Gerald F. Hawthorne
Ralph P. Martin

General Editors: Bruce M. Metzger, David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker
Old Testament Editors: John D. W. Watts, James W. Watts
New Testament Editors: Ralph P. Martin, Lynn Allan Losie
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Dedication

This book is dedicated in gratitude
to two special persons in the authors’ lives

Jane Hawthorne

and

Doreen Martin

who, like the women of Philippi,
have labored beside us in the work of the gospel

UXORIBUS CARISSIMIS
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Editorial Preface

The launching of the Word Biblical Commentary brings to fulfillment an enterprise of several years’ planning. The publishers and the members of the editorial board met in 1977 to explore the possibility of a new commentary on the books of the Bible that would incorporate several distinctive features. Prospective readers of these volumes are entitled to know what such features were intended to be; whether the aims of the commentary have been fully achieved time alone will tell.

First, we have tried to cast a wide net to include as contributors a number of scholars from around the world who not only share our aims, but are in the main engaged in the ministry of teaching in university, college, and seminary. They represent a rich diversity of denominational allegiance. The broad stance of our contributors can rightly be called evangelical, and this term is to be understood in its positive, historic sense of a commitment to Scripture as divine revelation and to the truth and power of the Christian gospel.

Then, the commentaries in our series are all commissioned and written for the purpose of inclusion in the Word Biblical Commentary. Unlike several of our distinguished counterparts in the field of commentary writing, there are no translated works, originally written in a non-English language. Also, our commentators were asked to prepare their own rendering of the original biblical text and to use the biblical languages as the basis of their own comments and exegesis. What may be claimed as distinctive with this series is that it is based on the biblical languages, yet it seeks
to make the technical and scholarly approach to a theological understanding of Scripture understandable by—and useful to—the fledgling student, the working minister, and colleagues in the guild of professional scholars and teachers as well.

Finally, a word must be said about the format of the series. The layout, in clearly defined sections, has been consciously devised to assist readers at different levels. Those wishing to learn about the textual witnesses on which the translation is offered are invited to consult the section headed If the readers’ concern is with the state of modern scholarship on any given portion of Scripture, they should turn to the sections on Bibliography and For a clear exposition of the passage’s meaning and its relevance to the ongoing biblical revelation, the Comment and concluding Explanation are designed expressly to meet that need. There is therefore something for everyone who may pick up and use these volumes.

If these aims come anywhere near realization, the intention of the editors will have been met, and the labor of our team of contributors rewarded.

General Editors: Bruce M. Metzger
David A. Hubbard
Glenn W. Barker

Old Testament Editor: John D. W. Watts
Associate Editor: James W. Watts

New Testament Editor: Ralph P. Martin
Associate Editor: Lynn Allan Losie
Author’s Preface [to First Edition]

Four years with Philippians seems like a long time. And it is! Yet it is not time enough to grasp completely all of the richness locked away in this beautiful letter that Paul wrote to his friends at Philippi, nor to master adequately the mass of literature that scholars, ancient and modern, have produced in an attempt to express what Paul meant by what he wrote. The Christ-Hymn itself (2:5–11), so majestic, so profound, could easily have absorbed the entire time allotted. And the literature on this single poem, so vast, so learned, could boggle far greater minds than mine. Thus to write this commentary has been an exercise in extreme pain and extreme pleasure. Ancient letters, by their very nature a conversation halved, are not at all easy to piece together and understand. This fact coupled with the great Apostle’s depth of thinking and depth of feeling expressed often in ambiguous and difficult Greek make the interpreter’s task most arduous. But when the clouds part and the brilliance of Paul’s ideas about God’s saving activity in Christ break through, when one at last begins to feel the intensity of Paul’s devotion to Christ and the sheer force of his appeal propelling him to follow the Savior—when all this happens as a result of painful mental toil, it constitutes rewards of incalculable delight, and the pleasure outweighs the pain.

I am debtor to so many that like Paul I should mention no names (cf. 4:21–23) lest inadvertently I should fail to mention even a single person to whom I owe a great deal. But unlike Paul I will take the risk. First, I am grateful to Professor Ralph P. Martin for
inviting me to take part in this venture, and for his own superb literary contributions to the overall understanding of Philippians.

Then, too, I am greatly in debt to all those others who have gone before me, those many scholars of the first rank who long ago and more recently still have wrestled hard with the text of Philippians to interpret correctly and to express clearly its meaning. And if in places this commentary has but followed the thinking of others, I make no apologies, since old thoughts are new to the new and quickly passing generations. To republish a thought, then, is to give it new life; it is a kind of resurrection of the dead. As someone quipped, “Why should a good observation or rule be lost because it is imprisoned in some monstrous folio? It is good to repeat worthy thoughts in new books, because the old works in which they stand are not read.” Whenever I have borrowed another’s idea, I have done my best to indicate this and to give credit to whom credit is due. If by chance I have failed in this endeavor at any point, I apologize, and hereby own my indebtedness to everyone whose writings I have read.

I am grateful, too, to my many students who tolerated me as I tested on them new ideas about Philippians. They were always patient and cheerful, but very ready to let me know the weakness of my arguments. I am certain I have been saved from many errors by their collected wisdom. Two former students in particular I wish to identify by name, John R. “Jack” Levison and Mark A. Rilling, both of whom have graduated with honors from Cambridge University, England, upon leaving Wheaton College. These young men allowed me to use them as sounding boards. They continuously supported me in my efforts, constructively criticizing,
suggesting bibliography—books and articles I had overlooked—
prodding to greater clarity and precision by their probing questions.

I am also grateful to my college—Wheaton College—and to its
administrative officers, especially Dr. Ward Kriegbaum, Vice President
for Academic Affairs, and Dr. William Henning, Dean of Arts and
Sciences, for their continued interest and their determination to free
two summers for me so that I might turn from teaching to writing.

Finally, I owe a very great debt of gratitude for the generous
financial assistance that has come to me through the G. W. Aldeen
Research Fund.

GERALD F. HAWTHORNE

Wheaton, Illinois

November 1982
Preface to Revised Edition

In some ways, of what follows, this preface has been the easiest part to be written. Dr. Gerald F. Hawthorne’s commentary appeared in 1983 and has proved its worth to a wide audience, which has been willing to read it carefully, as it deserves.

The tide of biblical studies flows relentlessly, and Paul’s “friendship letter” to the church at Philippi has been studied with increasing attention since 1983. It is clear that a new edition of this commentary is called for—a task that can only be taken up with great reluctance, not only because of the intrinsic value of the first edition but also because no one individual can claim to have consulted, let alone read, the massive literature on this short epistle. One disclaimer is, therefore, in order. What appears in the new edition represents a commentary on the text in the light of recent literature (1983–2002) that the present reviser has actually seen and read, however cursorily.

The approach to a revising enterprise ought to be stated for prospective readers. Is it worth investing in a new edition? What is the extent and scope of such revision? Fortunately the task is made easier by the now familiar layout of the Word Biblical Commentary series.

The Bibliography has been updated with such pertinent references as the reviser has been able to consult; these include major commentaries, monographs, and articles appearing in scholarly journals since the time of Dr. Hawthorne’s earlier work.
Occasionally a gap has been filled and some older references deleted.

Then, the Translation is left virtually intact, with only an infrequent change, usually marked by square brackets to denote the first author’s expansion of the text. He has approved any minor changes. The Notes have been altered only in the interest of updating.

The same approach is true of the major section denoted as Comment. Here the reviser’s additions have been woven into the first edition by a process (well-known in Synoptic studies) of “conflation.” These additions have sought not to break the continuity of the original author’s commentary but to update the discussion and sometimes to add a new paragraph of recent discussions and applications.

The last named is particularly true of the Explanation section, a segment that is variously employed by different authors throughout the WBC series. Insights from what is called Wirkungsgeschichte (literally “effective history,” or the history of the letter’s effects on those who heard [and still hear] it, as M. Bockmuehl describes it, including the reception of a text and its subsequent effect in the church’s history) are occasionally developed, and the reviser has not been averse to promoting a “devotional” thought in an epistle whose secondary themes of joy in suffering and life in Christ are so well known.

My regret, on a personal note, is that Dr. Hawthorne was not available to carry out the revision in his own name and inimitable style. The present reviser can only trust that what he has
contributed to what is virtually a new work has met with his colleague’s concurrence. Dr. Hawthorne has seen the final draft and approved it. Places in the Introduction section and in the christological passage of 2:6–11 are obvious loci for scholarly and friendly disagreement, and here we must submit to the judgment of the reader. Yet we dissent from each other’s opinion only with reluctance and always con amore.

So what is now offered is a joint enterprise, published under the two writers’ names as a substantial revision of an earlier book, and so deserving of a place in anyone’s library as an example of cooperative study. What appeared in 1983 was good; what is due to appear, since this preface is written as the revision is underway, is (it is hoped) better in the sense of being more up to date; whether it is the best the two of us can make is doubtful, given that the final word in biblical scholarship can never be spoken. And how serviceable this new book will seem to be is left to the verdict of the present and future generations of readers.

My heartfelt indebtedness is acknowledged to those who have labored with me in preparing this revision, in particular Barbara Hayes, Benjamin Schliesser, Roberto Bustamante, and Thomas C. Hanson, Sr. With all the recent New Testament contributors a special word of thanks goes to the managing copyeditor Melanie B. McQuere and associate editor Dr. Lynn A. Losie.

In conclusion, some readers may lay down this revised edition and wonder if the present reviser who has sought to play the role of Philip Heseltine to Peter Warlock has, in fact, rather become a Mr. Hyde to Dr. Jekyll!
* It is regretted that, as this volume went to press, we were able to make only a passing reference to a Festschrift offered to Dr. Hawthorne. Under the title New Testament Greek and Exegesis: Essays in Honor of Gerald F. Hawthorne, ed. A. M. Donaldson and T. B. Sailors (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), it has three essays devoted to the themes of Philippians, all of which are significant. They are “Philippians 1:28b, Once More,” by S. E. Fowl; “Transformation of Relationships: Partnership, Citizenship, and Friendship at Philippi,” by G. W Hansen; and “Ephesus and the Literary Setting of Philippians,” by F. S. Thielman.
## Abbreviations

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<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>ad loc.</td>
<td>ad locum, at the place discussed</td>
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<td>allis.</td>
<td>aliqui, some [others]</td>
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<td>Ap. Lit.</td>
<td>Apocalyptic Literature</td>
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<td>app.</td>
<td>appendix, appendices</td>
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<td>Aram.</td>
<td>Aramaic</td>
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<td>Codex Vaticanus</td>
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<td>b.</td>
<td>Babylonian Talmud</td>
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<td>BG</td>
<td>Berlin Gnostic Codes</td>
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<td>C</td>
<td>Codex Ephraeimi Syri</td>
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<td>ca.</td>
<td>circa, about</td>
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<td>cf.</td>
<td>confer, compare</td>
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<td>chapter(s)</td>
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<td>cod., codd.</td>
<td>codex, codices</td>
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<td>contra</td>
<td>in contrast to</td>
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<td>D</td>
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<td>deuterocanonical literature</td>
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<td>DSS</td>
<td>Dead Sea Scrolls (see §F.)</td>
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<td>edited by, edition(s), editor(s)</td>
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<td>exempli gratia, for example</td>
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<td>English translations</td>
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<td>et al.</td>
<td>et alii, and others</td>
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<td>f., ff.</td>
<td>and the following (verse or verses, pages, etc.)</td>
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<td>ibid.</td>
<td>ibidem, in the same place</td>
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<tr>
<td>i.e.</td>
<td>id est, that is</td>
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in loc. in loco, in the place cited
infra below
Lat. Latin
lit. literally
LXX Septuagint
m. Mishnah
masc. masculine
mg. margin, marginal
MS(S) manuscript(s)
MT Masoretic text
n., nn. note, notes
n.d. no date
NHC Nag Hammadi Codex
no., nos. number, numbers
NS new series
NT New Testament
OL Old Latin
OT Old Testament
p., pp. page, pages
par. parallel
Pers. Persia, Persian
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<td>ps.</td>
<td>pseudo</td>
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<td>Q</td>
<td>Quelle (&quot;Sayings&quot; source in the Gospels)</td>
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<td>q.v.</td>
<td>quod vide, which see</td>
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<td>rev.</td>
<td>revised by, revision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam.</td>
<td>Samaritan</td>
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<tr>
<td>sc.</td>
<td>scilicet, namely</td>
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<td>Sem.</td>
<td>Semitic</td>
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<tr>
<td>ser.</td>
<td>series</td>
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<td>sg.</td>
<td>singular</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sum.</td>
<td>Sumerian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s.v.</td>
<td>sub verbo, under the word</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symm.</td>
<td>Symmachus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syr.</td>
<td>Syriac</td>
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<tr>
<td>t.</td>
<td>Tosefta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tg.</td>
<td>Targum(s), Targumic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theod.</td>
<td>Theodotion</td>
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<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<td>--------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>tr.</td>
<td>translation, translator, translated by</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ugar.</td>
<td>Ugaritic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Univ.</td>
<td>University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UP</td>
<td>University Press</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>u.s.</td>
<td>ut supra, as above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v, vv</td>
<td>verse, verses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vg.</td>
<td>Vulgate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>viz.</td>
<td>videlicet, namely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vol., vols.</td>
<td>volume, volumes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vs.</td>
<td>versus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>y.</td>
<td>Yerusalmi (Jerusalem Talmud)</td>
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### B. Abbreviations for Modern Translations and Paraphrases

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ASV</td>
<td>American Standard Version</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRUCE</td>
<td>The Letters of Paul: An Expanded Paraphrase, F. F. Bruce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GNB</td>
<td>Good News Bible</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>GOODSPEED</td>
<td>The Complete Bible: An American Translation, E. J. Goodspeed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JB</td>
<td>Jerusalem Bible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KJV</td>
<td>King James Version</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KNOX</td>
<td>The Holy Bible: A Translation from the Latin Vulgate in the Light of the Hebrew and Greek Original, R. A. Knox</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LB</td>
<td>Living Bible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MLB</td>
<td>Modern Language Bible (Berkeley Version)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAB</td>
<td>New American Bible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NASB</td>
<td>New American Standard Bible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEB</td>
<td>New English Bible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NIV</td>
<td>New International Version</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NJPS</td>
<td>Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures: The New JPS Translation according to the Traditional Hebrew Text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NRSV</td>
<td>New Revised Standard Version</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHILLIPS</td>
<td>The New Testament in Modern English, J. B. Phillips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSV</td>
<td>Revised Standard Version</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RV</td>
<td>Revised Version</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TGNT</td>
<td>The Twentieth Century New Testament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Description</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>WEYMOUTH</td>
<td>The New Testament in Modern Speech, R. F. Weymouth</td>
</tr>
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</table>

## C. Abbreviations of Commonly Used Periodicals, Reference Works, and Serials

| AB | Anchor Bible |
| ABRL | Anchor Bible Reference Library |
| AGJU | Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums |
| AJT | American Journal of Theology |
| ANQ | Andover Newton Quarterly |
| ANTC | Abingdon New Testament Commentaries |
| AS | Asbury Seminarian |
| ASNU | Acta seminarii neotestamentici upsaliensis |
| AsSeign | Assemblées du Seigneur |
| ATANT | Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments |


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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Title</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BNTC</td>
<td>Black's New Testament Commentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BR</td>
<td>Biblical Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSac</td>
<td>Bibliotheca sacra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BT</td>
<td>The Bible Translator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BTB</td>
<td>Biblical Theology Bulletin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BU</td>
<td>Biblische Untersuchungen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BWANT</td>
<td>Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BZ</td>
<td>Biblische Zeitschrift</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BZAW</td>
<td>Beihefte zur ZAW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BZNW</td>
<td>Beihefte zur ZNW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBC</td>
<td>Cambridge Bible Commentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBET</td>
<td>Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBQ</td>
<td>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCER</td>
<td>Cahiers du Cercle Ernest-Renan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEB</td>
<td>Commentaires évangéliques de la Bible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CGTC</td>
<td>Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CJT</td>
<td>Canadian Journal of Theology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNT</td>
<td>Commentaire du Nouveau Testament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ConBNT</td>
<td>Coniectanea neotestamentica or Coniectanea biblica: New Testament Series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Description</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>ConNT</td>
<td>Coniectanea neotestamentica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CTM</td>
<td>Concordia Theological Monthly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CurTM</td>
<td>Currents in Theology and Mission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CV</td>
<td>Communio viatorum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAGR</td>
<td>Dictionnaire des antiquité grecques et romaines. Ed. C. Daremberg and E. Saglio. 6 vols.</td>
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<tr>
<td>DC</td>
<td>Doctor Communis</td>
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<tr>
<td>DTT</td>
<td>Dansk teologisk tidsskrift</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EB</td>
<td>The Expositor's Bible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EC</td>
<td>Ephemerides Carmeliticae</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ED</td>
<td>Euentes Doceta</td>
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<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Description</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>EgT</td>
<td>Eglise et théologie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EstBib</td>
<td>Estudios bíblicos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETL</td>
<td>Ephemerides theologicae lovanienses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EV</td>
<td>Esprit et Vie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EvJ</td>
<td>Evangelical Journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EvK</td>
<td>Evangelische Kommentare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EvQ</td>
<td>Evangelical Quarterly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EvT</td>
<td>Evangelische Theologie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ExpTim</td>
<td>Expository Times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEUNTK</td>
<td>Forschungen zur Entstehung des Urchristientums des Neuen Testaments und der Kirche</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FF</td>
<td>Foundations and Facets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRLANT</td>
<td>Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments</td>
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<tr>
<td>GJ</td>
<td>Grace Journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greg</td>
<td>Gregorianum</td>
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<tr>
<td>GTA</td>
<td>Göttinger theologischer Arbeiten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GTT</td>
<td>Gereformeerdt theologisch tijdschrift</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>GuL</td>
<td>Geist und Leben</td>
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<tr>
<td>HBT</td>
<td>Horizons in Biblical Theology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HDR</td>
<td>Harvard Dissertations in Religion</td>
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<tr>
<td>HNT</td>
<td>Handbuch zum Neuen Testament</td>
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<tr>
<td>HNTC</td>
<td>Harper’s New Testament Commentaries</td>
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<tr>
<td>HPR</td>
<td>Homiletic and Pastoral Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HTKNT</td>
<td>Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament</td>
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<tr>
<td>HTR</td>
<td>Harvard Theological Review</td>
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<tr>
<td>HTS</td>
<td>Harvard Theological Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HUT</td>
<td>Hermeneutische Untersuchungen zur Theologie</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICC</td>
<td>International Critical Commentary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Int</td>
<td>Interpretation</td>
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<tr>
<td>IVPNTC</td>
<td>InterVarsity Press New Testament Commentary</td>
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<tr>
<td>JBL</td>
<td>Journal of Biblical Literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JETS</td>
<td>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JHC</td>
<td>Journal of Higher Criticism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JRR</td>
<td>Journal of Radical Reformation</td>
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| JSNT         | Journal for the Study of the New
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<th>Reference Code</th>
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<tr>
<td>JSNTSup</td>
<td>JSNT: Supplement Series</td>
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<tr>
<td>JTC</td>
<td>Journal for Theology and the Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JTS</td>
<td>Journal of Theological Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KEK</td>
<td>Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament (Meyer-Kommentar)</td>
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<tr>
<td>LCL</td>
<td>Loeb Classical Library</td>
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<tr>
<td>LEC</td>
<td>Library of Early Christianity</td>
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<tr>
<td>LQ</td>
<td>Lutheran Quarterly</td>
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<tr>
<td>LS</td>
<td>Louvain Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>LTJ</td>
<td>Lutheran Theological Journal</td>
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<td>MNTC</td>
<td>Moffatt New Testament Commentary</td>
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<td>NA²⁷</td>
<td>Novum Testamentum Graece, Nestle-Aland, 27th Ed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>NCB</td>
<td>New Century Bible</td>
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<td>NCIB</td>
<td>New Clarendon Bible</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neot</td>
<td>Neotestamentica</td>
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<td>NIB</td>
<td>The New Interpreter’s Bible</td>
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<td>NIBCNT</td>
<td>New International Biblical Commentary on the New Testament</td>
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<td>NICNT</td>
<td>New International Commentary on the New Testament</td>
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<tr>
<td>NIGTC</td>
<td>New International Greek Testament Commentary</td>
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<td>NKZ</td>
<td>Neue kirchliche Zeitschrift</td>
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<td>NovT</td>
<td>Novum Testamentum</td>
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<td>NovTSup</td>
<td>Novum Testamentum Supplements</td>
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<tr>
<td>NRTh</td>
<td>La nouvelle revue théologique</td>
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<td>NTAbh</td>
<td>Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen</td>
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<tr>
<td>NTD</td>
<td>Das Neue Testament Deutsch</td>
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<td>NTF</td>
<td>Neutestamentliche Forschungen</td>
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<tr>
<td>NTS</td>
<td>New Testament Studies</td>
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<td>NTT</td>
<td>Norsk Teologisk Tidsskrift</td>
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<td>NTTS</td>
<td>New Testament Tools and Studies</td>
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<td>OBT</td>
<td>Overtures to Biblical Theology</td>
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<td>Acronym</td>
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<tr>
<td>OJRS</td>
<td>Ohio Journal of Religious Studies</td>
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<td>OTL</td>
<td>Old Testament Library</td>
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<tr>
<td>PC</td>
<td>La Pensée Catholique</td>
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<td>PerTeol</td>
<td>Perspectiva teológica</td>
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<td>PLut</td>
<td>Positions Luthériennes</td>
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<td>PNTC</td>
<td>Pelican New Testament commentaries</td>
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<td>PReI</td>
<td>Philosophy and Religion</td>
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<tr>
<td>PRSt</td>
<td>Perspectives in Religious Studies</td>
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<td>PTMS</td>
<td>Pittsburgh Theological Monograph Series</td>
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<tr>
<td>PWSup</td>
<td>Supplement to PW</td>
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<td>RB</td>
<td>Revue biblique</td>
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<td>RE</td>
<td>Realencyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche</td>
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<td>ResQ</td>
<td>Restoration Quarterly</td>
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<td>RevExp</td>
<td>Review and Expositor</td>
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<td>RevistB</td>
<td>Revista bíblica</td>
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<td>RGGG</td>
<td>Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart. Ed.</td>
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</table>

RHPFR
Revue d’histoire et de philosophie religieuses

RHR
Revue de l’histoire des religions

RivB
Rivista biblica italiana

RNT
Regensburger Neues Testament

RSPT
Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques

RSR
Recherches de science religieuse

RThom
Revue thomiste

RTR
Reformed Theological Review

RVV
Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten

SANT
Studien zum Alten und Neuen Testaments

SBL
Society of Biblical Literature

SBLDS
SBL Dissertation Series

SBLMS
SBL Monograph Series

SBLBSBS
SBL Sources for Biblical Study

SBLSP
SBL Seminar Papers

SBT
Studies in Biblical Theology

ScEs
Science et esprit

SCHNT
Studia ad corpus hellenisticum Novi Testamenti
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<td>Studia Evangelica I, II, III (= TU 73 [1959], 87 [1964], 88 [1964], etc.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>SHAW</td>
<td>Sitzungen der heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften</td>
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<tr>
<td>SJT</td>
<td>Scottish Journal of Theology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNTSMS</td>
<td>Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SO</td>
<td>Symbolae osloenses</td>
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<tr>
<td>SQ</td>
<td>Shane Quarterly</td>
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<tr>
<td>ST</td>
<td>Studia theologica</td>
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<tr>
<td>SUNT</td>
<td>Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testaments</td>
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<tr>
<td>TBC</td>
<td>Torch Biblical Commentaries</td>
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<td>TBT</td>
<td>The Bible Today</td>
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<tr>
<td>TEH</td>
<td>Theologische Existenze heute</td>
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<tr>
<td>THKNT</td>
<td>Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament</td>
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<td>Abbreviation</td>
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<tr>
<td>ThSt</td>
<td>Theologische Studiën</td>
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<tr>
<td>TLZ</td>
<td>Theologische Literaturzeitung</td>
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<tr>
<td>TNTC</td>
<td>Tyndale New Testament Commentary</td>
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<tr>
<td>TP</td>
<td>Theologie und Philosophie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TQ</td>
<td>Theologische Quartalschrift</td>
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<tr>
<td>TS</td>
<td>Theological Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TSK</td>
<td>Theologische Studien und Kritiken</td>
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<tr>
<td>TT</td>
<td>Teologisk Tidsskrift</td>
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<tr>
<td>TTZ</td>
<td>Trierer theologische Zeitschrift</td>
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<tr>
<td>TU</td>
<td>Texte und Untersuchungen</td>
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<td>Theologie und Wirklichkeit</td>
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<td>TynBul</td>
<td>Tyndale Bulletin</td>
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<td>TZ</td>
<td>Theologische Zeitschrift</td>
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<td>UNT</td>
<td>Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament</td>
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<tr>
<td>UUÅ</td>
<td>Uppsala Universitetsårskrift</td>
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<tr>
<td>VCaro</td>
<td>Verbum caro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VD</td>
<td>Verbum domini</td>
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<tr>
<td>VE</td>
<td>Vox evangelica</td>
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<td>VS</td>
<td>Verbum salutis</td>
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<td>Description</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>WBC</td>
<td>Word Biblical Commentary</td>
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<tr>
<td>WMANT</td>
<td>Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WoWa</td>
<td>Wort und Wahrheit</td>
</tr>
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<td>WTJ</td>
<td>Westminster Theological Journal</td>
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<tr>
<td>WUNT</td>
<td>Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WZUJ</td>
<td>Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Universität Jena</td>
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<td>ZKNT</td>
<td>T. Zahn, ed., Kommentar zum Neuen Testament</td>
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<td>ZKT</td>
<td>Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie</td>
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<td>ZNW</td>
<td>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</td>
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<tr>
<td>ZTK</td>
<td>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</td>
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<tr>
<td>ZWT</td>
<td>Zeitschrift für wissenschaftliche Theologie</td>
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**D. Abbreviations for Books of the Bible and Deuterocanonical Books**

**OLD TESTAMENT**

<table>
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**E. Deuterocanonical Books**

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<td>Additions to Daniel</td>
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<td>Pr Azar</td>
<td>Prayer of Azariah</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bel</td>
<td>Bel and the Dragon</td>
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<td>Sg Three</td>
<td>Song of the Three Young Men</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sus</td>
<td>Susanna</td>
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<tr>
<td>1–2 Esdr</td>
<td>1–2 Esdras</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Add Esth</td>
<td>Additions to Esther</td>
</tr>
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<td>Ep Jer</td>
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<td>Judith</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pr Man</td>
<td>Prayer of Manasseh</td>
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<td>Sir</td>
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<td>Tob</td>
<td>Tobit</td>
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<td>Wis</td>
<td>Wisdom of Solomon</td>
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**F. Abbreviations for Old Testament Pseudepigrapha and Early Christian Books**

**OLD TESTAMENT PSEUDEPIGRAPHA**

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<td>Apoc. Ab.</td>
<td>Apocalypse of Abraham</td>
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<td>Apoc. Mos.</td>
<td>Apocalypse of Moses</td>
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<tr>
<td>As. Mos.</td>
<td>Assumption of Moses</td>
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<tr>
<td>2–3 Bar.</td>
<td>2 (Syriac)–3 (Greek) Apocalypse of Baruch</td>
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<tr>
<td>1–2–3 Enoch</td>
<td>1 (Ethiopic)–2 (Slavonic)–3 (Hebrew) Apocalypse of Enoch</td>
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<td>4 Ezra</td>
<td>4 Ezra</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jub.</td>
<td>Jubilees</td>
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<tr>
<td>L.A.B.</td>
<td>Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum (Pseudo-Philo)</td>
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<tr>
<td>L.A.E.</td>
<td>Life of Adam and Eve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let. Aris.</td>
<td>Letter of Aristeas</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Mart. Isa. Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah 1–5
Odes Sol. Odes of Solomon
Pss. Sol. Psalms of Solomon
Sib. Or. Sibylline Oracles
T. 12 Patr. Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs
T. Asher Testament of Asher
T. Benj. Testament of Benjamin
T. Dan Testament of Dan
T. Levi Testament of Levi

EARLY CHRISTIAN BOOKS

Ambrosiaster, Phil. Letter to the Philippians
Barn. Barnabas
1–2 Clem. 1–2 Clement
Did. Didache
Diogn. Diognetus
Eusebius, Hist. eccl. Ecclesiastical History
Herm. Mand. Shepherd of Hermas, Mandate
Herm. Sim. Shepherd of Hermas, Similitude
Herm. Vis. Shepherd of Hermas, Vision
Ign. Eph. Ignatius, To the Ephesians
Ign. Magn. Ignatius, To the Magnesians
<table>
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<td>Ignatius, To the Philadelphians</td>
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<td>Ign. Pol.</td>
<td>Ignatius, To Polycarp</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ign. Rom.</td>
<td>Ignatius, To the Romans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ign. Smyrn.</td>
<td>Ignatius, To the Smyrnaeans</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ign. Trall.</td>
<td>Ignatius, To the Trallians</td>
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<tr>
<td>Iren. Haer.</td>
<td>Irenaeus, Against Heresies</td>
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<td>Justin, 1 Apol.</td>
<td>First Apology</td>
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<td>2 Apol.</td>
<td>Second Apology</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dial.</td>
<td>Dialogue with Trypho</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mart. Pol.</td>
<td>Martyrdom of Polycarp</td>
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<td>Pol. Phil.</td>
<td>Polycarp, To the Philippians</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tert. Praescr.</td>
<td>Tertullian, Prescription against Heretics</td>
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**G. Abbreviations for Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Texts**

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<td>Damascus (Document)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ḥev</td>
<td>Naḥal Ḥever texts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mas</td>
<td>Masada texts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mird</td>
<td>Khirbet Mird texts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mur</td>
<td>Wadi Murabbaʻat texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>Pesher (commentary)</td>
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Q  Qumran
1Q, 2Q, 3Q, etc. Numbered caves of Qumran yielding written material, followed by the number or abbreviated name of the text
QL  Qumran literature
1QapGen ar Genesis Apocryphon from Qumran Cave 1
1QH a Hodavot a (Thanksgiving Hymns a) from Qumran Cave 1
1QpHab Pesher Habakkuk from Qumran Cave 1
1QM Milḥamah (War Scroll) from Qumran Cave 1
1QS Serek Hayyaḥad (Rule of the Community) from Qumran Cave 1
1QSa Appendix A (Rule of the Congregation) to 1QS
1Qsb Appendix B (Blessings) to 1QS
1QIsa a,b First or second copy of Isaiah from Qumran Cave 1

H. Greek and Latin Works

Aeschylus, Persians, Persians
Prom. Prometheus Bound
Aristophanes, Acharnians
Aristotle, Nichomachean Ethics
Eth. nic. Poetics
Poet. Politics
Pol. Rhetoric
Rhet. Rhetoric
Augustine, Admonition and Grace
Corrept. De inventione rhetorica
Cicero, Inv. Pro Rabirio Perduellionis Reo
Rab. Perd. Corpus hermeticum
Corp. herm. Roman History
Dio Cassius, Antiquites romanae
Hist. Media
Dionysius of Antiquites romanae
Halicarnassus, Media
Ant. rom. Homiliae in epistulum i ad
Euripides, Med. Timotheum
John Chrysostom, Philostratus,
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<td>Axiochus</td>
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<td>Laws</td>
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<td>Pliny, Ep.</td>
<td>Pliny the Younger, Epistulae</td>
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<td>Ps.-Aristotle, Rhet. Alex.</td>
<td>Rhetoric to Alexander</td>
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<td>Quintilian, Inst.</td>
<td>Institutio oratoria</td>
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<td>Seneca, Ep.</td>
<td>Epistulae morales</td>
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<td>Polyb.</td>
<td>Ad Polybium de consolatione</td>
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<td>Sophocles, Ant.</td>
<td>Antigone</td>
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<td>Strabo, Geogr.</td>
<td>Geographica</td>
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<td>Suetonius, Claud.</td>
<td>Life of Claudius</td>
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Nero
Tacitus, Ann.  Annales
Hist.  Historiae

I. Philo

Planting  On Planting

J. Josephus

Ant.  Jewish Antiquities
J.W.  Jewish War
Life  The Life
Commentary Bibliography

The following list of commentaries includes those that have been most frequently cited in this volume. They will be cited by author’s name only in the text of the commentary.

General Bibliography

Readers should also refer to the bibliography in M. Bockmuehl, The Epistle to the Philippians, BNTC (London: A. & C. Black; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998) 273–97. The following list includes titles later than 1998.

Introduction
Authorship

Bibliography


The letter to the Philippians claims Paul as its author (1:1), an association that rarely has been challenged since it was first made. And for good reason. In disclosing his innermost feelings (1:18–24), sharing autobiographical information (3:5–6), describing his present situation (1:12–13), naming his friends and co-workers (2:19–30), and referring to gifts sent him from Philippi to Thessalonica and elsewhere, including the place of his captivity (4:15–16; cf. Acts 17:1–9; 2 Cor 8:1–5), the author unconsciously and naturally draws
a picture of himself that coincides precisely with what can be known of Paul from other sources (e.g., Acts and Galatians). In style and language, too, “no letter can make a stronger claim to be from Paul” (Enslin, Christian Beginnings, 3:280). And it deserves to be ranked with the Hauptbriefe, the “capital epistles” of Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Galatians—a status that P. Oakes (Philippians, 23) supports. An abundance of special Pauline vocabulary appears throughout Philippians. Phrases, ideas, and allusions to opposition of false teachers that show up here also appear in letters unquestionably written by Paul (Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians). “In this epistle surely, if anywhere, the two complementary aspects of St. Paul’s person and teaching... both appear with a force and definiteness which carry thorough conviction” (Lightfoot, 74). Indeed, Lightfoot’s observation in his preface is so patently true, yet often forgotten, that it is worth reproducing.

Though the Gospel is capable of doctrinal exposition, though it is eminently fertile in moral results, yet its substance is neither a dogmatic system nor an ethical code, but a Person and a Life.

Echoes of Philippians may be heard in the writings of Clement (ca. A.D. 95), Ignatius (ca. A.D. 107), Hermas (ca. A.D. 140), Justin Martyr (d. ca. A.D. 165), Melito of Sardis (d. ca. A.D. 190), and Theophilus of Antioch (later second century). Polycarp of Smyrna (d. ca. A.D. 155) addresses himself to the Philippians and directly mentions Paul as having written to them (Pol. Phil. 3.2). Irenaeus (d. ca. A.D. 200), Clement of Alexandria (d. ca. A.D. 215), Tertullian (d. ca. A.D. 225), and later Christian writers not only quote from Philippians but assign the letter 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. A.D. 160). There apparently never was a question in the minds of the early Christian leaders about the canonical authority of Philippians or its authorship.

A few scholars, however, have questioned the Pauline authorship of Philippians, in whole or in part. E. Evanson (1731–1805) was the first to do so (Dissonance, 263), followed later by F. C. Baur (1792–1860) and the Tübingen school he founded. Baur’s historical studies led him to the conclusion that Paul wrote none of the epistles that bear his name except Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Galatians. This radical view, though ably set forth by persons of learning, was not convincing and disappeared, only to be revived in recent years by A. Q. Morton and J. McLeman.

With the aid of computers, Morton and McLeman are able to do intricate and detailed studies. For example, they claim that they can readily count the number of sentences in each epistle that bears Paul’s name and at the same time the frequency of καί, “and,” in each sentence. On the basis of such analysis they can profess, to their own satisfaction, which of the letters were written by Paul and which were not. Their conclusions harmonize with those of Baur. Philippians is not among the genuine Pauline letters. The validity of Morton and McLeman’s methodology and the quality of their work have been severely criticized (see H. K. McArthur, ExpTim 76 [1965] 367–70; idem, NTS 15 [1969] 339–49; M. Whittaker, Theology 69 [1966] 567–68). Therefore, their conclusions have not been widely adopted, nor are they likely to be. Here is an example of the way,
in biblical study, ideas arise, have their day with limited appeal, and disappear without a trace.

It is safe to say that most contemporary NT scholars consider that Paul did write Philippians and that the question of its genuineness has only historical significance (Gnilka). This statement, however, does not mean that all these scholars agree that Paul wrote all of Philippians. For example, W. D. Völter attempted to excise non-Pauline insertions in Philippians (TT 26 [1892] 10–44, 117–46). Phil 1:1b, with its mention of bishops and deacons, is looked upon by some as an addition to the original letter (Riddle and Hutson, New Testament Life and Literature, 123; Schenk, 78–80; on this verse, see esp. E. Best, SE IV (= TU 102 [1968]) 371–76). Still others consider that 2:6–7 is a Marcionite interpolation (E. Barnikol, Marcionitische Ursprung). Many see the whole of 2:6–11 as a song to Christ, not originally written by Paul but modified and used by him as a call for humility, obedience, and service and adapted from a pre-Pauline Vorlage (original edition) (see R. P. Martin, Hymn of Christ; idem, New Testament Foundations, 2:256–68, for details; see also M. D. Hooker, “Philippians 2:6–11,” for the problems involved in discovering pre-Pauline fragments in the Pauline letters). This literary feature of pre-Pauline fragments is now generally accepted, on grounds of contextual placement, literary features and style, and theological content. Its analysis goes under the name of tradition and redaction. See the popular treatment in R. J. Karris, Symphony. J. H. Michael (112) suggests the possibility that 2:19–24 was a brief Pauline note “written to correspondents whose identity can no longer be determined.” P. Wick
(Philipperbrief) has divided the text into elaborately sectioned parts, hypothetically (and improbably) assigned to separate units.
The Integrity of Philippians

Bibliography


Although most interpreters agree that Paul wrote Philippians, by no means do all these agree about the question of integrity: Is Philippians a single letter or a compilation of several letters?

The suggestion that Philippians is a composite letter was first made in the seventeenth century (so Collange; Koperski, JTS 44 [1993] 599–603), and this suggestion has gained an increasing number of supporters through the years (see Beare; Bornkamm, “Philipperbrief”; Collange; Gnilka; Köster, NTS 8 [1961–62] 317–32; Müller-Bardorff, WZUJ 7 [1957–58] 591–604; Rahtjen, NTS 6 [1959–60] 167–73; Reed, Discourse Analysis; Schenk; Schmithals, Paul;
idem, ZNW 51 [1960] 225–45; Wick, Philipperbrief). The chronicle of this debate over unity and integrity is given in Koperski, JTS 44 [1993] 599–603, and the later theories in O’Brien and summarized in Koperski, Knowledge, 69–72. The reasons for believing that Philippians is actually one document compiled from two or more letters are many and plausible: (1) If Rom 16 was originally a note addressed to Ephesus and 2 Corinthians was composed of at least two letters, then it is not an incredible thing to think of Philippians as a composite of previously existing letters. (2) One can readily imagine that Paul wrote more than a single letter to a community he loved as dearly as he loved the church at Philippi. If he did, were all these letters lost but one? (3) An ancient Syriac stichometry mentions two letters to the Philippians (E. Preuschen, Analecta [Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1910] 68, noted by Fitzmyer, 2:248). (4) Pol. Phil. 3.2 also states that Paul had written them letters (ἐγραψεν ἐπιστολάς; cf. 11:3). (5) Polycarp’s own letter may itself be the end product of a compilation. If so, here is further confirmation of the practice of composing one letter out of several (P. N. Harrison, Polycarp's Two Epistles). (6) The disjointedness of Philippians itself raises the question of original unity. This is especially noticeable in the abrupt transition from 3:1 to 3:2, which introduces a section whose tone is markedly different from the rest of the letter. Since the letter as a whole is a model of warmth and friendliness, the furious attack launched in 3:2 against Paul’s opponents, whom he calls “dogs,” “evildoers,” and “mutilators,” seems out of place (J. Weiss, Earliest Christianity, 1:387; Schmithals, Paul, 71–72). (7) According to Schmithals, “Verses 3:1 and 4:4 fit together so exactly that upon sober reflection one must come to
the conclusion that a later hand has pulled the two verses apart” (Paul, 72). This was done to insert a harsh letter (3:2—4:3) written by Paul at a different time (so Schmithals, Paul, 72–73). (8) The question of unity is further raised by the fact that Paul did not turn to thanking the Philippians for their gift until the end of the letter (4:10–20), unless it can be shown, on rhetorical grounds, that ancient letter writers chose to keep the “thank you” section until the close. See Reed, Discourse Analysis, 273–83, and earlier G. W. Peterman, TynBul 42 (1991) 261–70. Does this seem likely? Hardly. From this then arises the argument that 4:10–20 must be a separate earlier letter sent soon after Epaphroditus brought the gift, but carried back to Philippi by someone else since Epaphroditus fell ill (Müller-Bardorff, WZUJ 7 [1957–58] 596–98).

