek language. There arose, then, the need to translate the Hebrew Bible into Greek. This was begun sometime in the third century BCE and completed sometime around the end of the second century BCE. For certain (apparently unlikely) reasons it became known as the Septuagint (LXX). It had a profound effect on the writers of the NT—including the apostle Paul; they regard it as authoritative, alluding and/or quoting from it extensively.

⁵ Though the term indicates Paul’s humble service (and Timothy’s) it is not the denigrating sense often seen in Greco-Roman culture. This is so since, while outsiders to the Christian faith may have found the concept of “slavery” quite repugnant, Paul undoubtedly regarded it as a privilege to be a slave *of Christ Jesus*.

Philippi⁶ and Paul intentionally includes with them those who are leaders in the church, i.e., the **overseers** (episkopois) and **deacons** (diakonois).

The reference to the Christians in Philippi as **saints** is not a reference to their conduct or way of life *per se* (though conduct is often logically associated with such a term), but rather to their definitive salvation accomplished by Christ Jesus (cf. Rom 8:30). They are saints by virtue of being **in Christ Jesus**.

What is important to note in this introduction is that when Paul refers to the church, he refers to **all** of them, not some or most, but *all*. Since such a focus on *all the believers* is rare in other Pauline introductions (cf. the only other place is in Rom 1:7), yet occurs here in Philippians 1:1 and throughout the letter, it is perhaps significant and ought to be explored momentarily. Let's look at some of the "all" passages in Philippians:

1:4 Always in my every prayer for **all of you** I pray with joy

1:7 For it is right for me to think this about **all of you**, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel **all of you** became partners together with me in the grace of God.

1:8 For God is my witness that I long for **all of you** with the affection of Christ Jesus.

1:25 And since I am sure of this, I know that I will remain and continue with **all of you** for the sake of your progress and joy in the faith,

2:17 But even if I am being poured out like a drink-offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I have joy and rejoice together with **all of you**.

2:26 Indeed, he greatly missed **all of you** and was distressed because you heard that he had been ill.

4:21 Give greetings to **all the saints** in Christ Jesus.

Paul affirms that he prays for *all* of them and that *all* of them share in the gospel. He considers his life and ministry to be directed toward *all* of them and their progress in the faith. He rejoices with *all* of them, even with the ones who had caused some of the strife. Thus we can now see that the inclusion of the words "all of you" in the introduction are significant and reflect Paul's attempt to unite the church together around Christ and their common bond in Him. So concerned is he about this issue of unity in the church at Philippi that he opens the letter with an anticipation of dealing with it. This kind of preliminary glance at a theme to come later in the letter is not at all uncommon in Paul (e.g., 1 Cor 1:6-9 with chapters 12-14; Col 1:3-14 and the rest of the letter).

Paul also refers to the leaders in the church as **overseers** (episkopois) and **deacons** (diakonois). These terms need some explaining though it is difficult to be certain about their precise origin and meaning. Basically the plural noun **overseers** refers to a group of individuals who were given the responsibility to care for the people, perhaps as Gordon Fee suggests, through "administration, hospitality, and pastoral care."⁷ In this case it carries the same basic function as its use in Acts 20:28 where Paul exhorted the Ephesian elders to tend to the flock among whom God had made them episkopoi. People in these positions (probably official offices of the church in Philippi) were expected to maintain a certain kind of lifestyle outlined in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. This included the ability to teach and refute false doctrine. On the other hand, the plural noun **deacons** refers to another accompanying group of leaders in the church at Philippi (1 Tim 3:8-13). The specifics of their functions are very difficult to say with any degree of certainty but the term generally has a background referring to more menial tasks done in service to others (cf. Mark 10:43-45; Acts 6:2).⁸

Thus it is reasonably clear that there was an established, visible leadership in Philippi and according to the pastoral letters (1 Tim 3:1-13; Tit 1:5-9), such was to be the case in other Pauline churches as well (cf. Acts 14:23). The question is asked, then, since this leadership was established in other Pauline churches, why is this the only time in which Paul explicitly mentions them in a letter to a church? Some commentators argue that these leaders were responsible for organizing the gifts sent to Paul and he thus wished to give attention to them for their fine work in the Lord (cf. 4:14-18). But they are not mentioned in 4:10-20, though the congregation may have understood them to be those primarily responsible for sending aid to Paul. Other scholars, in light of the probability that there was some measure of disunity in the church,

⁶ For a discussion of the city and background information see the introductory lesson.

⁷ Gordon D. Fee, *Philippians*, NICNT, ed. Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 68-69.

⁸ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 9.

have argued that Paul mentions these leaders so as to remind them of their duty to carry out his injunctions to promote unity and peace. Certainly this would have been a responsibility of theirs, but Paul gives his injunctions directly to the church (e.g., 3:1ff). Others have argued that the reason Paul mentions these leaders is to endorse their authority to deal with those whom the apostle refers to as “dogs,” “mutilators of the flesh” and “enemies of the cross of Christ” (3:2-3, 18). This too lacks for any positive proof since the warning is given to the members as a whole (3:1). Finally, some suggest that there was friction among the leaders themselves, of which Euodia and Syntyche were a part (4:2-3), and the mention of the leaders in a greeting which focuses on servanthood and humility (see comments above) suggests that Paul wants to remind them of their need to be unified. All these suggestions have at least some merit in the text of the epistle, but the last is more in keeping with the overall focus in the letter on humility and unity among the Christians in Philippi.

C. The Greeting (1:2)

The greeting itself is identical to that found in 1 and 2 Corinthians, Romans, Ephesians and Philemon and has thus become a standard for Paul. The interesting point in the salutation is to see how Paul has transformed Greek and Hebrew traditions according to the work of Christ and God’s attitude toward his church. Paul always expressed a Christo-centric attitude and perspective on life.

grace

The common salutation in Greek letter writing was “Greetings” but they tended to use the Greek *verb* *chairein* not the *noun* **grace** (*charis*) as Paul does. An example of contemporary Greek usage can be found in the NT in Acts 15:23 and James 1:1. In both of these cases the writers have used *chairein*. But Paul uses the noun *charis*.

This was a favorite word of Paul’s which he uses approximately 100 times most of which express the unmerited favor of God toward undeserving sinners like the Philippians, and by extension you and me as Christian believers. It is the term he uses in Ephesians 2:8-9 to express that salvation is totally the work of God on behalf of the believer and comes not through any human effort (i.e., “not by works”). Grace was at the heart of Paul’s gospel. For Paul, the grace of God is a primary motivator toward a holy life, for it is his God’s unmerited favor that teaches believers to say “no to ungodliness and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age” (Titus 2:11-12). It was the grace of God that turned Paul—the greatest legalist of his day—into the greatest exponent of the love and mercy of God (cf. 1 Cor 15:10). Paul was confident that all the Philippians shared in the saving grace of God (1:7) and as a result he prayed in 4:23 that the grace of Christ might rest on them.

peace

Though most translations render this verse as “Grace and peace to you...” in all the salutations of the apostle except 1 Timothy-Titus, the Greek text invariably reads “grace to you, and peace...” which indicates that the **peace** that follows is as a result of the grace just mentioned. That is, for Paul, there is no peace in the heart, no sense of well-being and wholeness, no tranquillity before God and in the storms of life, until a person has entered into the grace of God by faith. Then, and only then, can he/she have the peace of God in his/her heart. A person enters that peace by personally trusting in Christ as savior (Rom 3:21-31).

God our father and the Lord Jesus Christ

Paul writes that the grace and peace are not from him but **from God our father and the Lord Jesus Christ**. It would have been pleasantly startling for Paul’s readers to have received a greeting from God. It is even more startling for us today, in light of what we know about Paul’s monotheistic Jewish heritage, to see Jesus functioning in the same capacity *as the father*. Both of them, according to Paul here, are the authors of the grace and peace for the Christian. Thus there is at least the implication, in light of the ease with which Paul allows the statement to flow from his monotheistic pen—unencumbered—that he regarded Christ as deity as well. In this interpretation the term **our** is not to be taken with anything other than **father** (cf. Matt 6:9) and Christ is seen as another agent in the giving of grace and peace.⁹ Thus Paul is not saying, as he has done on other occasions: “the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 15:6; 2 Cor 1:3; 11:31 Eph 1:3; Col 1:3), but instead implying that Christ is equal to the Father in the dispensing of salvation benefits. Further,

⁹ Cf. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 11-12; Fee, *Philippians*, 70-71; Peter T. O’Brien, *Philippians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 50-52.

the issue of the deity (and humanity) of Christ will come up again in the letter in 2:6ff. Thus once again the apostle has anticipated another important theme in the introduction to his letter.

V. Applicational Ideas

1. Recognize and appreciate that in the church we are all servants no matter what how “high” or “low” our profile in the body of Christ may be.
2. Learn to appreciate other Christians by thanking God for their ministries and contribution to the body.
3. Accept God’s grace and enjoy the peace he has provided for you.
4. Meditate (as you look up other passages in your Bible) on the person of God the father in terms of his relationship to you and the person of Christ as Lord (cf. John 14:23). Remember we have One God who has revealed himself in three persons. There are three distinct persons, yet all are equally deity.

Lesson 3: Thanksgiving and Prayer for the Philippian Church (1:3-11)

I. Translation

1:3 I thank my God every time I remember you. **1:4** Always in my every prayer for all of you I pray with joy **1:5** because of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now. **1:6** For I am sure of this very thing, that the one who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. **1:7** For it is right for me to think this about all of you, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel all of you became partners together with me in the grace of God. **1:8** For God is my witness that I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. **1:9** And I pray this, that your love may abound even more and more in knowledge and every kind of insight **1:10** so that you can decide what is best, and so be sincere and blameless for the day of Christ, **1:11** filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

II. Outline

- A. Thanksgiving (1:3-8)
 - 1. The Frequency of Paul's Thanksgiving for the Philippians (1:3)
 - 2. The Manner of Paul's Thanksgiving for the Philippians (1:4)
 - 3. The Reasons for Paul's Joyful Thanksgiving for the Philippians (1:5-6)
 - 4. The Context of Paul's Thanksgiving for the Philippians (1:7-8)
- B. The Content and Goal of Paul's Prayer (1:9-11)
 - 1. The Content Proper: A Love Characterized by Increasing Knowledge and Insight (1:9)
 - 2. The Immediate and Ultimate Goals: The Glory and Praise of God (1:10-11)
 - a. The Immediate Goal (1:10-11a)
 - b. The Ultimate Goal (1:11b)

III. Thanksgiving and Prayer (1:3-11)

A. Thanksgiving (1:3-8)

1. The Frequency of Paul's Thanksgiving for the Philippians (1:3)

Paul **gives thanks** (eucharisteo,) **every time he remembers them**. It was common in the secular world of letter writing to open a new letter with thanksgiving to God.¹ So Paul emulates here what is found in the culture at the time. But there are some important differences including his personal reference to God as *my God*. There are only two other certain instances where Paul refers (in his introductory prayer) to God as *my God*, namely, in Romans 1:8 and Philemon 4. This may also be the case in 1 Cor 1:4 though the text is in some doubt. The simple formula: "we thank God" is also found in 1 Thess 1:2 and Col 1:3.

In any case, Paul refers to God as **my God**² which reflects the deep intimacy he shared with the Lord and the expression itself may well come from the Psalter. When the psalmist cries out for God's help against his enemies he petitions the Lord: "Arise O Lord, Deliver me, O *my God*..." (Ps 3:7). David cried out to God for help, entreating him saying,

¹ So Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, WBC, ed. Ralph P. Martin, vol. 43 (Waco: Word Books, 1983), 15, who cites Adolf Deissman, *Light from the Ancient Near East* (New York: George H. Doran, 1927; reprint Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 168, n. 3.

² There is no indication here that Paul's intends to say that *his* God is just one of many gods, i.e., *my God* as opposed to *your* God. What he is referring to is the close personal relationship he enjoys with the one God of the universe who has made himself known particularly in Christ Jesus the Lord

“Listen to my cry for help, my king and my God, for to you I pray.” And, when David was running from Saul he prayed to the Lord: “I love you, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock in whom I take refuge.” What incredible closeness to the Lord these passages speak of. Paul was undoubtedly drawn to these or similar texts as they ministered untold comfort during his difficult circumstances in prison.

There are several indicators in Philippians that reveal Paul’s close personal relationship with the Lord in spite of his trying circumstances. First, as a result of his intimacy with the Lord, Paul could eagerly expect and confidently hope, that in whatever circumstances he found himself, he would not be ashamed. He was confident that he would have sufficient courage so that Christ would always be exalted through him, whether in life or death (1:20). This can only come as a result of spiritually abiding in Christ (John 15:7-8). Second, the apostle goes so far as to say that “for him to live is Christ and to die is gain” and that he would much rather “depart and be with Christ” (1:21-23). Third, he rejoices in his ministry to the Philippians even though the cost to him was great and he was somewhat uncertain of the results (2:16-18).³ Fourth, his sufferings have brought him to the place where he wants to know Christ more than anything else. He talks about knowing Christ in terms of knowing the power of his resurrection, the fellowship of sharing in Christ’s sufferings, being conformed to the likeness of his death, and rising from the dead (3:10-11). There is much more in the letter that we could talk about as well. Paul was a man who knew his God; he referred to the Lord as my God. He understood the suffering and humiliation that Christ underwent for him (2:6-11) and now it was his turn to follow his master’s example.

2. The Manner of Paul’s Thanksgiving for the Philippians (1:4)

Paul’s prayers for the Philippians grew out of his intense, deep, and personal love for the Lord and for them (1:7-8). He wants the Philippians to know that he prays for them *often* and that on each occasion that he does pray, he does so with *thanksgiving* and *joy*.

Hawthorne has suggested that “every time I remember you” (back in v. 3) indicates that Paul was not simply thinking about praying at *random* times per se, though he undoubtedly did that, but that he was thinking about praying at *set* times, much according to his Jewish heritage (Ps 5:3; Ezra 9:5; Ps 55:17; Dan 6:10; 1 Chron 23:30).⁴ Luke records the practice of Peter and John going up to the temple at the hour of prayer (i.e., 3pm; Acts 3:1). The Jews of Paul’s day regularly prayed: (1) early in the morning, in connection with the morning sacrifice; (2) at the ninth hour in connection with the evening sacrifice (3 pm); (3) at sunset.⁵ Thus there is evidence that prayer at set times was actually done by Christian Jews—and it is probably quite safe to say that Paul himself followed this tradition—but it is by no means certain that his comment in v. 3 can be limited to that. The language is just not specific enough to warrant such a narrow referent. He probably means that he prays all the time for the Philippians, not just at set times. In any case, he was in prison, and undoubtedly had many opportunities to pray for his beloved friends.

Let’s begin our discussion of this verse with a closer look at the word **prayer** (dee,sei). The word is used 18 times in the NT, 12 of which are in Paul (Rom 10:1; 2 Cor 1:11; 9:14; Eph 6:18 [2x]; Phil 1:4 [2x]; 1:19; 4:6; 1 Tim 2:1; 5:5; 2 Tim 1:3). The term can be used in a narrower way than the general term for prayer found in Phil 1:9 (proseuchomai) and may relate better to known, specific needs.⁶ Thus, for example, in Romans 10:1 Paul prays specifically for the salvation of his Jewish brethren. In 2 Corinthians 1:11 Paul asks for specific prayer concerning deliverance from trouble. In Philippians the word occurs twice in 1:4, and in two other verses, namely, 1:19 and 4:6. In 1:19 Paul regards his imprisonment as coming to an end soon because the Philippians have *prayed* specifically for his release. In 4:6 the term probably refers to *prayer* for unity in the Philippians church. Thus in the book of Philippians the word carries a narrower sense than just general prayer.

The question arises, then, as to what specific needs are in mind in the use of the term in 1:4. This can be understood by looking at the letter as a whole and the problems within the church at Philippi. First, because of certain factions developing in the church, Paul’s immediate concern is with unity (4:2-3). Second, he denounces the false teachers in his letter and shows the Philippians a better way toward spirituality (3:1-21). Thus it seems that Paul’s prayers to make up what is

³ Philippians 2:1 is notoriously difficult to interpret. We will discuss the imagery in some detail when we come to the verse in our exposition, but suffice it to say here that Paul rejoices in his ministry to the Philippians even though it comes with a price tag attached.

⁴ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 16-17.

⁵ See Richard N. Longenecker, “Acts,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 293; SBK 2:696-98.

⁶ See BAGD, s.v. dehvsí".

lacking in the Philippians faith, that is, his prayer that God will bring them to maturity, includes prayers for their humility and unity, as well as prayers for their protection from false teachers.

It must be said, however, that while Paul makes these prayers for specific needs in the church, and even though these needs are connected to sin on the part of some members (e.g., 2:3-4; 4:2-3), he nonetheless, prays for all of them (huper panto, n humo, n) and he does so with joy (charas). The focus on **all of them** as we stated in the first lesson (Philippians 1:1-2), not only ensures the Philippians that Paul prays for all of them and not just a select group, but also anticipates the discussion about unity to come in the bulk of the letter. Again, the apostle's procedure makes it plain to the Philippians that in Paul's mind they are all valuable and equal members of the church.

Paul says that he always prays for the Philippians with joy. **Joy** is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:23) and refers to the experience of "fullness of life" because of the presence of the Spirit within—regardless what the circumstances are. It is closely connected to feelings of well being and a deep and lasting peace grounded in the personal knowledge of God's presence and sovereignty over all peoples and events.⁷ It is in this experience of joy that the apostle prays for the church. But he does so according to the following reasons outlined in vv. 5 and 6.

3. The Reasons for Paul's Joyful Thanksgiving for the Philippians (1:5-6)

Paul gave thanks for the Philippians, and prayed for them with joy because of their **participation** in the gospel. The Greek word translated *participation* (koino, nia) can be understood in at least a couple of ways. First, it might refer to the Philippians' experience in salvation. In this case Paul is thanking God because he shares with the Philippians in the salvation offered in the gospel. A second way to understand it is as a reference to the Philippians' participation in the furtherance of the gospel, namely, by helping Paul in his missionary work. This latter way is preferable here. First, koino, nia in 1:5 must be understood in light of the term with which it is connected, namely, *gospel* (euangelion). The term *gospel* occurs nine times in Philippians. For Paul the gospel was *good news* about Christ (1:27). But it was good news that must be "defended and confirmed" (1:7, 16), "furthered" (1:12; 2:22), "lived out in the face of opposition" (1:27); "contended for" (4:3), and "contributed (ekoino, se, sen) toward" (4:15). While Paul obviously had a deep personal fellowship with the Lord (cf. 3:10-11), the focus on the term *gospel* in the book of Philippians is on outward realities and one's tangible commitment to promulgate the *good news*.

Second, in 4:15-16 Paul talks about how in the first days of their (i.e., the Philippians') acquaintance with the gospel, nobody shared (ekoino, se, sen) with him in the matter of giving and receiving except the Philippians alone. These two verses have much in common with 1:5. Both 4:15-16 and 1:5 point back to the Philippians' first acquaintance with the gospel. They both use the word *fellowship* (1:5 has the noun and 4:15 the verbal form of the same word). The latter refers to the Philippians' gift for Paul in order to advance the gospel in the midst of his trials in prison. It seems likely, then, given both the consistent use of the term *gospel* in Philippians as *good news* to be advanced in one way or another, and the connections in 4:15-16 to 1:5, that what Paul has in mind in 1:5 is the Philippians' participation in furthering the gospel by their financial gifts. This is not the only time where Paul joins the idea of the *gospel* and *fellowship* with the idea of *giving*—the latter as a tangible expression of participation in the gospel. 2 Corinthians 9:13-15 reads as follows:

9:11 You will be enriched in every way so that you may be *generous* on every occasion, which is producing through us thanksgiving to God, **9:12** because the service of this ministry is not only providing for the needs of the saints but is also overflowing with many thanks to God. **9:13** Through the evidence of this service they will glorify God because of your obedience to your confession in the *gospel* of Christ and the generosity of your *sharing* with them and with everyone. **9:14** And in their prayers on your behalf they long for you because of the extraordinary grace God has shown to you. **9:15** Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift.

But Paul may also mean more by *participation in the gospel* than just the gifts sent to him by the Philippians. They had furthered the gospel in their own context as well. He encourages them to stand firm against those who oppose them and to thus contend as one man for the faith of the gospel (1:27). In 2:16, if they do everything without complaining or arguing, they will shine like stars in the universe (world) as they hold out the word of God to a world in darkness. The reference, then, to their participation in the gospel **from the first day until now** refers not solely to their original support,

⁷ Cf. *TDNT*, 9: 369-70.

nor their continued financial support of the apostle. While it includes these things, it is much broader and refers to any and every way in which they had advanced the gospel of Christ since the time of their conversion.⁸

While verse 5 looks at the faithfulness of the Philippians from the beginning of their conversion until the writing of the Philippian letter, **verse 6** looks to the future and their continued faithfulness in Christian living and witness. Paul is confident that the Philippians will continue to live out the Christian life, including making specific contributions to the furtherance of the gospel because God is the ultimate author of their faithfulness. He espouses a similar theology in 2:12-13 where he encourages them to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling because the One who is working in them, both the willing and the doing, is God.

Paul refers to the effect of the gospel in their lives as a **good work**. The expression *good work* cannot refer primarily to “the progress of the gospel,” by human means (i.e., through the Philippians), as Hawthorne suggests.⁹ Several reasons argue against such a narrow referent: (1) the “thanksgiving section” in 1:3-8 is for the Philippians’ *participation in the progress of the gospel*, not the progress of the gospel, per se; (2) the temporal indicators, “first day,” “until now,” and “Day of Christ Jesus” in vv. 5-6 indicate that a chronology is involved with the Philippians themselves as the subjects operating in the time frames laid out. This is true in v. 5 and therefore in v.6; (3) in v. 7 Paul says he thinks “this” (i.e., the contents of v. 6) about *all of you* (i.e., the Philippians). The “this” refers back to what he said in v. 6 and the *all of you* indicates that verse 6 refers to the Philippians and not just the progress of the gospel; (4) if the progress of the gospel were the *good work* to which Paul refers, then we would expect “through you” (*dia humo,,n*) instead of “in you” (*en humo,,n*)¹⁰; (5) it is superfluous for the apostle to say that the gospel will go forth until the day of Christ. The point is that God will continue his good work in the Philippians, as he will again discuss in 2:12-13, until the Day of Christ Jesus.

The idea of a *good work*, then, is broader than a reference to the progress of the gospel. It refers to God’s saving activity in their hearts and its expression in their lives. The specific focus in v. 6 because of the **in you** phrase is God’s work in their hearts. Their contribution to the furtherance of the gospel, as important as that is, is only an outward manifestation due the inward reality of the creative work of God. Because the Philippians had given themselves to the service of the gospel, it was clear to Paul that God had begun, was carrying on, and would complete, his good work in them (cf. 2 Cor 5:17).

The apostle says that God will perfect that good work in them **until the day of Christ Jesus**. Thus Paul responds to the Philippians, who are facing troubles on the inside (4:2-3) and troubles on the outside (1:26-31), by encouraging them with the truth about the certainty of their ultimate salvation. Such a salvation, the perfection of that which God had begun in them, will be complete at the day of Christ Jesus, that is, at the second coming of Christ (2 Thess 1:10). The expression *the day of Christ Jesus* is sometimes referred to by Paul as (1) *the day* (1 Thess 5:4; 1 Cor 3:13; Rom 13:12); (2) *that day* (2 Thess 1:10); (3) *the day of Christ* (Phil 1:10; 2:16); (4) *the day of the Lord* (1 Cor 5:5; 1 Thess 5:2; 2 Thess 2:12); and (5) *the day of our Lord Jesus [Christ]* (1 Cor 1:8; 2 Cor 1:14). We notice that only in Philippians is the term *Christ* associated with the day of the Lord.¹¹ While it is difficult to say why this is, the expression itself—day of the Lord—is an expression drawn from the OT and carries with it both negative and positive aspects. In Joel 2:1-2 the prophet refers to the day of the Lord as a day of judgment and wrath (cf. Amos 5:20), as well as blessing and salvation (Joel 3:14-16). Both of these senses are present in the writings of Paul. He uses it both in its negative sense involving judgment and God’s anger, as well as to indicate blessing and the vindication of God’s saints. This latter sense is the meaning here since Paul is referring to the salvation of the Philippians. The mention of the day of the Lord in 1:6 and 1:10, like so many other comments in his introductory thanksgiving in Philippians, anticipates the mention of the judgment of the Philippians’ enemies (1:28) and the return of Christ for his people (3:20). Finally, we might also add that Paul’s reference to the day of the *Lord* as the day of *Christ* may imply his conscious conviction regarding the deity of Christ.

4. The Context of Paul’s Thanksgiving for the Philippians (1:7-8)

v. 7 The context for Paul’s thanksgiving and confidence in the Philippians is his deep personal love for them and their mutual relationship. Paul says that it is right for him to **think** this about them. The Greek term for *think* in this context is not so much a reference to thinking or reasoning per se, or analyzing something, as much as it is a reference to a settled

⁸ See Gordon D. Fee, *Philippians*, NICNT, ed. Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 84-85.

⁹ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 21.

¹⁰ P. T. O’Brien, *Philippians*, NIGTC, ed. I. Howard Marshall and W. Ward Gasque (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 64.

¹¹ O’Brien, *Philippians*, 65.

mindset or disposition (cf. Rom 8:6-7).¹² Thus Paul has a settled attitude about the Philippians, including the joy he experiences when he prays for them because of their past participation in the gospel (v. 5), their future security with God (v.6) and their future faithfulness to Paul in prison (v.7). The emphasis on the **right-ness** of Paul thinking about the eternal security of the Philippians may be a polemical comment about what certain false teachers thought about the security of the Philippians. Perhaps these teachers had criticized them for their failure to conform to certain external religious practices like circumcision and so on that basis called into question their salvation. Paul says “no way, you’re saved.” The evidence of the grace of God is apparent in your lives!

The terms **defense** and **confirmation** (in respect to the gospel) could be taken in a technical sense and as a reference to Paul’s trial before Caesar (Acts 26:16; 2 Tim 4:16). Many commentators understand them as such. But it may be better to see it not only as a narrow reference to the particular occasion of his trial, but also in the broader sense of his apostolic ministry over the years. This is more consistent with our argument for the broader meaning of the expression *good work* in v. 6—referring to both the experience of salvation as well as the expression of it in one’s life. Thus we would also understand the meaning of **partners in the grace of God** to refer to the Philippians’ sharing not only in God’s salvation, but also contributing to Paul’s ministry and themselves holding out the word of life to unsaved people around them (2:16; cf. 1:26-30).

v. 8 In order to express the genuineness and depth of his love for them Paul introduces his next statement in v. 8 with an oath—**God is my witness**. Paul calls God as his witness regarding the sincerity and depth of his love for the Philippians. While the apostle used oaths on other occasions in his writings, they were not common (Rom 1:9; 2 Cor 1:23; 1 Thess 2:5, 10). Here the message is clear: “God knows the reality in my heart: I love you.” Would that all Christian leaders had such a deep commitment to the people they led, and could thus invite God to test the sincerity of that love—confident that their words would be proven correct.

When Paul says he **longs** for **all** of them he is referring to his desire to be with them and to see them again (cf. 2:26; see also 2:12, 23; Rom 1:11; 1 Thess 3:6; 2 Tim 1:4). In commenting on his plans after his release from prison he tells the Philippians that he wants to remain with them for their joy and progress in the faith (1:25). But his longings to be with them are not simply vague feelings, but indeed are the **affection(s) of Christ Jesus**. They are, as Martin has said, “nothing less than Christ’s love expressing itself through Paul.”¹³ Once again Paul’s deep love for the Philippians bubbles to the surface. It is a love that Paul had first experienced from Christ and continually learned in his walk with the Lord. It was out of this context that he had grown to love his friends in Philippi so much. We too may ask ourselves why it is that we do not love as we ought. Are we as close to the Lord as Paul was (cf. 3:10-11)? If not, let us be on our knees about this so that God may have his way in us and his kingdom may be exalted in and through our lives.

B. The Content and Goal of Paul’s Prayer (1:9-11)

1. The Content Proper: A Love Characterized by Increasing Knowledge and Insight (1:9)

Having stated that he prays for them *regularly* (vv. 3-4)—and in keeping with his thoughts of love for the Philippians (vv. 7-8), Paul now moves on in vv. 9-11 to inform them of the content of things he prays for them: Out of his own love for them grows his prayer for their growth in love. He prays that their love may abound so that they may be able to discern what is best with the ultimate result of living lives to the glory and praise of God. The reason Paul tells them his prayers, indicating what he really desires for them, is that it gives his prayers an exhortational nature. That is, sharing his prayers in this manner may well be a form of implicit encouragement to act on what he is praying.¹⁴

There are several words in his prayer that need discussion and exposition in order to get the richness of what the apostle is asking God for. The first term is **love**. While Paul speaks only sparingly of *love for God* (Rom 8:28; 1 Cor 8:3), he nonetheless emphasizes love in relationships between Christians (1 Thess 4:9; Col 1:4; 3:19; Phlmn 5; Eph 4:2; 5:25; 6:23). Stauffer comments on Paul’s use of love (agape,) in his letters:

Paul takes up the command of Jesus that we should love our neighbors, and establishes it in the same way as the Lord. But his true interest is concentrated on brotherly love. The organic principle which is given once and for all with the orientation of love to the neighbour is here worked out in terms of

¹² Fee, *Philippians*, 89; O’Brien, *Philippians*, 66-67.

¹³ Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians*, NCB, ed. Matthew Black (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 67.

¹⁴ So Martin, *Philippians*, 68.

organisation (sic). Neighbourly love, once a readiness to help compatriots in the covenant people of Israel, is now service rendered to fellow-citizens in the new people of God. It implies making the welfare of the brotherhood the guiding principle of conduct.¹⁵

Stauffer goes on to talk about the influence of eschatology¹⁶ on Paul's thinking about love:

Decisive definition is given to brotherly love, however, by the cosmic, historical *kairos* ["time"] which demands it. Brotherly love is the only relevant and forward looking attitude in this time of decision between the cross and the *telos* ["end"]. It stands under the sign of the cross. It is a readiness for service and sacrifice, for forgiveness and consideration, for help and sympathy, for lifting up the fallen and restoring the broken in a fellowship that owes its very existence to the mercy of God and the sacrificial death of Christ... With love the power of the future age already breaks into the present form of the world. As for Jesus, so for Paul *agape*, is the only vital force which has a future in this aeon [i.e., now until Christ returns] of death.¹⁷

Thus love is the active pursuit of other people and those things which are beneficial for them. Paul wanted the Philippians to understand that this, not division (4:2-3) or selfish ambitions (2:3-4), should characterize their church. They ought to love one another, caring for the needs of others and humbly stand united in the defense of the gospel (1:26-30). There is an eschatology or future looking aspect to love in other letters of Paul and so also in Philippians. Paul says that it is his desire that their love abound... until the **day of Christ**.

But Paul wanted their love not only to be present in "drips and drabs" until the day of Christ, but to **abound** (perisseue,) until the day of Christ. The term *perisseue*, connotes the idea of "abundance," "richness," and "supply unlimited" and was a special word for Paul—used by him 26 of the 39 times in the NT—to refer to God's gracious act on our behalf, and to the attendant blessing in our lives and our ensuing responsibility. First, it is an apt verb to refer to God's amazing work in Christ for us. In Ephesians 1:8 Paul says that God has "lavished" (NIV) his grace upon us in salvation. In Romans 5:15 it characterizes the manner in which the blessing of Christ has been come to "the many." In contrast to the sin of Adam, Jesus' act of righteousness has caused grace to *overflow* (not trickle!) to the many. The ministry of the Spirit abounds in bringing about righteousness and life in comparison to the ministry of the Law which brought about sin and death (2 Cor 3:9).

Second, there is an intimacy that we as Christians experience which Paul loves to describe with the use of this verb. In the present age, with the giving of the Spirit and our participation in the kingdom, we receive *overflowing* comfort from Christ in our trials (2 Cor 1:5) and God himself fills us with all joy and peace as we trust in him so that by the power of the Holy Spirit we might *overflow* with hope (Romans 15:13).

Third, as a result of the *overflowing* grace of God expressed to us in the work of Christ and the sending of the Spirit, our lives are characterized by an abundance of provision for the performing of the will of God (2 Cor 9:8), and we ought to overflow in thankfulness to God (2 Cor 4:15; 9:12; Col 2:7), giving (2 Cor 8:2, 7), love for other Christians (1 Thess 3:12; 4:1, 10) and in our work for the resurrected Christ (1 Cor 15:58).

Paul wants their love to abound in the direction of knowledge (*epigno*,*sis*) and every kind of insight (*pase*,*aisthe*,*sei*) so that they may be able to discern what is best and be filled with the fruit of righteousness. But what does he mean specifically by **knowledge and every kind of insight**. The first term *knowledge* is not what we generally think of when we speak about knowledge. We say that a person is "knowledgeable" or we refer to a particular discipline as a "field of knowledge." In these cases we are basically referring to knowledge as factual information about this subject or that. But that is not what Paul has in mind here.

The term *epigno*,*sis* is used by Paul some 15 times in his letters¹⁸ and refers to such things as one's personal knowledge of sin through the explicit demands of the Law (Rom 3:20). In Ephesians 1:17 Paul prays for the Ephesians (and others to whom the letter was sent) that God might give them spiritual wisdom and understanding so that they might have a better *knowledge* of Christ (cf. Eph 4:13; Col. 1:9). Thus it is a personal kind of knowing that is in view, not just

¹⁵ Ethelbert Stauffer, *TDNT*, 1:50-51.

¹⁶ "Eschatology" is a fancy word which generally refers to the study of doctrines and ideas related to the end-times.

¹⁷ Stauffer, *TDNT*, 1:51.

¹⁸ He uses the verbal form only on one occasion (2 Cor 1:13).

mental assent to certain facts, like the width and depth of the Grand Canyon. Further, it is the kind of *knowledge* that is also closely related to ethics and behavior. Paul prays that the Colossians will be filled with the *knowledge* of God's will so that they might walk worthily of the Lord (Col. 1:9-10). There is a focus in the pastoral epistles on the kind of *knowledge* that is according to the truth and leads to godliness (see 1 Tim 2:4; 2 Tim 2:25; 3:7; Tit 1:1). Outside of Paul, 2 Peter 1:3-4 suggests that God's power in our lives is made operative through our *knowledge* of him who called us (cf. 2 Pet 1:2, 8; 2:20). The writer of Hebrews also held a logical connection between epignosis and moral behavior (Heb 10:26).

Thus for Paul, the term epignosis refers primarily to personal knowledge of God through Christ and the lifestyle that flows from that. This is the case in Philippians 1:9 and is confirmed by the reference to *purity* and a *blameless* lifestyle in 1:10. But the term is also closely connected to the second word, namely, **insight** (aisthesis). The term aisthesis only occurs here in the New Testament. It does, however, appear 27 times in the Greek Old Testament, 22 of which are in Proverbs. In Exodus 28:3 it refers to wisdom given to men by God for making garments for Aaron. In Prov 1:7 it is associated with the fear of the Lord and must be sought after from God (2:3). It is concerned with practical matters like speaking (10:14; 11:9; 12:23; 22:12) and general prudence and discernment concerning how to live rightly in relationships. It can be referred to as "tact" and the ability to understand relationships and situations with a view to practical action.¹⁹ The reference to **every kind** of insight refers to the ability to make practical decisions in a wide range of situations.²⁰ Thus it leads in Philippians 1:10 to an ability to discern or decide what things are best in certain situations and how to live a pure life. The point of what the apostle is praying, then, is that the Philippians' love—love being defined as that motivation which leads to acts done for the benefit of others—would develop more in terms of their personal relationship with Christ and that it be expressed concretely in the every day living among the Philippians. This prayer, while general enough to be prayed for every Christian community, may have had special significance for the Philippians because of the problems of selfishness (2:3-4) and division (4:2-3) that had crept in.

2. The Goal: The Glory and Praise of God (1:10-11)

Paul really has two overarching and related goals in mind when he prays for the Philippians. The first concerns their holiness and the second concerns the glory of God. He prays that they might abound in love and then demonstrate that love in their relationships with one another so that they might be pure and blameless which itself will result in the praise of God's glory. Thus there is an immediate goal as well as an ultimate goal.

a. The Immediate Goal (1:10-11a)

The immediate goal that Paul has in mind actually has two purposes within it. Paul prays for their love to abound more and more in knowledge and every kind of insight so that they may be able to approve or decide what things are best. This, then, further achieves the purpose or goal of the development of sincere and blameless lives among the Philippians. The phrase **decide what is best** (dokimazein ta diapheronta) is important to Paul's meaning. The verb dokimazein ("decide") carries the idea of "to prove something as credible, worthy, or true by testing it." It was used to refer to the testing of metals and coins to appraise their worth. It is used in Luke 14:19 when a man who was invited to the great banquet said that he could not come because he had just bought five yoke of oxen and he needed to go and *test* them out, to see if they were any good. The identical expression dokimazein ta diapheronta appears in Romans 2:18 where it refers to a Jew approving a higher moral standard according to the Law and the revealed will of God. 2 Corinthians 8:8 is another good example:

8:8 I am not saying this as a command, but I am *testing* the genuineness of your love by comparison with the eagerness of others.

Thus the process of approving something is a process that involves testing with a view to a choice about the value of the thing in question. Here Paul says that he wants the Philippians to learn to approve ta diapheronta. The term ta diapheronta refers to that which is excellent, surpassing in value, or really matters and is critical. It is easy to see how things that surpass other things in moral and spiritual value are also more important.²¹ Paul wants the Philippians' love to abound in practical discernment so that they can approve the best course of action in each specific situation in which they find themselves. The purpose of approving the things which are critical is to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ. Once again, in the introductory prayer, the apostle anticipates subjects to be taken up in the rest of the letter. The

¹⁹ Cf. O'Brien, *Philippians*, 77.

²⁰ Cf. O'Brien, *Philippians*, 76-77.

²¹ See BAGD, s. v. diafevrw 2.

idea of approving the things which are excellent and, therefore, critical and more important, is taken up again by way of application in 2:14-15 and 4:9. He also gives them his own example in 3:1-21. He was one who possessed the kind of love and discernment for which he prayed for the Philippians.

The term **sincere** (eilikrineis) can be translated as “without spot” and refers to moral purity. Originally, the term was derived from two words: (1) “sun”; (2) “judge.” Together the sense was “tested against the light of the sun,” “completely pure,” and “spotless.” The picture may be, as Hawthorne has suggested, of someone bringing a garment or the like out into the sun to see if there be any stain or spot on it.²² From the time of Plato it has been used in a moral sense, as is the case here in Phil 1:10 and in the rest of the NT (see 1 Cor 5:8; 2 Cor 1:12; 2:17; 2 Peter 3:1).²³

The other term, namely, **blameless** (aproskopoi) could refer to either putting a stumbling block in someone’s path or to stumbling oneself. In light of the only other usage in Paul in 1 Cor 10:32 (cf. Acts 24:16), it seems best to take it as a reference to causing someone else to stumble. This is also more likely in light of the focus on love in v. 9 and practical decision making in relationships entailed in that idea.

In summary, then, Paul wants the Philippians’ love to abound more and more in personal knowledge about God and spiritual relationships and insight concerning how to act in specific situations. The reason he prayed for this was so that the Philippians might learn to judge for themselves as to what was most important and valuable and live pure lives without offending others. This, then, is the way he wants them to live in light of the **day of Christ** (i.e., his coming) where they will experience the consummation of their salvation (cf. discussion of 1:6) as well as testing (cf. 1 Cor 3:10-15).

b. The Ultimate Goal (1:11b)

Paul wants the Philippians to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ and to be **filled with the fruit of righteousness** (peple,,ro,,menoi karpon dikaiosune,,s). There are some who argue that by “fruit of righteousness” (dikaiosune,,s) Paul here is referring to fruit that comes from a right standing with God (i.e., fruit that arises from our justification) as its source. Others argue that what Paul is referring to is fruit *that is* righteous in character without any explicit reference to God, Christ, or the Spirit as its source. While all commentators realize that Paul is talking about a lifestyle honoring to God and ultimately characterized by the fruit of the Spirit, the latter option is preferable since it is in keeping with the OT background (Amos 6:12; Prov 3:9; 11:30)²⁴ of the phrase and recognizes the parallel between this phrase, “filled with the fruit of righteousness” and the other modifiers in v. 10, namely, “sincere” and “blameless.” In any case, what Paul undoubtedly has in mind here is the fruit produced by the Spirit as we walk with him (Gal 5:16-24). His own life, expressed in emotional language in 3:1-14, is a testimony to the Philippians concerning the “pattern” (3:17) he wants them to follow. He wants the lives of the Philippians to be marked by a crop of righteous fruit **to the glory and praise of God**. Now that’s a goal worth shooting for!

IV. Principles for Application

1. Do we thank God often enough for other Christians?
2. We need to ask ourselves how we pray for other Christians. Is it with joy? If so, why? If not, why?
3. Do we share with other Christians in need? Is it time to review this area in your life?
4. Are there any Christians in our lives that we love as much as Paul loved the Philippians?
5. What is one specific thing you could do to help another Christian(s) with their growth?
6. Is your life characterized by righteousness as Paul prayed?

²² Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 28.

²³ Friedrich Büchsel, *TDNT*, 2:397-98.

²⁴ See Fee, *Philippians*, 103-04.

Lesson 4:
Paul's Circumstances:
Perspective, Joy, and Mission in Life—Part I
(1:12-18a)

I. Translation

1:12 I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that my situation has actually turned out to advance the gospel. **1:13** The results of this are that the whole imperial guard and everyone else knows that I am in prison for the sake of Christ, **1:14** and that most of the brothers, having confidence in the Lord because of my imprisonment, now more than ever dare to speak the word without fear.

1:15 Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from goodwill. **1:16** The latter do so from love because they know that I am placed here for the defense of the gospel. **1:17** The former proclaim Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, because they think they can cause trouble for me in my imprisonment. **1:18** What is the result? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is being proclaimed, and in this I rejoice.

II. Outline

(The outline pertains to both this and the next lesson so that you can see the context).

- A. Paul's Circumstances (1:12-18a)
 - 1. The Advancement of the Gospel through Preaching (1:12-14)
 - a. General Statement about Paul's Circumstances (1:12)
 - b. The Whole Imperial Guard Knows (1:13)
 - c. Other Brothers Speak the Word (1:14)
 - 2. The Motivations for Preaching (1:15-18a)
 - a. General Statement about Preaching (1:15)
 - b. Preaching from Right Motives (1:16)
 - c. Preaching from Wrong Motives (1:17)
 - d. The Result: Christ is Preached! (1:18a)
- B. Paul's Attitude of Rejoicing (1:18b-26)
 - 1. In Light of His Expectations (18b-21)
 - a. To Be Released (1:18b-19)
 - b. To Exalt Christ (1:20-21)
 - 2. In Light of His Future (1:22-26)
 - a. Regarding Productive Ministry (1:22-23)
 - b. Regarding Ministry to the Philippians (1:24-26)

III. Paul's Circumstances: Perspective, Joy, and Mission in Life
(1:12-18a)

A. Paul's Circumstances (1:12-18a)

Having thanked God for the Philippians' long term support and participation in the gospel with him (1:3-8)—as well as having prayed for their love and fruitfulness in Christian living (1:9-11)—the apostle now moves on to relate, unfortunately only in general terms, what the effects of his imprisonment are (1:12-26). Contrary to what the Philippians may have thought or expected, his "chains" have really served to advance the gospel. As always, the apostle views life as it relates to the progress of the gospel and the concomitant blessing experienced by those who welcome it. Thus, should he be released—and this is what he expects to happen—he will continue to work with the Philippians for their progress and joy in the faith (1:25). He can think of no other course of action fitting for his life. Paul's attitude can be summarized in eight words: "To know Christ (3:10-11) and to make him known (1:22)!"

Further, there can hardly be any doubt that one of the reasons Paul describes his own experience in 1:12-26, even if the Philippians had expressed an interest in it when they sent him their gift, was not simply to inform them of his situation,

but also to give them a “pattern” to live by (cf. 1:26-30; 3:17; 4:9). Knowing that both he and they shared the same struggle (1:30), Paul never lost an opportunity to “show the way” toward proper Christian living in a fallen world.¹

There are several connections in 1:12-26 to what Paul has said in 1:3-11. **First**, there is the repeated theme of prayer. In 1:3-4 Paul prays for the Philippians and in 1:19 he is counting on their prayers for him. **Second**, the gospel and its furtherance is a main theme in 1:3-8 as it is in 1:12-26 (cf. too 1:27ff). **Third**, in the same way Paul was confident that God would perfect or carry on his good work in them until the day of Christ, I think he also, in light of 1:20, felt that God would carry on his good work in him. **Fourth**, the issue of the defense and confirmation of the gospel sounded in 1:7 is generally the context for 1:12-26 and is taken up specifically and somewhat surprisingly with respect to other Christians in 1:16. **Fifth**, Paul’s joyful and Christ-like attitude in his imprisonment is an example of being “filled with righteousness,” and recalls the content of his prayer for the Philippians in 1:11. Such an attitude also anticipates the sufferings of Christ in 2:5-11. **Sixth**, Paul’s *willingness* to remain on in the body for the sake of the Philippians (1:24-25) is an example of deciding or approving what is best (1:10).

Paul transitions, then, from the introduction to the letter (1:1-11) to the body of the letter (1:12ff) through the use of a common formula: “I want you to know, brothers and sisters...” The formula “I want you to know” (*gino„skein de humas boulomai*) was common in Paul’s culture, though *he* nowhere else uses it specifically in this setting, that is, to introduce the body of the letter with a description of his situation primarily in mind (but cf. Col. 2:1; see also Rom 1:13; 11:25; 1 Cor 10:1; 11:3; 12:1; 2 Cor 1:8; 1 Thess 4:13 for similar constructions). There are several papyri which have the same formula, i.e., “I want you to know,” and then follow it with facts about how the writer is doing, his safety, feelings, and activities.² An oft-cited second century CE example reads as follows:

Apollinarius to Taesis, his mother and lady, many greetings. Before all I pray for your health. I myself am well and make supplication for you before the gods of this place.

I wish you to know, mother, that I arrived in Rome in good health on the 25th of the month of Pachon and was posted to Misenum....³

Paul may have been using a similar style current in his day, but he is unique in his focus on Christ and the gospel. Thus it is not a mere trifle as an introduction, but he sincerely wants them to know about what’s happening in his life. We will proceed now to look in detail at this section in which the apostle informs his readers of what’s going on around him and how he feels about it.

1. The Advancement of the Gospel through Preaching (1:12-14)

The focus in vv. 12-14 concerns the advancement of the gospel through preaching, in spite of the fact that Paul is in prison. In fact, it seems that the gospel is moving ahead *because* he is in prison. As a result the entire imperial guard knows why Paul is in chains and other brothers are speaking the word with greater daring.

a. General Statement about Paul’s Circumstances (1:12)

In verse 12 Paul gives a general statement about the contents to follow in the paragraph (i.e., in vv. 13-26). It concerns Paul letting the **brothers** know about the **advance** of the gospel because of his circumstances.

The term **brothers** is used by Paul approximately 133 times in his letters to express his close personal relationship to other Christians on the basis of their new family relationship in Christ (e.g., Rom 1:13; 1 Cor 1:10; 2 Cor 1:8; Gal 3:15; Eph 6:23; Phil 1:12, 14; 2:25; 3:1, 13, 17; 4:1, 8, 21; Col 1:2; 1 Thess 1:4; 2 Thess 1:3; Philemon 1). It is used nine times in *Philippians* alone, and even—if not used sarcastically—includes those who tried to stir up trouble for the apostle while he was in prison (1:14-15). Thus everyone who is a genuine Christian is a brother in the family although many “brothers” do not act as they ought. The term itself probably comes out of Paul’s Jewish heritage, though for him it expresses the distinctive relationship that exists between those who are in Christ. Since we are all “*sons of God by faith*” (Gal 3:26-28) we are, therefore, “brothers” by new birth into a new family. Further, it should also be pointed out that the term “brothers”

¹ Cf. Gordon D. Fee, *Philippians*, NICNT, ed. Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 107.

² Cf. Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, WBC, ed. Ralph P. Martin, vol. 43 (Waco, TX: Word Publishers, 1983), 33.

³ See A. S. Hunt and C. C. Edgar, *Select Papyri I*, Loeb Classic Library (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge Press, 1932), 303; Fee, *Philippians*, 106, n. 2; Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 33.

in v. 12 definitely includes Christian women as well, and is thus translated as “brothers and sisters” in the NET bible. It is unlikely, however, that the same term in 1:14 includes women. There it probably refers to men only.

Paul says to his Christian brothers that what has happened to him has actually turned out to **advance** the gospel. The noun translated “advance” (prokope,,n) appears first in the literature of the Hellenistic period (5th through 3rd centuries BCE). The verbal form was originally a technical term from the nautical world meaning “to make headway in spite of blows” referring to a ship at sea striving against the wind. Both the verb and the noun came to mean “progress” and were in and of themselves neutral, not referring specifically to progress in something evil or something good. They were also used in Stoic philosophy to speak of the movement from being unwise to possessing wisdom.⁴ There is also an excellent example of the use of the term in 2 Maccabees 8:8.⁵ In some ways this example parallels the use of the term in Phil 1:12. We will look at the entire passage in 2 Maccabees 8:1-11 to get the big picture. It reads as follows:

8:1 Meanwhile Judas, who was also called Maccabeus, and his companions secretly entered the villages and summoned their kindred and enlisted those who had continued in the Jewish faith, and so they gathered about six thousand. ²They implored the Lord to look upon the people who were oppressed by all; and to have pity on the temple that had been profaned by the goddess; ³to have mercy on the city that was being destroyed and about to be leveled to the ground; to hearken to the blood that cried out to him; ⁴to remember also the lawless destruction of the innocent babies and the blasphemies committed against his name; and to show his hatred of evil.

⁵ As soon as Maccabeus got his army organized, the Gentiles could not withstand him, for the wrath of the Lord had turned to mercy. ⁶ Coming without warning, he would set fire to towns and villages. He captured strategic positions and put to flight not a few of the enemy. ⁷ He found the nights most advantageous for such attacks. And talk of his valor spread everywhere.

⁸ When Philip saw that the man was *gaining ground* (eis prokope,,n) little by little, and that he was pushing ahead with more frequent successes, he wrote to Ptolemy, the governor of Coelesyria and Phoenicia, to come to the aid of the king’s government. ⁹ Then Ptolemy promptly appointed Nicanor son of Patroclus, one of the king’s chief Friends, and sent him, in command of no fewer than twenty thousand Gentiles of all nations, to wipe out the whole race of Judea. He associated with him Gorgias, a general and a man of experience in military service. ¹⁰ Nicanor determined to make up for the king the tribute due to the Romans, two thousand talents, by selling the captured Jews into slavery. ¹¹ So he immediately sent to the towns on the seacoast, inviting them to buy Jewish slaves and promising to hand over ninety slaves for a talent, not expecting the judgment from the Almighty that was about to overtake him (NRSV, italics mine).

Thus in 2 Maccabees 8:8 it refers to an army making steady headway by winning a succession of small but important battles—in spite of overwhelming odds.

Paul uses prokope,, to refer to his own progress and advancement in Judaism as a young man (Gal 1:14). He also uses the term in reference to the progress he wants Timothy to evidence as he gives himself fully to his pastoral concerns (1 Tim 4:15). Paul also uses prokope,, in a negative sense to refer to the progress in evil that false teachers are engaged in (2 Tim 3:9, 13). Here in Phil 1:12 it refers to the progress of the gospel in spite of what might naturally have been thought to impede its progress (cf. Thess 3:1). This progress is not only to be understood in terms of the number of people now preaching the gospel because of Paul’s imprisonment, or even hypothetically to the number people now accepting the gospel because of Paul’s imprisonment, but also to the changed lives among some of the brothers who now have more courage to speak the word. The fact that it is used again in v. 25 with respect to the Philippians’ growth not only brackets this section off as a unit, i.e., vv. 12-26, but also serves to confirm the idea that the “progress of the gospel” includes more than just Christ being preached; it also includes the effects of such preaching, both among non-Christians (1:13) and Christians (1:14).

b. The Whole Imperial Guard Knows (1:13)

⁴ See Gustav Stählin, *TDNT*, 6:703-19.

⁵ 2 Maccabees is a book in the Apocrypha (14 or 15 Jewish books written from 250 BCE to 150 CE) and gives us a theological interpretation of certain important events among the Jews in the second century BCE.

As a result of the gospel making inroads in people's lives, Paul says the whole imperial guard and everyone else knows that he is in chains because of Christ. Paul was in prison not because he had committed some crime against the state, but because he was a Christian and because he preached the gospel. But this may not be all that he means by the expression **that I am in prison for the sake of Christ**. The wording in the Greek text makes it somewhat difficult to be certain as to Paul's exact meaning here, but he may be referring to the fact that he is in prison as one who shares in Christ's sufferings. Thus, it may be a similar meaning to that found in 3:10 where he talks about sharing in Christ's sufferings.⁶

In any event, the knowledge that his imprisonment is connected to Christ—and not some crime, political or otherwise—has become known throughout the **whole imperial guard**. There have been a number of suggestions as to the exact meaning of this expression, “whole imperial guard,” read in the Greek text as *holo, to, praito, rio,*. The term *praito, rio,* is a Latin loanword (from *praetorium*) attested in Greek inscriptions and papyri. In time the word came to refer to a “governor's official residence” (see Matt 27:27; Mark 15:16; John 18:28, 33; 19:9; Acts 23:35).⁷ O'Brien lists four meanings typically suggested, all of which also impact upon the place of origin of the letter. The “whole imperial guard” could refer to: (1) the emperor's palace. But there is no example of the term used in this way; (2) the “barracks attached to the imperial palace” and the small group of praetorian guards stationed there. But the term is not used in this way and the space is too small to be equated with the “whole imperial guard” with its 9000 soldiers; (3) the “large permanent camp of the praetorian soldiers.” But this camp was not known as the “praetorium.” (4) “men,” and not a place, that is, those men who made up the praetorian guard. This last solution is perhaps the best because the term is used extensively in this manner in papyri and the personal referent is in keeping with Paul's subsequent comment about “everyone else” which is also personal.⁸ The reference to **everyone else** probably refers to others who had dealings with imperial affairs and had occasion to be in Rome and learn that Paul was in prison for preaching Christ.⁹

c. Other Brothers Speak the Word (1:14)

Paul says that those outside of the church, i.e., the whole imperial guard and others too, had heard about Christ as a result of his “chains” (v. 13). But there were also those on the inside, that is, Christians who had been affected by Paul's imprisonment for the gospel (v. 14). The reference to **most of the brothers** refers to Christians who were in the Roman church. Some have suggested that these were Christians in other churches like Corinth and Thessalonica, or even Philippi. The latter of these interpretations, namely, Philippi, is a most unnatural reading of the text. Since Paul refers to the impact of his imprisonment upon the imperial guard *in Rome* (v. 13), it is likely that in v. 14 he is referring to the impact of his imprisonment on the church *in Philippi*. Further, there is nothing in the text to suggest that he means any other place other than where he is—i.e., Rome. He is certainly not referring to the Philippian church since they had shared with him in the ministry of the gospel for a long time (Phil 1:5-8). What is somewhat lamentable is the fact that his imprisonment only spurred on “most” and not “all” of the brothers to speak the word. And, further, it is lamentable that it took the imprisonment of another brother to bring this about, and that even then some of the Christians did not do it with proper motivation (1:15-18a). In the end, however, Paul rejoices for at least the gospel is going forth. Those preaching the gospel in this manner stand in sharp contrast to the solid character found in Christ (2:6-11), and men like Timothy and Epaphroditus (2:19-30)—men who were not opportunistic, but instead gave their lives to the faith and furtherance of the gospel.

Nonetheless, the example Paul set while he was in prison had made a deep impact on most of the brothers. As I said above, it is somewhat lamentable that it took Paul's imprisonment to get them moving, but their increased courage is nonetheless to be applauded. This elevated courage, however, came firstly and ultimately from the Lord: “Most of the brothers, **having confidence in the Lord**...dare to speak the word without fear.” It was because of their relationship with Christ that they were spurred on to share the gospel. Paul's chains were only the *occasion*, not the grounds, for their confidence. We too must remember that God can use the present situation to motivate us, but ultimately that motivation has to come from him if the resulting deed is to be done in a way that pleases him.

These “brothers,” who experienced greater courage because of their relationship with the Lord and because of Paul's imprisonment, now more than ever, **dare[d] to speak the word without fear**. The term **dared** means to have moral courage to act without fear of embarrassment or physical harm. After Jesus had responded to all their questions and they

⁶ See Moises Silva, *Philippians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Moisés Silva (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 68.

⁷ BAGD, 697.

⁸ See Peter T. O'Brien, *Philippians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 93.

⁹ So Fee, *Philippians*, 114.

were thoroughly embarrassed, the Pharisees did not dare ask Jesus any more questions (Matt 22:46; Mark 12:34; Luke 20:40). That is, they didn't have the moral courage. At bottom they were cowards who could not take the chance that their world might get messed up with some new facts. The disciples, after seeing Jesus alive, did not dare ask him who he was (John 21:12). Mark 15:43 provides us with an example that relates more to daring to do something in spite of the probability of physical harm. In this passage Mark describes the courage of Joseph of Arimathea who dared to ask Pilate for the body of Jesus in spite of (the possibility of) the threat to his life. Further, Acts 7:32 speaks about Moses who, in holy fear, did not dare to look at the Lord and Romans 5:7 speaks about someone who might dare to die on behalf of a good man (cf. also Jude 9). When the brothers in Rome dared to speak the word, there existed a threat to them as well. The threat to the Roman church and the reason they feared may well be due to certain political realities under foot during the reign of Nero. Commenting on this, Fee says:

This probably reflects the historical situation in Rome in the early 60s, when Nero's madness was peaking and the church there had begun to fall under suspicion, as Nero's program against them just a couple of years later bears witness. The present situation in Rome for followers of Christ had (understandably) led them to a more quiescent form of evangelism than was usual for early Christians. For good reasons, then, Paul joyfully explains to the Philippian believers that the net effect of his own imprisonment has been to give their Roman brothers and sisters extraordinary courage to proclaim Christ, at the heart of the empire itself, where storm clouds are brewing.¹⁰

Thus, despite possible political repercussions "most of the brothers" spoke **the word** and did so fearlessly (=with great boldness). Paul often times refers to the gospel or message about Christ and his saving work as "the word." It is translated accurately in many modern versions by the term "the message" (e.g. NIV). Verse 15 confirms that "the word" = "the gospel" or "the message about Christ." In 1 Thess 1:6 Paul rejoices that the Thessalonians had received "the word" (=the gospel, v. 5) with much joy even though they had suffered severely. Paul also refers to "the mystery about Christ" as "the word" (Col 4:3; see also Gal 6:6).

2. *The Motivations for Preaching (1:15-18a)*

Not everyone who was spurred on to preach Christ did so with the best of motivations. To be sure, some did preach Christ out of love, but others out of selfish ambition. The bottom line for Paul, however, was that Christ was preached and the apostle rejoiced in that.

a. A General Statement about the Preaching (1:15)

Verses 15-18a form a unit with an *inclusio* ("bookends"), that is, it begins and ends on the same note: In v. 15 Paul says that "some preach Christ" and in v. 18a he speaks about the fact that "Christ is preached." There is also a chiasm in the middle of these verses which provides the general content of the passage. The chiasm follows an A B B' A' pattern:

A: Some preach Christ from envy and rivalry (v. 15)

B: Some preach Christ from goodwill (v. 15)

B': The latter do so from love... (v. 16)

A': The former proclaim Christ from selfish ambition...(v. 17)

The emphasis in the chiasm falls on the repetition found in the A/A' lines. The fact that the passage is "sewn together" in such a tight fashion and is joined only weakly to the preceding passage in 1:12-14 (by an "and" [kai] in the Greek text) has led some commentators to regard it as a digression or excursus not directly related to what came before. Generally speaking, those who argue this point, also argue that those who preach Christ out of "envy and rivalry" in v. 15 cannot be the preachers Paul refers to as "brothers" in v. 14 who have "confidence in the Lord." But such a rigid separation of vv. 15-18a from 12-14 is not warranted.

First, the simplest explanation and reading of "some...are preaching" in v. 15 is that the "some" makes up part of the group referred to as "most of the brothers" in v. 14. The same is true of the "others from goodwill" in v. 15; the "others" is also part of the "most" referred to in v. 14.

Second, there is no immediate reason why Paul cannot refer to Christians who preach with wrong motives as "brothers"—improperly focused and misguided as they may be! Even though they are preaching from "envy and rivalry," two

¹⁰ Fee, *Philippians*, 116.

terms often associated with works of the flesh and the fallen condition (Gal 5:21; Tit 3:3), they are nonetheless, in Paul's estimation, *preaching Christ*. Besides, it is entirely possible that a Christian operate in such a sinful condition. The commands throughout the NT to avoid such behavior are meaningless if this is not the case, however unfortunate such a life might be (Rom 13:13; 1 Pet 2:1-2). Again, the NT letters presuppose that Christians do indeed sin in this way (cf. 1 Cor 1-4).

Third, Paul rejoiced that Christ was "preached" (= "to speak the word" in v. 14). This implies that the gospel preached by these contentious Christians—at least its essentials—was for the most part accurate (cf. v. 18a). It is difficult to conceive of Paul saying this if these brothers were not saved. The best answer is that they were saved and thus the problem is removed. Further, there is no indication in the text that these "brothers" in v. 14ff. are in any way connected to the opponents and false teachers Paul denounces in 1:28; 3:2, 18-19. The latter seem to be in Philippi, while the former are part of the church in Rome. The men in vv. 14ff. "advance the gospel" (cf. 1:12) while those in 1:28; 3:2, 18-19 are enemies of the cross of Christ; their end will be destruction. No connection should be seen with Paul's opponents in 2 Corinthians either.

But who, then, are these people who "think they can cause trouble for Paul in his imprisonment"? Several things can be noted: (1) their motivation for preaching Christ is envy and rivalry; (2) this envy and rivalry is directed at Paul; (3) it is concerned with Paul's chains; (4) it is coming from members of the Roman church. These points when taken together rule out suggestions that Paul is here dealing with factions in Corinth, or Gnostic teachers, or Judaizers *per se*. We are dealing here with Christians who are trying to give Paul grief in connection with his chains. Because Paul makes the point that he is "placed" (i.e., by God) in prison it seems that he is *defending* the consistency between the idea of prison and the gospel he preaches. Thus it may be that certain Christians in Rome were arguing that if his gospel were really the true one—and by this they specifically mean the practical applications that flow from the gospel—then he really wouldn't be in prison. Thus they maintained a more triumphal approach to ministry and thumbed their noses at Paul. They undoubtedly took special offense to Paul's idea that God had strategically placed him in prison there for a *defense* of the gospel. To their thinking nothing could be more inconsistent than for Paul to speak of a God-ordained message of liberation, on the one hand, while in prison, on the other.¹¹ In contrast to their efforts which were directed with one eye on Paul and one eye on the gospel, Paul had both eyes on Jesus. He was, however, not opposed to a triumphal theology, but only in God's time, when *He* decides to vindicate *His* apostle (cf. 1:20-21).

b. Preaching from Right Motives (1:16)

Paul says that those who preach out of goodwill—goodwill probably directed toward him (not God *per se*)—do so in love. The **love** could be love for God or love for Paul. While it is true that those who did preach Christ with the right motives undoubtedly had a love for God, the emphasis here must be seen in contrast to what others were doing to cause Paul grief. Just as some had tried to cause him trouble by their preaching, there were those who out of love for him and the work that needed to be done, jumped in and began evangelizing. It was their way of showing their solidarity with Paul and his message.

c. Preaching from Wrong Motives (1:17)

We have discussed the basics of this verse in the commentary under v. 15 above. Nonetheless, a comment is in order. It was unfortunate that some of the Christians in Rome could not get past their own agendas and self-serving motivations. But we do not have to be like that. Surely the Holy Spirit incorporated this section in his word to provide an example for us—albeit a negative one in terms of those who preached with wrong motives—so that we might watch our own motivations closely and seek to share his word with others in a spirit of unity, not "one-up-man-ship." Paul's selfless attitude in v. 18a is the positive model. Here is someone we can pattern our life after (cf. Phil 4:9).

d. The Result: Christ is Preached! (1:18a)

For Paul, Christ was everything (1:21): when he was facing the possibility of death, the resurrected Christ was enough (1:20; 3:10-11). When he was suffering in prison, the suffering of Christ was his comfort (2:6-11). For the man who wanted the highest possible calling in life, Christ was his focus (3:10-11). For an arrogant young man who could not love as commanded and had ardently striven to attain his own righteousness, Christ was his righteousness (3:4-11). For the

¹¹ The context for this rivalry between Paul and certain members of the church in Rome may have been fueled by his letter to them and the concessions he wanted Jews and Gentiles to make in their relationships with one another. But this is only speculation. Cf. Fee, *Philippians*, 121-124.

arrogant young Pharisee, who had his own agenda, Christ had become his all in all so that whether from false motives or pure, if Christ were preached, he could rejoice. What happened to him was of little consequence. The gospel and its progress was more important to Paul. The apostle was a man of one vision: to know Christ and to make him known. He had perspective in his circumstances and joy as a result. Finally, he never lost sight of the mission to which he been originally called (Acts 9:6, 15).

IV. Questions and Principles for Application

1. How do you view your circumstances? Can you rejoice in them, even when you are doing all you can, but the circumstances appear to be of little help in the cause of Christ?
2. How do you deal with people, especially Christians, who intentionally try to cause problems for you? If it hasn't happened to you yet, trust me, it will. How do you (would you) respond to that kind of treatment?
3. When was the last time you shared Christ with someone? If you are not sure how, please consult the "ABC's for Christian Growth: Laying the Foundation," on this website and go to "Lesson 1: Assurance Regarding the Gospel." You will find practical help there for sharing your faith. May God grant you the strength to share lovingly with everyone you meet. "Go ... and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how he has had mercy on you" (Mark 5:19)!

Lesson 5:
Paul's Circumstances:
Perspective, Joy, and Mission in Life—Part II
(1:18b-26)

I. Translation

Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, **1:19** for I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the support of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. **1:20** My confident hope is that I will in no way be ashamed but that with complete boldness, even now as always, Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or death. **1:21** For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. **1:22** Now if I am to go on living in the body, this will mean productive work for me; yet I don't know what I prefer: **1:23** I feel torn between the two, because I have a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far, **1:24** but it is more vital for your sake that I remain in the body. **1:25** And since I am sure of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for the sake of your progress and joy in the faith, **1:26** so that because of me you may swell with pride in Christ Jesus, when I come back to you.

II. Outline

- A. Paul's Circumstances (1:12-18a)
 - 1. The Advancement of the Gospel through Preaching (1:12-14)
 - a. General Statement about Paul's Circumstances (1:12)
 - b. The Whole Imperial Guard Knows (1:13)
 - c. Other Brothers Speak the Word (1:14)
 - 2. The Motivations for Preaching (1:15-18a)
 - a. General Statement about Preaching (1:15)
 - b. Preaching from Right Motives (1:16)
 - c. Preaching from Wrong Motives (1:17)
 - d. The Result: Christ is Preached! (1:18a)
- B. Paul's Attitude of Rejoicing (1:18b-26)
 - 1. In Light of His Expectations (18b-21)
 - a. To Be Vindicated (1:18b-19)
 - b. To Exalt Christ (1:20-21)
 - 2. In Light of His Future (1:22-26)
 - a. Regarding Productive Ministry (1:22-23)
 - b. Regarding Ministry to the Philippians (1:24-26)

III. Paul's Circumstances: Perspective, Joy, and Mission in Life
(1:18b-26)

If you have not read the lesson on 1:12-18a, we encourage you to do this now. This is now the second section of this entire section from 1:12-26. Thus we start in the outline with point **B**.

B. Paul's Attitude of Rejoicing (1:18b-26)

Paul rejoices knowing that his imprisonment has resulted in the advance of the gospel (1:12). Both those outside the church, such as the imperial guard, and those within the church, have been affected. The entire imperial guard and other people connected to the imperial house know about Christ as a result of Paul's chains (1:13). Those within the Roman church have been moved to preach the gospel (1:14). While Paul recognizes that some preach Christ out of goodwill (1:15-16) and others out of envy and rivalry (1:15, 17), he nonetheless rejoices in the fact that Christ is preached (1:18a). By way of summary, then, vv. 12-18a are really about Paul's circumstances and what has transpired as a result of his imprisonment. The next paragraph we're going to look at in vv. 18b-26 really describes his response to his imprisonment. Paul rejoices in light of what he expects will happen, that is, in terms of his vindication or release (1:18b-21) and the future ministry he knows he will carry on, if released (1:22-26). Someone once said that the true test of a leader is how he/she holds up under fire. Paul provides us with an excellent model of one who not only "held up under fire", but who

led the cause of Christ in the midst of what would otherwise have been defeating circumstances. The Philippians were to learn from his model (4:9). How about us as well?

1. In Light of His Expectations to Be Vindicated (18b-21)

Paul rejoiced because the gospel was preached. He also rejoiced in the hope of his vindication and that Christ would be exalted in his life whether he lived or died.

a. To Be Vindicated (1:18b-19)

Paul ends off v. 18a with a note about rejoicing in the present and begins v. 18b with a note about future rejoicing: **I will continue to rejoice**. The explanatory **for** (gar) beginning v. 19 indicates that what follows in 1:19-20 elaborates the reason for his continued rejoicing. There are several key issues to be studied in these two verses (i.e., 1:19-20), including the meaning of “deliverance” (so,te,ria), “prayers,” “support of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,” “confident hope,” “ashamed,” etc. After reflecting on each of these terms and expressions we will then return to tie it all together into a meaningful whole. Let us begin with the meaning of “deliverance.”

Paul says he knows that **this will turn out for my deliverance** (touto moi apobe,setai¹ eis so,te,rian). The term **this**, though part of the quoted material from Job (see below), probably refers to Paul’s circumstances including his imprisonment and the increased preaching of the gospel, even by those who do so in order to cause him trouble. But what exactly does he mean by “deliverance”?

The term **deliverance** translates the Greek term so,te,ria. Fundamentally, the term so,te,ria simply refers to “release,” “rescue,” or “salvation” and can be applied in variety of contexts. In the NT it is used by different writers to refer primarily to spiritual salvation (Acts 13:26; 2 Cor 7:10; 1 Thess 5:9;), but deliverance from physical harm as well (Luke 1:77; Acts 27:34; Heb 11:7).² To what does Paul refer when he uses the term here? (1) spiritual salvation, and if so, in what way? (2) a favorable verdict at his trial resulting in his “release” from prison; (3) vindication by God; or (4) some combination of two, three, or all of them? To answer this we will first examine some background in the Old Testament.

First, the identical phrase, “this will turn out for my deliverance” (touto moi apobe,setai eis so,te,rian), also occurs in the Greek Old Testament in Job 13:16. Second, the language of “shame” and “magnifying” in Philippians 1:20 picks up “the language of the ‘poor man’ in such Psalms as 34:3-6 and 35:24-28.”³ Thus, there is a concrete OT setting for Paul’s terminology and expressions in 1:19-20. This OT context must, of course, be investigated briefly in order to see what it contributes to the manner in which Paul is using the term so,te,ria in Phil 1:19.

First, we will cite a portion of the text of Job:

13:13 Keep silent in order that I may speak and cease from anger, **13:14** while I take up my flesh in my teeth, and I place my life in (my) hand. **13:15** If the Powerful One has placed his hand upon me, since he has indeed begun, I will certainly speak and plead before him. **13:16** And this will turn out for my **deliverance**, for no guile can enter before him. **13:17** Listen! Listen to my words for I will announce them while you listen. **13:18** Behold, I am near my judgment. I know that I will appear righteous (dikaios).

Zophar had earlier accused Job of being a mere talker who could not expect to be “vindicated” (Job 11:2, dikaios). He also accused him, in light of the terrible things that had happened to Job, of being guilty of some sin for which God was now punishing him (11:14). Job’s response in chapters 12-14 to Zophar, Eliphaz and Bildad, was to reassert a measure of his innocence in regard to his sufferings and to argue that his vindication (dikaios) would be obvious when God judged him (v. 18). In 13:13-18 one can see that “deliverance” refers not to physical deliverance but to vindication, namely, that someday (i.e., on the threshold of eternity when God will pronounce all final judgments) God would prove Job right before his detractors.

¹ For a similar use of apobhsetai meaning “will turn out,” see Luke 21:13.

² See BAGD, 801.

³ See Gordon D. Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 130-32; Peter T. O’Brien, *Philippians*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 114.

The same kind of “vindication” is evident in Psalm 34:3-6 where David thanks God for delivering him from all his fears and taking away any possibility of shame. In Psalm 35:24-28 David also speaks about the vindication of God’s saints:

35:24 Vindicate me by your justice, O LORD my God! Do not let them gloat over me! **35:25** Do not let them say to themselves, “Aha! We have what we wanted!” Do not let them say, “We have devoured him!” **35:26** May those who want to harm me be totally embarrassed and ashamed! May those who arrogantly taunt me be covered with shame and humiliation! **35:27** May those who desire my vindication shout for joy and rejoice! May they continually say, “May the LORD be praised, for he wants his servant to be secure.” **35:28** Then I will tell others about your justice, and praise you all day long.—NET Bible

It seems quite clear that *so„te„ria* in Job 13:16 means vindication (cf. 13:18) and so also in the two psalms we cited. The vindication in Job will take place at the final judgment. This fits the context in Philippians quite well—a context which indicates strife and therefore naturally leads to Paul’s desire to be vindicated by God. That is, there were some who tried to cause problems for Paul because of his chains. Thus they had slighted the apostle—and probably his message as well—because of the fact that he was in prison. Perhaps they saw an inconsistency in what they regarded as the gospel, on one hand, and Paul being in *prison claiming to be there for the gospel*, on the other. Further, it is unlikely that “deliverance” refers to “release” from prison since at the end of v. 20 he seems uncertain as to whether he will live or die.

There are two other factors as well. First, Paul generally uses the term *so„te„ria* to refer to spiritual salvation and in particular the deliverance of the believer from the final judgment (Rom 10:10; 2 Cor 7:10). This is how he uses the term in Phil 1:28. This fits well with the idea of vindication at the final judgment. Second, while we have already stated that the phrase, “whether by life or death” in v. 20, indicates his uncertainty about the outcome of his trial, it also suggests that he is talking about something more important than immediate vindication before Caesar’s court—and before those who have tried to cause him trouble in his chains (cf. 17).⁴ He is really talking about his vindication before the tribunal of heaven.⁵ This is also entirely consistent with his focus on living and dying for Christ in v. 21. Therefore, by **deliverance**, the apostle means his vindication at the final judgment before the law courts of heaven. Now, having said all this, it can nonetheless be suggested that such a vindication in the future could still include his release from prison in the present, though this is not the central concern of the apostle in vv. 19-20.

Paul says that this will turn out for his vindication (which may or may not include his release from prison⁶) by means of the Philippians’ **prayers and the support of the Spirit of Jesus Christ**. The reference to **prayers** (*dee„seo„s*) is according to the restricted sense of the word (see discussion on same term in 1:4). Here it is used not in reference to prayers in general, but in close connection with the following phrase, “the support of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.” This indicates that it is through the specific requests of the Philippians that Paul will receive the support of the Spirit.

The **support of the Spirit** could be taken in at least two different ways. The basic meaning of **support** (*epichore„gias*) is “supply.” Does Paul mean that the Spirit is that which is supplied? Or, does he mean that the Spirit will supply Paul with something like help or strength (so NIV)? Some have even argued that it means both. If we take it in the first sense, this does not mean that Paul would then receive the Spirit for the first time. It means that he would receive a special filling of the Spirit. The noun *epichore„gias* is used in Ephesians 4:16 and the verb form is used in 2 Corinthians 9:10; Colossians 2:19; 2 Peter 1:5, 11 and the most notable example for our purposes in Galatians 3:5:

3:15 Does God then *give* you the Spirit and work miracles among you by your doing works of the law or by you believing what you heard?

The word “give” in Galatians 3:5 is the same term as “support” in Phil 1:19, although the former is a verb. The interesting thing about the parallel is that in Galatians 3:5 the direct object of “give” is the *Spirit*. This would favor the interpretation that the *epichore„gias* of the Spirit is actually the Spirit himself.⁷ But in the context of Phil 1:19 the idea that the Spirit supplies something to Paul, such as some spiritual strength (cf. 4:13), seems more likely. Thus, the point of

⁴ Cf. Moisés Silva, *Philippians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Moisés Silva (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 68.

⁵ Cf. O’Brien, *Philippians*, 110.

⁶ For the argument that “deliverance” means release from prison see Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. Ralph P. Martin, vol. 43 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 39-40.

⁷ See Fee, *Philippians*, 132-34.

what Paul is saying is that the means by which his circumstances will turn out for his deliverance or vindication is by the prayers of the Philippians and the support offered him by the Spirit of Jesus Christ. The reference to the Spirit as **of Jesus Christ** may indicate that Jesus is the sender of the Spirit to Paul or perhaps it signifies that Christ is the one who is resident in Paul by the Spirit. The latter option makes more sense in the context which itself is focused on Christ. As Fee says:

This is how Christ lives in him—by his Spirit (Rom 8:9-10). The reason for this unusual qualifier lies in the context. Paul’s concern throughout the ‘explanation’ is on Christ and the gospel. In anticipation of the final clause expressing the nature of his ‘salvation/vindication,’ Paul knows that Christ will be glorified in his life or death only as he is filled with the Spirit of Christ himself. That is, it is Christ resident in him by the Spirit who will be the cause of Paul’s—and therefore the gospel’s—not being brought to shame and of Christ’s being magnified through him.⁸

It ought to be our sincere prayer that God fill us with his Spirit so that Christ may be magnified in our lives (cf. Eph 3:14-21; 5:18). Are you facing some difficulty? Do the odds appear impossible? Turn to God and ask him for the strength to honor Christ in your circumstances. He did not fail Paul. He will not fail you. The psalmist knew the truth about the utter dependability of God in times of difficulty (Ps 56:4)!

b. To Exalt Christ (1:20)

Paul says that through their prayers and the support of the Holy Spirit, he knows that his circumstances will turn out for his deliverance/vindication. This is his confident hope, namely, that he will in no way be ashamed but that with complete boldness, even now as always, Christ will be exalted in his body, whether by life or death.

The expression **confident hope** is two words in the Greek text separated by the conjunction *kai*: “eager expectation” (apokaradokian)⁹ and “my hope” (elpida mou). Apokaradokian occurs only one other time in the NT, namely, in Romans 8:19 where it refers to the creation waiting in “eager expectation” for the sons of God to be revealed. It has been argued by some commentators that the *karadokeo*, word group in extrabiblical Greek involves some uncertainty as one awaits the outcome of certain events. One good example occurs in Josephus¹⁰ (*War* 3.264):

for all those who brought ladders to the other places, he took no notice of them, but *earnestly waited* for the shower of arrows that was coming (*italics mine*).¹¹

But as O’Brien points out, the context in Philippians rules out any uncertainty in Paul’s use of the term.¹² He knows that the support offered by the Spirit will be sufficient for him so that Christ will be magnified in his body whether by life or death. Thus Paul is not concerned or anxious about the outcome of his trial, but is confidently expecting that *whatever happens* he will honor Christ. That much he knew for sure. Further, apokaradokian is tightly joined through the use of the article to the following word “hope” (elpida). **Hope** in the NT—when discussing spiritual realities—does not refer to wishful thinking such as we might exhibit today when we say: “I hope it doesn’t rain tomorrow” or “I hope I’ll get home in time to watch the football game.” For Paul, hope was a certainty regarding the future and our completed salvation when we would be with the Lord forever. It is according to the sure promises of God (e.g., Rom 4:18-21) and looks to its consummation in the age to come (1 Cor 13:13). But the present experience of the hope of the future is grounded in the fact that the future has broken into the present and thus we have a taste of glory now (Rom 5:1-5). It is this taste of glory now through the indwelling Spirit that gives us the assurance (=hope) of our future with the Lord. With the future brought into the present through the ministry of the indwelling Spirit Paul was confident (=hope) that Christ would be magnified in his body.

Since the two words apokaradokian and elpida are joined tightly together (by the article in Greek) they probably ought to be understood as a hendiadys, that is, the latter modifies the former: “hopeful expectation,” or better “hope-filled eager expectation.”¹³

⁸ Fee, *Philippians*, 134-35.

⁹ See BAGD, s.v. apokaradokia, 92.

¹⁰ Josephus was a Jewish historian who lived in the first century and was a contemporary of Paul.

¹¹ See William Whiston, trans., *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*, new updated edition (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987), 651.

¹² O’Brien, *Philippians*, 113.

¹³ O’Brien, *Philippians*, 113.

Paul's confident hope has both a negative and a positive side. On the one hand, he says he is confident that he will in no way be ashamed. On the other, he knows that with complete boldness, even now as always, Christ will be exalted in [his] body, whether by life or death.

Paul uses the verb **ashamed** one other time, in 2 Cor 10:8 where he speaks about not being ashamed when he *boasts* about his authority. He is not ashamed because unlike the false apostles in Corinth, he *possesses* the authority, albeit derived from the Lord, but he has it nonetheless. He uses the noun form (aischune,) on two separate occasions, in 2 Cor 4:2 and again in Phil 3:19. In the former passage he speaks about his character as a minister of the gospel. He was one who had renounced secret and *shameful* ways, meaning that he did not distort the word of God simply to make a profit off the people to whom he preached. In Phil 3:19 he refers to the immoral excesses of those who are enemies of the cross of Christ. Their lifestyles are shameful and include constant sexual indulgences.

Thus the word aischune,, is not used a great deal in the NT, but it is used frequently in the Psalter, in Jeremiah (Jer 2:36; 12:13), and in Isaiah (1:29; 45:24). Perhaps one of the best examples comes from Ps 35:26-27 which we have cited above (cf. also Ps 70:3-5). The focus in virtually all of these OT references is on the humble person who trusts in God and, therefore, need not fear being ashamed before his enemies on the day of judgment.¹⁴ In Phil 1:20 the apostle is thinking in particular about being put to shame on the day of God's judgment by failing to honor Christ during his life. Only secondarily, and perhaps not at all, is he concerned with being ashamed at his trial or in front of those who tried to cause him trouble because of his imprisonment. Though Paul often sought to be blameless before others—as in the case of his administration of the collection for the Jewish saints (2 Cor 8:21) and before all men (Acts 24:16)—he nonetheless, was not altogether too concerned about what troublemakers thought of his ministry. He was, on the other hand, deeply concerned about what Christ thought.

Instead of being ashamed for having done something disgraceful, or having lived life in a way dishonoring to his Lord, Paul was confident that Christ would be **exalted** (megalunthe,,setai) **in [his] body**. The psalmist also brought the two verbs, aischunthe,,somai and megalunthe,,setai together in Ps 34:26-27 (see above): "May my enemies be *ashamed*... may the Lord be *exalted*." So Paul does the same here. However, he does not say "I will exalt Christ" which was probably too bold a statement for him, but instead says, "Christ will be exalted..." making Christ the subject of the passive verb.¹⁵ But how does this "magnifying/exalting" of Christ take place?

There are three clues in the text which help answer this question. Paul says his confident hope is that Christ will be exalted (1) **with complete boldness** (2) **in his body** (3) **whether by life or death** and that he further modifies the exalting of Christ with the words, **even now as always**.

The expression **with complete boldness** is actually two words in the Greek text (parre,,sia). The term parre,,sia can refer to (1) openness and frankness of speech; (2) openness to the public; or (3) courage, confidence or boldness in relationships between men, as well as between men and God.¹⁶ The term was used in Classical Greek for "freedom of speech," the democratic right 'to say everything' one wished to say.... In the NT the two main connotations of the term are a similar joyful confidence before God, but now based on Christ's saving work, and a bold and open proclamation of the gospel.¹⁷ Paul uses the term 8 times and generally according to these two broad categories (2 Cor 3:12; 7:4; Eph 3:12; 6:19; Phil 1:20; Col 2:15; 1 Tim 3:13; Philemon 8). He refers to boldness in his speech in 2 Cor 3:12 (7:4?);¹⁸ Eph 6:19; Philemon 8 and confident access to God in Eph 3:12. Also, the idea of "openness to the public" is evident in Col 2:15. Compare also the use of the term in 1 Timothy 3:13 where it refers to the "confidence" or "assurance" a good leader has before God (1 Tim 3:13).

In Phil 1:20 parre,,sia should be interpreted in light of the mention of **life and death** at the end of the verse, which two nouns, when taken together, refer to the possible outcomes of Paul's trial. He might be released ("life") or he might face the death penalty ("death"). Since his upcoming trial is likely the immediate setting for his words, parre,,sia probably refers to his bold proclamation of the gospel in that setting. Thus Christ will be exalted through Paul's life (i.e., **in his**

¹⁴ See Rudolph Bultmann, *TDNT*, 1:189-91.

¹⁵ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 43.

¹⁶ See BAGD, s.v. parrhsia.

¹⁷ Andrew Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 42, ed. Ralph P. Martin (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1990), 190.

¹⁸ 2 Cor 7:4 may also reflect "bold speech," but it is difficult to be certain. See Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 40, ed. Ralph P. Martin (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1986), 221.

body) when he boldly proclaims Christ no matter what the outcome of the trial. The passion of Paul's life was that Christ be exalted (Phil 1:12-18a). He carried that same attitude and desire into the situation in Rome (cf. **even now as always**).

2. *In Light of His Future (1:21-26)*

a. *Regarding His Life in General (1:21)*

In 1:21 Paul gives the reason (cf. **For**) he wants Christ to be exalted in his life, whether by life or death. The reason is simple, but powerful: "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain." The word **me** (*emoi*) stands first in the Greek clause for emphasis. Paul is not simply saying that this (i.e., the statement in v. 21) is *his* attitude and not that of *many others*, though this was certainly the case, as 1:17 makes clear. His focus, rather, arises totally out of the life and death situation he faces and not any conflict with other Christians who preach from wrong motives. He is saying that no matter what the authorities do, *it is my passion* to live for Christ. Thus, for Paul, neither life nor death was the issue. Honoring Christ was the issue.

The apostle wants Christ to be exalted in his body because for him "to live is *Christ* and to die is *gain*," i.e., gain in the sense of being with Christ (v. 23). If your whole life is wrapped up in living for Christ, how much better it would be to see him face to face (cf. 1 John 3:2-3)! When Paul says **to live is Christ** he is picking up the mention of "life" in 1:20 and thus referring to his earthly existence and not to spiritual life *per se*. This is true since "life" in v. 20 is contrasted with physical "death." Thus when he says "to live is Christ," he is referring to what he will do if his life should continue. Christ is the object of his affection and the goal of his life. Therefore, he will say in the following verse(s) that if he is to go on living this will mean fruitful work for him, i.e., fruitful work done for Christ, done with his strength and under his Lordship. This is, in large measure, what the expression "to live is Christ" means.

But the expression "to live is Christ" also connotes not just service, but intimacy. Paul enjoyed an intimacy with Christ which he hoped would grow (hence his desire to depart and be with Christ). He says in Phil 3:10 that he wants to know Christ and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, and to be like Christ in his death in order to attain to the resurrection from the dead. In Galatians 2:20, another passage often cited in connection with Phil 1:21, Paul says that he has been "crucified with Christ" and no longer lives, but Christ lives in him. The life he lives in the body he lives "by faith in the Son of God who loved him and gave himself for him." In Phil 3:12 Paul says that he strives to lay hold of that for which Christ had taken hold of him. No matter what place you're at, God wants to give you the same heart you see here in the apostle Paul. Most of us would rather stay on earth than be with Christ. God would rather that you know Christ here so that heaven might truly be "gain" to you.

b. *Regarding Productive Ministry (1:22-24)*

Paul continues with a deeply personal note in vv. 22-24 in which he expresses his feelings regarding the prospect of life and death. He realizes that if he is to go on living this will mean fruitful work (i.e., missionary work), but he's not sure that that's really what he wants. In fact, he would really rather depart and be with Christ which he regards as superior to living on in the body. But, he does recognize how much the Philippians need him. So he concludes that it would be better for them that he remain in the body for their sakes.

Thus the sense of the passage is clear enough, but there are some details that need to be discussed. First, the identification of the "then" clause in the "if-then" construction poses some difficulties. In other words, v. 22 begins with "**If I am...**" The question arises, however, where is the "then" to complete the meaning? Some commentators say that the clauses should read as follows:

"But if my living in the body will bear fruit, then..."¹⁹

Granted, there are problems in the grammar of the Greek text, but this is not the best solution. The best way to read the passage is: Now *if* I am to go on living in the body, (*then*) this will mean productive work for me." There are two main reasons: (1) the "this" in the Greek text is first in its clause and emphatic. It should, therefore, be taken with the "if" clause which precedes it; (2) the Greek text of v. 22 should probably be broken down into three parts as follows: (a) Now...body; (b) this...for me" (3) and what shall I choose, I do not know." If we take the last clause to be the "then" clause, we make "and" (*kai*)—the first word in the clause—mean "then." This is unlikely.

¹⁹ See discussion in O'Brien, *Philippians*, 124; Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 46-47; Fee, *Philippians*, 142-43.

Paul's reference to **productive work for me** (moi karpos ergou) is literally "for me fruit of work" in the Greek text. It is unlikely that Paul is referring to completing any tasks as a result of his release from prison. The apostle uses the term "fruit" to refer to his missionary endeavors in Romans 1:13:

1:13 I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that I often intended to come to you (and was prevented until now), so that I may have some **fruit** among you too just as I have among the rest of the Gentiles also.

The specific sense intended in Romans 1:13 is the conversion of people as a result of the work of preaching the gospel. This is probably the sense intended in Philippians 1:22. The focus throughout this section in Philippians (i.e., 1:12-26) is on the furtherance of the gospel. Second, the "fruit" is referred to as the "fruit of work" which we interpret as fruit arising from the missionary work Paul will do. This does not deny the spiritual fruit that Paul's converts will exhibit in their lives, but the focus is on getting the gospel out (cf. Phil 1:6; 2:30).

The verb **prefer** (aire,,somai) can have the sense of "to elect" or "choose" as in the sense of God's election or choice of the Thessalonians (2:13), but it can also have a weaker sense of simply "to prefer" one option over another (Heb 11:25). This is the sense intended in Phil 1:20, the third and only other occurrence of the word in the New Testament. Paul is stuck on the horns of a dilemma. He simply does not know what he prefers: to be with the Lord or to remain on in the body.

Paul says that he is **torn** between the two options of living on in the body and departing to be with Christ. The word "torn" (sunechomai) occurs 12 times in the NT. It refers to closing the ears by covering them with the hands, as in the case of Stephen's accusers (Acts 7:57). It also refers to the crowds when they "pressed" in on Jesus (Luke 8:45) or to the soldiers when they guarded Jesus (Luke 22:63). Paul uses it on one other occasion in 2 Cor 5:14 in reference to the love of Christ which "constrained" him to preach the gospel (cf. also Luke 12:50). Thus it is a term with a great deal of emotion associated with it in the various contexts in which it appears. There are other contexts in which it is used in which it carries even more emotion—emotions like distress and torment. It is the term used to refer to Simon's mother-in-law when she was "suffering" (sunecho,,mene,,) with a fever (Luke 4:38). When Jesus healed the demon-possessed man in Luke 8:26-39 the people were "seized" with fear (8:37; phobo,, megalo,, sun Eichonto). It is a term that "depicts a person or object held under pressure from two sides so that movement in either direction is difficult or impossible."²⁰ Thus it is an emotionally difficult decision to be faced with and Paul literally feels "torn" in his heart over the whole affair. In the end, however, his sense of mission and love for the Philippians takes precedence over what he would naturally prefer were things different. He realizes that **it is more vital for your sake that I remain in the body**. Note: It is not that Paul wants to escape the realities of living in a fallen world with its "toil and sweat," but that he longs to be with Christ. It is not escape from reality, but a longing to be with Christ that gives rise to his wanting to depart this life.

c. Regarding Ministry to the Philippians (1:25-26)

We have argued all the way through this section (i.e., vv. 18b-24) that Paul is uncertain about the future. He does not know whether he will live or die. But this seems to be in contradiction to what he now says in vv. 25-26. In these verses he seems to sound a note of certainty regarding his release from prison—a note that contradicts his uncertainty recorded earlier in v. 20, i.e., in the expression, "whether by life or death."