These, then, are the major reasons for seeing the letter to the Philippians as a composite, the work of an anonymous editor, who, aware of the existence of several notes from Paul to the Philippians, put them all together to form a “more imposing whole,” thereby increasing the importance of the Philippian correspondence at a time when Paul’s letters “were acquiring an eminently respectable status” (Collange, 7; cf. Feine et al., Introduction, 236; the latest discussion is Bormann, Philippi, 108–18, which divides the letter into three, but questions of why these divisions are required are largely passed over). Belief that Philippians is one letter composed of two or more earlier letters leads naturally to an attempt to isolate these letters and to interpret accordingly. Some scholars see Philippians made up of only two letters: Letter A = 1:1—3:1a, 4:2–7, 10–23, and Letter B = 3:1b–4:1, 8–9 (Gnilka; cf. Bruce, BJRL 63 [1981] 260–84). Other
scholars (e.g., Collange; Bormann, Philippi; and Bakirtzis and Koester, Philippi, 52–56) see Philippians made up of three letters: Letter A = 4:10–20 (or 4:10–23); Letter B = 1:1—3:1a, 4:2–7, 21–23, and Letter C = 3:1b–4:1, 8–9. Few scholars, however, can agree on the number of “letters” or on precisely what sections make up these “letters” (Beare; Lake and Lake, Introduction, 143; Michael, Expositor, 8th ser., 19 [1920] 49–63; Rahtjen, NTS 6 [1959–60] 167–73; Refshange, DTT 35 [1972] 186–205; Schmithals, Paul, 79 n. 58; see Wick, Philipperbrief, 39–54, for five letters).

The case, then, for believing that Philippians is one letter made from several letters is considerable (and Wick's study represents the ultimate bid to partition the letter), but not wholly convincing:

(1) The fact that Romans and 2 Corinthians may be composite letters proves nothing about the composition of Philippians. Aside from 3:1 there are no telltale signs of a division such as appear in the seams of Rom 15:33 / Rom 16:1 and, more especially, 2 Cor 6:14 / 6:15 and 2 Cor 7:1 / 2.

(2) It is easy to imagine that Paul wrote more than one letter to the church at Philippi and that Paul himself may have alluded to this fact when he said: “It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again” (3:1). But attempts to recover these letters remain wholly in the realm of conjecture (see Delling, RGG, vol. 5, cols. 333–36; Mackay, NTS 7 [1960–61] 161–70; Schweizer, TZ 1 [1945] 90–105; and Michaelis, TZ 1 [1945] 282–86; idem, TZ 14 [1958] 321–26; as well as Bockmuehl, 21–22, for some wise comments).
(3) Polycarp’s use of the plural “letters” (ἐπιστολάς) when he reminded the Philippians of the apostle’s having written to them may not in itself be strong proof that Paul wrote more than one letter to the church at Philippi. The plural may mean simply “a letter of importance” (Lightfoot, 140–42), or it may refer to a collection of Paul’s letters sent to all churches, including the church at Philippi (Mitton, Formation), or it may simply be a guess on Polycarp’s part, inferred from his reading of Phil 3:1 that Paul said he would be writing “again,” i.e., that another letter was in his mind (Schnelle, Einleitung, 167; Wikenhauser, New Testament Introduction, 437; Martin [1976], 11–12).

(4) The reference of the Syriac stichometry, Catalogus Sinaiticus, to two Philippian letters may be the result of accidental repetition (so A. Souter, Text and Canon of the New Testament [London: Duckworth, 1954] 209) and thus may offer no corroborating proof of a plurality of Pauline letters to Philippi.

(5) P. N. Harrison’s thesis that the one letter of Polycarp is in reality a composite of two earlier letters has not gone unchallenged (see B. Altaner, Patrology [Freiburg: Herder, 1960] 111, for bibliography).

(6) There is certainly a disjointedness about Philippians, and Paul does interrupt himself at 3:1b. But this should not be surprising in a personal, almost conversational, letter written by a man accustomed to abrupt shifts in style (cf. Rom 16:16–19, which, of course, is disputed as to its Pauline authorship—see commentaries—and 1 Thess 2:13–16; see E. Strange, “Diktierpausen in den Paulus-Briefen,” ZNW 18 [1917–18] 115–16, cited by Martin [1976],
The change in tone from warmth and friendliness to harshness is startling only if one assumes that the opponents Paul denounces were fellow Pauline Christians, identical with those opponents already mentioned in 1:15–17. But 3:1b–21 makes it clear that they were Jews or Jewish-Christian teachers (see later, Introduction, Paul’s Opponents and the False Teachers at Philippi) who were hostile to Paul’s gospel—reason enough for Paul to be indignant and to assert his authority (3:4–6; see Klijn, Introduction, 109–10; idem, NovT 7 [1964–65] 278–84; Schmithals, Paul, 82–122; Köster, NTS 8 [1961–62] 317–32). It should also be noted that the harsh tone of 3:2–6 leads up to and anticipates the most eloquent personal confession of faith and hope found anywhere within the writings of Paul—a confession that is totally consistent with Paul’s other intimate expressions found elsewhere in his letter to the Philippians. In addition, it is difficult to separate chap. 3 from the rest of the letter because the same terms, word roots, and motifs pervade all of its so-called separate parts (see Furnish, NTS 10 [1962–63] 80–88; Mackay, NTS 7 [1960–61] 161–70; Pollard, NTS 13 [1966–67] 57–66; Dalton, Bib 60 [1979] 97–102; Culpepper, RevExp 77 [1980] 349–57; and Garland, NovT 27 [1985] 141–73).

(7) If it is true that 3:1 and 4:4 fit together so perfectly that chap. 3 must be viewed as a later insertion from another Pauline letter, one cannot help asking why any intelligent scribe, bent on unifying the fragments, would have placed it here. And the same question may also be asked about the so-called letter of thanks (4:10–20). Why would a scribe, wishing to put the Philippian “letters” together into an ordered whole, place this “letter” at the end? (See later, pp. lxiv–lxxii, for some explanation of this feature,
adduced on rhetorical grounds; the more fanciful reason for the editors’ locating 4:10–20 at the letter close is that it was the intention of the Philippians to erect an “attractive memorial [ein schönes Denkmal]” to themselves [so Bornkamm, “Philipperbrief,” 192–202]. Is not Bahr’s suggestion just as reasonable—that Paul, in the custom of his day, dictated the early part of the letter, but picked up the pen to sign it in his own hand, and in doing so wrote his own personal “thank you” for their gift (JBL 87 [1968] 38)? But that idea does not account for Paul’s delay to express acknowledgement until the close of the letter. The only explanation, unless canons of rhetoric dictated it, is to suppose that 1:3 should be rendered “I thank my God for all your remembrance of me,” and see in μνεία the Philippians’ “remembrance,” i.e., their support, of Paul. See Comment on 1:3.

Compilation theories, therefore, solve nothing. They merely shift the problem of order and organization from Paul to an unknown editor and raise questions impossible to answer: Why should three original letters be combined at all (Michaelis, TZ 14 [1958] 321–26)? Were these earlier letters complete letters with salutations and signatures, or merely fragments? If they were complete letters, why were they not allowed to stand without modification since apparently length was not a criterion for preservation (e.g., Paul’s letter to Philemon)? If they were complete letters, what right did any editor have to eliminate their prescripts and postscripts?

(8) From the beginning of its manuscript history there has been only one canonical letter to the Philippians. Admittedly, however, the earliest manuscript that includes Philippians is the Chester Beatty Papyrus (¶ 46), dated about A.D. 200.
There is, then, no compelling reason to doubt the integrity of Philippians. As Dibelius has noted, “all the peculiarities of the sequence of thought are comprehensible without assuming editorial work or interpolations.... The style of the whole corresponds not with the desire to express a homogeneous conception, but with the requirement proper to private speech” (Fresh Approach, 166–67). As a consequence, Philippians will be treated in this commentary as a single letter written by Paul. The exegesis of the text that follows will, therefore, be governed by this assumption, for any claim to be able to isolate separate letters and to identify the theology and Sitz im Leben of each proves to be an exercise in subjective criticism (see Richardson, Israel in the Apostolic Church, 111 n. 4).
The Recipients and Their City

Bibliography

Paul addressed his letter to the Christians who resided in Philippi and to their “bishops and deacons” At the time he wrote, Philippi was already an ancient and historic city. It was built and fortified in 358–357 B.C. by Philip II of Macedon (the father of Alexander the Great) and named after him. The site Philip chose for his new fortification was the old Thracian city of Crenides (or Daton) in northeast Greece (Macedonia). It was located about eight miles from the sea in a very fertile region that was enriched by an abundance of springs and by the gold that was mined there (Strabo, Geogr. 7.331, frg. 33–34: ἀρίστην ἔχει χώραν καὶ
εὐκαρπὸν καὶ ναυπήγια καὶ χρυσὸν “it has the best land and richness of fruit and shipbuilding and gold mines”; see Schmidt, PW [1938] 19, 2:2212).

After the Roman victory over the Persians in 168 B.C. Philippi became part of the Roman Empire and belonged to the first of the four regiones “districts,” of Macedonia (Schmidt, PW [1938] 19, 2:2213; cf. Acts It also gained in importance because it was made one of the stations along the Via Egnatia, “Egnatian Way,” the main overland route connecting Rome with the East, stretching from the Adriatic coast to Byzantium.

Philippi became world prominent, however, as the place where the battle between Brutus and Cassius, the assassins of Julius Caesar and of Antony and Octavian, took place in 42 B.C. It was one of the decisive battles of history. Antony and Octavian emerged as the victors. When Octavian later defeated Antony at Actium (31 and was accorded the title of Augustus (63 14), he rebuilt Philippi; established a military outpost there; filled it with Roman soldiers, veterans of his wars, and Antony’s partisans evicted from Italy; made it a colony Iulia [Augusta] Philippensis; see Schmidt, PW [1938] 19, 2:2233–34; Bormann, Philippi, 14–19; but see the critique of this in Oakes, Philippians, 52–53); and gave it the ius italicum, “Italian law” (Lemerle, Philippes, 7–10), which represented the legal status of a Roman territory in Italy—the highest privilege obtainable by a provincial municipality 559). Colonists, therefore, could purchase and own or transfer property and had the right to civil lawsuits. They were also exempt from both the poll tax and the land tax.
Thus when Paul made his first visit to Europe, he purposely passed through the port city of Neapolis to begin preaching the gospel in the small but more important city of Philippi, of “the first district of Macedonia” reading “first,” a conjecture supported in some Alexandrian See H. Conzelmann, Acts of the Apostles, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 130, and H. Koester, “Paul and Philippi,” in Philippi, ed. Bakirtzis and Koester, 51, contra Most translators follow either the standard text and read “the leading city of the district of Macedonia,” which is problematic because the Greek text is uncertain and the translation and its historical meaning are difficult (Bockmuehl, 13; Fee [1995], 25, does not face the difficulty that Amphipolis was the leading city of the district, and Thessalonica was its capital), or a conjectured reading of “leading,” and translate “a leading city of the district of Macedonia.” In this case πρώτη implies a title of honor (so K. Lake and H. J. Cadbury in Beginnings of Christianity, 4:188). There are other variants in the textual tradition, so we cannot be precisely sure what Luke meant and will have to be content with a general sense. Philippi was “a first city of its region” in Macedonia (cf. Bormann, Philippi, 5 n. 16). See for the textual data about this translation problem and Sherwin-White, Roman Society, 93–95, for a good explanation and solution of the difficulty. See also TCGNT 393–95; G. Zuntz, “Textual Criticism of Some Passages of the Acts of the Apostles,” Classica et Mediaevalia 3 (1940) 36–37; and most lucidly C. S. C. Williams, Alterations to the Text of the Synoptic Gospels and Acts (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1951) 61–62.

The textual and interpretative problems involved in Acts 16:12 are still debated. They are several. On one side, the historical credibility
of Acts is under suspicion, and some (like Schenk, 339–40) think that the geography of Acts and so the itineraries of Paul, especially the visit to Philippi in Acts are Lukan fabrications woven from Paul’s letters (e.g., 1 Thess 2:2 and the traditions of Paul’s sufferings in the Pastorals Tim) Because Acts 16:10 opens a “we” section in the Acts narrative, a lot turns on our attitude toward Luke as an eyewitness of, or participant in, these events (see S. E. Porter, The Paul of Acts, WUNT 2.115 [Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1999]) and our assessment of the historiographic, epigraphic, and archeological evidence under current review. Admittedly Luke writes with a distinct Tendenz or bias (Bormann, Philippi, 220 n. 42; Mengel, Studien, 5, 6, 211), but that concession in no way rules out his claim to be a reliable narrator, and, where he can be tested, his witness to geographical and cultural data relating to the Macedonian mission holds up very well. We may refer to the treatments of 1 Thessalonians and Acts 17 in the works of F. F. Bruce & 2 Thessalonians, WBC 45 [Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982]; Commentary on the Book of Acts, rev. ed., NICNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988]) and the six volumes of The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting, edited by B. W. Winter (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993–2001). On the other hand, the textual data have been variously assessed, and as is often the case, we have to decide on the basis of “probability.” We opt for the translation “a first or leading city of its region,” noting with Bockmuehl (13–14, citing Pilhofer, Philippi, 1:162) that the Greek term μερίς represents the Latin regio, “region” or “district.” Macedonia was divided into four such administrative subprovinces. The important matters, for the exegesis of Philippians, are the Lukan words “colony,” and
“city,” in the sense of civitas, “commonwealth,” giving to Philippi its awareness of Romanitas, “Romanness.” How far we may accept Luke’s knowledge as accurate—and there is some archeological and inscriptive evidence to support it, not least the Greek and Roman monuments found in a matter for discussion (recently ventilated by Oakes, Philippians, 14–40, with reference to the status of Roman settlers).

This city was inhabited predominantly by Romans (Dio Cassius, Roman History, 47.42–49); whether they were veterans of the Roman army is not certain. Some colonies, such as Capua and Nuceria, founded in 57 did receive veterans as new settlers; Puteoli was merely given the status of colonia, “colony,” in 60 B.C. But many Macedonian Greeks and some Jews lived in Philippi as well, though there is only one inscription using the word “synagogue.” The inhabitants were a people proud of their city, proud of their ties with Rome, proud to observe Roman customs and obey Roman laws, proud to be Roman citizens (cf. Acts Philippi was a reproduction of Rome. Yet as to the status and legal privileges of towns in the empire not much is certain. Nero founded colonies in Campania, but Pompeii and Tegeanum in Lucania had titles and privileges that are unclear.

The story of Paul’s arrival in Philippi and the beginning of the church there is told in dramatic fashion by Luke to underscore heavily the significance of the transition of the gospel mission from Asia Minor to Europe see Conzelmann, History of Primitive Christianity, 96). For some scholars, as we note, this story is so heavily obscured by legends that it cannot be trusted as a historical source for details concerning Paul or the founding of the church at
Philippi (see Haenchen, Acts of the Apostles, 504; Perrin, New Testament, 106). For others “this episode contains nothing unworthy of credence” (Weiss, Earliest Christianity, 1:282), and their research has shown the essential trustworthiness of the information Luke provides here (Sherwin-White, Roman Society, passim; Ramsay, St. Paul, 221; and the summary by Martin [1976] 7–9, to be updated now by C. J. Hemer, The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History, WUNT 2.49 [Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1989]). The cultural, historical, and religious background is discussed in Bormann, Philippi, and Bockmuehl, 6–10, as well as the geography of Paul’s possible routes by the west gate into the city by the southwestern wall (see on this latter point Bockmuehl, 14–15).

In any case, whatever historical value one places on the account, Acts does say that Paul made his journey to Philippi along with Silas, Timothy, and Luke as the result of a night vision he had. In it Paul saw someone standing and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us” Upon reaching Philippi, these missionaries spent several days in the city before the first Sabbath came round. Luke gives no hint of what they did in the interim, or where they stayed. Were they looking for work? Studying the town? Getting acquainted with the customs and practices of the people? Sizing up the composition of the population? Observing evidences of religious interest? Apparently the religion of the Philippians at this time was distinctively syncretistic. Indigenous Thracian deities coexisted with the imperial cult and the classical Greco-Latin gods, as well as those from Egypt, Syria, and elsewhere (see Collart, Philippi, 389–486; Collange, 2; Bockmuehl, 6–8; Beare’s commentary was one of
the few modern works, in 1959, to describe the non-Christian religious milieu of Philippi and its gods and goddesses).

When the Sabbath did come, however, Paul and his companions went out of the city to the riverside, where they expected to find a Jewish place of prayer. Some have understood these words to mean that there were too few Jews in Philippi to have a synagogue of their own and that what Jews there were held their services in the open air beside the Gangites or Angites River (Blevins, RevExp 77 [1980] 312; but this assumption is erroneous; see Pilhofer, Philippi, 1:165–74, esp. 168 n. 14). Others see in these remarks a quite different meaning—almost certainly “a house of assembly, in fact a synagogue, [for] there is evidence elsewhere that such places were usually, for convenience of religious ablutions, built close to water” (Weiss, Earliest Christianity, 1:281; but see also Collart, Philippi, 319–22; McDonald, BA 3 [1940] 20; and for a different perspective see L. M. White, “Visualizing the ‘Real’ World of Acts 234–61).

The first convert to Christianity was Lydia, a God-fearer τῶν a pagan woman who had been impressed with the lofty teachings of the Jewish religion and who had attached herself to the synagogue. She was in Philippi to sell cloth that had been dyed in her home town of Thyatira in north Lydia (Asia Minor). Guild workers and dyers at Thyatira are mentioned in inscriptions 5:550; Pilhofer, Philippi, 1:177; cf. 2:693). It is conceivable that this woman’s real name was not Lydia but that she bore the title “the Lydian” as a surname to some other name (Weiss, Earliest Christianity, 1:281). She is not mentioned in Paul’s letter to the Philippians, unless Euodia or Syntyche is this Lydian woman. On Lydia, see Pilhofer, Philippi, 1:174–82, who casts doubt on the identity of this person

Nevertheless, responding to the gospel and putting her faith in Christ, Lydia was baptized. She and her family became the first Christians in “Europe” and the fledgling Christian church of Philippi began to meet in her home (16:15, 40). How many others were added to the church before Paul was forced to leave Philippi is not indicated. But quite likely Paul and his companions stayed on in Philippi, in spite of the pain and insults they had to face (cf. 1 Thess and preached and taught for a longer period of time than one might expect from reading the Acts account. If this is so, then the number of converts may have been many, though gathered in a house community (see Acts and their growth in the knowledge of the faith considerable. Certainly Paul left behind a “strong” church that continued to show its fidelity to God and its love and concern for the apostle and was able to contribute financially to the Pauline mission (2 Cor 8:1-3).

The other Philippian converts mentioned in Acts were the jailer and his family on the term “jailer” [vv see Pilhofer, Philippi, 1:197–98, and on a negative view of his “historicity,” see Haenchen, Acts of the Apostles, 499–504). At the climax of Luke’s dramatic story this Roman soldier rushed into the prison where Paul and Silas had been bound and tremblingly begged them to tell him what he must do to be saved. Their answer was “Believe in the Lord Jesus Jesus as Lord].” The jailer responded positively to this initial message and the teaching that followed it (cf. Acts was baptized,
and demonstrated his faith by deeds of kindness Other names of members of this Philippian community that are mentioned—Epaphroditus, Euodia, Syntyche, and Clement that the first church on European soil was made up largely of Gentiles (see Schinz, Christliche Gemeinde, and more recently on their social and cultural background see the literature in Meeks, First Urban Christians; L. M. White, “Visualizing the ‘Real’ World of Acts 234–61; Pilhofer, Philippi; Bockmuehl; Oakes, Philippians)

Women seem to have played a major role in the Philippian church (Malinowski, BTB 15 (1985) 60–64; Portefaix, Sisters, Rejoice [on this title, see Pilhofer, Philippi, 1:41–44]; Köstenberger, “Women in the Pauline Mission,” 241–47), not only in meeting the physical needs of the missionaries, but also in working side by side with them in the proclamation of the gospel ἐν τῷ ἐὐαγγελίῳ συνήθλησάν “who fought at my side in the spread of the gospel” see W. D. Thomas, ExpTim 83 [1971–72] 117–20). Lydia, who welcomed Paul into her home and first provided for him in those earliest days, probably should get the credit for rallying these women and for keeping alive the cordial and intimate relations that existed between Paul and the rest of the Philippian Christians.

Paul stayed in touch with the Macedonian churches through Timothy Phil and he himself visited them on at least two other occasions—probably the autumn of 54–55 and again a short time later in the spring of 55–56 see Feine et al., Introduction, 228). We may suppose he made every effort on these trips to visit his friends at Philippi in order to instruct and encourage them. In any case, they remained loyal to Paul; sent him gifts on several
occasions and, long after his death, continued strong in the faith he preached (see Pol., Phil.).

Paul's trouble at Philippi began when he freed a slave girl (calling out that Paul and Silas were “servants of the Most High God see Pilhofer, Philippi, 1:182–88) from an evil spirit that enabled her to predict the future and so make money for her owners. Furious, these men seized Paul and Silas, dragged them before the authorities and charged them with teaching customs that were against Roman law (the nature of those charges is much discussed). Then, in case their charge should fail, they took advantage of an apparent pervasive anti-Jewish sentiment (see Bruce, New Testament History, 291–304; Witherington, New Testament History, 261) by adding, “These men are Jews” Paul and Silas were whipped publicly without a trial and thrown into prison where the jailer fastened their feet between heavy blocks of wood (tradition links this site, which became a center for the cult of Paul, as part of Basilika A with the idea that there could have been a prison on this spot, but this is doubtful, whatever the popular tourist guidebooks say).

This incident highlights several significant things: (1) The Christian church was not yet distinguished from Judaism by outsiders, so hostile feelings against the Jews were readily transferred to Christians. (2) Paul could have appealed to his Roman citizenship in order to avoid a flogging. He did not, perhaps because he was caught up in an upsurge of popular animosity at Philippi, as subsequently (we argue, see later) at Ephesus. Theodor Mommsen’s suggestion that a Jew who was a Roman citizen might well be reluctant, on ethnic grounds, to insist
overmuch on his Roman privileges may be the reason Schriften [Berlin: Weidmann, 1907] 3:440, cited by Sherwin-White, Roman Society, 66). Paul at this time may have considered that he was a Jew before he was a Roman; yet, according to Acts he will appeal to his Roman citizenship. (3) And so, although Paul would not (or could not) claim Roman citizenship to spare himself physical suffering, he would and did claim it to clear Christianity from any possible reproach by the Roman government. Personal preferences must now be sacrificed to make sure that future contacts between Christianity and Rome might be positive and the gospel not impeded.
Place and Date of Writing

Bibliography


Coppieters, H. “Saint Paul fut-il captif à Ephèse pendant son troisième voyage apostolique?” RB 16 (1919) 408–18.


From the second-century Marcionite prologues attached to Paul’s epistles (cf. J. Knox, Marcion and the New Testament, 170; see also the subscriptio to some Greek MSS in NA ²⁷ [ Phil 4:23 ]) until the eighteenth century, everyone accepted without question the “fact” that the Philippian letter was written from Rome. Now, in the words of a more recent writer, it seems impossible to decide the place where the Philippian epistle originated with any degree of certainty (Wikenhauser, New Testament Introduction, 436). In addition to the traditional location (i.e., Rome), Caesarea, Ephesus, and even Corinth have been suggested as cities from which Paul wrote Philippians, and each of these suggestions is supported by substantial arguments. The plethora of suggestions makes it likely that we can never know for certain. The best conclusion is that one location has the “balance of probability” (Dibelius, 98: “Therefore a definite solution of this problem can hardly be reached because, even if we consider it difficult to imagine its [the letter’s] having been composed at Rome, the Ephesian hypothesis still rests on mere supposition”). That may be so, yet we should register the opinion that recent scholarship has taken a more positive attitude to Paul’s Ephesian trial (so R. E. Brown, Introduction, 496, and more cautiously Carson et al., Introduction, 321) and the close
relation of Philippians to Paul’s Corinthian letters. See the evidence in the commentary that follows.

A. Rome. The traditional case for Rome, as we shall see, has still been made by commentators such as Bruce, O’Brien, Fee [1995], Silva, and other writers, e.g., Wick (Philipperbrief, 191), with Bockmuehl (32) concluding that “the case for Rome remains the least problematic.” If his remark is the best that can be said for Rome, it cannot be right for him to confess earlier (27) that “there are overwhelming difficulties with an Ephesian origin of this letter,” when most of those “difficulties” have been successfully surmounted by proponents of an Ephesian dating, leading H. Koester to conclude, “this letter... was not written from Rome, but from Ephesus” (“Paul and Philippi,” in Philippi, ed. Bakirtzis and Koester, 52; see later).

There are, however, certain fundamental factors that must be considered before even a tentative conclusion about place and date can be reached. Some of these include (1) the fact that Paul was in prison when he wrote (Phil 1:7, 13, 17 ; 2:17 ; 4:14); (2) the evidence that Paul faced a trial that could end in his death (1:19–20, 2:17) or acquittal (1:25 ; 2:24); (3) the information that there was a praetorium (τὸ πραιτῶριον, 1:13) and there were “those who belonged to Caesar’s household” (οἱ ἐκ τῆς Καίσαρος οίκίας, 4:22) in the place that Paul wrote; (4) the witness that Timothy was with Paul (1:1 ; 2:19–23); (5) the fact that extensive evangelistic efforts were going on around Paul at the time he wrote to the Philippians (1:14–17); (6) the promise that Paul soon planned to visit Philippi if he was acquitted (2:24); and (7) the indication that
several trips were made back and forth between Philippi and the
place from which Paul wrote Philippians—all within the time of his
imprisonment.

We may address this last point: (a) news traveled to Philippi of
Paul's arrest; (b) the Philippians therefore sent Epaphroditus to Paul
with a gift to aid him in his distress; (c) news of Epaphroditus's
illness was sent back to Philippi; (d) word that the Philippians were
greatly concerned about Epaphroditus reached Paul (see 2:25–30);
and (e) Paul hoped to send Timothy to the Philippians and get
encouragement back from them through Timothy before he himself
set off for Philippi (2:19, 24; note the adverb ταχέως, NRSV
“soon,” but better translated “quickly”; see Silva, 7, who underplays
the force of this adverb and dismisses the test of distance from
Philippi as a “pseudo problem,” yet he is in error in thinking that
Timothy and Epaphroditus traveled as “imperial couriers” averaging
in part fifty miles a day [Silva, 6 n. 4]).

Rome, as the place from which Philippians was written (ca. A.D.
60–62), it is held, meets most of these fundamental points and
thus still has many advocates (Buchanan, EvQ 36 [1964] 157–66;
Dodd, “Mind of Paul”; Harrison, NTS 2 [1955–56] 250–61; W. L.
Knox, St. Paul; Reicke, “Caesarea, Rome”; Schmid, Zeit und Ort;
and most of the commentators, mainly Anglo-Saxon and
conservative). In Rome, Paul was a prisoner under house arrest
(custodia libera) for at least two years (Acts 28:30; but see
Johnson, ExpTim 68 [1957–58] 24). He had soldiers guarding him
(28:16), yet he was free to send letters and to receive Jewish
leaders and anyone else who came to see him or bring him gifts
(28:17, 30). He was also free to preach the gospel, and he readily
took advantage of this opportunity so that evangelism thrived in Rome under Paul's direction (28:31; but this is an inference, for there is no mention of this kind of evangelism in Acts 28). From Rome, Paul had no higher court of appeal; here he would stand trial before Caesar, and here his fate would ultimately be decided—death or acquittal. The expressions “the... praetorium” (Phil 1:13) and “those of the imperial household” (4:22) are most easily and naturally understood if Rome is assumed as the place of writing Philippians—the Imperial or Praetorian Guard, on the one hand (cf. Tacitus, Hist. 4.46; Suetonius, Nero 9; MM, 553), and the large number of people, slaves and free, in the employ (not in the family) of the emperor, on the other hand (see BDAG, 695). In Rome there was a church sufficiently large and of sufficiently diverse composition to divide up into factions over Paul and his teaching (Phil 1:14–17).

Yet we must bear in mind that Paul was largely unknown at Rome, both by Jews (Acts 28:21) and maybe by Christians there, when he wrote Romans. As to Paul's claim that his presence was known to the entire Praetorian Guard, we know that Agrippina found them crucial to her plans in Rome in A.D. 51. These men formed cohorts as the chief bodyguard of the emperor, guarding his chamber by night and watching over him in Rome as well as accompanying him on his journeys. Founded by Augustus with two leading men to command the guard, they were always in danger of conspiring against the Princeps, “Leader.” At Nero's accession in A.D. 54 there were twelve cohorts controlling the city from their barracks on the Viminal Hill (Suetonius, Nero 9; cf. Tacitus, Ann. 13.3, 4, 10). The Praetorian Guard represented a great number. Are
we to suppose that all of them knew of Paul’s imprisonment, as Phil 1:13 explicitly says, or is Paul hyperbolic in his language? When the emperor traveled, obviously a fewer number would accompany him, and so it is feasible to find some support for Paul’s writing to be located in the provinces, in Syria or Asia. The same question is raised about “the imperial household” (Phil 4:22), where a vast army of military personnel and civil servants in the imperial city may be contrasted with the smaller detachments in Caesarea or Ephesus.

The strongest objection to a Roman origin for Philippians (so Collange) is the distance between Rome and Philippi. It is difficult to fit all the known trips back and forth between these cities into the two-year span of Paul’s imprisonment in Rome. Indeed it is nearly impossible, as the Comment section on Phil 2:25–30 will show by calculating the travel times between Antioch and Rome, based on Ignatius’s journey in the early second century. Even if we concede that Antioch is farther away from Rome than Philippi, the travel time is considerable and the journeys “enormous” (Deissmann’s word). It is difficult to understand how Paul could speak so easily about sending Epaphroditus, a recently very ill man, back to Philippi (2:25–30) and about dispatching Timothy there as well with the expectation of his quick return (2:19) if the distance was really as great as the distance between Rome and Philippi, some 730 land miles, plus one or two days’ sea voyage across the Adriatic.

Other objections to a Roman origin stem (1) from the fact that there is no indication that Timothy was with Paul in Rome (but see Phil 1:1, which, of course, begs the question), (2) from the
hope that Paul planned to visit Philippi upon his release from prison (2:24) when earlier his expressed intent was to be finished with the East and to focus his attention on new mission fields in the West, especially Spain (Rom 15:24–28 ; but see Grant, Historical Introduction, 90), and (3) from the assumption, drawn from Phil 1:30 and 4:15–16 (cf. also 1:26 ; 2:12, 22), that Paul is here stating that he had not been back to Philippi since he and Timothy founded the church there (so Michaelis, cited by Feine et al., Introduction, 230)—an impossible statement if Paul was writing from Rome since he had in fact twice been to Philippi between its founding (Acts 16) and his trip to Rome (Acts 20:1–6). This disparity leads T. W. Manson, BJRL 23 (1939) 190 (= Studies, 157) to comment, “If Philippians was written from Rome, Paul’s remarks on the subject of the gift sent from Philippi (see Phil 4:10, ‘you had no opportunity to show’ your kindness) cannot be construed except as a rebuke, and a sarcastic rebuke at that.”

B. Ephesus. In 1900 H. Lisco (Vincula Sanctorum) first suggested that Paul may have written his letter to the Philippians from Ephesus (ca. A.D. 54–57). Since then, many scholars have followed his lead and developed his suggestions with detailed arguments (Bowen, AJT 24 [1920] 112–35; Deissmann, “Zur ephesinischen Gefangenschaft”; Duncan, St. Paul’s Ephesian Ministry; Ferguson, ExpTim 83 [1971] 85–87; Hinshaw, “Provenance”; Michaelis, Gefangenschaft; Rowlingson, AThR 32 [1950] 1–7; and a few commentators—Bonnard, GnIlka, Collange). Some of these arguments are the following: (1) The references to the “praetorium” can allude to the residence of any provincial governor (and do so exclusively in the rest of the NT : Matt 27:27 ; Mark 15:16 ; John
18:28, 33 ; 19:9 ; Acts 23:35), and “those of the imperial household” can refer to slaves or freedmen in the imperial service located in Rome, Ephesus, or elsewhere (J. T. Wood, Discoveries at Ephesus, app. 7, 18; McNeile, Introduction, 182 n. 3). (2) Timothy was with Paul in Ephesus as he was when Paul wrote Philippians (Acts 19:22 ; Phil 1:1, thereby making Acts agree with Paul), and the projected trip of Timothy to Philippi (Phil 2:19) from Ephesus harmonizes with his recorded itinerary in Acts (19:22). (3) The relatively short distance between Ephesus and Philippi favors an Ephesian origin for Philippians. The distance between the two cities could have been traversed in a week’s time so that the mention of several journeys in the letter to the Philippians is no longer a problem. (4) It is certain that extensive evangelistic activity went on in and around Ephesus during Paul’s long stay there (Acts 19:10, 25, 26 ; cf. Phil 1:12–14) and that contention over Paul and his teaching was intense, especially on the part of the Jews (Acts 19:8–9). (5) Acts does not say that Paul was imprisoned in Ephesus, but this fact does not tell against the possibility that he was: (a) Acts makes no attempt to record every imprisonment Paul experienced, citing only three of these (Acts 16, Philippi; Acts 23, Caesarea; and Acts 28, Rome). (b) Paul says he was often in prison (2 Cor 11:23), and Clement of Rome specifies how often this was—seven times (1 Clem. 5:6). (c) 2 Cor 1:8–10, coupled with Acts 20:18–19, indicates that in Asia Paul suffered extreme hardships even to the point of despairing of life. (d) The mysterious reference to Paul fighting with wild beasts (ἐθηριομάχησα) in Ephesus (1 Cor 15:32), if it is not to be taken literally since he did not die in the arena, ought to be taken figuratively of his imprisonment (so Marxsen, Introduction,
A rupture occurred in Paul’s relations with the Jews at Ephesus because he preached the gospel (Acts 19:8–9), and the motive for Paul’s imprisonment, hinted at in Phil 1:12–13, 16, was the preaching of the gospel. This, plus Paul’s sharp attack on the Jews (if they are in his sights) in Phil 3:2–6, makes it conceivable that Paul’s Jewish adversaries were the ones who had him put in jail. Acts 19:11–12 tells of miracles of healing taking place at Ephesus as the result of handkerchiefs and scarves being carried from Paul’s body to the sick. This can more easily be understood on the hypothesis that Paul was in jail at the time and so unable to heal the sick personally (so Stanley, Christ’s Resurrection, 66 n. 23; but this is a piece of fantasy and guesswork). The language, style, and ideas of Philippians are closer to those of the epistles in the Ephesian period of Paul’s ministry—especially the Corinthian correspondence written from Ephesus—than to those of his other prison epistles written either from Caesarea or Rome at a later date—Colossians and Philemon and maybe Ephesians (yet these attributions are all contested). This last-named argument is often passed over in the commentaries. Alert readers of this commentary should note how often Paul’s allusions tally with the problems that beset his relationships with alien teachers at Corinth (2 Cor 11:4, 13–15), who are certainly to be identified with Jewish Christian preachers (and maybe itinerant missionaries from Jerusalem) claiming to be sent by super-apostles (see survey of Paul’s opponents in 2 Cor 11 in Martin, “Opponents of Paul,” 279–89).

The fatal flaw, it is alleged, in the Ephesian imprisonment hypothesis is that it is totally built on conjecture. And Hinshaw
Provenance), who has provided one of the most thorough historical surveys for the provenance of Philippians and who himself decides for Ephesus, is forced to admit that the attempts to show how the data of Philippians fit into an Ephesian milieu better than into a Roman one are mostly of neutral value. On the other hand, additional research (see later under Comment on 2:25–30 for bibliographical data) since the original contributions of Deissmann, popularized by G. S. Duncan, accounts for these so-called flaws.

Other objections to the Ephesian origin of Philippians are as follows: (1) The silence of the letter about the “collection” for the poor in Jerusalem, a matter of supreme importance to Paul when his ministry in Ephesus was drawing to a close, is difficult to explain. It is mentioned in every other letter known to have been written from this period, except Galatians; and Romans was written when Paul was on the eve of his last journey as a free person. Thus it is hard to imagine that Paul, so ardent and single-minded in soliciting funds for the needy, would say nothing at all about this project to the Philippians, but would, on the other hand, accept their personal gift to him (Phil 2:26; 4:10–20; see Schmid, Zeit und Ort, 114, referred to in Martin [1976], 34, who responds). (2) Paul speaks harshly about the Christians who are around him, with the exception of Timothy (Phil 2:19–21). But this seems strange when most likely his best friends, Aquila and Priscilla, were in Ephesus when he was (Acts 18:2, 18, 24–26; 1 Cor 16:19; a lot can happen in three years, however, and we know only a little of what transpired during Paul’s Ephesian ministry; also Rom 16:3–4 may be traced to Ephesus when the couple nearly died for Paul). (3) The church in the city from which Paul writes to the Philippians
was a divided church—some standing with him and others against him (Phil 1:15–17)—a factor that does not answer to the situation in Ephesus, a church founded by Paul and under his control (Scott; but see E. Käsemann, ZTK 49 [1952] 144–54). (4) If Paul was imprisoned in Ephesus, how could he be facing the possibility of immediate death for his crime (Phil 1:19–20) when he had the right as a Roman citizen to appeal his case to the emperor—a right he exercised in Caesarea (Acts 25:10)? G. S. Duncan, however, answers this by citing the evidence of social anarchy when there was a breakdown of law and order following the assassination of the procurator Julius Silanus in A.D. 54, i.e., in the years Paul was threatened at Ephesus (2 Cor 1:8–10; 1 Cor 15:32 [details in Martin (1976), 48–50]). (5) Finally, C. L. Mitton has demonstrated clearly that parallel ideas, phrases, and vocabulary are spread throughout all of Paul’s letters, so that it is difficult, if not impossible, to say what letter is early and what letter is late simply on this basis alone (Epistle to the Ephesians, 322–32). As a counterpoint to this, however, only in 2 Cor 11:13–15 does Paul express himself so vehemently against “false apostles, deceitful workers”—phrases that are reminiscent of Phil 3:2, “evil workers,” indicating some degree of common relationship between those opponents in 2 Corinthians and Philippians.

C. Corinth. That Paul wrote Philippians from Corinth (ca. A.D. 50) was first hinted at by G. L. Oeder in 1731 (see Martin [1976], 44), but it was a suggestion that did not gain widespread support. Recently it has been revived and championed by Dockx (RB 80 [1973] 238–43). His argument includes the following elements: (1) There was a proconsul in Corinth (Acts 18:12) and consequently a
“praetorium” and “a household of Caesar” (“des gens de la maison de César”; cf. Phil 1:13 ; 4:22). (2) Corinth is not as far from Philippi as is Ephesus. Therefore the frequency of journeys to and fro that are hinted at in Philippians is still more easily accounted for. (3) Seemingly Paul wrote Philippians before his polemic with the Jewish Christians emanating from James (but this is doubtful; note that there is no reference to his apostleship in Philippians, a fact explained by the classification of Philippians as a friendly family letter—see later). Therefore, it is likely that the letter was written before 1 Corinthians, which was written at the beginning of Paul’s stay in Ephesus, and thus written likely while he was still in Corinth. (4) One can understand that the Philippians wanted to continue sending regular gifts to Paul but were prevented from doing so (Phil 4:10) because of Paul’s rapid flight from Thessalonica to Berea to Athens and then the winter stop in Corinth. Climatic conditions would have prevented the Philippians from assisting Paul until the opening of the sea and resumption of regular travel. Since the Philippians then came to Paul’s aid as soon as possible (in spite of the time reference in Phil 4:16, καὶ ἄπαξ καὶ δίς, “repeatedly,” which suggests a lapse of time between his leaving Philippi and writing his letter), the quick arrival of Epaphroditus and his companions ought therefore to be placed in Corinth and not in Ephesus. (5) 2 Cor 11:9 is seen as an allusion to the arrival of Epaphroditus with the gift from the Philippians for Paul and to Paul’s “thank you” note sent to them in return (cf. Phil 4:15). (6) Paul, meeting severe opposition in Corinth and in “mortal danger,” received divine encouragement and the promise of safety through a dream (Acts 18:10). The parallels between this
nocturnal call to courage and that which came to Paul in prison in Jerusalem (Acts 23:11) are so similar that one is permitted to suppose that Paul’s enemies in Corinth had arrested him, put him in prison, and threatened him with death (Dockx, RB 80 [1973] 243). Comforted by this vision in the night, however, he could be confident of release and could write to the Philippians these words: “I know that I shall remain and continue with you all” (1:25).

According to Dockx, the Corinthian hypothesis is far more plausible than the Roman one and is at least as plausible as the Ephesian hypothesis. Yet it faces insurmountable odds.

The major difficulty with placing the writing of Philippians in Corinth is that the theory is wholly based on speculation with no evidence to support it. There is no mention anywhere of a Corinthian imprisonment for Paul, nor any mortal danger, nor is there sufficient correlation between the other parts of Dockx’s thesis and the facts called for by the statements in Philippians. Again, as against the Ephesian hypothesis, Paul’s harsh remarks about those around him (Phil 2:19–20) make no sense when one realizes that during his time in Corinth Priscilla and Aquila, his most trusted friends (cf. Rom 16:3, 4), were with him there (Acts 18:1–2, 18). The time factor (in Phil 4:16), mentioned above, militates decisively against the theory.