Several different interpretations have arisen in light of this problem. Some argue that Paul received a revelation sometime after the writing of v. 20 and realized that he was going to live after all. Others argue that Paul came to realize on his own during the process of writing this passage that it is obviously God's will that he live so that the Philippians could progress in their faith. Still others see Paul beginning his monologue on a pessimistic note, but ending on an optimistic note about the future—perhaps because he learned of some favorable developments regarding his trial. All these are weak since Paul seems to imply that death is still a possibility in 2:17. Further, if he did arrive at this conclusion, why not go back and rewrite vv. 12-14 to express his hope more clearly?²¹

There is a better solution: Paul is not saying that he is convinced that he will remain (i.e., live). What he is saying in vv. 25-26 is that *if* he does remain he is convinced that it will be for Philippians' progress and joy in the faith. This is what

²⁰ Homer J. Kent, "Philippians," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 11, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 115.

²¹ See O'Brien, *Philippians*, 138-39.

he is so convinced of. In this interpretation the term **this** in v. 25 goes back to **for your sake** in v. 24 and takes in the idea that it is more critical for Paul to remain with them for their progress and joy in the faith.

We discussed the term **progress** (prokope,,n) in v. 12 where we translated it **advance**—in relation to the advance or furtherance of the gospel. We will only briefly review our comments on the term here. The noun translated “progress” (prokope,,n) appears first in the literature of the Hellenistic period (5th through 3rd centuries BCE). The verbal form was originally a technical term from the nautical world meaning “to make headway in spite of blows” referring to a ship at sea striving against the wind. Both the verb and the noun came to mean “progress” and were in and of themselves neutral, not referring specifically to progress in something evil or something good. They were also used in Stoic philosophy to speak of personal human development from the condition of lacking wisdom to the point of becoming wise and finally possessing wisdom.²² It was also used to refer to the steady advance of an army against its enemies (2 Maccabees 8:8²³). Paul uses prokope,, to refer to his own progress and advancement in Judaism as a young man (Gal 1:14). He uses the term positively in reference to the progress he wants Timothy to evidence as he gives himself fully to his pastoral concerns (1 Tim 4:15), as well as negatively to refer to progress in evil that false teachers are making (2 Tim 3:9, 13). Here in Phil 1:25 he uses it to refer to the steady growth in Philippians’ understanding of their **faith** and (cf. Phil 1:9-11) what that should look like both in their relationships in the community and in the world (1:27-30).

The ultimate reason Paul wants to be with them is not just for their progress and joy in the faith, but so that their pride might overflow in Christ Jesus because of his presence. The term **pride** (kauche,,ma) really indicates the “grounds for boasting” not the act itself (which would require kauche,,sis). Thus the occasion of their boasting will be Paul with them, but the sphere of their boasting will be **in Christ Jesus**. Everything is directed to Christ in Paul’s thinking and he relishes the thought that he can, by his presence and personal ministry (cf. Rom 1:11-12), be instrumental in the lives of the Philippians—encouraging them to boast in the greatness of Christ and in nothing else. Paul talks about boasting in the Lord in 1 Corinthians 1:31 where he cites Jeremiah 9:24. He cites the Old Testament prophets as a rebuke to the Corinthians who were boasting in mere men. There may also have been some improper boasting on the part of the Philippians as well which Paul later tries to correct through the proper example of boasting (i.e., only in the Lord) he evidenced in his own life (3:3 and 4-6ff).

With this final note Paul comes to the end of this section describing his circumstances and the advance of the gospel. His own example of Christ-centeredness, humility, and bold preaching prepares us for the exhortations in 1:27-2:18. In that section he will urge the Philippian church to develop a posture of humility, standing firm for the gospel, united in one mind. Once again he has become a model (4:9) of the kind of thing he encourages his churches to do.

IV. Principles for Application

1. How do we view our circumstances? Do we have such a view of God that when bad things happen we conclude that nothing good can come of it? God may be testing us and fitting us for life with him in the future. We must not forget this as Christians.
2. Do you rely on the Spirit to make up what you’re lacking in regards to doing the will of God? Trusting him is not always easy, but there is no other path to pleasing him (Prov 3:5-6; Heb 11:6).
3. Do we view our lives as opportunities for fruitful labor for Christ? Or, do we view them as an old clock just waiting to strike its last “tick-tock?” What do you need to begin to believe differently about God and your life before you can make the necessary changes to be a person committed to the vision of fruitful work in the Lord? How does this passage speak to your beliefs and attitudes? Your goals in life?
4. Paul’s vision was to help others grow in their faith. He wanted to be with the Philippians for their progress and joy in the faith. I ask one question, “When will the church sincerely adopt this yardstick to measure what they do with people week in and week out?” Paul didn’t just say he wanted to be with them so that they could listen to him preach. If I may paraphrase, he wasn’t going to be happy until he saw them progress in their faith and joy and he did everything in his power under the guidance of the Spirit to bring that about. People weren’t his pastime, they were his passion!!

²² See Gustav Stählin, *TDNT*, 6:703-19.

²³ 2 Maccabees is a book in the Apocrypha (14 or 15 Jewish books written from 250 BCE to 150 CE) and gives us a theological interpretation of certain important events among the Jews in the second century BCE.

Lesson 6: Exhortation to Unity—Part I (1:27-30)

I. Translation

1:27 Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ so that—whether I come and see you or whether I remain absent—I should hear that you are standing in one spirit, by contending together with one mind for the faith of the gospel, **1:28** and by not being frightened in any way by your opponents. This is a sign of their destruction, but of your salvation—a sign which is from God. **1:29** For it has been granted to you not only to believe in Christ but also to suffer for him, **1:30** since you are encountering the same conflict that you saw me face and now hear that I am facing.—NET Bible

II. Outline

- A. The Command: Live Worthy of the Gospel (1:27a-b)
- B. The Way: (1:27c-28)
 - 1. By Contending for the Faith of the Gospel
 - 2. By Not Being Frightened
- C. The Ultimate Rationale (1:29-30)
 - 1. The Ultimate Rationale for Suffering (1:29)
 - 2. The Example (1:30)

III. Exhortation to Unity—Part I (1:27-30)

A. The Command: Live Worthy of the Gospel (1:27a-b)

Paul begins v. 27 with the adverb **only** (*monon*) which modifies the main verb “conduct yourselves.”¹ The term *monon* goes back to the uncertainty about Paul’s release in v. 20 and anticipates his comments in the rest of v. 27—“whether I come...” It stands first in its clause in the Greek text and is therefore emphasized. Some commentators argue that it strikes up a chord of warning as the apostle shifts from vv. 18b-26 to vv. 27-30 wherein he will exhort the Philippian community. The phrase “whether I come and see you...I should hear” should not be taken to mean that if they do not comply with the command to walk worthy of the gospel, he (or the Lord) would enforce some measure of discipline on them when the apostle finally arrived in Philippi. The term is connected rather to vv. 29-30 where the ultimate reason for obedience is considered: they must walk in a manner worthy of the gospel because it has been granted to them not only to believe, but also to suffer for Christ. Thus, even in the midst of their persecution they had a “bottom-line” responsibility to live in a way pleasing to the Lord (cf. Phil 2:12-13; Col 1:10-11). This is consistent with the idea expressed in 1:29, namely, that both suffering and belief were entrusted to the Philippians.

To walk worthily of the Lord was Paul’s major goal throughout the whole ordeal of his struggle and imprisonment. In 1:20 he talks about exalting Christ in his body and in 3:10-11 he reveals his deepest passion to know Christ so intimately that he might actually attain to the resurrection from the dead. The Philippians too, in their situation of struggle in the Roman city of Philippi, must walk worthily of Christ. Thus the term *monon* adds a sense of *urgency* and *single-mindedness* to Paul’s command.

The only command that appears in this section is **conduct yourselves** (*politeuesthe*)—a term uncharacteristic for Paul, and other NT writers for that matter. The only other occurrence in the NT of the verb *politeuomai* is in Acts 23:1 where Paul is telling the Sanhedrin that he has *fulfilled* his duty before God with all good conscience. Generally, the apostle uses another term to describe living the Christian life, namely, “walking” (*peripateo*); Rom 13:13; Eph 4:1; Col 1:10; 1 Thess 2:12). But here he chooses a term which originally carried the idea of taking a personal, active role in the political affairs of the “state” (*polis*). It concerned the free actions of those who were citizens of Rome and who also had certain responsibilities as well. Thus there existed a corporate focus to the term which considered the good of the whole.

¹ Verses 27-30 are one long sentence in the Greek text with *politeuesqe* as the main verb.

The fact that the church was composed of Roman citizens (see Lesson I: Introduction, Background and Outline) may well indicate a play on words where Paul uses their Roman citizenship as a picture of their heavenly citizenship and responsibilities in the church and to the gospel (cf. 3:20). Thus there is distinctively relational aspect to the command which is later highlighted in the participial phrase, “contending together” in v. 27.

To this point then, Paul has sounded an urgent note that they live out their heavenly citizenship (cf. 3:20) in a manner **worthy** (axio,,s) of the gospel of Christ. Several questions come to mind with the use of the word axio,,s. First, what is the sense of the term? Second, how does it relate to the gospel of Christ? In other words, for the Philippians, what is “worthy” of the gospel and what would be unworthy of the gospel of Christ? Third, how does this term relate to the citizenship language inherent in the main verb?

First, the sense of this term—one which was extremely important to Paul and one which clearly indicates that the gospel has ongoing ethical dimensions to it (not just purely forensic)—can be gleaned from several other Pauline texts in which the term is found. In 1 Thessalonians 2:12 Paul tells the Thessalonian believers, who are in the midst of trials (2:14), that they must walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls them into his own kingdom and glory. We might note that in 1 Thess 2:13, the following verse, their reception of the Word is characterized by Paul as akin to welcoming a guest; they received the gospel message as the very word of God, not just the words of men! Accepting the Bible—the inscripturated truth of God—as nothing less than the word of God through the words of men, is the place where walking in a manner worthy of the Lord begins. Do not reject his word, rather cherish and obey it (James 1:22).

Further, in Colossians 1:10, Paul defines living (peripateo,,) worthily of the Lord as bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, and being strengthened by God for patient endurance and long-suffering. Again in Ephesians 4:1 he urges the Christians to walk worthily of the calling with which they were called, by exhibiting such qualities as humility, gentleness, long-suffering, love, and unity. Recall that unity is a major issue in the Philippian church.

Using very similar language to the apostle Paul, the venerated bishop of Smyrna, Polycarp—martyred at age 86 (155-60CE)—later wrote to the Philippians urging them to walk (peripateo,,) in a manner worthy of God’s commandment and glory. Thus the term means to live in accordance with a standard. Here in Philippians 1:27 that standard is the “gospel of Christ.”

Now that we understand the meaning of the term “worthy,” we return to the second of our series of questions, namely, what constitutes action worthy of the gospel of Christ and what kind of action is not? This can only be grasped once we work through what Paul means by **the gospel of Christ** (tou euaggeliou tou christou). Since the gospel is a complex set of ideas we need to ask what particular aspect(s) of it the apostle is focusing on here.

Generally speaking, the gospel can be characterized as “good news” about Christ. It includes in it knowledge of the person of Christ himself, as well as his work and its significance for people of all time. The fact that Paul commands his Philippian readers to live out their “heavenly citizenship” in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, and that he juxtaposes this command to the hymn in 2:6-11, indicates that the truths outlined in 2:6-11 are those about which Paul is thinking when he refers to **the gospel of Christ** in 1:27. In other words, the hymn of 2:6-11 unpacks what the gospel of Christ is. Thus, in 2:6-11 the gospel involves Jesus’ humiliation, that although he was God, he humbled himself by taking on human nature, suffering and dying. The gospel also involves his resurrection and subsequent exaltation and the application of his “victory” to those who believe (cf. Phil 2:9-11; Acts 13:37-38). This, then, is the narrative framework of the gospel of Christ.

Now when Paul says “conduct yourselves” in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ he is thinking about the Philippians living humble, loving, united lives in the midst of persecution. To be certain, the victorious Christian life is based on Christ’s resurrection, but the aspect of the gospel to which Paul is pointing here in Philippians 1:27 mostly concerns humble suffering and unity among the members of the church. Thus the kinds of actions that are not worthy of the gospel include disunity and fear (cf. 1:27-28), as well as other related sins such as grumbling and complaining—two actions completely *unworthy* of the gospel (2:14). These habits are sinful and we are reminded that it was because of such sin that Christ was put to death (cf. 2 Cor 5:21). The kind of life that is worthy of the gospel is one that promotes unity in the church (according to the truth, cf. Eph 4:15) and seeks the interests of others ahead of itself (Phil 2:3-4). This is in keeping with the good news about the one who also lived a humble life of love and who consistently sought the interests of others, even though he was persecuted to the point of death (cf. 2:5). In fact, his death, was an example of pursuing the interests of others to the point of the ultimate sacrifice (cf. John 15:13). Thus we have answered the question posed above concerning what it means to walk worthy of the gospel of Christ.

We now move on to consider the meaning of the remainder of the verse. Paul’s plan is to send this letter, and then send Timothy to the Philippians later (2:19). Then, he hopes that he too will go to see them, but he’s not sure if by the

time he gets to go, whether Timothy will be back with news about them. Thus, he says, **whether I come and see you or whether I remain absent—I should hear** (akouo,)....

No matter what happens, the thing that the apostle really wants to hear is that **that [they] are standing** (ste,,kete) firm in one spirit. The term ste,,kete may have been used in the context of military battles referring to “soldiers who determinedly refuse to leave their posts irrespective of how severely the battle rages.”² Paul uses the term ste,,kete 7 times in his letters (Rom 14:4; 1 Cor 16:13; Gal 5:1; Phil 1:27; 4:1; 1 Thess 3:8; 2 Thess 2:15). In most cases it means to *stand firm* according to one’s conviction regarding their faith (i.e., belief in the Lord) and with the power the Lord provides (cf. Phil 4:13). In Romans 14:4 God can cause the man who is viewed as having a weak faith to stand in his conviction. In 1 Corinthians 16:13 Paul urges the men in the church to stand firm *in the faith*, adding to that further admonitions to be courageous and strong. In Galatians 5:1 Paul exhorts the Galatians to *stand firm* in their conviction that Christ has set them free from the Law once and for all. There was no need for them, under any circumstances, to return to fleshly works of the Law *in an attempt to gain merit with God*. In 1 Thessalonians 3:8 and 2 Thessalonians 2:15 Paul speaks about *standing firm* in the midst of opposition (e.g., false teachers) and *standing firm* by holding on to the apostle’s teaching as truth. Paul talks about his own life as an example to the Philippians of how they ought to *stand firm* in the Lord in the face of those who persecute or teach erroneous doctrines contrary to the way of God’s grace (see 4:1). So here in Phil 1:27 Paul wants to hear that the Philippian believers are **standing firm** in one spirit. For the Philippians, then, Paul wants them to stand firm, that is, to maintain and develop a deep-seated conviction about the gospel, as well as its ethical demands, with the result that no external pressure can alter their allegiance!

Paul knows that if the Philippians allow division to further develop in their church, the faith of all of them will be incalculably injured and the church will lose its witness for Christ (cf. John 17:21-22). Thus he adds that their standing for the faith must be a united stand, **in one spirit** (en eni pneumati). He wants them to contend for the faith as if they were one man, totally committed to one goal (cf. James 1:5-8 for an example of a double-minded man). However, some scholars have taken “spirit” in the Greek text as a reference to the Holy Spirit, but this not convincing since the context is focused on *attitudes* of humility and unity (cf. the parallel with “one mind” in this verse and the attitudes mentioned in 2:3-4). Paul wants the Philippians to maintain unity as they contend *together* for the faith. Further, if “spirit” in v. 27 is a reference to the Holy Spirit, then the passage reads as if Paul is attempting to discern whether they actually have the Spirit. By conducting themselves in a manner worthy of the gospel, it is argued, he will be convinced that they do. But there is nothing in the immediate context that suggests that he doubts whether or not they possess the Holy Spirit (cf. 1:6).³

B. The Means (1:27c-28)

1. By Contending for the Faith of the Gospel (1:27c)

The expression **by contending together** is actually one word (i.e., a present participle) in the Greek text, namely, sunathlountes. It is found in the NT only two times, here and Phil 4:3—a fact which tends to closely link these two passages. The term means “to struggle with” or “contend alongside” someone for something.⁴ The word “by” indicates that the way in which Paul envisions the Philippians standing firm is *by* contending together **with one mind** (mia Psuke,,), that is “completely unified” and as if they were a single devoted person. While the metaphor of “standing firm” may well have been drawn from the life of the military, the expression “contending together” is a metaphor having to do with the realm of sports. As Hawthorne suggests:

With it [i.e., sunathlountes] Paul quickly changes the picture from soldiers at battle stations to athletes working as a team, side by side, playing the game not as individuals but together as one person with one mind, for one goal.⁵

² Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 43, ed. Ralph P. Martin (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 56.

³ But see Fee, *Philippians*, 163-66; Martin, *Philippians*, 83.

⁴ BAGD, s.v. sunaqlew.

⁵ Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. Ralph P. Martin, vol. 43 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 57. Some commentators argue that Paul is here drawing on the image of a gladiator and so he imagines the Philippians as gladiators in the arena of faith. Others feel there is more a sense of suffering in the passage. Perhaps both elements are present in a general way. See O’Brien, *Philippians*, 150-51.

The Philippians are to conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ by contending in a unified manner **for the faith of the gospel** (te, pistei tou euaggeliou). The key word to grasp in order to understand the phrase “for the faith of the gospel” is “faith.” There are at least three common senses in which it is found in Paul and in the New Testament. First, the term can mean “faithfulness” or “reliability.” Thus Paul says in Romans 3:3 that man’s faithless condition cannot nullify the “faithfulness” of God, i.e., his commitment to his promises and redemptive course of action.

Second, the term is frequently used to refer to one’s act of believing in God or Christ (Mk 11:22; Ac 19:20; 1 Pt 1:21; Heb 6:1; 1 Thess 1:8). “Faith” can refer to “faith in God” when God is not mentioned in the context (cf. Abraham’s faith in Rom 4:5, 9, 11-13, 16). In Col 2:12 Paul refers to “faith in the working of God who raised him [Jesus] from the dead.” Further, there were those who trusted Christ’s help in physical and spiritual distress (Matt 8:10; 9:2, 22, 29; 15:28; Mark 2:5; 4:40; 5:34; 10:52; Luke 5:20; 7:9, 50; 8:25, 48; 17:19; 18:42; Acts 14:9). Faith is clearly designated as faith in Christ by the addition of certain prepositions after the word “faith” (Acts 20:21; 24:24; 26:18; Col 2:5; Gal 3:26; Eph 1:15; Col 1:4; 1 Tim 3:13; 2 Tim 3:15). “Faith” can also be characterized as “faith in his (Jesus’) name” (Ac 3:16a). There are also other uses of “faith” including “faith” as a virtue alongside love (1 Thess 3:6; 5:8; 1 Tim 1:14) and hope (1 Cor 13:13; 1 Peter 1:21) as well as “faith” as a special gift which only few possess and which apparently enables them to trust God for amazing things (1 Cor 12:9). In all the uses of the term in this category, the verbal or active sense of the term is implied; it denotes the act of believing.

There is yet a third use of the term in Paul and in the New Testament. The term can refer to a body of belief or to a given set of doctrines. Perhaps the clearest example of this nominal (non-verbal) use of the word is in Jude 3 (cf. v. 20) where Jude found it necessary, given the influx of false teachers, to encourage his readers to struggle for the “faith” once for all “entrusted to the saints.” In this case the term refers to:

...the apostolic teaching which was regulative upon the church (Acts 2:42). Indeed, in this verse, he [Jude] comes very near to asserting propositional revelation, a concept widely denied today. God, he implies, has handed over to his people a recognizable body of teaching about his Son, in feeding on which they are nourished, and in rejecting which they fall...Jude is therefore saying that the Christian apostolic tradition is normative for the people of God.⁶

The idea of “faith” referring to a normative body of teaching is found much earlier in Paul as well (Rom 1:5; 12:6?; Gal 1:23; 3:23-25?; 2 Tim 4:7).⁷ This third sense is that which the apostle intends in Phil 1:27. He wants them to contend for the truth which indeed is the gospel. The phrase could also be expanded as: “for the truth which should be believed about the gospel.” Thus if the gospel was under fire at Philippi, the church there could withstand the opposition if they united around apostolic teaching and refused to allow certain people to move them from it.⁸

2. *By Not Being Frightened (1:28)*

Paul not only wants them to stand firm by “contending as one man” for the truth about the gospel, but he also wants them to stand firm **by not being frightened in anyway** (me, pturomenoi en me, deni). The term pturomenoi is a rare word, found at no other time in the Greek OT or NT. In Greek literature it is almost always used in the passive voice and means “to be frightened,” “terrified,” or “let oneself be intimidated.”⁹ It could denote the uncontrollable stampede which ensues when a herd of horses are spooked or alarmed for some reason.¹⁰ The Philippians were not to become frightened to the point where they “ran” from their opponents. It is obvious from this that these people were trying to throw the church into panic in an attempt to dismantle it. Paul exhorted the Thessalonians along similar lines when he told them not to be alarmed or unsettled at the trials they were facing (1 Thess 3:3-4).

Paul refers to the people causing the problem for the Philippians as **your opponents** (upo to, n antikeimeno, n). The term antikeimeno, n is used on several occasions, eight in all, in the NT. In Luke 13:17 the ruler of the synagogue was indignant that Jesus had healed a woman on the Sabbath. Jesus rebuked the man (and all those who were in league with

⁶ Michael Green, *2 Peter and Jude*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, rev. ed., ed. R. V. G. Tasker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 171-72.

⁷ The material here is derived largely from the discussion of “faith” (pistis) in BAGD, 662-665. The reader is also encouraged to read Rudolph Bultmann, *TDNT*, 6:174-228 for an extended discussion of the “faith” word group.

⁸ See Martin, *Philippians*, 83.

⁹ Cf. BAGD, 727.

¹⁰ O’Brien, *Philippians*, 152; Martin, *Philippians*, rev. ed., 89.

him), calling him a hypocrite and reminded him of his willingness to help an animal on the Sabbath, but not a human being. As a result of the rebuke, Luke says that “all Jesus’ opponents were humiliated.”

Luke uses the term again in his version of the Olivet discourse. There Jesus urged his disciples not to worry about how they might defend themselves when Jerusalem is overrun by an army, referring ultimately to events preceding the second coming. They will be given words, Jesus says, which none of their *adversaries* will be able to resist or contradict.

Paul also used the term to refer to those who opposed him and his message, including those who were violent in their opposition. In 1 Corinthians 16:9 he says that his work was not yet completed in Ephesus because there was a great door (cf. “door” in Acts 14:27; 2 Cor 2:12; Col 4:13) of opportunity open for him there. He does not tell the Corinthians in his letter who his opponents in Ephesus were, but they probably included “the pagan craftsmen engaged in making miniature silver shrines of Artemis” (Acts 19:23-27).¹¹ Further, the apostle uses the term to refer to immoral practices which are contrary to (=oppose) the gospel (1 Tim 1:10) and to refer to the man of lawlessness who will oppose and exalt himself over everything that is [called] God or worshipped (2 Thess 2:4). Satan also is referred to as one who opposes Christians and their efforts to maintain a good testimony for the gospel (1 Tim 5:14). Finally, according to Paul, the war that goes on between the flesh and the Spirit in the Christian’s life is because the two are placed in *opposition* to one another (Gal 5:17). Thus it is a term that can refer to tremendous conflict within and between people (and between Satan and people) and graphically conveys Paul’s understanding of the present conflict in Philippi.

The precise identification of the opponents of the Philippians is difficult to say for certain and is obviously not crucial to an understanding of the passage as a whole. Nonetheless, certain suggestions are worth mentioning. Some argue that since there were not enough Jews in the city of Philippi (cf. discussion in Lesson 1: Introduction, Background, and Outline) it is unlikely that the church’s opponents were Jews.¹² But as Kent points out:

Some have insisted that the reference could not have been to Jews because the Jewish population of Philippi was too small (Lenski, p. 755). This ignores the fact that hostile Jews often dogged Paul’s steps and caused trouble in the churches he founded. Such was the case in other Macedonian churches (Thessalonica: Acts 17:5; Berea: Acts 17:13).¹³

Also against the idea that these could not have been Jews is the fact that certain specifics of Paul’s discussion in 3:2-3 seem to indicate that indeed Jews were involved, in one way or another. He refers to Christians as the “true circumcision” which seems to indicate that his opponents were of Jewish origin, though he regards them as the “false circumcision.”¹⁴ Also, when he says that he “puts no confidence in the flesh,” this makes more sense if Jews who *do put confidence in the flesh* were behind at least some of the problems in Philippi.

Thus, there is room in the term “opponents” for Jews. But could they have been Jews who were saved and were simply arguing for their legalistic version of the gospel (cf. Acts 15)? This is unlikely since it is difficult to conceive of Paul referring to Christians, no matter how astray they wandered as heading for “destruction” (*apollumi*).¹⁵

Further, there is one factor that makes it unlikely that if Jews are involved, that they are the primary threat to the church in 1:28; while the Gentile Christians in Philippi may have been upset by Jewish opponents, it is unlikely that they would have been “frightened,” at least not to the extent that Paul’s language suggests.

Thus, while there may be room in the term *antikeimeno*,n for unsaved Jewish persecutors, there may be a more central source for the persecution. Fee suggests that the “opposition” might have come from the Roman citizens themselves:

There were those in Philippi who “stood in opposition to them.” Since the Philippians knew to whom Paul was referring, he does not elaborate; we can only surmise. But in light of several hints within the

¹¹ W. Harold Ware, “1 Corinthians,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 10, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 294.

¹² Cf. O’Brien, *Philippians*, 153, who discusses the unlikelihood of Jewish opposition.

¹³ Homer A. Kent, Jr., “Philippians,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 11, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 119.

¹⁴ He sarcastically refers to them as “mutilators of the flesh (not peritomh, but katatomh).

¹⁵ This is a term, along with others such as *apollumi*, *olethros*, and *kolasis*, that often refers to eternal suffering in hell (cf. 2 Thess 1:9).

letter, especially the emphasis on Christ as “lord” and “savior,” and of the loyalty of this colony to the cult of the emperor, it seems very likely that the (Roman) citizens of Philippi, who would have honored the emperor at every public meeting, were putting special pressure on the Philippian believers; their allegiance had been given to another kurios, Jesus, who himself had been executed at the hands of the empire. The present context, in which Paul asserts that they are undergoing ‘the *same* struggle’ he is now engaged in—as a prisoner of the empire—gives us good reason to believe so.¹⁶

O’Brien, who also argues against the idea that Jewish legalists are in mind in 1:28, suggests that the opposition came from the Philippian populace who reacted to the high ethics of the Philippians. The pure lives of those who formed the church evoked guilt and conviction among the pagans at Philippi.¹⁷ While this is probably true to some extent, it seems less likely than that the opposition came from Philippian citizens reacting to the lack of adherence among Christians to the worship of the emperor.

Whatever the particular source(s) and precise mixture of the opposition in 1:28, Paul wants the church to stand in one spirit by contending for the gospel and not being frightened. Now as the church does this, Paul says that such behavior (=this [he,,tis]) will be a two-pronged sign to those who are opposing the Philippians. Some scholars argue that the word **this** could refer back to the Philippians’ faith (v. 27), or their sufferings, or their steadfastness, or the opponent’s persecution of the church. Most likely, the pronoun takes in these ideas in general, except the last one mentioned, i.e., the persecution by the opponents. Thus, with the word “this” Paul is referring generally to their steadfastness in the face of persecution—and all this because of their faith.

The term **sign** (endeixis) occurs four times in Paul (Rom 3:25, 26; 2 Cor 8:24; Phil 1:28) and carries the idea of “proof”¹⁸ or “evidence.” Thus the sterling behavior of the Philippians while under persecution is “proof” that they will be saved, but that their persecutors will suffer destruction. Because these are “future events,” i.e., “salvation” and “destruction,” some translations have rendered endeixis with the word “sign” so as to point to the future (so e.g., NIV). But it may be better translated as “omen.”¹⁹ This does not deny the futurity of the statement, but it does give the whole affair a rather somber and ominous tone. This does not necessarily mean that the opponents of the Philippians understood these events as proof of their destruction, except perhaps only marginally,²⁰ for the word **their** in the expression “their destruction” may simply mean “with reference to their destruction.”

The word **destruction** (apo,,leias) includes the idea of separation from the Lord and final and eternal loss (cf. 2 Thess 1:8-9). In contrast to their opponents, the Philippians would experience **salvation** (humo,,n de,,te,,rias), that is, the blessing of being with the Lord in peace in the future. There may also be a sense of vindication in the term so,,te,,rias in this context as well (see discussion on so,,te,,rias in 1:20). All this, including their opposition, courageous stand, and ultimate salvation (and the destruction of the opponents) is **from God** (apo theou).

C. The Ultimate Rationale (1:29-30)

1. The Ultimate Rationale for Suffering (1:29)

The word **For** (oti) indicates that what follows in v. 28 is an explanation of what has just preceded. The question surfaces as to what *exactly* it is connected. It is probably best to see it as an explanation of why the Philippians should not be frightened, that is, because God is the one who has ordained their suffering or persecution. To the true believer this would definitely be an encouragement in suffering, to know that your heavenly father was in control of all of it.

Paul says that two things have been **granted** (echaristhe,,) to the Philippians and that both of them, i.e., believing and suffering, are on behalf of Christ. The word “granted” is the same verb Paul uses on many other occasions to speak about God’s salvation, freely and graciously given to believers (cf. Eph 2:8-9; Rom 8:32; 1 Cor 2:12). Note here that the verb is in the passive voice, referring to God’s activity and that it is past tense (aorist in Greek). Thus the “granting” of the suffering occurred at the time they believed. Therefore, God has a plan for the life of his children worked out from

¹⁶ Fee, *Philippians*, 167.

¹⁷ O’Brien, *Philippians*, 153.

¹⁸ BAGD, s.v., endeixis.

¹⁹ BAGD, s.v., endeixis. Fee, *Philippians*, 169, fn 55.

²⁰ If there were any understanding on the part of those who opposed the Philippians, it was probably quickly submerged in their conscience so as to avoid the concomitant guilt.

the very beginning of our salvation. Obviously the Lord has a plan for us from before all eternity (Eph 1:4), but Paul's specific focus here is from the time of our initial conversion/belief forward. It might also be noted that Paul credits the faith of the Philippians as ultimately something which God granted them (cf. Eph 2:8-9). A similar theology appears again in Phil 2:12-13 in respect to sanctification.

We note too that “the believing” and “the suffering” were granted **on behalf of Christ** (to huper christou). What Paul is saying is that just as Christ suffered at the hands of sinful men in order to procure their salvation (cf. 2:6-11), so also the Philippians now have an opportunity to suffer for their Lord. A disciple is not above his master. It is not that the Philippians are suffering simply because they are allied with the name of Christ. It is much more intimate than that idea will allow (cf. Phil 3:10-11). They are suffering for the one whom they now love and for the one whom they are waiting to return from heaven (3:20). This may have been a strange idea to the ears of former polytheistic worshippers, but the knowledge that it was God's will for them to suffer for Him would have been a strengthening force.

2. The Example (1:30)

Paul now turns to his own life as an example of one who had carried out his struggle for the gospel and had done so on behalf of Christ. Paul said that he had the **same** struggle as the Philippians and that they had seen him face it before. This is probably a reference to his first visit to Philippi—on his second missionary trip—recorded in Acts 16. On that occasion Paul (and Silas) was stripped and flogged because of the accusations made by the owners of the slave girl and the impetus of the crowd which joined in to attack the missionaries (16:16-24). The Philippian jailer and his family, as well as Lydia—all converts in Acts 16 and probably still members of the church in Philippi when Paul sent this letter—constitute some of those who **saw** Paul **face** those struggles. Since Phil 1:30 indicates that the Philippians had the “same” conflict that Paul had when he wrote the letter (i.e., persecution from Rome) it is likely that they too were suffering at the hands of their countrymen—i.e., Roman citizens (see discussion on 1:28 above). The term **conflict** (ago,,n) occurs in Paul four times (Col 2:1; 1 Thess 2:2; 1 Tim 6:12; 2 Tim 4:7) and the cognate verb ago,,nizomai six times (1 Cor 9:25; Col 1:29; 4:12; 1 Tim 4:10; 6:12; 2 Tim 4:7). He uses it to refer to an intense struggle or wrestling, including both inner conflicts and outer pressures as well. The goal of the struggle involves the countless difficulties the apostle endured in the course of promulgating the gospel and maturing the saints (Col 1:28-2:1).

IV. Principles for Application

Though generally speaking we have not suffered in the United States and Canada to the same degree as the Christians at Philippi, the following applications flow from the text:

1. If you are not suffering, what does it mean for you to walk worthy of Christ? Compare Col 1:10-11.
2. How do we respond to people who oppose us or our message? What would it look like for us to stand firm in our faith? (cf. 1 Pet 3:15ff)
3. How committed are you (we) to sharing the gospel and advancing the kingdom of God? When was the last time you shared your faith? These may be difficult questions to face, but they nonetheless must be faced by all of us if we are to faithfully carry out the work the Lord entrusted to us (cf. Matt 28:19-20).
4. Are we willing to undergo stress to help other believers in the faith? Paul was deeply committed to the gospel and those who came to trust in Christ. He agonized over new believers' growth in the Lord and used all his available energy (which he received from the Lord), to help those Christians. Each of the letters he wrote can in some way be deemed a “follow-up” letter, written in order to bless, direct, encourage, and in short, “to mature,” those Christians. A good place to learn about the process of following-up new believers is in the books of 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Also, see “The ABCs for Christian Growth” on this website. What could you do this week to help another Christian grow in their faith? Surely there is someone God has placed in your life that you could help. Pray for them and then help them in love.

Lesson 7: Exhortation to Unity—Part II (2:1-4)

I. Translation

2:1 Therefore, if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort provided by love, any fellowship in the Spirit, any affection or mercy, **2:2** complete my joy and be of the same mind, by having the same love, being united in one spirit, and having one purpose. **2:3** Instead of being motivated by selfish ambition or vanity, each of you should, in humility, be moved to treat one another as more important than yourself. **2:4** Each of you should be concerned not only about your own interests, but the interests of others as well.

II. Outline

- A. The Command: Be Unified (2:1-2)
 - 1. The Grounds for an Appeal to Unity (2:1)
 - a. Encouragement in Christ
 - b. Comfort Provided by Love
 - c. Fellowship in the Spirit
 - d. Affection or Mercy
 - 2. The Command to Unity (2:2)
 - a. The Command Proper
 - b. The Nature of the Command
- B. The Application: Looking Out for Others (2:3-4)
 - 1. Treat Others as More Important than Self
 - 2. Be Concerned about Interests of Others

III. A Literal Translation and Clausal Structural Outline

Philippians 2:1-4 is one long, somewhat convoluted sentence in the Greek text. There are times when it helps to do a fairly literal translation and clausal structural outline so that a person can see where everything connects, as well as the difficulty of some of the issues facing interpreters. This exercise is primarily for the person who does not have an acquaintance with the original language. You can take your English Bible and do the same thing with any paragraph in order to reveal its structure.

Therefore

if any encouragement in Christ (#1)

if any comfort of love (#2)

if any fellowship of spirit (#3)

if any affection or mercy (#4)

complete my joy

by being like-minded

by having the same love

by being one in spirit

by having one purpose

by (doing) nothing according to selfish ambition or vanity, but

by regarding one another as more important than yourselves

by each one not being concerned about their own interests only, but also

by (being concerned) about the interests of others

The clausal structural layout above helps the reader understand the major connections in the paragraph.¹ The only command in the paragraph is highlighted in black and moved to the left. The “if” clauses modify the command and are therefore shown above it (because they precede it in the text) and indented a bit. See the commentary below for an understanding of how these “if” clauses are functioning. Hint: sometimes “if” clauses actually mean “since.” The “by” clauses are underneath the main command and indented slightly to show that they too modify the command. Thus, Paul wants the Philippians to make his joy complete *by* being and doing certain things.

IV. Context

From the very outset of his letter to the Philippians, Paul has maintained a focus on the church *as a whole*, with an attempt to promote unity. In his opening address in 1:1 he addresses the whole church and not just those who are living right. He says, “to *all* the saints in Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons.” He regards them *all as saints*, though certain ones had caused a measure of division within the church (4:2-3). We said in lesson 2 of this series that Paul’s focus on *all* of the church carries on throughout the entire letter (1:4; 1:7; 1:8; 1:25; 2:17; 2:26; 4:21). Further, he attempts to promote humility and unity through his own example in the introduction when he includes both himself and Timothy *together* under the title “servants of Christ Jesus.” He could have referred to himself as an apostle and Timothy as a servant—which is his custom—but instead he realizes that he is first and foremost a “servant of Christ Jesus,” just like every other Christian.

In his thanksgiving and prayer section (i.e., 1:3-11), Paul focuses on the church as a whole and aims at their love and unity. He thanks all of them for their participation in the gospel from the time they had become Christians until the present (1:5). He also relates to them how confident he is that the God who had begun a good work in them would carry it on to completion (1:6). Paul was convinced that *all of them* shared in God’s grace with him (1:7). The focus on the church as a whole continues into the prayer section. When 1:9-11 is taken in light of larger concerns in the book regarding unity and persevering under trial it is easy to see that Paul’s comment about love in v. 9 concerns their learning to be unified and do what is right in any and every circumstance.

In 1:12-26 Paul recounts for the Philippians his circumstances and how he is responding to the difficulties. As he describes his circumstances and his joy, his life becomes a model for the Philippians of how to deal with those who attempt to cause division and disunity. His humility and confidence in God shine through (1:19-20) and his priorities reflect those of his master (cf. 1:20; John 5:30).

It is only after addressing them as a unified whole (1:1-2), praying for them to this end (1:3-11), and giving his own life as a model (1:12-26; cf. 4:9), that Paul turns in 1:27-30 to urge them to lives worthy of the gospel of Christ; they are to stand firm by contending for the faith *as one man* and by not being frightened in any way by those who persecute them. The emphasis in 1:27-30 is on unity in the face of pressure *from without*.

In 2:1-4 Paul continues to urge the church to maintain unity, but now in the face of problems *from within*. Thus 2:1-4, insofar as it focuses once again on the theme of unity, is a further development of the command in 1:27, to walk worthy of the gospel of Christ. It is of little value to be unified against opposition from without and then fail to be unified within.

V. Exhortation to Unity—Part II (2:1-4)

The passage is built around a single imperative which is preceded by several “if” clauses and followed by several “by” clauses, the latter of which indicate the means or manner in which the command is to be carried out. As far as the “if” clauses are concerned, they are not to be interpreted as indicating some doubt on the part of the apostle: Paul is not saying that “if you have any encouragement in Christ” and I’m not sure that you do....” Rather, he is *certain* that they do. The “if” is simply a rhetorical way of forcefully saying “*since* you have encouragement in Christ, *since* you have comfort provided by love, *since* you have fellowship with the Spirit, and *since* you have affection and mercy, *then* complete my joy....” The passage as a whole is predicated on the idea found in 1:6 where Paul says that he is confident that the one who had begun a good work in them would carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. God’s work in their hearts

¹ If you are uncertain about how to study the Bible and you want some help, please consult the article on this website entitled, “How to Study the Bible: For Beginners” (<http://www.bible.org/studies/splife/study/bs1.htm>). It will get you started.

included such experiences as comfort, love, and fellowship with the Spirit, as well as affection and mercy toward one another and in their relationship with the apostle.

I. The Command: Be Unified (2:1-2)

Paul begins this new section in 2:1-4 with the transitional term, **therefore** (oun). Generally speaking, the “therefore” draws on what was said in 1:27-30, but has its specific focus on what Paul says in 1:30. That is, Paul appeals to them out of his suffering and struggling for the advancement of the gospel. Since he is doing this, they ought to stand firm and remain unified in love. He can appeal to them as such since he has a great love for them (1:7) and since he considers them his joy and his crown (4:1).

A. The Grounds for an Appeal to Unity

Paul gives a fourfold basis for his appeal to unity, though the details of what he states are difficult to understand and commentators have taken them in various ways. Not only are they difficult to understand individually, they are also difficult to understand when taken together. Some scholars see parallels between #1 (see clausal structural layout above) and #3 since the former concerns realities in Christ and the latter seems to speak of the Holy Spirit. Those who take the passage in this way often see a further parallel between #2 and #4 where both seem to be taken up with human compassion and love, for example, Paul’s love for the Philippians and vice-versa. There are numerous other ways they have been taken, but it would be impossible to give satisfactory treatment to them here. We simply mention this so that the reader knows that certain literary features of this passage are uncertain. This in no way, however, diminishes their value, since no matter how they are interpreted, whether referring primarily to God’s work or primarily to human relationships, God is the ultimate author of all of the qualities in 2:1 and we are responsible as Christians to demonstrate them.

Having said that, it is nonetheless my opinion that the first three “if” clauses in v. 1 refer to God’s work on behalf of the Philippians. The fourth clause has to do with relationships within the church and between the church and Paul. In short, the ethical teaching of the NT consistently springs from certain spiritual realities established by God and here it is no different (cf. Rom 12:1ff). We move now to a consideration of the four clauses.

a. Encouragement in Christ

The first thing Paul mentions concerns his certainty that the Philippians have some **encouragement in Christ** (parakle,,sis en christo). The term parakle,,sis can yield the sense of “encouragement,” “exhortation,” “appeal,” or “comfort.”² Since the Philippians were suffering, the idea of “encouragement through comfort” is perhaps the intended sense.³ But they had this “comfort” **in Christ**. The expression “in Christ” lies at the heart of Pauline theology and among many things denotes the sphere of the Christian’s blessing (Eph 1:3-4). And so it is, that those in Christ are those who can receive comfort from him in the midst of their trials. This applies to Paul in prison as well as to the Philippians who are undergoing the same struggle as their apostle. A similar idea can be found in 2 Cor 1:3-11 where Paul refers to his hardships in the province of Asia. In 1:3 he speaks about God as the “God of all comfort who comforts us in all our trials.” Then, in v. 5, he says that “through Christ” his comfort overflows.

Further, since parakle,,sis is a general term, it may serve as an overview to steer the content of the remaining ideas of “love,” “fellowship,” “affection” and “mercy.” They all work toward the encouragement and comfort of the suffering believer.

b. Comfort Provided by Love

The phrase **comfort provided by love** (paramuthion agape,,s) is literally “comfort of love.” The elliptical nature of the expression contributes to the difficulty in its interpretation. The meaning seems to be “comfort received from love or “comfort which comes from love.” It can also carry the meaning of “to alleviate” with respect to poverty.⁴ There is not a great deal of difference in the two nouns parakle,,sis and paramuthion in this context and any attempt to force a rigid

² BAGD, s.v. parakhsis. They list three basic senses: (1) encouragement or exhortation; (2) appeal or request; (3) comfort or consolation.

³ See Fee, *Philippians*, 179-80.

⁴ BAGD, s.v., paramuqion.

distinction is probably misguided.⁵ If there is a minor difference, it is in temporal focus. The former term can apply to the future, whereas paramuthion applies consistently in the NT to comfort in the present.⁶

The real question in the phrase **comfort provided by love** is to whose love does Paul refer? Most likely Paul is appealing to the love God shows toward believers, the love he has poured out in their hearts through the Holy Spirit he has given them (Rom 5:5). Fee concludes that Paul is referring to the love God has for believers as well. He gives several convincing reasons for this, including a possible Trinitarian substructure behind Phil 2:1 (cf. 2 Cor 13:13) and the fact that love in the OT most frequently refers to God's love for his people. He also points out that the expression "comfort of love" occurs after the mention of "encouragement in Christ" and "fellowship of the Spirit." This may further confirm that "love from God" is the meaning.⁷ Thus the Philippians who have experienced comfort in Christ, have also experienced (and are experiencing) love from God.

c. Fellowship in the Spirit

Paul appeals to yet another common Christian experience as forming the grounds for the command to be unified in v. 2: the Philippians have experienced **fellowship in the Spirit** (koino„nia pneumatos). The expression koino„nia pneumatos is literally "fellowship of spirit." Its elliptical nature makes it difficult to interpret as well. Nonetheless, it seems that the term "spirit" is probably a reference to the Holy Spirit since it is consistent with the mention of Christ and God (implied as the one who loves; see discussion above) in the context. The idea of **fellowship**, then, has to do with participation with or communion with the Holy Spirit enjoyed by each and every believer. He is the one who will give the Philippian believers strength (cf. 4:13) to love each other, courage to seek the interests of others, and generally do the will of God (2:13-13). In other contexts Paul refers to the Spirit as the One who lives in Christians, sanctifying them (1 Cor 2:12; 3:16; Gal 5:16; Eph 5:18), and making Christ known to them (Rom 8:16) and through them (2 Cor 3:3). Thus the Philippian believers could count on encouragement from Christ, comfort from the love of God, and communion with the Holy Spirit to enable them live in unity with one another, each of them seeking first the interests of others in the community.

d. Affection or Mercy

Next Paul refers to their **affection** (spla„gchna) and **mercy** (oiktirmoi). These terms are not modified by any reference to deity and seem to be directed at the strained relationships within the church at Philippi (4:2-3), as well at relations between the Philippians and their imprisoned apostle. Paul is saying that as a result of enjoying encouragement in Christ, love from God, and fellowship with the Spirit, they ought to have compassion and mercy toward one another and toward him. Since the Philippians have experienced all these things, he urges them to make his joy complete by being of the same mind;⁸ whatever grievances have developed, they ought to be forgiven and relationships restored.