D. Caesarea. In 1799 H. E. G. Paulus proposed for the first time that Caesarea was the place of the origin of Philippians (Introduction). In modern times his proposal has been taken up and developed by F. Spitta, Zur Geschichte und Literatur; Lohmeyer, 3–4, 15–16, 40–41; J. J. Gunther, Paul, 98–120; Johnson, ExpTim 68
These are the more important arguments:

(1) Luke specifically states that Paul was imprisoned in Caesarea in the praetorium of Herod (Acts 23:35). This was a palace built by Herod the Great but used in NT times as the residence of the Roman procurator and as the headquarters of the Roman garrison in Palestine. This specific statement corresponds, then, with Paul’s phrase in Phil 1:13, ἐν ὅλῳ τῷ πραυτωρίῳ καὶ τοῖς λοιποῖς πᾶσιν, “in the whole praetorium and to all the rest.” One is not compelled to believe, however, that the phrase ἐν ὅλῳ τῷ πραυτωρίῳ can only mean a body of people and not an official residence (so Reicke, “Caesarea, Rome,” 283; yet the phrase can mean either, so it is inconclusive, just as there are many branches of the Mukhabarat, the intelligence service, overarching the military as a sort of Praetorian Guard for the ruling family in Arab-Islamic countries like Saudi Arabia and Iraq). It is rather a hyperbolic statement by which Paul triumphantly asserted that the news of his imprisonment for Christ had become known in the entire (ὅλῳ) palace; i.e., it had not escaped the notice even of the procurator himself. And indeed it had not (Acts 24:24–26). The phrase καὶ τοῖς λοιποῖς πᾶσιν, “and to all the rest,” could easily refer to the soldiers garrisoned in Caesarea (or elsewhere, indeed) who were attached to the praetorium. Furthermore, this statement of Luke’s, that Paul was put in the praetorium of Herod, harmonizes with Phil 4:22, where the expression “those of the imperial household,” meaning any number of administrative staff in the employ of the
emperor, refers to those administrative personnel involved in the governing of Judea from Caesarea.

(2) It is clear also from Acts that Paul’s imprisonment was a long one, at least two years (Acts 24:27), allowing time for several communications to pass from Philippi to Caesarea and back (but the journey time presents a roadblock to this view since it is about the same as from Antioch to Rome).

(3) Luke says, too, that the Roman governor, Felix, gave orders that the centurion should keep Paul in custody but allow him some liberty (Acts 24:23: ἀνεσις, “open arrest”? See Josephus, Ant. 18.6.10 §235, and K. Lake and H. J. Cadbury in Beginnings of Christianity, 4:304) and prevent none of his friends from attending to his needs (Acts 24:23). This is in complete accord with the statements in Phil 2:25–30 and 4:10–20, but falls foul of the plain remark in Phil 2:20–21 that Paul has only Timothy to trust.

(4) Furthermore, Phil 1:7 implies that Paul had already been given a hearing and that he had made a defense (ἀπολογία) of himself and his preaching of the gospel, while Phil 1:16 indicates that Paul still lay in prison (κεκουμαι) in spite of his defense. This harmonizes with events that took place in Caesarea. There Paul defended himself before the Roman governor Felix for preaching the gospel (Acts 24:27), yet remained a prisoner for two years subsequent to this defense. The story of Paul in Rome, on the other hand, concludes by describing him as a prisoner without even hinting that he had made any defense before any government official (Acts 28:16–31). If Acts, however, is trustworthy, there was no capital
charge against Paul at Caesarea (Acts 23:31–32), and the nature of detention there was not life threatening (contrast Phil 2:17).

(5) At the time Paul wrote to the Philippians he was confident (in his brighter moments) that he would be released from prison (1:24–26) and would soon visit them on his journey west (2:24; cf. Rom 1:13–15; 15:23–29). Here again is a close correlation between the statements in Philippians and those in Acts (19:21; 23:11). Paul’s projected westward journey loomed extremely large in his thinking because he believed that there was no more place for him to work in the East (Rom 15:20, 23, 24, a decisive pointer against Roman provenance, pace Bruce, xxiv, who can only tamely remark that Paul’s travel plans were never inflexible; Bruce does not note that Paul is most careful to clarify his motives and changes of travel promises in 2 Cor 1). Thus, to assume that Paul later changed his mind and made plans to return east from Rome would be a most perplexing assumption and one entirely without foundation in fact (see Robinson, Redating, 6). It is not unreasonable, however, to assume that Paul would want to stop off on his way west to see old friends, especially those as loyal and as generous as the Philippians had been to him.

(6) Paul’s bitter attack in Phil 3:2–6 was probably directed against Jewish or Jewish-Christian opponents (see the discussion below for details). The tone here is markedly different from the tone Paul used against those fellow Christians who opposed him and who preached the gospel for the purpose of adding to his troubles (Phil 1:15–18). The bitterness of his attack, therefore, harmonizes with the “fanatical and unrelenting Jewish opposition Paul encountered in Jerusalem and Caesarea” (Robinson, Redating, 61; cf. Acts 21:37—
26:32 ; 28:19) rather than with his experience with the Jews in Rome. The only statements Luke makes about the Jews in Rome indicate that they treated Paul fairly, although they did not all believe his message (Acts 28:21–28 ; see Robinson, Redating, 61). This argument is only valid, however, if the warnings of Phil 3:2 are directed to non-Christian Jews.

(7) The fact that there is no mention in the Philippian letter about the “collection” and that Paul was now willing to accept a personal gift from the Philippians argues for a period after the collection was completed and delivered to the poor in Jerusalem, i.e., when Paul was in custody in Caesarea. The absence of this theme of the “collection” in Philippians is often regarded as damaging to the case for a provenance in Ephesus, especially since Paul’s time in Ephesus would have been a period in his life when he was preoccupied with this ministry to Jerusalem. A. J. M. Wedderburn, NTS 48 (2002) 95–110, esp. 102, gives the latest statement of this argument. Yet his objections can be answered. There may well be a plausible reason to account for the silence in Philippians if it was indeed written from Ephesus. We know Paul mentions the collection in 1 Cor 16 and then alludes to it (in 2 Cor 8:6, 10) when Titus has brought good news of the disaffection being resolved at Corinth. If the letter to Philippi came out of the period when Paul was facing an uncertain future at Ephesus in his three years there (A.D. 52–54) and his standing as an apostle at Corinth was challenged, this would reasonably explain his silence.

If distance from Philippi is the major objection for considering Rome as the site for the origin of Philippians (so Collange), then there exists no possibility for suggesting Caesarea in its place.
Caesarea is comparable to Rome in its distance from Philippi. But as E. F. Scott pointed out, too much can be made of this matter of distance and of the number of trips assumed to be required by statements in the epistle (7; cf. Reicke, “Caesarea, Rome,” 284, who contends that the epistle presupposes only two journeys; but this cannot be). But even if the journeys are as numerous as suggested, all of them could be fitted into two years (Guthrie, New Testament, 147; cf. Philostratus, Vit. Apoll. 7.10, who says that the distance from Puteoli [the Port of Rome] to Corinth was crossed in a record-breaking five days). The most difficult aspect of this matter of distance, however, is the supposition that Paul planned to send Timothy to Philippi with the expectation that he would return in a short time bringing news about the Philippians—a return that would take place even before Paul made his own trip to Philippi (Phil 2:19; 2:24). The flaw in this argument lies in the fact that though Paul expected to send Timothy to Philippi soon, there is no statement in the text that requires the interpretation that he expected him back soon. If Paul were still in prison, he could wait; time was no factor. If he were released, it may be assumed he would go himself and join Timothy in Philippi.

The evidence from the movements of Epaphroditus, however, has to be factored in, and, if so, it will produce the following reconstruction. Deissmann (“Zur ephesinischen Gefangenschaft,” 121–27) first elaborated the point of the great distance and frequent journeys and communications between Philippi and Rome, which are required by the internal evidence of the letter itself. He gives a list of no less than five journeys to and from the place of Paul's
confinement, together with an extra four trips envisaged in the future plans of Paul. These are given as follows:

a. Timothy travels to be at Paul’s side at the place of his captivity. He is not mentioned in the journey to Rome (Acts 26–28) but was with the apostle when the letter was composed (Phil 1:1).

b. A message is sent from the scene of captivity to Philippi to say that Paul is a prisoner and is in need (Phil 4:14). This is inferred from the way Paul writes to the effect that the reader knew Paul was in trouble (lit. “affliction”).

c. After the collection of a love gift at Philippi, it is brought by Epaphroditus, who travels from Philippi to the place of the imprisonment (Phil 4:18).

d. Epaphroditus falls sick, and news of this somehow reaches the church at Philippi (Phil 2:26).

e. Paul now receives a message that the Philippians have heard of their messenger’s sickness, and he is able to report that this news has had a painful effect on Epaphroditus himself (Phil 2:26).

The journeys that are planned according to inferences in the letter are:

a. Epaphroditus’s journey to bring the letter to Philippi (Phil 2:25, 28).

b. Timothy’s journey in the near future from the place of Paul’s confinement to Philippi (Phil 2:19).
c. Timothy’s return to Paul so that he “may be cheered” when he learns of their state during Timothy’s visit in Philippi (Phil 2:19).


Deissmann remarks that “those enormous journeys” cannot be fitted into the period of Acts 28:30, that the use of the adverbs “soon” (Phil 2:19, 24) and “immediately” (2:23) gives the impression that the distance between the place of writing and the city of Philippi is not great, and that such rapid and repeated travel is more likely to be possible, in the time of imprisonment, if the apostle is captive at a place nearer to Philippi than Rome. He names Ephesus as the most likely alternative.

This outline should be compared with one (much abbreviated) offered by R. E. Brown, Introduction, 493–94.

a. Paul was in prison (Phil 1:7, 13, 17).

b. Where he was imprisoned, there were members of the Praetorian Guard (1:13), as well as Christians among “the imperial household” (Phil 4:22).

c. Paul mentions the possibility that he might die (Phil 1:19–21 ; 2:17): Would his death come as a condemnation at the end of his imprisonment? Or as a missionary’s always possible fate?

d. Yet he also hopes to be delivered (Phil 1:24–25 ; 2:25).

e. Timothy was with Paul (Phil 1:1 ; 2:19–23).

f. Christians with different motives in this area, some envious of Paul, have been emboldened to speak the word of God (Phil 1:14–18).
g. There have been frequent contacts between Paul and Philippi through messengers back and forth:

1. News reached the Philippians of Paul’s imprisonment.
2. They sent Epaphroditus with a gift (Phil 4:15); but staying with Paul, he became ill, even to the point of death (2:26, 30).
3. News reached the Philippians of Epaphroditus’s illness.
4. Epaphroditus heard that this news distressed the Philippians.
5. Paul had sent or is now sending Epaphroditus back to Philippi (Phil 2:25–30).
6. Paul hopes to send Timothy soon (Phil 2:19–23), and indeed to come himself (2:24).

W. Marxsen (Introduction, 64) makes the statement that there is no evidence of a church in Caesarea as proof against its being the city from which Paul’s letter to the Philippians originated. But this statement does not seem to fit the facts: (1) Caesarea was a large, beautiful, and new city, built by Herod the Great in 25–13 B.C. Josephus describes its palaces, temples, theaters, hippodrome, aqueducts, and other monumental structures (Ant. 15.9.6 §§331–41; see PW 3.1:1291–94). It is hard to imagine (but it is no more than a supposition, of course), therefore, that Christian missionaries would have neglected this key city in their strategy to spread the gospel. (2) This apart, Luke does record that Peter preached to the Gentiles in Caesarea at the invitation of the Roman centurion Cornelius (Acts 10). (3) In addition, Philip the evangelist first visited
Caesarea (Acts 8:40) and later settled there to live and preach with his virgin daughters, who themselves were active in the Christian proclamation (Acts 21:8–9). (4) Furthermore, Luke records that some of the disciples from Caesarea accompanied Paul as he journeyed toward Jerusalem (Acts 21:16). This last statement in itself could imply (a) that the church in Caesarea was of a fair size, (b) that some of its members were extremely loyal to Paul, and (c) that some may have been less than enthusiastic about him. Again, it may be a possible conjecture, but no more.

A major objection to Caesarea is the fact that wherever Paul was when he wrote Philippians, he was facing the possibility of death (Phil 1:20 ; 2:17), as we noted. This, however, could not be true, so it is assumed, if he were in any place but Rome or Ephesus. As a Roman citizen he had the right of appeal to Caesar, and he could easily have staved off the death penalty in the provinces by such an appeal. Yet, as Robinson points out, the Acts account makes clear that Paul’s life was in constant danger in Caesarea (and, he may have added, at Ephesus; cf. Acts 21:31, 36 ; 22:22 ; 23:30 ; 25:3, 24 ; 26:21) and that he was protected from death only because he was in Roman custody. But if the Jews could have proved that he had really brought a Greek into that part of their temple that was forbidden to Gentiles (cf. Acts 21:28 ; see Reicke, “Caesarea, Rome,” 281 and n. 3), “then, even as a Roman citizen, he would, under Jewish law, have been liable to death” (Robinson, Redating, 60; see Josephus, J.W. 5:5.2 §§193–94; Ant. 15.11.5 §417; note Paul’s own words to Festus: “If, however, I am guilty of doing anything deserving death, I do not refuse to die” [Acts 25:11]). But since he knew he was innocent of this charge and he knew
the authorities were convinced of his innocence, he could confidently expect release in order to go about his business of strengthening the churches and preaching the gospel. This statement and hope are true if Paul wrote in Caesarea or Ephesus, but not Rome.

That no plans for missionary journeys, such as those anticipated in Phil 2:24, were possible after Paul appealed to Caesar (see Beasley-Murray, 985) is hardly an argument against the Caesarean origin of Philippians. Paul, up until the last moment, expected to be set free. Therefore, he planned missions and wrote of his plans. Only at the last moment, when he feared that Festus would hand him over to the Jews, did he finally make his appeal to the emperor.

Not all questions can be answered or all problems solved, and to paraphrase Origen, “Only God knows where Philippians was really written.” Yet it seems best for the sake of the understanding and explanation of Philippians to make a decision about where it was written and to interpret the text in the light of that decision. Hence, the assumption made in the first edition of this commentary was that Philippians was written by Paul from prison in Caesarea about A.D. 59–61. Robinson is correct in thinking that Caesarea, as the place of origin for Philippians, has been too quickly abandoned; he finds it preferable to Ephesus, and “Rome has little to be said against it, precisely because the evidence is so thin” (Redating, 61; see Kümmel, Introduction, 329).

For the revision of this commentary, we have summarized the objections to Paul’s writing the letter from Rome or Caesarea and
have espoused the proposal of an Ephesian provenance (which is in keeping with the trends of recent scholarship). Further bibliographical details will be found in R. P. Martin (1987), 20–38; idem (1980), 36–57. In this, as in other debated topics, let the reader decide.
Paul’s Opponents and the False Teachers at Philippi

Bibliography

Opposition to Paul

Paul was facing opposition to himself while in prison. Strangely, this opposition came from fellow Christians as well as from the outside world (Phil 1:28–30). Paul called them “brothers” and said that they spoke the word of God and preached Christ (1:14–17). But these “brothers” did so with impure motives—envy (φθόνος), rivalry (ἔρις), and selfish partisanship (ἐριθεία)—hoping thereby to add to Paul’s suffering (1:15–17). Although Paul could joyfully accept the results of their conduct—the fact that Christ was being preached (1:18)—it is impossible to imagine that he could have believed that their attitude and actions were right. Perhaps, then, the force of Paul’s personal feeling against his opponents came to the surface in his harsh words contained in 2:21: “All seek their own interests, not the interests of Jesus Christ”—a verdict that throws light on the Philippian situation, referred to in 2:1–4, and is the clue to his use of an already existing hymn in 2:6–11 and the
models of Timothy and Epaphroditus (see Comment on 2:5–11; 2:19–24; 2:25–30). One cannot say with certainty who these opponents were.

A. Christian Missionaries with a Divine-Man Theology. Some have suggested that they were Christian missionaries with a divine-man theology who believed that humility, meekness, imprisonment, and suffering were proofs that Paul was no apostle (or divine man) since these weaknesses, which Paul experienced, showed that he knew nothing of the triumphant power of Christ. According to Jewett, “The divine-man concept in the Hellenistic world assumed a correspondence between the missionary and the god he served” (NovT 12 [1970] 368; see also Georgi, Opponents; Friedrich, “Gegner”; and the survey in Martin, “Opponents”). This particular identification of Paul’s opponents assumes (1) that the divine-man idea in the Hellenistic world has been satisfactorily demonstrated (but see Baumbach, Kairos 13 [1971] 252–66; idem, “Irrlehrer,” 293–310; and Tiede, Charismatic Figure), (2) that this divine-man concept was sufficiently well formulated within the Christian church so as to be considered a theology adopted by a band of itinerant missionaries, and (3) that Ephesus was the place of Paul’s imprisonment, because these missionaries were surely the same as those Paul contended with when he wrote the Corinthian letters (Jewett, NovT 12 [1970] 364). The same opponents are then identified with the teachers in Rom 16:17–20 in view of some common lexical links (e.g., Rom 16:18 par. Phil 3:19), and some support for this identification is found if Rom 16 is a note to the church at Ephesus (see Martin, New Testament Foundations, 2:194–96).
B. Christian Judaizers. Others have suggested that Paul’s opponents while he was in prison were Judaizers: Jewish Christians who taught that in addition to believing in Christ one must also keep the Jewish law, including regulations about food and drink and especially the rite of circumcision (cf. Meyer, Lightfoot; but see Beare). Paul had been hard on these teachers, who at least claimed to come from James, and even on Peter, who was influenced by them (cf. Gal 2:11—3:5). Paul said that they preached “another gospel” that was not good news (Gal 1:6–7), they frustrated the grace of God (Gal 2:21), they bewitched people (Gal 3:1), and they sought their own interests, not those of Christ (Phil 2:21). They in turn would surely have been opposed to Paul, seeking, whenever possible, to stop him from proclaiming what they regarded as a partial gospel. They would likely, therefore, have taken advantage of Paul’s imprisonment, seeing it as a means to achieve their goal. If he had been put in prison because of the gospel, they would proclaim the gospel in order to keep him there and curtail his activities. It is true that Paul’s most intense struggle with the Judaizers was much earlier (ca. A.D. 54–57), but the virility of this movement kept it alive as an active force for years beyond the Apostolic Conference. It could still have been strong in Caesarea in A.D. 59 and is certainly in the background of Paul’s correspondence written from Ephesus and Macedonia in A.D. 52–54. The Judaizing menace was present at Rome (in his Roman epistle, written from Corinth, and, we have noted, especially in Rom 16, arguably written from Ephesus in view of its textual problems).

Although it may not be possible to identify with certainty those who opposed Paul while he was in prison, it is certain, however,
that Paul was not concerned about himself and the threat to his own life (in spite of Phil 1:20–21; 2:17). He would gladly accept the consequences of Christians preaching Christ for whatever motive they might do this, if only Christ would be preached (1:18). What concerned him was the threat to his friends at Philippi and to their faith. It was this concern that caused Paul to promise destruction (ἀπώλεια, 1:28; cf. 3:19) for those who opposed the Philippians, who made them afraid, and who attempted to undermine their firmness in the gospel (1:27–29). It was this concern that caused him to turn on these same persons so suddenly and fiercely in 3:2 (see Klijn, Introduction, 109; idem, NovT 7 [1964–65] 278–84; Martin [1976], 22, however, does not think that the opponents mentioned in 1:28 have any relation to the ones in chap. 3 because the danger in 1:28 is real while the false teachers are only on the horizon in chap. 3).

**False Teachers**

Who were the false teachers in chap. 3? (We may note, but only in passing, the unlikely view of Doughty, NTS 41 [1995] 102–22, that 3:2–21 does not address real opponents but is a later insertion into the text.) Paul calls them by the term κύων, “dog” (3:2), a word intended not to describe but to insult (Koester, NTS 8 [1961–62] 317–19). To a Jew it meant the ignorant, the godless, the heathen, “die Nichtisraeliten” or non-Israelites (Str-B 3:621–22). Paul also says that they are τοὺς κακοὺς ἐργάτας, “those evildoers” (3:2). This is an expression too vague to be helpful in identifying the false teachers since it could refer to any number of adversaries. Paul’s next remark, however, narrows the field. The false teachers
are people who were urging, or who were intending to urge upon, the Philippians the necessity of circumcision: βλέπετε τὴν κατατομὴν. Ἡμεῖς γὰρ ἔσμεν ἢ περιτομὴ, “watch out for the incision. For we are the circumcision” (3:2–3). In a bitter, aggressive, ironic play on words—κατατομὴ/περιτομή, “incision/circumcision”—Paul claims circumcision for Christians, denies it to Jews, and supplies the latter instead with a new “jeering title of his own coinage” (Beare, 104; Koester, TDNT 8:109–11; see De Vries, “Paul’s ‘Cutting’ Remarks”). The three titles together—“dogs,” “evildoers,” “mutilators”—seem heavy with irony and thus seem to point, according to one interpretation, to non-Christian Jewish missionaries “who think they are clean, and do good and are inborn members of God’s people (cf. Rom 2:17–29), but who have converted these features into the opposite through their opposition to the gospel” (Richardson, Israel, 114) or, according to an alternative interpretation, to Jewish-Christian missionaries (in view of Paul’s similar remarks in Galatians and 2 Corinthians).

A. Non-Christian Jewish Missionaries. Paul’s difficulties in Thessalonica, Berea, Corinth, and Ephesus, after he left Philippi (Acts 16), came from Jews who were not convinced by his message and who considered him a menace to their own religion (Acts 17:5, 13; 18:6; 19:9). A possible source of the trouble threatening the Philippians, then, may have been non-Christian Jews, possibly from Thessalonica (Richardson, Israel, 113; Klijn, Introduction, 109–10). Paul attempts to combat this threat from the opponents by claiming that a right standing (δικαιοσύνη) before God is achieved not through human effort, by painstakingly obeying the law and
practicing circumcision, but rather by abandoning all confidence in these external things and staking one's life wholly upon Jesus Christ. The passionate autobiographical section, which begins with “circumcised the eighth day” (Phil 3:5), is Paul’s way of proving the validity of his claims: “I personally have found this to be true! I had all the advantages of a Jew. I appraised their real value. I found them to be less than nothing when compared to Christ” (3:5–9).

B. Gnostic Christian Missionaries. The middle part of chap. 3 (vv 12–16) has been used to develop a theory that the Philippians also faced a second set of opponents—gnostics (“gnostische Schwärmerei,” or “gnostic enthusiasts,” according to Friedrich, 120). (The term “enthusiasm” carries a pejorative meaning in German Lutheran scholarship since it goes back to Luther’s struggle with radicals in his own fold, like the group around Carlstadt, Müntzer, and the people involved in the Peasants’ Revolt of 1525. See A. G. Dickens, Reformation and Society in Sixteenth Century Europe [London: Thames and Hudson, 1966] esp. 69–73.) They believed and taught that perfection could be attained on earth without waiting for, or without any need for, the resurrection.

It is not necessary, however, to see in these verses opponents different from those already mentioned in 3:2–3. The idea of “perfection” was not foreign to Judaism, “which states repeatedly that a person who has been circumcised and is true to the law can reach perfection” (Rigaux, NTS 4 [1957–58] 238, cited by Klijn, Introduction, 109). In vv 12–16, therefore, Paul may be seen to continue his attack against Jewish, rather than gnostic, opponents. Though they may offer immediate perfection, it is an earthbound
(Ἐπίγεια) perfection (3:19) and comes to an end with the earth without any prospect of bodily transfiguration. Christ, however, offers true “perfection” and the promise of a new body, like his own glorious body, although this perfection cannot be attained this side of the resurrection (3:21 ; cf. 3:11). The expressions “their god is their belly” and “their glory is their shame” need not mean Paul is addressing heretical libertinists with gnostic tendencies, who arose out of the Philippian church itself (so Schmithals, Paul and the Gnostics, 82–84). Rather, it is possible to see these remarks as allusions to Jewish practices involving foods for the belly that could and could not be eaten, on the one hand (cf. Rom 16:18, with the comments of C. K. Barrett, A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, HNTC [New York: Harper & Row, 1957] 285), and circumcision that on occasion was considered a mark of shame and disgrace, on the other (cf. Hab 2:16 LXX ; Hos 4:7 ; Mic 1:11 ; Nah 3:5 ; Sir 4:21).

Paul, then, may be seen to set his face against a single set of opponents in chap. 3: Jews who had their own missionaries proclaiming a message of righteousness and perfection that was attainable now simply by submitting to circumcision and complying with certain laws. Theirs was a seductive message because it offered visible and tangible tokens of God’s favor in the present, not in the future and invisible world. Paul begins with bitterly harsh words his attack against these adversaries who would undermine the faith of the Philippians (3:2). He concludes his opposition to them with tears (3:18 ; Lohmeyer, 153, denies this, but cf. Rom 9:1–2). He weeps for these enemies of the cross (cf. Rom 11:28), for their end will be destruction (ἀπώλεια, Phil 3:19 ; cf. 1:28, but here
the setting may be different, as an alternative interpretation will suggest below).

The apostle continues and concludes his polemic against the Jewish emissaries by contrasting the Christians’ πολίτευμα, “colony,” with that of Judaism (3:20–21). πολίτευμα, “commonwealth,” “state,” “colony,” refers to “a group of people who live surrounded by an ethnologically different population and lead a more or less independent existence” (Klijn, Introduction, 110). The Jews outside of Jerusalem had their own πολιτεύματα, “colonies,” in the many cities of the Greco-Roman world where they were permitted to live according to their own laws. But theirs were earthly “colonies” and time-bound as a consequence. The Christians’ πολίτευμα, “colony,” by contrast, is in heaven and is thus eternal. Hence, there should be no incentive to turn to Judaism because the one who knows God through Jesus Christ is the “circumcision,” will achieve perfection and bodily transfiguration at the resurrection, and is a citizen of a heavenly colony that is eternal yet lies in the future. (Bornkamm, New Testament, 104; Fuller, Critical Introduction, 37; Koester, NTS 8 [1961–62] 317–32; Schmithals, Paul and the Gnostics; Martin, New Testament Foundations, 2:205–8, all agree that Paul fights against only one group of adversaries. They do not agree, however, that this group was composed of Jews.)

C. Jewish-Christian Missionaries. Another suggestion of the identity of the Philippians’ opponents recognizes that the identity markers of Judaism played a role in political and religious conflicts in which Jewish Christians were involved in both Judea and Asia in the midperiod of Paul’s career, and Pauline Christians were under
pressure from Jewish Christian nomists to declare their ancestral loyalty (see Jewett, NTS 17 [1970–71] 198–212). This setting of chap. 3 orients Paul’s warnings to what he regarded as a menace to his congregations in Galatia, Philippi, and Corinth—all in the Ephesian period. When he came to Rome, the struggle for his gospel in Galatia and at Corinth and at Philippi was a thing of the past.

Any explanation of the problem in chap. 3 has to address the entire chapter, as Gnilka observed (212–14), and seek to answer three questions: What is the true circumcision? In what does the true knowledge of God exist? Is perfection possible in this life? Jewett (NovT 12 [1970] 362–90) answers these related issues with the view that these teachers claimed to offer “perfection” by a denial of the future hope of a Parousia of Christ, and this was linked with membership in the true Israel by the puberty rite of circumcision, as in Galatia. If we add in the evident claim that Christians could enjoy a life exempted from hardship, strife, and loss—on the ground that they were already raised with Christ to a “heavenly life” here and now—then the complete picture is covered in the entire third chapter. This view helps account for the role of suffering in the letter (see Introduction, Exegesis and Rhetorical Analysis), explains why Paul sets himself and his associates as models of obedience in suffering, and throws light on the call to serious moral ideals that require strenuous effort to attain (Phil 3:12–15). Such ethical endeavors can only be achieved as life is lived in obedience to Christ’s lordship since he came to his enthronement as Lord only along a path of suffering (2:6–11). Thus, the Philippians’ opponents can be understood to be Jewish Christians who used their identity badges to prove their essential
Jewishness and promised an immediate salvation with its corollaries of ethical indifference and a claim to “perfection” now, based on a realized eschatology.

It may be well to paint in broad strokes the rival views so that readers may come to their own conclusions. Table 1 below is intended for that purpose. All agree that the vehemence of 3:18–21 is paralleled only in Gal 1:6–11 and 2 Cor 11:13–15. The issue is how to classify the identity and nature of the Philippian agitators.

**Table 1. Various Identities of the Philippian Agitators**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>As ethnic Jews</th>
<th>As Judaizers</th>
<th>As Gnostic Christians</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Their fate is “destruction” because they reject the Messiah.</td>
<td>1. They are, says Paul, to be enemies of his gospel of sola gratia, sola fide, “by grace and faith only.”</td>
<td>1. They deny Paul’s theology of the cross so they are its enemies. Their hopes are pinned on the exalted Christ, and they profess to be raised already with him. Hence, no sufferings and no resurrection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Their god is κοιλία, “belly” (food laws).</td>
<td>2. Circumcision, their badge, cuts them off from the Messiah (Gal 5:4). They claim circumcision leads to perfection, but Paul denies this since they are still dominated by σάρξ, “flesh” (= self), and have their “mind” on earthly realities.</td>
<td>2. κοιλία, “belly” is their immorality, says Paul, and they are libertine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Their ground of boasting is what they claim to be their δόξα, “glory,” but Paul sees it as no better than its opposite, “shame.”</td>
<td>3. Their alleged heavenly life now denies Paul’s future eschatology and is offended by Paul’s sufferings, which (he says) are a sign of his true status.</td>
<td>3. Their salvation is already achieved, and so no progress is thinkable. Indeed their self-designation is τέλειοι, the “perfect ones,” which Paul disowns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. They represent the Jewish Dispora, a community of Israel, which Paul contrasts with the heavenly πολίτευμα, “colony.”</td>
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Paul’s Purposes for Writing Philippians

Bibliography


In assuming that the letter to the church at Philippi is a unity (see above, pp. xxx–xxxiv, one is not thereby forced to conclude that Paul had only one purpose in mind when he wrote this letter (against those who divide up the letter and see each part as addressing different issues, e.g., W. Schmithals—see above, pp. xxx–xxxii). Indeed his purposes were many:

(1) The simplest purpose to imagine is that, having a deep affection for the Philippians (cf. Phil 4:1), he wanted to write them. So when an opportunity came to have a letter taken to them (2:25–28), he wrote. It is also true that every letter has a situation, i.e., an occasion that calls it forth, as rhetorical criticism has reminded us. See later, Introduction, Exegesis and Rhetorical Analysis.

(2) Paul wrote also to bring them up to date on the news about himself, about his present situation, and about the prospects for his future, namely, that he was in danger and was suffering but was at the same time rejoicing and optimistic (1:12–26 ; 2:24).
(3) Paul wrote to inform them of the erroneous but seductive tenets of some menacing ideas and to plead with them to follow him and his teaching as a pattern for living rather than to follow these teachers (3:2–21).

(4) Paul wrote to encourage the Philippians to stand firm for the faith of the gospel, to inspire in them complete dedication to the will of Christ in spite of any crucible of suffering they might find themselves in—whether because of persecution that might come upon them from a hostile world (1:28–30), or because of the possibility of experiencing a martyr’s death for refusing to bow before any Lord but Jesus (2:11). Lohmeyer (5–6) saw this as the overriding purpose for Paul’s writing to the Philippians and as a consequence considered the letter addressed to them as a tractate on martyrdom written by a martyr to a community of martyrs. His key passage was 1:7, giving maximum value to the adjective συγκοινωνούς, “sharers together with” (26). Although Lohmeyer’s contribution had a profound impact on such Christians as Dietrich Bonhoeffer and perhaps other modern Christian martyrs, it is a thesis that cannot be wholly maintained without straining the exegesis of the text (cf. Gnilka, 95 n. 12).

(5) Paul wrote the Philippians to tell them about Epaphroditus, their messenger whom they sent to minister to his needs. Epaphroditus had been desperately ill; he had now recovered; he had not failed in his mission although he was returning home; and he was worthy of a place of very great honor among them, perhaps a place of leadership, for risking his life to carry out their orders and fulfill the work of Christ (2:25–30).
(6) Paul wrote them to correct division within their ranks. He was proud of the Philippians and asked “for nothing better than to have his work judged by the record of this one church” (2:16 ; 4:1 ; Scott, 12). Yet he was keenly aware that all was not well within it. The fellowship was fractured, not so much by doctrinal (though these elements have been detected; see Peterlin, Paul’s Letter to the Philippians) but by personal differences—differences arising out of rivalry, vanity, selfishness, and animosity. Repeatedly, therefore, Paul encourages them to unity (1:27 ; 2:2–4 ; 4:2) and sets before them the ideal of Christian “perfection” (3:12–16), which is not sinlessness, as though “inability to sin” (posse non peccare) were attained in this life, but rather complete dedication to the will of God (cf. Dante, “In His will is our peace” = shalom), which later Paul will elaborate in Rom 12:1–2. Here τελειότης, “perfection,” is expressed in the twice-repeated adjective εὐάρεστος, “pleasing [to God],” and we may invoke the example of Epaphras, the Colossian pastor (Col 4:12) who prays that his people may stand “mature [τέλειοι ]... in everything that God wills” (NRSV).

(7) Paul wrote to exhort the Philippians to rejoice irrespective of circumstances (Phil 2:18 ; 3:1 ; 4:4). He could do this, for he himself rejoiced, although in prison and facing the possibility of an unnatural death (1:18–20). χαρά, “joy,” and χαίρειν, “rejoice,” occur sixteen times in this letter. Bengel summarizes Paul’s intent in his succinct phrase: “ Gaudeo, gaudete ” (“I rejoice; so you rejoice”).

(8) Paul wrote them to express his thanks for their gift of money (presumably it was a money gift; it may have been help of another kind, e.g., clothing) to ameliorate his situation in prison (4:10–20).
This, however, surely cannot be the sole purpose for writing the letter, or even the chief purpose, because Paul leaves it to the last to mention (except for the reference discussed in 1:3) and then expresses his gratitude, as Dibelius remarked, “in that form of thankless thanks” (Fresh Approach, 164). Perhaps Paul’s words here constitute a delicate way of saying “I did not need your gift, but I appreciate the Christian love that prompted it.” (See Peterman, Paul’s Gift from Philippi.)

Philippians bears all the characteristics of a very personal letter, though with rhetorical patterns following some literary conventions of the day, where the reasons for writing are various and numerous. It is like a chat, the subject matter changing without notice, as in an informal conversation between friends. For this reason an outline of the letter is not easy to make. The letter follows no logical progression. Swift changes of topic and even of tone come as no surprise. Philippians is the antithesis of Romans (or Galatians; see H. D. Betz’s elaborate discussion of the literary composition of Galatians in his commentary on that epistle [Galatians, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 14–25]).

Recent study, however, has viewed Philippians as more structured and artistically designed than was earlier believed. Some commentaries (Bockmuehl, 40) follow outlines that simply relate to the contents, while studies in rhetorical criticism offer much more elaborate proposals. We may set down a few of the latter type for comparison, as summarized by Wick, Philipperbrief:

(1) Swift (BSac 141 [1984] 234–54) presents the following analysis:
1:1–2 Salutation 1:3–11 Prologue 1:12–26 Biographical Prologue 1:27—4:9 Body

1:27–30 Introduction 2:1—4:1 Central Unit 4:2–9 Consolatory Unit

4:20 Epilogue

(2) Garland (NovT 27 [1985] 141–73) argues for the letter's unity and sees elaborate examples of inclusio; e.g., in 1:12–26, προκοπή, “progress,” appears in 1:12 and again in 1:25 to complete the “inclusion”; similarly with the root πολιτ-, for “be a citizen, citizenship,” in 1:27 and 3:20–21. Phil 3:1–21 is a digression; then Paul returns to his main theme, to call Euodia and Syntyche to unity (4:2–3). Thus there are three components to the rhetorically framed letter (akin to Aristotle's rubric of “a beginning, a middle, and an end” [Poet. 1450b.26, cited in Martin, Hymn of Christ, 34 n. 2]).

(3) Watson (NovT 30 [1988] 57–88) also champions the epistle's unity, and divides it thus:

1:3–26 Exordium (Proem) 1:27–30 Narratio 2:1—3:21 Probatio (Demonstration)

2:1–11 The first development of the propositio 2:12–18 The second development of the propositio 2:19–30 Digression 3:1–21 The third development of the propositio

4:1–20 Peroratio

4:1–9 Repetitio 4:10–20 Adfectus

Obviously this model differs from the two earlier arrangements, both in description and division.
(4) Schoon-Janssen (Umstrittene “Apologien” in den Paulusbriefen) criticizes Watson and is suspicious of Schenk, who bases his rhetorical analysis on a collection of separate letters. (Letter A consists of 4:10–20 with conclusion at 4:21–23. Letter B contains a prescript, 1:1–2, and expression of thanks and prayers, 1:3–11. An Information Bulletin begins with 1:12–26, leading to the principal concern of Paul in 1:27—2:18, which is followed by plans to send his associates, 2:19–30; this is developed into expressions of joy in 3:1 + 4:4–17. Letter C is a fragment of a warning letter, 3:2—4:3, 8, 9.) In a sage comment Schoon-Janssen remarks that “when Schenk tries to support a partition-theory by rhetorical analysis, Watson, using the same methods, tries to prove a unity” (141).

(5) Such skepticism leads Wick (Philipperbrief) to seek a combination of rhetorical and epistolary conventions in the construction of Philippians, and he regards the question of the combination of these two elements as “very fruitful” (173). We should therefore find in the letter a set of multiple themes, arranged in parallels (note his tables of 2:13–18 par. 4:4–8 and 2:19–30 par. 4:10–20; but some of these word occurrences are overdrawn, as Reed, Discourse Analysis, notes; see below, pp. lxxi–lxxii), with no fewer than five separate letters in which the center point of the third letter (at the middle of canonical Philippians) is the hymn of 2:6–11 (Wick, Philipperbrief, 61). These variegated themes offer a theological “point of view,” expressed as Imitation of Christ, Joy in the Lord, and Fellowship, especially in this letter but common to other Pauline letters (Wick, Philipperbrief, 191).
Outline of Philippians

This outline assumes the letter’s unity along with similar outlines in O’Brien, Fee (1995), and shorter commentaries.

I. Introductory section (1:1–11)
   A. Salutation (1:1–2)
   B. Thanksgiving and prayer (1:3–11)

II. Information bulletin: news and instructions (1:12—2:30)
   A. News about Paul (1:12–26)
   B. Instructions for the church (1:27—2:18)
      1. To stability in the faith (1:27–30)
      2. To harmony and humility (2:1–4)
      3. Kerygomatic center of the letter: Christ, the supreme encouragement to humility and unselfishness (2:5–11)
      4. Application: to obedience (2:12–18) with Paul as model
   C. News about Timothy and Epaphroditus (2:19–30) and their role as models

III. Digression: warning against false teachings with Paul’s experience and life as a model to follow (3:1–21)
   A. Warning against circumcision and pride in human achievements (3:1–3)
B. Paul’s own life, past and present: an answer to opponents (3:4–11)

C. Warning against perfection now (3:12–16)

D. Paul’s life: a model to imitate (3:17)

E. Warning against imitating other teachers (3:18–19) F. Paul’s hope in the future and unseen (3:20–21)

IV. Exhortations to harmony and joy (4:1–9) V. Gratitude expressed for the Philippians’ generosity (4:10–20)

VI. Conclusion (4:21–23)
Aspects of the Theology of Philippians

Bibliography


Paul’s writings in general do not provide a systematic presentation of his thought. And this is especially true of his letter to the Philippians. Intensely intimate, it lacks formality. Paul sets down his ideas as they come to him, and they are primarily concerned with personal matters—himself, his friends, Timothy and Epaphroditus, and the problems and generosity of the Philippian community. It is a far cry from being a theological treatise. And yet unconsciously he writes theologically, or christologically, for his mind is saturated with thoughts of Christ, God, the social world, salvation, the Spirit, the eschatological hope of the resurrection, the Parousia, the new world, and so on. And all this is on the background of life in a town in the Roman province of Macedonia (so Oakes, Philippians, 77–84) and a scene where the Philippians are under duress and their sufferings call out for a theodicy (Phil 1:28–30).

The background for Paul’s thought was not primarily Hellenistic philosophy or Hellenistic mystery religions, as has been believed and taught for a long while (see Fitzmyer, JBC 2:802–3; Nock, St. Paul; Stauffer, New Testament Theology, 35–36; Whiteley, Theology, 1–8; and more recently Marshall, NTS 19 [1972–73] 271–87; Hengel, Judaism and Hellenism; Ellis, NTS 26 [1980] 497). Paul was born into a Jewish home that rigidly adhered to traditional Jewish beliefs and customs (Phil 3:5). He was sent “to the holy city of his people to attend the law school, before the world outside the ghettos could gain possession of his affections” (Stauffer, Theology, 35). He
attended the school of Hillel; studied under Rabbi Gamaliel
(according to Acts 22:3); joined the order of strict observance of
the law, the Pharisaic order (cf. Phil 3:5–6); and earned the
confidence of his superiors (see Hengel and Schwemer, Paul
between Damascus and Antioch). Paul had a promising career as a
teacher of the law until the Damascus-road experience. While on a
mission to Damascus to persecute the church, he encountered—or
better, in his own words, he “was seized by” (Phil 3:12)—the
exalted Lord of the church, Jesus (Acts 9:1–8), and the whole
course of his life was radically altered. He who had persecuted
Jesus now preached Jesus.

The effects of this encounter never wore off (see Kim, Origin of
Paul’s Gospel). When Paul wrote to the Philippians many years
later, and perhaps near the end of his career or in the mid-50s, he
still stressed the overwhelming and life-shattering importance of
Christ. Never once did he himself regret giving up everything to
gain Christ, and he had no compunction about urging others to
follow his example (Phil 3:7–8, 17). One might say that Paul was
obsessed with Christ, because for him Christ was everything (1:20–
21). His Lord was divine and preexistent, humble to the point of
becoming human and dying on a cross, exalted to heaven, adored
by the universe and all its powers, and given a new name that was
above all names, Lord (ΚΥΡΙΟΣ, 2:6–11).

This centrality of Jesus Christ in the universe, in the world, in
the life of both church and congregation, vibrates throughout the
letter to the Philippians, but not in any formal way. Rather, even
the great christological hymn (2:6–11) is introduced as an
illustration of what the Christian’s life should be like—humble, self-
giving, a life for others lived under the exalted lordship of the cosmic Christ. And the intimate personal testimony of what Christ meant to Paul is seemingly the inevitable outcome of a passionate denunciation of false teachers. Had he not become so agitated, the curtain of his inner life might not have been drawn aside so completely so that the dramatic encounter between Christ and his people might be seen on display in Christ's lordship, which sets the pattern for his people both to confess his authority and live out what life in fellowship in conformity to him means. This conformity is not to his example, as though Paul's call were “Do what Jesus did” (an impossible feat!), but to the way of life he showed in his obedience, which in turn requires a corresponding submission to his authority (2:5, 12). As 2:6–11 is the centerpiece of the letter and its Christology governs the tenor of what Paul writes, so Paul and his colleagues are the human models of suffering and sacrifice. They have “caught” this from their Lord, and such examples of selflessness and altruism, seen in Timothy's “worth” (2:22) and Epaphroditus's sacrifice (2:27–30), are a powerful rebuke to the self-centeredness and arrogance of some of the Philippian members, possibly encouraged by their leaders.

A life of goodness, that is, one filled with the fruit of righteousness, is possible because of Jesus Christ (1:11; cf. 2:5–11), but Paul does not elaborate on how Jesus Christ effects this in a believer. Christ died a death on a cross (2:8), but Paul does not say here that it was for “our sins” that he died, as in the traditional gospel (1 Cor 15:3). Rather he (or rather, the quoted hymn) says that death was the supreme display of obedience on Christ's part as a paradigm for Christians to accept and practice
Incorporated in Christ by faith, Christians are found to be “right with God,” that is, not having a “righteousness” (i.e., a right relationship) of their own earning as a relationship based on covenant fidelity, but having the righteousness that comes from faith in Christ, given by God in response to faith (3:9). Christ alone is sufficient to put men and women right with God. Jesus Christ, now in heaven, will come again to deliver Christians and transfigure their bodies, making them like his own resplendent body (3:21). The day of Christ’s return, the day of transfiguration, is near (4:5; on one view of this text, see below, Comment on 4:5).

Jesus Christ was the central “fact” of Paul’s life, from the Damascus encounter to the destiny of his martyrdom, and this reality can be seen cropping up everywhere in his brief letter to the Philippians. Jeremias wrote that “the hour of Damascus is the key to Pauline theology” (ExpTim 76 [1964–65] 30, echoed by later writers such as Stuhlmacher and Kim). Yet there are some interesting restraints here as well as those that are characteristic of Paul elsewhere: (1) Paul never addresses Jesus Christ directly, either in a prayer or in thanksgiving. He does not call on him to bear witness to any aspect of his own conduct, nor does he direct his doxology to him, even if the hymn of 2:6–11 is sung in his honor as an encomium, a laus Christi, “praise of Christ” (Brucker, “Christushymnen” oder “epeidiktische Passagen”? 319). Even Paul’s final salutation, “May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you each one” (4:23), seems to be a studied avoidance of any kind of direct address to Jesus. Only God the Father is the object of prayer and thanksgiving (1:3; 4:6). Only God is called on to bear witness (1:8). Only God receives the doxology of praise (2:11;
only God is directly addressed. (2) Paul is careful to distinguish between God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (1:2). Jesus is never called “God” (θεός) in Philippians (but see 2:6 and cf. Rom 9:5 and 2 Thess 1:12, both debated). The “fruit of righteousness” is produced through Jesus Christ, but it is for the glory and praise of God (1:11; cf. 2:11). Christians are called “children of God” (2:15), not of Christ. Righteousness comes from (ἐκ) God through (διὰ) faith in Christ or through the faithfulness of Christ (3:9). God calls his people by Christ (3:14). God is the God of peace (4:9) who brings peace to them in/by Christ (4:7). Why this distinction? Why this restraint in vocabulary on the part of an apostle so obviously committed to the lordship of Jesus Christ? Perhaps it was due to the influence of Jewish monotheism on Paul, the former Pharisee (cf. 1 Cor 8:5–6). Convinced as Paul was from the Christ-encounter on the Damascus road that Jesus was divine, on a par with but not God himself (cf. Phil 1:1; 2:6, 11), and one to be worshiped by the church as well as by the cosmos (2:10), he, nevertheless, could not quickly or easily bring himself to transfer to Jesus a title that he regarded to be exclusively that of Israel’s covenant God; hence scholars call Paul’s Christology “christological monotheism” (see Moule, Origin; Wright, Climax; De Lacey, TynBul 30 [1979] 1–28; Bauckham, God Crucified; Kreitzer, “When He at Last Is First!” for helpful suggestions in this difficult area of names for Jesus).
Text of the Letter

Bibliography


No major difficulties are posed by the textual tradition of Philippians. The oldest witness to the Greek text of this letter is the Chester Beatty Papyrus (𝔓 46), dating from about A.D. 200, now kept in Dublin. It contains Phil 1:1, 5–15, 17–28, 30 ; 2:1–12, 14–27, 29–30 ; 3:1–8, 10–21 ; 4:2–12, 14–23. The other papyri, 𝔓 16 and 𝔓 61, are later, the former dating from the third or fourth century, and the latter about A.D. 700. 𝔓 16 contains Phil 3:9–17 ; 4:2–8, and 𝔓 61 contains Phil 3:5–9, 12–16. There are eighteen uncial witnesses to Philippians, the three oldest of which (𝔓, B, A) provide a complete text, dating from the fourth and fifth centuries. Six other uncial manuscripts also contain the whole of the Philippian text. The minuscule manuscripts stand in contrast to the eighteen uncials in that there are no less than 626 of them as of September 20, 1967 (so Gnilka).
Silva gives a list of 112 variant readings in the Nestle-Aland text, and there are no changes in NA ²⁷. The commentary that follows will note significant textual matters, if any, in the Notes for each Translation. As Bockmuehl observes, the main places of textual interest are 1:1, 11 ; 2:4 ; 3:3, 12 ; 4:7, 23.
Exegesis and Rhetorical Analysis, with Special Reference to Philippians 2:6–11

Bibliography


Introduction
In recent years the technique of rhetorical analysis has been applied to Philippians, with some positive results in seeking both (1) to classify the genre of the letter (Is it an appeal to the emotion of the implied and intended readers? Or an exercise in reasoned argument, engaging the readers’ mind, their logos? Or does it endeavor to persuade the readers to action and to galvanize them to do something in response by appealing to the speaker’s model or models that he/she invokes?) and (2) to aid in exegesis. In the latter case, it must be confessed, the gains so far have been meager, and some scholars regard rhetorical criticism as simply an exercise in method, much like source criticism or redaction criticism. It is interesting, but no more.

Such a judgment is probably premature, and practitioners of the discipline will rise up at any negative comment, though rhetorical criticism has got to win its way into the standard commentaries. Yet there are signs that the situation is changing, as is evidenced from M. Bockmuehl’s contribution to Black’s New Testament Commentary (1998), as earlier in the contribution of W. Schenk in his commentary (1984).

At this point we need to register the difference between rhetorical situation and rhetorical problems, a distinction basic to P. A. Holloway’s Consolation in Philippians. He notes that the pioneering work of L. Bitzer (Philosophy and Rhetoric 1 [1968] 1–14) opened up the field of inquiry. Moving beyond the discussion that was content to classify the types of rhetorical strategy, he took as his starting point that “persuasion” is the main purpose of public utterance (so Aristotle, Rhet., 1.2.1 §1355b: “Let rhetoric be defined as the art of perceiving the available means of persuasion in any
given situation,” cited in Holloway, Consolation, 34). He fastened on the role of “situation.” Paul’s letters were composed always with “response-to-a-situation” in view and then to move the implied readers/hearers to action. Not all “persuasion” is successful, as we know from 1 and 2 Corinthians, so the charge is leveled against Bitzer that he is guilty of determinism, and then of reversing the roles of letter and situation. Which came first? Bitzer said “situation,” a verdict that may be true. But “situations” do not generate letters (as he said). They provide the scene or occasion for letters to be written. And that raises and introduces the idea of “rhetorical problems.” The situation that calls forth the letter is problematic, i.e., full of problems; otherwise why would Paul write to the Philippians? This is Holloway’s point of entry into the rhetorical situation, and he approaches it by posing two issues. We know from the letter that Paul (1) was in jail (Phil 1:7, 13–14, 17, 29–30 ; 2:17 ; 4:14) and (2) was faced with life-or-death issues (1:21–22 ; 2:17–18). The Philippians too were in trouble, both from the outside (1:28–30) and from factions inside that were evident (2:1–4 ; 4:2–3). There were encroaching dangers (3:2) and, on another front, anxieties over their messenger who had fallen sick (2:25–30). Yet they had been generous in their support of Paul (1:3 ; 4:10–20), and maybe they were wondering whether Paul had received their latest gift(s).

Paul’s responses to these situations, for Holloway, constitute the nub of the letter. Paul is set a double task: how to acknowledge their generosity while remaining “independent” (4:11–13) and how to call the fractious congregation to courage under suffering and to unity when they are splintered and disgruntled (2:14). Paul’s
response is to offer a letter whose genre is consolation (hence Holloway's title, though it takes in a wide range of discussion of ancient literary sources and involves him in exegesis, not all of which is convincing).

If Holloway's submission is correct, all subsequent commentaries should be written from the point of view that rhetorically Philippians is a letter of consolation and that its thrust has to be seen from the standpoint of the readers' situation and Paul's reaction thereto. Holloway says as much (Consolation, 45): “The primary purpose in writing to the Philippians seems to have been to console them that things were in fact going much better than they imagined.” Theology enters in at Phil 1:6, he says, when Paul assures his readers that “God who began his mission at Philippi” is the God who “would see that mission to completion.”

That this is one of Paul’s purposes cannot be doubted. The sticking point is whether it is Paul’s “primary purpose,” which is a claim we may take leave to doubt, and not least because it overlooks the character of God referred to in Phil 1:6, and that depiction of God is precisely the thrust of the carmen Christi, “hymn of Christ” (2:6–11). So we are back with the otherwise uncontested fact (at least, so we believe) that Philippians is a theological document, cast in letter form and carrying all the hallmarks of a friendship-family letter, but whose chief interest lies in what it says about God in the face of the many-sided problems at Philippi. Granted that Paul alludes to these problems as part of the rhetorical situation, a question still remains to be answered: How does he present his case for handling those issues of rivalry, selfishness, suffering, and alien teachers? The one umbrella idea
that would contain his answer to these variegated matters is that God is disclosed in the incarnation, death, and vindication of Jesus Christ. And this was precisely the conclusion reached as the last sentence of R. P. Martin, Carmen Christi (rev. as Hymn of Christ, 1997), 311, back in 1963!

What was not addressed in 1963, however, was how to understand such matters as the literary structure of the hymn, as seen in rhetorical criticism, and the genre of the letter. These are the two concerns in recent study of the letter. And, of course, the potential of exegetical insights that has come with these new techniques and approaches is the opportunity facing the exegete today.

Survey

In one sense, the task of introducing rhetorical analysis to readers and students of Philippians has already been done in the short but incisive work of L. J. Kreitzer, “When He at Last Is First!” especially 114–18. True, he devotes his attention to the place of Phil 2:9–11 in the structure of the hymn, but his wide-ranging essay covers many of the points raised throughout the letter as a whole. His essay may well serve, therefore, as an introduction to the rhetorical approach to Philippians, and it may suffice to summarize Kreitzer’s views and comment briefly on them, adding to his list of “four rhetorical assessments of Philippians” that he believes are “worth noting” (115).

(1) The first is the essay of C. J. Robbins, CBQ 42 (1980) 73–82. His thesis is that the verses of Phil 2:6–11 are a unit and there are
no interpolations added by Paul. He produces a twelve-line structure that, he avers, conforms to the classical rhetorical pattern. He overturns what has become a sententia recepta, “accepted opinion,” in modern study, that v 8c (and possibly v 11c) breaks the rhetorical flow and betrays a reviser’s hand, i.e., Paul’s. This view will be treated in the commentary. It will be rejected, and for good reason(s), we believe.

(2) D. F. Watson, NovT 30 (1988) 57–88, is a more ambitious work. He sees the letter as an example of deliberative rhetoric, formally classified as probatio, or “proof,” in which an author/speaker—and here we pause to note that Philippians was written to be read out to the infant church and heard in the assembly as a public discourse (hence discourse analysis, a term favored by J. T. Reed, Discourse Analysis; see below, pp. lxxi–lxxii)—seeks to move the readers/audience by appealing to models. There is much to commend in this approach, and the cases of Paul himself, Timothy, and Epaphroditus function as “examples” who exemplify the life lived under the lordship of Christ in his obedience, suffering to death, and self-sacrifice. These models will, it is hoped, move the hearers to renounce self-seeking (2:1–4) and “work out their own salvation” (2:12). Because these human personae are not exalted as the Lord was in 2:9–11, Watson can find no place for the second half of the hymn, and so his argument is weak. Incidentally, Watson’s lacuna shows by default how it is impossible to view the hymn except as a “self-contained period” in which the thought flows from 2:6 to 2:11 (Lohmeyer’s original insight in Kyrios Jesus, 7) and that it is wrong to regard vv
9–11 as an “appendix,” as Dibelius in his commentary (81) sought to do.

(3) Where Watson sees the hymn as only a tangential illustration of rhetorical probatio, or “proof,” C. Basivi and J. Chapa, “Philippians 2:6–11,” set the hymn firmly in the center of the letter—as this commentary will also do. Their classification of the hymn as an encomium called laus Christi, “praise of Christ” (cf. R. Brucker, “Christushymnen” oder “epideiktische Passagen”? reviewed by R. P. Martin, JBL 118 [1999] 361–62; this designation of the hymn as Christuslob, “praise of Christ,” is accepted by S. Alkier, Wunder und Wirklichkeit), rightly points to the theological basis of the entire letter. The hymn serves as a professio fidei, “profession of faith,” a kerygmatic statement of who Christ was, what he became, and where he now reigns over the cosmos as the ground for the Philippians’ obedience (2:12) and a reminder of how they came to be “in Christ” (2:5). Here rhetorical criticism speaks directly to exegesis, and in a favorable way that we naturally applaud!

Kreitzer (“When He at Last Is First!” 115) questions whether this analysis can deal with vv 9–11. The answer is yes. The ground of Paul’s appeal for obedience is the exaltation of Jesus as Lord, and so he is the one who has the right to command. The second half of the hymn is in its rightful place; it is integral to the hymn (unlike how it is seen in the so-called ethical interpretation of 2:5–11) and offers much, not little (pace Kreitzer, “When He at Last Is First!” 116), in interpreting the hymn with its center of gravity in the twin, related themes of obedience and lordship.
Another way to view the interrelation of Phil 2:6–8 and 2:9–11 is offered by L. G. Bloomquist, The Function of Suffering in Philippians, 97–118. As the title makes clear, Bloomquist is interested in tracing the role of suffering through the letter, with obvious paradigms in Christ as well as Paul and his associates. The Philippians themselves are the implied readers, who are encouraged (in a letter that is to be classified as exhortatio) to apply these models to their lot as a suffering community. Christ suffered; they are being persecuted (another agreed datum, since Lohmeyer, 28, called the letter a “tract of martyrdom,” with some exaggeration surely). He was exalted to cosmic lordship; but how could this promise ever apply to his people in the context of the hymn? The honest answer is that it cannot. Only Christ is the unique Lord. So Dibelius (81) wrote off 2:9–11 as an “excursus,” leaving the interpreter with these verses as a surd. Bloomquist follows a host of commentators who are quick either to appeal to 3:20–21 in the letter or to go outside the letter to Paul’s writings elsewhere, e.g., Rom 8:17–18 or later to 2 Tim 2:11: “If we endure, we will also reign with him.” The question of whether it is legitimate to appeal to these texts by going beyond the six verses of 2:6–11 is never raised by Bloomquist, nor by those such as S. E. Fowl, Story of Christ, and M. D. Hooker, “Phil. 2, 6–11.” All three writers seek to argue that as 2:6–11 is central to the letter (agreed) and suffering is a leitmotif (agreed); the role of vv 9–11 and the eschatological hope of 3:20–21 may be used to show how humility is rewarded. So we conclude, even if these scholars do not actually say so. This leads Kreitzer (“When He at Last Is First!” 117) to wonder how Hooker can escape the charge that 2:9–11 has no
relevance to the theme of humility (as she admits) and how Fowl (in criticism of the Käseman-Martin interpretation that opposes the so-styled ethical imitation view) can find a connection in positing that Christ is an exemplar in a vague sort of way (“When He at Last Is First!” 95). In point of fact, it would have been better to treat 2:6–11 on its own and find the fundamental theme of the hymn not in suffering nor example nor humility, but in obedience and exaltation as epitomizing the “story of Christ” (again Alkier’s term, Wunder und Wirklichkeit, 252) and offering the ground of Paul’s ethics, applied in 2:12.

The positive gain of Bloomquist’s treatment is noteworthy. Anticipating more recent investigations into Paul’s situation and that of the readers as a key to unlocking the meaning of the letter, Bloomquist starts from the position that the letter is “a rhetorical address, the focus of which is entirely on Paul” (Function of Suffering, 138), and he goes on—in anticipation of P. A. Holloway (see above)—to see it as a letter of comfort (149). He agrees that Paul’s imprisonment is a key factor in raising all manner of questions about God’s control of events. In the following commentary, we will call this factor by its technical name of theodicy, meaning how to account for God’s undefeatble yet loving purpose in the face of human suffering. It is such a need that unites, in a triangular fashion, the writer of Philippians, the readers, and all subsequent inquirers as those who ask about the form, shape, and purpose of the letter. The last-named group is those who pose the issues in their day and set the agenda for what has come to be called Wirkungsgeschichte. This is a term meaning “effective history” or the ways an ancient document has been
received, understood, and applied in later history, especially (in biblical study) of the Jewish and Christian “church.” A good illustration of this method is in P. Oakes, “Jason and Penelope Hear Phil. 1:1–11,” 155–64.

(5) The role of “models” in this triangular relationship is the special contribution of P. Oakes, Philippians. While he does not offer much in answer to the question of how the letter is to be understood rhetorically, he sees that Philippians is concerned with the related themes of unity and suffering (124), and he seeks to show the precise relationship between them. He observes (123) that Bloomquist had a secondary purpose in mind, namely, that of interpreting Paul. This purpose was to reassure the suffering church (Bloomquist, Function of Suffering, 150), and Oakes wants to press this point further. Suppose (we may ask) the Philippians were not a church undergoing hardship and we knew little or nothing about their situation. How might Paul have written? Obviously he had a close bond with them on account of their giving (Phil 4:10–20), and he would (we infer) want to keep the lines of communication open. Yet if he is writing a letter of cordial affection to cement that bond (as L. A. Alexander, JSNT 37 [1989] 87–110, believes; there is a similar view in M. Bockmuehl’s recent commentary, 33, where he finds in the return of Epaphroditus “the primary reason for writing at this particular time”), then Paul’s letter is not to be regarded as a response to any other situation. And it serves only to deepen the union between apostle and people. Oakes calls this approach “relational” (Philippians, 125), and he has some sympathy for it as for S. Winter’s (unpublished) view that the letter was sent
“to increase the commitment of the Philippians to their relationship with Paul” (Oakes, Philippians, 125).

Having reached the conclusion that this letter is all about unity and suffering, with corresponding calls to “stand firm” (4:1) and “be brave” (1:27), Oakes is left with this question: Since we know that Philippi was a Roman colony (Acts 16:12–40) and Paul uses Roman ideas, both in language (Phil 1:27; 3:20, 21) and concepts (e.g., societas = partnership, after J. P. Sampley, Pauline Partnership in Christ: Christian Community and Commitment in Light of Roman Law [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980]), how does he express his message in a way that would appeal to his audience? The answer is found in Phil 2:6–11 where, Oakes alleges, Christ and the Roman emperor are contrasted, as in 3:20–21 and even in the use made of OT texts, such as Isa 45:23. The title Kyrios, “Lord,” along with these OT texts is more political than religious in its application to the Philippians. What they needed was to see in the example of Christus imperator, “Emperor Christ,” the antidote to their squabbling, but with the obvious caveat that Jesus the Lord is the model of a humble Lord, as we know and the Philippians knew from “early Christian testimony about Jesus” (Philippians, 209).

Along the way to this conclusion, Oakes is critical of the Käsemann-Martin line and thinks that Phil 2:6–11 was written (by Paul?) specifically to meet the needs of the Philippians and epitomizes the message of the epistle in all its parts. To have placed 2:6–11 at the heart of the letter, as does P. Wick, Philipperbrief, 58–81 (esp. 81: “The Philippian hymn [2:6–11] forms the thematic center of the letter”; this is criticized by J. T. Reed, Discourse Analysis, 362–64 [see later], who is suspicious of his
excisions and overuse of word occurrences), is commendable, but there is no need to follow Wick’s elaborate partitioning of the letter since D. E. Garland’s work, which demonstrates its unity (NovT 27 [1985] 141–73). This is a positive gain to exegesis and our understanding of the letter’s “point,” its Sache. Yet questions remain about Oakes’s treatment of individual verses, and in particular his doubtful interpretation of “reward” (2:9) and his close tie-in between Christ and the imperial cult. The latter is no new idea (cf. Martin, Hymn of Christ, 80–81), though Oakes brings his own slant to the data and is invaluable in the use made of coins (cf. Kreitzer, Striking New Images) and epigraphic evidence. Oakes’s appeal in part to recent commentators, notably Fee ([1995], 43–46), and studies such as that of D. Seeley (JHC 1 [1994] 49–72) does no more than make the hypothesis possible. It offers one possible source in a number of sources available to the author of the hymn in writing to Roman Philippi, as Seeley acknowledges, and serves to make the single point that “lordship” means “right to rule,” as the reviser of this commentary indicated in Hymn of Christ, lxiii n. 40, with reference to Seeley. The Philippians may well have read (or sung) the hymn and thought of Caligula or Nero. We cannot know. What we do know is that all early Christians appealed to the OT and found in it a testimonium Christi, “testimony of Christ.” This is true of the Philippians, even if Paul only once or twice specifically cites the OT (Phil 1:19, 2:10; but there are allusions and resonances, listed in Wick, Philippbrief, 174, and considered in this commentary later). Yet his terms (δοῦλος, “slave”; κύριος, “Lord”; σωτήρ, “savior”; θυσία, “sacrifice”; δόξα, “glory”; κοινωνία, “partnership”) are all parallel with OT ideas, making recourse to
“Christ and the Emperor” not so much untrue as otiose. A swift application of Occam’s razor would dispose of much of Oakes’s argument, however much we appreciate his “parallels.” J. Moffatt (First Five Centuries, 113) put it succinctly in another context: “analogy does not mean genealogy.” P. Henry’s verdict (“Kénose,” DBSup 24 [1950] 41) remains: that this tracing of Christ’s lordship in Phil 2:6–11 to Roman imperial claims is imaginative but no more.

As far as exegesis goes, this bid to set Paul’s theology in Philippians in contrast to the claims of Caesar worship reaches its extreme form in N. T. Wright, “Challenge to the Empire.” The gist of his short contribution is to see Paul’s piece of autobiography in 3:3–11 as closely linked with the middle section of the chapter, with its call to imitation (3:17), and leading up to the main “point” in 3:20–21. The last section has to be understood as setting up the contrast between Christ and Caesar: “Caesar is parody and his Empire is parody of the Kingdom.” The purpose behind such a contrast is to challenge the readers to embrace their loyalty to Christ.

Why then does Paul use Judaism and paganism as part of his warnings when his chief thrust is to oppose the emperor worship? Wright’s reply is to allege that these earlier warnings (in 3:3–6 and 3:18–19) are foils to show the real conflict between the church and the empire, and they pose no real threat since the warnings are “coded.” Paul is setting up a kind of straw man, saying in fact, “As I, Paul, have rethought my Jewish allegiance in the light of the crucified and risen Jesus, so you should rethink your Roman allegiance in the same light” (Wright, “Challenge,” 178). The
application follows: “Do not go along with the Caesar-cult that is currently sweeping the Eastern Mediterranean. You have one Lord and Savior, and he will vindicate and glorify you, if you hold firm to him” (178).

This novel view of Paul’s appeal to the Philippians is open to several serious objections. (a) Granted that Paul wants his readers to “find their whole identity with the crucified and risen Messiah and nowhere else,” the question is how this is accomplished. Certainly not by following Paul’s example, even if he exemplifies what living under Christ’s lordship implies. (b) When Wright remarks that there is “no hard evidence that this danger (from Judaism and the Jewish-Christian mission) threatened the churches in Greece as it had done there in Asia” (175), he overlooks the problems in 2 Corinthians, especially chaps. 3, 10–13—a fatal omission. (c) There is little substance in the claim that Paul saw the empire as such a threat in the 50s, if we believe the evidence of Acts and Rom 13. (d) Wright’s recourse to “code” language makes Paul’s meaning so obscure and recherché that one wonders how the Philippian congregants could ever have followed it. Wright talks of Paul’s subtlety and uses terms like “subversive” and “intrigue”; but these are all scholars’ jargon and betray an attempt to treat Paul’s writings as unduly sophisticated. In this treatment of Paul’s narrative in chap. 3 as parody, Wright is turning Paul into a Seneca, whose art of satirical writing is well known in his farce Divi Claudii Apocolocyntosis, “The Pumpkinification of the divine Claudius” (Dio Cassius, 60.35). Claudius’s bid for apotheosis is ridiculed in this Hellenistic satire, which combines prose and verse (just as in, e.g., Phil 3:2, to be sure), but the obvious difference is
that Seneca’s parody concerns one who was dead, whereas Paul’s writing is self-parody, as in 2 Cor 10–13. What remains to be shown is that the Philippians, unlike the Corinthians, would be able to read this descriptive writing in the way Paul (so Wright alleges) intended. We doubt it.

(6) And that brings us to the latest, fullest treatment of Phil 2:6–11 and the entire letter as a species of rhetoric, called discourse analysis. I refer to J. T. Reed, Discourse Analysis, based on work written as a dissertation under L. A. Alexander of the University of Sheffield. Reed is sympathetic to Alexander’s essay (JSNT 37 [1989] 87–110) asserting that Philippians is to be set in an epistolary context, written to convey information about the well-being of both author and audience. It shares the same characteristics as letters that would pass between families. Hence, the oft-repeated address to “brothers (and sisters) in the Lord” (1:12, 14; 2:25; 3:1, 13, 17; 4:1, 8, 21). This feature of Philippians as a “friendly hortatory letter” is also found in L. M. White, “Morality between Two Worlds.” He emphasizes koinonia, “partnership”; joy; and the call to be united by sharing a common mind. Both Alexander and White agree on the letter’s unity; and Reed praises their efforts as having “advanced understanding of the epistolary typology of Philippians on both formal and functional grounds” (Discourse Analysis, 170), though later he qualifies that support (“I am not advocating, however, that Paul’s letters are merely identical reflections of personal, family letters” [174]).

After earlier rehearsals of the positions adopted by other students of rhetorical method, whether they are concerned with genre or classical rhetoric or more general classification, viewing Philippians
under the rubric of τύποι ἐπιστολικοί, “models of letters” (from Pseudo-Demetrius), with the topos of “friendship” prevalent (or “gratitude,” following Aune, New Testament in Its Literary Environment, 210), Reed finally arrives at his own conclusion (173):

In summary, the issues raised by Deissmann [as to how best to classify the New Testament documents, whether as “epistles” or “letters”] still haunt New Testament scholarship, now in the debate over the relational nature of Paul’s letters. The rhetorical camp treats them fundamentally as speeches, that is, orations embodying the canons of the rhetorical handbooks.

This conclusion Reed will regard as suspect for the following reason: he argues that Paul’s letters in general and Philippians in particular do not really lend themselves to the analysis of rhetoric based on epistolary conventions. The best method for the modern interpreter is to show how he “adapted the epistolary genre to his own immediate situation” (176). He raises a valid point against too precise a classification, insisting that we must take the letter as a whole, and not the work of a redactor who hypothetically brought the text into line (177), and see it as a “mix” of epistolary traditions, some literary, some nonliterary, some hortatory, some liturgical, embodying hymns (2:6–11 !), and so on, we suppose.

Here we may break off our appraisal of Reed’s contribution, with admiration for his industry and assessment of previous works (we have covered the main ones in our brief survey), and pause to wonder where it is all leading us. Does it assist our understanding of what is said or what Paul meant to say to the Philippians? Frankly, the answer is one of skepticism, and we are left with very
little to show at the end of the day (or many days in reading a large volume of some 454 pages).

**Conclusion**

What we do know is (1) that Paul was a careful writer whose words convey his thoughts to implied readers at Philippi (Reed's opus shows that); (2) that he confronts several problems in the church there; (3) that those problems were concerned with suffering and unity and "false teaching" on the horizon; (4) that he was bound to this church by strong cords of affection (Phil 4:1 ; see P. Pilhofer's term, "die Lieblingsgemeinde des Paulus" [Philippi, 1:245]); (5) that he was glad to have some expressions of generosity from Philippi to aid his ministry; (6) that he was hoping to send Timothy and Epaphroditus as a prelude to his coming to the city; and (7) most painfully of all, that he learned that the people in the Philippian house congregations were divided and full of selfish and self-seeking ambition (2:1–4 ; 4:2–3). See earlier on Paul's Purposes for Writing Philippians.

All of this is evident to the "simple" reader today. No one is likely to dispute this list. Yet how he put these thoughts onto papyrus and sent them as a letter to Philippi we really cannot know. We can describe his mode of writing in the language of his contemporaries (going back to Aristotle, Pseudo-Demetrius, and the papyri data), and sometimes we can sympathize with modern scholars who need to use rare terms (such as "iconicity," as Reed [383] does, or "linguisticality," as Schlüssler Fiorenza ["Rhetoricity," 456] does), but does this exercise bring us to the heart of Paul's message in this letter?
Paul writes as a missionary, a church planter, a pastor, a rhetor, and a theologian. Wick (Philipperbrief, 187–91) treats the last two of these job descriptions of the apostle yet sees the “theological viewpoint” of Paul as one of emphasizing “imitation of Christ,” joy in “the Lord,” and “fellowship,” here in Philippians as elsewhere. All we can say is that his writings share all of these concerns. And in the history of interpretation, this letter to the Philippians will be read in the church (its Wirkungsgeschichte) as a theological missive, in which Jesus Christ is central, and the character of God he disclosed in his obedience, death, and enthronement sets the tone and controls the style of Paul’s writing. It presents the kerygmatic “models” by which living under Christ’s lordship is to be seen.

By common consent the christological passage in Phil 2:6–11, prefaced by 2:5 and leading to 2:12, is the beating heart of this letter, which rhetorically may be classified as a “friendship-family” letter, or a “consolation,” or in regard to content a tract on martyrdom, or pastorally an earnest plea for unity in suffering. All these designations have been offered in recent studies, up to 2002.

Readers will instinctively turn to Phil 2:6–11 to test the value of this revised commentary. So it has been agreed, by original author and reviser, to give a summary statement of how this hymn may be approached, without the trappings of scholars’ names and their theories. Admittedly, it is the reviser’s work, and he will stand by it, in this his latest and last contribution to the carmen Christi, “Hymn of Christ,” debate.
Christology in Philippians

We have taken this epistle to be Paul’s friendship or family letter (see earlier Exegesis and Rhetorical Analysis, with Special Reference to Philippians 2:6–11) addressed to his people in the Roman colony of Philippi in Macedonia. A close bond of affection and loyalty united the apostle and the congregation ever since the church’s founding (Acts 16:12–40; Phil 1:7; 4:1). Evidence for this comes partly in the way he pays tribute to their gifts of money (we assume) to support his ministry (Phil 2:25–30; 4:10–20; perhaps too 1:3) and the warm terms of endearment in which he writes (e.g., 4:1). Yet at a deeper level he addresses the problems the Philippians were facing. These are both external in terms of pressure from a hostile society (1:27–30; 2:15) and also issues within the congregation’s life where a tendency to self-seeking and mutual criticism was causing disunion (2:1–4, 14). Possibly this spirit of divisiveness not only related to the enduring hardships that some were finding difficult to explain (implied in 1:29, 30) but also reflected a discontent with Paul himself as a suffering apostle whose absence some could not understand (implied in 1:26). Here we may touch on a key idea, suggesting a leitmotif for the entire letter. Paul needs to present a theodicy to justify both his own suffering and his readers’ persecution. This now should be added to P. Oakes’s recent attempt (Philippians [2001]) to see the letter as concerned with suffering and unity. This is true, but needs a third element in the letter’s theological “point.” It will be clear that Christology is the way Paul presents his case. Linking his (and his colleagues’) trials and the afflictions lately visited on the Philippians is the role of the church’s Lord, who passed through suffering
obedience to his vindication as cosmic Ruler. In focusing on this role, Paul gives a paradigm of the biblical principle that God will bring his faithful ones through trial to ultimate victory and conquer his enemies, who may be deemed the church’s real adversaries behind the human agents in Philippian society. If this is so, the section of 2:6–11 is at the heart of the letter in every way. We may trace its influence throughout all the chapters, thus unifying them into a coherent whole.

The Story of Christ: Lordship as Ethical Impetus

Given the setting of the letter as directed to a community faced by threats from the hostile world around it (Phil 1:27–30) and experiencing internal divisions and a mood of querulousness about their lot as an afflicted church (2:14–15), Paul’s call is both to steadfastness and to courage (1:27 ; 4:1), and equally to unity “in the Lord” (2:1–4 ; 4:2). Both virtues are linked to the summons to humility and self-disregard. Yet Paul is not in the business of handing out simple bromides to faltering faith; nor is he insisting on oneness on prudential grounds. Rather his rationale is given on the theological basis of God’s sovereign control, and his call to unity rests on their shared possession of what life in Christ should mean. The key is their selfless regard for others and an active desire for the neighbor’s well-being and interest in preferring the neighbor’s good rather than one’s own. It is the outcropping of Paul’s koinonia ethics, as believers are viewed as “members of one body.” For that chief reason we should regard the christological passage of 2:6–11 less as a call to imitate humble love seen in the
incarnate and glorified Lord and more as a way of expressing what “life in Christ” means and how it sets a pattern to which his members should conform their corporate life. The introductory verse (2:5), with its elliptical syntax and obvious lacuna needing to be filled with a supplied second verb, should be paraphrased: “Let this way of life be yours, such as you have in Christ Jesus,” that is, as members of his community living under his lordship. The ethical admonitions of 2:1–4 prepare the readers for what is to come, just as 2:12 enforces the exhortation, “As you have always obeyed [the call to your Christian identity as those confessing Jesus Christ as Lord], so apply the message [of the quoted passage in vv 6–11] to your well-being [expressed as σωτηρία, ‘salvation’] as God’s people.”

1. A study of Phil 2:6–11 reviewed and summarized. The noble verses in Phil 2:6–11 almost baffle analysis, as one might expect once we recognize them, with most scholars, to be poetic, imaginative, and quite possibly liturgical in form and setting. The passage is an early Christian hymn, inserted into the letter, since it is replete with non-Pauline and rare idioms. As to its sequence, the poem/hymn flows in a logical and progressive measure. It sets down the “road” Christ took from God’s eternal presence, which he enjoyed “in the beginning” (v 6), to his ultimate glory alongside God’s throne, which he now shares—by way of his incarnation (v 7), humble obedience to death (v 8), and exaltation (vv 9–11). Evocative metaphors are drawn from the OT, chiefly illustrated by Adam, who aspired to be “like God” (Gen 3:5); the suffering servant of Isa 53:12, who “poured out” his life in death; and the vindicated king-messiah of Ps 110:1, who is now elevated to co-regency with Israel’s covenant God and is seated at his “right
hand,” with hostile powers brought to subservience and acknowledgment of his authority (Isa 45:23). Hence the center of gravity in the hymn is in the admission of all cosmic forces that “Jesus Christ is Lord,” the very name of God himself (Yahweh) and whose Greek equivalent kyrios denotes “right to rule.”

2. The setting of Phil 2:6–11. As Paul utilized this confessional period of couplets and stanzas, maybe enriching an original version to bring out emphases that he wished to highlight, he evidently did so with a single purpose in view. Clearly, the quotation of the hymn was meant to enforce an ethical appeal. Opinion is sharply divided over the ground of this appeal. In the traditional reading of the text, the hymn looks to set out the example of the humble Christ as a model to rebuke pride and point the way to true selflessness. Paul is faced with a proud and wayward congregation (Phil 2:1–4, 14; 4:2). So his call to humility is reinforced by this recital of the path of lowly condescension taken by the Lord (2:8). V 5, while introducing the hymn, is often understood as “Act as he acted, and resemble the one who revealed God as self-giving, humble love.” The hymn, on this reading of the text and its setting, reminds the readers of how gracious God is and elevates Christ’s example ad imitandum, “for imitating,” by spurring its audience to follow his steps.

In several other places, including the following section of this revised commentary, the reviser has taken issue with this popular view. Here, it will be sufficient simply to restate how Paul’s adopting of the cosmic lordship of Christ is the better guide to how the hymn functions in the pastoral context of the Philippian letter. As a simplified caption under which the hymn may, in our
view, be more adequately viewed, we should give it the title “Living under Christ’s Lordship,” with three exegetical pointers offered in support:

(a) As we noted, v 5 is more convincingly to be understood as “act as it befits those who are in Christ Jesus.” The formula “in Christ Jesus” is Paul’s shorthand expression for what it means to be incorporated into the community that owes its first allegiance to the church’s Lord (1:27).

(b) The structure of the hymnic period, set in a succession of couplets with parallelismus membrorum, “parallel lines,” the key poetic feature, confirms how the flow of the hymn, expressing the odyssey of Christ, moves to its climax in the second stanza, with the first stanza setting the stage for the great reversal at v 9. Thus

Stanza 1

[It is he] who was in the form of God,
Yet he did not regard it as a prize to be equal with God;
But he emptied himself,
Being born in human likeness;
And disclosing himself in human appearance,
He humbled himself, becoming obedient to death
[even death on a cross].

Stanza 2

So therefore God highly exalted him,
And engraeced him with the name high above all names,
That at the name of Jesus, 
Every knee should bow
And every tongue acknowledge
That “Jesus Christ is Lord”
[to the glory of God the Father].

(c) Understanding obedience to Christ as the key to stanza 1 and the lordship of Christ to be the culmination of the saga in stanza 2 allows us to give true weight to Paul’s appeal in v 12. His call is “obey the obedient one,” to whose “way” believers are summoned to conform and whose authority, achieved as God’s vindication of the road he was willing to take from heavenly glory to the ignominy of death, provides the ground plan for their life in Christ. It is this life, with its behavior patterns spelled out negatively in 2:1–4, that receives the approbation of God, just as Christ’s lowly abasement in obedience was rewarded by the eschatological endorsement in vv 9–11. This latter theme will be worked out in 3:20–21, as will be clear as we turn to Paul’s cosmic Christology in a wider frame.

**The Story Illustrated: Lordship as a Way of Life**

The hymn in its finale declared the sole lordship of Christ as victor over all alien powers. This would give the readers the courage they needed to live in a none-too-friendly society (2:15), as it proclaimed that the Lord to whom they address their encomium of praise is indeed Christus Victor, a lesson not to be lost on a
company of men and women living in a Roman colony (Acts 16:12–40) and whose life as “good citizens” has already been mentioned (Phil 1:27) as providing a clarion call. The same lordship would be a powerful incentive to live together in unity and love since Christ came to his throne only along a road of self-giving sacrifice and service. He refused to use his “right” within the divine life as a means of exploiting (see v 6, NRSV) that privilege; instead he surrendered his claims and chose to be “equal with God” as he received it as a gift of grace (v 9). In any community of people called into being by such an act of divine-human condescension, the only appropriate way of life is obedience to the servant-king. So the Philippians should proceed to move from their hymn singing to repairing human relationships, called in v 12, “work out your own salvation.”