B. The Command to Unity

Having reminded them of their experience in Christ and God's deep love for them—a love mediated primarily through the Spirit who dwells in them—as well as the compassion and mercy they share with one another and with the apostle, Paul now moves on in v. 2 to exhort them to unity. His appeal to the Philippians is straightforward: **complete my joy** (ple„ro„sate mou te„n charan).

⁵ See O'Brien, *Philippians*, 172.

⁶ Stählin, *TDNT*, 5:821. He says, "Nor does paramuqeomai ever denote eschatological comfort, as parakaleo so often does. It is always the comfort granted in this present earthly sphere."

⁷ Fee, *Philippians*, 180-81.

⁸ But see O'Brien, *Philippians*, 174-76, who regards spla„gchna and oiktirmoi as referring to *God's* compassion and mercy. Admittedly, nailing down the source for the compassion and mercy is a very difficult task and one that lends itself to little certainty, but it seems better, since the terms are not modified by a reference to deity, to take them as operating primarily in the sphere of human relations. On the other hand, the *ultimate* source for these qualities, is, of course, God himself.

The term *plēroō*, *sate* from *plēroō*, has a wide range of uses in the NT. In this case it has the meaning of “to bring to completion.” Paul uses it similarly in Romans 15:19 when he talks about having fulfilled the preaching⁹ of the gospel all the way from Jerusalem to Illyricum. What he means, in part, is that he had completed his task of preaching the gospel everywhere. The same sense is evident in Colossians 1:25 where he says that was given the ministry to fulfill, i.e., complete the word of God (cf. 2 Thess 1:11). Here in Philippians 2:2 Paul has great joy when he thinks of the Philippians (4:1) so he wants them to make his joy complete, i.e., let there be absolutely no room for anything *but* joy in his thoughts of them. They can do this by being of the same mind.

The phrase **the same mind** (*hina¹⁰ to auto phroneō*) occurs in Paul four times (Rom 12:16; 15:5; 2 Cor 13:11; Phil 4:2). It does not mean that Paul wants the Philippians to hold to exactly the same opinion on every issue. Such a command would be ludicrous and as Hawthorne comments, would cause more dissension than otherwise. Though certain cults operate in this manner, it is not Christian and is repudiated by passages such as 1 Corinthians 12 where Paul argues for unity *in diversity* and *diversity* within unity. In Romans 12:16 the expression seems to indicate “living in harmony” and in 15:5 it carries the idea of “unity” in strained relationships (2 Cor 13:11). The expression is focused on an attitude and not on critical thinking *per se*. It is a call for the church to focus on what they have in common in Christ and their relationship bound up together with him. The same expression is used in 4:2 in a similar way.

The following phrases in v. 2—i.e., “having the same love,” “being united in one spirit” and “having one purpose”—are virtually synonymous and their piling up on top of one another is Paul’s way of emphasizing to the Philippians’ their need for genuine unity. Thus they are qualities that the Philippians will possess if they desire to be of “the same mind.” The word **same in the same love** (*te, n aute, n agape, n*) once again stresses unity in the body. It argues that people ought to love each other equally and not give preferential treatment to some over others. Such is inconsistent with the gospel where Christ died for men who were all equally undeserving (2:8). This love, of course, is the outflow of the love they have received from God and which Paul has just spoken about in v. 1. The references to **being united in one spirit** (*sumpsuchoi*) and **having one purpose** (*to hen phronountes*) continue to stress the need for unity in the Philippian church.

II. The Application: Looking Out for Others (2:3-4)

Nothing is more diametrically opposed to unity and being one in spirit and purpose than selfishness and seeking one’s own interests. The two attitudes—unity and selfishness—cannot coexist. One has to give way to the other. Paul says in light of encouragement in Christ, love from God, and fellowship with the Spirit, that there must be no selfish ambition among the Philippians. Such an attitude is totally inconsistent with Christ who did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking on the nature of a servant (2:6-7). God loves us, so he requires that we lay down our selfish goals!

The term **selfish ambition** (*eritheian*) denotes an ugly attitude, with attending actions, which themselves leave a train of misery in their wake. Such is the bulk of the human story. This one desire has led to the slaying of innocent people, brutal dictatorships, hatred for God and fellowman, divorce, corruption, and a host of other ills equally disastrous. Apart from Christ it can never be overcome in human beings. It stands at the heart of what it means, practically speaking, to be a fallen person with a totally corrupt nature. It describes those who engage in ‘base self seeking’ and “cannot lift their gaze to higher things.”¹¹

⁹ See James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 38b, ed. Ralph P. Martin (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1988), 864.

¹⁰ This is a difficult phrase to translate. The *iJvna* (*Jina*) clause could be a direct object clause, an imperatival clause, or a clause indicating the means by which the action of the main verb *plhrwsate* (*plhrwsate*) is fulfilled. The latter seems preferable in this case and the end result is not greatly affected. In each case, it is related to and explains the idea of “making Paul’s joy complete.” See Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 67.

¹¹ Buchsel, *TDNT*, 2: 661.

The term is “found before NT times only in Aristotle (*Polit.* 5, 3 p. 1302b, 4; 1303a, 14), where it denotes a self-seeking pursuit of political office by unfair means.”¹² It is found in the NT seven times, five of which are in Paul and two in James. We’ll look at each one of these passages.

In Romans 2:8 Paul uses the term to refer to those who are so “selfish” that they disobey the truth and are persuaded that wickedness is right. For them, Paul says, there will be wrath and fury. In 2 Cor 12:20 the term means “selfishness” and appears in a list of vices which taken together could spell the end of the Corinthian church. The list includes such sins as quarreling, jealousy, anger, *selfishness*, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder. He also mentions impurity, sexual immorality, and licentiousness in 12:21. It is no wonder that coupled with such sins as selfish ambition one also finds sexual immorality and general licentiousness. James connects the term with “bitter envy” in 3:14 and calls on his readers to admit and renounce such attitudes. He goes on to say in 3:16 that when such attitudes are present there is disorder and every kind of wickedness (pan phaulon pragma). In fact, he regards such “wisdom” as “earthly, unspiritual, and of the devil” (3:15). Thus there is nothing positive about the term and the sinful practice it denotes.

Paul uses *eritheia* earlier in Philippians 1:17 to describe the motivations of those who preach Christ from selfish ambition. Here it probably also carries the sense of “factions” and is connected to the idea of “false motives” (prophasei) that is, preaching Christ under the pretext of zeal for God when in reality it is nothing of the sort. These Christians were trying to cause Paul problems in his imprisonment (cf. Acts 27:30; 1 Thess 2:5). So here in 2:3 Paul does not want Philippian believers seeking their own interests and pursuing selfish, “me-centered,” agendas. Such individualism would destroy the church then, and it will destroy it now.

“Selfish ambition” is coupled with the idea of **vanity** (*kenodoxia*) and both are strongly prohibited under any circumstances. The believers at Philippi are to do nothing out of selfish ambition and vanity. The term *kenodoxia* occurs only here in the NT. In the Apocryphal work, *Wisdom of Solomon*, the making of physical idols and idolatry are regarded as the product of *kenodoxia* (14:14). Interestingly enough, as in 2 Cor 12:20, so also in *Wisdom of Solomon*, there is a connection made between selfish ambition, vanity, and sexual immorality. It seems that selfish ambition which is often produced by vanity is not enough for us. It only leads to further sin (cf. Eph 4:17-19).

On the other hand, Paul says there is another way. It is the way of Christ—humility. In profane Greek literature **humility** (*tapeinophrosune*,) occurs only rarely and usually with a derogatory nuance indicating “servility, weakness, or a shameful lowliness.”¹³ Such is not the case in the NT, however! It occurs seven times in the NT, five of which are in Paul (Acts 20:19; Eph 4:2; Phil 2:13; Col 2:18, 23; 3:12; 1 Pet 5:5). The cognate noun *tapeinos* occurs eight times and signifies lowliness or humility. Jesus is the example par excellence of one who was humble (Matt 11:29) and, therefore, he was a refreshing place people could come for respite. Jesus is also the example of humility to which Paul refers his readers later in Phil 2:8. There Jesus is said to have humbled himself to the point of accepting death on a cross for the sake of others (on “humility” in the OT see e.g., Prov 3:34; 11:2; 15:33). Humility is the fruit of a life lived consciously in the grace and mercy of God.

Therefore, instead of doing things out of selfish ambition and vanity, Paul wanted each of the Philippians, in humility and lowliness, to regard others **as more important** (*huperechontas*) **than** themselves. They were to be focused on *other* people and serving them (cf. 1 Pet 5:7). Thus he continues in v. 4 to say that **each** of the Philippian believers **should be concerned not only about his/her own interests, but the interests of others as well**. The command was *not* just for a few competent outgoing people; it was for each and every one of them. *Each Christian*, says Paul, is to look not only to their own interests, but to the interests of others as well.

The key term in 2:4 is **concerned** (*skopountes*). It is found in Homer, Josephus (*Ant* 12.30) and Philo and generally means “to look (out) for, notice, keep one’s eyes on.”¹⁴ Paul uses it in Romans 16:17 to exhort the church to “look out” for those who cause divisions in the church. In 2 Cor 4:18 he uses it metaphorically in reference to “fixing the eyes [of faith] on a target,” i.e., what cannot be seen as opposed to what can be seen. In Gal 6:1 he tells the Galatian believers that they ought to help their brother who has sinned, but that they should do so *looking* or *watching* themselves carefully, lest they fall into sin as well. In Phil 3:17 Paul uses the word again, this time in reference to *watching* or *examining* the lives of those who walk properly so that such examples might be imitated. So the term in 2:4 is not just to be concerned in a

¹² BAGD, s.v., *eritheia*.

¹³ O’Brien, *Philippians*, 180.

¹⁴ Cf. BAGD, s.v., *skopew*.

passive sense. It means to take a good look at the needs and interests of others and do something about it. Jesus was someone who sought to meet the needs of others in a legitimate way and so also was Timothy (2:20-21).

VI. Principles for Application

1. How is your relationship with the Lord? There can be no unity among brothers and sisters in the Lord until they have dealt with the sin they know to be in their lives. We do this by confession (1 John 1:9) and drawing near to the Lord (cf. 1 Peter 2:1-3). Further, it seems that when Paul talks about “encouragement in Christ,” “love from God,” and “fellowship with the Spirit,” he is talking about a person having intimacy with the Lord (cf. 3:10-11). One way to draw close to the Lord, especially in times of distress (a la the Philippian situation), is to pray. Drawing close to God in this way, with a clean and pure heart, allows us to experience the filling of the Spirit and strength, as well as encouragement, and warmth from God. There is a time to act, and there is a time to pray. Unfortunately, most Christians in the West live such cluttered lives that they never make time to invest in prayer. Unfortunately they are also, on many occasions, powerless Christians.
2. But we must not lose sight of where Paul is going in 2:1-4. He is deeply concerned with Christian unity. What can you do this week to promote goodwill and unity among the Christian brothers and sisters at your church? Just this week I had a discussion with a Christian woman who knew of two other Christian couples who were at odds with one another. She rightly decided to pray for them and seek an opportunity to either be a peacemaker herself or encourage another person—who knew the couples better—to bring them together. It grieves God’s heart when Christians cannot live in unity. After all, this was one of the last things Jesus prayed for us (John 17:22-23).
3. Take time this week to *think* seriously about the needs and interests of another Christian. Ask God to lead you to translate that thinking into some specific actions. God bless you as you reach out to others.

Lesson 8: Exhortation to Unity—The Example of Christ (2:5-11)

I. Translation as It Appears in the NET Bible

2:5 You should have the same attitude toward one another that Christ Jesus had,
2:6 who though he existed in the form of God
did not regard equality with God
as something to be grasped,
2:7 but emptied himself
by taking on the form of a slave,
by looking like other men,
and by sharing in human nature.
2:8 He humbled himself,
by becoming obedient to the point of death
—even death on a cross!
2:9 As a result God exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
2:10 so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bow
—in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
2:11 and every tongue confess
to the glory of God the Father
that Jesus Christ is Lord.

II. Outline

- A. The Command (2:5)
- B. The Example: Christ (2:6-11)
 - 1. His Humility (2:6-8)
 - a. His Deity and Pre-existence (2:6)
 - b. His “Emptying” (2:7a-b)
 - c. His Death (2:7c-8)
 - 2. His Exaltation (2:9-11)
 - a. The Receiving of the “Name” (2:9)
 - b. The Purpose of Jesus’ Exaltation (2:10-11b)
 - i. Every Knee Will Bow (2:10)
 - ii. Every Tongue Will Confess (2:11a-b)
 - c. The Glory of God (2:11c)

III. Context

From the very outset of his letter to the Philippians (1:1-2), Paul has argued, both by example and explicit statement, that he wants the church to cultivate the virtue of humility with a view toward corporate unity. In his thanksgiving and prayer section (i.e., 1:3-11), he focuses on the church as a whole and aims at their love and unity. He thanks all of them for their participation in the gospel and assures them of his deep love for *all* the believers (1:3-8). His prayer in 1:9-11 is also concerned with the issue of promoting humility and unity.

In 1:12-26 Paul recounts for the Philippians his circumstances and how he is responding to the difficulties. As he describes his circumstances and his joy, his life becomes a model for the Philippians of how to deal with those who attempt to cause division and disunity. His humility and confidence in God shine through (1:19-20) and his priorities reflect those of his Master (cf. 1:20; John 5:30).

Thus, after addressing the church as a unified whole (1:1-2), praying for them to this end (1:3-11), giving his own life as a model (1:12-26; cf. 4:9), and urging them to live lives of humility and unity—both in the face of pressures from within (1:27-30) and pressures from without (2:1-4)—Paul turns his attention to the powerful example of Christ himself in 2:5-11.

Therefore, the example of Christ's humility in 2:5-11 is placed in a context aimed at humility and unity. But the connection of the previous material with 2:5-11 can be spelled out in terms more specific than this. Philippians 2:5-11 is the most important passage in the book from a theological as well as practical point of view and exercises a controlling and shaping influence on material which has come before and that which will follow in the letter. Let's look at some of those connections.

First, recall that Paul does not refer to himself as an "apostle" in 1:1, but as a "servant." He also includes Timothy under this title. The mention of "servant" (*douloi*) here early in the book anticipates Paul's reference to Jesus as *the* servant (*doulou*) in 2:7.

Second, we said in our study of 1:6 that the expression "good work" includes God's saving grace experienced personally by the Philippians' and its expression in their lives. Further, Paul tells the Philippians that the humble attitude which was seen in Christ ought to be found in them (2:5). Thus, the "good work" God is doing in them is directed at a similar humility and an "other's-centered" approach to life as was seen Jesus. This is further confirmed by 2:13 where Paul says that the "One who works in them" to produce this kind of ethic is God.

Third, to exhibit the attitude and example of Christ is part and parcel of what it means to be filled with the fruit of righteousness (1:11). Incidentally, prayer is critical to abiding in Christ and producing the kind of fruit that glorifies God and demonstrates that you are Christ's disciple (John 15:7-8).

Fourth, Paul was other's-centered and lived his Christian life seeking to serve others for their progress and joy in the faith (1:25). He is an excellent model of one who poured out his life so that others might really live (2:17). This, of course, is precisely what Christ did for us, though on a much grander scale (2:6-8).

Fifth, when Paul urges the Philippians to a life worthy of the gospel, he has in mind, among many things, the idea of suffering faithfully. Christ himself suffered (2:8) and it has been graciously given to Christians not only to believe on Christ, but also to suffer for him (1:29-30). If our Lord humbled himself and accepted the cross on our behalf, so we must be willing to suffer for him.

Sixth, Phil 2:6-8 is most explicitly connected to the idea of humility in 2:3-4. In these two verses Paul commands the Philippians to do nothing out of selfish ambition or vanity, but in humility regard others as better than themselves. They are to look out for the interests of others ahead of themselves. Is this not exactly what Christ did in 2:6-8. That is why Paul says in 2:5 the attitude of the Philippians should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.

Thus there are many connections in 1:1-2:5 to what follows in 2:6-11. But there are also connections in 2:12 ff to 2:6-11.

First, the "therefore" in 2:12 connects the ethical injunctions in 2:12-15 with the example of Christ outlined in 2:6-11. Once again he is the model to follow. He never complained or grumbled. He never sought his own way. Neither should we.

Second, both Timothy (2:21) and Epaphroditus are examples of Christ-like people (2:21; 2:29-30). Both of them "put the interests" of the Philippians ahead of themselves. Epaphroditus almost paid for such self sacrificing service with his life.

Third, Paul's example in 3:7-11 is also consistent with the attitude that was in Christ Jesus. He did nothing out of selfish ambition or vanity. He did everything for Christ.

Fourth, Phil 2:9-11 speaks about the exaltation of Christ after his suffering. The fact that the exaltation came after the suffering should not be missed or glossed over. If indeed there were individuals suggesting to the Philippians that the true gospel was purely triumphant and did not involve suffering, Paul had another word! He argues that Christ himself suffered first and then was exalted. The Philippians must suffer first (1:29) and then be exalted (3:20). This is the divine order and cannot be changed. Not for us today either! To be sure the gospel is a triumphant message and one taken up with victory, but the complete victory over sin and suffering must await heaven (3:20-21). Now we have victory through suffering, at the consummation we will have victory over suffering.

So we see that the passage is tightly connected to what came before and after. We are now ready to examine it in some detail. The first item we need to consider is the genre of the passage or the kind of writing it represents. Then we can proceed to an exegesis of the details. Concerning the genre of the passage, there are those who argue that it is an early Christian hymn and that it has certain affinities with other (apparently) hymnic material in the NT (cf. Col. 1:15-20; 1 Tim 3:16). This is quite likely. Still others argue that it is more along the lines of narrative.¹ The answer to this question may not necessarily be an either/or. The passage may well have an underlying chronology, reflecting a narrative structure,² but the fact that it is set off by the relative pronoun “who” (hos), which is also found at Col 1:15 and 1 Tim 3:16 (other NT hymnic material), makes it likely that it is hymnic and that it represents material used as such in the early church. The antecedent of the pronoun, then, is Christ and everyone in the churches wherein it was used knew that. There are other hymnic features including parallelisms and meter, though the precise metrical structure is difficult, if not impossible, to nail down with certainty.³

It is thus reasonable to conclude that the passage has at least some poetic and hymnic elements. With this in mind we should not attempt to make it “walk on all fours.” We cannot press every detail for theological insight and inquiry. It is the language of worship not the carefully guarded comments we find in Romans 8, for example. Further, the passage is being used as a model of Christian humility and behavior. This must be kept in mind when examining the details.⁴

IV. Exhortation to Unity—The Example of Christ (2:5-11)

In this section Paul will give the command for the Philippians to imitate the example of Christ himself. Though he was fully divine, he emptied himself by taking on human nature and dying a shameful death on a cross. Only then, after a life of complete and humble obedience, did God exalt him. The Philippians, and all of us by extension, who name the name of Christ are to walk in his footsteps. We are to humbly carry out God’s will as chosen servants and wait for our vindication and exaltation at the glorification.

A. The Command (2:5)

The sentence in v. 5 literally reads: “this think among yourselves which also in Christ Jesus.” Thus there is no expressed verb in the second clause. As a result some commentators have supplied the verb “think,” since this is the verb in the first clause. Thus they render the sentence: “think this among yourselves which also *you think* in Christ Jesus.” That is, the same way as you think in Christ Jesus is to be the way you think in your relationships with Christians; or, think this way because it is the only way of thinking that agrees with being a Christian. But this fails to realize that 2:6-11 is not about the way we think *in Christ*, but is itself an example taken from Christ.⁵ Therefore, it is better to supply the verb “to be” and render it as “this think among yourselves which *was* also in Christ Jesus.” We can say the same thing in a little less awkward way: **You should have the same attitude toward one another that Christ Jesus had.**

Paul wants the Philippians to take on the same attitude that Christ himself had. The apostle has already made reference to the “good work” which undoubtedly includes God’s work of conforming them into the image of Christ (cf. Rom 8:29). Paul wants them to adopt this attitude because he is confident that God is working in them to that end. This is also brought out forcefully in 2:12-13—an exhortation coupled with theological rationale, both of which are closely connected to 2:5-11 through the term “therefore” (ho„ste). Also, regarding the use of **attitude** (phronein), the same meaning prevails in 2:5 as we discussed earlier in 1:7. It has more to do with a settled attitude and disposition than any deliberate analytical thinking. In short, Paul wants them to consider their life as Christ considered his.

¹ See Fee, *Philippians*, 196.

² There is a movement from Christ’s pre-existence, to his incarnation, to his suffering and death, to his exaltation and universal Lordship.

³ See Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 76-79.

⁴ For further discussion on the literary form, background, authorship, and text of this piece of literature, see O’Brien, *Philippians*, 187-203. This history of discussion on this passage alone is enough to keep a person reading for a very long time.

⁵ Paul is not referring here to the technical sense of “in Christ” such as we find in passages like Ephesians 1:3-14.

B. The Example of Christ (2:6-11)

The example from the life and career of Christ is taken from both his humiliation and exaltation, and as we said above, the order is significant. He had to suffer faithfully and then be exalted. This was God's plan, both for him, as well as the Philippians.

1. His Humility (2:6-8)

a. His Deity and Pre-existence (2:6)

Paul begins this wonderful hymn about Christ's humility and exaltation with a powerful note about his deity and pre-existence. He says that **though he existed in the form of God**.... There is no little debate over the meaning of the expression **form of God** (en morphe,, theou) in this sentence. Generally speaking, however, the term **form** refers to outward manifestation which corresponds exactly with what a thing is in its essence. It corresponds with the essential attributes a thing possesses without which it could not be what it is. Thus insofar as Jesus partakes of the **form of God**, he partakes of all the essential attributes of deity (cf. John 1:1). The mention of "equality with God" (isa theo,,) in the next phrase further indicates that in the expression "form of God" we are dealing with Christ's deity.

Though Jesus was fully God **he did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped**. The difficult expression to understand in this statement is **something to be grasped** which translates only one Greek word (harpagmon). This word appears only here in the NT. There are at least three different meanings for the word though not all of them are equally valid in this context. First, there are those who argue that it means "to rapture" or "to catch up" or "to have an ecstatic experience." This is based in part on the use of the verb in passages like 1 Thess 4:17 and 2 Cor 12:2-4. This interpretation makes no sense whatsoever in Phil 2:6 since Paul is not talking about some mystical experience Christ had. Second, some argue that the term refers to something not yet possessed, but to be "grasped after" or "reached for." But the text says that he was already in the form of God, not that he wanted to become God, as we see for example, in the case of Satan or Adam (Gen 3:5; Isa 14:12-13). Third, the term can also mean "something already possessed" and, therefore, "to be clutched onto" or "held closely" so as to protect.⁶ This last sense fits the context well. Jesus was not grasping to get something, but already possessed deity and because he did so, he could freely give or empty himself. He "did not regard being equal with God... something to be used for his own advantage."⁷

We may summarize this verse using the words of one commentator:

The participle huparcho,,n ("being" [NIV], in the sense of "existing") is in the present tense and states Christ's continuing condition. To say that he was existing in the essential metaphysical form of God is tantamount to saying that he possessed the nature of God. The phrase is elaborated on by the words "equality with God" (isa theo,,). It should be noted that isa is an adverb (not the substantive *ison*), and hence describes the manner of existence.⁸

b. His "Emptying" (2:7a-b)

Paul says that Christ did not use his divinity for personal gain, but instead **emptied himself** (eauton ekeno,,sen). This is one of the most interesting comments in all of Scripture and one that has precipitated an enormous amount of discussion over the centuries. Just what did Paul mean by the verb ekeno,,sen? The answer to this question has led to a number of theories about the incarnation and what took place when Christ took on humanity. Some theories include: (1) Christ divested himself of his deity, but such an hypothesis leaves us with a savior incapable of paying an eternal debt; (2) he gave up his independent exercise of authority. But nothing in the text suggests this interpretation; (3) he emptied himself of his glory; (4) he emptied himself of the relative attributes of deity such as omniscience, omnipresence, etc. (5) he emptied himself of being equal with God.⁹

⁶ Cf. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 84-85; Silva, *Philippians*, 117-18.

⁷ Roy W. Hoover, "The Harpagmos Enigma: A Philological Solution," *HTR* 64 (1971): 118, as quoted in Silva, *Philippians*, 118.

⁸ Kent, "Philippians," 123.

⁹ Cf. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 85, for a summary list of proposed theories.

The problem with all these theories is that they have no basis in the text and are, therefore, suspect. There is a better sense in which to take the verb *ekenosen*. It can mean “to pour out”¹⁰ and this better fits the context. Thus it is a metaphorical and emotional way of expressing the tremendous humility that Jesus, who will always possess a divine nature, expressed when he took on a human nature and became a servant to the point of dying on a cross.

Thus the way that Jesus expressed this “emptying” or “pouring out” was *by* taking the form of a servant and *by* looking like other men. The expression **form of a servant** (*morphe, n doulou*) uses similar language to “form of God” (*morphe, n theou*) and stands in stark contrast to the former. The One who was God became a slave! The emphasis in the expression is on his humanity and the fact that as a man he functioned as a slave, one without privileges who came to serve others (cf. Mark 10:45). There have been attempts to see the background for “slave/servant” here as arising out of the servant songs of Isaiah. This may indeed form part of the backdrop, but Paul’s emphasis here is on the contrast between Christ’s deity and lofty position and the fact that he condescended to be a slave among us. It is not on his vicarious messianic mission *per se*. Thus he is an example to the Philippians who were urged to refrain from selfish ambition and doing things with only their own interests in mind.

The phrase **looking like other men** (*en omoio, n mati anthrpo, n genomenos*) also modifies the verb “he emptied himself.” It serves to strengthen the fact that even though he was divine, Jesus voluntarily took on a genuine human nature.¹¹ The term “likeness” or “like” (*omoio, n mati*) as the NET Bible has it, does not indicate mere appearance, as we might think of the word today. Rather, it means that Christ was in all respects a man, except that he was without sin (Heb 4:15).¹²

c. His Appearance to Other Men and His Death (2:7c-8)

Though he was eternally God, he made himself nothing (so NIV) by taking on the form of a slave and by being made in human likeness. The participial phrase **by sharing in human nature** can also be translated as “being found in appearance as a man.” It can either go with the verb “emptied himself” or with the following verb “humbled himself.” In either case, the key term “appearance” (*sche, n mati*) stresses the humanity of Christ as he appeared visibly to other men. They regarded him as fully human (cf. 2 Cor 5:16) for he went through all the phases of life that normal human beings go through. Regarding Scriptural statements about Jesus’ humanity, Hendriksen enumerates the following list: (1) He came into the world through natural means, i.e., birth (Luke 2:7), but men did not understand the virgin birth; (2) He grew up like other boys (Luke 1:80; 2:52); (3) He learned a trade like other young men (Mark 6:3); (4) He was hungry, thirsty, weary, and slept like other people (Matt 4:2; John 4:6; Mark 4:38); (5) He got angry like others, though often for other reasons (Mark 3:5), and (6) he died like others, though his death was vicarious. People regarded him as fully human, and rightly so, but they misunderstood his sinlessness and his deity.¹³

Paul goes on to say that Jesus **humbled himself, by becoming obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross!** Thus the magnitude of his humility is measured by the extent to which he was obedient—all the way to death. The term **obedient** (*hupe, n koos*) means to adhere to or follow the desires of another, in this case the Father. Jesus always did what pleased his Father and in the Garden of Gethsemane he yielded his own will to that of the Father (Matt 26:39; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42).

The repetition of the word **death** with the term **even** between the two occurrences stresses the awful shame and cruelty of death by way of the cross. Death by crucifixion was considered to be reserved only for criminals, those who were slaves, thieves, killers, and outright enemies of the state. The Jews viewed death on a cross as a sure sign that the

¹⁰ So Fee, Hawthorne, Silva, and O’Brien.

¹¹ The language of “emptying himself” does indeed lead to theories and models concerned to demonstrate how the divine nature can coexist with a human nature in one person with apparently one will (cf. certain kenotic theories and the two-minds theory). But, this passage does not answer that question in any detail, save only to present us with certain facts about this person. It does not tell us precisely the way in which this works. For a discussion of the coherence of the incarnation as idea, see Thomas D. Senior, “The Incarnation and the Trinity,” in *Reason for the Hope Within*, ed. Michael J. Murray (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 238-52.

¹² Hendriksen, *Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*, 110.

¹³ Hendriksen, *Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*, 111-12.

individual so crucified was accursed by God (Deut 21:22, 23; 1 Cor 1:23).¹⁴ Commenting on the horrors of death by crucifixion, Green says:

Among the torturous penalties noted in the literature of antiquity, crucifixion was particularly heinous. The act itself damaged no vital organs, nor did it result in excessive bleeding. Hence, death came slowly, sometimes after several days, through shock or a painful process of asphyxiation as the muscles used in breathing suffered increasing fatigue. Often, as a further disgrace, the person was denied burial and the body was left on the cross to serve as a carrion for the birds or to rot.

Crucifixion was quintessentially a public affair. Naked and affixed to a stake, cross or tree, the victim was subjected to savage ridicule by frequent passersby, while the general populace was given a grim reminder of the fate of those who assert themselves against the authority of the state.¹⁵

2. His Exaltation (2:9-11)

The result of Christ's humiliation and pouring himself out unto death is that God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name. The ultimate end or goal of Christ's exaltation and universal Lordship is the realization of God's glory. Thus there is a marked contrast between the first section of this hymn (2:6-8) and the last section of the hymn (2:9-11). The first part deals with Christ's humility and lowliness, while the second deals with how God responded to Christ's obedience by exalting him and giving him dominion over the entire universe.

a. The Receiving of the "Name" (2:9)

Paul says that because of the faithful obedience of Christ, God **exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name**. The verb **exalted** (*huperupso,,sen*) means to "super exalt" or "lift up to the highest place." Jesus is lifted up to reign over all creation—a role that YHWH (God) himself fulfills (cf. vv. 10-11). This is similar to a statement found in 1 Enoch 51:3 which speaks of the "son of man" assuming the throne of God and sharing in his cosmic rule:¹⁶

In those days, (the Elect One) shall sit on my throne and from the conscience of his mouth shall come out all the secrets of wisdom...

The exaltation, then, is to rule over everything in creation. The same verb is used in the Greek OT to refer to YHWH's exalted status above all other gods (Ps 96:9; Dan 3:52; 54, 57-58).¹⁷ The past tense of the verb (i.e., "exalted") is meant to take in the resurrection and exaltation in one grand sweep, though the emphasis lies on the latter.

God not only exalted him, but more specifically, he gave him the name that is above every other name. The term **gave** (*echarisato*) means "graciously given." The reference to the **name** (*onoma*) serves the function of not only identifying Jesus, but also saying something specific about him. It is the name of "Lord" (v. 11 *kurios*) that was given to him. Therefore, Jesus enters into the ruling functions of God himself. This name and all that goes with it was acquired not by selfish ambition, but by lowly submission and was, therefore, graciously given to Christ. He is enjoying that which was already his by right, but for which he never clung to selfishly. As Martin says:

The honour now conferred is expressed by the bestowal of *the name*, i.e., a character, which he chose to assume not by right or seizure (the *harpagmos* of v. 6), but by obedient humiliation. The honour which he refused to arrogate to himself is now conferred upon him by the Father's good pleasure... The human name 'Jesus' is important not least because it declares that lordly power is seen as committed to the hands of the historical person of Jesus of Nazareth, who is not some cosmic cipher or despotic ruler but a figure to whom Christians can give a name and a face.¹⁸

There are many other passages in the NT that affirm Christ's universal right to rule. In Matthew 28:18 Jesus claims to have received all authority in heaven and earth. In Ephesians 1:20-21 Paul says that Christ was seated in the heavenlies far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every *name* that can be named not only in the present age, but

¹⁴ See Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 89-90.

¹⁵ Joel B. Green, "Death of Jesus," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 147.

¹⁶ See Bertram, *TDNT*, 8:609, fn. 31.

¹⁷ Cf. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 91.

¹⁸ Martin, *Philippians*, 109.

also in the age to come. The early preaching of the church recognized that Christ was exalted to the status of Lord (Acts 2:33, 36) and upon the basis of his universal Lordship offered the gospel to all men (Acts 10:34-36). Thus, Christ's lordship is viewed as universal and eternal. But he got there by humble obedience—that is the message proper of Philippians 2:6-11.

In early Christian teaching this pattern of suffering first, then exaltation, was affirmed repeatedly. For example, Jesus himself, when discussing his death with the disciples, said that “whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matt 16:25). Thus, suffering proceeds glory. Peter told the young would-be leaders of the church to humble themselves under God's mighty hand, and that God would exalt them in due time (1 Peter 5:7). It is interesting to note that in both 1 Peter 5:7 and Matt 16:25 the devil is right there to tempt a person to promote themselves. The same pattern of humility and then exaltation occurs in James 4:10 as well: “Humble yourselves under God's mighty hand that he may lift you up in due time.” This lesson for us is obvious; we should regularly measure our lives by Christ's humiliation.

b. The Purpose of Jesus' Exaltation (2:10-11b)

Paul reveals the two purposes for the exaltation of Jesus Christ, namely, that (1) every knee will bow and (2) every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God. In reality, however, these two purposes form a unified vision which amounts to the universal recognition of Jesus' lordship. It is particularly his lordship and rule which is to the glory of God.

i. Every Knee Will Bow (2:10)

The following comment about “every knee bowing” and “every tongue confessing” is taken from Isaiah 45:23. The context of the quotation from Isaiah is taken up with the uniqueness of YHWH in contrast to lifeless idols (45:14 “he has no peer; there is no other God”). In the Isaiah passage, YHWH, and YHWH alone, is unique and the only One who creates, redeems, and sustains (45:17-18,). In particular, Isaiah 45:22-25 reads as follows:

45:22 Turn to me so you can be delivered,
all you who live in the earth's remote regions!
For I am God, and I have no peer.
45:23 I solemnly make this oath,
what I say is true and reliable:
*Surely every knee will bow to me,
every tongue will solemnly affirm,*
45:24 they will say about me,
“Yes, the LORD is a powerful deliverer.”
All who are angry at him will cower before him.
45:25 All the offspring of Israel will be vindicated by the LORD
and boast in him.

Thus the passage is a powerful statement about YHWH's regal supremacy. It is precisely this supremacy which is conferred on Jesus in Philippians 2:10-11. Paul says that **at the name of Jesus** (en to, onomati Ie, sou) every knee will bow and every tongue confess. In contemporary Christian circles the common misinterpretation of this passage is that the reference to the word **name** means specifically the name *Jesus*. But, it is the name *given to* Jesus which is the issue here. That name is “Lord” (kurios) and *it is at that name* that all will bow and confess. The image of bowing invokes attitudes in the ancient Near East of paying homage to one's god(s) in recognition of its inherent authority.¹⁹ The application to Christ is amazing.

The reference to those **in heaven and on earth and under the earth** speaks to the universal nature of his Lordship such as we saw in passages like Matt 28:18 and Eph 1:20-21. He is Lord over absolutely every created being, whether they be angelic or human. Christ is “Lord of Lords and King of Kings!” Commentators who limit the statement: “those who are in heaven, on earth, and under the earth,” to spirits and demonic powers, have failed to realize, among other things, that it is *people* who were giving the Philippians a difficult time, not spirits *per se*. Thus while the hymn may take

¹⁹ Fee, *Philippians*, 224.

in spirits, it takes in all humanity as well. It is likely that **in heaven** refers to spirits in the heavenly realm; **on earth** refers to human beings, and **under the earth** refers to the dead who will someday confess Christ as Lord.²⁰

ii. *Every Tongue Will Confess (2:11a-b)*

The question arises with these two purpose clauses as to whether every knee will *gladly* bow and every tongue *gladly* confess—that Christ is Lord. The answer in this passage seems to be “no.” There will be many who under the sheer weight of the obvious, will, under compulsion, acknowledge his sovereignty. They will be forced to concede his place of power and rule, but they will do so with much shame. This agrees with the Isaiah passage, especially 45:24 which says that all who have raged against him will be put to shame.²¹

On the other hand, all Christians will rejoice together and gladly proclaim to the universe that Christ is Lord. In fact, to the degree that we confess him as Lord today, we share in the great eschatological “confession” when the entire universe will acknowledge his rule!

c. *The Glory of God (2:11c)*

The confession of Christ’s Lordship will certainly bring **glory** to God, but it may be in this passage that Paul is thinking about Christ’s Lordship *itself*, not the confession, as something that brings him glory. The “lordship of Jesus in no way threatens or rivals God. Quite the reverse, for it actually reveals the divine glory since the Father has planned that this should be so.”²²

V. Principles for Application

1. The first thing an intelligent Christian should do in the light of Philippians 2:6-11 is bow with their face low to the ground and worship the Lord. He, and he alone, is the sovereign of the universe. That position was graciously given to him in the light of his obedience unto death.
2. Practically, the passage as a whole enforces the ethic taught in 2:1-4 and 2:12ff. If Christ himself, though he was divine, did not seek selfishly anything that he might credit to his own account, but instead obeyed the Father completely his entire life, so ought we to do the same. If we have been seeking our own interests, we need to repent and seek the interests of others. You can begin with the relationships in your own home, work place, etc.

²⁰ See Fee, *Philippians*, 224-25; cf. also f.n. 35.

²¹ O’Brien, *Philippians*, 243.

²² O’Brien, *Philippians*, 251.

Lesson 9: Exhortation to Unity—A Final Word Concerning Obedience (2:12-18)

I. Translation as It Appears in the NET Bible

2:12 So then, my dear friends, just as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence but even more in my absence, continue working out your salvation with humility and dependence, **2:13** for the one bringing forth in you both the desire and the effort—for the sake of his good pleasure—is God. **2:14** Do everything without grumbling or arguing, **2:15** so that you may be blameless and pure, children of God without blemish though you live in a crooked and perverse society, in which you shine as lights in the world **2:16** by holding on to the word of life so that I will have a reason to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run in vain nor labor in vain. **2:17** But even if I am being poured out like a drink-offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I have joy and rejoice together with you. **2:18** And in the same way, you also should be glad and rejoice together with me.

II. Outline

- A. The Command to Obey (2:12-16)
 - 1. General Statement and Theological Rationale (2:12-13)
 - a. General Statement (2:12)
 - b. Theological Rationale (2:13)
 - 2. Specific Application and Results (2:14-16)
 - a. No Complaining or Arguing (2:14)
 - b. Becoming Blameless and Pure (2:15)
 - c. Holding Out the Word of Life (2:16a)
 - d. Paul's Boast (2:16b)
- B. The Example of Paul (2:17-18)
 - 1. His Life as a Drink-Offering (2:17a)
 - 2. His Desire That They Rejoice (2:17b-18)

III. Context

From the very outset of his letter to the Philippians (1:1-2), Paul has argued, both by example and explicit statement, that he wants the church to cultivate the virtue of humility with a view toward corporate unity. This emphasis can be seen in his thanksgiving and prayer section (i.e., 1:3-11), the recounting of his own circumstances in prison (1:12-26), his appeal for the Philippians to live lives worthy of the gospel (1:27-30; 2:1-4), and his beautiful description of the humiliation and exaltation of Christ himself (2:5-11). Now, in 2:12-18, the final appeal of this section (i.e., 1:3-2:18), he urges them again to obey and seek unity. They are not to grumble and complain, but are to be pure and blameless, children of God without fault in a depraved world.

IV. Exhortation to Unity—A Final Word Concerning Obedience (2:12-18)

A. The Command to Obey (2:12-16)

1. General Statement and Theological Rationale (2:12-13)

a. General Statement (2:12)

This paragraph starts off with a conjunction “so then” (ho„ste) which clearly indicates that there is an inference to be drawn from the previous material in 2:6-11. But what is the inference? The Greek term translated “obedient” in 2:8 is

the noun *hupe,,koos*. The cognate verbal form for “obedience,” *hupakousate*, is the term Paul uses in 2:12 to urge the Philippians “to obey.” Thus the connection between 2:12-18 and the Christ hymn in 2:6-11 is that Paul wants the Philippians to obey the Lord in the same way as Jesus obeyed the Father. He obeyed completely and without reservation and so should they. We too must obey him implicitly.

It is a good thing for a person to be concerned about the will of God for their life. Questions revolving around where the Lord wants me to work, who he wants me to marry, and where I should go to college, etc. are all very important. But sometimes we get unduly stressed out about these questions *when we haven't been leading an obedient life in areas that the Bible is clear about*. If you want to know the will of God in specific decisions that pertain to your life only, begin with what is *explicitly* revealed in Scripture and obey that. Then seek guidance on other matters.

Concerning the word *hupakouo,,*, Kittel says:

The frequent use of *υπακουειν* (*hupakouein*) for *ουρα*? [i.e., “to hear”] in the LXX [Greek OT completed in second century BCE] shows how strongly the idea of hearing is still present for the translator in the Gr. [Greek] *υπακουειν*. Hence *υπακουειν* and *υπακοη* as terms for religious activity are always to be thought of in the sphere of a religion which receives the divine Word by hearing and then translates it into action.¹

The Philippians had received the word of God from Paul and were encouraged to translate that into action in their everyday lives. So we too are responsible to hear the word of God and put it into practice in our lives. Listen to the words of Jesus, Paul, and James:

Matthew 7:24 Everyone who hears these words of mine and does them is like a wise man who built his house on rock. **7:25** The rain fell, the flood came, and the winds beat against that house; but it did not collapse because it had been founded on rock. **7:26** Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. **7:27** The rain fell, the flood came, and the winds beat against that house, and it collapsed; it was a tremendous fall!

1 Thessalonians 2:13 And so we too constantly thank God that when you received God's message that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human message, but as it truly is, God's message, that is at work among you who believe.

James 1:22 But be sure you live out the message and do not merely listen to it and so deceive yourselves. **1:23** For if someone merely listens to the message and does not live it out, he is like someone who gazes at his natural face in a mirror. **1:24** For he gazes at himself and then goes out and immediately forgets what sort of person he was. **1:25** But the one who peers into the perfect law of liberty and sticks with it, and does not become a forgetful listener but one who lives it out—he will be blessed in what he does.

Thus Paul commands the Philippians to obey, that is, “to work out their own salvation.” But it is not the bark of a drill sergeant that is in mind here. The reference to the Philippians as **my dear friends** (*agape,,toi mou*) softens the command, not in terms of its importance, but in terms of the context in which it is given; it comes from someone who loves them. Paul also referred to the Romans in the same way, and despite the Corinthians' proclivity to give the apostle “nightmares,” he loved them too (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 15:58). If you want to impact a person, they need to know how much you love them. This is especially true when circumstances in their life are difficult. As someone once said, “People don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care!” The Philippians knew how much Paul cared for them.

Paul was not “battering them up,” as it were, when he made the comment, “**just as** (*katho,,s*) **you have always obeyed** (*hupe,,kousate*). He did not make this comment solely to win their favor, but rather from his perspective, their *consistent obedience* was a fact. They had obeyed not only in the initial reception of the gospel (Acts 16:14, 32-33), but ever since that time as well (approx. ten years). Again, as far as Paul was concerned, they had *always* obeyed (cf. 2 Cor 7:15; 10:6; 1 Thess 2:13; 2 Thess 3:4; Philemon 21).

But the obedience of the Philippians should **not only** [be] **in my presence but now even more in my absence**. Though the mention of **presence** and **absence** in this verse links it up with similar thoughts in 1:27, there are nonetheless some ambiguities in the meaning of the phrase as a whole. Some commentators take the phrase with the imperative

¹ Kittel, *TDNT*, 1:224.

“continue working out”² and “presence” as a reference to Paul’s proposed future visit (2:24). In this case Paul is saying that they should not obey just because he’s coming to see them (cf. 1 Cor 4:21; 2 Cor 13:1-3).³ Some scholars, however, say that the term “presence” looks back to Paul’s founding of the church in Acts 16:15, 33, and the church’s obedience to the gospel during that time.⁴ But to confine the term “presence” to just that occasion is to miss the force of the **always** in the expression **as you have always obeyed**. Others argue that the comment is simply general and has no specific relationship to any past or future visits. The Philippians should obey whether Paul is ever among them or not.⁵ But this seems to miss the force of the **now**. The term “now” seems to indicate that their problems were due in part to the absence of the apostle and that when he was actually with them in the past they did not have some of those struggles.

Paul says that whether he is with them, as he was in the past, or whether he is absent, as he is in the present, they are to **continue working out** (katergazesthe) [their] **salvation** (eauto,,n so,,te,,rian) **with humility** (phobou) **and dependence** (tromou). This passage in conjunction with verse 13, together form a powerful comment on the Biblical view of sanctification and together deliver the death blow to many faulty understandings concerning the growth process of the Christian.

Just as the proper understanding of 1:19 depends to a large extent on the meaning of so,,te,,ria, so also here in 2:12. The correct understanding of this passage depends largely on the meaning one sees in the word so,,te,,rian. There are basically three options: (1) a corporate view focusing on salvation as the “health of the entire church; (2) spiritual salvation; (3) some combination of the two.