Equally their life together in fellowship with the once-crucified Lord should be the antidote to their questionings about their lot as sufferers (2:14). Paul will return to this point later (3:10) by using language of conforming to the suffering Lord and point on to the ultimate conforming to the glorified body of Christ at the Parousia (3:20–21) in the context of their citizenship life, which is both temporal and heavenly.

To drive home the thrust of this appeal, securely rooted in his Christology of cosmic lordship, he goes on to show how “living under the authority” of Christ the Lord may be read off from a set of human models. This becomes evident in 2:17 and 3:8–21. Links between the hymn’s language and ideology and Paul’s autobiographical writing in the letter have often been noted. His life is being “poured out” (2:17) just like that of the suffering servant
(2:7; cf. Isa 53:12). His reflection on his life's ambition to reach out to grasp the prize (Phil 3:12-13) runs parallel to the idiom used in 2:6-8. The heavenly Christ always had a place in the life of the Father-God as his “form” (2:6), yet he was presented with a choice to snatch “equality with God” by seizure or exploitation, just as an athlete or swimmer might leap off a springboard and use it to his or her advantage. Christ, the hymn reports, did not aspire to gain lordship in this way; yet Paul wants to respond to the call to go forward (3:14). So the parallel, while implied in the common wording (the Greek verb ἡγεῖσθαι, “to reckon,” in 2:6 par. 3:7-8), is not exact.

Nor is the parallelism often adduced between 2:6-11 and 3:20-21 exactly appropriate. The hymnic conclusion brought the obedient Christ to a dignity that is conferred on him as a gracious act (2:9), which installed him as sovereign Lord. The hope of resurrection and final conformity to his likeness (3:21) at the end time of the Parousia are indeed part of God's saving design (1:10; 2:16), but there is no confusion, in Paul's thought, between the Savior (3:20) and the saved (3:21). Nor is there any hint of Christians being finally rewarded for their meekness and selfless regard for others (called for in 2:1-4). Indeed, such a prudential motive, called by some commentators (e.g., Fee [1995], 44, and Oakes, Philippians, 202-4) “eschatological reward” or “vindication” (be humble now... so that you may share in Christ's otherworldly glory and office), is explicitly denied in 2:4 (don’t look to your own interests). (Both Fee and Oakes show a complete indifference to the idea that what Paul is citing had a prior existence and does not necessarily represent his basis for ethics. This leads Oakes to accuse the
reviser of this commentary of espousing “Stoic ethics” that make
the only reward an end in itself. But that, it may be said, is what
Jesus taught. He promised rewards to those who did not seek
rewards [cf. R. Bultmann, Jesus and the Word (New York: Scribner’s
Sons, 1934) 78–79].

More to the point is Paul’s eagerness to be obedient at any cost,
even his willingness to meet a martyr’s fate, because only in such
an understanding of being “in Christ” lies the secret of the
“partnership” (a key term— koinonia—in the letter, as
Witherington, Friendship and Finances in Philippi, makes clear),
with Christ’s sufferings and conforming to his pattern of dying to
live (3:10), with the promise of resurrection as a final goal, still
unrealized (3:11 ; cf. 4:5, which may include the prayer call marana
tha, “our Lord, come!” as a desire for the Parousia; cf. 1 Cor
16:22).

Other colleagues known to the Philippians are brought forward to
illustrate the “story of Christ” epitomized in 2:6–11. In particular,
Timothy’s “worth” (2:22) and Epaphroditus’s courage in a near-
death trauma (2:27) contribute to Paul’s argument. Timothy has
been described in the letter’s prescript as a “servant” (δοῦλος) of
Christ Jesus, just as Jesus took the rank of a servant (2:7). And
Timothy is said to have played the part of a servant (Ἐδούλευσεν,
2:22) as one bound to the apostle in filial relationship. His sterling
character is praised as unrivaled among Paul’s co-workers
(ἴσόψυχον, “of equal soul,” 2:20 ; cf. the term ἵσα θεῷ, “like
God,” in 2:6). Clearly Paul’s language is designed to portray his
colleague as one who has lived out the Christ model. It is even
more pronounced as Epaphroditus is praised as Paul’s kin in the faith and someone engaged in the same conflict as Paul’s (1:30) as a fellow struggler (2:25–30). Moreover, his sickness brought him to death’s door (2:27, 30), where the expression “close to death” (v 30, NRSV) renders μέχρι θανάτου, the exact phrasing lifted from the hymn at 2:8. Once more, the reference is not precise. Epaphroditus did not die, whereas Christ’s obedience led to his death on the cross. The point, however, is that Epaphroditus exhibited the same spirit of sacrifice in loyalty to the Pauline mission, as one whose life was “in Christ Jesus” (2:5). That wording in 2:30 would not be lost on the self-seeking Philippians who are charged (in 2:1–4) to renounce their “individual interests” (τὰ ἑαυτῶν). The three illustrations—of Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus—would be powerful reminders of leaders whose “life under Christ’s lordship” made them conformable to a pattern of service, sacrifice, and, above all, obedience (3:17, spelled out in 4:9 as a call to the readers to do as Paul did).

The Christology of Philippians is centered in a noble depiction of a cosmic Lord, in the double sense of that adjective. His becoming human has its frontispiece in his life with God as sharing the divine glory/image/rank (2:6: ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ). Thereafter, following the story of his condescension and obedience to death, he is lifted to the status of lordship in a cosmic setting as all the spiritual powers acknowledge his authority (2:11; Rev 5:13; Ign. Trall. 9:1). Paul’s citation of the hymn serves to summon his readers to live out their citizen life (1:27) as “in Christ” (2:5) and to yield their allegiance to Christ the Lord as they submit to that lordship (2:12). So cosmic Christology, not here speculative, is
turned to moral exhortation, a call that is reinforced and illustrated by a trio of human leaders who model what life in Christ is and should be.

The remaining items in the letter’s theology and Christology may be briefly considered. These may be classified as follows:

(1) Through Christ the providence of God is seen in his care of the church, and confidence of God’s care is affirmed in a number of ways. God’s grace is praised as the source of the church’s life, even though Paul was the human agent for its establishment (Acts 16:12–40). His “good work” (Phil 1:6) resonates with allusions to Gen 1:30, and the Philippian readers understand that it was divine initiative that both originated the congregation and will safeguard it. It will be preserved amid the threatening hardships until the final day (the Parousia of Christ runs as a faint echo through the letter: 1:6, 10; 2:16; 3:20; 4:5).

That God is in charge of events, if we may so define “providence” (a Stoic term, notable in Epictetus, Discourses 1.16, “On Providence”), is clear from several places: in 1:28–29 suffering is viewed as a generous gift of God, just as in 2:9 God graciously exalted the obedient one (χαρίζεσθαι); and the Philippians (2:12–13) are exhorted to work out “their own salvation,” meaning the good of the church in reliance on God who wills to work to the same end. To achieve that desired goal the readers are assured of the resources available through prayer (4:6, 7), yet they have their part in “cooperating with the divine” (another Stoic idea, though the Stoics used the word for what was necessary: ἐκόντα δέχεσθαι τὰ ἀναγκαῖα, “willing to receive what is necessary”), and they are
summoned to steadfastness and unity with rejoicing (3:1 ; 4:1 ; 4:4).

(2) Paul’s teaching on justification and sanctification in what may be termed an early ordo salutis, “order of salvation,” or Heilsplan, “plan of salvation,” is compressed into a few pregnant verses. Already, in an allusive way, he introduces the notion of “righteousness” at the final day (1:11). The main teaching on justification is elaborated in 3:7–11, with its theme “righteousness by faith” (on this passage see Koperski’s full study, Knowledge of Christ Jesus My Lord). The main lineaments are displayed both negatively, by renouncing “confidence in the flesh” (3:3) and abandoning a striving for “righteousness based on law” (3:9), and positively, by embracing confidence in Christ (3:3) and receiving the righteousness from (ἐκ) God and through (διὰ) faith, with “faith” (whether personal or Christ’s faithfulness) as the ground (ἐπὶ τῇ πίστει).

The complement is sanctification, a calling to be holy. This note is sounded in the proem (1:1), as the Philippians are “saints in Christ Jesus,” meaning “holy people.” The life of “saints” is epitomized as “fellowship with Christ” (3:10), based on a passion mysticism that identifies the people of God with the sufferings of Christ, though its primary reference point is to apostolic sufferings (as in Col 1:24). On the nature of such mysticism see Penna, “Problems and Nature of Pauline Mysticism,” 2:235–73. The experience of sanctification is progressive since Paul confesses that he is “in pursuit” (διώκειν) of the goal and has not yet reached it. There is an eschatological dimension to that attainment (3:11, 20,
and the call to realize one’s own “sanctification,” to become in reality what the Christian is by God’s calling (werde das was du bist), means that the life of believers is ethically regulated by God’s righteousness, where “righteousness” is not a substitute for godliness or spirituality but a means to it (3:19; 1:11).

(3) Lest it should be imagined that Pauline ethics is individualistic and inward looking, he reminds his readers at Philippi that they are citizens of both an earthly and a heavenly polis (1:27; 3:20; here P. Oakes’s study, Philippians, is valuable). As such, they are summoned to courage, unity, and harmony, always on theological grounds (2:1–4; 4:2). So the call is to “stand firm” ἐν κυρίῳ, “in the Lord.” Otherwise they will be easy prey both to outside enemies (1:28) and to internal divisions (2:14). The integrity of their congregational life is best seen in 2:15, where they are to be “lights” shining in a dark world and witnesses extending the Christian message. There is no mandate for withdrawal or exclusivist spirit since some of the greetings are sent from “saints” in the imperial civil service (4:22). Above all, they are practitioners of “goodness,” a trait seen in their generous support of the Pauline mission (4:15–20).
I. Introductory Section (1:1–11)
A. Salutation (1:1–2)

Bibliography

Translation

1 Paul and Timothy, slaves [or, servants] of Christ Jesus, a to all God's people incorporate in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the overseers b who serve [or, overseers and deacons]. 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Notes

1.a. There is no textual variant here, but in several MSS of Paul's other letters the formula appears both as Ἰησοῦς Χριστοῦ, “Jesus Christ,” and as Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, “Christ Jesus” (Rom 1:1 ; 1 Cor 1:1 ; cf. Eph 1:1). In Philippians the following variations of this title appear: Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, “Jesus Christ” (1:6), 11, 19 ; κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, “Lord Jesus Christ,” 1:2 ; 2:11 ; 3:20 ; 4:23 ; Χριστός, “Christ,” 1:10, 13, 15, 17, 18, 20, 21, 23, 27, 29 ; 2:1, 16, (30); 3:7, 8, 9, 18 ; Χριστὸς Ἰησοῦς ὁ κύριός μου, “Christ Jesus, my Lord,” 3:8 ; Ἰησοῦς, “Jesus,” 2:10.

1.b. Β ² Κ 33 al. and Cassiodorus read συνεπισκόποις, “to the fellow bishops” (i.e., co-bishops with Paul and Timothy), for σὺν ἐπισκόποις, “with the bishops,” or “with the overseers.”

Form/Structure/Setting
This section follows a set pattern, drawn from the Hellenistic world, that Paul uses as an introduction to all his letters. It has three basic parts to it, and each part always appears in the same order: (1) the sender’s name, (2) the name of the person or persons to whom the letter is sent, and (3) the greeting.

Although quite unlike the twenty-first-century style of letter writing, this pattern, nevertheless, conforms closely to that of the letter form of the first century and earlier. It is reminiscent, on the one hand, of ancient Near Eastern letters (cf. Dan 4:1 [RSV]: “King Nebuchadnezzar to all peoples, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you”; Ezra 7:12; 2 Bar. 78:2)—a fact that points to the possibility of Aramaic influence on Pauline epistolography, especially if one considers “seriously the proposal that the Captivity Letters... were composed in Caesarea Maritima” (Fitzmyer, JBL 93 [1974] 201–25; and idem on the Aramaic origin of Phil 2:6–11 [CBQ 50 (1988) 470–83]; see Martin, Hymn of Christ, chap. 2; yet this suggestion of Semitic background to Paul would be true no matter where he wrote). It also recalls, on the other hand, the personal letters of the Greco-Roman period published and discussed by Deissmann (see Light from the Ancient East, 148–217, and note this example: “Asclepiades, the son of Charmagon, to Portis, the son of Peramis, greeting [χαίρειν]” [152–53]; see also Hunt and Edgar, Select Papyri, 2:549–601; cf. Acts 15:23; Jas 1:1). Deissmann’s division of written conversations in the Greek world between popular “letters” (Briefe) and the more literary “epistles” (Episteln) has been vigorously challenged in recent times. Its validity has been denied on the ground that Deissmann’s dichotomy is too neat; his social analysis of early congregations as
proletarian and illiterate is challenged by scholars such as Doty (Letters), and Deissmann failed to note the data from documents such as Seneca’s Epistulae and the Cynic epistles. So we should conclude that while Paul retained his Jewish thought forms, Hellenism had an even greater influence on his epistolary habits. And we should not overlook the simple observation that, after all, he was writing in Greek to a Greek-reading audience.

Although Paul may have owed much to both East and West for the basic form of his letters, so that the introductions of his letters, like their models, invariably followed the pattern “A to B, greeting,” his own contribution to the history of letter writing should not be denied. He often expanded these conventional formulas and infused them with deep theological or christological meaning (cf. Rom 1:1–7).

It is important to recognize this “literary” form, the letter form, for what it is. When Paul chose to express his ideas in this form, one can only surmise that he did so with a limited audience in mind—friends, for the most part, whom he knew personally and who, he knew, were facing particular problems of faith and life (the exception is the letter to the Colossians; see Col 2:1; 4:16, as well as Rom 1; Rom 16 with its many names is the exception to prove the rule). The content of his letters shows that Paul wrote with a keen awareness of apostolic authority, but the letter form seems to indicate that he had no intention of leaving behind him masterpieces of literature or theological treatises for the world (but see Malherbe, OJRS 5 [1977] 3–77, who notes that rhetorical theorists discussed the letter form). It is also to be recalled that Paul wrote letters to be read aloud in public (cf. Col 4:16), and
this fact opens the questions of their rhetorical shape; see the
Introduction, Exegesis and Rhetorical Analysis.

Comment

1 Παῦλος καὶ Τιμόθεος δοῦλοι Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, “Paul and
Timothy, slaves [or, servants] of Christ Jesus.” The unique feature
here is not that Paul links Timothy's name with his own, for
Timothy was Paul's “son in the faith” (1 Cor 4:17), his close
associate in the gospel (2 Cor 1:19), and his trusted emissary (Phil
2:19). Besides, Paul names other co-senders of his letters with him
(1 Cor 1:1; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1). Rather, the singularity lies in
the fact that Paul permits the noun δοῦλοι, “slaves,” to stand in
apposition to both his own name and Timothy's, a unique feature
in the literary legacy left by Paul. In all other letters he puts a
distance between himself and his colleagues by describing only
himself as “slave,” or “apostle,” or “prisoner” of Christ Jesus—
ever anyone else. If ever he does add a descriptive title to a
fellow worker, he does so only with the word ἀδελφός, “brother” (1
Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 1:1; Gal 1:2; Col 1:1; Phlm 1). From this
observation it is clear that Paul was always conscious of his own
supreme authority within the churches he founded and of his
unique relationship to the risen Christ, a relationship so exceptional
that no other person could share it, as the later witness of
Ephesians indicates (Eph 3:3–5). The fact that it is shared only this
once demands explanation.

The explanation cannot lie in the fact that Timothy was
associated with Paul in his imprisonment (Martin [1976]), for why
then is the familiar distance again put between the apostle and
Timothy in two of the other Prison Epistles (Col 1:1; Phlm 1)? Nor can the explanation be that Timothy was coauthor of the letter (Meyer, 11), or any part of it, because it is throughout far too personal for that. Paul’s use of “I,” “me,” “my” pervades Philippians (fifty-one times), while Timothy’s name appears again only in 2:19, and then “in clear distinction from the author of the letter” (Collange, 36). That Timothy was Paul’s secretary or amanuensis (J. J. Müller) is not the explanation either. In Rom 16:22 Paul’s secretary is named, and if it can be assumed that this chapter is an integral part of the Roman letter, it becomes obvious that for one to have been Paul’s secretary was not, therefore, sufficient reason to have his name linked with that of the apostle in the salutation. Furthermore, to assume that Paul regularly dictated his letters to secretaries is a valid proposal (cf. 1 Cor 16:21; Gal 6:11; Col 4:8; 2 Thess 3:17; and especially Rom 16:22; see Bahr, JBL 87 [1968] 27–41). But there is no evidence that will permit the assumption that Timothy was one of these secretaries. Nor can one say that Paul shared the title δοῦλος, “slave,” with Timothy because Timothy was a co-founder with him of the church at Philippi (Gnilka). It is true that Timothy was indeed with Paul when this church began (Acts 16:1–15; see earlier, pp. xxxiv–xxxix, on what W. M. Ramsay, St. Paul the Traveller, 198, regarded as “in many respects the most remarkable paragraph in Acts”). But he was only a junior member of the missionary team who, apparently because of his unobtrusiveness, escaped the serious trouble Paul and Silas experienced (Acts 16:16–40). What is more, it seems that Paul even had to remind the Philippians of Timothy’s worth and reliability, of the quality of his character and the validity of his
credentials (Phil 2:19–24). Nor can the explanations that Paul wished to be courteous to a loved associate (Keck, Caird) or to give wider scope and a more solid basis to what he was going to say (Michael) be adequate reasons for such a radical departure from Paul’s standard procedure. Why then did the apostle choose to share, for this one time, his otherwise carefully and jealously guarded “uniqueness”? The best explanation seems to be that Paul, by such condescension, was able most effectively to teach the Philippians a lesson they needed to learn—“that relationships in the bosom of the church between collaborators were not those of authority, superiority or inferiority but of humble equality” (Collange, 36; cf. Phil 2:6–11).

δοῦλοι Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, “slaves [or, servants] of Christ Jesus.” The word δοῦλοι, often translated “servants,” literally on its sociological background means “slaves,” a word that carries the normally negative ideas of abasement, subservience, and total submissiveness. Slavery was a commonplace feature of the Roman world of the first century and a fact of life seldom questioned or challenged (OCD, 843–44; A. A. Ruprecht, “Slave, Slavery,” DPL, 881–83; K. Hopkins [with P. J. Roscoe], Conquerors and Slaves; L. Adkins and R. A. Adkins, Ancient Greece, 412–13). There was no autonomy for the slave. His own will was totally subject to the will of another, so that he was a person with “no right of personal choice” (R. Rengstorf, TDNT 2:261). The service he provided was not voluntary but forced. He was totally in bondage to the claims of his master. He had no rights and no freedoms.
It is possible then that Paul understood δοῦλοι in terms of this contemporary cultural practice. He, therefore, would have viewed himself and Timothy as persons bound over to Christ Jesus, owned by him (1 Cor 6:20), possessing no rights of their own, totally at the service of their master. But δοῦλοι Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, “slaves of Christ Jesus,” would not have been a repugnant expression to Paul, as it would have been for his contemporaries—none of whom would ever have described his or her own relationship to the deity in terms of slavery (R. Rengstorf, TDNT 2:262–65; yet this may be questioned, since Hellenistic Judaism used the term to denote such a relationship); rather, the expression would have been a liberating idea. For Paul viewed himself and Timothy as slaves of one who was divine. Κύριος, “Lord,” the common term for the master of slaves (Col 4:1), was also the Septuagintal word for Yahweh. It was this title, “Lord,” that Paul regularly used as the most important christological term to describe Jesus (cf. Phil 2:10–11). And, paradoxically, for Paul to be a slave of this divine master was the only way to be a truly free person—free from the tyranny of sin (Rom 6:18–22), of fear (Gal 4:8–9), and of the law (Rom 7:1–6). See Explanation below.

δοῦλος, “slave/servant,” however, was used frequently in the Septuagint to describe Yahweh’s special servants (Exod 14:3; Num 12:7; Jer 25:4; Ezek 38:17; Amos 3:7; Zech 1:6). It is possible, therefore, that this title may have had a quite different meaning for Paul from that outlined above. Understood in the context of the OT, δοῦλος may have conveyed to Paul the idea of leader or prophet, and he may have understood it as a title of esteem (Gnilka) to be used to inform his readers that he and Timothy
were two of the select few who had the “God-given authority to speak and act in his name, as his accredited (representatives)” (Martin [1976], 60). If so, δοῦλος consequently carried for Paul not “the thought of unconditional vassalage and bodily ownership, but the thought that God is acting through” him. “Not servitude but instrumentality” stands in the foreground. The word then takes on a new theological meaning “in which the emphasis no longer rests on... the unfree condition of the man, but wholly upon the work and actions of God” (Sass, ZNW 40 [1941] 24–32, as quoted by Beare).

If one must choose between these two ideas, it appears that the better choice is to affirm that Paul derived the meaning of δοῦλος from his Hellenistic-Roman environment, yet with undertones that belong to his Hebraic heritage, since he will go on to write chap. 3. There is no hint of servility in the term. For here at the outset of his letter to the Philippians Paul uses it to strike the note of devoted service and its consequent idea of subordination first and foremost to Christ Jesus (note that “Christ Jesus,” or “Lord Jesus Christ,” occurs three times in the salutation alone [vv 1–2 ]; see Escande, Kyrios, Iésous, Christos) and second to the church and its needs. Paul is going to stress throughout this letter a very Christian concept: the greatest person must be the servant (διάκονος) and the most important the slave (δοῦλος) of all (2:8 : cf. Mark 10:43–44), a lesson the Philippians apparently were slow to learn.

πᾶσιν τοῖς ἁγίοις ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, “to all God’s people incorporate in Christ Jesus.” Paul rarely uses the all-inclusive word
πᾶς, “all,” to address the readers of his letters (only in Rom 1:7 and Phil 1:1). He does so here, one suspects, as a watchword (Mengel, Studien, 223), because there was dissension in Philippi and not everyone was convinced that he or she was included in the apostle’s concern. The startling frequency of the expression “all of you” with which Paul continually addresses the Philippian Christians (Phil 1:4, 7 [2x], 8, 25 ; 2:17, 26 ; cf. 4:21, 23 mg) indicates that he is subtly but forcefully calling them to unity, assuring them all of his love and prayers, and telling them that he was writing not only to those who continually brought him joy (4:1), but also to those whose actions tended to fracture the church (4:2–3). None was excluded.

ἅγιοι is often translated “saints.” With this word Paul regularly addresses the Christians to whom he is writing, to draw attention not primarily to the ethical character of their lives (i.e., “saintly,” “pious”) but to their special relationship to God; not here to their moral qualities, as if there were no longer any sinners at Philippi, but to the new ground of their existence (Gnilka).

ἅγιος, “holy,” has a long history of meaning. Originally it was applied only to the gods as beings who commanded religious awe (ἁγιος) or were worthy of veneration (ἁζεσθαι, “to stand in awe of”). Later it was also applied to persons and things, because of their special relation to the gods. By virtue of this special relationship, therefore, they were separated from the profane world about them so as to be ceremonially pure enough to perform special service for, or be used in special rites pertaining to, the worship of these gods.
In the LXX ἅγιος is used chiefly to translate קדש qōdeš, a Hebrew word with essentially the same meanings as the Greek word. Yahweh God is holy (Lev 19:2), and as such is different from, over against, set apart from, transcending every created thing and the one who rightly commands awe and veneration (Isa 6:1–5; on the Thrice Holy, see Spinks, Sanctus, and 1 Clem. 34:6: “They cried Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of Sabaoth, the whole creation is full of his glory”; see too J. L. Wu, “Liturgical Elements,” DLNT, 659–65 [with bibliography]). Because of God’s special relation to parts of his creation, things also can be holy (e.g., the ground around a burning bush [Exod 3:5], Jerusalem [Isa 48:2], the temple [Isa 64:10], the Sabbath, garments, candlesticks, oil, swords, etc.) and persons can be holy, even the entire nation. Yahweh makes a covenant with Israel, and as a result Israel is called holy, God’s elect people, a nation separated from all the other nations of the world (Exod 19:5–6; Lev 11:44–45). Israel was holy because of God’s gracious choice (cf. Asting, Heiligkeit, who writes: the holy ones are such “not only as living for a while in the evil world and not belonging to that world, but as elect children of God and members of the coming kingdom” [156]; see also K. G. Kuhn and O. Procksch, TDNT 1:89–110; G. F. Moore, Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1927–30] 2:102–3). These same ideas still cling to ἅγιος in the NT (see Matt 24:15; Mark 1:24; Luke 1:49; John 17:11; Acts 9:13; 1 Pet 2:9–10). Therefore, to translate ἅγιοι as “God’s people,” rather than the traditional and often misunderstood “saints,” is fully justified, capturing better the root meaning of the word and showing more clearly that Paul viewed the members of
the Christian church as the New Israel, the new community separated and dedicated to God, the eschatological people, the people of the end time, to whom God would make good his promises (cf. Dan 7:17–27; see too 1Q M III, 5; VI, 6; X, 10; XVI, 1; T. Levi 18:11, 14; T. Dan 5, 12; 1 En. 100.5).

This is not to say, however, that ethical ideas are totally foreign to ἅγιος. Quite the contrary. They were present in the OT (Lev 19:2–18), and they are present in the NT (1 Pet 1:16; cf. Matt 5:8; 1 Tim 1:5; 2 Tim 2:22). Since God is holy, that is to say that among other things God is perfect in purity and goodness and justice and love, it is expected that his special people will also possess personal purity and practice goodness, justice, and love. Hence, ethics and religion belong together; relationship to God requires a moral response; God’s people must live like God. But the point to be made is that Paul used the word ἅγιοι here as a technical term to refer to people who are in a special relation to God (cf. ἅγιοι in 1:1; 4:21, 22 with ἁγνῶς, “purely,” “from pure motives,” in 1:17 and ἁγνά, “pure,” in 4:8). See W. Stock, Kultische Terminologie, esp. 4.2.2: “οἱ ἅγιοι als Gemeindebezeichnung” (156–58). He connects οἱ ἅγιοι, “the saints/God’s people,” with ἐκκλησία, “church” (Phil 3:8), as synonyms. The term is related to Paul’s reference to Jewish Christians, for whom he undertook the “collection for the saints” in 1 Cor 16:1; 2 Cor 8:4, 9:1, 12; Rom 15:25, 26, 31, but the association in Philippians is more with οἱ κλητοί, “the called,” as in Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2.

ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, “in Christ Jesus,” modifies τοῖς ἅγιοις, “to God’s people.” The Philippians were holy, not through any merit of
their own but because they were “in Christ Jesus.” The expression ἐν Χριστῷ, “in Christ,” first appears in the letters of Paul, where it is used 164 times (not counting its appearances in the Pastorals; so Deissmann, Die neutestamentliche Formel). Other NT writers rarely use it, and even in the Pauline corpus its usage varies (e.g., in Ephesians it has a special connotation). For Paul, then, ἐν Χριστῷ (also ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, “in Christ Jesus”; ἐν κυρίῳ, “in the Lord”) seems to have been the key phrase by which he was able to describe the essence of the Christian life (cf. 1 Cor 1:30–31). The words are simple—“in Christ”—but their meaning is profound and elusive. Does this expression refer to a mystical, ecstatic experience that follows some sacramental initiation rite, resulting in the Christian becoming absorbed into Christ, just as the pagan initiate was absorbed into the divinity in the Greek mystery religions (Bousset, Kyrios Christos, 164–69; Schweitzer, Mysticism; but see Neugebauer, In Christus)? Does it mean that Christ must be understood as a semiphysical ethereal spirit that permeates the Christian and in which the Christian lives, as air is in him and he in air (Deissmann, Die neutestamentliche Formel, 98)? Does it mean that instead of the Christian’s being in Christ (ἐν, “in,” as location), Christ is the source, cause, and power of the Christian’s life (ἐν, “in,” as instrument), that is, “‘in Christ’... means that... in him and not in me, salvation has taken place: therefore it is true for me. Christ is the instrument of God” (Conzelmann, Outline, 210; Büchsel, ZNW 42 [1949] 146–52; Boutrier, En Christ)? Is it a metaphor of personal communion with Christ, an expression for the most intimate relation between the believer and Christ (Kennedy, Theology, 121, 124; cf. the translation of the GNB: “To all God’s
people... who are in union with Christ Jesus”). Is it a phrase that “often simply replaces the adjective ‘Christian,’ which has not yet been formed” (Conzelmann, Outline, 209)? Or has it been coined to express the contrast “‘in Adam’ humanity lost, ‘in Christ’ it gained” and more so (Rom 5:15; see Dunn, Theology of Paul, 79–101).

A more helpful way of getting at the meaning of ἐν Χριστῷ derives from recognizing that the early church viewed Christ also as a universal person (A. Oepke, TDNT 2:542). Christ was indeed a single individual who lived in space and time, but to Paul the risen Christ was more than a historical human being. Paul understood and experienced him to be a cosmic human being (so Schenk, 88–89, who adds the term “risen” to the name of Jesus in the prescript). Just as Adam was a single self and yet a corporate human being, one who embodied the whole world of humankind and included his descendants in himself and under himself, so for Paul Christ was the Last Adam, the progenitor of a new race of humans, especially God’s people (Rom 5:12–21; 1 Cor 15:22, 45–49; cf. Phil 1:1 NEB: “God’s people incorporate in Christ Jesus”). As Moule observes:

Paul had religious experiences in which the Jesus of Nazareth who had recently been crucified—this same person... was found to be more than individual. He was found to be an ‘inclusive’ personality. And this means, in effect, that Paul was led to conceive of Christ as any theist conceives of God: personal, indeed, but transcending the individual category. Christ is like the omnipresent deity ‘in whom we live and move and have our being.’... Jesus Christ... actually is, or constitutes that ideal society: He is the
ultimate Adam, to be incorporated in whom is to belong in the renewed society. (Origin, 95, 126)

See also Barrett, First Adam to Last, 73, 77–78, and passim; Ellis, Paul and His Recent Interpreters, 31–33; Longenecker, Paul, 160–70; Ridderbos, Paul, 58–62; and Dunn, Theology of Paul, chaps. 3–4, showing that Gen 3–4 played a decisive role in Paul’s Christology.

σὺν ἐπισκόποις καὶ διακόνοις, “with the overseers who serve [or, overseers and deacons].” It is striking to observe that in Paul’s lists of officers of the church—apostles, prophets, teachers, evangelists (1 Cor 12:28; cf. Eph 4:11)—there is no mention made of “overseers” or “deacons” (unless, of course, they are referred to by different names, e.g., ἀντιλήμψεις, “helpers,” and κυβερνήσεις, “administrators” [1 Cor 12:28], which is unlikely). And nowhere else in Paul’s letters do these two terms, “overseers and deacons,” appear so coupled together (so Schenk, 81, who regards the words as a redactional addition, mainly because they are not referred to later as Epaphroditus is; but see Peterlin, Paul’s Letter to the Philippians, 21–22). Hence, it has been thought difficult to determine whether they refer to administrative officers within the church at Philippi (cf. Ign. Trall. 2.1.2; 3.1; 7:2; idem, Phld. 6.2) or simply to any person who might at any time be called upon to perform a particular function important to the welfare of the church. (Schenk, 79, argues for an inclusive structure of congregational “government,” citing the Barmen Declaration of the Confessing Church of 1934, Articles 3, 4.)

The following general matters should be noted, however, before reflecting on the specific terms themselves: (1) The phrase
ἐπισκόποις καὶ διακόνοις may be explained grammatically as referring to two distinct groups of people, “overseers and deacons,” or it may also be correctly accounted for as referring to a single group of people, “overseers who are also deacons” (see Moulton et al., Grammar, 3:335, on the epexegetical καὶ, “also”; Schenk, 80 and n. 18, denies this, but others affirm it). (2) Paul mentions the ἐπισκόποις καὶ διακόνοις in such a way as to distinguish them from the congregation. This implies that he considered them to be persons with some kind of official status. (3) Paul did not address himself to these “officers” over the heads of the congregation. Rather, as was his custom elsewhere in his letters, he spoke to the congregation; he addressed the “overseers and deacons” second and only in conjunction with the congregation (cf. also Acts 15:4; but contrast LB’s loose rendering: “to the pastors and deacons and all the Christians in the city of Philippi”). One can infer from this that Paul perceived these not as “lords” over Christ’s church but as individuals designated for special service within the church and perhaps subject to the church. (4) The terms are plural: “overseers and deacons.” This means at least that at the time Paul wrote there was no single chief officer (overseer or bishop) with his assistant (deacon) at Philippi (contrast this with Ign. Smyrn. 8.1–2; 9.1; but monespiscopacy is by no means universally attested in these early centuries, and Ignatius is writing polemically to appeal to a regular hierarchy as the only valid form of ministry; see Virginia Corwen, St. Ignatius and Christianity in Antioch [New Haven, CT : Yale UP, 1960]).

The word Ἐπίσκοπος, “overseer, bishop,” had a long history of usage before Paul employed it here, reaching far back into antiquity
where the gods (cf. Job 20:29 LXX) were described as “watchers over” men and things that were committed to their protection (see LSJ for references). In classical and Septuagintal Greek ἐπίσκοπος also was used of humans who had functions to perform or who filled established offices: tutors, inspectors, scouts, army officers, watchmen, superintendents, officials associated with the temple, treasurers, and so on were called ἐπίσκοποι (see LSJ; Num 4:16; 31:14; 2 Kgs 11:18; 12:11; Neh 11:9; 1 Macc 1:51). Although this single word could describe so many different offices and functions, the one idea of “oversight” consistently ran as a common thread through all these various titles.

One also learns with interest that each of the Essene communities (Jewish ascetic communities existing in Palestine from about the second century B.C. to about the second century A.D.) was administered by a supervisor (מֶבַּאַקְר) who had to be at least thirty years old, who was viewed as a shepherd of his sheep and spiritual father of his people, and who was responsible, among other things, for receiving gifts for charity from the community and overseeing the distribution of these gifts (CD XIII, 7–9; XIV, 8, 9, 13; see J. Jeremias, Jerusalem, 260–61). Jeremias notes that the title מֶבַּאַקְר, “supervisor,” “corresponds literally with the Greek ἐπίσκοπος,” and that “the position and the functions of the מֶבַּאַקְר are identical with those of a bishop in the Syrian Didaskalia,” as indeed in Hippolytus, Apostolic Tradition (c. A.D. 215). He suggests, therefore, that the מֶבַּאַקְר might have been the model for the NT ἐπίσκοπος (Jerusalem, 261; see also Reicke, “Constitution of the Primitive Church,” and more recently Thiering, JBL 100 [1981] 59–74, who concludes that now there is “even better
reason for supposing that the earliest Christian church adopted the office of bishop from the Essene lay communities” [74]).

In light of this it is by no means unthinkable that from its inception, even in that early period when the Spirit was universally experienced (Collange, 40), the early church developed some sort of organizational structure, most likely along the lines of its Jewish counterparts. This development may have taken place, for reasons unknown (but see Beare), more rapidly in Philippi than elsewhere. If so, then ἐπίσκοποι, “overseers,” in Phil 1:1 probably does not refer to functions that just any Christian on any required occasion could be led to fulfill (see Schweizer, Church Order; von Campenhausen, Ecclesiastical Authority; Chevallier, Esprit de Dieu, 148–50), but to officials, that is, specific individuals who were appointed by the apostle and his companions (cf. Acts 14:23) and whose duties were fairly well defined. They were in some sense to govern, to administer, to oversee the affairs, both material and spiritual, of the community (cf. Acts 20:28). The idea of “supervision” or “protective care” still lay at the heart of the meaning of ἐπίσκοπος, even after centuries of usage (H. W. Beyer, TDNT 2:610, 615–16).

διάκονος, “deacon, servant,” like ἐπίσκοπος, “overseer,” was commonly employed by the Greeks. They used it to describe one who was a servant or responsible for certain welfare duties within the city, or a messenger, or an attendant in a temple or a religious guild (LSJ). Often the negative ideas of servility or meniality were present when διάκονος was used—ideas repugnant to the Greeks. They believed that ruling, not serving, was the proper activity for
humans over against the animals; hence “slaves” were treated as “things, objects,” res in Latin, not human beings (H. W. Beyer, TDNT 2:88). Service, to be sure, is seen in a better light when rendered to the state or to God (Epictetus, Discourses 3.22.69), but in such instances, service to people as a virtue faded almost into obscurity. There were, of course, notable exceptions; otherwise, why did military and political heroes like Pericles gain “honor” for service to the state?

διάκονος appears infrequently in the LXX, but there it is used to describe a loftier kind of service—adviser to the king, for example (Esth 1:10 ; 2:2), or the king’s bodyguards (4 Macc 9:17). In the NT, διάκονος is elevated to the ultimate of titles to describe those involved in beneficent activity. Here value systems are completely reversed, and Jesus is responsible for this change. He consciously opposed the world’s idea of values and substituted his own: greatness lies not in the antithesis of serving but in the dignity in being the servant of all (Mark 10:45). Hence, Paul sees rulers as servants of God (Rom 13:4), distinguished Christian persons as servants of the church or of Christ (Rom 16:1 ; 1 Cor 3:5 ; Eph 6:21 ; Col 1:7), Christ as the servant of the Jews (Rom 15:8), and himself as a servant of the gospel (Col 1:23). (See W.-H. Ollrog, Paulus und seine Mitarbeiter, 63–67.)

Service or ministering to others, then, is at the heart of the word διάκονος. And this point will be made later in Paul’s rebuke of Philippian pride, so it would not be lost on the first hearers at Philippi as this letter was read out to them. Thus, if here in Phil 1:1 the word διακόνοις, “deacons,” refers to people appointed to
religious office (see MM, διάκονος) and is to be distinguished from the ἐπισκόποις, “overseers,” these people would quite likely be assistants to the overseers, people primarily responsible for the more menial tasks such as taking care of the needs of the poor and the sick in the community, and those in prison (cf. Rom 12:7; 16:1–2; 1 Cor 12:28; 1 Clem. 59.4 contains such a ministry based on the Jewish Eighteen Benedictions prayer).

It is possible, however, to translate the expression ἐπισκόποις καὶ διακόνοις as “bishops who are deacons” or “overseers who serve.” This is an ancient interpretation (Chrysostom), but it has been rejected by most scholars. Yet the following observations may be made: (a) “Bishops and deacons” looks very much like a ready-made, stock phrase (Lemaire, Les ministères, 97–103), unique to Paul. (b) This same coupling of terms appears not only in Phil 1:1 but also in two other early Christian texts, 1 Clem. 42.4–5 and Did. 15.1, whereas in the Pauline letters to Timothy, bishops are discussed separately (1 Tim 3:1–7) from deacons (1 Tim 3:8–13). (c) It is worth noting that Clement speaks of the apostles appointing their first converts as “bishops and deacons,” and then he legitimizes this action by a free quotation from Isa 60:17, where in typical Hebrew parallelism bishops and deacons are equated: “for the scripture says... ‘I will establish their bishops [ ἐπισκόπους ] in righteousness, and their deacons [ διακόνους ] in faith’ ” (1 Clem. 42.4–5). (d) The conjunction καί (with the meaning “also”) may be used to point to a single group of people known as ἐπισκόποις καὶ διακόνοις (see above on the epexegetical καί). (e) ἐπίσκοπος, “overseer, bishop,” and πρεσβύτερος, “elder,” were synonymous
terms in NT times, with the latter, perhaps, the title of the office and the former a description of the duties of the officer (Acts 20:28; Titus 1:5–7; see Lightfoot, 95–99). (f) Polycarp speaks about πρεσβύτεροι, “elders,” in a way that does not seem to distinguish them from διάκονοι, “deacons” (Pol. Phil. 5.2–3). (g) Although certain early Christian writers did view “bishops,” “deacons,” and “elders” as separate and distinct offices (cf. 1 Tim 3:1–10; Ign. Smyrn. 8.1–2), this was not universally so. Thus it is reasonable to assume that at one stage of the tradition elders, who may have been called “bishops and deacons” or “bishops and elders,” could have been referred to also as “deacons.”

If there were not two groups of officers in Phil 1:1, why then the double title ἐπισκόποις καὶ διακόνοις? The answer lies “in Pauline Theology and also in the particular circumstances presented by the Philippian community at the time when the letter was written” (Collange, 39), i.e., dissension, lack of humility, and self-serving attitudes (cf. Phil 2:1–5)—circumstances that perhaps had their origin among the leaders of the community (see Peterlin, Paul’s Letter to the Philippians, 101–32, who finds the focus of dissension in the [women] leaders, with Euodia and Syntyche in charge of respective house congregations as διάκονοι [222]). Maybe Philippian women leaders were advocating withholding of support for Paul in their house assemblies, as White (“Morality between Two Worlds,” 214 n. 58) suggests. So in beginning his letter Paul “tried gentleness and persuasion—and at once he started by giving a title to the leaders of the church, something he normally avoided. At the same time he reminds them that authority before all else means responsibility, and he addresses them only after ‘all the
saints’ whose edification (as ‘diakonoi’) they have been called to serve” (Collange, 41).

If this interpretation can be sustained, no further inquiry needs to be made into why Paul, contrary to his custom, singled out certain officers of the church for address at the beginning of his letter. It was not, then, because they had control of the treasury and were chiefly responsible for the gift of money sent to Paul, nor because Paul felt a special need of bringing his commendation of Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25–30) to the attention of the leaders of the church, nor because the members of the church lacked due respect for these leaders, but simply because by using this stock expression, ἐπισκόποις καὶ διακόνοις, “overseers who serve,” Paul was articulating an idea that the Philippian people with their officials needed to learn and adopt that was wholly consistent with Paul’s own understanding of all offices within the church (Rom 1:1; Phil 1:1) and with the teaching and practice of his Lord (Mark 10:45; John 13:3–17; Phil 2:6–11). See T. W. Manson, Church’s Ministry.

Translators, however, differ considerably on how to render ἐπισκόποις καὶ διακόνοις: “bishops and deacons” (AV, ASV, RSV, NEB, NRSV), “overseers and deacons” (NIV, NASB), “church leaders and helpers” (GNB), “overseers and assistants” (WILLIAMS), “ministers of the Church and their assistants” (WEYMOUTH), “superintendents and assistants” (GOODSPEED), “overseers and ministers” (DARBY), or “presidents and assistant officers” (TCNT). Such a plethora only indicates that no one really knows how the collocation of these two “titles” fits together, or indeed, what they
meant. A counsel of despair is to excise the phrase “overseers and deacons” as “an anachronism” (Schenk, 80).

2 χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη, “grace to you and peace.” The salutation of the letter form current in the Greco-Roman world of Paul’s day invariably concluded with the word χαίρειν, “greetings,” or the phrases πλείστα χαίρειν or πολλὰ χαίρειν, “abundant greetings” (cf. also Acts 15:23 ; 23:26 ; Jas 1:1 ; see Hunt and Edgar, Select Papyri, 1:269–395; Lohmeyer, ZNW 26 [1927] 158–73). Paul follows this form. But in a clever play on the sound of the standardized and expected χαίρειν [chairein], “greetings,” he deliberately substitutes χάρις [charis], “grace” (see J. Weiss, Der erste Korintherbrief [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1910] 4). This latter word is a definitely Christian word, used 155 times in the NT, and a key term in Paul’s letters, used by him approximately 100 times. Through it he conveys to his readers more than his own personal greetings. He stresses each time the idea of the free, spontaneous, unmerited favor of God. God is now “for them,” having acted in grace toward them on the basis of the death of Christ (cf. Gal 2:15–21 ; see H. Conzelmann, TDNT 9:394; H. Küng, On Being a Christian, trans. E. Quinn [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976] 249–77; and the older work of J. Moffatt, Grace in the New Testament [London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1931], which still has considerable value).

But Paul changes the standardized Greco-Roman formula of salutation still further. Correspondence of that period generally limited the greeting to a single word (χαίρειν) with its appropriate modifiers. Paul, however, not only replaces χαίρειν, “greetings,” with
χάρις, “grace,” but regularly adds to it the word εἰρήνη, “peace.” χάρις καὶ εἰρήνη, “grace and peace,” then, is his most frequently used formula of greeting (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2; Phil 1:2; Col 1:2; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:2; Phlm 3; but cf. 1 Tim 1:2; Titus 1:2; many MSS of Titus 1:4 and 2 John 3, where the greeting χάρις, ἔλεος, εἰρήνη, “grace, mercy, and peace,” appears). He thus combines Western and Eastern salutations in his new formula, “peace” being the standard Jewish or oriental form of greeting (cf. Gen 43:23; Ezra 4:17; Dan 3:98 [4:1]; 2 Bar. 78:2; see Fitzmyer, JBL 93 [1974] 214–16). But once again the commonplace is used in an uncommon way—an ordinary salutation is elevated into a benediction (Michael), for εἰρήνη, “peace,” like the word grace, is linked with the activity of God. As a result, “peace” comes to mean in Paul “harmony,” “tranquility,” “wholeness,” “well-being,” “salvation” of the total person, reconciliation of persons and societies to God as well as to one another—peace at the deepest level. The whole greeting, χάρις καὶ εἰρήνη, “grace and peace,” therefore, states that the OT dream for the future is being fulfilled (Isa 11:1–9; Houlden, 50), and, therefore, it “becomes an epitome of all that is central and essential in the Christian religion” (Jones; W. Foerster TDNT 2:411–16).

ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, “from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” This phrase, ascribing grace and peace to the fatherhood of God and the lordship of Christ, never found in Greco-Roman correspondence, now carries the salutation on to extraordinary heights of meaning. Commonplace to
Christians today, it must surely have been striking to those who first received such an address. For by this modification of the traditional letter form Paul says, in effect, that it is God who ultimately salutes them, and he does so with grace and peace. God greets them as the ultimate source of all that is good. From now on no evil “destiny has power, validity or meaning…. Words like εἰμαρμένη ['destiny'] or μοῖρα ['fate'] are never found in the NT. The NT has overcome both the cosmic anxiety of the world of antiquity, and the very concept of fate itself” (E. Stauffer, TDNT 3:118). This provides a clue to understanding the lordship of Christ in the hymn of Phil 2:6–11 (see Comment on this text for details of the thesis that Paul’s antidote to the Philippians’ problems has to be sought in his portrayal of the character of God and its disclosure in the incarnation and exaltation of Christ; see also Introduction, Christology in Philippians).

The expression πατρὸς ἡμῶν, “our Father,” echoing the Lord’s Prayer (cf. Matt 6:9), indicates (1) Paul’s presumed but debated acquaintance with the gospel tradition, (2) the intimacy of the relationship that now exists between God and human beings, and (3) the reality of personal faith on the part of writer and readers—a faith that makes it possible for both to think of God as “our Father.” The last named is a Hebrew designation, e.g., in Jewish synagogue prayer, especially in the prayer for New Year (Rosh Hashanah) and the invocation ʾAbînû Malkênû, “Our Father, our King.”

The phrase καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, “and the Lord Jesus Christ,” on the surface seems open to more than one
interpretation. The καί, “and,” could coordinate κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, “of the Lord Jesus Christ,” with ἡμῶν, “of us,” in order to emphasize the subordination of Christ to the Father: “from God the Father of us and of the Lord Jesus Christ.” (1) This idea is not foreign to the NT, for the very expression “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” is found in the writings attributed to Paul (Rom 15:6 ; 2 Cor 1:3 ; 11:31 ; Col 1:3 ; cf. Eph 1:3) and to others (1 Pet 1:3 ; cf. 1 John 1:3). (2) Had Paul wished to say something different from this—i.e., had he wished to say “from God and from our Lord Jesus Christ” (cf. KJV and JB) and not “from God the Father of Christ”—he might have been expected to repeat the preposition ἀπό, “from,” before κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, “Lord Jesus Christ” (cf. 2 John 3 and Rev 1:4–5).

More likely, however, Paul intended the καί, “and,” to couple κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, “Lord Jesus Christ,” with θεοῦ πατρός, “God the Father,” to emphasize the coordination of Christ with God the Father as the co-source with him of grace and peace, and for the following reasons:

(1) One must not think of the ἡμῶν, “our,” as a separate entity that could in any way be construed as a coordinate with κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, “Lord Jesus Christ.” As has been pointed out above, ἡμῶν, “our,” is such an integral part of the traditional formula “our Father” that the two words, πατρὸς ἡμῶν, “our Father,” must be treated as a single phrase, with πατρὸς, “Father,” the significant substantive. For all practical purposes then ἡμῶν, “our,” is grammatically nonexistent, and thus in no way is it able
to be a coordinate with κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, “Lord Jesus Christ.”

(2) In the majority of instances in a nonliterary style of writing, the preposition is not repeated, although we might wish it were. So although Paul truly meant “from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ” by his phrase ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρός ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, it is to be expected, on the basis of contemporary unofficial documents, that he would quite naturally and quite unconsciously omit the second preposition before the phrase connected by καί, “and” (see Moulton et al., Grammar, 3:275).

(3) Those modifications of the Pauline formula ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρός ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, “from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,” (a) that either omit ἡμῶν, “our,” altogether (several important MSS of 2 Thess 1:2), (b) that remove it from its place after πατρός, “Father,” and place it at the end of the phrase (1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2; Titus 1:4), or (c) that add a second preposition before κυρίου, “Lord” (2 John 3), seem consciously designed to remove any possibility of coordinating κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, “Lord Jesus Christ,” with the wrong word and to make crystal clear that Paul fully intended to make κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, “Lord Jesus Christ,” coordinate with θεοῦ πατρός, “God the Father.” “The Lord Jesus Christ” is, therefore, as much the source of “grace and peace” as is “God the Father.” Thus, in the words of Moule, “The position here occupied by Jesus in relation to God, as well as in many other opening formulae of the NT letters, is nothing short of astounding—especially when one
considers that they are written by monotheistic Jews with reference to a figure of recently past history” (Origin, 150)—for it appears to put Jesus Christ and God the Father on an equal basis. See Comment on Phil 2:6–11 for a discussion of the “christological monotheism” in these verses as well as how the expression he was “in the form of God” is to be understood and how that expression links up with “equality with God.”

**Explanation**

The introduction to Paul’s letters follows a basically uniform structure that corresponds closely to a contemporary, widespread, stereotyped letter form involving three elements: sender, addressee, and greeting. But Paul is never content to shut himself up to just these three elements when he writes: e.g., “Paul, to the Church at Philippi, greetings!” On the contrary, he fills them with matters of great mutual concern to himself and the community to which he writes and raises them to the level of theological statements to match individual needs, always, however, centering in Christ (the name Christ Jesus occurs three times in the opening two verses). Hence, the precise contents of the prescripts in Paul’s letters vary. Here two important features, unique among the Pauline letters, appear: (1) Paul allows Timothy to share the same “platform” with him, and (2) Paul addresses the “overseers and deacons” within the church. Both of these speak to the concrete situation at Philippi. How is one to begin to attack selfishness and disunity? By subtly showing from the very beginning that in the church seniority and high calling do not put one Christian leader above another (Paul and Timothy together are one—they are “slaves” of Christ
Jesus) and that “church supervisors” are not above serving, but are, by virtue of their office, called to serve (to be diakonoi), ministering to the needs of their people at Philippi.

Slavery to Christ is a leading theme in this prescript and recalls the genius and paradox of Christian service as viewed by Paul. He can see Christ’s salvation as slavery, but also it is in service that the true paradox is to be found. It is expressed in the ancient prayer for peace, the Second Collect, addressed to God “whose service is perfect freedom” or, as it is stated in the hymn couplet:

Make me a captive, Lord,

And then, I shall be free.
B. Thanksgiving and Prayer (1:3–11)

Bibliography

Translation

³ I thank my God a every time I mention you [or, remember you] in my prayers. ⁴ Always in every prayer I pray, I pray for all of you with joy ⁵ because you have been partners with me in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶ And I am sure that God who began this good work through you [or, in you] will bring it to completion at the day of Christ Jesus. b ⁷ Indeed it is only right that I should feel like this about all of you, because you hold me in such affection, and because all of you are sharers together with me in the privilege c that is mine both of being in prison and of defending and vindicating the gospel. ⁸ For God is my witness that I yearn for all of you with deep affection that comes from Christ Jesus. ⁹ And I pray that your love may keep on increasing d still more and more in deeper knowledge and broader perception, ¹⁰ in order that you may approve what is excellent, be pure and harmless in preparation for the day of Christ, ¹¹ and be filled with the fruit of righteousness that Jesus Christ produces—and all this for the glory and praise of God. e
Notes

3.a. D F G b Ambrosiaster have ἐγὼ μὲν εὐχαριστῶ τῷ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν, “I for my part thank our Lord.” This reading has little MS support and no theological support. Paul never “gives thanks to the Lord”—only “to God.” Yet it is adopted by K. Barth and others.

6.b. ΝΑ pm read Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, “Jesus Christ.”

7.c. Eberhard Nestle’s conjectural reading (in NA 27)—χρείας, “need,” for χάρις, “grace,” i.e., “all of you have been sharers with me in my need”—has not been adopted.

9.d. B D pc read the aorist περισσεύσῃ, “may increase,” for the present-tense περισσεύῃ, “may keep on increasing.” The present tense better fits the context.

11.e. D has the curious reading καὶ ἔπαινον Χριστοῦ, “and praise of Christ”; F G have καὶ ἔπαινον μοι, “and my praise”; Ὁ 46 has θεοῦ καὶ ἔπαινον ἐμοί, “[for the glory] of God and my praise.” Could one of these ill-supported readings be original? It is hard to imagine how they came into existence if the original reading was “[for the glory] and praise of God.” See discussion in Bockmuehl, 70–71. On the (original?) reading in Ὁ 46 see Collange, 50; Silva, 63–64. Could μοι be an example of dativus commodi, “dative of advantage”: “to the glory of God and praise for me”? 

Form/Structure/Setting

Although the major part of Paul’s education was under the direction of Jewish rabbis (see Introduction, Aspects of the
Theology of Philippians), it is inconceivable that the rhetorical schools common in the hellenized cities of the East played no part in his intellectual development. If only indirectly, through the rabbis, Paul became familiar with the rhetorical conventions of speeches in the law courts, the oral teachings of Greek philosophers, and the conventions of Greek letter writing. Some of his letters seem even to indicate the influence on them “of the arrangement of contents, argumentation, and figures of speech of classical rhetoric” (Kennedy, Classical Rhetoric, 130; H. D. Betz, Galatians, Hermeneia [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979] 14–23; cf. Bultmann, Stil, and Weiss, Beiträge zur paulinischen Rhetorik). On the εὐχαριστεῖν, “to thank,” form, see J. M. Robinson, “Die Hodayot Formel,” and more recently Arzt, NovT 36 (1994) 29–46 (response in Reed, Discourse Analysis, 3–4, 87–99); and Holloway, Consolation in Philippians, 87, who divides Phil 1:3–11 into (1) thanksgiving prayer proper (vv 3–6), (2) a digression in which Paul offers “(personal) assurance” (Gnilka) that his appreciation of the Philippians is sincere (vv 7–8), and (3) the intercessory prayer report (vv 9–11).

Paul’s letter to the Philippians, though far less formal and less carefully developed than his letters to the Galatians and the Romans, nevertheless anticipates the parts of the classical oration that were later adapted into a standard five-part epistolary structure: (1) the salutatio or greeting; (2) the captatio benevolentiae or exordium, which secured the goodwill of the recipient; (3) the narratio; (4) the petitio or specific request, demand of announcement; and (5) the conclusio, which was usually relatively simple (see Kennedy, Classical Rhetoric, 186; cf. also White, Form and Function). The form of this section (Phil 1:3–11) seems to
answer to the captatio benevolentiae, for Paul here formally secures
the goodwill of the Philippians by letting them know how thankful
to God he is for them (1:3), how deeply he loves them (1:7–8), and
how regularly he prays for them (1:9).

As in the salutation (Phil 1:1–2), Paul again seems consciously to
be following the Hellenistic letter-writing conventions of his day—
conventions that he developed and enriched, to be sure, from the
piety and liturgy of Judaism, on the one hand (2 Macc 1:3–5), and
his own Christian ideas and practices, on the other. But it is
incorrect to imply, as does Gnilka (42), that the Jewish community
letters (jüdische Gemeindebriefe) were the only, or even the
primary, models that Paul used to construct his own epistles. The
following pagan letter, dated in the second century A.D., reveals
close parallels to Phil 1:1–11:

Apion to Epimachus his father and lord [ τῷ πατρὶ καὶ κυρίῳ ],
very many greetings [ πλείστα χαίρειν ]. Before all else I pray [ εὔχομαι ] for your health.... I thank [ εὐχαριστῶ ] the Lord
Serapis. [Hunt and Edgar, Select Papyri, 1:305; see also 1:274, 283,
303, 307, 317, 319]

See Schubert, Form and Function, for a survey of all the
surviving parallels; see also C. K. Barrett, ed., The New Testament
Background: Selected Documents, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper
Roller, Formular, 63.

Recognizing the carefully structured nature of this section (Phil
1:3–11), controlled as it is by liturgical idiom and epistolary
convention, Wiles nevertheless sees it functioning as a prologue
that sets the tone of the letter and anticipates the major themes that bind the whole letter together (Paul’s Intercessory Prayers, 206–7): gratitude, affection, joy, thanksgiving, the importance of partnership (κοινωνία), growth in Christ, the Day of Christ, perfection, Paul’s imprisonment, and so on (see also Garland, RevExp 77 [1980] 328–32, and Schubert, Form and Function, 71–82). Thus Paul acknowledges the rhetorical patterns of his day, welcomes their availability, and ably adapts them to and employs them in the cause of Christ. On the rhetorical setting of Phil 1:3–11, see Watson, “Rhetorical Analysis of Philippians.”

Comment

3 εὐχαριστῶ τῷ θεῷ μου, “I thank my God.” Adhering to a secular custom, Paul begins his letter with thanks to God (Deissmann, Light from the Ancient East, 168 n. 3). But only in Rom 1:8; 1 Cor 1:4 (?) and Phlm 4 is the form as personal and intimate as it is here: “I thank my God.” The apostle stands alone before his God in prayer (contrast Col 1:3; 1 Thess 1:2; 2 Thess 1:3). The joint relationship with Timothy that was so apparent in the salutation (Phil 1:1) has disappeared, later to reappear in 2:20.

In thus expressing his gratitude, Paul shows (1) that this prayer is not a community prayer for the church at Philippi, but his own—one that reveals his personal state of mind toward the Christians there, which is that of complete thankfulness for each one of them (Gnilka); (2) that he keenly senses a close personal and vital relationship with and dependence upon God—“my God” (cf. Acts 27:23); and (3) that he feels at liberty freely to supplement a common Hellenistic letter form with expressions of religious piety
derived from his Jewish background (cf. Pss 22:1 ; 63:1 ; 1QH X, 34 in F. García Martínez, The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated, 2d ed. [Leiden: Brill, 1996]). Thus Paul takes a colorless, customary convention, reworks it, and makes it express the intensity of his devotion to God and of his feelings for his friends.

ἐπὶ πᾶσῃ τῇ μνείᾳ ὑμῶν, “every time I mention you [ or, remember you].” Several exegetical difficulties present themselves in this brief expression.

(1) The first has to do with the meaning of ἐπὶ with the dative. Does it mean “because of,” especially when it follows a verb that expresses feelings or emotions (ἐὐχαριστῶ, “I thank”), or does it convey the idea of time and thus mean “at the time of”?

(2) The second difficulty has to do with the phrase πᾶσῃ τῇ μνείᾳ: (a) Paul alone of the NT writers uses the word μνεία (Rom 1:9 ; Phil 1:3 ; 1 Thess 1:2 ; 3:6 ; Phlm 4 ; cf. Eph 1:16). Does he do so to convey the idea of “recollection” or “remembrance,” or the idea of “mentioning someone (in prayer)?” (b) How is πᾶσῃ τῇ μνείᾳ to be translated? Usually when πᾶς means “all” or “every,” it stands outside the article-noun unit (Moule, Idiom-Book, 93). Can the phrase ἐπὶ πᾶσῃ τῇ μνείᾳ be as general, then, as “whenever someone mentions/remembers another” (cf. PHILLIPS, NEB, JB, NRSV)? Or must it mean “every mention/remembrance of another” (cf. KJV, ASV, NIV)?

(3) The third problem has to do with the genitive ὑμῶν. Is it objective—“I remember/mention you”—or subjective—“you mention/remember [me]”? Both are grammatically possible. 3 Bar.
5:5 has μνεία with a subjective genitive (O’Brien, 60): “Arise, O Jerusalem,... and see your children gathered from west and east at the word of the Holy One, rejoicing that God has remembered them [ τῇ τοῦ θεοῦ μνεία ].”

To translate the expression ἐπὶ πᾶσῃ τῇ μνείᾳ ὑμῶν as “for all your remembrance of me” and to link it with v 5 seemingly solves all difficulties and results in a translation that makes excellent sense: “I thank my God because of your every remembrance of me... and because of [ ἐπί ] your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now” (vv 3, 5). V 4 must, therefore, be understood as a parenthesis. As the present reviser of this commentary has noted earlier, “There is everything to commend this interpretation, not the least the fact that it shows how Paul expresses his thanks for the Church’s love-gift right at the head of the letter. He does not... leave his ‘thank you’ until a final section (in ch. 4)” (Martin [1976], 64; so also Ewald and Wohlenberg; O’Brien, 58–61; Witherington, 38).

Attractive as this interpretation is, the data do not seem to support it (cf. Morlet, 60; Bockmuehl, 58):

(1) Martin claims that Schubert (Form and Function, 71–82) has demonstrated that “in the other Pauline letters apart from Philippians the construction epi (for) with the dative case... invariably introduces the cause for which thanks are offered” (Martin [1976], 63 [italics added]; also O’Brien, 59 n. 12, who criticizes the earlier edition of this commentary). But can this be so? In only one other letter does Paul express his reason for giving thanks (ἐὐχαριστεῖν) in the opening part of his letter by using ἐπί
with the dative (1 Cor 1:4; cf. also 2 Cor 9:15). Everywhere else this idea is expressed either by the conjunction ὅτι, “because” (Rom 1:8; 1 Cor 1:14; 1 Thess 2:13; 2 Thess 1:3; 2:3), or by the prepositions περί or ὑπέρ, “for,” with the genitive (Col 1:3; 1 Thess 1:2; cf. Eph 1:16). Hence, although ἐπί with the dative may express the reason for Paul’s gratitude, it does not of necessity do so here. BDAG, s.v. μνεία, argue for the traditional rendering “as often as I make mention of you [in prayer]”; so Holloway, Consolation in Philippians, 89.

(2) In the OT there were set times when the pious prayed (1 Chr 23:30; Ezra 9:5; Pss 5:3; 55:17; Dan 6:10). And it is evident from rabbinic literature that this practice continued on beyond NT times (m. Ber. 4:1; see “Prayer,” in EncJud, 13:982; Sanders, Paul and Palestinian Judaism, 223). Hence, the expression ἐπὶ πάσῃ τῇ μνείᾳ suggests not so much the possibility that Paul was giving thanks for something as that he was giving thanks at those formal times of prayer that accorded with the customs of his Jewish heritage, to which he adhered even as a Christian. At every one (ἐπὶ πάσῃ) of these prayer times he was compelled by love to mention his Philippian friends. This means, then, not that Paul gave thanks whenever he happened to remember them but that he regularly gave thanks for them and mentioned them to God at set times of prayer. (Yet this view would make Paul’s prayer habits somewhat stereotyped. So the debate is still open.)

(3) It is unambiguously clear from Paul’s use of μνεία with the genitive elsewhere in his letters that it is he (or he and his companions) who does the remembering or mentioning of someone
else and not the other way around (Rom 1:9 ; 1 Thess 1:2 ; Phlm 4 ; cf. Eph 1:16). On the other hand, “remember(ing) the poor” (Gal 2:10) is a characteristic Pauline sentiment, even if it is a verbal form, not a noun. Holloway (Consolation in Philippians, 88) argues to the contrary.

4 πάντοτε ἐν πάσῃ δεήσει μου ὑπὲρ πάντων ὑμῶν, μετὰ χαρᾶς τὴν δέησιν ποιούμενος, “always in every prayer I pray, I pray for all of you with joy.” Although Paul never allowed elegance of speech to detract from his message (1 Cor 2:1), it is clear, nonetheless, that he was aware of the rhetorical elegances current in his day. On occasion he even made use of them. Here in vv 3–4 he indulges in alliteration in π (p) and in a play on related sounds by a deliberate repetition of the same word in different forms— πάση ... πάντοτε ... πάση ... πάντων (vv 3–4). Thus it is clear that v 4 is so closely tied to v 3 by these figures of speech that it must not be thought of as a parenthesis as some have suggested (see Martin [1959], following Lightfoot; see also Omanson, BT 29 [1978] 244–45). The rhetorical flair Paul employs here serves forcibly to arrest the attention of his readers and focus it upon several important points: (1) the intense personal nature of his prayer (δεήσει μου ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν, “my prayer for you”), (2) the constancy of his prayer (πάντοτε, “always,” and the present participle ποιούμενος, “making [my prayer]”), (3) the all-inclusiveness of his prayer (ὑπὲρ πάντων ὑμῶν, “for all of you”)—none of the Philippian Christians for any reason whatever was excluded from the apostle's love and concern, and (4) the spontaneousness of his prayers. He prayed for them with joy (μετὰ
Paul's attitude toward the Philippians made his praying for them a delight, not a chore. (And that observation may militate against the argument above that Paul is referring to set times of prayer.)

δέησις, “prayer,” appears twice in v 4, and it is most often translated as given above (RSV, NEB, NIV, NRSV). But it is not the usual word for prayer (προσευχή, cf. 1:9) that Paul uses in the beginning sections of his letters (cf. Rom 1:10; 1 Thess 1:2; Phlm 4). The original meaning of δέησις is “lack” or “need.” It comes therefore to be used for specific prayers in specific situations for God to fulfill a real need that only God can (Luke 22:32; Rom 1:10; Heb 5:7)—a meaning it retains even when “the object of the prayer is not mentioned and the situation provides no clue” (H. Greeven, TDNT 2:41). Thus the idea of intercession is always close at hand (cf. Rom 10:1)—someone pleading with God to fill up that which is lacking in another person’s life. Paul, knowing what the Philippians have need of (unity, humility, mutual concern, etc.), offers a prayer (δέησις) for them. The Philippians, on the other hand, knowing what Paul needs (i.e., release from prison), offer a prayer (δέησις) for him (1:19). There exists, then, between the apostle and his beloved congregation mutual understanding and affection that prompt each to plead that God will meet the particular needs of the other. Intercession indeed is the fundamental response of love within the community of believers (cf. 1 John 5:16–17; see Gnilka, 44; Stauffer, New Testament Theology, 194).
μετὰ χαρᾶς, “with joy,” begins the theme of joy that pervades Philippians, linked with prayer. It may be easy enough to translate the words χαρά and χαίρειν as “joy” and “rejoicing,” but it is not as easy to understand the concept (for a full study see Morrice, Joy, summarized in idem, “Joy,” DPL, 511–12). Whatever it is, seemingly it cannot be affected by external happenings. Personal hostilities against himself, imprisonment, or the prospect of a violent death cannot rob Paul of joy (Phil 1:18; 2:17). To quote K. Barth, joy “is a defiant ‘nevertheless,’ which Paul sets like a full stop against” resentment and fear that might otherwise well up within him (120). And yet, at the same time, joy seems to be something that can be affected by external happenings: (1) The Philippian church was Paul’s joy, or the source of his joy, if they continued to “stand firm in the Lord” (4:1). (2) The Philippians were at least capable of increasing, if not diminishing, the amount of Paul’s joy. Their positive response to his plea for unity, for example, would make his joy complete (2:2). (3) Had Epaphroditus’s illness resulted in his death, it would have brought down upon Paul multiplied sorrow (λύπη, the opposite of χαρά, “joy” [2:27]; see 2 Cor 2:3). Epaphroditus’s recovery, however, was grounds for rejoicing (Phil 2:28–29).

What then would the Philippians have understood by Paul’s use of χαρά, “joy,” and χαίρειν, “rejoicing”—words that recur sixteen times in this brief letter (more times than in any other of Paul’s writings) and with apparently conflicting meaning? The Philippians’ resolution of this conflict and their understanding of “joy” came about by listening to what else Paul had to say to them about the subject. They thus came to realize that when he talked of joy, he
was, in reality, describing a settled state of mind characterized by ἐλημόσυνη, “peace,” an attitude that viewed the world with all its ups and downs with equanimity, a confident way of looking at life that was rooted in faith or “the” faith (τῆς πίστεως), that is, in a keen awareness of and trust in the living Lord of the church (Phil 1:25, which uses the definite article with “faith”). Again and again the command is “Rejoice in the Lord! ” (3:1; 4:4, 10). Hence, for Paul joy is more than a mood or an emotion. Joy is an understanding of existence that encompasses both elation and depression, that can accept with submission events that bring delight or dismay, because joy allows one to see beyond any particular event to the sovereign Lord who stands above all events and ultimately has control over them. Joy, to be sure, “includes within itself readiness for martyrdom” (Lohmeyer, 16), but equally the opportunity to go on living and serving (2:27–29; see H. Conzelmann, TDNT 9:369–70). On the senses of “faith” see Binder, Glaube bei Paulus, and Young, Faith in Jesus and Paul.

5 ἐπὶ τῇ κοινωνίᾳ ὑμῶν εἰς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, “because you have been partners with me in the gospel.” Some interpreters (see O’Brien, 61–63; Silva, 43–47, is undecided) claim this expression must be taken with εὐχαριστῶ, “I thank” (v 1), because (1) εὐχαριστῶ would otherwise be left without an object, (2) εὐχαριστεῖν, “thank,” and similar verbs are used by Paul with ἐπὶ, “for” (cf. 1 Cor 1:4; 2 Cor 9:15), and (3) to construe ἐπὶ τῇ κοινωνίᾳ ὑμῶν, “for your partnership,” with μετὰ χαρᾶς, “with joy,” would require the definite article τῆς before ἐπὶ, producing the phrase μετὰ χαρᾶς τῆς ἐπὶ τῇ κοινωνίᾳ ὑμῶν, “with joy that is
for your partnership” (Vincent, 6; Omanson, BT 29 [1978] 244-45; cf. Lightfoot, J. J. Müller, Gnilka, Martin [1976]). But the Greek is not so clear and precise as to be that certain. (1) εὐχαριστῶ, “I thank,” is used without an object when the object can be inferred from the context (cf. Matt 15:36 ; 26:37). Here in v 5 it is possible to infer that the Philippians themselves are the object of Paul’s gratitude. (2) Only once does Paul use εὐχαριστεῖν, “thank,” with ἐπὶ, “for,” and the dative to express the object of his thanks (1 Cor 1:4 ; but cf. 2 Cor 9:15 for a similar instance). He uses other constructions much more frequently. (3) To demand that the definite article be present before ἐπὶ, “for,” in order to connect ἐπὶ τῇ κοινωνίᾳ ὑμῶν, “for your partnership,” with μετὰ χαρᾶς, “with joy,” is to demand the unreasonable, for it is to place classical requirements on a writer of nonliterary Koine Greek (cf. τὸ κρίμα ἐξ ἐνός, “the judgment from one” [ Rom 5:16 ]; οἱ νεκροὶ ἐν Χριστῷ, “the dead in Christ” [ 1 Thess 4:16 ]; see BDF §272). Hence, it is possible to take this prepositional phrase with χαρᾶς, “joy”: “I pray for all of you with joy because you have been partners with me” (cf. KJV, PHILLIPS, LB, GNB, NEB, NIV).

κοινωνία, “to have something in common,” is a distinctively Pauline word, used by him thirteen of the nineteen times it appears in the NT. The frequent use of this word and its cognates in Philippians is striking (Phil 1:5, 7 ; 2:1 ; 3:10 ; 4:15) and provides further proof of the intimate relationship that existed between Paul and the Christians at Philippi. The word carries a wide range of ideas, from being an expression to describe the marital relationship as the most intimate between human beings (P.Oxy. 1473.33; 3
Macc 4:6), to indicating generosity or altruism (2 Cor 9:13), to providing proof of brotherly unity, i.e., a gift or contribution (Rom 15:26), to referring to a participation or sharing in something (see BDAG; Campbell, JBL 51 [1932] 352–80; Seesemann, Begriff KOINΩΝΙΑ; Ford, SQ 6 [1945] 188–215; McDermott, BZ 19 [1975] 64–77, 219–33).

Here in v 5, modified as it is by εἰς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, “in the gospel,” κοινωνία ὑμῶν, “your partnership,” may refer to the fact that the Philippians and Paul share together in a common faith that is brought about by the preaching of the gospel (ὑμῶν, “your,” seen as an objective genitive, “partnership with you”); see Seesemann, Begriff KOINΩΝΙΑ, 73–83, and Lohmeyer, 64–65, as noted by Martin [1976], 64–65, based on Phil 2:1). Even if this interpretation is admissible (and it may not be; see Vincent, 7), nevertheless, this “sharing in the faith” results in tangible assistance. Paul, therefore, can and does use κοινωνία to describe the “collection” for (εἰς) the poor in Jerusalem (Rom 15:26; 2 Cor 8:4; 9:13), meaning a sharing of one’s material goods for (εἰς) the physical benefit of others (cf. Heb 13:16). Hence, it is easy to see in this expression ἐπί τῇ κοινωνίᾳ ὑμῶν εἰς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, “for your partnership in the gospel,” a clear reference to the gift(s) that the Philippians had sent to Paul (ὑμῶν, “your,” understood now as a subjective genitive) in order to make it possible for him to spread the gospel. The same preposition εἰς, “in,” follows κοινωνία, “partnership,” here as in Rom 15:26 and 2 Cor 9:13. The Philippians were partners (κοινωνοί) with the apostle in the proclamation of the good news, not in the sense that they shared.
the same faith with him, or were co-evangelists with him, but that they supported him financially in his mission work. This view may tip the scales in our exegetical decisions in v 3. It also implies a “joint participation” in God’s work, a point insisted on in Seesemann’s careful discussion (Begriff KOINΩΝΙΑ), accessible to English readers in George, Communion with God in the New Testament.

This understanding of KOINΩΝΙΑ, “partnership,” however, does not exclude references to the Philippians’ faith, nor their own efforts at evangelism, nor their intercession for the progress of the gospel in the world. In its fullest extent KOINΩΝΙΑ means whole-hearted, active participation in every imaginable way with Paul in the “labor and suffering” that was necessary to spread the good news (Vincent, 6–7; see Lightfoot; F. Hauck, TDNT 3:798; Gnilka, Collange, Martin [1976]).

ΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΟΝ, “gospel,” is another distinctively Pauline word, used by the apostle approximately sixty of the seventy-six times that it appears in the NT. Originally it meant “a reward for good news” and then simply “good news.” In the NT, and especially in Paul’s letters, its meaning narrows to the specific sense of the “good news” that God has acted to save people from their sins and to reconcile them to himself in or through Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Cor 15:1–3; 2 Cor 5:19; especially Rom 1:16; Gal 1:6–8; cf. Stuhlmacher, Das paulinische Evangelium, passim; idem, “Pauline Gospel”). For Paul, the gospel is not merely good news in the sense of words spoken and heard, i.e., a good story, but is itself God’s power by which people are changed (cf. Rom 1:16): “effective
power which brings to pass what it says because God is its author” (G. Friedrich, TDNT 2:731; Schniewind, Die Begriffe Wort und Evangelium bei Paulus, 64–117). For the recent debate on the origin of εὐαγγέλιον, “gospel,” see R. A. Guelich, Mark 1–8:26, WBC 34A (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1989) on Mark 1:1, 15; O’Brien, “The Importance of the Gospel in Philippians.”

In Philippians, as also in the other letters of Paul, εὐαγγέλιον, “gospel,” appears most frequently without modifiers of any kind (Phil 1:5, 7, 12, 16, 2b7 ; 2:22 ; 4:3, 15), a fact that indicates that its contents, its message, and its meaning were well known to writer and readers alike, so that no explanation was necessary. The gospel as a message was at the center of Paul’s thought and the force behind his mission (see G. Friedrich, TDNT 2:729). The churches to which he wrote came into existence as a result of their response to the gospel he preached (cf. 1:5).

The gospel was the good news about Jesus Christ that was constantly being proclaimed (Phil 1:15 [ κηρύσσειν, “preach”], 27a), a body of teaching that had been and could be defended (1:7, 16 [ ἀπολογία τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, “defense of the gospel”]), a message that was being spread abroad, helped along, furthered, caused to progress by what people said about it or by how they behaved in respect to it (1:12 [ προκοπὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, “progress of the gospel”], 27 [ ἀξίως τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, “worthily of the gospel”; πίστις τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, “faith of the gospel”]; 2:22). It is this last idea that is prominent in the expression εἰς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, “in the gospel” (cf. 1:5), where the Philippian church is commended for making a turning (Wendung) toward the gospel message and taking
an active part with Paul in passing it along (Gnilka). Yet its objectivity remains the dominant theme in Paul, while he places obligation on his readers to “live worthily” of the Gospel (1:27). But see Silva, 46 n. 11.

ἀπὸ τῆς πρώτης ἡμέρας ἀχρί τοῦ νῦν, “from the first day until now.” This phrase does not so much mark in time the precise moment when the gospel reached Philippi and was accepted by the community as it indicates (1) the constant loyalty of the Philippians to the gospel and to Paul who brought it, and (2) Paul’s rare willingness to continue to accept gifts from a particular church. It had been his policy not to take money from those groups he preached to, for fear that someone should accuse him of charging for that which in reality was free—the grace of God (cf. 1 Cor 9:15–18; 2 Cor 11:7–9). The Philippians, however, had sufficiently gained Paul’s affection and confidence so as to persuade him to waive this rule in their case. They, therefore, sent more than one gift to him for the advancement of the gospel while he was in Thessalonica (Phil 4:16) and at least one gift while he was in Corinth (2 Cor 11:9). Now, again at this critical time, they sent additional funds in the hope that they could thereby alleviate his suffering in prison (Phil 4:10, 18) or perhaps secure his release. Here, then, is an excellent example where “the beginning has value only in so far as it involves the enlightening and revitalizing of the present” (Collange, 45). On the importance of the Macedonian mission in Paul's strategy, see Gnilka on Phil 4:15, citing E. Meyer, Ursprung und Anfänge des Christentums (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1923) 3:80.
6 πεποιθῶς αὐτὸ τοῦτο, “and I am sure.” This translation must not be allowed to obscure the fact that the participle πεποιθῶς, lit. “being confident,” depends on εὐχαριστῶ, “I thank,” making clear that Paul’s thanks to God are accompanied closely by his confidence in God. Confidence permeates Philippians, much like joy. Paul’s fellow Christians are made confident by his imprisonment and thus daringly preach the gospel without fear (Phil 1:14). Paul himself is confident that he will be released from prison (2:24); he is confident that he thus will continue to be around to stimulate the church at Philippi to joy and faith (1:25). But the basis for such confidence is the Lord; yet he expresses uncertainty as to the outcome, and 1:25 is modified by his conclusion at 2:17. It is a confident certainty about life that finds its locus not in human decisions, whether to Paul’s apparent advantage in life or death, but in the character and acts of God. Here in 1:6 Paul is confident about the church of Philippi because he is confident in God who is at work in the church (cf. 2:13). Holloway (Consolation in Philippians, 89) thinks that the Philippians did not share this confidence and “had begun to question their contribution” (κοινωνία). But there is no evidence for this supposition.

The phrase αὐτὸ τοῦτο, lit. “this very thing,” need not be made much of, as though it might be important to identify its antecedent. Such universal adjectives as τοῦτο, “this,” were popular in Koine as in classical Greek and had a strong tendency simply to pass over to the accusative of general reference. Thus πεποιθῶς αὐτὸ τοῦτο means “confident with just this confidence” or “I am sure” (BDF §154).
ὅτι ὁ ἐναρξάμενος ἐν ὑμῖν ἔργον ἁγαθὸν ἐπιτελέσει ἄχρι ἡμέρας Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, “that God who began this good work through you [or, in you] will bring it to completion at the day of Christ Jesus.” ὃτι, “that,” introduces the object of Paul’s certainty: “I am sure that God will finish what he started!” What God started Paul describes as ἔργον ἁγαθὸν, “a good work,” a phrase that cannot be shaken loose from its immediate context and be interpreted primarily in terms of “God’s redeeming and renewing work” in the lives of the Philippians (Martin [1959]; see also Jones, Barth, J. J. Müller, Hendriksen, Caird; Marshall, 12, calls attention to a recurrent theme in the letter, that of Christians’ growth involving their own efforts [2:12–13]). Rather ἔργον ἁγαθὸν, “a good work,” finds its explanation in the fact that the Philippians were partners with Paul in the gospel (v 5) and shared their resources with him to make the proclamation of the gospel possible. This “sharing in the gospel” is the good work referred to here (cf. 2 Cor 8:6). Alternatively, it may simply be the gospel itself, as we note below.

The word ἔργον, “work,” may have brought to Paul’s mind the creative activity of God. For he very likely stood in that tradition of thinkers who referred to creation as God’s ἔργον, God’s “work” (cf. Gen 2:2–3; 4 Ezra 6:38, 43; G. Bertram, TDNT 2:629–30). If so, then Paul would have viewed this “good work” he mentions here not as some accomplishment that the Philippians could justly take credit for by themselves. Rather he would have seen it as the creative activity of God, something God initiated (ἐναρξάμενος) and something that he alone would bring to completion (ἐπιτελέσει) by means of (ἐν) the Philippians (ἐναρξάμενος ἐν,
“who began... in or through,” does not demand the idea of “in” or “within” [cf. Gal 3:3], for ἐνάρχεσθαι simply means “to make a beginning” and ἐν can be instrumental [“through”] as well as local [“in”; BDF §219(1)]; ἐν ὑμῖν, “in you,” may also be rendered “among you,” as in the parallel use of the phrase in Phil 2:13 [against Silva, 55]). As in the first creation God accomplished his work (ἔργον) by his word—4 Ezra 6:43: “His word went out and the work of creation was done forthwith” (cf. 4 Ezra 6:38; see J. M. Myers, I and II Esdras, AB 42 [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974] 204)—so now in the new creation God will accomplish this “good work” (ἔργον ἀγαθόν), that of advancing the gospel by human means and, in this instance, by the Philippian church. This conclusion also supports the view that the “good work” is the gospel message and ministry (so Holloway, Consolation in Philippians, 90, who takes the “good work” as the gospel mission itself [τὸ εὐαγγέλιον] and renders ἐν ὑμῖν as “among you”; Stowers, “Friends and Enemies,” 117, notes how the text is set in the frame of “a larger narrative about God, Christ, and Paul”). Many commentators prefer to give an exclusively local sense to the phrase ἐν ὑμῖν, “in you”; i.e., God is the one who is “at work in you” (Phil 2:12) to transform either the individual’s personal life or corporate life, or both. See Comment on Phil 2:5 for more interpretation of the phrase ἐν ὑμῖν, “in you.”