Martin and Hawthorne⁶ are typical of those who argue (quite cogently) in favor of the first alternative, namely, so,,te,,ria means the health of the Philippian church community (#1). They point out that (1) Paul has just finished speaking against individualism and urging the Philippians not to look out solely for their own interests; (2) the verb katergazesthe means to “work at,” or “achieve” a meaning that fits better with the idea of corporate health and unity than one’s personal salvation; (3) the verb katergazesthe and the reflexive pronoun eauto,,n are both plural, not singular; and (4) the term so,,te,,ria can mean “health” or “well-being” (Acts 27:34).

It does not seem likely that given the focus on corporate unity and “togetherness” in the passage that option #2 is likely. On the other hand, Silva has made an excellent case for the traditional view that what Paul is espousing here is personal renewal and its evidence in the community of believers (#3). Thus, his view is a combination of #1 and #2. We will summarize his arguments here: (1) in light of the view of Martin, Hawthorne, and others, the question arises as to how God works in the midst of people if not through personal renewal. To assume a conceptual dichotomy between the two is both false and lethal. Therefore, Paul is arguing for personal renewal as evidenced in corporate holiness; (2) while the translation of so,,te,,ria as “health” may be possible, it is not probable. In the nearly twenty occurrences of the term in Paul, it invariably carries its technical theological sense. The evidence, therefore, favors the technical theological sense here; (3) the argument that concentration on one’s soul is improbable in a context dealing with selfishness, is tantamount to making the false equation between concern for one’s soul and selfishness; (4) if the term so,,te,,ria is taken as personal salvation this does not mean that Paul is teaching salvation by works. The term can refer to more than initial or forensic justification, however. It can refer to the process of living out the Christian life and producing the fruit commensurate with being in right relationship with God. Thus “in the particular context of Philippians 2, the outworkings of the believer’s *personal* salvation take the form of *corporate* obligations within the Christian community: the duty of seeking the good of others.”⁷

Therefore, in the *context* of the community, the Philippians are individually to work out their own relationship with God, with **humility** (phobou) **and dependence** (tromou). Though these are combined in terms of human relations (1 Cor 2:3; 2 Cor 7:15; Eph 6:5) they are here used in reference to our posture before God. We are to live before God in reverence and trembling in light of our weakness and struggle to live out his commandments. The Christian is to be humble before his God and dependent on him for help in living out his will (cf. Phil 1:6).

² The negative particle **not** (mh) goes better with the command “continue working out.”

³ Cf. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 99.

⁴ Cf. Martin, *Philippians*, 114.

⁵ Cf. Silva, *Philippians*, 141.

⁶ Martin, *Philippians*, 115-16; Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 98.

⁷ Silva, *Philippians*, 138; 135-42.

b. Theological Rationale (2:13)

Verse 13 begins with the conjunction **for** (gar) and introduces the theological rationale for the command in v. 12; verse 13 supplies the reason for obeying the command to work out our own salvation. The reason is because **the one bringing forth** (ho energo,,n) **in you both the desire** (to thelein) **and the effort** (to energein)—**for the sake of his good pleasure** (huper te,,s eudokias)—**is God**.

The expression **the one bringing forth** is actually a participle in Greek, namely, ho energo,,n from which we ultimately get our English word “energy.” The present continuous sense of the expression denotes God’s continual, uninterrupted work of moving us along to greater and greater growth in love for God and men (cf. John 15:1-2). The sphere of that work is **in you** (en humin). The prepositional phrase en humin can mean “among you,” as for example in 2:5, but here it carries a more restricted sense of “in you,” i.e., in your hearts. As we said above under v. 12, God often works *in* us before he works *through* or *among* us.

God’s continual “working” in us relates to two very important areas, namely, **the desire** (to thelein) or “will” to do what is right, as well as **the effort** (to energein) or “energy” to do it. This is an amazing statement. Though he doesn’t specifically mention it, the apostle can be thinking of none other than the Holy Spirit who lives in us in fulfillment of the new covenant (Jer 31:31-33; 2 Cor 3:4-18). The Spirit indwells us permanently (2 Cor 1:20-21; Eph 1:13-14), fills us for worship (Eph 5:18), enables us to surrender our lives (Rom 7:6), delivers us out of sin (Gal 1:4; 5:16-24; Rom 8:2-3, 13) and generally enables us to understand Christ (Rom 1:16; Eph 1:18; John 16:13-14). He is a Spirit who is constantly working to glorify Christ and create unity in the body of Christ—undoubtedly one of his primary efforts within the Philippian church (cf. Eph 4:3⁸). Thus the Philippians were to come in “humility” and dependence” upon God as they worked out their salvation. They were to be careful not to become arrogant as if some of them were better than others (cf. Phil 2:3-4; 3:7-11). The Spirit is the One who would work in them to carry out God’s will; they were totally bankrupt in and of themselves (cf. Eph 2:1; John 15:6). He not only gave them the desire to do God’s will, such as seeking the needs of others ahead of themselves (as Jesus did in 2:6-11), he also gave them the energy or will to do it. God has provided such a complete salvation! One of the primary means that God has established for us to experience such empowerment is prayer. Paul has already mentioned this in connection with his desire to exalt Christ in his body (1:19-20), but he will mention prayer again near the close of the letter (4:6-7).

By way of summary, then, verse 12 talks about obedience to God and verse 13 talks about the grace of God in our hearts. The tension that exists between these ideas should not be minimized lest we fall off one side or the other. We cannot say, “It all depends on me. This makes Christianity just a list of do’s and don’ts.” This negates v. 13. Yet, on the other hand, we cannot sit around waiting for God to do something, all the while disobeying the explicit teaching of Scripture. This is to deny the imperative in v. 12. The informed Christian who knows the Lord through his word, and in prayer, will say with the apostle Paul:

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me has not been in vain. In fact, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God with me (1 Cor 15:10).

2. Specific Application and Results (2:14-16)

Having made a general statement regarding obedience (v. 12) and the grace of God which enables us to obey (v. 13), the apostle now moves to apply his teaching to the specific situation at Philippi. The Philippians are not to grumble or complain. They will become pure and blameless as they obey and Paul will have confidence before God that he is not running in vain.

a. No Complaining or Arguing (2:14)

Paul says that in light of the humility and dependence required before God the Philippians are to **do everything without grumbling** (goggusmo,,n) **or arguing** (dialogismo,,n). The term goggusmo,,n occurs only three times in the New Testament outside of Phil 2:14.⁹ In John 7:12 the term is used to refer to the whispering or secretive talk engaged in by the people regarding the person of Jesus: “There were many in the crowd “grumbling” about him, some said he was a good man and others said he was a deceiver.” In Acts 6:1 the Grecian Jews “grumbled” against the Hebraic Jews (i.e.,

⁸ Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 10, ed. R. V. G. Tasker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 110.

⁹ The verb occurs eight times: Matt 20:11; Luke 5:30; John 6:41, 43, 61; 7:32; 1 Cor 10:10 [2x].

strife was developing) because widows among the Grecian Jews were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. The complaining and divisiveness was quickly cut off, however, when the apostles dealt with the issue. They understood that such attitudes are lethal to church unity and witness. In 1 Peter 4:9 the apostle commands the various Christians in the churches to offer hospitality to one another and to do so without grumbling. One can see from the examples in Acts 6:1 and 1 Peter 4:9 the close connection between this word and selfishness ambition which we saw in 2:3.

The term **arguing**, *dialogismo*,ⁿ occurs 14 times in the New Testament and is never used in a purely favorable light (cf. Luke 2:35). It appears in conjunction with the antagonistic thinking of the Pharisees as they opposed the ministry of Jesus (Luke 5:22; 6:8) and the self-centered, arrogance of the disciples (Luke 9:47) as they “reasoned” about who would be the greatest in the kingdom (i.e., immediately after Jesus had predicted his death [Luke 9:45])! Further, James refers to those who despise the poor as “judges with evil *thoughts*.” In Luke 24:38-39 the term refers to “doubts” in the minds of the apostles regarding Jesus’ resurrection. Further, Paul tells Timothy that men are to lift holy hands in prayer and to do so without “disputes” (1 Tim 2:8). Thus the term signifies contentious behavior probably connected in some way with an arrogant attitude. The Philippians, Paul says, are to do everything without this kind of attitude.

To anyone who has ever read the Old Testament in some detail, especially the book of Numbers, the use of the two words **grumbling** and **complaining** evokes images of the “grumbling” and “complaining” done by the Israelites in the desert (Exod 15:24; 16:2; Num 11:1-6; 14:1-4; 20:2; 21:4, 5). And this is exactly what is in the apostle’s mind. In fact, in 2:15 he quotes verbatim Deut 32:5 in which Moses talks about the corruption of the Israelites. The question that surfaces, however, in the discussion of 2:14-15 is, “how is Paul using the Israelite imagery?” Does he mean to say that: (1) the Philippians were grumbling *with God* as the children of Israel did; (2) they were grumbling *with one another*; (3) the Philippians, and so all Christians, are in a period of “wandering” as it were, until the second coming of Christ and they should thus surrender to Christ; (4) he sees himself as parallel with Moses and the Philippians as parallel with the children of Israel. In this last case the Philippians are grumbling against him as the Israelites did Moses. There appears to be very little in the passage or book as a whole to commend this final suggestion, i.e., #4. The answer probably lies in the manner in which one unites the first three suggestions. Paul is not unfamiliar with the similarities between Israel’s wanderings and struggles and those of the Christian church, as 1 Cor 10:1-13 demonstrates (#3). In some measure he undoubtedly sees a parallel between the Philippians and the Israelites. The parallel provides the foundation for the application of the OT to his readers. The specifics of the that application, however, seem to be that the Philippians were grumbling at one another, and perhaps their leaders (1:1), and thus ultimately at God—as the One who provided the leaders. Paul says that they are not to do this. The implication is that God will chasten them if they persist in this disobedience (cf. 1 Cor 10:1-10, and v. 11), though such action on God’s part remains only an implication from the OT context.

b. Becoming Blameless and Pure in a Fallen World (2:15)

Paul wants them to do *everything*—not just *some* things—without grumbling or complaining **so that** (*hina*) they might be **blameless** (*amemptoi*) **and pure** (*akeraioi*), **children of God** (*tekna theou*) **without blemish** (*amo,ma*). Some commentators argue that the terms “blameless” and “pure” refer to the future when Christ returns to judge. This interpretation is ruled out, however, on the grounds that Paul is talking about their present character in light of their role in a crooked and depraved generation. Paul is not referring in this text to some future eschatological period, but instead to the “here and now.”

The term **blameless** (*amemptoi*) occurs five times in the NT. In Luke 1:6 Zechariah and Elizabeth’s piety is regarded as “blameless” in terms of the manner in which they kept “all the commands and righteous requirements of the Lord.” In 1 Thess 2:13 Paul prays that the love the Thessalonians have for each other may overflow so that their hearts will be strong, blameless in holiness before the Lord. In this passage *amemptoi* is inextricably bound up with love for other Christians. The term is also used twice in Philippians. In 3:6 Paul refers to his former Pharisaic way of life under the Law as “faultless” or “without blame.” The sense of the term in 2:15 is “to be beyond reproach” (cf. Job 1:1; 4:17).¹⁰ If the Philippians continue to grumble and complain they will give occasion for outsiders to find fault with them and their gospel. Instead they are to give no reason for accusation; they are to be blameless.

The term **pure** (*akeraioi*) is related to the verb *kerannumi* which means to “mix” or “mingle.” The noun *akeraios* (note the negative prefix *a*) was used to refer to undiluted wine or unalloyed metals.¹¹ It occurs only three times in New

¹⁰ Cf. BAGD, 45, s.v. *amemptos*.

¹¹ O’Brien, *Philippians*, 293. Cf. Kittel, *TDNT*, 1:209-10. Kittel suggests that the connection with the verb *keraiw* (“to harm” or “ravage”) indicates that *akeraios* means unharmed or unravaged, e.g., a city’s walls before a siege.

Testament. In Matt 10:16 Jesus wants the disciples to be as wise as serpents and as “innocent” as doves. In Romans 16:19 Paul says that he wants the Romans to be wise about what is good and “innocent” about what is evil. In Phil 2:15 it refers to the opposite of **grumbling** (goggusmo,,n) or **arguing** (dialogismo,,n). The “purity” that Paul has in mind in Philippians is broad and covers every area of their lives, but it specifically has in focus the need to refrain from in-fighting and divisive behavior. Thus, as the Philippians—and therefore all Christians—grow in blamelessness and purity they will truly reflect their lineage as **children of God** (tekna theou) **without blemish** (amo,,ma; see Eph 5:27; Jude 24). They are to reflect the attitude and values of their Father (cf. John 1:12; Rom 8:16; Gal 3:28; 1 John 3:1, 2) without blemish.

Thus Paul wants the Philippians not to grumble and complain, but to be blameless and pure. They are to be innocent in respect to all such behavior. They are to live lives unified around Christ even though they live **in a crooked** (skolia) **and perverse** (diestrarmene,,s) **society**. The generation of people among whom the Philippians lived on a day to day basis were regarded by the apostle as **crooked** (skolia). The term is used three other times in the New Testament. In Luke 3:5 it is used metaphorically (i.e., morally) to refer to the straightening of crooked roads, i.e., the crooked state of affairs, so that the coming of the Messiah to Israel would not be hindered. The generation of Jews who rejected the Messiah were regarded as a corrupt (skolia) generation of people under the judgment of God (Acts 2:40). In 1 Peter 2:18 Peter refers to certain masters as “corrupt,” meaning that they are unjust and harsh in their treatment of slaves (cf. 2:19).¹² The term **perverse** (diestrarmene,,s) occurs in Matt 17:17 where Jesus refers to his generation as “perverse” because of their lack of faith and stubborn unbelief. Paul accused Elymas of perverting the right ways of the Lord because he tried to turn the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, from the Lord (Acts 13:10). He also warned the Ephesian elders about men who would arise in their midst to pervert the truth or teaching about the Lord in order to draw men after themselves (Acts 20:30). The two terms **crooked and perverse** together in this context are taken directly from Deut 32:5. The difference in Phil 2:15 is that Paul refers to the unsaved world in Philippi as “crooked and perverse” whereas Moses referred to the Israelites (i.e., God’s people) as “crooked and perverse.” Paul probably has in mind the people in Philippi who are trying to oppose the church (1:28) or the legalists of chapter three who are perverting the gospel (3:2ff).

Nonetheless, to the degree that the Philippians heeded the admonition of the apostle they would **shine** (phainesthe) **as lights** (pho,,ste,,res) **in the world**. Fee is probably correct in seeing the imagery of Daniel 12:1-4 behind Paul’s comments here. The Daniel passage reads as follows:

12:1 “In that time there will arise Michael the great prince who affords protection to your people. There will occur a time of distress such as has not occurred from its beginning up to that time. But in that time your own people will escape—all those found written in the book. **12:2** Many of those who sleep in the dusty ground will awake—some to everlasting life, and others to reproach and everlasting abhorrence. **12:3** But the wise will shine like the brightness of the heavenly expanse. And those bringing many to righteousness will be like the stars forever and ever. **12:4** “But you, Daniel close up these words and seal the book until the time of the end. Many will dart to and fro, and knowledge will increase.”

Verse three is the key verse for the analogy Paul is drawing. Just as the wise in Daniel’s revelation of the future flourish during a time of distress so the Philippians will shine as stars in the world/universe. The term **lights** (pho,,ste,,res) refers to any shining object and the term **world** (kosmo,,) indicates the context in which the Philippians’ witness will be carried out.

c. Holding Out the Word of Life (2:16a)

The phrase **by holding on** (epechontes) **to the word of life** (logon zo,,e,,s) indicates the means by which the Philippians will shine in the world. They will do so both by their behavior and also by holding out the word of life to those around them who are ignorant of God’s salvation in Christ. Some commentators, in fact many commentators, take the term epechontes to mean “holding on,” as we have it in the text of the NET Bible (check the note, however, for the alternate renderings of “holding out” or “holding forth”). This, however, in my judgment, is not the sense of the term here. It is better for several reasons to understand the verb to mean “hold out” and not “hold fast to” the word of life. There are five reasons: (1) the term probably never means “to hold on.”¹³ It virtually always means “to hold out or toward

In a figurative sense, then, the term means “that which is still in its original state of intact-ness, totality or moral innocence.” It means innocence and harmlessness as opposed to deceit and cunning.

¹² See BAGD, s.v. skolios, #2.

¹³ Hendriksen, *Philippians*, 126, in f.n., 107.

(Luke 14:7; Acts 3:5; 1 Tim 4:16; Acts 19:22);”¹⁴ (2) Paul is discussing their role in the world as reflecting the character of God; they are his children. They are “in the midst” of a crooked generation, and they “shine” as stars in the world/universe. Thus, the context is one which stresses their active role in the world, an idea which lends itself more easily to the notion of witnessing than trying to hold on to something; (3) in the Greek text the expression “holding [out/on to] the word of life” immediately follows the term “world” which indicates that witnessing is in view; (4) the expression “word of life” seems to be better understood in terms of the word which brings salvation to others; and (5) Daniel 12:3 underlies Phil 2:15c-16a. Recall that Philippians 2:15c reads: “in which you shine as lights in the world....” This corresponds to Daniel 12:3a where Daniel says “But the wise will shine like the brightness of the heavenly expanse.” Phil 2:16a reads: “by holding [out/on to] the word of life.” Daniel 12:3b says: “And those bringing many to righteousness will be like the stars forever and ever.” The emphasis in Daniel 12:3b is on people *bringing others to righteousness* which more easily fits an evangelism emphasis in Phil 2:16a.¹⁵

d. Paul’s Boast (2:16b)

In a somewhat striking turn the apostle gives the second reason he wants them to obey. It is **so that** (eis) [he] **will have a reason to boast on the day of Christ that [he] did not run (edramon) in vain (kenon) nor labor (ekopiasa) in vain (kenon)**. Drawing on athletic metaphors of running (cf. 1 Cor 9:24-27) and perhaps the OT image of the Servant of Isaiah, the apostle wants the Philippians to know that their obedience will be proof at the return of Christ that he did not labor for nothing, i.e., in futility. His boast will be their purity and blamelessness before the Lord (cf. Phil 4:1). As Thielman says:

Here and elsewhere, Paul describes his apostolic labor as a race in which he runs and which, if stumbling blocks do not intrude, will result in a prize (1 Cor 9:24-27; 2 Tim 4:6-8; cf. Gal 2:2). These stumbling blocks may include Paul’s own faithlessness to his call (1 Cor 9:24-27), hindrances placed before him by other Christians (Gal 2:2), or, as here, the faithlessness of the churches whom God had placed in his care.

Paul enriches this metaphor with one drawn from Isaiah. In Isaiah 49:4 the Servant of the Lord expresses dismay that he appears to “have labored to no purpose,” to “have spent [his] strength in vain for nothing”; but he also expresses his confidence that his reward is in the Lord’s hands. Later the prophet promises that in the final day, when God creates new heavens and a new earth, his people “will not toil in vain (Isa. 65:23).¹⁶

B. The Example of Paul (2:17-18)

1. His Life as a Drink-Offering (2:17a)

Paul now moves on from the image of the athlete and Servant of the Lord to more intense images—images which may allude to his death. He says that he is being poured out (spendomai) like a drink-offering on the sacrifice (thusia) and service (leitourgia) coming from their faith (pisteo,,s). It is more likely that the apostle is drawing from the OT sacrificial system here, though some scholars argue that he simply has in mind the drink offering often performed in pagan religions. Most scholars take Paul’s words as ultimately a reference to his death, and that is certainly possible (cf. 2 Tim 4:6). It may also be that what Paul has in mind here is simply the sacrificial nature of his ministry arising as a result of the faith of the Philippians. The fact that he is suffering as a result of their faith (i.e., the mission to the Gentiles) is further evidence that he is not running his race in vain.

2. His Desire That They Rejoice (2:17b-18)

Paul says that even if he was being poured out as a sacrifice as a result of their faith, **he has joy (chairo,,) and rejoice[s] (sugchairo,,) together with [them]. And in the same way, [they] also should be glad (chairete) and rejoice together with [him] (sugchairete)**. Thus we return to the example of Paul himself who no matter what the circumstances experiences joy and calls others to rejoice with him.

¹⁴ BAGD, s.v. epecw, #2.

¹⁵ See Fee, *Philippians*, 247-48; cf. Martin, *Philippians*, 120-21.

¹⁶ Frank Thielman, *Philippians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 140-41.

V. Principles for Application

1. Christians should obey the Lord whether other people are watching or not. Paul told the Philippians that he wanted them to obey whether he was present or absent (2:12). We obey an omnipresent and omniscient God (Jer 32:17) and it is not conditioned on whether the appropriate Christians are present, e.g., the pastor or other Christian leaders.
2. We must be careful to hold verses 12 and 13 in the proper tension. It is misinformed to think that obedience totally relies on me; “I was saved by grace, but now I have to work to grow.” That fails to understand verse 13. On the other hand, it is bad theological reasoning to conclude that I must wait for God to do something before I can act. This is to neglect the command in verse 12. Do everything in the strength the Lord provides through his Spirit in you, the encouragement of his Word, people, and prayer.
3. If grumbling or complaining is a habitual sin in your life, then take steps now to move away from the mindset in which it fosters. Learn to replace it with thanksgiving to God and the encouragement of others (Col 3:16). Tell a friend whom you trust and with whom you can pray. Continually ask God for strength to obey and forgiveness when you fail. He is faithful (Isa 41:10).
4. As Christians we are the *light* of the world, irrespective of what wattage we might be (Matt 5:16). Plan to do at least one thing this week with a person who does not know Christ. Ask God for an opportunity to serve them and share Christ with them. “Hold out” the word of life so that God can enlighten them!
5. Remember, as you just learned from the apostle Paul, Godly character and ministry to others, both the saved and the unsaved, is costly and involves sacrifice. Don’t give up. Remember the words of Jesus who defined his life as that of a servant: “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

Lesson 10: Timothy and Epaphroditus— Two Examples of Humility and Unity (2:19-30)

I. Translation as It Appears in the NET Bible

2:19 Now I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you quickly, so that I too may be encouraged by hearing news about you. **2:20** For there is no one here like him who will readily demonstrate his deep concern for you. **2:21** Others are busy with their own concerns, not the Lord's. **2:22** But you know his qualifications, that like a son working with his father, he served with me in advancing the gospel. **2:23** So I hope to send him as soon as I know more about my situation, **2:24** though I am confident in the Lord that I too will be coming soon. **2:25** But for now I have considered it necessary to send Epaphroditus to you. For he is my brother, coworker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to me in my need. **2:26** Indeed, he greatly missed all of you and was distressed because you heard that he had been ill. **2:27** In fact he became so ill that he nearly died. But God showed mercy to him—and not to him only, but also to me—so that I would not have grief on top of grief. **2:28** Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you can rejoice and I can be free from anxiety. **2:29** So welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor people like him, **2:30** since it was because of the work of Christ that he almost died. He risked his life so that he could make up for your inability to serve me.

II. Outline

- A. The Example of Timothy (2:19-24)
 - 1. The Reason for Sending Timothy (2:19)
 - 2. The Character of Timothy (2:20-22)
 - 3. Summary and Explanation for not Sending Timothy (2:23-24)
- B. The Example of Epaphroditus (2:25-30)
 - 1. Paul's Estimation of Epaphroditus (2:25)
 - 2. Paul's Reasons for Sending Epaphroditus (2:26-30)

III. Context

We have already noted in the previous lessons that Philippians 1:3-2:18 is taken up with exhortational material directed at the church to encourage humility and unity in the face of attacks from without and divisive behavior from within. We noted too that in 3:1-4:20, Paul gives his own life as an example of Christian maturity (3:1-4:1), appeals to them for unity (4:2-9) and thanks them for their gift (4:10-20). Since we know the context of the entire letter, the question immediately presents itself as to why the material of 2:19-30 should be placed where it is. It seems that such details should go at the end of the letter as a way of concluding it. This would seem to be more in keeping with the Paul's habits (e.g., Romans 1:14-16:27; 1 Cor 16:1-24; Eph 6:21-24; Col 4:7-18; 1 Thess 5:25-28; 2 Tim 4:19-22) as well as the contemporary Greek practice of letter writing. After all, it appears to be nothing more than Paul's "agenda and travel plans." Some scholars have used this observation as an argument for the composite nature of the Philippian letter. That is, they say that since this truly belongs at the end of the letter, Paul must have ended this letter at 2:30. Then, either he or someone else wrote another letter (chs. 3-4) which was later joined to Philippians 1:1-2:30 (see Lesson 1: Introduction, Background and Outline). But, as we shall see, there are good reasons for believing that the inclusion of the "travelogue" in Phil 2:19-30 is strategic and inextricably related to the themes of "humility and other centered-ness" being pursued up to this point in the letter.

There is also another question that surfaces in the discussion. Why is Timothy (2:19-24) mentioned before Epaphroditus (2:25-30)? Is this just the way Paul happened to do it, or is there a discernible reason? Chronologically, in terms of what's going to happen in the future, it is the reverse of what one would expect since Epaphroditus is going back to the Philippians before Paul sends Timothy.

These two questions surrounding both the placement of 2:19-30 after 2:12-18 and before 3:1-20, and the order of Timothy followed by Epaphroditus, can be answered relatively quickly. First, there is good reason for the placement of 2:13-19 here instead of at the end of the letter. Recall that from the outset of Philippians (1:1-2), Paul has urged, both by example and by explicit statement, that the church cultivate the virtue of humility with a view toward corporate unity. In particular, he wants these Christians to stand firm (1:27-30) and to seek the interests of others ahead of themselves (2:3-4). That this is such a strong theme running through the epistle is evidenced by the example of Christ in 2:6-11 who poured out his life unto death for the sake of others. And herein lies the reason for the mention of Timothy and Epaphroditus in 2:19-30. Both of them are living examples of people who have done just that. In fact, it is difficult to miss the similarity of language between 2:3-4 and 2:21: Paul urges the Philippians to look out for the interests of others (2:3-4) and then turns right around and gives them the example of Timothy, of whom it is said in 2:21, that he *looks out for the interests of others*. Epaphroditus too is one who sought the needs and interests of others ahead of himself. He traveled all the way from Philippi in order to bring a much needed gift to Paul. In fact, he almost died for the work of Christ as he risked his life to make up for the Philippians' inability to serve Paul (cf. 2:8). Thus both these men stand as living examples of the Christ-like attitude Paul has spent so much time urging on the Philippians.

Regarding the second question, the reason Timothy is mentioned ahead of Epaphroditus is because his visit concerns "what's happening to them." That is, Paul will send him *in order to know about their situation* and how things are going for them. Thus Paul is once again modeling interest in other people ahead of himself. We will discuss this more in our exposition below.¹

IV. Two Examples of Unity and Humility (2:19-30)

A. The Example of Timothy (2:19-24)

The apostle Paul appears to digress in 2:19-30 to give his "travel plans." But on close inspection much more is going on in the mention of Timothy and Epaphroditus. Timothy was an example of someone who truly sought the needs of others first. He was a living testimony, an "incarnation," if you will, of the principle in 2:4.

1. The Reason for Sending Timothy (2:19)

Paul says that he **hope[s]** (elpizo,,) to send Timothy soon. But his hope is not just a wishful thought, but something that he believes to be the will of God. Thus he says that he hopes this **in the Lord Jesus** (en kurio,, ie,,sou). The use of the phrase **in the Lord Jesus** is not akin to our modern day glib comment, "Lord willing." It means much more than that. Paul recognizes that Jesus, having poured out his life unto death, has subsequently been exalted to the place of universal Lord (cf. Acts 2:36). It means that Timothy is going to the Philippians in the authority of the exalted Lord to encourage the church to walk in the directives outlined in 1:27-2:18.

The comment **so that I too may be encouraged** indicates that not only will Timothy encourage the Philippians, but also Paul when he returns to the apostle in Rome. The verb **encouraged** (eupsucho,,) is used only here in the NT. In the culture it appears on Hellenistic gravestones and in letters of condolence. It carries the idea of "may it be well with your soul."² The **news about you** that will encourage the apostle is, of course, the report that the church responded to his letter. Paul will be greatly encouraged to find out when Timothy returns that the Philippians had welcomed him and followed the directives of the letter. The **news about you** also includes how they were doing personally and any further reports about the opposition the church was facing.

2. The Character of Timothy

The specific reason (cf. the **For**) Paul will send Timothy is now given for us. It is because of the kind of man he is. The expression **no one** (ouden) is emphatic in the Greek text and stresses the quality of Timothy in the eyes of Paul; there simply isn't anyone on the same level as this man. The words **like him** are really one word in Greek, literally "equal-souled." The term is rare and means to be in complete agreement with someone in the context of a personal relationship. But the question remains as to who Paul has in mind? With whom is Timothy "equaled-souled?" Some argue that the comparison is with the members of the Roman church. There is no one in the Roman church who compares with Timothy in Paul's mind. Others suggest that Paul means that Timothy is "equal souled" with him. This latter view is preferable.

¹ For further comment on these questions, see Fee, *Philippians*, 259-62.

² O'Brien, *Philippians*, 317-18.

What Paul means, then, is that Timothy has the same love and concern for the Philippians as he himself does. They are “equal-souled” in their concern for the welfare of the Philippians and the furtherance of the cause of Christ.³

That this interpretation is probable is made clear by the following phrase: **who will readily demonstrate his deep concern for you**. This phrase relates directly to the expression “equal-souled” and unpacks it in terms of its relationship to the Philippians. Timothy has a profound and genuine concern for this struggling church. The adverb **deep** (gne,,sio,,s) occurs only once in the NT and means “sincerely” or “genuinely.”⁴ The related adjective gne,,sios occurs four times. It can refer to children born in wedlock, i.e., they are legitimate and “genuine” children. It is also used to qualify teaching as being genuine or accurate, and love as pure and sincere (2 Cor 8:8).⁵ Interestingly enough, it is used by Paul in 1 Tim 1:2 and Titus 1:4 to refer to Timothy and Titus as “true” sons (of the apostle) in the faith (cf. Phil 4:3). Though the stress in Phil 2:20 is on the idea of sincerity, Hawthorne is probably correct to note that the root idea of “legitimate children” should not be overlooked. Thus Timothy is genuinely interested in the Philippians *because* he is a genuine son of Paul.⁶ Verse 22 seems to bear this out.

The verb **concern** (merimne,,sei) is in the future tense and translates the same Greek verb in 4:6. In 4:6, however, the emphasis is clearly on “worry” or “anxiety.” In fact the word is used in several places in the NT with the idea of anxiety. In Matt 6:28, 31 (Luke 12:29) Jesus warns the disciples not to worry about the basic necessities of life. They were to seek God (as are we) and He would provide all that was necessary for life. Further, the disciples were not to worry about what they were to say before the authorities, for the words would be given them by the Spirit (Matt 10:19-20).

The term can also have a less intense meaning. In 1 Cor 7:32, 34a it does not refer to *anxiety* as such, but to *concern* for the Lord’s work and *concern* for one’s own life. In Cor 12:25 the same term refers to a proper concern for the welfare of others so that there be no division in the body of Christ. It is this latter sense of “concern for the welfare of someone else” that is intended here in 2:20. The future tense of the verb refers specifically to the time when Timothy will be with them, though he presently shares concern for them.

Thus Timothy feels the same about the Philippians as Paul does, for he too has a genuine concern for their welfare. But not everyone available to Paul is so other’s-centered in their approach to life and ministry. As verse 21 comments, this is because [Greek has gar “for”] **others are busy with their own concerns, not the Lord’s**. But who are the **others** to which Paul refers? Actually the term he uses is “everyone” (oi pantes); “everyone” seeks his own interests. Who, then, is this “everyone” to whom Paul refers? Is Paul here, in one grand sweep, criticizing all Christians in the church where he’s located? He cannot count on even one of them because they are so engrossed in their own affairs? This seems unduly critical and probably unlikely. Others argue that there may have been people willing and available in the Roman church, but none of them possessed the qualifications necessary to deliver the letter and motivate the church to obedience and unity. This appears somewhat more likely than the first argument. While both these suggestions contain some merit, however, it may simply be that the apostle is making a generalized, somewhat hyperbolic, statement about the nature of the world in which he lived. There simply were not many people who genuinely sought the needs and interests of others ahead of themselves. It is a rare thing indeed to find a Christian who possesses the same attitude as his Lord (2:6-11). It is as rare for us today as it was for Paul then.

The concern **of the Lord** (lit. “the things of Jesus Christ”) in Phil 2:21 includes the church’s humility, unity, and Christ-like, “other-centered” character. Such attitudes are completely consistent with Jesus’ humility expressed in 2:6-11. The “things of God/Christ/Spirit,” is spoken of in other places in Scripture and includes such ideas as the necessity of Christ’s suffering and death (Mark 8:33) and the apparent foolishness of a crucified Messiah (1 Cor 2:11-14).

Paul continues his commendation of Timothy in v. 22. He says that the Philippians know Timothy’s **qualifications, that like a son working with his father, he served with me in advancing the gospel**. The Philippians were well aware of Timothy’s qualifications. The term **qualifications** (dokime,,n) means “proven character” as evidenced under testing. It can refer to the *process* of testing or to the *product* one gets after the testing is finished. The process is highlighted in 2 Cor 8:2 where Paul actually talks about “testing,” in reference to the persecution the Macedonian (e.g., Philippian) churches were undergoing. The product, namely, a proven character, is the result of enduring under suffering and opens up a deeper experience of the hope produced by the Spirit (Romans 5:4). The term often carries with it the idea of

³ See O’Brien, *Philippians*, 318-19.

⁴ BAGD, s.v. gnhsiw.

⁵ See BAGD, s.v. gnhsios.

⁶ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 111.

obedience, i.e., to apostolic authority (2 Cor 2:9; cf. also 13:3). Anyone who has ever worked with others in ministry knows that they would give their right hand (or perhaps both) for a person with proven character. People who own their own business or those who are managers know that nothing is more important than hiring and working with people who possess strength of character.

3. Summary and Explanation for not Sending Timothy

Paul says by way of summary concerning the sending of Timothy that he will do it **as soon as I know more about my situation....** Under the heading **Context** above we discussed the placement of 2:19-30 in the letter and why it is that Timothy precedes Epaphroditus in the discussion. What we left partially unanswered was the question of why Paul did not want to send Timothy now, but instead felt it necessary to send Epaphroditus (2:25). Was it that he no longer trusted Timothy, as some have suggested? This interpretation is completely ruled out by the positive affirmations of Timothy in v. 22. Further, the apostle is not saying that he will not send Timothy, but only that *now* is not the right time (2:23). How then can we put the pieces together to create a probable scenario of what stands behind 2:19-30?

The emphasis in 2:19-24 is on the importance of Timothy *to Paul* and that he cannot send him now. It is possible that the Philippians wanted a visit from Paul (after his release) or Timothy (now). So they sent Epaphroditus to relieve Timothy and free up Paul's assistant for a trip to come and see them. But Paul was not willing to send Timothy at the moment. The apostle, however, does not want the Philippians to think that Timothy is not interested in them. Therefore, he commends Timothy highly in 2:20-22 and explains that the latter has a genuine concern for their welfare. Timothy meant a lot to Paul and it seems that the apostle needed him present. Thus, he thought it better to send Epaphroditus back. Besides, Epaphroditus was longing to see the church because he knew that they had found out that he had been ill (2:26). The church, however, was not to think of Epaphroditus as second best. On the contrary, Paul considered him his "brother," "fellow-worker," "fellow-soldier," and "their apostle and servant" (2:25). Indeed, they were to honor men like him because of his work in the gospel *on their behalf* which almost cost him his life (2:27-30).⁷

Therefore, Paul wanted to keep Timothy and send Epaphroditus. But he was **confident in the Lord** that he too would come **soon**. By adding this comment the apostle is telling the Philippians that although his situation is difficult, and he needs Timothy, he nonetheless has aspirations of being released and coming to see them soon.

B. The Example of Epaphroditus (2:25-30)

1. Paul's Estimation of Epaphroditus (2:25)

Not only did Paul want to keep Timothy in Rome with him, he also wanted to send Epaphroditus to Philippi because the latter was longing (perhaps homesick) to see his home church. So the apostle sends this trusted servant to the Philippians with a note of deep appreciation for his service. He highly esteems his colleague with five different epithets: (1) my **brother** (adelphos); (2) my **coworker** (sunergon); (3) my **fellow-soldier** (sustratio„te„n); (4) your **messenger** (apostolos); (5) your **minister** (leitourgon).

The use of the term **brother** (adelphos) denotes Epaphroditus's relationship to Paul in the Lord. Paul regarded all Christians as brothers and sisters in the Lord because of the special fatherhood of God through Christ. The term "brother," in this context, also connotes the warm personal intimacy and friendship Paul and Epaphroditus enjoyed.

The term **coworker** (sunergon) occurs 13 times in the New Testament. Apart from one occurrence (3 John 8), it is only used by Paul. It refers to Epaphroditus's commitment to the furtherance of the gospel and the work that is associated with that mission. Epaphroditus and Paul were on the "same page," as it were, in their philosophy of ministry.

Paul also referred to his dear brother as a **fellow-soldier** (sustratio„te„n). He used the term on only one other occasion (i.e., Philemon 2) where he refers to Archippus as "our fellow-soldier." The term connotes the idea of one who has fought the battles and endured the hardship concomitant with the preaching of the gospel and ministering to people. In 2 Timothy 2:3 Paul tells the young pastor Timothy to endure hardship in the course of his ministry and to do so as a good *soldier* of Christ Jesus.⁸

⁷ For a more detailed reconstruction along similar lines see Silva, *Philippians*, 155-57.

⁸ The term "soldier" is the same as "fellow-soldier" except that the former is without the sun prefix. Both terms, however, stress the hardships and battles fought in the cause of the gospel.

The previous terms, namely, **brother**, **coworker**, and **fellow-soldier**, relate primarily to Paul's relationship with Epaphroditus. The next two terms, however, describe Epaphroditus's relationship with his home church in Philippi. First, he was their **messenger** (apostolon). He was the one they had chosen to send Paul in order to meet the apostle's needs. The term apostolos in 3:25 is the same term from which we get "apostle," but here it is not the technical meaning of the term found for example in 1 Cor 9:1-2 or Ephesians 3:5. The pronoun *your* belongs with both apostolon and "minister of my need" and gives a general sense to the term "apostle" in this context. Further, the term is used with too local a flavor to indicate "one who holds the office of apostle" in the same sense that Paul and the twelve did. They had authority over the entire church, Epaphroditus was simply *sent* to help Paul. On the other hand, however, some see no significance beyond "messenger" in the title. It is nonetheless interesting that in a context where Paul the *apostle* cannot be with the church and has to explain his reluctance to send Timothy, that he should refer to Epaphroditus as an apostle.

Epaphroditus was also a **minister** (leitourgos) of Paul's needs. The OT priestly background to this term is unmistakable. As Kent says:

In this capacity Epaphroditus had served as their "minister" (*leitourgon*), functioning officially on their behalf in performing a sacred service to Paul. The noun *leitourgos* appears five times in the NT (Rom 13:6; 15:16; Phil 2:25; Heb 1:1; 8:2) and in several of these a priestly sort of ministry is in view. It is used of Christ's priestly ministry in the heavenly tabernacle (Heb 8:2) and of Paul's sacred service in the evangelizing of Gentiles and presentation of them to God (Rom 15:16). Hence, the use in Philippians 2:25 has overtones of a priestly act, that of Epaphroditus's presenting to Paul the Philippians' offering, "an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God" (4:18).⁹

2. Paul's Reasons for Sending Epaphroditus (2:26-30)

Thus Paul wants to send Epaphroditus, his brother, fellow-worker, and fellow-soldier in the preaching of the gospel back to Philippi with an important message of thanks and gratefulness. First, Paul wanted to send Epaphroditus to the Philippians because the latter greatly missed all of them and was distressed. The expression **greatly missed** (epipotho,,n) is a strong term in the Greek language expressing deep desire. It is the same term Paul used in 1:8 to refer to his deep affection for the Philippians. He genuinely loved each and every one of them. He also uses it to express his deep desire to visit the Roman church (Rom 1:8; cf. 1 Thess 3:6) and in 2 Cor 5:2 he employs it to refer to the Christian's deep longing and groaning to experience the consummation of their salvation: Christians long to receive glorified bodies—bodies which are free from the oppression, fallen-ness, and limitations of sin. Paul also used it, as he recalled the tears of his dear friend Timothy, to express his deep longings to visit this young struggling pastor (2 Tim 1:4). James uses the term to express the evil cravings and longings of the fallen human spirit (4:5)¹⁰ and Peter uses it to refer to the strong desire of a baby for its mother's milk (1 Pet 2:2).

Thus Epaphroditus had been longing to see the Philippians and he was distressed. The term distressed (ade,,mono,,n) is a forceful term as well. It is used only two other times in the New Testament, both in reference to the internal, emotional, and spiritual agony suffered by Jesus in the face of his impending arrest, "trial," and death by crucifixion (Matt 26:37; Mark 14:33). This leads to a question, however. Why was Epaphroditus so agitated and distressed? The suggestion that he was very concerned about the Philippians and longed to personally help them in their defense of the gospel in Philippi (1:27:30) has some merit, but the text explicitly says that he longed for them and was distressed *because they had heard that he was ill*. Perhaps he had gotten sick during the voyage from Philippi to Rome. In any event, news somehow got back to Philippi that Epaphroditus had gotten ill. But this still leaves the question unanswered. It strains the language of the passage to suggest that the primary or sole reason for Epaphroditus's distress was because he knew that the church had found out that he had been ill. We must dig a bit deeper. It is possible that the Philippians thought Epaphroditus had not carried out his mission very well and that he had ultimately been only a burden to Paul. This would produce the kind of distress in Epaphroditus that Paul says he experienced. For this reason Paul felt it necessary to highly commend his brother and restore him to the church. In keeping with this, we must remember that Paul has already alluded to certain struggles the church had with its leadership (as 2:14-15 imply).

⁹ Kent, "Philippians," 134.

¹⁰ This passage is notoriously difficult to interpret, but whichever way we take it—e.g., as a reference to God's longing for the Holy Spirit or the desire for jealousy of the spirit of sinful man—the force of *epipoqei* denotes strong desire.

Paul tells them that indeed Epaphroditus was ill and almost **died**. But, says Paul, **God showed mercy to him—and not to him only, but also to me—so that I would not have grief on top of grief**. It was difficult enough to be in prison, awaiting the outcome of a trial to decide his fate, but to have to suffer the loss of a dear brother—after grieving with him through his illness—was yet another grief. Added to that is the probability that his death would have been as a direct result of traveling hundreds of miles in service to Paul. As it turned out, however, God had mercy on both Epaphroditus and Paul. Hendriksen comments:

God *pitied* both Epaphroditus and Paul! It is comforting to know that the heart of God is filled with *mercy*, that is, with *lovingkindness and active pity*. In Christ he is ‘touched with the feeling of our infirmities.’

‘Mindful of our human frailty
Is the God in whom we trust;
He whose years are everlasting,
He remembers we are dust.
Changeless is Jehovah’s mercy
Unto those who fear his name,
from eternity abiding
To eternity the same.’¹¹

Therefore, says Paul, **I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you can rejoice and I can be free from anxiety**. Paul was eager to send Epaphroditus to the church so that they might know the sincerity of his service to Paul (i.e., rejoice when they see him) and that Paul might be free from anxiety about discord and fractured relations in the church. We see here again the theme of unity and humility in Paul’s dealings with the church.

Paul commands the Philippians to **welcome** (*prosdechesthe*) Epaphroditus **in the Lord and honor** (lit., “have honor for”) men such as him. The term **honor** (*entimos*) is used five times in the New Testament (Luke 7:2; 14:8; Phil 2:29; 1 Pet 2:4, 6). In Luke 14:8 it refers to a person’s rank in society and their being distinguished from others on that basis. At a banquet, Jesus says, they receive the places of *honor*. In 1 Pet 2:4 the term is used of Christ himself as the chosen one of God and *precious* to him. Thus the Philippians were to highly esteem Epaphroditus in light of his service and they were to do so with **great** (literally “all”) **joy**. They were to hold nothing back in their estimation and affection for him. As their ambassador to Paul he had done an excellent job, almost to the point of death. They were to recognize him for this. Again, as Paul said, Epaphroditus **risked his life** so that he could make up for the church’s inability **to serve** the apostle. With this comment Paul is not complaining about the Philippians’ lack of service to him, but is simply pointing out that it was *Epaphroditus* who brought their gift and directly contributed to the furtherance of the gospel. Regarding the important term, **risked**, Hawthorne’s comments are worth quoting at length:

But Paul’s high commendation of Epaphroditus does not come simply because of what he did, great as this may have been. It comes also because of why he did it. His was a self-renouncing motivation. He chose against himself for someone else: “He came close to losing his life,” Paul writes the Philippians, “because he staked his life to give me the help you were not able to give me yourselves.” The vigor of Paul’s vocabulary here could not but totally overcome any remaining prejudice the Philippians may have had against Epaphroditus. The participle *paraboluesamenos* translated here “staked” is especially powerful and in all likelihood Paul coined it....It seems...to have been created from the verb *paraballesthai*, “to throw down a stake,” “to make a venture,” or from the noun *parabole*,s, “gambling,” “rash,” “reckless,” or from *parabolanoi* “persons who risk their lives to nurse those sick with the plague”.... Thus from this word alone it is clear that Epaphroditus was no coward, but a courageous person willing to take enormous risks, ready to play with very high stakes in order to come to the aid of a person in need.¹²

May God raise up an army of Epaphroditus’s in our world today! Indeed both of these men, Timothy and Epaphroditus, stand as models of humility, unity and suffering, and are an honor to Christ himself.

¹¹ Hendriksen, *Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*, 142.

¹² Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 120.

V. Principles for Application

1. In 2:25-27 Paul talks about the *mercy* that God had shown him in sparing the life of Epaphroditus. On the other hand, there are times when the Lord allows Christians to die because of sickness, accident, or at the hands of other people who reject the gospel. Consider for example the life of John the Baptist, cut short even though he was a faithful servant of the Lord. Whatever our circumstances, and some of them are very difficult, by the sheer grace of God we need to lift up our eyes and look for the demonstrations of the mercy of God in our lives. We can give thanks for his bountiful mercy and grace to each of us.
2. Paul says that Epaphroditus “risked his life” for the work of Christ and the gospel. Nothing should speak more clearly into our complacent, nonchalant attitudes in America. Here is a man who almost gave his life for another brother. Let us, then, think of ways to serve our brothers and sisters in Christ and be willing before God to do whatever it takes to meet their genuine needs.
3. We said in the commentary that there may have arisen negative attitudes in Philippi directed against Epaphroditus. If this were the case, then two principles suggest themselves for our application: First, we must be careful in forming our opinions about the Christian service of others until all the facts are known. We can cause unnecessary harm and stress to others when we evaluate incorrectly what they’re doing. Second, if we are so judged by others, that is, incorrectly, we need to go to them, as Epaphroditus desired, to straighten the matter out (cf. Matt 5:24).

Lesson 11: True Righteousness (Part I)— A Study in Contrasts: The Judaizers and Paul (3:1-8)

I. Translation as It Appears in the NET Bible

Philippians 3:1-11 will be treated in two separate studies. In the first study we will deal with 3:1-8 and in the second, 3:9-11. We have, however, included the translation and outline for the entire 3:1-11 in both studies to provide a quick reference for understanding the immediate context of each passage. The translation is as follows:

3:1 Finally, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord! To write this again is not a bother for me, and it is a safeguard for you. **3:2** Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of those who mutilate the flesh! **3:3** For we are the circumcision, the ones who worship by the Spirit of God, exult in Christ Jesus, and do not rely on human credentials **3:4** —though mine too are significant. If someone thinks he has good reasons to put confidence in human credentials, I have more: **3:5** I was circumcised on the eighth day, from the people of Israel and the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews. I lived according to the law as a Pharisee. **3:6** In my zeal for God I persecuted the church. According to the righteousness stipulated in the law I was blameless. **3:7** But whatever was gain to me, I consider these things as loss because of Christ. **3:8** More than that, I now regard all things as loss compared to the far greater value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things—indeed, I regard them as dung!—that I might gain Christ, **3:9** and be found in him, not because of having my own righteousness derived from the law, but because of having the righteousness that comes by way of Christ’s faithfulness—a righteousness from God that is based on Christ’s faithfulness. **3:10** My aim is to know him, to experience the power of his resurrection, to share in his sufferings, and to be like him in his death, **3:11** and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

II. Outline

- A. Introduction (3:1)
- B. Warning against False Righteousness: The Judaizers (3:2-3)
 - 1. The Warning Proper (3:2)
 - 2. The Rationale (3:3)
- C. The Example of True Righteousness: The Life of Paul (3:4-11)
 - 1. Paul’s Previous Life in Judaism (3:4-6)
 - 2. Paul’s Present and Future Life in Christ (3:7-11)
 - a. Counting Loss and Gaining Christ (3:7-8)
 - b. Paul’s Justification (3:9)
 - c. Paul’s Sanctification (3:10)
 - d. Paul’s Glorification (3:11)

III. Context

After a brief introduction (1:1-2) and a section devoted to Paul’s thanksgiving and prayer for the church (1:3-11), the apostle begins a rather lengthy section emphasizing humility and unity in the face of opposition from without and division from within (1:12-2:18). He even gives two examples of humble service to the Lord, namely, Timothy and Epaphroditus (2:19-30). Then, in 3:1-4:1, he embarks on a distinct yet related topic. Because certain Judaizers¹ had been in contact with

¹ These were often from the more legalistic segment of the church which taught that Gentiles needed to be circumcised and obey the law of Moses in order to be saved (cf. Acts 15:1ff). If this doctrine were permitted to develop it would destroy unity in the church between Jew and Gentile (Eph 2:11-22). The Gentiles, by virtue of the fact that they had no Jewish heritage to appeal to, would have *de facto* been viewed as second class citizens. This was something which

the church, the apostle focuses on true righteousness in contrast to false, law-based righteousness. In 3:1-16 he uses his own life as a model of what true righteousness is and how it is achieved. In 3:17-4:1 he applies this message to the Philippian church. In this lesson we will look at 3:1-8 where Paul really exposes the arrogant presumption of both the Judaizers and himself in his pre-Christian stance. In the end, he repudiates his previous attitude toward his background, knowing that such renouncing was necessary in order to know Christ and be found in him not having his own righteousness based on the Law (i.e., based ultimately on human merit and achievement), but one which comes through faith.

IV. True Righteousness (Part I)—The Judaizers and Paul (3:1-8)

A. Introduction (3:1)

Paul begins this new section of his letter with the words, **Finally, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord!** The term **finally** (to loipon) can indicate the end of a letter, as for example in 2 Cor 13:11. This has been cited by several commentators as further evidence that the letter to the Philippians is a composite document and that 3:1-4:1 was not part of the original letter. But loipon in 1 Thess 4:1 and to loipon in 2 Thess 3:1 indicate that the expression can simply signal a transition in the content. In any case, if the transition in Phil 3:1 is as abrupt as some argue, and that the only possible explanation is to assume some form of interpolation, then it is hard to see why any redactor would have left it in such an awkward state.²

The new subject Paul wants to transition to concerns the Judaizers and their contention for a law-based righteousness. But first he tells the Philippians to **rejoice in the Lord** (chairete en kurio,,). One of the surest ways to deal with legalism and a “works-oriented” Christianity, to prove its utter worthlessness, is to continue rejoicing in the Lord. The Philippians are not to take pride, or “rejoice” as it were, in their own accomplishments regarding Christianity, but they were to **rejoice in the Lord**. Paul has already told them to rejoice in 2:18 and will command them again in 4:4 (two times in 4:4!). The joy of the Lord is their strength!

Paul says that **to write this again is not a bother for [him], and it is a safeguard** for the Philippians. The term **bother** (okne,,ron) is also found in Matt 25:26 and Rom 12:11. It means to be “tired” or “lazy.” Paul is saying that warning the Philippians is not a tiresome chore for him, but something that he gladly does because, as he says, it is a **safeguard** (asphale,,s) for them. The term *asphale,,s* means “certain,” or “firm.”³ In 1 Clement 33:3 (2nd century AD) Clement refers to the creation as set upon the *firm* foundation of God’s will. In Ignatius’s letter to the Smyrnaeans (8:2; 2nd century) he uses the term in reference to doing everything in a *trustworthy* way, that is, in accord with the desires of the bishop and correct teaching. Thus the warning that Paul is about to give the Philippians is a “safeguard” in that it will show them what is right and prevent them from unknowingly slipping into any form of legalistic heresy.

The question arises, however, as to what Paul is referring to with the term **this** (ta auta; lit. “the same things”); it is not a bother for him to write **this**, but what does he mean by **this**? He has just commanded them to rejoice for the second time. Is he referring to that? Is he referring to some prior oral or written communication with the Philippians? Or, is he referring to what follows in the letter regarding the warning about the Judaizers? How specific can we be? The second option may well be true but we have no evidence to confirm that Paul had actually written anything previously intended specifically for the Philippians. Certainly, the third option plays a role in what Paul is talking about. But it may well be, although it is denied by several commentators, that the repeated command to rejoicing is that to which the apostle refers. As I said above, it is the joy of the Lord that protects a person from legalism (as well as the works of the flesh such as murmuring, divisive behavior, etc.). While it is an essential part of the package, even correct doctrine is not enough. It must be married to authentic experience. Thus Paul goes on in 3:4-14 to talk about the authentic experience of trusting in Christ Jesus.

Paul—insofar as it depended on him—would not countenance. It is possible that the particular Judaizers in view in Phil 3:2 may not have been saved, but actually Jewish teachers floating on the fringes of Christian communities.

² Cf. Silva, *Philippians*, 165-68.

³ Cf. BAGD, s.v., *asphale,,s*.

B. Warning Against False Righteousness: The Judaizers (3:2-3)

1. The Warning Proper (3:2)

Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of those who mutilate the flesh! Paul starts off a rather “charged warning section” with three quick commands all beginning with the term **beware!** In the Greek text **beware** (blepete) means not so much to “look carefully at,” but to “stay clear of.” Paul wants the Philippians to note the error of these Jewish false teachers and to avoid it for all their worth! He carefully assigns three epithets to these teachers, each one beginning with the letter k in Greek—a fact which creates assonance in the section and gives it an emotional charge. He deliberately refers to the Judaizers as **dogs, evil workers, and those who mutilate the flesh.**

The choice of the term **dogs** (kunas) is ironic since this was a term characteristically used by Jews in reference to Gentiles since the latter were ritually unclean (1 Enoch 89:42; see Matt 15:26; Rev 22:15). Thus Paul says that by their attempts to adhere to the law, they have so broken the import of the law that they have become ritually unclean, just like the Gentiles. And now they want to defile the church with their teaching as well!⁴ The dogs to which Paul refers here are not house pets, but large, ugly pariahs. They were scavengers that roamed the streets searching through the garbage⁵—an apt metaphor for the Judaizers.

But, in the calculated opinion of the apostle, the Judaizers were also **evil workers** (kakous ergatas). The term **workers** calls to mind the Judaizers’ insistence on their ability and faithfulness to perform the works of the Law and that their righteousness was consciously based on this fact (Rom 3:20). But, in the nature of the case, then, they have become **evil workers** because in reality they do not keep the Law. Further, they fail to realize that the presumption that one *can keep the law to gain merit with God* is itself inimical to the gospel; it is diametrically opposed (in the strongest way) to both fallen, human nature and the free grace of God. Thus they have become evil. In short, they stand opposed to the very purposes of God in the world, i.e., the saving of undeserving sinners through the preaching of the gospel about Jesus Christ. The Judaizers stand in contrast to people like Timothy and Epaphroditus (2:19-30), genuine workers for the Lord.

Paul ends his triad of castigations with a rich pun in reference to the Judaizers; they are those who **mutilate the flesh.** In Greek there is a play on words: the Judaizers are not the peritome,, (“circumcision”) as they thought they were, but indeed they are the katatome,, (“mutilation”). As Martin comments:

Those mutilators of the flesh refers to the practice of circumcision; but Paul will not give it its proper name *peritome,,*. Instead, by a pun, he mockingly calls it a mere cutting, *katatome,,*, i.e. mutilation of the body on par with pagan practices forbidden in Leviticus 21:5....The derision is applied to the Judaizers in Galatians 5:12, where apokoptein, “to cut off” is a reference to their concern with the physical act of circumcision, and ironically also means “to castrate.”⁶

Thus the apostle berates the Judaizers for their slavish adherence to the outward rite, all the while neglecting and denying the repeated warnings of the OT that the rite must also be accompanied with a circumcision of the heart done by the Spirit (Lev 26:41; Deut 10:16; 30:6; Jer 4:4; Ezek 44:7). Paul says the same thing in Romans 2:28-29.

2. The Reason (3:3)

Paul begins his next sentence in v. 3 with the term **For** (gar). It introduces the reason for the warning in v. 2. The Philippian Christians are to beware of the Judaizers and not be sucked in by their supposed authority; the church is the true people of God. In 3:3 Paul emphatically states four things about the church—four things which stand in stark contrast to the Judaizers on the one hand, and certify that the church is the true people of God, on the other.

In reference to himself and the Philippian church, Paul says **we are the circumcision, the ones who worship by the Spirit of God, exult in Christ Jesus, and do not rely on human credentials.** The use of the pronoun **we** (he,,meis) in the Greek text is emphatic and indicates that Paul believes the following four things are true about the church and definitely untrue about the Judaizers.

First, Paul says that the church is the **circumcision.** In Col 2:11-15 the apostle refers to circumcision in ways akin to regeneration and new birth. Thus the Christian is the real circumcision because he/she is permanently made part of the

⁴ Cf. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 125.

⁵ Hendriksen, *Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*, 150.

⁶ Martin, *Philippians*, 141.

redeemed covenant community by the circumcision done not with human hands, but by Christ himself. We have the true sign of being allied with the covenant community, namely, the Holy Spirit.

Second, the church is the real circumcision because its members **worship by the Spirit of God** not according to some external rite or ritual. We have the reality itself, not some rite that was intended to point to the reality until it arrived. The Judaizers were living in the past, not in the present manifestation of the grace of God through Christ and the Spirit. In 2 Cor 1:21-22 and Eph 1:13-14 Paul emphatically states that the Holy Spirit was given to us as a down payment guaranteeing our inheritance in the future.

Third, as Christians we **exult [boast/brag] in Christ Jesus** and definitely not in any works of the flesh or supposed obedience to the Law of Moses—or any other rules *per se*. We do not rely on our own abilities to please God. We know that Christ has paid our debt and that by the life-giving Spirit in us we can please God. Thus we are proud of the atoning work of Christ even though it testifies to our own bankruptcy. In the end, we are in the family of God *because of Christ and his work* (1 Cor 1:30-31), not because of any work or effort on our part.

Fourth, we **do not rely on human credentials**. In Greek this expression is literally “put no confidence in the flesh.” The term **flesh** ([sarx], i.e., **human credentials**) has a fairly broad semantic range in the New Testament.⁷ It can refer physically to the body, to the totality of human nature (John 1:14), and to our fallen human nature (Rom 7:5; 8:9). In Phil 3:3 the term refers to the best the religious man can produce apart from Christ. The point is that the very best that he can achieve still leaves him condemned before God. On the contrary, the Christian does not trust in his natural abilities to please God. Instead, he places all his confidence in Christ. By his continuing persistence in relying on his obedience to the Law, the Judaizer repudiates the gospel and winds up under the judgment of God (cf. Rom 5:10).

C. The Example of True Righteousness: The Life of Paul (3:4-11)

But, says Paul, if the Judaizers want to play the game of “credentials,” he can play it too—even better than they can. His “bragging” here is not altogether different from that which he felt compelled to do for the Corinthians (2 Cor 11:16; 21:11).⁸ He says that **if someone thinks he has good reasons to put confidence in human credentials**, he has **more**. The apostle then goes on to list his credentials in 3:4-6. But, in the end, such merit is really demerit and often hinders, if not precludes, a person from coming to know Christ. This is Paul’s point in 3:7-11. Let’s look at the apostle’s credentials first and then see how he viewed his “qualifications.”

1. Paul’s Previous Life in Judaism (3:4-6)

Paul lists seven facts about his life that more than amply qualify him for a place in the covenant people of God, at least according to the Judaizers’ standards. The first four he came by naturally, the latter three he earned by hard work. First, he **was circumcised on the eighth day**. Paul proudly proclaims that unlike proselytes to Judaism (which some of his detractors may have been) or the descendants of Ishmael, he was circumcised on the eighth day in strict accordance to the letter of the Law (Lev 12:3). The implication is that he grew up and was educated (until he left for Jerusalem) in an obedient Israelite family.

Second, he was from **the people of Israel** meaning that he had a natural right—if anyone did—to all the blessings and privileges promised to every Israelite. Hawthorne, following Martin and others, suggests that the name Israel was of “such continuing significance that apparently Hellenistic Jews used it prominently in their propaganda efforts.”⁹ Paul was not a convert to Israelite religion, but was born a Jew and was thus—in the thinking of his opponents—an automatic member of the covenant community.

Third, Paul was of **the tribe of Benjamin**. These words came off his pen with a note of pride as Benjamin held primacy of place among the tribes of Israel. Several facts contribute to the idea that the tribe of Benjamin was highly honored: (1) Benjamin was the only son born in the promised land; (2) Israel’s first king, Paul’s namesake, Saul, came from the tribe of Benjamin; (3) Jerusalem was within the borders allocated to Benjamin; (4) the tribe of Benjamin

⁷ See George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed., ed. Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 509-17.

⁸ Cf. Martin, *Philippians*, 145.

⁹ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 132.

remained loyal to the house of David after the break up of the kingdom in 931 BCE (1 Kgs 12:21); and (5) the tribe of Benjamin held the post of honor in the Israelite army.¹⁰

Fourth, Paul was also a **Hebrew of Hebrews** meaning that he was pure Jew. His father was a genuine Jew, and his father before him, etc. If there ever were a Jew who rightly inherited the promises of his forefathers it was the apostle Paul. Thus the statement a **Hebrew of Hebrews** summarizes what he meant by making reference to his circumcision on the eighth day, his lineage in Israel, and the fact that he was a Benjamite; the point is, Paul was most certainly, by even the strictest of standards, a Jew!

The next three aspects of Paul's life relate to what he had accomplished, not what he had inherited from his past *per se*. The first thing is the well-known fact that he **lived according to the law as a Pharisee**. Paul was the son of a Pharisee (Acts 23:6) and studied under the well known rabbi, Gamaliel (Acts 5:34; 22:3). The Pharisees were one of several Jewish sects which developed in the intertestamental period sometime around the middle of the second century BCE. It has been argued that their name means "separated ones," due largely to the fact that they had resisted the inroads of Hellenism in their synagogues and religion. At the time of Paul they were regarded as the strictest of the sects (cf. the Sadducees) and devoted themselves to the oral tradition developed around the Law in an attempt to prevent any violation of its standards. While the term **Pharisee** is often used in a derogatory fashion today, the Pharisees had more in common with Jesus theologically than any of the other contemporary religious sects and Paul is here using it as a badge of honor. Nonetheless, their focus on externals to the complete neglect of love and mercy earned them a scathing rebuke from Jesus himself (Matt 23). It is this external focus that Paul is here referring to when he says that according to the Law he was a Pharisee. He was proud of his commitment to the Law of God as evidenced in its outward demonstrations that all could see.

Second, Paul signaled his great **zeal** for God (note what he says about zeal without knowledge in Rom 10:2) by persecuting (dio„ko„n) the church, having people thrown into prison, and having given approval for their executions (Acts 8:1). His zeal in persecuting the church had become well known. Ananias was afraid to go and see Paul because he knew of Paul's reputation (Acts 9:13). Many of the people throughout Damascus had heard of Paul's brutality and were astonished when they learned that he had come to faith (Acts 9:21). In Galatians 1:13 Paul's own testimony is that he *intensely* persecuted the **church**. It is also interesting to note in Gal 1:13 that the term **church** (ekkle„sia) refers to the entire church of God, not just a local congregation. Paul persecuted the body of Christ (Acts 9:4-5).¹¹

The third and final comment Paul makes about his former life is that he was, at least **according to the righteousness** (dikaiousune„n) **stipulated in the law, blameless** (amemptos). What Paul means here is that by the standard of external Law-keeping he was without fault. He had invested enormous energy in keeping the details of the Law and was, in the eyes of his Jewish colleagues, without fault. It was not until he had his Damascus road experience that he came to realize the bankruptcy of such blind religious dedication. Never in his wildest dreams did he regard his efforts or works as dung—not until, that is, he met Christ. Then he understood the truth of it all! How many of us can say the same thing!

2. Paul's Present Life in Christ (3:7-8)

Paul now turns in 3:7-8 to give his appraisal of both the seven items he outlined in 3:5-6 as well as every other facet of his life which he might have previously thought to be gain, spiritually speaking. The *contrast* between his pre-conversion thinking and his post-conversion thinking is well highlighted by the strong adversative **but** (alla). He says in 3:7 that **whatever was gain to me, I consider these things as loss because of Christ**. The term **whatever** (hatina) takes in Paul background and achievements in 3:5-6 but also includes anything he might ever have viewed as gain to his spiritual account.

It needs to be pointed out that Paul does not condemn the things in his past on the basis of the things *in themselves*. There is nothing wrong with being born a Jew. Indeed it was a blessing to be circumcised on the eighth day and reared in a devout Jewish home. It was a tremendous privilege to belong *by birth* to the nation of promise and descend from one of the most famous tribes within it. The fact of his zeal, although misdirected, is admirable in itself and so is the upright life he strove to live. He was moral, religious, and deeply committed to his people and their heritage. In many respects he was a model citizen. The problem is not with the things in themselves *per se*, but rather with Paul's approach to them and what he hoped they'd accomplish before God. He performed them with the arrogant (yet under the guise of humility) conviction

¹⁰ See Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 132-33; Kent, "Philippians," 139-40; Silva, *Philippians*, 174-75. But cf. Hendriksen, *Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*, 156-58, who offers some balancing comments regarding the mention of Benjamin here.

¹¹ Cf. Martin, *Philippians*, 147.

that because of them God found him pleasing. In such a posture he was virtually an enemy of God and the gospel. They were **gain to me** (moi kerde,,), the apostle says, in that he thought they would achieve standing and merit with God. This was his fundamental (mis)understanding of the OT Law and his complete lack of appreciation for the Christian gospel.

But once he came to know **Christ** (i.e., because of Christ) personally, on the Damascus road, and the 25 years or more that had elapsed between then and the writing of Philippians, the apostle had come to a radically different point of view. This is not to say that Paul underwent a gradual change of heart over the years. On the contrary, it was instantaneous and permanent on that day when he was converted to Christ; it had only deepened over the years. The new point of view initiated at his conversion included the repudiation of the idea that his background somehow gave him special standing with God. That mentality was completely rejected. Any approach to life in the future with that kind of mentality was to be completely rejected. Such a point of view was disastrous to the cross of Christ and thus regarded by the apostle as pure and complete **loss** (ze,,mian). Paul's "considered judgment" (he,,ge,,mai) was that his perception of those things had indeed turned them into one huge loss for him. They were a stumbling block to the reception of the grace of God in his life. We note that Paul did not spurn or repudiate his background as such, since much of his Pharisaical exegetical training shows up in his letters, he exploited his background as Jew in his missionary efforts, and he continued to be a man of great zeal. Again, it was his *perception of his background and its place before God* that had changed.

More than that, Paul says, **I [now] regard all things (panta) as loss...** What was definitely implied in the previous verse (3:7) is now made clear; he regards *everything* as loss. Paul maintains this radical perception, not just of his own past, but presently of **all things**. And this is the attitude we must have as Christians as well. Whatever good we may have done or whatever prowess we possess, it must all be brought under the Lordship of Christ. It is all from his grace and not to be considered as having any salvific merit before God. Nothing could be more inimical to the cross than to attempt to trust wholly in Jesus and yet secretly cling to some other *thing* for comfort, help, and ultimate salvation.

But notice that Paul says he regards all things as loss **compared to the far greater value** (dia to huperechon) **of knowing** (te,,s gno,,seo,,s) **Christ Jesus my Lord** (tou kuriou mou), **for whom I have suffered the loss of all things—indeed, I regard them as dung!—that I might gain Christ...** Hawthorne rejects the idea that there is a comparison involved with the construction dia plus the accusative to huperechon and that it simply indicates cause and should be translated as such; i.e., *because of* the far greater value of the knowledge of Christ Jesus.¹² This may be true to a certain extent but it is difficult to get around the comparison implied in the articular participle to huperechon ("surpassing greatness"). The point is that for Paul knowing Christ was of more value *than* anything else in his heritage and more precious to him than anything else in his present experience. It was more valuable because it is saving, personal, and transforming. It is the personal knowing of Christ that is so exciting to Paul and ought to be to the Philippians and to us today as well. None of this can be said of following a religion with all its do's and don'ts.

The grammar of 3:8 is somewhat tricky and we ought to take a moment and discuss it. The term **knowing** (te,,s gno,,seo,,s) in the Greek text is actually a noun in the genitive case. It modifies the participle **far greater value** (to huperechon) in an appositional manner. That is, it tells what the far greater value is; it is knowledge of Christ. But **knowing** is a verbal noun, that is, it has verbal qualities and therefore we translated it as a verb, i.e., **knowing**. The following genitive noun **Christ Jesus** is objective and relates the object of that knowing. It is knowing Christ Jesus personally that is worth more than anything else to Paul. And he knows Christ as **my Lord**. The term **my** once again suggests the intimacy that Paul shared with his risen Lord and the One who had captivated his allegiance. This is why we stress the personal relationship aspect of the **knowing** to which Paul refers.

But what is the background to the term gno,,sis? Paul may be exploiting the term commonly used by initiates within the Greco-Roman mystery religions to describe the secret "insight" or "knowledge" they received from the god(s) during their religious ceremonies. In Paul's use here, then, it has a somewhat polemical value in terms of proclaiming that the true knowledge of the so-called gods is knowledge of Christ Jesus, the One and Only true God (cf.2:6). But this may not be Paul's primary intent in the choice of the word since the false teachers he is opposing in 3:2-3 were primarily Jewish and not pagan. Therefore, it may better to see the background of the term coming out of the OT and referring to the true knowledge of God as expressed in personal relationship, love, and obedience. Paul, in contrast to the Judaizers, truly knew and loved God. They, on the other hand, only loved their tradition. His was a deeply experiential "knowing"; theirs was merely intellectual and even that was distorted. Regarding the term gno,,sis Martin says:

¹² Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 137. But see Silva, *Philippians*, 182.

The verse uses a noun “knowledge,” *gnosis*, which Paul received as God’s gift in the illumination of his conversion experience; the noun corresponds to the Hebrew *dʿaʿa* from the verb *yʿdʿa*, *to know*. For example, it is used of God’s knowledge of his people in election and grace (in Am. 3:2, of the nation; in Ex. 33:12, 17 and Je. 1:5; of an individual; cf. 2 Tim 2:9) and their knowledge of him in love and obedience (see Je. 31:34; Ho. 6:3; 8:2). The Pauline expression “to know Christ” is intimate (my Lord), and glows with the warmth of a direct relationship; it may therefore be taken as equivalent to “fellowship with Christ” to which Paul was introduced on the day of his conversion (cf. 2 Cor 4:6).¹³

There is a discernible progression in Paul’s narration. He moves from considering (1) whatever was gain to him as loss, to (2) regarding all things as loss, to (3) actually suffering the loss of all things and (4) in the end he regards them all (present tense) as *dung*!

So then, Paul says that not only does he regard all things as loss (*ze,mia*), but that he has **suffered the loss** (*eze,mio,the,n*) of all things. The aorist past tense (passive) of **suffered the loss** may well look back to the time of his conversion, but more likely it refers to some point after becoming a Christian when the Jewish authorities regarded his accomplishments and standing as null and void. He no longer had any officially recognized position in his religion. This was of course due to his commitment to and preaching of Jesus as the messiah. But in the end Paul considers his heritage, achievements, and accomplishments as nothing but **dung** (*skubala*). That is, they were of no value and *even a detriment* to knowing and trusting in Christ. The meaning of the term **dung** is difficult to express with certainty. Many take it back to the idea of “that which is thrown to the dogs.” Thus *skubala* may be a veiled reference to the Judaizers as dogs (cf. *kunas* in 3:2).¹⁴ In any case it was used to refer to (1) excrement; (2) refuse; and (3) even a half-eaten corpse. In the final analysis, then, it was a revolting term and provided a sober crescendo to how Paul came to understand his previous thinking about *his* Judaism; *his previous attitude* toward *his* background and accomplishments was damning.¹⁵

Now the reason Paul regarded his past and present accomplishments, etc. as **loss** and **dung** was in order **that he might gain Christ**. It was more valuable for Paul to lose his life and then gain it, than to try—as so many people do today—to gain his life in this world, only to lose it in the next (cf. Matt 16:26). What he means by **gain Christ** is according to what he has just been saying and will say in 3:9-11. “Gaining Christ,” then, refers to partaking in His free offer of righteousness, entering into a deep and satisfying relationship with Him, and thus securing an eternal home with Him. In all ways, Paul had gained Christ.

V. Principles for Application

1. We must take seriously Paul’s command to rejoice in the Lord (3:1). After confessing all known sin, we ought to rejoice in God’s grace and mercy. Paul is commanding us here to exhibit a certain emotion of joy in the Lord. Sometimes we are so hampered by feelings of inadequacy and attitudes of selfishness that we can’t look long enough at the Lord to rejoice in who *He* is. If there is any emotion that will keep you from bitterness and back-biting, it is the experience of rejoicing in Christ. May your life be swallowed up by your joy for the Lord—perhaps it will be contagious!
2. Be careful and watch out for those who teach that salvation *and sanctification* are by works alone—any human works. Nothing will rob you of your relationship with Christ quicker than reducing Christianity to a mere ethic. Now, to be sure, scripture commands us to live a certain way in order to please God, but it is *because we are in vital union and communion with Christ by our living faith* (John 15:1-11). If you are not close to him, you are undoubtedly a very religious person who *feels/demands* that others need to do more and that more must be done to please God. If you are close to him, and know him deeply, you are *grieved* over the sin of Christians and that more is not done to honor Christ. There is quite a difference! Be careful of trusting in anything other than Christ. You are saved and grow as a Christian as you trust in him. You are not saved because you grew up in a Christian home, went to church faithfully, or can recite the apostle’s creed. Never confuse meaningful relationship with Christ with mere religion about Christ.
3. We are saved by grace through faith (Eph 2:8-9). But faith that genuinely taps into the grace of God will always express itself in works that have their source in Christ as well as their nature and goal in Christ and His law (cf.

¹³ Martin, *Philippians*, 149.

¹⁴ Cf. Silva, *Philippians*,

¹⁵ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 139;

Gal 6:1-2). The best way to express saving faith and experience the transformation of the Spirit of Grace is by obeying Christ's commands. Let us not forget that what Paul is reacting to in Philippi is not the principle of obedience to God, but rather a mindset and belief that thinks that the way to secure one's salvation and standing with God is by relying on one's own abilities to do law-works sufficient to please God. This belief system, though common in most religions, is at odds with God's estimation of our sinful flesh—in which no good thing lives—and completely contrary to the saving purposes of Christ's death on the cross.

Lesson 12: True Righteousness (Part II)— A Study in Contrasts: The Judaizers and Paul (3:9-11)

I. Translation as It Appears in the NET Bible

Philippians 3:1-11 has been treated in two separate studies due to the length of the passage. In the first study we dealt with 3:1-8 and in the second we will be looking at 3:9-11. We have, however, included the translation and outline for the entire 3:1-11 in both studies to provide a quick reference for understanding the immediate context of each passage. The translation is as follows:

3:1 Finally, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord! To write this again is not a bother for me, and it is a safeguard for you. **3:2** Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of those who mutilate the flesh! **3:3** For we are the circumcision, the ones who worship by the Spirit of God, exult in Christ Jesus, and do not rely on human credentials **3:4** —though mine too are significant. If someone thinks he has good reasons to put confidence in human credentials, I have more: **3:5** I was circumcised on the eighth day, from the people of Israel and the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews. I lived according to the law as a Pharisee. **3:6** In my zeal for God I persecuted the church. According to the righteousness stipulated in the law I was blameless. **3:7** But whatever was gain to me, I consider these things as loss because of Christ. **3:8** More than that, I now regard all things as loss compared to the far greater value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things—indeed, I regard them as dung!—that I might gain Christ, **3:9** and be found in him, not because of having my own righteousness derived from the law, but because of having the righteousness that comes by way of Christ's faithfulness—a righteousness from God that is based on Christ's faithfulness. **3:10** My aim is to know him, to experience the power of his resurrection, to share in his sufferings, and to be like him in his death, **3:11** and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

II. Outline

- A. Introduction (3:1)
- B. Warning against False Righteousness: The Judaizers (3:2-3)
 - 1. The Warning Proper (3:2)
 - 2. The Rationale (3:3)
- C. The Example of True Righteousness: The Life of Paul (3:4-11)
 - 1. Paul's Previous Life in Judaism (3:4-6)
 - 2. Paul's Present and Future Life in Christ (3:7-11)
 - a. Counting Loss and Gaining Christ (3:7-8)
 - b. Paul's Justification (3:9)
 - c. Paul's Sanctification (3:10)
 - d. Paul's Glorification (3:11)

III. Context

After a brief introduction (1:1-2) and a section devoted to Paul's thanksgiving and prayer for the church (1:3-11), the apostle begins a rather lengthy section emphasizing humility and unity in the face of opposition from without and division from within (1:12-2:18). He even gives two examples of humble service to the Lord, namely, Timothy and Epaphroditus (2:19-30). Then, in 3:1-4:1 he embarks on a distinct yet related topic. Because certain Judaizers¹ had been in contact with

¹ These were often from the more legalistic segment of the church which taught that Gentiles needed to be circumcised and obey the law of Moses in order to be saved (cf. Acts 15:1ff). If this doctrine were allowed to develop it would have destroyed unity in the church between Jew and Gentile (Eph 2:11-22). The Gentiles, by virtue of the fact that they had no Jewish heritage to appeal to, would have *de facto* been viewed as second class. This was something which

the church, the apostle focuses on true righteousness in contrast to the false law-oriented righteousness. In 3:1-16 he uses his own life as a model of what true righteousness is and how it is achieved. In 3:17-4:1 he applies this message to the church. In this lesson we will look at 3:9-11 where Paul reveals his deepest desire to know Christ and enjoy the power of the resurrection in his current experience. In fact he begins with justification in v. 9, then moves to sanctification in v. 10 and concludes with glorification in v. 11. His desires stand in marked contrast to the selfish, carnal lives of the Judaizers whose confidence in themselves reeked with smug arrogance and incited the judgment of God.

IV. True Righteousness (Part II)— A Study in Contrasts: The Judaizers and Paul (3:9-11)

1. Paul's Present Life in Christ (3:7-11 beginning with v. 9)

a. Paul's Justification (3:9)

Paul ends 3:8 with the subordinate clause **that I may gain Christ**. The word **and** (kai) beginning 3:9 is epexegetic meaning that what follows is a further explanation of what it means to “gain Christ.” Both the verbs **gain** and **be found** are in the aorist tense and indicate that Paul is thinking here of a definitive future time when he will stand before God's tribunal trusting solely in the merits of Christ's righteousness applied to him through faith. He wants to **be found in him** (Jeuresqw en autw), that is, in the sphere of the blessings and righteousness of Christ. God forbid that he, or we, should be “found” in any other way.

Thus, Paul says, “I want this...**not because of having my own righteousness** (emhn dikaiosunhn) **derived from the law** (ek nomou), **but** (alla) **because of having the righteousness that comes by way of Christ's faithfulness** (thn dia pistews cristou)—**a righteousness** (thn dikaiosunhn) **from God** (ek qeou) **that is based on Christ's faithfulness** (epi th pistei). Paul in no way wants to appear before the Judge of all mankind with only his “own” righteousness to offer (cf. Isa 33:22). This would be a disaster. The term **righteousness** here refers to God's legal declaration (i.e., forensic) of righteousness imputed to the believer at the time of his/her salvation. It is based solely on the person and atoning death of Christ (Rom 3:21-31; 2 Cor 5:21) and establishes a new relationship with a holy God (Rom 5:1ff). It is not acquired by attempting meritorious works of the Law, but rather thn dia pistews cristou. This phrase in Greek can be read in one two different ways: (1) “the faithfulness of Christ.” This is how we have translated it, or (2) “through faith in Christ” (so most modern translations). There are good grammatical arguments on both sides of the issue. My preference is for the latter of the two. The contrast in the passage is not between Paul and Christ *per se*, but between two different “ways” to be justified. Thus the contrast is between faith and works as competing ideas. Paul says that he has abandoned *works* as a way to secure favor with God and has turned instead to *faith* in Christ as the only means by which one may be justified before God.

Thus the focus in v. 9 is primarily on justification/vindication and the future judgment of God. The direction Paul begins to move in v. 10 concerns sanctification and his present experience until the day when he stands before God.

b. Paul's Sanctification (3:10)

Knowing that through faith in Christ Paul has entered into a *personal* relationship with the living Lord, the apostle has made it his aim **to know him** (tou gnwnai auton), **to experience the power** (thn dunamin) **of his resurrection** (ths anastasews), **to share in his sufferings** (thn koinwnian twn paqhmatwn autou), **and to be like him** (summorfizomenos) **in his death** (tw qanatw)....

The phrase **to know him** (tou gnwnai auton) picks up the thought of verses 8 and 9: Paul *regards* (present tense) all things as loss compared to the surpassing greatness of the knowledge of Christ Jesus [his] Lord for whose sake he has lost all things and considers (present tense) them dung. He does so that he might gain Christ...and that he might know him. One cannot cling to one's pedigree, achievements, or status, on the one hand, and know Jesus intimately, on the other. The term **to know** is used by the apostle to refer to knowing facts, or giving mental assent to certain facts (Rom 1:21; 1Cor 1:21). But in this context the “knowing” to which he refers is much more intimate and personal. This is true because the object of the knowing is a person, namely, Christ. Also, the language of his resurrection, his sufferings, and transformation, is all personal to Paul. This is not some abstract way of knowing nor the factual academia of the law (the kind of

Paul—insofar as it depended on him—would not allow to happen. The particular Judaizers in view in Phil 3:2 may not have been saved, but actually Jewish teachers on the floating on the fringes of Christian communities.

“knowing” the Judaizers engaged in), but living in union with Jesus himself (John 15:1-11). Paul may have lost all things, but he has gained the “one thing” that really matters. “He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose.”²

The next phrase, namely, **to experience the power** (thn dunamin) **of his resurrection** (ths anastasews) is a further description of what it means to know Christ personally. Paul wants to know Christ so intimately that he experiences firsthand the life-giving, transforming power of the resurrected Lord. He wants to overcome sin, not by carnal adherence to the Law, but by the indwelling Christ who gives him resurrection power. What Paul really wants is LIFE and God is the only one who can give that (Rom 6:1-11; 8:11). Obviously this power is mediated through the indwelling Holy Spirit in Pauline theology. For similar thoughts on the efficacy of the new covenant and the role of the Holy Spirit in the believer’s present deliverance from sin see also 2 Cor 3:7-18.

But to know Christ intimately is not just to share in his resurrection life, but also **to share in his sufferings** (thn koinwnian tw n paqhmatwn autou). These are not two completely unrelated ideas. Sharing in Christ’s sufferings is the lot of every Christian as they live in a fallen world. This struggle includes every force from within and without that would hinder our intimacy with Christ and the progress of the gospel. Paul is not referring here to our participation in Christ’s sufferings on the cross as if somehow our sufferings could contribute to Christ’s atoning work. Such an idea is foreign to the apostle who pronounced the whole world unworthy sinners and taught that salvation, including the faith to believe, was by grace (Rom 3:10-20; Eph 2:8-9). What he means is that we share in Christ’s sufferings since he too lived and walked in a fallen world. The relationship between experiencing resurrection power and suffering is that the former becomes most evident in the context of the latter. His power through us is seen most strikingly in the midst of our struggles (2 Cor 4:7-12).

The final phrase in verse 9, namely, **and to be like him** (summorfizomenos) **in his death** (tw qanatw) is literally, “being conformed to his death.” It clarifies the ultimate inward nature of our struggle as people saved in the present, yet awaiting the full realization of our salvation in the future. Specifically, the basis upon which we can be conformed to his death is the fact that we all as Christians died with Christ on the cross. When he died on the cross we died with him and so were set free from sin. His death was applied to us when we first trusted in Christ (Rom 6:1-11; Gal 2:20). We died with him on the cross so that he might live in us. His death was a death to sin and, therefore, to be conformed to his death means to die to sin in this life so that resurrection to eternal life is our lot in the next. Romans 8:17 puts it this way:

If children, then heirs; heirs of God and fellow-heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with him in order that we may be glorified with him (my translation).

c. Paul’s Glorification (3:11)

Though we have titled this section, “Paul’s Present Life in Christ,” that does not mean that there is nothing of the future in these verses. Indeed, in v. 11 Paul seems to be thinking of the eschaton and future judgment. Paul says **and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead**. Paul is not intimating here that he is not sure how he will be resurrected, whether it will be after martyrdom or natural death, after the rapture, etc. These suggestions, the former of the two having more merit, are quite unlikely. Nor is the passage strictly a reference to his humility, though after the reflection on his piety in 3:8-10, one might think this to be the case. And, even if it is a statement through which Paul is attempting to communicate his profound humility, it is still difficult to account for the note of uncertainty.

It is true that elsewhere the apostle Paul is certain of his future with the Lord (Rom 8:30-31; 2 Tim 1:12). But the issue in Phil 3:2-11 is trusting in one’s own nature, background, or prowess to please God. The issue concerns *putting confidence in the flesh*. Therefore, knowing the sinful flesh as he does, the apostle still has a measure of healthy self-doubt about his own *complete* trust in Christ. He says that he really wants to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, but he knows that in his flesh he is not able to maintain such pursuits. Thus he needs to continue to trust in Christ and *that* is the “somehow” of attaining to the resurrection from the dead—continued trust in the context of being a sinner.³

² I believe this statement was originally made by Jim Elliot, one of the five Ecuadorian martyrs. I have yet to track down the precise source.

³ Cf. Silva, *Philippians*, 191-93.

The note of uncertainty in the passage also prepares the reader for 3:12-14. Lest someone should think—and it appears that there was a teaching/doctrine of perfectionism floating around in Philippi—that Paul had spiritually “arrived,” he lets them know in v. 11, and then explicitly in vv. 12-14, that this is certainly not the case. He does not walk around as the Judaizers who trust in legal obedience, or other Christians who assume that since you’ve trusted in Christ you’ve been perfected. Rather, Paul walks around knowing that there is much more “ground” to be taken in his personal relationship with the Lord and that he hasn’t arrived yet. He lives within the eschatological tension of the “now/not-yet.” He knows that he is included in the true circumcision, worships by the Spirit of God, and glories in Christ Jesus, but he also knows that he is still a sinner. Thus he holds these two realities in tension: they find their ideal expression in the pursuit of Christ, to know him, the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings.

V. Principles for Application

1. We must not spurn good solid reminders from godly teachers about our need to grow in Christ and not rest on our laurels. This truth is especially difficult for those who have been Christians a long time, but who have evidenced little trust in Christ. Let us listen well to what Paul is saying in 3:1-11 and give careful thought to our ways (Haggai 1:7; 2:15).
2. Do we really regard all things as loss compared to the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord? Remember that the verb “regard” means to make a conscious, sober judgment about “all things” in our life in terms of whether our attitude toward these things is a hindrance or help in our relationship with Christ. Remember too that if the “thing” is not intrinsically immoral, then it is not the thing-in-itself which is the problem. It is our “thoughts and feelings” toward the “thing” that cause the problem.
3. Ask God, out of his amazing grace and mercy, to give you a passion to know him more intimately. You cannot do this on your own. But, by yielding your life to him and humbly asking that he create a new heart within you, he will do it. He is the one who can make resurrection power available to you and the one who will be there during the times when you are acutely aware of sharing in Christ’s sufferings. He is the one who guarantees your resurrection from the dead.

Lesson 13:
The Nature of Paul’s Pursuit of Christ:
Living in the “Now/Not Yet”
(3:12-16)

I. Translation as It Appears in the NET Bible

3:12 Not that I have already attained this—that is, I have not already been perfected—but I strive to lay hold of that for which I also was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. **3:13** Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself to have attained this. Instead I am single-minded: forgetting the things behind and reaching out for the things ahead. **3:14** With this goal in mind I strive toward the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. **3:15** Therefore, let those of us who are “perfect” embrace this point of view. If on some point you think otherwise, God will reveal this also to you. **3:16** Nevertheless, let us live up to the standard that we have already attained.

II. Context

The relationship of 3:12-4:1 to its immediate context is difficult. It seems that 3:12-16 (and also 3:17-41) is related to 3:2-11 by way of balancing some of his zealous comments about knowing Christ and thus trying to prevent any attitudes of perfectionism from developing within the church—attitudes which would prove disastrous for love and unity. This does not necessarily mean, as many commentators have argued, that the church was facing a specific false teaching along the lines of perfectionism—perfectionism related perhaps to the Judaizers and their emphasis on the Law, or to the Gnostics, or to other Christians. This may be the case, but the use of the term **perfect** (*teleios*), a term used by certain Jewish and Gnostic groups, is scarcely enough information to create certainty on this issue.

III. The Nature of Paul’s Pursuit of Christ:
Living in the “Now/Not Yet”
(3:12-16)

Lest the Philippians think that the apostle had totally arrived, he begins in 13:13-15 to bring some balance—by way of creating a healthy tension—to his thoughts in 3:2-11. In 3:12ff the apostle says that he has **not already** (ouc Joti hdh elabon) **attained this**. The word **this** is not in the Greek text and has therefore been supplied. But to what does it refer? What is it that Paul considers himself not yet to have attained? Some argue that he is referring to not having obtained the prize he speaks of in 3:14. Others claim that Paul is talking about the resurrection in 3:11. Still other scholars think that what he is referring to is the whole import of vv. 8-11, or the righteousness he mentions in v. 9. Since each of these suggestions has some merit, it may be that what Paul is talking about is “gaining Christ” completely and knowing him perfectly.¹ Thus, it seems best to take it as a reference to knowing Christ to such a degree that Paul fully participates in his resurrection power and shares in his sufferings—attaining as it were to resurrection life—full and unhindered. The apostle says that he has not yet attained this kind of intimacy, **that is**, he had **not already been perfected** (h hdh teteleiwmai).

The reference to the **already** stresses the “not-yet” aspects of salvation in the present age and uncovers one of the fundamental substructures of Paul’s thought about life in Christ in the age of the Spirit before the consummation of the kingdom. He views people in Christ as new creations (2 Cor 5:17), possessing the Spirit (Rom 8:9), partakers of the new covenant (1 Cor 11:25), sharing in the promises (Eph 2:12-13) and being delivered from this present evil age (Gal 1:4). However, he knows that there is still more to come in the future at the consummation of all things when we are glorified (Rom 8:30) and our bodies are transformed into the likeness of his glorious body (Phil 3:20). Thus a certain measure of OT promise has been fulfilled **already** (the “now”) and the rest will come later (the “not-yet”). In order to understand why Paul qualifies 3:8-11 with the **not that**...of 3:12-14, some have speculated that there existed a group from within the church (or from without) which advanced an over-realized eschatology and considered themselves as having “arrived” (perhaps some form of the Judaism discussed in 3:2-3). There is no necessary need to suggest as much, though such a group may have been influencing the church. An adequate reading of 3:12-14, however, is achieved in light of 3:8-11,

¹ Cf. O’Brien, *Philippians*, 422-23.

without the need to postulate some theoretical group. Paul's point is that there is a "now" and a "not-yet" when it comes to our present experience of salvation in this life.