Paul envisioned that the good work, which God started and which was now being carried on by the Philippians, would reach its completion at the day of Christ Jesus. That is to say, Paul was certain that the Philippians would never waiver in their generosity,
would never cease sharing their good gifts to help spread the gospel, until the Parousia, the return of Christ, took place—that final event of history, which he believed was near at hand (Phil 4:5). This “day of Christ Jesus” (also referred to as the “day of Christ” [Phil 1:10]; the “day of our Lord Jesus” [1 Cor 1:8]; the “day of the Lord” [1 Thess 5:2]; the “day of judgment” [1 John 4:17]; the “day” [1 Thess 5:4]; “that day” [2 Tim 1:12]; and the “day of wrath” [Rev 2:5]; cf. Kramer, Christ, Lord, Son of God, 139) very likely brought the idea of judgment to Paul’s attention since it was an expression that had its origin in the OT concept of the day of Yahweh, a day of darkness and gloom and wrath (Joel 2:2; Amos 5:20), often thought of in popular expression as Israel’s promotion, but reinterpreted to mean judgment on Israel. Paul perhaps has the prophetic sense in mind. This day would test the deeds of humankind with fire (1 Cor 3:13) and the works of the Philippian church as well. But Paul anticipated that day without alarm. Knowing the Philippians, he was confident that when their “work” (ἔργον) was examined, it would be pronounced “good” (ἀγαθόν; cf. Phil 2:16; 4:1). Otherwise, the adjective “good” refers not only to human character or responsibility but also to God’s sovereign work in grace (so Gen 1:31).

Other interpretations of v 6, such as those that apply its words to “a more comprehensive work of grace in the hearts of the believers (in general), affecting both (their) inner disposition and (their) outward activity” (J. J. Müller), must be considered secondary to that given above. The context does not permit any of them to be primary. It does not follow, however, that they cannot be right by extension. For when God is involved, whatever he
begins already has the end in sight. The completed state already exists in the divine initiation. It is the nature of God that this be so. For what God creates he brings to completion (cf. Isa 48:12, 13; 44:6). So if God calls the community to faith, he stands also at the end of the call to bring each member to the desired goal of their faith—the salvation of their souls (cf. 1 Thess 5:24; see also 1 Cor 1:8, 9; 2 Cor 1:8; 2 Thess 3:3; cf. Gnilka).

7 καθώς ἐστιν δίκαιον ἔμοί τοῦτο φρονεῖν ὑπὲρ πάντων ὑμῶν, “indeed it is only right that I should feel like this about all of you.” These words begin a difficult section to translate. καθώς, “as” or “just as,” usually calls for its correlative οὕτως, “so” (but not always, as in Mark 1:2). Paul frequently begins a sentence with καθώς not followed by οὕτως, and in so doing gives to καθώς something of the meaning of “because” (Rom 1:28; 1 Cor 1:6; 5:7; Gal 3:6; Phil 3:17; Eph 1:14; see BDF §453 [2]). He does that here and thus connects v 7 with vv 3–6 to show that his gratitude to God for each one of the Philippians, his joy over them, his confident expectation of their constant fidelity, are feelings on his part (ἔμοι) that are justly and rightly (δίκαιον) due them. To have such thoughts about the Philippians is just as it should be for Paul, and just as the Philippians would have expected of him.

The verb φρονεῖν, translated “feel” (so NIV), is a distinctively Pauline word. Paul uses it twenty-three of the twenty-six times it occurs in the NT, and ten of these twenty-three are found in his letter to the Philippians (1:7; 2:2 [2x], 5; 3:15 [2x], 19; 4:2, 10 [2x]). It is a difficult word to translate, for in addition to ideas of attitude and feeling, on the one hand, such as “interest in,”
“sympathetic attention to,” “concern for,” φρονεῖν also includes such ideas as “to think,” “to form or hold an opinion” about someone or something, “to set one’s mind on, to be intent on something” (Fee [1999] includes the idea of “mindset”). It therefore is a word that embraces both feeling and thought, emotions and mind. Paul not only feels deeply for the Philippians, but as a consequence he plans, or schemes (though not in the popular American sense of “evil intent”), how best his concern for them can be actualized in tangible ways. As J. Moffatt observes, “He cannot and need not send them money..., but he can cherish great and good hopes of their religious prospects” and work toward those ends (quoted by Michael, 15; see also G. Bertram, TDNT 9:220–35; Martin [1976]).

The antecedent of τοῦτο, “this,” has been much discussed. The options are set out in Holloway, Consolation in Philippians, 90 n. 21: (1) Some, such as Weiss and Dibelius, understand the allusion to be to the expression of confidence in 1:6. (2) Other commentators, including Lightfoot, Gnilka, and Collange, see a reference to the entire section of 1:3–6, while Bonnard thinks only 1:3–5 to be in mind. The latter is Holloway’s preference and is to be followed since τοῦτο, “this,” more naturally refers not to God’s inner working but to the Pauline mission. Holloway offers two reasons for his choice, one of which is found in Paul’s appeal to his mission’s success that is founded not in the Philippians’ lives but in God’s work. The second reason is less secure. It takes the Philippians’ being “mutual partners” (συγκοινωνοῦς) as a partnership with Paul in suffering (so Fee [1999], 50). It is more likely that the referent to the adjective is “the gospel” (so Fee
διὰ τὸ ἔχειν μὲ ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ ὑμᾶς, “because you hold me in such affection.” The rightness (δίκαιον) of Paul’s feelings for the Philippians is explained in this phrase, which is usually translated “because I have you in my heart,” meaning “because you are very dear to me.” But again the Greek is so ambiguous that one cannot be certain that this interpretation is correct. (1) There is no personal pronoun modifying καρδίᾳ, “heart,”; hence, the definite article could mean “my heart” or “your heart.” (2) The word order ἔχειν μὲ ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ ὑμᾶς is not itself a guarantee that the flow of thought must be “I have you in my heart” and not the opposite “You have me in your heart.” First, there are no other examples of διὰ τὸ ἔχειν, “because [someone] has,” in Paul’s writings. Hence, it is not possible to determine a pattern of word order for this construction based on Pauline usage. In addition, on examining διὰ τὸ ἔχειν, “because [someone] has,” elsewhere, one notices that the so-called (accusative) subject of the infinitive stands outside the prepositional phrase as many times as it does within the phrase (cf. Matt 24:12; Luke 2:4; 6:48; 19:11; Acts 18:2; Heb 7:23; Jas 4:2; contrast Mark 5:4; Acts 27:9). Where subject and object are both clearly denoted, sometimes the subject is within the phrase and the object outside (John 2:24; Acts 27:4); sometimes the object is within the phrase and the subject outside (Heb 10:2); and sometimes both subject and object (as here) are outside the phrase with object first and then subject (Luke 18:5) or subject first and then object (Acts 4:2). (3) The context seems fairly neutral as well. V 8 may favor the interpretation “I have you in
my heart,” but the content of v 7 favors the opposite: Paul says, “I am justified in thanking God for you, rejoicing over you, having confidence in you, because you have me in your heart and because you are partners with me in my imprisonment, etc.” Since the construction is ambiguous and yet it is necessary to make a choice between the two interpretations, the translation of the NEB (NRSV too) is judged best to fit the facts: “because you hold me in such affection.” Justification for the way Paul feels about the Philippians has its basis, then, in their affection for him, καρδία, “heart,” being understood as the seat of one’s emotions. (See O’Brien, 90, and Fee [1995], 68, for a discussion on the translation here. The former prefers “It is quite right for me to have you in mind... because I have you in my heart, and since you are so well-disposed to me,” appealing to Reed, NovT 33 [1991] 1–27; and now more recently idem, Discourse Analysis, 387. Also in support of the rendering “I hold you in my heart” is Bockmuehl, 63, against Witherington, 38.)

συγκοινωνούς μου τῆς χάριτος πάντας ὑμᾶς ὄντας, “and because all of you are sharers together with me in the privilege that is mine.” Paul’s justification for his feeling about the Philippians also finds its basis in the fact that all (πάντας) members of the Philippian community are (ὄντας, taken as a causal participle, “because [all of you] are”) Paul’s partners (συγκοινωνούς; cf. the echo here of κοινωνία, “partnership,” in v 5) in the grace given him by God. χάρις, “grace,” in this context refers not to the general favor of God—God’s salvation grace (Heilsgnade) —extended to everyone through Christ’s death and resurrection (as Bockmuehl, 63, takes it when he translates “my partners in grace,” granting that the syntax is indeed ambivalent),
but to the special favor of God (τῆς χάριτος, “the privilege”) in the form of a spiritual gift or an ability given to individuals to accomplish certain specific tasks (see BDAG). Here χάρις, “grace,” refers to Paul’s apostolic commission to preach the gospel handed him by God (cf. Rom 1:5 ; 12:3, 6 ; 1 Cor 3:10 ; Gal 2:9 ; cf. Eph 3:2 ; see Heinzelmann, Benoit, Caird) and in which the Philippians have shared by making it financially possible for him to carry out this work of evangelism.

ἐν τῇ ἁπολογίᾳ καὶ βεβαιώσει τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, “both of being in prison and of defending and vindicating the gospel.” χάρις, “grace,” as Lightfoot (85) has pointed out, “applies equally to Paul’s ‘bonds,’ and to his ‘defense and confirmation of the gospel.’ ” Paul’s present situation of suffering for the gospel and of defending and confirming the gospel is but the result of his commission. And in this also the Philippians are partners. If Paul suffers, so do they; if he defends and vindicates the gospel, so do they. Paul sees himself as an extension of the Philippian Christians and them as joint participants with him in his troubles and triumphs, co-sharers with him of the divine grace or privilege (τῆς χάριτος).

ἐν τῇ ἁπολογίᾳ καὶ βεβαιώσει τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, “in... defending and vindicating the gospel,” does not refer to that general defense and vindication of the gospel—that overcoming of objections to the Christian message, on the one hand, and confirming of it by straightforward preaching, on the other—that Paul customarily gave when he was able to proclaim the gospel as a free man (so Lightfoot, and see the misleading translation of the GNB). Rather
Paul had in mind a particular defense that he had already made, or was in the process of making, before his judges subsequent to his arrest for the sake of the gospel (cf. Acts 22:1). ἀπολογία, “defense,” and βεβαιωσις, “vindication,” are technical, legal terms common in the law courts of the first century (cf. Acts 25:16; 2 Tim 4:16; see Deissmann, Bible Studies, 104–6; MM, 108; Fee [1995], 93). The picture that emerges, therefore, is the following. Paul, the prisoner, gave evidence in his own case. This allowed him the opportunity to defend not only himself but also the gospel and, in the process, to vindicate it. His defense speech was an extraordinary opportunity to proclaim the gospel. The proclamation of the gospel was the means by which people were won to the faith (cf. Acts 26:29). Their conversion showed that the gospel was a creative, life-imparting power (Gnilka). This beneficial effect of the gospel cleared it of slander and proved to the world that it did not and does not ever deserve to be on trial. Paul, in making his own defense, therefore, acts as advocate for the gospel, and he congratulates the Philippians on being his partners in the privilege (Caird, 108). He now waits for the verdict, confident that he has made a good case for himself (cf. Phil 1:19; 2:24; yet 2:17 is less confident in its mood) as well as for the gospel.

8 μάρτυς γάρ μου ὁ θεός, “for God is my witness.” By means of the conjunction γάρ, “for,” Paul emphatically calls on God to bear witness to the genuineness of his feelings for the Philippians, all of them (cf. Phil 1:4, 7 [2x], 8)—those feelings of gratitude, joy, and confidence that he had articulated in vv 3–6 and the feeling of yearning that he mentions now. Why did Paul think it necessary to employ such an extreme statement, even employing the name of
God that the rabbis studiously avoided (Str-B 1:330–32; 3:26; O’Brien, 71; Fee [1995]), especially since such oaths are relatively infrequent in his other letters (Rom 1:9; 2 Cor 1:23; 1 Thess 2:5, 10)？ Was it because Paul was incapable of expressing his own feelings, so he calls on God to help: “I cannot express how I long” (so Chrysostom, as quoted by Vincent, 10)？ Was it because the enormity of Paul’s love deserved more than his own testimony to its genuineness could provide？ Perhaps (so Vincent, J. J. Müller, Caird). More likely, however, Paul took this solemn oath because he was aware that within the church that he founded and for which he cared so deeply there were those who were not at all convinced of his right to lead them nor certain of the reality of his love for them. What more could he do to convince them than swear before God that they all (πάντας ὑμᾶς, “all of you,” in a fourth reference to the entire Christian group at Philippi) had the same great place in his affections？ Nothing. In his day and in his culture a solemn oath was the end of every dispute (cf. Heb 6:16).

ὡς ἐπισημοθεῖ πάντας ὑμᾶς ἐν σπλάγχνοις Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, “that I yearn for all of you with deep affection that comes from Christ Jesus.” ὡς, “that,” though a word with more than one meaning, here introduces the content of the divine witness (“God witnesses to the fact that [ ὡς ] I yearn for you”; cf. Rom 1:9 [ KJV, RSV, GNB, JB ]), rather than the degree of Paul’s yearning (“how greatly” [ KJV, RSV, JB ]; NRSV has a neutral sense, “how I long for all of you”). This latter idea is already fully expressed by the modifying phrase ἐν σπλάγχνοις Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, “with deep affection that comes from Christ Jesus,” and needs no additional word such as ὡς, “that,” to explain it qualitatively. Fee ([1995], 94 n. 101,
followed by O’Brien, 71) thinks this appeal to ὡς, “that,” is overdone: most likely Paul means something like our cumbersome “how that.”

ἐπιποθῶ, “I yearn,” is a Pauline word used by the apostle seven of the nine times it appears in the NT. It is a strong word and registers Paul’s intense longing for his friends (see Spicq, RB 64 [1957] 184–95; idem, TLNT 2:58–60). Here he uses it to describe his longing for the Philippians—probably his longing to be with them, to enjoy their presence, and to help them in their Christian faith (cf. Phil 4:1; but this view not agreed to by Fee [1995], 94, who prefers an expression of Paul’s concern for the Philippians, noting that 4:1 does not imply a longing to see them again; yet we query this deduction, given Paul’s earlier intense desire to be reunited with the Philippians [1:27], and Epaphroditus’s return home is expressed in similar idiom [2:26]). But it is a longing that is not only intense but unique, in that it is rooted in a love (ἐν σπλάγχνοις, “with deep affection”) that originates in and is fostered by Christ Jesus (Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ is a subjective genitive: “that comes from Christ Jesus”). Paul loves them as Christ loves them and because Christ loves them through him. Bengel states: in Paulo non Paulus vivit, sed Jesus Christus; quare Paulus non in Pauli sed Jesu Christi movetur visceribus, “In Paul it is not Paul that lives, but Jesus Christ; wherefore Paul is moved not by Paul’s but by Jesus Christ’s affection” (quoted by Barth, 20).

The phrase Paul uses to describe his “deep affection” is striking and powerful: ἐν σπλάγχνοις Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ literally is “in the viscera, entrails of Christ Jesus.” In Greek the viscera (τὰ
σπλάγχνα) were the nobler organs of the body—the heart, liver, and lungs—not the intestines (τὰ ἔντερα), and were regarded as the seat and origin of the deeply felt emotions, such as anger and love (see H. Köster, TDNT 7:548). So Paul is saying, in effect: “If it is true that you hold me in your heart [using now the alternative sense of the phrase in v 7] and this is the measure of your affection for me, I wish to assure you how I long for you. I hold you in the heart of Christ Jesus! This is the measure and meaning of my affection for you.” Surely this astonishing metaphor powerfully drove home to the Philippians the depth and reality of Paul’s love for them!

9 καὶ τοῦτο προσεύχομαι ἵνα, “and I pray that.” Love leads to prayer and informs knowledge, not the other way around, as Silva (59) takes it when he comments that “Paul’s concern is knowledge that cultivates love.” Once more Paul reminds the Philippians that they are constantly in his prayers (προσεύχομαι, “I pray,” is present tense). Now, however, he not only states the fact that he prays for them (cf. v 4), but he reveals the content of his prayer: καὶ τοῦτο προσεύχομαι ἵνα, “and I pray this, namely, that.” The ἵνα, “that,” here is a conjunction that introduces a clause explaining or expounding on τοῦτο, “this,” the grammatical object of προσεύχομαι, “I pray,” and not one that offers the purpose of his prayer (“in order that”). (For similar uses of ἵνα see Luke 1:43; John 15:8, 13; 17:3; 1 John 3:11, 23; 4:17, 21; 5:3; 3 John 4; cf. also 1 Cor 9:18; 2 Cor 2:9; Phil 2:2; Herm. Sim. 9.28.4; see BDF §394 and Moule, Idiom-Book, 145–46, who calls this “ἵνα
The content of his prayer, then, is that the Philippians’ love may increase.

ἡ ἁγάπη ύμων ἔτι μᾶλλον καὶ μᾶλλον περισσεύῃ ἐν ἐπιγνώσει καὶ πάσῃ αἰσθήσει, “your love may keep on increasing still more and more in deeper knowledge and broader perception.” Paul does not qualify or limit this love for which he prays by adding an object to it—it is not love for others (LB), nor for each other (JB), nor yet their love for him. Rather, it is love unlimited, “the inward state of the soul” (Lightfoot, 86), “love in the most comprehensive sense as the central element of the Christian life” (Beare, 54)—God’s love poured out in their hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5). In effect, Paul prays that the Philippians increasingly may be persons characterized by love, even as God their Father, is himself characterized by love (cf. 1 John 4:3). Paul knows that if the love they already possess increases steadily (μᾶλλον καὶ μᾶλλον, “more and more”) and continues to abound (περισσεύειν, “may keep on increasing”—the total context indicates that the present tense is preferred to the aorist περισσεύσῃ, “may increase”), it will overflow into deeds of kindness; wrong attitudes and actions toward each other will disappear, and the problems at Philippi will be resolved (2:3–4; 4:2–3). Paul’s prayer, therefore, borders on exhortation (Collange).

περισσεύειν, “to abound, overflow, be more than enough, be extremely rich,” is a Pauline word, used by Paul twenty-six of the thirty-nine times it appears in the NT. Perhaps no other word so characterized for him the new age opened up by Christ as did this word. For this new age is no meager age but one marked by an
overflowing and rich abundance of good things—grace overflows (Rom 5:15–17), the church richly overflows in hope (Rom 15:13), in faith, in word, in knowledge, in zeal (2 Cor 8:7), and in wisdom (Eph 1:8). The new ministry (διακονία) overflows in edification (1 Cor 14:12) and in excellence, in contrast to the old (2 Cor 3:9); Christians overflow in ability to comfort (2 Cor 1:4–5), in generosity (2 Cor 8:2), in thanksgiving (2 Cor 4:15), in every good work (i.e., the grace of generosity [ 2 Cor 9:8 ] in the work of the Lord (1 Cor 15:58), in everything (2 Cor 8:7 ; see Gnilka; Fee [1999], 52–53).

So it is not surprising, then, that Paul’s aspiration for the Philippians, people of the new age, is that they might be so rich in love that they have no room to store it. Love must not only characterize them, it must well up and flow out from them in an ever-increasing degree (ἐτί μᾶλλον καὶ μᾶλλον, “still more and more”) toward each other and toward all (cf. 1 Thess 3:12).

With the phrase ἐτί μᾶλλον καὶ μᾶλλον, “still more and more,” Paul quietly thrusts in the idea that the Philippians have not yet become “perfect” (cf. Phil 3:12–15) in love and gently opens up the subject of the problems that exist in this community through a lack of love—problems he intends to deal with more directly later on (2:1–5 ; 4:2–3 ; see Garland, RevExp 77 [1980] 330).

But their ever-increasing love is also to be a discriminating love. It is to be accompanied by and will lead to knowledge (ἐπιγνώσει) and understanding (αἰσθήσει), intellectual and moral insight—a new awareness of God as revealed in Jesus Christ, on the one hand, and the ability to make moral decisions, on the other (Grayston [1967]). As Scott observes, “Nothing perhaps is more harmful than
the easy good nature which is willing to tolerate everything; and this is often mistaken for the Christian frame of mind. Love must fasten itself on the things which are worth loving, and it cannot do so unless it is wisely directed” (27).

One of the things that directs love is ἐπίγνωσις, “knowledge.” This is another of Paul’s favorite words, used by him fifteen of the twenty times it appears in the NT. Over against the simple γνῶσις, “knowledge,” it may refer to a deeper, fuller, or more advanced type of knowledge (cf. 1 Cor 13:12). Since ἐπίγνωσις is limited in usage to religious and moral things (BDAG), it follows that for Paul ἐπίγνωσις is that advanced knowledge, that full appreciation of the real meaning of the Christian gospel that is the result of instruction and experience. It is practical knowledge that “informs Christian love as to the right circumstances, aims, ways and means” in which it is to be applied in the concrete situations of life (Vincent, 12). Without ἐπίγνωσις, love easily may be misdirected.

The prayer-report of Phil 1:9–11 has been widely discussed, exposing two problems (noted by Holloway, Consolation in Philippians, 92–100): (1) How are we to understand the relationship between love and knowledge in 1:9, and (2) how does such a relationship connect with the purpose clause in 1:10? Holloway challenges Gnîlka’s view (51) that Paul’s prayer is for “overflowing love” that will lead to spiritual discernment. Holloway successfully opposes that view on the ground that in the case of the verb περισσεύειν, “to increase, overflow,” in something, it is not the subject (ἀγάπη, “love”) that increases but the object of the
preposition ἐν, “in,” citing Rom 15:13; 1 Cor 15:58. We can only conclude that Paul is calling for the Philippians’ love to increase in knowledge. On 1:10 Holloway wants to understand τὰ διαφέροντα not as “things that differ” (so Peterman, Paul’s Gift from Philippi, 106–7, 113) but as “things that do matter,” since for Paul ἐριθεία, “selfish ambition,” and κενοδοξία, “empty conceit,” are not things that are irrelevant, but they do matter a great deal, since both are wrong and to be condemned. In other words, Paul’s use of Stoic terminology (so Lohmeyer, 2–3) does not imply a call to Stoic ἀπάθεια, “absence of grief.” But the appeal to joy is among the chief concerns on which the Philippians should set their minds.

πάση αἰσθήσει, “broader perception,” is another control set on love by Paul. This is the only time αἰσθησις, “perception,” appears in the NT, although it is frequent in Proverbs (Prov 1:4, 7, 22; 3:20; 5:2, LXX), where it sets forth the ideas of “sensation,” i.e., sense perception, and “insight,” and denotes moral understanding and discernment (BDAG). The adjective πάση, “all,” that modifies αἰσθήσει, “perception,” does not so much mean total perception as it means a breadth of perception. Hence πάσα αἰσθησις, “broader perception,” is the ability to make proper moral decisions in the midst of a vast array of differing and difficult choices that are constantly presenting themselves to the Christian (cf. Heb 5:14). Love, therefore, although constantly expanding, is nevertheless regulated by knowledge and perception (ἐπίγνωσις καὶ αἰσθησις). Both of these words and the phrase τὰ διαφέροντα, “what is excellent” (v 10), i.e., the things that really matter, were frequently used by moral philosophers contemporary with Paul (see Bonhöffer,
Epiktet, 105, 298–99). Paul, therefore, is not averse to taking up ideas and traditions from the intellectual world around him in order to put them to good use in developing a truly Christian morality, based not on human striving, on the one hand (Hellenistic moral philosophy), nor on the law, on the other hand (Judaism; cf. Rom 2:18), but on love (see Gnilka; and the critique in Engberg-Pedersen, “Stoicism in Philippians,” 262 n. 10).

If one were to ask whence come these regulatory agents of knowledge and perception, the answer would be “from God,” and hence they are legitimately included in Paul’s prayer for the Philippians, as is the request for love. Yet this is not a complete answer; for although knowledge ultimately is the revelation of God, it is nevertheless passed on from generation to generation by the teachers of the church. Knowledge that controls love, therefore, is that which is learned by hearing and responding to the truth of God as God’s ministers, such as Paul, constantly and carefully expound it. And perception, though it too may be considered a gift of God for which one can pray, in a sense is a “moral taste” that can only be acquired and developed by experience—a sensitivity to and desire for what is right as opposed to what is wrong. This can only be the result of determined and strenuous moral exercise on the part of each individual Christian (Heb 5:14).

Paul prays that the Philippians’ love may be a controlled and developing love for two reasons: (1) that they might know how to make the best choices possible and (2) that they themselves might be the best people possible.
εἰς τὸ δοκιμάζειν ὑμᾶς τὰ διαφέροντα, “in order that you may approve what is excellent.” Paul expresses the first of these purposes with a phrase that is yet another of Paul’s difficult expressions to understand. The verb δοκιμάζειν may mean either “to test or examine, to prove by testing,” as one would assay metals or test the genuineness of coins (Plato, Tim. 65c), or “to accept as proved” hence “to approve” (1 Cor 16:3). And the verb διαφέρειν from which τὰ διαφέροντα comes may mean either “to differ” (1 Cor 15:41) or “to be superior” (Matt 6:26; see BDAG and MM). Hence, the phrase has been variously understood to mean “in order that you may put to the proof things that differ” (Alford, Vincent, Weiss, on the basis of degree, as in Rom 1:28; 12:2; but see Holloway, Consolation in Philippians, for the misuse of these texts often appealed to) or “in order that you may accept as proved the things that really matter” (Meyer; Lightfoot; Houlden; Collange; Martin [1976]; Holloway, Consolation in Philippians). Since one must choose between these two interpretations, one should choose the latter, because to distinguish between things that differ significantly is a relatively easy task. But great powers of insight and perception are needed “to decide with sureness what things are really excellent and worthy of adoption in practice” (Plummer). To distinguish ex bonis optima, “best among the good” (Bengel, 427), is the truly difficult task. Hence, love sharpened by knowledge and discernment is for Paul the ultimate requirement for acquiring “a sense of what is vital” (MOFFATT) and choosing from among those things that in themselves may be morally indifferent. It should be noted, in passing, that the majority of the early Greek Fathers understood the distinguishing of v 10 to mean the ability
to distinguish between what was orthodoxy and what was heresy, what was true and what was false teaching (Vincent, Collange).

ἵνα ἦτε ἐλεικρινεῖς καὶ ἀπρόσκοποι εἰς ἡμέραν Χριστοῦ, “in order that you may be pure and harmless in preparation for the day of Christ.” Paul’s second goal in praying for the Philippians is that they might be the best people possible. This simple idea is expressed by three adjectives (vv 10b–11), each of which is filled with imagery. The first is ἐλικρινεῖς, usually translated “sincere” or “pure.” Although the etymology of this adjective is not certain (cf. Moulton et al., Grammar, 2:105), it appears to be derived from ἐλη (ήλιος), a word that means “the warmth and light of the sun,” and κρίνειν, “to judge” (Lightfoot). If this is so, then the picture it conjures up is of someone bringing something, a garment or the like, out into the sunlight in order to see clearly if it is unsoiled, free of stains. Through usage, therefore, the word came to mean “spotless,” and from Plato’s day (Phaed. 66a, 81c; Symp. 211e) onwards this idea of spotlessness or cleanliness in the physical realm moved over into the idea of purity in the moral realm. In the NT, ἐλικρινής, “pure,” and its cognates always denote moral purity (cf. 2 Pet 3:1 ; 1 Cor 5:8 ; 2:17; see F. Büchsel, TDNT 2:397–98; cf. also Gnilka, 52 n. 14; MM, 184). Hence, Paul’s goal for the Philippians is that they may be people of sincerity, honesty, and cleanliness of mind who live lives that are transparent before God and other people.

The second adjective is ἀπρόσκοποι, usually translated “blameless.” Derived as it is from προσκόπειν, a verb that can mean either “causing someone to stumble” or “stumbling” (A-S),
ἀπρόσκοπος, “blameless,” is equally as colorful a word as εἰλικρινής, “pure.” It pictures either people who carefully avoid (ἀ-, alpha privative) putting anything in another’s way that would cause that person to trip and fall, or people who are equally careful to avoid tripping over obstacles that may be placed in their own way. Chrysostom takes ἀπρόσκοπος in both senses (Beare). Yet in light of 1 Cor 10:32 (the only other place it is used in Paul’s writings), it seems best to understand the adjective here as “not causing another to stumble.” But the intransitive sense of “without stumbling” (Acts 24:16) is preferred by Wiles, Paul’s Intercessory Prayers, 211 (see Gal 5:4 for a Pauline parallel). Bockmuehl, however, makes a valid point that “Paul’s central concern is not primarily the readers’ relationship to outsiders but the wider issue of how they will appear in the presence of the coming Lord” (68–69). Paul’s aspiration for the Philippians, then, is that they may be harmless and that their conduct may give no offense either toward those within the church or to those outside it in light of the eschatological hope.

Paul reminds the Philippians with the accompanying phrase εἰς ἡμέραν Χριστοῦ, “in preparation for the day of Christ,” that the quality of their lives and the character of their behavior toward others are vital as preparation for the final judgment (cf. Matt 25:31–46; Michael). The day of Christ will be a day of scrutiny (see Comment on v 6 above), and it is Paul’s hope that the conduct of the Philippians will be such as to fend off or stand against (εἰς) possible punishment (cf. 1 Cor 3:10–15). The day of Christ thus “lends direction and seriousness to ethics” (Collange). But this call to the blameless life has an eschatological dimension,
whose fulfillment awaits the Parousia. Silva (62) recognizes this, yet it is misleading to conclude, as he does, that “believers may—no, must—be regarded as ‘pure and blameless’ in this life” (his italics).

πεπληρωμένοι καρπὸν δικαιοσύνης τὸν διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, “and be filled with the fruit of righteousness that Jesus Christ produces.” The third adjective Paul uses is a participle, πεπληρωμένοι, “be filled with,” with its accompanying direct object καρπὸν, “fruit.” Paul’s imagery here is drawn from an orchard setting. The Philippians are now graphically pictured as trees loaded down with, bearing a full crop of (πεπληρωμένοι) good fruit (καρπὸν δικαιοσύνης, “fruit of righteousness”) ready to be harvested.

What is this good fruit, lit. “the fruit of righteousness,” that Paul here has in view? Is it that “divine righteousness” about which he has so much to say elsewhere in his letters—that “right standing” with God that cannot be achieved by keeping the law (cf. Phil 3:4–9), that righteousness that is imputed, that righteousness that is God’s free, unearned gift, based solely on the work of Christ and obtained by faith (Collange, Caird)? The answer is no. Since the expression καρπὸν δικαιοσύνης, “fruit of righteousness” (δικαιοσύνης, a genitive of apposition, “fruit consisting of righteousness”), is a familiar biblical phrase for conduct pleasing to God (LXX : Prov 11:30 ; Amos 6:12 ; cf. Jas 3:12); since the participial phrase πεπληρωμένοι καρπὸν δικαιοσύνης, “be filled with the fruit of righteousness,” is parallel to the two previous adjectives ἐξιλικρινεῖς, “pure,” and ἀπρόσκοποι, “harmless”; and
since the previous adjectives describe the Philippians in relationship to others as being transparent before them and having no inclination to harm anyone in any way, it is but natural to see here an extension of this same idea. The “fruit of righteousness,” therefore, must be understood in an ethical sense as referring collectively to those “truly good qualities” (GNB) in the Philippians that result in all kinds of noble acts and worthwhile deeds done toward each other and their neighbors (Michael, Scott).

Paul makes it clear, however, that this crop of goodness is not self-generated, nor can it be. For the “fruit” he has in mind is supernatural and is produced through Jesus Christ: καρπὸν δικαιοσύνης τὸν διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, “fruit of righteousness that Jesus Christ produces.” Hence, although Paul uses the vocabulary of the OT, i.e., “fruit of righteousness” (Prov 11:30; Amos 6:12), he recognizes, as the OT writers seemed not to recognize, that no man is capable of producing this by himself. So in exactly the same way as he told the Galatians that love, joy, peace, and so on are the fruit (καρπῶς) of the Spirit (Gal 5:22), so here he tells the Philippians that their rich harvest of good deeds is in reality the product of Jesus Christ, the source of all life and goodness (cf. John 15:4; see Ziesler, Meaning of Righteousness, 151, 203; Martin [1976]; Reumann, Righteousness; O’Brien, 80).

εἰς δόξαν καὶ ἐπαινὸν θεοῦ, “and all this for the glory and praise of God.” Paul concludes this section with this phrase to indicate (1) that the Philippians are to recognize and openly acknowledge God’s power and grace at work in their community, and (2) that their neighbors are to do the same upon seeing
evidence of this power and grace in the way the Philippians live. For it should be clear to all that their love that abounds in knowledge and moral perception, their ability to choose the things that really matter, and their good qualities that result in an abundance of noble deeds point beyond themselves to God, God as the source and origin of goodness and truth, justice and mercy — ἐξ αὐτοῦ καὶ δι’ αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν τὰ πάντα, “Source, Guide, and Goal of all that is” (Rom 11:36 NEB).

The fact that this phrase, “for the glory and praise of God,” and others like it, seems to have been a common phrase of doxology regularly used to conclude Jewish prayers (2 Sam 22:50; Pss 21:13; 35:28; 41:13; Sir 39:10; Pr Man 15; 1QSb IV, 25; see Gnilka, Collange, Martin [1976], O’Brien) must not detract from its meaning here. Paul did not merely use it by habit, unthinkingly, to bring his prayer to a close; he uses it with full comprehension of what he wrote. God is the ultimate finality of the Christian life (Gnilka), and as such he alone is to be honored and praised by all. In exactly the same way that the life of Jesus and its influence on humankind were ordained for the glory of the Father (Phil 2:11; Fitzmyer, JBC 2:249), so the life of the Philippian community and its influence on its environs are also ordained for the glory and praise of God. Paul can see it no other way: as the master was, so must the servant be.

Explanation

This section (Phil 1:3–11) follows the conventions of first-century letter writing, as did the earlier section (1:1–2). It begins with the customary thanksgiving (1:3–8) and is followed by the prayer (1:9–
11). Although stylized in form, there is nothing perfunctory here about Paul’s words, nor any hint of insincerity in them. Rather, every word and phrase breathes out (1) the genuine gratitude of the apostle for the Philippians and their continued partnership with him in the gospel; (2) his utter confidence that they will not let up in this good work until the day of Christ Jesus, simply because God will not permit them to do so; and (3) his deep affection for them, generated in turn by their love for him—a love that is demonstrated by their stand with him and their continued support of him even while he is in prison defending and vindicating the gospel.

And his prayer, though brief, is profound in its implications; it is a prayer for a Christian community (1) that it might overflow in an intelligent and perceptive love, (2) that it might have the ability to recognize and choose the truly essential things of life, (3) that it might be pure and never the means of hurting others, (4) that it might allow Jesus Christ to generate through it all kinds of good deeds, and (5) that thus it might become a community committed to honoring and praising God, and at the same time the occasion of God’s being honored and praised by others.
II. News and Instructions (1:12–2:30)
A. News about Paul (1:12–26)

Bibliography

Translation

¹² Now I want you to know, my brothers [and sisters], that the things that happened to me have advanced the progress of the gospel [rather than retarded it]. ¹³ As a result it has become clear throughout the...
entire praetorium and to everyone else that I am a prisoner because I
am a Christian. ¹⁴ Furthermore, my being a prisoner has made most
of the brothers [and sisters] confident in the Lord, so that they dare all
the more to preach the gospel a without fear. ¹⁵ And yet some of
these preach Christ out of envy and a desire to stir up trouble; but
surely some do so out of good intentions. ¹⁶ Some preach Christ
because they love me. They know that I am put here to defend the
gospel. ¹⁷ Others preach Christ without sincerity, moved by selfish
ambition. They think that they will stir up trouble b because I am in
prison. c ¹⁸ What then comes of all this, except that d in every way,
whether with false motives or true, Christ is being preached? e This
surely makes me glad.

Yes, and I will continue to be glad, ¹⁹ for f I know that everything
that has happened to me will result in my release because of your
prayers and the help that comes from the Spirit of Jesus Christ. ²⁰ And
all of this is in harmony with my [own] eager hopeful expectation. g I
know, too, that I will not be put to shame by anything, but rather
that with full courage now, as always, Christ will be praised because of
me, whether by my life or by my death. ²¹ For to me, living is Christ
and dying is gain. ²² But if to live on in the body means fulfilling
some good purpose, then I cannot tell what I would choose. h ²³
Indeed, I am torn between two desires. I desire to break camp and to
be with Christ, which is a very much better thing for me, ²⁴ and [yet] I
desire to remain alive i in this body, which is a more urgent need
for you. ²⁵ Therefore, since I am convinced that this need exists, I
know that I am going to stay, to remain on with all of you in order
that you may make progress and be glad in the faith, ²⁶ and in order
that your boasting in Christ Jesus might increase because of me through my presence with you once again.

Notes

14.a. τὸν λόγον, “the word,” adopted by NA 27, is supported by Ψ 46 D 2 Majority Text and Marcion; τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ, “the word of God,” by Ἡ A B (D*) P Ψ 33 81 aliq. lat sy co Clement of Alexandria; τὸν λόγον κυρίου, “the word of the Lord,” by F G Cyprian. The latter two readings, as the translations show, reflect attempts to make clear the meaning of τὸν λόγον, “the word.”

17.b. For the difficult ἐγείρειν, “to raise up,” the Majority Text has the easier reading ἐπιφέρειν, “to bring to,” “to inflict upon.”

17.c. Except for the position of οἱ μὲν ... οἱ δὲ, “some... others,” the Majority Text puts v 17 before v 16 (cf. KJV), making the order here coincide with the order in v 15 but thereby destroying the chiastic structure of this section.

18.d. πλὴν ὅτι, “except that,” although supported by Ψ 46 A F 33 81 aliq., looks like a conflation of πλὴν, “except,” supported by the Majority Text, and ὅτι, “that,” supported by B sy p.

18.e. Ψ 46 adds ἀλλά, “but,” at this point, which likely is dittography for the ἀλλὰ that appears again almost immediately.

19.f. The γάρ, “for,” here is weakened to δὲ, “and, but,” in Ψ 46 B.
20.g. The compounded form ἀποκαραδοκία, “hopeful expectation,” found only in Christian writings, is returned to its earlier, better-known form καραδοκία, “hopeful expectation,” by only a few MSS.

22.h. 𝔓 46 B 2464 have the subjunctive αἱρήσωμαι, “I would choose,” for the indicative αἱρήσομαι, “I will choose,” which looks like an attempt to improve on the Greek.

24.i. A few MSS, including B, have the aorist infinitive ἐπιμένω, “to remain,” for the present infinitive ἐπιμένειν, “to be remaining.”

Form/Structure/Setting

Paul moves from the introductory sections, which contain the customary salutation, thanksgiving, and prayer, to the body of his letter (for a recent, clear statement of the structure of Paul’s letters, see Cousar, Letters of Paul, chap. 1).

The first subsection of Phil 1:12–14 is usually classified as the epistolary body opening, in which Paul expresses his concern. It comes in the rhetorical form of a “disclosure formula,” documented in the papyri as well as in Paul (as noted below). In the technical language of rhetoric (Ps.-Aristotle, Rhet. Alex. 1438a.22) it is called narratio, “narrative,” following on the exordium, and is the place in the letter wherein the facts of the “occasion” (causa) are set out. The narratio is brief and to the point, setting out the stasis, “basic issue,” in the question “whether the gospel has been preached in vain and whether as a result Paul has experienced his present circumstances in vain—and thus, by extension, whether the Philippians have sent their gifts in vain” (Bloomquist, Function of
Suffering, 123–24). But the last phrase has to be inferred without being explicitly stated in the text.

The second subsection of 1:15–18a is classified as partitio, “division [of the elements of the thesis],” raising the scholarly issue whether 1:15–18a is part of the letter’s body opening or body middle (on this see Bloomquist, Function of Suffering, 107–8, 124–25, who concludes that 1:15–18a is Paul’s partitio) consisting of a double propositio, “thesis,” incorporating, as we shall see, a chiasm to contrast two different kinds of preaching.

Vv 18b–26 form an argumentatio, “argument,” which opens with a confirmatio, “proof,” (1) setting Paul forth as an exemplum, “example” (Cicero, Inv. 1.32.52). This agrees with Quintilian’s statement that deliberative rhetoric is concerned with “to whom appeal to authority is made and to whom it applies” (Inst. 3.8.36). (2) The second half, consisting of confunctio, “execution [of the proof],” is 1:21–26, building on the premise of 1:20b–c and connecting in the form of “deliberation” to the choices before him (stated as life vs. death [1:21]) with the reminder to his readers that he apparently has a choice (1:22–24). (See Quintilian, Inst. 3.8.34, cited in Bloomquist, Function of Suffering, 126, who remarks that “the consequences of this choice are made known in 1:25–26.”)