Nonetheless, Paul says, **I strive to lay hold** (diwkw de ei kai katalabw) **of that for which** (ef Jw) **I also was laid hold of** (katelhmfqhn) **by Christ Jesus** (Jupo Cristou Ihsou). Even though Paul considered it a monumental goal, that is, to know Christ, he did not quit, but pressed on (i.e., to strive) as it were. The verb **strive** (diwkw) is used 24 times in the New Testament. It is used thirteen times in Matthew-Acts, always with the sense of to persecute or hunt down, as, for example, in the case of Israel who always persecuted the prophets sent to her (Matt 23:34; Acts 7:52). Paul uses the term ten times (Romans 9:30; 12:13, 14; 14:19; 1 Cor. 4:12; 14:1; 2 Cor 4:9; Gal 6:12; 1 Thess 5:15; 2 Tim 3:12), both in the sense of "to persecute" (Rom 12:14; 1 Cor 4:12; Gal 6:12; 2 Tim 3:12) and "to ardently pursue" something, i.e., righteousness (Rom 9:30); love (1 Cor 14:1); doing good to others (1 Thess 5:15). Whether Paul is thinking here of the athletic metaphor of running a foot race, as Hendriksen suggests,² the point is clear: it is strenuous and requires great effort and focus.

But what is Paul striving for? Some argue that the verb **to lay hold of** signifies "to grasp" or "comprehend" in the sense of "understanding an idea." Hawthorne, while he regards katalabw as a truly difficult word, argues along these lines:

Paul's one desire is to know Christ. But he is keenly aware that he has not yet grasped the full import of the significance of Christ. As a consequence, he sets out, very much like a runner, to see whether he might at last be able to comprehend (katalabw) him fully.³

Admittedly the term katalabw can refer to "understanding." But, the problem with Hawthorne's exegesis, here in Philippians 2:12, is that it is too narrow and therefore fails to capture the full sense in which Paul wants to "lay hold of" Christ. It isn't that he just wants to comprehend or understand Christ's significance, for example, in God's great redemptive plan, but that he wants to *experience* Christ to the point where he has totally overcome every obstacle and sin that would otherwise hinder. He not only wants to fathom the mysteries and depth of Christ, he also wants to live in relationship with him—the unfettered enjoyment of His presence. While this undoubtedly involves a profound measure of "understanding" it also involves the apostle's whole being.

There is a certain ambiguity in the phrase **of that for which** (ef Jw)... The prepositional phrase ef Jw can be translated in one of two ways: (1) "because"; (2) "for which." The first translation is the more typical in Pauline usage (cf. Rom 5:12; 2 Cor 5:4). Thus, the first translation would indicate that Paul wants to lay of Christ *because* Christ had already taken hold of him. This translation indicates the *ground* on which Paul can pursue Christ. The second translation would mean that Christ laid hold of Paul *for the purpose of* Paul pursuing him. Though both interpretations are certainly true, this latter one seems to have the better of it here. Paul's point is not that it is because of Christ that he can seek Him, but that Christ saved him *for this purpose*. Thus the reason Christ took hold of Paul—undoubtedly a reference back to his Damascus road experience—was so that Paul might know him fully.

Paul continues in verse 13 with the interjection **brothers and sisters** (adelfoi). This direct address has a way of getting the attention of the readers, stopping them in their tracks as it were, before the apostle repeats the affirmation of v. 12.

Verse 13 is an emphatic restatement of what was said in v. 12. Paul says: **I do not consider myself to have attained this**. Both the use and placement of the pronoun **I** (egw) in the Greek text along with the deliberate insertion of the reflexive pronoun **myself** (emauton) emphasize Paul's personal commitment to the fact that he had not achieved his personal ambition of knowing Christ perfectly; he was not yet perfect in an absolute sense. And though it was his sober calculation (i.e., **consider** [logizomai]) about his *own* life, it was nonetheless true for others as well. Nobody had achieved a state of Christian perfectionism in which there was no more a need to strive to know Christ or overcome sin. The verb logizomai is used by Paul to refer to his own personal considerations but which considerations are also *universally* true as well. In Rom 8:18 he considers (logizomai) that our present sufferings are not worth comparing to the glory to come. This is not just his personal musings, but the truth which everyone who is in Christ will someday experience.⁴ Thus everyone who is united to Christ in the present age—between his first and second coming and the complete establishment of the

² Hendriksen, *Philippians*, 170-71.

³ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 152.

⁴ Cf. O'Brien, *Philippians*, 426-427.

kingdom—knows the struggle of the “now/not yet” aspects of salvation. We are saved from the *penalty* of sin, and are being saved from its *power*. Someday we will be completely saved from sin, even its very *presence*. Thus every Christian ought to say with the apostle that they have not yet “arrived.”

It is true that as Christians we have not yet arrived, but this is no condoning of a lackadaisical attitude. So the apostle continues in verse 13 to give the paradigm in which he operates in the time before Christ’s return. He says “brothers and sisters I do not consider myself yet to have attained this, but **instead (de) I am single-minded (Jen): forgetting the things behind (ta men opisw epilanqanomenos) and reaching out for the things ahead (tois de emprosqen epekteinomenos)**. Paul doesn’t live in a vacuum. He has put off certain attitudes and *put on others* (cf. Eph 4:22-24). Paul lived his life in a **single-minded** fashion. The metaphor behind this verse is that of the runner. The expression **single-minded** is actually a single word in Greek, namely Jen. It refers to “single-mindedness,” “having one purpose,” “being focused on one, single goal”—one and only one. There is no room for double-mindedness in this expression. And so it is with the runner who must not look to the left or to the right, but must keep his focus on the goal (cf. Phil 2:2; 1 Cor 9:19-27).

In order to be single-minded, i.e., “this one thing I do, not these many things I dabble in,” the Christian must forget the things behind. For Paul this meant not turning around and reverting to his Jewish way of life and achievements. He had left behind the self promotion involved in legal obedience to the Law and would never return to it. He was dead to it and it was dung to him. Some have suggested that what Paul is forgetting here is his success in Christ up to this point, that is, success defined positively in terms of obedience to Christ and personal knowledge of him. This is unlikely and unnecessary. Fee explains:

In light of v. 16 and the appeal for them to live up to where they currently are in Christ, it seems altogether unlikely that “the things behind him” denotes the measure of ‘knowing Christ’ that he has already attained. This is a clear case of letting the imagery rather than the context dictate meaning, which is always a hazardous procedure. Such a view not only focuses on the wrong things in Paul’s story, but it fails to take seriously enough the basic “already/not yet” framework of Paul’s thinking that dominates this passage. What is ‘already’ is not what is to be ‘disregarded,’ but rather what does not count for a thing at all in light of Christ—even though at one time in Paul’s life he thought of it in terms of gain.⁵

Forgetting what lies behind, the apostle is always **reaching out for the things ahead (tois de emprosqen epekteinomenos)**. Paul continues the metaphor with athletics. The term epekteinomenos signifies straining with all one’s energy and stretching out to cross the finish line in a race. The focus in the metaphor is not on winning the race *per se*, in contrast to those who lose, but on the idea of running with a goal fixed continuously before one’s eyes. For Paul, **the things ahead** include knowing Christ now as well as the hope of being found in him later, i.e., found in him by faith alone and not by his own attempts at meritorious works of the Law.

Thus Paul runs purposively toward the goal. The noun **goal (skopon)** occurs only here in the NT⁶, but its meaning is largely determined in context with Paul’s “running” metaphor and the use of **prize (brabeion)**. It is the “finish line,” if you will, and Paul is running toward it and will not allow himself to be distracted in any way. He wants the **prize** which is here modified as the **upward call of God in Christ Jesus**. Paul also uses the term **prize (brabeion)** in another related context, namely, 1 Cor 9:24 (cf. vv. 19-27). The passage is as follows:

9:19 For since I am free from all I can make myself a slave to all, in order to gain even more. **9:20** To the Jews I became like a Jew to gain the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) to gain those under the law. **9:21** To those free from the law I became like one free from the law (though I am not free from God’s law but under the law of Christ) to gain those free from the law. **9:22** To the weak I became weak in order to gain the weak. I have become all things to all people, so that by all means I may save some. **9:23** I do all these things because of the gospel, so that I can be a participant in it. **9:24** Do you not know that all the runners in a stadium compete, but only one receives the **prize**? So run to win. **9:25** Each competitor must exercise self-control in everything. They do it to receive a perishable crown, but we an imperishable one. **9:26** So I do not run uncertainly or box like one who hits only air. **9:27** Instead I subdue my body and make it my slave, so that after preaching to others I myself will not be disqualified.—(1 Cor 9:19-27 NET Bible)

⁵ Fee, *Philippians*, 348, n 42.

⁶ The verb occurs six times (Luke 11:35; Rom 16:17; 2 Cor 4:18; Gal 6:1; Phil 2:4; 3:17).

Paul's words to the Corinthians come in a context emphasizing the proper use of freedom, the human need to focus on what's important, and the centrality of the gospel in all of that. Here the focus is on winning the race, but not defined as beating other people *per se*—as if other Christians were the opponents—but rather winning in the sense of living the Christian life in a disciplined fashion and finishing well. This, he says, is not for a perishable crown (a crown made from celery⁷), but an imperishable one.

The important point to walk away with from this passage is that the Christian life is a disciplined life with a view toward the finish line. This does not mean that we cannot live “in the moment” as God himself is in an “eternal now,” but it does mean that the quality of the moment depends on one's long term focus. So Paul wants the prize and runs stringently to achieve it.

We return now to that interesting expression, namely, **the upward call of God in Christ Jesus** (ths anw klhsews tou geou en Cristw Ihsou). This phrase has been interpreted along various lines⁸: (1) the “upward call of God” is the “prize” about which Paul speaks. This is unlikely since Paul generally uses the term “call” to refer to God's initial act of calling someone to salvation. It is not a process *per se* nor does it *focus* solely on the end, but rather on the beginning of salvation (though it has an eschatological intent; see Rom 11:29; 1 Cor 1:26; 7:20; Eph 1:18; 4:1, 4; 2 Thess 1:11; 2 Tim 1:9); (2) the “call” refers to the call of the president of the games to the victorious athlete to step up unto the podium and receive his prize. Once again, while this picks up on certain cultural clues, it is probably not the image Paul intends here since in this interpretation “call” is being defined as something occurring *after* the race has been won. In contrast, Paul generally uses it to refer to God's call to salvation when an individual is first saved (cf. Rom 8:30); (3) the term “call” refers to that initial salvific call of God to Paul on the Damascus Road. It was an **upward** (anw) call in that it had heaven as its immediate and ultimate goal (its eschatological end) and, it is the call of God since He was the One doing the calling. The reference to **in Christ Jesus** signifies the grounds and sphere in which the call was given. It also conveys the sphere in which the apostle experienced the immediate blessings of that call, including forgiveness, grace, and union with Christ. The third interpretation seems better on the whole, though there is much overlap between the various renderings. According to this reading of the text, then, the **prize**, refers to final and complete salvation in the eternal state, defined as knowing Christ perfectly and intimately without any hindrances. This is what Paul has his eyes focused on and that for which he runs with such discipline.

Having spelled out his own life and perspective on knowing Christ and the contrast with the Judaizers (3:1-14) Paul now turns to apply what he has said to his listeners (3:15-16ff.). As is typical of this entire letter, the apostle consistently uses examples in order to bring home his point—examples which include himself earlier (1:12-26), Jesus (2:6-11), Timothy (2:19-24) and Epaphroditus (2:25-30). He says in 3:15: **Let those of us who are “perfect” embrace this point of view. If you think otherwise, God will also reveal this to you.** Several questions come to mind in the interpretation of this verse. In what sense does he intend **perfect**? In what ways could they think **otherwise** or differently? How will God **reveal** this to them and what does he mean by **this**?

Most of these questions (as well as some not stated) relate to the meaning of the term **perfect** (*teleios*). Therefore, we will begin our discussion here. The noun *teleios* is used 19 times in the NT, of persons and things. It refers to having “attained a purpose,” “being mature,” “complete,” or “whole.”⁹ It never means to be absolutely perfect and free from sin in any and all respects in the present time. That is the ultimate eschatological goal inherent in the term, but it is never used absolutely as such in the NT.

The likely background for Paul's use of the term here in Philippians is the spiritual/ethical teaching of the OT, though it may have been used in current religious thought to designate initiates into the mystery religions as well. It is used approximately 19 times in the Greek OT (LXX) to indicate (1) Noah's blameless character in the context of the generation in which he lived (Gen 6:9; Sirach 44:17); (2) the Passover lamb which was required to have no blemish, that is to be perfect physically, in order that it be acceptable for sacrifice (Exod 12:5); (3) Israel's blameless (i.e., perfect) character evidenced as she refused to engage in the heathen practices of witchcraft, etc. going on around her; (4) a heart totally devoted to God as evidenced by complete obedience to his commands (1 Kgs 8:61; 11:4; 15:3, 14); a teacher as opposed to a pupil (1 Chr 25:8); Solomon's perspective on his new wife (i.e., she was perfect, without flaw in his eyes; SS 5:3;

⁷ See Fee, *Philippians*, 348-49.

⁸ See O'Brien, *Philippians*, 430-32, for more details on the following summary.

⁹ BAGD, 809.

6:9); the whole (teleion) number of Judah taken into exile. Thus teleios, in its spiritual and moral sense in the OT, communicates the idea of completely devoted to God according to the revelation of the Law.

In Philippians, when Paul uses the term, he is thinking of obedience to God, but now it is an obedience or perfection understood from the perspective of the “now/not yet” substructure of his thinking. It is not the revelation of the Law that is in view, but that of Christ, the cross, and the Spirit. The one who is teleion, says Paul, is the one who realizes the inaugural character of the present salvation offered in Christ and knows that there is still much to come in the future. That person, therefore, recognizes the strenuous nature of the Christian life as presently conceived and exerts all their energies to “work out their own salvation” (Phil 2:13). In affirming this, though, Paul knows that the antecedent grace of God is the context for all so-called “perfection” (cf. 1 Cor 15:10). It is not akin to the idea of “buckling down and trying harder.” It is the effect of the grace of God in a person’s heart and its expression in their lives (Rom 5:1-5). A good translation for the term is “**perfect**” (so that the connection to v. 12 is not lost), but “perfect” in the sense of “mature.” Paul used the term similarly in 1 Cor 2:6; 14:20; Eph 4:13; Col. 1:28; 4:12.¹⁰ Thus, the use of the noun teleios in 3:15 is somewhat different than the use of the verb in 3:12. The verb does refer to complete spiritual perfection such as is often envisioned in the eternal state. Recognizing this difference avoids a contradiction, i.e., Paul saying he has “not been perfected” in 3:12, but nonetheless names himself among the “perfect” in 3:15 (i.e., “let us” think).

But the apostle says to the Philippians that **If on some point you think otherwise, God will reveal this also to you.** But what does he mean by their thinking **otherwise** (Jeterws)? And, what does **this** (touto) refer to? In 3:2-14 Paul has been arguing for the proper orientation to life and faith in the “now time” (nuni de as he is accustomed to saying in Romans), that is, the interim time before the Lord’s return. The proper orientation to God through Christ is not some form of legal obedience as the Judaizers advanced. Such a posture is not only worthless to the Christian, it is also detrimental to a healthy relationship with Christ and is, therefore, not an option; it is inimical to any kind of growth by faith. Having made this point abundantly clear, and being convinced that the Philippians understand what true perfection is, he then proceeds to tell them that if on something (ti) they think **otherwise** God will reveal this also to them. The term **otherwise** (Jeterws) may indicate “fault” or “blame” due to error, as for example, in the case of Jeteros (adjective) in Galatians 1:6. But more likely it simply means, a different “take” on something (ti) minor or of relatively little importance when compared to the proper understanding of Christian perfection. Lightfoot explains the two options:

Here Jeterws seems to have the meaning ‘amiss’... It may however be ‘otherwise,’ in reference to touto fronwmen; in which case eiti will mean ‘in any minor point’: ‘If you are sound at the core, God will remove the superficial blemishes.’¹¹

Paul says that if they think differently on some minor point **God will reveal this also** (touto goes back to ti) to them. Paul is not saying that God will give them more revelations on top of the ones he has already given. He is not talking about any revelations they may or may not have received in the past.¹² Rather, he is simply saying that if they differ on some point God will make that point known/plain to them. The verb **reveal** (apokaluyei) speaks of divine revelation and is used some 26 times in the New Testament. Jesus said God reveals secrets about his identity and the nature of his mission to the humble and not to the wise and learned (Matt 11:25; Luke 10:21). At Caesarea Philippi the Father revealed to Peter that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God (Matt 16:17). Further, the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel (Rom 1:17) and the Holy Spirit reveals God’s wisdom in Christ to people (1 Cor 2:10). Near the time of the end the man of lawlessness will be revealed according to God’s schedule (2 Thess 1:6, 8). In all its occurrences in the NT, the verb has God or the Holy Spirit as its subject so that what is “revealed” is not something man dreamed up or reasoned on his own, but something God himself made known. The noun form of the term, namely, apokaluyis, also carries this same force in all of its 18 uses in the NT (Luke 2:32; Rom 2:5; 8:19; 16:25; 1 Cor 1:7; 14:6; 14:26; 2 Cor 12:1, 7; Gal 1:12; 2:2; Eph 1:17; 3:3; 2 Thess 1:7; 1 Pet 1:7, 13; 4:13; Rev 1:1). In Phil 3:15, then, Paul is saying that God will “make known” to individuals the nature of the disagreement they have and its relationship to the proper Christian attitude outlined in 3:2-14. The one who had begun a good work in them would *carry it on* until the day of Christ Jesus. Though the way in which

¹⁰ See O’Brien, *Philippians*, 437; cf. Lightfoot, *Philippians*, 151.

¹¹ Lightfoot, *Philippians*, 151-52.

¹² See O’Brien, *Philippians*, 438.

God will do this is not expressly stated,¹³ this aspect of “revealing” is part of that good work and ensures that it does indeed move forward.

Concluding the paragraph in 3:16 the apostle makes the appeal: **Nevertheless, let us live up to the standard** (tw autw stoicein) **that we have already attained** (plhn eis Jo efqasamen). Paul says that whether they have disagreements or not—and he recognizes that this is important—he wants them to **nevertheless** live up to that standard of teaching and ethics that he has already given them over the years of his relationship with them. They are not to depart from that while in the process of working through disagreements. They are instead to live up to that which was already established by Paul in their community. This includes foundational ideas of humility, unity, and others-centeredness.

IV. Principles for Application

1. Any form of Christian perfectionism that includes in it the idea of sinlessness in our present experience is heretical and must be abandoned. The first place to start to live for Christ is to understand that your life according to God’s salvation in the present age can be marked by love for others and intimacy with God, but there will never be a time in your life this side of heaven where you will be completely free from sin. Therefore, sinlessness is not the goal. Striving to know Christ perfectly and to love others purely; that is the goal. We know that this does not come without its share of struggles.
2. Realize that in the midst of your struggles that it was Christ Jesus who laid hold of you so that you might know him. He is on your side in the fight (Rom 8:31-39). Therefore, don’t give up, but humbly come to him for the strength that you need (Phil 4:13; Heb 4:15-16).
3. Forget the things behind, meaning anything you used to trust in...let it go. It’s over and you can no longer trust in that for anything. Instead, trust in Christ and him alone for everything!
4. In the pursuit of holiness and knowing Christ, remember that the prize is Christ himself at the end of the race. Keep your eyes fixed on him and this will ferret out any sinful attitudes and beliefs. May God help us to live according to the example of Paul. Contemplate Phil 4:9.

¹³ It may be that Paul has in mind a thought similar to 2 Tim 2:7: “reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.” Or, perhaps the Lord would reveal directly to each person the nature of their differences.

Lesson 14: The Exhortation to Imitate Good Examples (3:17-21)

I. Translation as It Appears in the NET Bible

3:17 Be imitators of me, brothers and sisters, and watch carefully those who are living this way, just as you have us as an example. **3:18** For many live (about whom I often told you, and now say even with tears) as enemies of the cross of Christ. **3:19** Their end will be destruction. Their god is the belly. They exult in their shame. They think about earthly things. **3:20** But our citizenship is in heaven—and we also await a savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, **3:21** who will transform these humble bodies of ours into the likeness of his glorious body by means of that power by which he is able to subject all things to himself.

II. Outline: The Exhortation and Rationale to Imitate Good Examples (3:17-21)

A. The Command (3:17)

1. The Example of Paul (3:17a)
2. The Example of Others (3:17b)

B. The Rationale (3:18-21)

1. The Characterization and Conduct of Enemies (3:18-19)
 - a. Their Characterization: Enemies of the Cross of Christ (3:18)
 - b. Their Conduct (3:19)
 - i. Their End Is Destruction (3:19a)
 - ii. Their God Is the Belly (3:19b)
 - iii. They Exult in Their Shame (3:19c)
 - iv. They Think Earthly Things (3:19d)
2. The Citizenship and Future of the Christian (3:20-21)
 - a. The Citizenship of the Christian (3:20a)
 - b. The Future of the Christian (3:20b-21)
 - i. We Are Waiting for a Savior (3:20b)
 - ii. We Will Be Transformed (3:21)

III. Context

The relationship of 3:17-21 to its immediate context is difficult to discern. As Hawthorne says, we are not really prepared for a discussion of **citizenship** and **a savior from heaven** and the earnest expectation that that might create.¹ The problem is further compounded by the fact it is well nigh impossible to be certain about who the opponents are in 3:18-19. Nonetheless, the overall sense is clear and the subject of imitating the godly example of Paul surely relates directly to 3:4-14 and 3:15-16.

¹ Cf. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 168-69.

IV. The Exhortation to Imitate Good Examples (3:17-21)

A. The Command (3:17)

1. The Example of Paul (3:17a)

As we have seen throughout this epistle, Paul consistently gives living examples to illustrate and reinforce the particular truths he has been teaching. He uses his own life as an example of the doctrine of humility and other-centeredness, (1:12-16), as well as the career of Jesus (2:5-11), and the lives of his fellow workers, i.e., Timothy (2:19-24) and Epaphroditus (2:25-30).² These examples serve to clothe with “flesh and blood” the truths he has been emphasizing throughout, especially humility, truth, unity, and standing firm. So when we come to 3:17 we are not surprised, after the apostle has just given intimate details of his own perspective on the Christian life in 3:4-14, that he then turns around in 3:17 and enjoins the church to imitate him.

With the use of the vocative **brothers and sisters** (*adelphoi*) Paul affectionately addresses the church (i.e., his friends) urging them to **be imitators of me** (*summime, tai mou ginesthe*). There are at least three important questions that must be answered in the interpretation of this passage. First, what does the term *summime, tai* mean? Second, what is the significance of the prefix *sun* (“with”) on the Greek noun *summime, tai*. Third, what exactly is it about his life that the apostle wants imitated?

The term *summime, tai* occurs only here in the NT and nowhere else in all of Greek literature as far as we know. The related noun *mime, tai* occurs six times in Paul. In 1 Cor 4:16 Paul wants the church in Corinth to imitate him in terms of his understanding of the cross, self-sacrificing ministry, humility, and his stress on unity.³ In 1 Cor 11:1 Paul urges the church to follow his self-sacrificial example as he follows the like example of Christ. Paul would rather give up his rights and privileges than impede the gospel or another’s growth in the gospel by the exercise of his freedom. This, of course, flew in the face of Corinthian notions of “authority,” “power,” and “spirituality.” The apostle also enjoins the Ephesian church (and others receiving the letter) to imitate God in terms of his unconditional, self-sacrificing love for others. Further, he says that the Thessalonians had become imitators of the Lord (and other churches) in that they welcomed the word in the midst of severe persecution (1 Thess 1:6; 2:14). In Hebrews 6:12 the writer admonishes the readers to imitate those (e.g., Abraham) who through faith and patience inherit what was promised. Thus, as Fee states, the term is found in contexts focusing on suffering for the sake of Christ and the gospel (1 Cor 4:16; 11:1; Eph 5:1; Heb 6:12?), and contexts focusing on behavior consistent with the gospel (1 Thess 1:6; 2:14).⁴ Thus the term means “to copy,” “imitate” or “emulate,” but it does not mean “to duplicate” in the full sense of that term. It is not that Paul wants them to become *clones*, but instead to live out certain principles in like manner. The term involves, as Michaelis notes, the idea of obedience (as in the case of Phil 3:17).⁵

The second question concerning the meaning or force of the prefixed preposition *sun* is much discussed. It has been suggested that it is basically tautologous, that is, the meaning of the noun *summime, tai* is the same as the noun without the prefix, i.e., *mime, tai*.⁶ But this seems somewhat unlikely since the term is so rare and therefore likely used with some intention. Others argue that the prefix refers to Paul and that he is urging them to join with him in following the example of Christ. Though possible, this places quite a strain on the **of me** phrase and seems a rather obtuse way of saying something which he otherwise could have said much more clearly—and did on another occasion (cf. 1 Cor 11:1). Still, other scholars understand the **of me** to be the object of the imitation and the *sun* prefix to indicate the manner in which the

² Cf. Lihgtfoot, *Philippians*, 152-53.

³ Cf. Ben Witherington, *Conflict & Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 144-46.

⁴ Fee, *Philippians*, 364.

⁵ W. Michaelis, *TDNT*, s.v. *mimeomai*, 4:667-68.

⁶ Michaelis, *TDNT*, 667, n 13.

church at Philippi is to imitate Paul: they are to imitate him in a *unified* way.⁷ That Paul is the one to be imitated here is clear from the rest of the sentence: “and watch carefully those who are living this way, just as you have us as an example.”⁸

The third question attempts to uncover what exactly Paul was referring to when he told the church to imitate him in a unified way. It could be that Paul wants the church to imitate his general conduct and way of life to which he refers in 4:9 (cf. also 1 Cor 4:16; 11:1). Paul always took pains while staying with and ministering to churches to conduct himself in such a way so as to provide a model for the believers there (e.g., 2 Thess 3:9). While this is undoubtedly true, it tends to place more emphasis on the context of Paul’s other letters than the context here in Philippians, namely 3:4-14. The most likely answer to this question is that he is referring to his approach to the Law and life in Christ, outlined in detail in 3:4-14. He wants them to have the same outlook as he does, explicitly his renouncing of certain things (3:7-9), his passion for Christ (3:10-11), and then his understanding of the stage of salvation-history in which the Philippians now live (the “balance” he brings in 3:12-14). He wants the Philippians to imitate his approach to knowing Christ “in the now time” and take special note of others who also believe and live likewise.

There are several reasons why Paul’s call for others to imitate him is not egotistical or arrogant: (1) he was not really calling them to follow him ultimately, but to follow Christ (Phil 2:6-11; 1 Cor 11:1). Thus the intent was always Christocentric, never for his own gain; (2) the call to imitate was a call to self-sacrifice, humility, and suffering in the face of persecution for the cross; (3) Paul points the Philippians beyond himself to *others* who also live correctly in accordance with the gospel (Phil 3:17b); and (4) imitation does not mean to duplicate *en toto*, that is, to be a slave to another person. It means to emulate the principles operative in another’s life, as they are expressed through one’s own understanding. Therefore, in short, what Paul is urging here is not mindless following, but informed imitation of the Christlikeness found in the apostle.

2. *The Example of Others (3:17b)*

Thus Paul wants his brothers and sisters to imitate him and also **watch carefully those who are living this way** (skopeite tous houto, peripatountas)... The verb **watch carefully** (skopeite) means “to look (out) for,” “notice,” “keep one’s eye on.”⁹ It is an intense verb that occurs six times in the NT (Luke 11:35; Rom 16:17; 2 Cor 4:18; Gal 6:1; Phil 2:4; 3:17). In Romans 16:17—a verse commonly understood in connection with Phil 3:17, though the sense of the term in Rom 16:17 is negative—Paul alerts the church to “watch out” for those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching they had received. The church was to turn away from these people. In 2 Cor 4:18 the apostle talks about his own pursuit or “focus” on things eternal and not on things temporal. In Galatians 6:1 he encourages members of the church to help someone caught in a sin, but to do so with one eye on themselves (skopo, n, i.e., “guarding themselves”), lest they too are tempted to sin.

The verb is used twice in Philippians. In 2:4 Paul urges the church to **seek** (skopountes) the interests not of themselves only, but also those of others. The use of skopeite in 3:17 may be related to this usage, and thus the examples that Paul has in mind are those who live self-sacrificially. But 2:4 seems a bit removed from 3:17 to be the primary connection. It is probably to be taken in contrast with the use of “beware” (blepete) in 3:2.¹⁰ The Philippians were to be on guard (negative) against the legalizers and other erroneous views (3:18-19), and were to take special notice (positive) of those who lived according to the pattern found in Paul and others. The people that Paul has in mind, by the use of **those**, is probably anyone in the Philippian church or known to them who lived according to the pattern Paul and others had established.

Paul adds that he wants the Philippians to watch carefully other examples that “walk” in the same way as he and his associates do. The pronoun **us**, in the phrase **just as you have us as an example** (katho, s echete tupon he, mas), is to be understood as referring to Paul, Timothy, Epaphroditus and others, not just to Paul, as Hawthorne argues.¹¹ The term **example** (tupos) is used in the NT to refer to the nail “imprints” in Jesus’ hands (Jn 20:25), the “idols” Israel worshipped

⁷ For further discussion of the various views see O’Brien, *Philippians*, 445-46.

⁸ See S. E. Fowl, “Imitation of Paul/Christ,” in *Dictionary of the Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 429.

⁹ BAGD, s.v. skopew.

¹⁰ Cf. Silva, *Philippians*, 208.

¹¹ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 160-61. See O’Brien, *Philippians*, 449-50 who regards the referent for the **us** as including Paul and his associates such as Timothy and Epaphroditus.

(Acts 7:43), the example or pattern of Christian teaching (Rom 6:17), a letter sent to Felix is referred to as a *tupos* (Acts 23:25) and then OT events or persons are referred to as types in light of the clarifying role they bring to salvation in the present age (Rom 5:14; 1 Cor 10:6, 11). The term is also used in 1 Thess 1:7 to refer to the Thessalonians being a “model” for other believers (see also similar uses in 2 Thess 2:9; 1 Tim 4:12; Titus 2:7; 1 Pet 5:3).¹² The term, as used here in Philippians, refers to the ethical and doctrinal commitments that the church could see in the lives of Paul and his associates.

B. The Rationale (3:18-21)

There are always a number of people waiting to lead God’s people astray. So it is in the case of the Philippians; there are those who are enemies of the cross of Christ—as Paul refers to them—who are seeking to overturn apostolic teaching and example in the church. They are doing so by means of their own ungodly lives and appetites. In 3:18-19, after Paul has urged the church to follow *his* example, he turns to expose these opponents for what they really are. He mentions their final end, namely, destruction, and their moral conduct: their god is their belly, they exult in their shame, and they think about earthly things (only). Before we discuss “their end” and “their conduct” we will turn first to a brief discussion of their characterization as “enemies of the cross of Christ.”

1. The Characterization, End, and Conduct of Enemies (3:18-19)

a. Their Characterization: “Enemies of the Cross of Christ” (3:18)

In 3:18 Paul begins: **For (gar) many live (about whom I often told you, and now say even with tears) as enemies of the cross of Christ** (*polloi peripatousin...tous echthrou tou staurou tou Christou*). The term **For (gar)** indicates that what follows in 3:18-19 is the reason the Philippians are to follow the example of Paul and others who live according to the gospel (v. 18); they should “walk” properly because many walk in other ways—ways diametrically opposed to the gospel. But it is not as though Paul had never warned the church about these kinds of people. In fact, the opposite is true. He had told them **often (about whom I often told you)**, perhaps in person while he was with them or in other written correspondence. And further, it isn’t that he doesn’t care about them, but rather that he has been grieved by their sin and disobedience to the gospel (cf. Rom 9:1-5). In fact, even as he writes this letter he is brought to tears over their ultimate end and the lifestyle they are presently living. Paul was a passionate person who loved others deeply and maintained a deep and conscious commitment to the truth.

But who are the **many** (*polloi*) and in what sense are they to be considered as “enemies of the cross of Christ?” The construction **many live** suggests that the people referred to here are not part of the Philippian congregation, but were on the outside. The fact that he has told them about these people **often** further reinforces this idea.¹³ Several suggestions regarding the precise identity of these people have been offered: (1) Judaizers, perhaps those indicted in 3:2; (2) professing Christians; (3) Gnostic Christians, whose commitment to a radical body/soul dualism allowed them to participate in fleshly desires without any apparent contradiction in terms of the gospel; (4) pagans who opposed the gospel because of its ethical demands; (5) Jewish itinerants who eagerly sought to win converts; (6) libertinists of some kind who paraded their over-realized eschatology in the licentious lifestyle they lived. Obviously, there are strengths and weaknesses to each of these solutions. But, while it is always correct to attempt to identify the historical referents for the statements of Scripture, in some cases we simply do not have enough information to be certain. This is one of those cases. The overall sense of the passage, however, is clear enough as the following comments show.¹⁴

Thus, while we cannot be certain who these people were and the particular affinities they maintained, Paul does say that they lived **as enemies of the cross of Christ** (*polloi peripatousin...tous echthrou tou staurou tou Christou*). Whoever these people were, they had a major problem with the **cross** of Christ. They were enemies and thus opposed the idea itself—or at least the centrality of the idea—of the cross (perhaps in their view it demonstrated weakness). They, therefore, developed a form of Christianity where the cross was not essential, at least as Paul understood it by revelation. That is not to say that they were personal enemies of the apostle Paul, though this may have been the case. Nonetheless, Paul does not seem to cast them in this light (unless of course, one takes them as the same people as those of 3:2). The rest of the verse describes the ultimate “end” of these enemies of the cross of Christ as well as their “conduct.” It is particularly their conduct which tells us why Paul referred to them as enemies of the cross.

¹² Cf. O’Brien, *Philippians*, 449.

¹³ Fee, *Philippians*, 369.

¹⁴ For further discussion of this question, see Silva, *Philippians*, 208-11; O’Brien, *Philippians*, 452-54.

b. Their End: Destruction (3:19a)

Paul says that **Their end will be destruction** (ho,,n to telos apo,,leia). The term **end** (telos) is used in the NT some 40 times to refer to the “end” (Heb 7:3), “the rest/remainder” (1 Cor 15:24?), “tax, customs duties” (Rom 13:7; Matt 17:25), and “goal” or “consummation” (Rom 6:21; 2 Cor 11:15; 1 Tim 1:5; James 5:11; 1 Peter 4:17).¹⁵ It is in this last sense that Paul uses the term here. The final goal of their sinfulness will be destruction and according to their current path, it seems likely that this will be their unfortunate end. While those in Christ will experience salvation (1:28), those who oppose the message will suffer eternal destruction, i.e., eternal loss and punishment.

The term apo,,leia does not mean annihilation in this context, but eternal judgment. Jesus speaks to this same issue in Matt 25:46: “And these will go away into eternal punishment (kolasin aio,,nion), but the righteous to eternal life” (zo,,e,,n aio,,nion). Paul, in another place, also regards the final judgment of those who do not know Christ to be eternal damnation:

1:8 With flaming fire he will mete out punishment on those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. **1:9** They will undergo the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might (2 Thess 1:8-9).¹⁶

Hawthorne comments on apo,,leia saying:

...the precise meaning of apo,,leia is difficult to pin down. Hence, as is often the case it is best explained in terms of its opposites: so,,te,,ria (“salvation,” Phil 1:28); peripoie,,sis psuche,,s (“the preserving of one’s soul,” Heb 10:39); zo,,e,, aio,,nios (“eternal life” John 3:16). For Paul, then, to reject the crucified Christ as the sole means of salvation is in effect to reject salvation. It is to lose one’s soul and thus to forfeit life. Elsewhere he says of such people, to telos ekeino,,n thanatos (“their end is death,” Rom 6:21), a condition in which the destiny of life outside of Christ is turned to its opposite, i.e., corruption (Gal 6:8) or destruction (Rom 9:22 in the active sense of the word), ‘the absolute antithesis of the life intended by God and saved by Christ.’¹⁷

Thus the future of those who rebel against the cross is not a happy one. This is one incentive for the church to reach out to her neighbors in love and friendship with the gospel of Christ (cf. Phil 2:16). And, it is also another incentive not to be about the business of altering the gospel to fit the prevailing mood of the culture. It is true that we must “speak the language” of the people group/culture (1 Cor 9:19-27), but this has to do with packaging the message, not changing it materially. And while there is a relationship between the package and the substance, the package can change, but with great care lest we end up with “another gospel” (Gal 1:6). Finally, it must be remembered that Paul is not saying that these people cannot be saved if they turn from their enmity toward the cross and accept it as God’s way of salvation. They most certainly can. This is not to say, however, that some ever did.

c. Their Conduct (3:19b-d)

Paul now turns from their final end, a sad prospect indeed, to their present existence and rebellion. He mentions three kinds of behavior, all grounded in the one reality of their being enemies of the cross of Christ.

i. Their God Is the Belly (3:19b)

Paul says that **Their god is the belly** (ho,,n ho theos he,, koilia). There are those who regard this passage as a reference to the Judaizers of 3:2 who maintained an overly zealous attitude toward ritual purity and adherence to certain Jewish food laws. The problem with this is that the term **belly** seems to connote some degree of licentiousness and an inordinate attentiveness to one’s sensual needs. If this is true, then the ascetic practices of the Judaizers would hardly come under such a rebuke. It may be, as many have suggested, that Paul’s use of koilia (“belly”) is roughly equivalent to his use of sarx (“flesh”) in other contexts.¹⁸ Thus these people were driven by fleshly impulses. Therefore, as O’Brien

¹⁵ Cf. BAGD, s.v. telos.

¹⁶ Cf. the comments of Hendriksen, *Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*, 181-82; Fee, *Philippians*, 371, n 35; Kent, “Philippians,” 147

¹⁷ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 165.

¹⁸ Cf. Silva, *Philippians*, 210.

comments, “those who are enemies of Christ’s cross have failed to accept the death of the old life, the *koilia*, and have disqualified themselves from the new, because ‘they are serving their own fleshly impulses.’¹⁹

ii. They Exult in Their Shame (3:19c)

Paul also says that **They exult in their shame** (he,, doxa en te,, aischune,, auto,,n). It is common among interpreters, who regard the *polloi* (“many”) in 3:18 to refer to the Judaizers of 3:2, to understand the word **shame** as a disgraceful reference to their circumcision. Therefore, that which they glory in—and that which they boast about—Paul says is actually a shameful thing in light of the cross. But more likely is the interpretation that **shame** refers to immoral acts and immorality in general—a kind of immorality and licentiousness that strikes at the heart of the cross (and its concomitant doctrine of “death to sin”) and the pure, spiritual ethics which flow from it.

iii. They Think Earthly Things (3:19d)

Finally, Paul states that these enemies of the cross **think about earthly things** (hoi ta epigeia phronountes). The term **think** (phronountes) means “to have a settled disposition towards something,” and by extension “to have one’s focus on,” or “to set one’s agenda according to.” These people orient their lives according to earthly realities where “earthly” is synonymous with “fleshly.” The inevitable outcome of this way of life is death (Rom 8:5-8) and eternal separation from God. There is no room for faith and trust as they have found all they need *in themselves*. But their future, according to Paul, is not as hopeful as they might have been led to *think*. This phrase, **they think about earthly things**, with its orientation to the cause and ground of a sinful life, is rightly regarded as a summary of the other preceding descriptive phrases.

2. The Citizenship and Future of the Christian (3:20-21)

In stark contrast to the ultimate end of the opponents, the Philippians and by extension, all Christians, have a much brighter future. We are eagerly awaiting a savior from heaven who will transform our bodies and bring everything under his control. At that time faith will have been proven to be the only human response pleasing to God, while works (i.e., “legalism”) and licentious living will be unveiled for the evil that they really are—no matter *what* any mortal thinks.

a. The Citizenship of the Christian (3:20a)

But our citizenship is in heaven (he,,mo,,n gar to politeuma en ouranois huparchei). The term *hemo,,n* (“our”), because it is placed first in the clause, is emphatic and represents a vivid contrast between the opponents and Christians, i.e., *their* situation and ultimate end and *our* citizenship (vv. 18-20). This is why we have translated *gar*—which is a logical conjunction and generally expresses an inference drawn from previous material—with **but** (a contrastive conjunction). More needs to be said, however. This *gar* is the second one in as many sentences (see mechanical layout above) and does seem to reach not only into vv. 18-19, but also back to the imperatives of v. 17. That is, it appears to give another reason for the Philippians to live according to the good example of Paul and others (from v. 17)—but a reason that is closely linked, by way of contrast, with the destructive example of the opponents in v. 18. So then, the first reason the Philippians ought to live a certain way (i.e., according to Paul and others in v. 17) is that there are many who are enemies of the cross of Christ. The second reason the Philippians are to live a certain way is that their citizenship is in heaven. To put it all together would look like this: **Be imitators and watch carefully...for there are many who live as enemies...and (for) our citizenship is in heaven....** Both *for* clauses introduce a reason why one should imitate Paul and watch carefully others who live according to his pattern.²⁰

What does Paul mean by the term **citizenship** (*politeuma*)? It is difficult to be extremely precise since the term is not used in the NT on any other occasion. Various translations have been offered, including: (1) commonwealth; (2) colony; (3) citizenship; (4) state, etc. Whatever way one takes it, the overall sense is clear enough against the backdrop of the Roman citizenship that the colony of Philippi enjoyed. Several things can be noted. First, Paul says this “citizenship” or “belonging-ness to a people group” exists in heaven. It is not an earthly citizenship to which Christians belong. This does not imply in any way, however, that the early Christians did not have responsibilities to the earthly state, province, and government under which they lived (Rom 13:1-7; 1 Pet 2:13-17). What it does mean is that our ultimate home is in heaven and that we are strangers and aliens here (1 Pet 2:11). Second, since it is a citizenship *in heaven*, the ethical and

¹⁹ O’Brien, *Philippians*, 456.

²⁰ Cf. Fee, *Philippians*, 377-78.

spiritual standards of heaven, not those of the alien world in which the Christian is found, are *the* standards. This is the primary force of the term **citizenship** here (dynamic and active, not just static).²¹ The Christian is to **imitate** godly examples (v. 17) and not to live like enemies of the cross of Christ (vv. 18-19) because the standards of their genuine and eternal citizenship in heaven apply now! Third, the term **citizenship** connotes images of a mass of people, all living under one rule, and is thus an image for the kingdom and its present manifestation. Therefore, the kingdom is present now, but will be consummated, as Paul has already told us in 3:2-14 in the future. Fourth, the citizenship of which the Christian is a part has a ruler, a governor if you will. He is Jesus, whom Paul refers to as “a savior,” and “the Lord.”

b. The Future of the Christian (3:20b-21)

i. We Are Waiting for a Savior (3:20b)

The apostle says that the Philippians are members of a citizenship which exists in heaven and that they **also await a savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ** (ex hou kai so,,te,,ra apekdechometha kurion ie,,soun Christon). The verb **awaiting** (apekdechometha) is used eight times in the NT, six of which are by the apostle Paul. It is not found in the LXX, Paul’s Greek Bible. Therefore, it is Paul’s distinctive term to express the Christian hope of the eschaton—the consummation of the kingdom and our complete salvation. In Rom 8:19 Paul says that in spite of the fallen condition of the *cosmos* at the present time the anxious longing of creation *waits eagerly* for the revelation of the sons of God. At the present time, the sons of God are apprehended by faith only. There is coming a day, however, says the apostle, when it will be clear to all creation who was rightly related to God. Further along, in Rom 8:23, he says that as Christians we groan within ourselves as we *wait eagerly* for our completed adoption, that is, the redemption of our bodies. In 8:25 he says that while we hope for what we do not see, we *wait eagerly* for it with endurance. In 1 Cor 1:7 Paul speaks to the Corinthian Christians who had collapsed most of the future (if not all of the future) into the present, that their present gifting is sufficient as they *eagerly await* (and they should be) the [complete] revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ. In Galatians 5:5 Paul emphasizes that it is by faith through the Spirit that we are eagerly awaiting the hope of righteousness (cf. Heb 9:28).

The object of the Christian’s “waiting” is **a savior** (so,,te,,r) from heaven. The term so,,te,,r occurs only 24 times in the NT, 16 of which according to one commentator, refer to Christ.²² The Philippians would have understood the term in connection with Caesar who was also regarded as a savior, though not from sin *per se*, but from any attack and war.²³ The Savior in the Philippians’ heavenly commonwealth was Jesus, not Caesar. The lack of the article in Greek and the corresponding translation, **a savior** does not in any way indicate in Paul’s thinking that there were many legitimate “saviors” from which one could choose, and that the Christians decided to choose Jesus. The following clause which talks about Jesus bringing **all things** under his control hardly fits such an idea, let alone the fact that it is impossible to reasonably ascribe such an idea to the apostle Paul. Rather, the lack of the article stresses the qualitative aspect of “saving” inherent in the noun so,,te,,r. What Paul is emphasizing is Jesus’ saving activity, not the fact that Jesus is the savior. This latter point was assumed, taken for granted if you will. This “saving activity” will be explained in 3:21.

In 3:20, however, Paul also refers to Jesus as **the Lord** (kurios). The title kurios is the title commonly used in the LXX to translate YHWH. The fact that Paul had already referred to Jesus as the *exalted* Lord in Phil 2:11 suggests that he is once again referring to Jesus as deity in 3:20. This is made clear in v. 21 where the eschatological role of complete and universal dominion is ascribed to him.

ii. We Will Be Transformed (3:21)

When the savior comes from heaven he **will transform these humble bodies of ours** (hos metasche,,matisei to so,,ma te,,s tapeino,,seo,,s he,,mo,,n). When Christ returns he will literally **transform** (metasche,,matisei) our fallen, sinful, weak bodies. They will be transformed **into the likeness of his glorious body** (summorphon to,, so,,mati te,,s doxe,,s autou). As Kent comments:

²¹ See O’Brien, *Philippians*, 460. He regards “commonwealth” as the best translation.

²² O’Brien, *Philippians*, 462. The use of kurios far exceeds the use of swthr (approximately 717 to 24). It is difficult to say whether its infrequent use is due to the use of the same term in the mystery religions or whether the term kurios simply overtook other designations of Jesus in the early church, etc. See also Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 171-72.

²³ See Fee, *Philippians*, 381.

Christ at his return will “transform” (metasche,matisei, “change the outward form of”) believers’ mortal bodies, so that they will conform to the character of his resurrection body. The present body is described literally as “the body of lowliness” (to so,ma te,s tapeino,,seo,,s), a description calling attention to its weakness and susceptibility to persecution, disease, sinful appetites, and death. At Christ’s coming, however, the earthly, transient appearance will be changed, whether by resurrection of those dead or by rapture of the living, and believers will be transformed and will receive glorified bodies that will more adequately display their essential character (summorphon) as children of God and sharers of divine life in Christ. This will be accomplished by the same effective operation (*energeian*) that will ultimately bring all things in the universe under the authority of Christ.²⁴

Christ will do all this transforming **by means of that power by which he is able to subject all things to himself** (kata te,,n energeian tou dunasthai auton kai hupotaxai auto,, ta panta). The power of Christ is limitless and in the end all things will be subject to him (Eph 1:10; 3:9; Col 1:20).

V. Principles for Application

1. It is not enough to simply study the Bible. We must also put it into practice (James 1:21-25). Here Paul tells us one way to do that, namely, by imitating him and other godly examples. Two suggestions for application flow from this: (1) follow the example of Paul as we have defined it in the study and also look for someone at your church that you think is walking with God and ask them for help and insight on how to live the Christian life. This does not mean that you should become a slave to their every word, but that God is in the business of clothing truth with flesh and blood and that there may be someone there whom God wants to use in your life in this way (i.e., in a mentoring role); (2) if you are further along in the Christian life and see someone who needs a model, help them by coming alongside and mentoring them. This, of course, implies that you are walking with the Lord, love him, and want to serve him.
2. The so-called **many** of verses 18-19 provide an example, albeit a negative one, of the kind of earthly, “here-and-now-only” thinking that has no place in the Christian. Ask God to help you understand where these sinful strategies are at work in your life and to root them out through confession, cleansing, and mortification (1 John 1:9; Rom 8:13). Ask other trusted godly friends for insight as well.
3. Do we really look to heaven each and every day (moment) for our leading in how to live as aliens and strangers in a place that is no longer our home in any real and permanent sense? Remember, our citizenship is in heaven and we enjoy an intimate connection with the Lord of that commonwealth. Therefore, we need to live in accordance with the design of that commonwealth under the Lordship of Christ. Let us remember daily that this is not our home, but it is nonetheless our Father’s world.
4. At the consummation of all things, Christ will transform our lowly (i.e., humble) bodies into a new and glorious body. Thankfulness and eager expectation are two qualities we can ask God to cultivate in us as a result of this truth.

²⁴ Kent, “Philippians,” 148.

Lesson 15: General Exhortations (4:1-9)

I. Translation as It Appears in the NET Bible

4:1 So then, my brothers and sisters, dear friends whom I long to see, my joy and crown, stand in the Lord in this way, my dear friends! **4:2** I appeal to Euodia and to Syntyche to agree in the Lord. **4:3** Yes, I say also to you, true companion, help them. They have struggled together in the gospel ministry along with me and Clement and my other coworkers, whose names are in the book of life. **4:4** Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say, rejoice! **4:5** Let your gentleness be seen by all. The Lord is near! **4:6** Do not be anxious about anything. Instead, tell your requests to God in your every prayer and petition—with thanksgiving. **4:7** And the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. **4:8** Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is worthy of respect, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if something is excellent or praiseworthy, think about these things. **4:9** And what you learned and received and heard and saw in me, do these things. And the God of peace will be with you.

II. Outline: General Exhortations (4:1-9)

A. Transition (4:1)

B. Exhortations (4:2-9)

1. To Help Two Women (4:2-3)
2. To Rejoice (4:4-5)
3. To Pray (4:6-7)
4. To Think Rightly (4:8)
5. To Imitate Paul (4:9)

III. Context

There is no specific connection literarily to what has preceded in the letter. The connection is historical in that the various imperatives of 4:1, 4-9 are further exhortations for the church's growth. They may be grouped together as a final, general body of exhortations, though they are not to be viewed as secondary in any sense. Phil 4:2-3 concern a local situation regarding a dispute between two women, but 4:1 and 4:4-9 are more general in character.

IV. General Exhortations (4:1-9)

A. Transition (4:1)

4:1 So then (ho,,ste), my brothers and sisters (adelphoi mou), dear friends (agape,,toi) whom I long to see (epipothe,,toi), my joy and crown (chara kai stephanos mou), stand in the Lord in this way (houto,,s ste,,kete en kurio,,), my dear friends (agape,,toi)!

Chapter 4 and verse 1 serves as a transition. The term “so then” (ho,,ste), as it so often does, draws on previous material and expresses a logical conclusion from it. To be certain its immediate connection is to 3:20-21 and the idea that Christian citizenship is in heaven and that the Philippians are eagerly awaiting a savior from there. It is on this basis that the Philippians are to **stand in the Lord** (ste,,kete en kurio,,). But what does Paul mean by **stand in the Lord** and the adverb **in this way** (houto,,s). To stand firm in the Lord means to hold on to the truth on one hand—as a unified church, and to resist the onslaught of attacks on the other (Phil 1:27). The Philippians were to stand firm and not be taken in by the Judaizers (3:3-16) or those who were apparently of a more antinomian (“lawless) perspective (3:17-21). They were to do so **in this way**, meaning in the way that Paul had shown them by his own example (in 3:3-14, and indeed in the whole letter). Paul understood the error of their reasoning and the sufficiency of the cross. He knew that a personal relationship with Christ relies not on legalism, but on faith and personal trust. The Philippians were not to move away from this mark.

The command to “stand firm in the Lord” was not given the Philippians by an apostle who did not care for the churches over which God had placed him. Quite the contrary. Paul loved these people. Indeed the command is almost lost sight of in the midst of the many terms of affection, terms which go back to earlier comments in the epistle, e.g., 1:8. There he says: “God is my witness how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.” First, Paul refers to them as **brothers and sisters** (adelphoi). This is the seventh time in this letter—a letter in which the term appears a total of nine times. It not only connotes intimacy, but expresses the family relationship Paul has with these people in Christ. He refers to them twice as **beloved** (agape,,toi) which reflects his tremendous commitment to them as people and to their growth in the Lord (1:25). It is in this context of commitment and love that he urges them to stand firm in the Lord. Further, he says that he **longs to see them** (epipothe,,toi)—a point he has already made earlier in 1:8 (cf. also 2:24)—and thus it is no wonder that he refers to them as **my joy and crown** (chara kai stephanos mou). Joy is a theme in this letter as is evident in 1:4, 2:25 and 2:2. The Philippians are his joy in the sense that they give him great joy when he thinks and prays for them. They were a real “bright spot” in the apostle’s apostolic ministry and calling. The **crown** speaks to the feeling of pride Paul has in them now and might also allude to the apostle’s reward in eternity. Nonetheless, they are presently his honor. O’Brien comments:

As chara so also stephanos here describes what the Philippians are presently to Paul: they are already the cause of his honour, the source of his pride and joy. Certainly by their continued faithfulness ‘they ensure for him a crown on that day when the final word will be spoken on his apostolic work’. But they are his crown even now.¹

B. Exhortations (4:2-9)

1. To Help Two Women (4:2-3)

4:2 **I appeal** (parakalo,,²) **to Euodia and to Syntyche to agree in the Lord** (to auto phronein en kurio,,). 4:3 **Yes, I say also to you, true companion** (gne,,sie suzuge), **help them** (sullambanou autais). **They have struggled together** (sune,,thle,,san) **in the gospel ministry along with me and Clement and my other coworkers** (sunergo,,n), **whose names are in the book of life** (biblo,, zo,,e,,s). Paul now turns to make an urgent appeal to two women who seem to have been at odds with one another and whose relationship probably threatened the unity of the body at large. That the relationship of Euodia and Syntyche (two common names) did indeed threaten the entire church is likely since Paul mentions them *by name*, and does so in a letter that was to be read *publicly*. Some scholars have attempted to identify one of the women with Lydia (Acts 16:14, 40) while others have argued that the names are used metaphorically to refer to two factions (i.e., the Petrine and the Pauline) in the church. Neither of these arguments commend themselves.

The use of the word **Yes** serves to reinforce Paul’s appeal to Euodia and Syntyche; they are to come to a common mind in the Lord, that is, they are to live in agreement and unity. Paul even requests that a certain **true companion** (gne,,sie suzuge) help in this reconciliation. Scholars who regard the names as referring to literal people have suggested several people for the identity of the **true companion**, including Timothy, Silas, Epaphroditus, Paul’s supposed wife, Christ himself (in a prayer), the bishop of the church in Philippi, Luke, etc. Many others take the term suzuge as a proper name and the term gne,,sie to mean that the person is rightly named. That is, they have lived up to their name of “companion” or “yoke-fellow.” The one problem with this interpretation is that there is no inscriptional support for such a name. The truth is: all suggestions remain only that, suggestions. We have no way of knowing for certain, nor do we need to know who the person was in order to understand the point of the passage: Paul wants this person—whoever they may be—to help Euodia and Syntyche agree in the Lord. He wants both women to reconcile and live harmoniously.

The apostle wants help for these two women *because* **They have struggled together** (sune,,thle,,san) **in the gospel ministry along with him and Clement and Paul’s other coworkers** (sunergo,,n), **whose names are in the book of life** (biblo,, zo,,e,,s). The term sune,,thle,,san is an athletic term which highlights the intensity of the struggle these women endured in the cause of the gospel (cf. Phil 1:12-26). Further, they served in this struggle with Paul and as a result he appears deeply committed to resolving this issue. **Clement** is otherwise unknown to us but appears to have been an associate of Paul’s. There were also other **coworkers** (sunergo,,n) with whom Euodia and Syntyche had labored in the

¹ O’Brien, *Philippians*, 476.

² The verb parakalw appears two times, once before Euodia and once before Syntyche. The repeated use is for emphasis and expresses Paul’s strong desire that these two women come to an agreement in the Lord.

cause of the gospel. The repeated use of the sun prefix emphasizes the “togetherness” and unity of the people involved in the ministry of the gospel.

All of these peoples’ names are **in the book of life** (biblo,, zo,,e,,s). With the previous mention of “citizenship in heaven,” the reference to **the book of life** indicates the Christian’s registry in the commonwealth of heaven. The image is immediately *apropos*, since the Philippians, as citizens of Rome living in a Roman colony, would have had their names entered in a civic registry for the Roman government. The background of the imagery, however (of names in a **book of life**), is not particularly Greek, but Jewish and in Paul’s thinking undoubtedly comes from the OT. Fee explains:

The idea of names inscribed by God in a heavenly book is found as early as Exod 32:32-33 (“blot out my name from the book you have written”); it is actually called “the book of life” in Ps 69:28 (LXX 68:29, “book of the living”). The term was especially congenial to apocalyptic (cf. Dan 12:1; 1 Enoch 47:3; Herm. *Sim.* 29), as evidenced by its sevenfold occurrence in the Revelation (3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27; 22:19). This is the same tradition to which Jesus refers in Luke 10:20 (“your names are written in heaven”); cf. Heb 12:23.³

2. To Rejoice (4:4-5)

Having made an appeal to specific people in the church to help resolve a potentially divisive issue, Paul turns to the church at large and urges them to **Rejoice in the Lord always** (chairete en kurio,, pantote). **Again I say, rejoice** (chairete)! For Paul joy was bound up with the salvation and relationship he enjoyed with the Lord and was thus not contingent upon how things were going in his life or ministry. Thus he could tell the church to **rejoice always**. This does not mean that he did not feel sorrow (Phil 2:27), but that joy was overall, a major theme in his life. He regarded it as the work of the Holy Spirit (Phil 2:1 with Gal 5:23) who had sealed him for the day of redemption (Eph 1:13-14) and who was given as a down payment guaranteeing his future with the Lord (2 Cor 1:21-22; 5:5). The fact that joy was evident in his life accounts for the emphasis on this theme in the letter to the Philippians.

Paul says that in all his prayers for the Philippians he always prays with joy (1:4). In fact, he considers the Philippians *to be his joy*, that is, he welled up with the experience of joy when he thought of his friends in the church at Philippi (4:1). Paul rejoiced and was joyful at the thought of the advancement of the gospel whether it was preached by others—with false motives or true (1:18)—or whether it was advancing at the price of his own life (2:17). Paul’s joy increased as the gospel deepened its roots in the experience of the Philippians. He rejoiced at the hope of their spiritual development and progress, especially in terms of their commitment to Christ and faith, as well as to their commitment to unity and working together (1:25 with 2:2). The Philippians were to welcome back Epaphroditus as a soldier in the faith and to do so with all joy (2:29) and Paul even commands them to rejoice two times in the same passage (4:4). Paul also rejoiced over the gift the Philippians had sent him (4:10), another sign that the gospel was taking root and growing among them (cf. Phil 1:6). Thus joy and rejoicing permeate the letter!

4:5 Let your gentleness be seen by all (to epieikes humo,,n gno,,sthe,,to,, pasin anthro,,pois). Paul continues his series of imperatives with the command to be gentle with other people. The term *epieikes* occurs four other times in the NT.⁴ In 1 Tim 3:3 Paul wants overseers not to be drunkards, nor violent, but instead “gentle”.... In Titus 3:2 Paul wants all people in the church to be “gentle” and not contentious, being considerate toward all men and not to malign anyone. James regarded the virtue of “gentleness” as related to the wisdom which comes from God. And finally, slaves were to submit to their masters, and not just to those who were good and “gentle,” but also to those who were otherwise (1 Pet 2:18; cf. 2 Cor 10:1). Kent explains the force of the term:

Second, believers are to be gentle to all. The term *epieikes* (“gentleness”) is difficult to translate with its full connotation. Such words as *gentle*, *yielding*, *kind*, *forbearing*, and *lenient* are among the best English attempts, but no single word is adequate. Involved is the willingness to yield one’s personal rights and to show consideration and gentleness to others. It is easy to display this quality toward some persons, but Paul commands that it be shown toward all. That would seem to include Christian friends, unsaved persecutors, false teachers—anyone at all. Of course, truth is not to be sacrificed, but a gentle spirit will do much to disarm the adversary.⁵

³ Fee, *Philippians*, 396, n 59.

⁴ The related term *epieikeia* (“gentleness,” “graciousness”) occurs twice (Acts 24:4; 2 Cor 10:1).

⁵ Kent, “Philippians,” 151.

There is no explicit grammatical connection between **The Lord is near** (ho kurios eggus) and the preceding phrase **Let your gentleness be evident to all**. Nor is there any explicit connection with what follows in 4:6-7. Thus it is difficult to determine the precise function and point of the words. Further, the term eggus (pronounced *engus*) can mean the Lord is near in temporal terms, i.e., his second coming is at hand⁶ and it can, however, also mean that the Lord is near in spatial terms; he is close to every believer and every believer experiences his spiritual nearness.⁷ Both are correct theologically and have support in this letter (2:1; 3:20). It is virtually impossible to choose between the two and it may be that both are intended.⁸

3. To Pray (4:6-7)

Paul continues his series of staccato like commands with the imperative: **Do not be anxious about anything** (me, den merimnate). With the advent of the kingdom in the present experience of the Philippian Christians, and the love and care of their heavenly father, Paul exhorts them not to worry. It is difficult to say what precisely may have been causing the Philippians to worry and be unduly anxious and concerned about their lives, but it is probably related to the persecution spoken of in 1:27-30 and the tension between some members in the community (2:3-4; 4:2-3).

Jesus put his finger on issue of worry in the Sermon on the Mount; many people are anxious about the daily needs in their lives. The importance of the subject can be seen in the proportion of space he devotes to it. In 6:25-34 he gives more space to the issue of worry than he does to murder (5:21-22), reconciliation (5:23-26), adultery (5:27-30), divorce (5:31-32), oaths (5:33-37), love (5:43-48), giving (6:1-4), fasting (6:16-18), money (6:19-24), and judging others (7:1-5). Only prayer is talked about more (6:5-15; 7:7-11) and nothing more mitigates against prayer than worry. You cannot do one and be thoroughly engaged in the other. The lack of peace we experience can be devastating when we give ourselves to worry. Listen to the penetrating words of Jesus:

6:25 “Because of this [i.e., the fact that you cannot serve two masters] I say to you, do not worry about your life, as to what you will eat or drink, or about your body, as to what you will wear. Isn’t there more to life than food and more to the body than clothing? **6:26** Look at the birds of the sky: they do not sow, or harvest, or gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren’t you more valuable than they are? **6:27** Can any of you add time to his life by worrying? **6:28** Why worry about clothing? Think about how the flowers of the field grow. They do not work or spin, **6:29** yet I say to you that Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these! **6:30** And if God clothes the grass of the field this way, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire to heat the oven, won’t he clothe you even more, you people of little faith? **6:31** So then, don’t worry saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ **6:32** For the unconverted pursue these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. **6:33** But seek first his kingdom and righteousness, and all these things will be given to you. **6:34** So then, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Today has enough trouble of its own.—NET Bible

On another occasion, in connection with faith and trust, Jesus warned against the stifling affects of worry. He said that there are those people who choose to respond to the ups and downs of life with worry and so fail to respond to the word of God. They are like seed sown among thorns (Mark 4:18-19). In their fits of worry and anxiety they cannot *hear* the message of the good news of the kingdom: there is Someone who not only cares, but is able to do something about your plight. Therefore do not succumb to anxiety. He runs the world, you’re supposed to trust!

Thus, worry is a problem endemic to the human race and one that every believer is confronted with, some more than others. But believers must come to grips with the gracious character of our heavenly Father and trust that He *knows* what’s

⁶ For the temporal use of eggus see Matt 24:32; Mark 13:28; Lk 21:31; Jn 2:13; 6:4; Rom 13:11; Rev 1:3.

⁷ For the spatial use of eggus see Luke 19:11; Jn 3:23; Acts 1:12; Eph 2:13. For a fuller discussion of this issue see O’Brien, *Philippians*, 488.

⁸ See O’Brien, *Philippians*, 489. See Fee, *Philippians*, 407-08 for a discussion of whether **The Lord is near** goes with 4:5a or with 4:6-7 following and the command to pray and experience the Lord’s peace. If it is an allusion to Ps 145:18 (i.e., the Lord is near to all who call on him), he suggests that it most likely goes with 4:6-7 following. In the end, however, he thinks it better as a piece of eschatological encouragement that even though the church is presently suffering at the hands of those who proclaim Caesar as Lord, *the Lord is coming!*

going on in our lives. Jesus said, as we read above, that we are valuable to our Father and that He wants to provide what we need—and want, in many cases as well. Our responsibility (notice I said responsibility) is to seek first his kingdom!

Therefore, **instead** (all') of worrying, Paul admonishes the church saying, **tell your requests to God in your every prayer and petition—with thanksgiving** (all en panti te,, proseuche,, kai dee,,sei meta eucharistias ta aite,,mata humo,,n gno,,rizestho,, pros ton theon). Paul exhorts the Philippians not worry about **anything**, but in their **every prayer and petition to tell their requests to God**. The inclusive nature of the command can hardly be missed. It doesn't matter what's happened; "take it to the Lord" is what the apostle is saying. The term aite,,mata has the force of including all kinds of *specific* prayer and requests.⁹ Jesus promises us that God always hears and therefore he always answers, even if that answer—for our own good—is "no" (cf. 1 John 5:14-15). The important aspect of prayer to note in Phil 4:6 is that it is to be done with **thanksgiving** (eucharistias), in the context of who God is, who loves his children, and who knows their every cry, hurt, need, and desire. We are, first and foremost, in a relationship with him because of his amazing grace, and this must never be lost sight of in the process. Prayer has a lot more to do with God ministering to and changing us, than our getting something.

Immediately the apostle gives the result of replacing worry and anxiety with prayer and thanksgiving. With a note of utter certainty he concludes: **And the peace of God** (kai he,, eire,,ne tou theou) **that surpasses all understanding** (he,, huperechousa panta noun) **will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus** (phroure,,sei tas kardias humo,,n kai ta noe,,mata humo,,n en Christo,, Ie,,sou).

The **peace of God** refers to God's peace that he himself possesses in his nature as Someone unfettered with concern and anxiety in any way (cf. Col. 3:15). It is closely associated with the idea of spiritual and emotional *rest* and He gives *this* to us when we pray. His peace **surpasses all understanding** because it goes beyond human ability to discover. It is not that it achieves more than human reasoning can, that is, in terms of bringing peace and rest to the soul, but that it is *beyond* human comprehension.¹⁰ It lies outside the innate ability of human beings to develop that kind of peace or even understand how it can exist in a world fraught with worry and anxiety. It is based on the relationship we now have with God through Christ—a relationship grounded in the grace of God—grace extended to us in Christ on the basis of the justification he accomplished (Rom 5:1-5, 8-11).

It is *God's* peace which he gives to us and which **will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus**. The use of the term **guard** (phroure,,sei) recalls images, familiar to the Philippians, of Roman sentinels standing guard. Martin explains:

Paul uses a military metaphor in describing God's *peace*, which is almost personified... The Philippians living in a garrison town, would be familiar with the sight of the Roman sentry, maintaining his watch. Likewise, comments the apostle, God's peace will garrison and protect *you hearts and your minds*. Bunyan's use of this picture in the appointment and patrol of Mr. God's-Peace in the town of Mansoul should be read in conjunction with this verse.' Nothing was to be found but harmony, happiness, joy and health' so long as Mr. God's-Peace maintained his office. But when Prince Emmanuel was grieved away from the town, he laid down his commission departed also. It is a salutary reminder that we enjoy God's gift on *in Christ Jesus*, i.e., by our obedience to him and submission to his authority.¹¹

4. To Think Rightly (4:8)

4:8 Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true (ale,,the,,), **whatever is worthy of respect** (semna), **whatever is just** (dikaia), **whatever is pure** (agna), **whatever is lovely** (prosphele,,), **whatever is commendable** (euphe,,ma), **if something is excellent** (arete,,) **or praiseworthy** (epainos), **think about these things** (tauta logizesthe). This sentence and the terms employed are almost without precedent in Paul and indeed in the NT. While it seems that Paul has borrowed terms common in Greek moral philosophy, perhaps Stoicism, it must be clearly articulated that his focus on the Christian's personal relationship with Christ (3:10-11), and rejoicing and joy (e.g., Phil 4:4), indicate that he is not simply thinking of pure stoicism. On the other hand, he could be thinking of these terms as they appear in the LXX (i.e., Greek Bible), though this is difficult to demonstrate *here in Phil 4:8*.¹² In any case, the terms were commonly known in the culture. It

⁹ See lesson #3 for a fuller discussion of the terms for **prayer** and **petition**.

¹⁰ Cf. Martin, *Philippians*, 172; and Hendriksen, *Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*, 196, who says "This sweet peace originates in God who himself possesses it in his own being. He is glad to impart it to his children."

¹¹ Martin, *Philippians*, 173.

¹² See O'Brien, *Philippians*, 502.

appears that he was encouraging the Philippians to consider (logizesthe) these virtues when they appeared in the culture and use them as points of contact to relate to the culture at large. The need for the Philippian church was to stand firm on what was important (e.g., the gospel and unity) and to exploit points of contact with their non-Christian persecutors wherever they could. In this way they could hold out the word of life (2:16). It must be remembered, though, for Paul, there is no way one can live up to these virtues without Christ. Let's take a brief look at the virtues.

The term **true** (ale,the,) denotes the idea of truth which coheres with God, the gospel, and lives lived in conformity with the gospel. When the Philippians saw such things in their culture they were to acknowledge them however partial and incomplete these expressions were.

Respect (semna) is used of persons to indicate someone "worthy of respect," "honor," "noble," "dignified," or "serious." Deacons and aged men are to be regarded as "worthy of respect" (1 Tim 3:8; Tit 2:2). It is also used of divinities and supernatural beings indicating beings "worthy of reverence," "august," "sublime," or "holy." "Characteristics, states of beings, and things" are predicated as "honorable," "worthy," "venerable," "holy," "above reproach." Semna in Phil 4:8 would fall into this latter category.¹³

The term **just** (dikaia) refers to men who are "upright," "just," or "righteous" both in a Jewish sense of maintaining the law of God (Luke 1:6; Rom 3:10; 1 Tim 1:9) but also in a Greco-Roman sense of being model citizens. God is also regarded as **just** (Ps 140:5; Rev 16:5) as is Jesus himself (Matt 27:19; 1 John 2:1; 3:7; cf. Luke 23:47 where the term probably means "innocence"). In Phil 4:8 the term dikaia probably denotes "that which is obligatory in view of certain requirements of justice."¹⁴

The term **pure** (agna) means "pure" or "holy" and was a religious term, "originally an attribute of the divinity and everything belonging to it." It was also used by the stoics in reference to "wise men." In the NT, God/Christ are said to be **pure** (1 John 3:3) and Christians are to be pure as well, that is, free from sin (1 Tim 5:22). In Titus 2:5 the apostle says that Christian women are to be pure. "Things" are said to be pure as well, including one's conscience (1 Clement 1:3). James refers to the wisdom that comes down from heaven as **pure**. Thus the term denotes positively, holiness, and negatively, freedom from any kind of sin.¹⁵ Paul says that when the Philippians see these things they ought to think about them and allow them to guide their lives.

Lovely (proshile,), only appears in the passive voice referring to that which is pleasing, agreeable, lovely, amiable."¹⁶

Whatever is commendable (euphe,ma) refers to that which is "auspicious," "well-sounding," "praiseworthy," "attractive" or "appealing." It is difficult to determine which one best fits in Philippians 4:8 since the context is not a given.¹⁷ Praiseworthy is probably at the heart of the meaning in Phil 4:8, however.

The term **excellent** (arete,) means "moral excellence" and "virtue."¹⁸

And finally, **praiseworthy** (epainos) means someone or something which is worthy of "approval," "recognition" or "praise."¹⁹ The Philippians were to consider certain things in their culture that exemplified these virtues.

Hawthorne summarizes the list of virtues and their significance for the church in Philippi:

These then are the excellent qualities that belonged to the culture of Paul's day, not at all unique to Christianity, which the apostle availed himself and commended to his friends at Philippi. He asked them continuously to focus their minds (logizesthe) on these things, to give full critical attention to them,

¹³ BAGD, s.v., semnos.

¹⁴ BAGD, s.v., dikaios.

¹⁵ BAGD, s.v., agnos.

¹⁶ BAGD, s.v., prosfilh.

¹⁷ BAGD, s.v., eufhmos.

¹⁸ BAGD, s.v. areth.

¹⁹ BAGD, s.v., epainos.

and so to reflect carefully upon them with an action-provoking kind of meditation. It was not his desire to ask them merely to think about such noble matters without putting them into practice in their lives.²⁰

5. To Imitate Paul (4:9)

4:9 And what you learned (emathete) and received (parelabete) and heard (e,,kousate) and saw (eidete) in me, do these things (tauta prassete). And the God of peace will be with you (kai ho theos te,,s eire,,ne,,s estai meth humo,,n). Thus Paul turns again to his own example. The Philippians were to continually practice that which they had learned from him and received by way of formal teaching.²¹ They were also to practice what they heard from others about the apostle's life, as well as the principles they saw operative in his life while he was with them. The promise attending such obedience is nothing short of the peace of God.

V. Principles for Application

1. Paul's admonition to help two people who were having a disagreement should be followed by us as well. Too often we take sides in a dispute between people and the schism becomes even worse. What we should do is attempt through prayer, support, and encouragement to bring differing sides of a dispute together. Blessed are the peacemakers!
2. Life has a way of stealing our joy. Yet Jesus never changes, nor does his love for us. Therefore, we ought to rejoice in God and life, even if things are difficult. He has said that he will never leave us or forsake us. In light of this we can always be joyful. Take the command to rejoice seriously!
3. If we truly want the peace of God, let us pray and bring all our burdens, requests, and needs to him. Set up a time for daily prayer. Do it as an expression of your continual desire to know God deeply and experience His very own peace. And, when you come to Him in prayer, be thankful. Thankfulness is central to the Christian faith and love for God.
4. Ask God to help you find elements in your culture which are beneficial and can be described according to the virtues in Phil 4:8. Give thanks to God for them and let others—even non-Christians—know of your feelings about the worth of those things. Applaud truth, purity, justice, etc. whenever and wherever you see it. Such an attitude brings a positive approach to sharing the gospel with others.

²⁰ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 188.

²¹ The term *parelabete* probably refers to important tradition passed on orally in the early church. The Philippians would be responsible to pass it on as well.

Lesson 16: Thanksgiving for the Philippians' Gift and a Final Greeting (4:10-23)

I. Translation as It Appears in the NET Bible

4:10 I have great joy in the Lord because now at last you have again expressed your concern for me (now I know you were concerned before but had no opportunity to do anything). **4:11** I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content in any circumstance. **4:12** I have experienced times of need and times of abundance. In any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of contentment, whether I go satisfied or hungry, have plenty or nothing. **4:13** I am able to do all things through the one who strengthens me. **4:14** Nevertheless, you did well to share with me in my trouble. **4:15** And as you Philippians know, at the beginning of my gospel ministry, when I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in this matter of giving and receiving except you alone. **4:16** For even in Thessalonica on more than one occasion you sent something for my need. **4:17** It is not that I am seeking the gift. Rather, I seek the credit that abounds to your account. **4:18** For I have received all things, and I have plenty. I have all I need because I received from Epaphroditus your gifts—a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, very pleasing to God. **4:19** And my God will supply all that you need according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus. **4:20** May glory be given to God our Father forever and ever. Amen.

4:21 Give greetings to all the saints in Christ Jesus. The brothers with me here send greetings. **4:22** All the saints greet you, especially those from the emperor's household. **4:23** The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

II. Outline: Thanksgiving for the Philippians' Gift and a Final Greeting (4:10-23)

- A. Paul's Thanksgiving for Their Gift (4:10-20)
 - 1. Paul's Thanksgiving Proper (4:10)
 - 2. Is Not Because He Lacks Contentment (4:11-14)
 - a. Paul's Various Circumstances (4:11-12)
 - b. Paul's Secret to Contentment (4:13)
 - 3. Is Because He Wants Them To Be Blessed (4:14-20)
 - a. Paul's Commendation of the Philippians (4:14-16)
 - i. For Their Present Gift (4:14)
 - ii. For Their Past Faithfulness (4:15-16)
 - b. The Blessing of the Philippians (4:17)
 - c. Paul's Plenty Because of Their Gift (4:18-20)
 - i. The Nature of Their Gift (4:18)
 - ii. The Promise of Needs Met (4:19)
 - iii. The Glory to God (4:20)
- B. Final Greeting (4:21-23)

III. Context

In 4:10-20 Paul brings to a conclusion the issue of their gift hinted at throughout the letter (1:5-6; 2:25-30) and stresses their friendship in the midst of rejoicing over their generosity.

IV. Thanksgiving for the Philippians' Gift and a Final Greeting (4:10-23)

A. Paul's Thanksgiving for Their Gift (4:10-20)

1. Paul's Thanksgiving Proper (4:10)

Paul says he has **great joy** (ecarhn) **in the Lord** because **now at last** the Philippians have **again expressed** their **concern for** him. But it wasn't that the Philippians didn't care and only recently decided to do something about Paul's needs. On the contrary, Paul acknowledges their desire, but understands that they had **had no opportunity to do anything**.

Paul's great rejoicing (ecarhn...megalws) could be taken (wrongly) as his eager desire to get money from the church. But this is not the case, as he goes on to make clear in the rest of the paragraph, especially in 4:11 and 4:17-18. Thus he is walking a thin line between expressing his gratitude for the gift sent by Epaphroditus (4:18) and having the church misunderstand his intentions. Paul was simply overjoyed due to their generous response to him. But he was so, more because of what such a response demonstrated spiritually about them, than he was because of any benefit he might have received (see v. 17).

One cannot miss the imagery here implied in the use of the verb **again expressed ...concern** (aneqalete). It is a rare term meaning "grow up again," "bloom again" as used with plants. Paul is therefore saying that like the new bloom of flowers in the spring so is the Philippians' blossoming interest in his welfare.¹ The imagery is picturesque and connotes a deep and growing friendship.

2. Is Not Because He Lacks Contentment (4:11-14)

a. Paul's Various Circumstances (4:11-12)

4:11 I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content (autarkhs) **in any circumstance. 4:12 I have experienced times of need** (tapeinousqai) **and times of abundance** (perisseuein). **In any and every circumstance I have learned the secret** (memuhmai) **of contentment, whether I go satisfied or hungry, have plenty or nothing.**

Paul is not rejoicing because he was in need and now the Philippians have given him some money. Nothing could be farther from the truth. He had learned, since his conversion—growth takes time—to be content in whatever circumstances he found himself. The Greek term autarkhs ("content") was a common term in the culture, but had special duty among Stoic philosophers such as Seneca. Stoics viewed contentment as being happy with (i.e., accepting) one's present circumstances, station in life, etc. It involves a certain resignation to the surrounding circumstances. But, for Paul, contentment comes from a faith-oriented, Christ-centered approach to life's circumstances; it is not mere resignation, for it involves a deep and abiding joy through an ongoing consciousness of God's sovereign and good hand in everything. Therefore, Paul may have once again used Stoic jargon, but he certainly has a different integrating center in his thought; indeed, he is a long way from a Stoic worldview with its practical deism. For him, final reality was not some "world-spirit," but rather a personal God who had made himself known in and through his Son, Jesus Christ.

The verb memuhmai (**I have learned the secret**) was a term used in the mystery religions to describe the experience of the religious initiates. For those in such pagan cults it was a secret or private affair, but for Paul, on the other hand, it was a secret learned about contentment. He learned it not in some secretive service, but in the course of his public ministry to others, and he freely made it known. The secret of contentment is found in knowing God's secret, that is Christ, who was *publicly* portrayed as crucified and who was preached by Paul to *every* creature under heaven (Col. 1:23). Thus Paul's secret was not only for a select few, but for everyone (Matt 11:28-30) who might take up the cross and follow Christ (Luke 9:23).

b. Paul's Secret to Contentment (4:13)

So, what *was* the secret that Paul had been learning since his conversion and which had taught him contentment? In 4:13 he says, **I am able to do all things through the one who strengthens me** (panta iscuw en tw endunamounti me). Paul learned *in the context of serving Christ* that he could do all things through Christ who gave him strength. Most of us

¹ Cf. BAGD, s.v., anaqallw.

today only here the **I am able** part of the sentence. Corporate America, and its love affair with modernistic ideals and concepts of progress and achievement, sells tons of books and gives daily seminars with standing room only on “how” *to be able*.² But Paul’s focus is not so much on *his achievements and abilities*, as if he were somehow superior to the average man, but more on Christ who gives him the strength to carry out His will. It is **the one who strengthens me** who gets the credit and glory. It is not that progress is not important to Paul, as he indicates in 1:25 (though he defines it as the development of a servant character and faith, not necessarily mental and managerial prowess), but that Christ is the one who gives the grace for such “progress” (1 Cor 15:10). Since with his fallen human strength he was a stumbling block to Christ, Paul learned to rejoice in his weakness so that Christ’s strength, and not his own, would become evident (2 Cor 12:9-10). It must be noted as well that this verse is not the Christian’s *carte blanche* to get “power” from God to do whatever he/she wants. Paul received incredible internal strength from Christ to carry out Christ’s will, not his own (Eph 2:10; 3:16; Titus 2:11-12).

3. Is Because He Wants Them To Be Blessed (4:14-20)

a. Paul’s Commendation of the Philippians (4:14-16)

i. For Their Present Gift (4:14)

Even though he had learned the secret of living with much and living with little—and *both* take learning—he says to the Philippians that they **nevertheless...did well to share with him in his trouble** (plhn kalws epoihante sugkoinwnhsantes mou th qliyei). The gift that the church sent to Paul via Epaphroditus was both a blessing to Paul as well as to the church (cf. 4:17). The verb sugkoinwnhsantes (“to share with”) with the sun (“with”) prefix (remember this from previous lessons) stress the Philippians’ close participation with the apostle in his ministry and concomitant struggles. While the term embraces what was probably a financial gift, it also takes in much more in terms of Paul’s overall needs and support. He regarded them as dear friends in the cause of the gospel. The term qlipsei does not particularly stress the idea of suffering in light of the end times and the coming of Christ, but more Paul’s general distress and suffering in the cause of the gospel (Phil cf. 1:12-26). It is true that the coming to light of the gospel has ushered in the eschaton (in an inaugural way), but the use of mou (“my”) seems to lay greater emphasis on Paul’s ministry *now* and the trials and tribulations that came as a result (cf. 2 Cor 6:4-10; 11:23).

ii. For Their Past Faithfulness (4:15-16)

In continuing his praise of the church for their involvement in his ministry, the apostle says in 4:15: **And as you Philippians know, at the beginning of my gospel ministry, when I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in this matter of giving and receiving except you alone.** The phrase **at the beginning of my gospel ministry** can be translated as “in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel” (so NIV) thus referring to Paul’s initial ministry among them in Acts 16. This, it appears to me, is the best way to read the passage.

The reference to **giving and receiving** is not just a “double” transaction between the apostle and the church, i.e., they gave money and he gave spiritual input.³ Such a view ignores the strong probability that the phrase was idiomatic and used in many other contexts denoting the whole range of interaction within a friendship.⁴ It also ignores the fact that the letter to the Philippians stresses the friendship the apostle had with the church (cf. 1:7). Therefore, **giving and receiving** has metaphorical nuances—even though the term **matter** (logos) was used as an accounting term—expressing the sharing back and forth of many things (including finances). Such is the case in all genuine friendships.

Even when Paul was in Thessalonica (**For even in Thessalonica**) the Philippians sent him financial help. The phrase **on more than one occasion** (kai Japax kai dis) probably does not refer to repeated gifts received while in Thessalonica, but to gifts received while ministering in other places as well. But we know that since Paul chose to work night and day among the Thessalonians (1 Thess 2:9) the gift(s) was either insufficient to meet his total needs or he used only as much of the money as he needed, but then worked diligently so as to set an example for the Thessalonians (cf. 2 Thess 3:8). In

² The rapidly emerging post-modern culture of the 20th and 21st centuries will have serious implications for the profile of the corporate person.

³ So Martin, *Philippians*, 181.

⁴ Cf. O’Brien, *Philippians*, 534.

any case, Paul was *very* grateful (cf. the term **even** in 4:16) for their support and had obviously not forgotten their faithfulness.

b. The Blessing of the Philippians (4:17)

In 4:17 Paul emphatically denies that he is simply seeking the gift, but rather that he is seeking their good and spiritual growth. **It is not that** (ouc Joti...alla) **I am seeking the gift. Rather, I seek the credit that abounds to your account.** The expression ouc Joti is a strong denial: “It is *not* this, *but* that.” But what is it that the apostle is ardently seeking for this church? He refers to it as **the credit that abounds to your account.** But what does that mean? The expression is a commercial one and seems to speak to the spiritual benefits accruing to the account of the Philippians, both in the present in terms of their experience of God’s grace as well as in their future at the second coming. O’Brien comments similarly on Paul’s language:

The picture painted by the accounting metaphor is of compound interest that accumulates all the time until the last day. The apostle has employed this commercial language to show that he has set his heart on an ongoing, permanent gain for the Philippians in the spiritual realm. The advantage (*karpos*) that accrues to them as a result of their generous giving is God’s blessing in their lives by which they continually grow in the graces of Christ until the parousia.⁵

c. Paul’s Plenty Because of Their Gift (4:18-20)

i. The Nature of Their Gift (4:18)

If there were a legitimate inference in v. 16 indicating that the gifts of the Philippians did not meet all his needs while he was in Thessalonica, such is certainly not the case here. The apostle says that he was *amply* supplied **for** he had **received all things, and had plenty.** The **gifts** from Epaphroditus had supplied all his needs and he regarded them as a **fragrant offering** (*osmhn euwdias*), **an acceptable sacrifice** (*qusian dekthn*), **very pleasing** (*euareston*) **to God.**

The expression **a fragrant offering** (*osmhn euwdias*) is used in Ephesians 5:2 to describe Christ’s sacrifice which was motivated by love. Ultimately the language grows out of the OT and while it was used generally to describe sacrifices to God (i.e., in the case of Noah after the flood; Gen 8:21), it is especially connected in its approximately 50 uses to the Levitical sacrificial system and the various burnt offerings (cf. Exod 29:18, 25, 41; Lev 1:9, 13, 2:2, 9, 12; Num 15:3, 5, 7, 10, 13-14).

The expression **acceptable sacrifice** (*qusian dekthn*) in the OT referred to grain offerings as well as burnt offerings and could refer spiritually to the sacrifice of a broken spirit (Ps 51:17-19) or of praise (50:8). It indicated that the sacrifice as a whole was acceptable to God because the sacrifice itself as well as the heart of the one doing the sacrificing was pleasing to God. In the case of the Philippians whose hearts were committed to Christ and to their apostle, and whose gift was generous by any measure, their sacrificial offer was **very pleasing** (*euareston*) **to God.** It was given to Paul, but it was as if it had been offered directly to God.

ii. The Promise of Needs Met (4:19)

4:19 And my God will supply (*Jo de qeos mou plhrwsei*) **all that you need** (*pasan creian Jumwn*) **according to the riches** (*kata to ploutos*) **of his glory in Christ Jesus.** Paul knew *his* God. As a result he could say that his (i.e., **my**) God would meet all their needs, just as his God had done in his life. But it is not as if God would fulfill all their needs because they were so generous to Paul. Rather, God would fulfill all their needs as a demonstration of his approval of their sacrificial giving.⁶

When Paul says **all that you need** he is not simply referring to their financial needs (cf. v. 16), but also to many other needs they have as well, including the need for growth in discernment for living a holy life (1:9-11), unity in the church and humility (2:2-4). Whatever they need to accomplish God’s will, will be provided. One is reminded of 2 Cor 9:8:

And God is able to overflow unto you all grace so that at all times, always having all that you need, you will overflow in every good work.

⁵ O’Brien, *Philippians*, 539.

⁶ O’Brien, *Philippians*, 545; cf. Fee, *Philippians*, 452; Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 207.

Paul can say this because God does not give according to human need, but **according to the riches** (kata to ploutos) **of his glory in Christ Jesus**. Kent explains the meaning and function of this phrase:

The preposition kata (“according to”) conveys the thought that God’s supply of the Philippians’ need will not be merely from or out of his wealth but in some sense appropriate to or commensurate with it. The phrase en doxh (“in glory”; NIV, “glorious”) is sometimes construed with plerwsei (“will fill”; NIV, “will meet”) and translated “gloriously” (Muller), or in a local sense, perhaps with eschatological tones, “by placing you in glory” (Lightfoot). Word order, however, strongly favors relating it to ploutos (“riches”), “his riches in glory,” or “glorious riches” (Martin, *Philippians*). By this understanding, we are to think of the heavenly glories that Christ now enjoys as explaining the source of our supply.⁷

iii. The Glory to God (4:20)

The only thing left to do is to give glory and honor to the One who orchestrates life so that unworthy (but not worthless) sinners can benefit in his boundless grace and love. Paul cannot help himself as he joyfully writes: **may glory be given to God our Father forever and ever. Amen.** Glory be to God for his mercy, grace, and sovereignty (Rom 11:33-36).

B. Final Greeting (4:21-23)

4:21 Give greetings to all the saints in Christ Jesus. The brothers with me here send greetings. 4:22 All the saints greet you, especially those from the emperor’s household (Kaisaros oikias). 4:23 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

In his final word the apostle commands that greetings be given to all the saints. By the term **saints** he means God’s holy people as set apart by Him to be a new covenanted community—a new commonwealth as it were (cf. Eph 2:11-22).

The reference to saints from Caesar’s household in v. 22 is important and somewhat ironic. The very Romans who were persecuting the church in Philippi (cf. 1:27-30) had within their ranks, back home in Nero’s house, Christians to whom Paul refers as saints! This stands as an encouragement to the Philippians concerning the power of the gospel to change lives. After all, probably much to the surprise of many of them, the gospel had penetrated into the very heart of their “opponents!”

Philippians is a letter which stresses joy, humility, and unity. Paul provided many living examples of these qualities in order to flesh out what “the concepts looked like in action.” He talks about his own life, as well as that of Timothy, Epaphroditus, and the example *par excellence* of Jesus Christ himself. It is fitting, therefore, since Christ in his condescension is at the heart of the letter (2:6-11), to conclude with: **The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.** For Paul, everything was focused in Christ as God’s plan for the universe (3:20-21).

V. Principles for Application

1. Are you content with the situation in which you are? This does not mean that you cannot seek to improve yourself, develop, etc. It does mean, however, that if you’re not content with the life God has designed for you at the moment, then no amount of further restructuring will make you content. We must *learn* to be content in every situation and this includes good situations in which we find ourselves as well as “not so good” situations.
2. If you are affluent, remember that it takes as much of Christ’s strength to live well in that situation—perhaps more—as it does to live in a situation of relative want (connect 4:12 with 4:13). People seem to forget when they have money that it takes just as much grace to please God in that situation as it does when we do not have money. In both situations we need the Lord!
3. Is there a genuine need that you can fill right now? It doesn’t have to be just financial, although that may be exactly what the Lord wants you to do. It could be spiritual, emotional, etc. Is there someone you can help? Remember that when you reach out to someone in need, God will provide all that you need. And recall that he does so according to *his* riches in glory, not according to *your* need. In our way of thinking, the need is barely covered, but in God’s way of acting, not only is the need covered, but there are abundant blessings on top of it:

⁷ Kent, “Philippians,” 157.

People's lives are changed, obligations are met, the gospel is advanced, and God is praised. It's hard to think of a better plan!