This is the appropriate place to call attention to R. W. Funk’s contribution (“Apostolic ‘Parousia,’ ” 249–68). He notices Paul’s desire to visit the Philippians as a key item in this section. Paul expresses this desire with a statement of his travel plans, a notice dubbed “travelogue,” and since Funk, this has been acknowledged as an important part of the apostle's letter-writing strategy, aimed at
persuading the readers (see Doty, Letters, 36–37; White, Light, 219–20; Aune, New Testament in Its Literary Environment, 190–91). For Funk, the travelogue section is designed to convey Paul’s “apostolic presence” (or parousia) and so his authority to the recipients. In addition to writing as an apostolic teacher at a distance (Pol. Phil. 3:2) and sending envoys or messengers like Timothy and Epaphroditus (Phil 2:19–30), Paul mentions in prospect his hoped-for arrival (1:26). This is part of Paul’s evident persuasive strategy, seen most evidently in Phlm 21–22 as well as in Romans, which Funk cites. The appeals to the sender’s “presence” were first remarked on by Koskenniemi (Studien zur Idee und Phraseologie der griechischen Briefes, 38, quoted in Reed, Discourse Analysis, 205). The contrast that Koskenniemi alludes to as ἀπουσία/παρουσία, “absence/presence,” is found in Pol. Phil. 3:2 and implied in Paul in Phil 1:27.

A recent study by C. Croy (unpublished; see details in Cousar, 141) observes that in Phil 1:19–26 Paul uses the rhetorical trope called “feigned perplexity” (Gk. ἀπορία and διαπόρησις; Lat. dubitatio or addibutatio). This involves the rhetorical device of assuming uncertainty and posing an issue in question form as a way of strengthening or dramatizing an argument. Paul, Cousar remarks, is not in mortal danger, nor is he contemplating suicide in a mood of depression. He knows he will survive his imprisonment (as he concludes at 1:25–26), but he presents it as a possibility to enforce his point. This is a somewhat strained interpretation, we believe, and flies in the face of Paul’s serious contemplation of his martyrdom in 2:17.
Rhetorical criticism as a discipline is obviously a topic of complexity, evoking responses both positive (Watson, NovT 30 [1988] 57–88, whose analysis of Philippians is considered by Reed, Discourse Analysis, and idem, “Using Ancient Rhetorical Categories”) and cautious (Fee [1995], 14–17; see Introduction, Exegesis and Rhetorical Analysis). New ground is occasionally broken, as by Kittredge, Community and Authority, 61–65, when she distinguishes between rhetoric and epistolography, and applies this refinement to sections of the letter. She treats Phil 1:1–26 as an exordium, passing over Bloomquist’s subdivisions (in Function of Suffering; noted in the discussion above). She sees the function of these verses as captatio benevolentiae, that is, Paul’s bid to gain the goodwill of his audience, not only in praising them but also by calling attention to the divisions within the Christian community.

Paul moves from the introductory sections to the body of the letter by using a formula not found elsewhere among his other writings at this particular point of transition: γινώσκειν δὲ ὑμᾶς βούλομαι, “now I want you to know” (other like formulas appear in his epistles, but not in the same location or with the same function; cf. Rom 1:13 ; 11:25 ; 1 Cor 10:1 ; 1 Thess 4:13). This is an autobiographical section (see Lyons, Pauline Autobiography) that falls into three parts:

(1) Paul’s imprisonment and the progress of the gospel (1:12–14)
(2) Contrasting preachers of the gospel (1:15–18a)
(3) The apostle’s future (1:18b–26)
Paul here is either establishing a new model that was to be followed by later second- and third-century letter writers (for Paul’s formula does not show up in letters before the second century A.D.), or he and they both were adhering to a standard formula seemingly characteristic only of personal, intimate letters written in the first century or earlier. (This latter statement is the more likely. See Roller, Formular, 65, 467, and White, Form and Function, 121–22.) Hunt and Edgar collected and published letters dating from the second century A.D. onward in their Select Papyri. The following is but a single example taken from among many in their collection:

Apollinarius to Taesis, his mother and lady, many greetings. Before all, I pray for your health.... I wish you to know [γινώσκειν σε θέλω]... that I arrived in Rome in good health. (Select Papyri, 1:303; see also 1:307, 317, 327, 329, 341; Deissmann, Light from the Ancient East, 167, 178)

Invariably this formula directs attention to, and gives important information about, the safety, the activities, the feelings, and so on, of the sender. Paul, too, uses this formula in the customary way, classified as narratio, “a narration of facts that may help to remove any obstacles to the author’s purpose of persuading his audience” (Bockmuehl, 71), and to answer the readers’ concern over Paul’s personal fate (Bloomquist, Function of Suffering, 148). With this as an introduction, he begins to share personal information about himself. He does not tell his friends precisely what has happened to him (perhaps they already know the details, or to write the details in the letter’s prescript would be too dangerous, or maybe Timothy or Epaphroditus, who is on his way back to Philippi, will supply the information), but he informs them that everything is
working out the way he wants it to. Christians are becoming bolder; the gospel is being preached by all kinds of people, for right reasons and wrong; and he is glad. He also lets them in on some of the other emotions at work within him: a confidence that he will be released from prison, a fear of himself being shamed or bringing shame on Christ, a longing to be released from this body, but a still greater longing to live on, if by doing so he can be useful in helping them, his friends, to move joyfully forward in the faith.

One wishes that Paul had been more specific about the troubles he alludes to—what they were, when and where they happened to him, and so on—for historical reasons. But one cannot help but be grateful for the deep insights into the person of the apostle himself gained from the statements found here. It is a moving passage written by Paul that, though personal, does not focus attention upon him. Rather, it draws attention to his mission, to the progress of the gospel. All of Paul's anxiety is for the work in which he is engaged. As Scott (28) observes, “As long as it goes forward he cares nothing for himself.”

The emotions of joy, confidence (in the sense of παρρησία, “freedom of speech” [1:20]), as well as Paul's outlook for the future [1:25]; on “freedom of speech” see van Unnik, BJRL 44 [1962] 466–88), fear, desire, and so on that vibrate through this passage are heightened by Paul's rhetoric. (On a wider background see Cousar, Letters of Paul, chap. 2, and Porter and Olbricht, Rhetoric, expanding on Kennedy, New Testament Interpretation. Holloway, Consolation in Philippians, 103–8, analyzes Phil 1:12–18a as a piece of rhetoric offering five topoi of consolation: [1] one
must distinguish between things that matter and things that do not; [2] conventional misfortunes often actually advance the cause of things that really matter; [3] hardship enhances one's reputation; [4] misfortune offers an example to others [as in 1:14 ], as in the classic case of Socrates [Seneca, Ep. 24.4, 70.9]; [5] Socrates was able to praise his present fate with joy, as did Paul [ 1:18 plays on χαρά, “joy,” as Chrysostom notes].) Figures of speech abound: metaphor, alliteration, paronomasia, inclusio in the case of the term “progress” in 1:12 and 1:25, and especially chiasm. Paul chooses the rare word, or the compounded word, or plays with different words having similar meanings. He effectively makes his readers share his personal dilemma by skillful use of the rhetorical question, helping them focus on the alternatives by employing antitheses. Form, structure, and setting combine to show how deeply personal this letter to the Philippians is and how deeply Paul felt about the success of the gospel and the spiritual welfare of his friends.

Holloway (Consolation in Philippians, 111–15) has explored the rhetorical approach not only in Phil 1:12–18a but also in 1:18b–21, noting the difference that in the latter Paul not only informs the Philippians of his situation but begins to correct them. As part of his “consolation,” Paul explains that by “salvation” he means not his physical release but courage to glorify Christ. Perhaps their prayers needed to be directed to that end. In 1:22–26 he will go on to set the antithesis of death/life in perspective. If the life of Paul is spared, they will see him again, but “they may do so only by acknowledging their failure to have responded correctly to his imprisonment” (Holloway, Consolation in Philippians, 112). This strikes us as an overly subtle piece of exegesis.
Comment

12 γινώσκειν δὲ ὑμᾶς βούλομαι, “now I want you to know.” Although this expression is a trite formula of transition, apparently a standard part of personal letters of the first century, Paul nevertheless uses it here sincerely to inform his friends about himself and how he fares, or rather, about his mission and how it progresses. His use of γινώσκειν, “know,” here is a possible recall of ἐπιγνώσις, “deeper knowledge,” in Phil 1:9.

ἀδελφοί, “my brothers [and sisters].” Paul greets them affectionately as brothers and sisters (NRSV renders ἀδελφοί inclusively as “beloved,” but this loses the image of the family; see also Phil 3:1, 13, 17; 4:1, 8, 21; see J. Beutler, EDNT 1:29 for familiar language in early Christianity as in Hellenistic cults). He does so because he sees himself with them as belonging to the same family, closely and lovingly related to each other, not by birth but by faith in Jesus Christ and by commitment to doing the will of God (cf. Mark 3:34–35; see also MM, 9). ἀδελφοί, “brothers [and sisters],” is a favorite word with Paul (used by him 133 times), and its significance must not be forgotten. Later when he tells the Philippians about those who preach Christ for wrong reasons (Phil 1:15–18), he nevertheless calls them “brothers [and sisters]” (cf. 1:14 with 1:15). By doing so he says, in effect, that although he regrets their motives, he does not reject them. Osiek (38–39) has wise comments on the term as connoting equality and denying Paul’s androcentrism in this letter (cf. 4:2).
ὅτι τὰ κατ’ ἐμὲ μᾶλλον εἰς προκοπὴν τοῦ εὐαγγελίου ἐλήλυθεν, “that the things that happened to me have advanced the progress of the gospel [rather than retarded it].” Unfortunately, however, the apostle is silent about what exactly it was that had happened to him. He refers to it in the briefest possible way: τὰ κατ’ ἐμὲ, “my affairs” (cf. Col 4:7; cf. Eph 6:21). The thought is connected in a slightly different phrase in Phil 1:27. Whatever it was—whether a change of mind on Paul’s part from a desire for martyrdom to a determination to secure release for himself, a change of mind that may have angered and alienated his radical followers (Collange), or a lengthy prison term—it was something, however, that could rightly be assumed by some to injure the cause of the gospel and prompt Christians to remain silent out of pique or fear. (That Paul’s change of mind may have angered his followers is opposed by Fee [1999]. But Capper [TZ 49 (1993) 193–214] wants to see a rift between Paul and the Philippians. This is regarded as unlikely by Bockmuehl [72]. Turner’s proposal that the phrase “my affairs” relates to Paul’s lawsuit on the basis of Acts 25:14 [τὰ κατὰ Παῦλον, “Paul’s affairs”] is more appealing [Moulton et al., Grammar, 3:15.] But Paul writes to tell his friends at Philippi that the reverse of this was true. With the introduction of μᾶλλον, “rather,” he announces the unexpected (Omanson, BT 29 [1978] 446–48). Rumors to the contrary, Paul assures them that his “present situation,” which should have hindered the spread of the gospel, in fact caused it to spread more than (μᾶλλον) it otherwise would have without this hindrance.

Far from hurting the gospel’s cause, Paul’s “sufferings and restraints” (Lightfoot) actually helped it; far from slowing it down,
they really advanced it. προκοπήν, “progress,” is a metaphorical word that pictures “pioneers cutting a way before an army and so furthering its march” (Vincent, 16; G. Stählin, TDNT 6:703–19; Bonhöffer, Epiktet, 128; see also Sir 51:17 ; 2 Macc 8:8 ; 1 Tim 4:15 ; there are also Stoic parallels that may or may not illumine Paul’s word). On the term εὐαγγέλιον, “gospel,” in this letter see O’Brien, “Importance of the Gospel in Philippians.”

13–14 Proof that events have advanced the gospel lies in tangible results. Therefore, Paul now proceeds to name these results in the long sentence structured as follows: ὡστε ... γενέσθαι ... τολμᾶν, “as a result... to become... to dare.” These results are: (1) It has now become clear that Paul is a prisoner, not for any crime he committed, political or otherwise, but simply because he is a Christian (v 13). (2) Most of his fellow believers are inspired by his imprisonment to speak the word daringly and fearlessly (v 14).

(ὡστε, “as a result,” and the infinitives, as used here, contrary to classical idiom, indicate actual result, not mere potential or intended result [Moulton et al., Grammar, 3:136 (4)].)

13 ὡστε τούς δεσμούς μου φανεροὺς ἐν Χριστῷ γενέσθαι ἐν ὅλῳ τῷ πραίτωρίῳ καὶ τοῖς λοιποῖς πᾶσιν, “As a result it has become clear throughout the entire praetorium and to everyone else that I am a prisoner because I am a Christian.” Paul writes that his imprisonment is ἐν Χριστῷ, “in Christ.” The actual title “Christian” came later, though there are antecedents in Acts 11:26 ; 26:28 ; 1 Pet 4:16 preparing for the more common second-century nomenclature (cf. Pliny, Ep. 10.96, 97).
When Paul was arrested in Jerusalem (Acts 21) and shut away in prison in Caesarea (Acts 23–24), one could easily imagine that this was the end of his ministry, especially as his imprisonment dragged on month after month (Acts 24:27). But in the providence of God both the place of his imprisonment, the Praetorium of Herod (Acts 23:35), and the length of his imprisonment served to thrust the gospel up into higher levels of Roman society than it had ever reached before. Roman military officers, chiliarchs, and centurions (Acts 23:24, 26), as well as Roman soldiers, heard the gospel in Jerusalem and Caesarea. Two Roman governors, Felix and Festus, along with King Herod Agrippa and their wives heard Paul speak about faith in Christ Jesus (Acts 24:24–27; 25:1—26:32). One of these governors, over a span of two years, often sent for Paul to converse with him (Acts 24:26). News of this celebrated prisoner and his teaching must have spread through the Praetorium, the barracks, and out into the surrounding community. Thus, what appeared at first to be the fatal blow to the Christian mission, the arrest of Paul, turned out to be the means of its revitalization, the key to preaching the gospel before governors and kings (cf. Mark 13:9) and their staff personnel. It became evident, therefore, to those in all parts of the residence of the provincial governor of Caesarea (ἐν ὅλῳ τῷ πραιτωρίῳ, “throughout the entire praetorium”) and to all outside it (τοῖς λοιποῖς, “to everyone else”) that Paul was a prisoner because he was a Christian. (On the wide range of meanings of “praetorium” see BDAG; R. E. Brown, The Gospel according to John, AB 29A [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966] 845; Gnilka; Collange. On the location of this praetorium see Lohmeyer; contrast Reicke, “Caesarea, Rome,” 283; and see the
Christianity, therefore, gained public notice because of Paul’s bonds. His imprisonment produced notoriety as being for Christ (φανεροῦς ἐν Χριστῷ, “manifest in Christ”) and provided extraordinary opportunity for bearing witness to the saving power of Christ in the gospel (Lightfoot, Vincent, Lohmeyer, Benoit, Hendriksen).

14 καὶ τοὺς πλείονας τῶν ἀδελφῶν ἐν κυρίῳ πεποιθότας τοῖς δεσμοῖς μου περισσοτέρως τολμᾶν ἀφόβως τὸν λόγον λαλεῖν, “furthermore, my being a prisoner has made most of the brothers [and sisters] confident in the Lord, so that they dare all the more to preach the gospel without fear.” Paul’s affairs had yet a second result that advanced the gospel still more—the majority (πλείονας; cf. BDF §224[3]), though not all, of his fellow Christians (τῶν ἀδελφῶν, “brothers [and sisters]”) somehow gained confidence in the Lord or were infused with courage by the Lord because of Paul’s imprisonment, and they dared to preach more than they had ever dared to preach before. The device of not naming one’s friends and one’s opponents is here employed (see Marshall, Enmity in Corinth, 36–67). (It is best to take ἐν κυρίῳ, “in the Lord,” with πεποιθότας, “confident,” rather than with τῶν ἀδελφῶν, “the brothers [and sisters],” since by τῶν ἀδελφῶν Paul already means “the brothers [and sisters] in the Lord”; to add ἐν κυρίῳ, “in the Lord,” to it would be tautological. Cf. also Phil 2:24.)

Paul does not intend to suggest by this statement that these people, most likely his fellow Christian workers in Caesarea, had ever lacked courage or had ever failed in their preaching mission. His use of περισσοτέρως, “all the more,” merely indicates that
their courage and efforts, while continuing, were now heightened to a much greater degree. And these renewed efforts were directed toward preaching the word without fear. τὸν λόγον, “the word,” used here absolutely (cf. Gal 6:6; 1 Thess 1:6), but explained by its variants—“the word of God,” and “the word of the Lord” (see Note a)—refers to the totality of the Christian message (so Collange, 55 n. 3; G. Kittel, TDNT 4:114–19), against which all the hatred of the world concentrated itself. The “Tempter,” the “Opponent,” puts everything into action so as to make the gospel ineffective by intimidating those who proclaim it. The history of the church, then as later, was a history under the cross (Eusebius, Hist. eccl. 5, Prolegomenon). Stauffer notes the church’s response: “But the people of God withstood this general attack of God’s enemies in the fearlessness of those who fear God” (New Testament Theology, 187).

15–18a These verses form a unit, as is clear from the double chiasm (a crisscross structure) that binds them together (see fig. 1). Their purpose is to provide yet more information about Paul’s fellow Christians (ἀδελφῶν, “brothers [and sisters]” [v 14]) who had grown confident in the Lord, moving them to preach the gospel quite daringly (v 14). Paul says that they were all active in preaching, but surprisingly they were not all preaching with the right motives. Some were driven by jealousies, others by love and goodwill. There is no grammatical reason for viewing this section as an excursus independent of its context and especially independent of v 14, as several scholars suggest (Vincent; Barth; Dibelius; Hendriksen; Gnilka; Bockmuehl, 76: “a somewhat unexpected excursus”).
Figure 1. The double chiasm of Phil 1:15-18a

15 τινὲς μὲν κἀδιὰ φθόνον καὶ ἔριν, τινὲς δὲ κἀδὶ ἐὐδοκίαν τὸν Χριστὸν κηρύσσουσιν, “and yet some of these preach Christ out of envy and a desire to stir up trouble; but surely some do so out of good intentions.” τινὲς, “some,” which immediately begins v 15, is a pronoun whose antecedent most logically and naturally is taken to be ἀδελφοί, “brothers” (v 14). The καὶ, although it can be adversative, expressing the idea of contrast, setting one group off against another (Vincent), is nevertheless the common connective between nouns, adjectives, clauses, and so on (Moulton et al., Grammar, 3:334; BDAG), sometimes expressing surprise at something unexpected or noteworthy, and can be translated “and yet” (cf. Matt 3:14; 6:26; 1 Cor 5:2; Heb 3:9). Paul’s language, therefore, indicates that in vv 15–18a he has in mind some of those “brothers [and sisters]” he mentioned in v 14. Were it otherwise, surely he would have stated his intent more clearly. For “it would have been easy for Paul, had he so desired, to say, ‘These indeed act in such and such a way, but there are other preachers who act in a different manner’ ” (Michael, 37). True, it is difficult to imagine that Christian brothers and sisters, “made confident in the Lord,” could be prompted to act by motives of envy and selfish ambition. But the history of the Christian church makes plain that such a contradiction, though distressing (καὶ, “and yet”), is not rare. Indeed, in the rabbinic
tradition, rabbis similarly believed that all study and practice of Torah ought to be done lišmāh, “for its own sake” (m. ḮʾAbot 6:1) and not for selfish reasons or out of selfish motives (Bockmuehl, 78).

Whatever Paul might say later about his “brothers [and sisters],” he affirms first and foremost that all of them preach Christ (τὸν Χριστόν). To emphasize this fact he uses three different verbs successively and synonymously— λαλεῖν, “speak” (v 14), κηρύσσειν, “preach” (v 15), and καταγγέλλειν, “proclaim” (vv 17–18). Christ himself, or the message (λόγος) about Christ, including the account of his death, burial, and resurrection (cf. Acts 4:29–31 ; 1 Cor 1:23 ; Col 1:27–28 ; 4:3), is the gospel that they were preaching, and this pleased the apostle (v 18a). The content of their message was sound. Therefore, it is impossible to say with Lightfoot that the group whose motives Paul questioned was of the Judaizing party. For the Judaizers preached a different gospel, which to Paul really was not a gospel at all. Rather, to him it was a distortion of the gospel of Christ and contrary to the gospel he approved and preached (Gal 1:6–9 ; 2 Cor 11:4, 13–15).

16–17 οἱ μὲν ἐξ ἀγάπης, εἰδότες ὅτι εἰς ἀπολογίαν τοῦ εὐαγγελίου κεῖμαι, οἱ δὲ ἐξ ἐριθείας τὸν Χριστὸν καταγγέλλουσιν, οὐχ ἀγνώς, οἷόμενοι θλῖψιν ἐγείρειν τοῖς δεσμοῖς μου, “some preach Christ because they love me. They know that I am put here to defend the gospel. Others preach Christ without sincerity, moved by selfish ambition. They think that they will stir up trouble because I am in prison.” How Paul was able to judge the motives of these two groups he does not disclose. The phrase οἱ μὲν ... οἱ δὲ,
“some... others,” is the simple way of denoting contrast, though Osiek (40) calls attention to “the others” as a piece of set rhetoric (Phil 2:21) and appeals to Ign. Smyrn. 6:2. But Paul confidently asserts that one group preached Christ motivated by “good intentions” out of “benevolence” (εὐδοκία [v 15]) and from love (ἀγάπη [v 16]). (εὐδοκία, “benevolence,” corresponds to the Heb. rāṣôn, but it is not clear who is the agent of the goodwill here. Is it God, rather than the Philippians? So BDAG, O’Brien, 100, and Bockmuehl, 79, who think that it is the divine favor, appealing to the Greek construction of διὰ + accusative [“because of” or “for the sake of” the divine will], not genitive [“through” the goodwill of the Philippians toward Paul]. See BDF §222; Moule, Idiom-Book, 54–55.) Both of these terms are relational and mean that such attitudes as they describe are directed toward someone. Here Paul, not Christ, is the object (but see Bockmuehl, 79). Some of these brothers preached Christ simply because they had feelings of goodwill toward Paul, knowing that, irrespective of the consequences, this is what Paul wanted them to do. They knew for a fact (εἰδότες) that the apostle had been commissioned (κεῖσθαι, “to be appointed,” “to be destined”; see Luke 2:34 ; 1 Thess 3:3 ; O’Brien, 101 n. 16; the word has military connotations, like a soldier posted on duty, a thought that would not be lost on readers in a Roman colony) by God to provide a full defense (ἀπολογίαν) for the gospel (v 16). They knew also that if, because of their preaching, he should more quickly or more frequently be brought before the tribunal to defend himself, this would only serve a good end—namely, to provide a forum for the defense of the gospel. Therefore, they were not hesitant to speak the word boldly.
For they worked together with the apostle in a spirit of “understanding and collaboration” (Collange, 57; cf. Dibelius, Bonnard).

But Paul also asserts that others preached Christ for less noble reasons: φθόνον καὶ ἐριν, “envy and a desire to stir up trouble” (v 15; see Winter, Seek the Welfare of the City, 94–95), and ἔριθείας, “selfish ambition” (v 17; see BDAG, who relate this word not to ἕρις, “strife,” but to ἕρthroς, which originally meant a “day laborer,” then “sordid work” of any kind, then in politics “a hired canvasser,” and finally, “a partisan worker” or a “partisan spirit”). What does this mean? Were these preachers really directing their hostilities against Roman authority rather than against Paul? Was their aim to stir up strife by preaching and thus incur the anger of Rome in order to bring down upon themselves and Paul suffering, persecution, and even martyrdom in the belief that tribulation (θλίψις) was necessary to hasten the end of the world and the return of Christ (Hawthorn, ExpTim 62 [1950–51] 316–17)? Or were they preachers who were motivated by envy and strife against the Jews, whose intrigues had landed Paul in jail? Were they using the preaching of the gospel as a counterattack against these Jews, preaching out of a contentious spirit that was aimed at arousing friction (θλίψιν ἐγείρειν, “stir up trouble”) against them by Paul’s bonds, not at adding affliction to his bonds (Synge, 25)?

These proposals are attempts to ease what otherwise is the contradiction of Christian brothers and sisters behaving in a less than Christian way toward an apostle of Jesus Christ. But these answers cannot be correct, since (1) similar to “goodwill” and
“love,” the words “envy,” “strife,” and “selfish ambition” are relational words; (2) these latter words are exactly parallel to the former words; and (3) Paul was the object of those former words —“love” and “goodwill”—and therefore he is also the object of the latter words. People reacted against Paul himself and thought to hurt him by their preaching.

As to the identity of this second group, there is no certainty (see overview of options in O’Brien, 100–115). Helpfully, Cousar (149) asks: Is the issue one of personal animosity, anti-imperial politics, or theological emphases? Could it be that these were Christians who believed that for an apostle of the cross martyrdom was the true vocation, and were they thus disappointed with Paul “for the steps he [had] taken to secure his imminent release” (Collange, 56)? (If the place of the captivity is Rome, however, it is hard to see what Paul could have done to secure that release. And if he is in Caesarea, why did he not use his Caesarem appello, “I appeal to Caesar,” device earlier?) Or were they Christians with a divine-man theology, who believed that any sign of weakness on Paul’s part, such as imprisonment, showed that he knew nothing of the triumphant power of the Christ he presumed to serve? (This seems intended in 2 Cor 10–13, set in Paul’s Ephesian period.) Thus they acted in a hostile manner toward him because to them he had placed the Christian message in jeopardy by his inability to throw off his chains. They were his rivals because, contrary to him, they had a mission strategy that preached a gospel of success, and they proved their claim by triumphing over all opposition (Jewett, NovT 12 [1970] 362–90). More recently scholars have seen one of Paul’s greatest points of contention with his opponents in his
understanding of the Christian message and messenger as “weak in Christ” (for representative studies see Black, Paul, Apostle of Weakness; Käsemann, Legitimität des Apostels; Schütz, Paul and the Anatomy of Apostolic Authority). The relevance of this setting in Paul’s ministry is discussed in R. P. Martin, 2 Corinthians, WBC 40 (Waco, TX: Word, 1986) li–lxi, drawing on J. Collange, Enigmes de la deuxième épître de Corinthiens: Études exegetique de 2 Cor 2:14 —7:4, SNTSMS 18 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1972). Irrespective of the difficulty one faces in identifying this group of opponents precisely, it seems clear that it was made up of people who opposed Paul out of personal animosity and rivalry. And as Barth (29) has pointed out, the grounds for such feelings were manifold, for “there were ‘Christian’ persuasions which were so publicly and vigorously combatted by Paul that their supporters can hardly be blamed if they saw in him more their opponent than their Christian ‘brother.’ ”

18a τί γάρ; πλὴν ὅτι παντὶ τρόπῳ, εἴτε προφάσει εἴτε ἀληθείᾳ, Χριστὸς καταγγέλλεται, καὶ ἐν τούτῳ χαίρω, “What then comes of all this, except that in every way, whether with false motives or true, Christ is being preached? This surely makes me glad.” Why Paul felt it necessary to disclose to the Philippians the weaknesses of some of the brothers and sisters who were with him in Caesarea is a mystery. Was it simply because he could not contain his own vexation at this personal attack? Was his spirit “fretful as he wrote”? Does the splendid magnanimity of v 18 blind one to “the signs of annoyance” in vv 15, 16, and 17 and make it difficult to see a man who was unable to curb his agitated mind? Was Paul so hurt that “words escape him which in a calmer mood he would
scarcely have uttered” (Michael, 45)? Perhaps so; for Paul, though an apostle, was human and as susceptible to the range of human emotions as anyone else. The fact, however, that he could conquer his indignation with forgiveness and could replace his irritation with joy (v 18) provides a model for Christian living and thus is a sufficient reason for allowing this exposure of the darker side of Christian conduct to stand.

Yet it is more likely that Paul writes about these people who had wrong motives to make clear that such people do exist even within the Christian community and therefore the Philippian Christians should not be taken by surprise if such should arise in their midst. At the same time he wishes to show that the nature of these base motives is truly malevolent. For the particular words Paul chose to describe them—φθόνος, “envy,” ἔρις, “strife,” and ἐριθεία, “selfish ambition”—are words frequently found in lists of other vices that always adversely affect, even endanger, the life of the church (Rom 1:29; 2 Cor 12:20; Gal 5:20–21; cf. 1 Tim 6:4). Therefore, although Paul rejoices over the objective fact that men preach Christ (v 18a: ἐν τούτῳ χαίρω, “this surely makes me glad”), he cannot restrain himself from pointing out the subjective motives, false (πρόφασις) or true (ἀληθεία), that prompt people to do so. It is not to be imagined, however, that Paul took any delight in those who preached with impure motives (Οὐχ ἄγνως, “without sincerity” [v 17]) or who used their preaching as a pretext for attacks on himself. His joy was in knowing that the Christian gospel was being preached. The how of preaching is not the object of Paul’s joy; the fact of the preaching is. For when the word of God is preached, it overcomes all hindrances and moves on to its
goal; its contents are irresistible (Isa 55:10–11 ; 1 Kgs 2:27 ; 13:2, 5, 9, 17, 32 ; 2 Kgs 1:17 ; 9:36 ; 22:16). The power of the gospel, therefore, does not depend on the character of the preacher.

18b ἀλλὰ καὶ χαρῆσομαι, “Yes, and I will continue to be glad.” καὶ coupled with ἀλλὰ makes ἀλλὰ progressive and not adversative, to be translated, “and what is more,” rather than “but” (see Thrall, Greek Particles, 11–16; BDF §448[6]). Thus ἀλλὰ moves the letter on to a new topic: “I am glad because Christ is being preached. And in addition I will be glad for still another reason.” This reason Paul discusses in vv 19–20, and it has to do with his expected fate as a prisoner.

19 οἶδα γάρ, “for I know.” Paul’s future joy is based on (γάρ, “for”) what he knows (οἶδα, “I know”). To some interpreters, εἰδέναι, “to know,” as distinguished from γινώσκειν, “to know,” is “the knowledge of intuition or satisfied conviction or absolute knowledge” (Vincent, 23; cf. NEB : “knowing well”). But the usage of these two verbs does not justify such fine distinctions (cf. John 21:17 ; 1 Cor 8:1–3 ; 2 Thess 1:8). Although Paul prefers εἰδέναι to γινώσκειν, he nevertheless uses them synonymously.

How Paul came to know what he did is not completely clear. Information about his future state may have filtered down to him through friends in high places. More likely, however, his knowledge was simply a deep inner conviction based on the words of Scripture. Paul’s words τοῦτό μοι ἀποβήσεται εἰς σωτηρίαν, “this will turn out for my deliverance” (RSV), are exactly the words of Job (Job 13:16 LXX ; see Schaller, ZNW 71 [1980] 21–26, and for later rabbinic parallels see Bockmuehl, 83). Although this OT text is
not introduced as a quotation, and it may not have been noticed as such by the Philippians (Gnilka; Hays, Echoes, 23–29, uses this allusion to Job as a test case for intertextuality), surely the verbal identity between the two passages strongly indicates that Paul understood and interpreted his situation in terms of Job’s experience. As Job was ultimately “saved” from his plight and vindicated, so he, Paul, would ultimately be saved from his plight and vindicated. (Does he mean vindicated in an earthly court? Or at the heavenly one? This question can only be decided once we have considered the sense of σωτηρία, “deliverance, salvation”; see below.) Thus, he was able to say “I know” with a conviction originating in sacred Scripture.

ὅτι τοῦτό μοι ἀποβήσεται εἰς σωτηρίαν, “that everything that has happened to me will result in my release.” There are two things here that Paul knew, each of which is introduced by the conjunction ὅτι, “that”: (1) that things would turn out well for him (v 19) and (2) that he, on the one hand, would not be ashamed and Christ, on the other hand, would be honored (v 20a).

The first of these convictions is expressed in ambiguous language, ὅτι τοῦτό μοι ἀποβήσεται εἰς σωτηρίαν, which the RSV translates with equal ambiguity, “this will turn out for my deliverance.” By τοῦτο, “this,” Paul refers to all the things that had happened to him, good and bad, “perplexities and annoyances” and so on, that had come to him as the result of his preaching the gospel. But what does Paul mean by σωτηρία, “deliverance”? It is true that σωτηρία is the special word that he uses to refer to the ultimate “salvation” that people will experience at the last judgment
Thus, many interpreters feel compelled to give to σωτηρία its full and final eschatological sense here. They insist that Paul means he is confident that he will endure to the end and so be saved in the day of Christ (Beare, Gnilka, Houlden, Collange; see W. Foerster, TDNT 7:992–94). And so he will be vindicated before God (Bockmuehl, 83). σωτηρία also has a lesser meaning, especially in the papyri, with the general sense of “health” or “well-being” (MM, 622). Such an understanding of σωτηρία for the present passage shows up in several modern translations: “all this will turn out for my highest welfare” (GOODSPEED), “my good” (LB), “my soul’s health” (KNOX). σωτηρία seems also to have the meaning of “vindication,” and thus some interpreters suggest that σωτηρία here is “equivalent to [Paul’s] vindication at court. He hopes that his trust in God will be honored and his witness to divine faithfulness will be attested by the turn of events” (Martin [1976], 75).

Several things, however, argue for the fact that when Paul spoke of σωτηρία here he had in mind his release from prison: (1) The primary meaning of σωτηρία is deliverance from impending death (BDAG). (2) Although Paul does indeed use σωτηρία regularly for the ultimate cosmic saving act of God to be completed at the turn of the ages or the end of the world, it is wrong to say he must always give this meaning to the word (cf. 2 Cor 1:6, where “salvation” coupled with “encouragement” seems simply to refer to the general welfare or profit of others; and the use of σωτηρία in Acts 27:34 in a speech of Paul related by Luke). (3) Paul, seeing in the Job story parallels to his own sufferings and the
misunderstandings of these sufferings by others, and knowing that God saved Job out of all his troubles and vindicated him, was led to the conviction that he too would be “saved,” released from prison, and vindicated in the eyes of Jews and Romans. Yet a vindication in Yahweh’s court seems also to be included, and Bockmuehl (83) appositely cites 2 Tim 4:18: “The Lord will rescue me from every evil work and bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom!” (Bockmuehl’s translation). (4) Finally, Paul repeats this same verb οἶδα, “I know,” later on when he states, “I know that I am going to stay and remain on with all of you” (vv 25–26). He uses an even stronger verb when he assures the Philippians that he will soon come to see them (Phil 2:24). How could this be, unless he knew that his release was certain?

διὰ τῆς ὑμῶν δεήσεως, “because of your prayers.” Paul believed that some important things would contribute to his being set free from prison. One of these was prayer (δέησις). As he prayed for the Philippians (see Comment on Phil 1:4 for the meaning of δέησις), so he now depends on them to pray in his behalf. Whenever Paul asks the church to pray for him, it is that he might be delivered from disobedient and evil people (Rom 15:30–31; 2 Thess 3:2), that he might be released from prison and brought safely again to his friends (Phlm 22), that he might remain true to God in the face of opposition (2 Cor 1:9–11; 1 Thess 5:25), and that his ministry might be effective (Col 4:3; 2 Thess 3:1–2). Paul knew that God effected changes in history through prayer, and therefore he counted heavily on his churches to carry out this ministry on his behalf.
καὶ ἐπιχορηγίας τοῦ πνεύματος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, “and the help that comes from the Spirit of Jesus Christ.” Another thing that Paul believed would contribute to his release is phrased in a way difficult to understand, which has been translated as “the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ” (KJV). The difficulty arises from the ambiguity of the genitives Paul uses here, an ambiguity that is perpetuated in the translation of these genitives into English by the preposition of —“of the Spirit of Jesus Christ” (ον πνεῦμα, “spirit,” and its ambiguity in Paul see Osiek, 41–42). There are at least two possibilities of interpretation for the first of these genitives, τοῦ πνεύματος, “of the Spirit.” On the one hand, τοῦ πνεύματος could be an objective genitive, meaning that the Spirit is the object of the action implied in the noun ἐπιχορηγίας, “supply” (Fee [1995], in support, criticizes translations that substitute “help” for this word). Such an interpretation leads naturally to a translation such as MOFFATT: “The outcome of all this... will be my release as I am provided with the Spirit” (cf. NEB). On the other hand, as adopted in the Translation, τοῦ πνεύματος could be a subjective genitive. So understood, the Spirit is not that which is given but is the giver of the needed help or assistance to bring about his release. “The help which comes from the Spirit” (GNB) or “the help given by the Spirit” (NIV) are the logical translations from such an interpretation. This idea of the Spirit bringing assistance to Christians, especially as they bear witness to their faith when they are brought before judges, is an idea firmly anchored in early Christianity, although not particularly in Paul (Collange; except Gal 3:5; cf. Mark 13:11; Matt 10:20; Luke 12:12).
The other difficulty is in understanding the genitive Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, “of Jesus Christ.” It could be a genitive of apposition, indicating that “the Spirit of Jesus Christ” means “the Spirit that is Jesus Christ” (cf. Rom 8:1–11). It could also be a subjective genitive, meaning that Jesus Christ is the giver of the Spirit, in accord with the promise he made to his disciples (Luke 12:11–12; cf. John 16:7). Or since in Paul the Spirit is usually said to be given by God the Father, not by Jesus Christ (1 Cor 6:19; 2 Cor 1:21–22; 5:5; Eph 1:17; Gal 3:5; 1 Thess 4:8), and the Spirit is referred to alternatively as the Spirit of Christ (Rom 8:9; 1 Pet 1:11) and the Spirit of his Son (Gal 4:6), perhaps it is best to understand this expression as just another name for the Holy Spirit, the Spirit who animated Jesus in his human life and who, in the risen Christ, is the life principle of believers (Vincent; cf. 1 Cor 15:15; and see also E. Schweizer, TDNT 6:415–36; Dunn, Jesus and the Spirit, 318–26). The implied Trinitarian teaching is to be noted (see Fee [1999], 740–43).

κατὰ τὴν ἀποκαραδοκίαν καὶ ἔλπιδα μου, “And all of this is in harmony with my [own] eager hopeful expectation.” Paul’s confident conviction that he would be released from prison harmonized with (κατά and the accusative) his own aspirations (τὴν ἀποκαραδοκίαν καὶ ἔλπιδα μου, “my [own] eager hopeful expectation”). In effect he told the Philippians, “Things will turn out just as I expected and hoped!” The word Paul used to describe his expectation, ἀποκαραδοκία, is a rare word, perhaps coined by him and used elsewhere in the NT only in Rom 8:19. Etymologically it envisions both an outstretched head (κάρα, “head,” and the Ionic
δέκεσθαι, “to stretch”) and the averting of the eyes from (ἀπό) other objects. As it has been explained, ἀποκαραδοκία is “the concentrated hope which ignores other interests... and strains forward as with outstretched head” (Kennedy; see also BDF §119[1]; G. Delling, TDNT 1:393; G. Bertram, ZNW 49 [1958] 264–70). ἐλπίς, “hope,” although regularly used by Paul to describe the Christian’s hope for the eternal future (Gnilka; R. Bultmann, TDNT 2:530–33), is here used with the lesser meaning of simple human expectation but based on the conviction of God’s sovereign purpose, since he is God (cf. Rom 4:18 ; 1 Cor 9:10 ; cf. Acts 16:19). Since these two nouns are bound together with only one article (τὴν ἀποκαραδοκίαν καὶ ἐλπίδα μου), it is possible to treat them as a hendiadys and translate “my [own] eager hopeful expectation” (cf. NEB).

Why was Paul so eager (and evidently confident) to be released from prison and so filled with the expectation that he would be? Certainly the reasons were not because he could not stand suffering, although he might wish to be freed from it (cf. 2 Cor 4:17), or that he feared death (cf. Phil 1:21–23). Rather, release would demonstrate that he was innocent of any crime and especially prove that the gospel he preached was not a subversive element in society aimed against the Roman government. Release would mean not only his vindication but that of the gospel as well. Also to be included is the desire to receive eschatological vindication coram Deo, “before God” (Barth). The contrast between “being put to shame” and “being exalted” paves the way for what follows and is in line with the Psalms of lament in the OT (Pss 6:10 ; 22:5 ; 25:2, 3 ; 31:1, 17 ; 53:5).
ὅτι ἐν οὐδενὶ αἰσχυνθῆσομαι, “I know, too, that I will not be put to shame by anything.” Paul knew, then, that he would be set free. Yet it is a calculation based on his faith in God, not in a turn of events that he can somehow engineer and control. This is the first thing of which he was convinced (οἶδα ὅτι, “I know that” [vv 19–20a]). The second conviction he had is also introduced in the same way, with ὅτι, “that” (v 20b). Most commentators (but see Michaelis) and translators, however, attach this ὅτι clause with ἐλπίδα, “hope,” and not with οἶδα, “I know,” making it the object hoped for rather than the object known: “my hope is that I will not be ashamed” rather than “I know that I will not be ashamed.” The majority notwithstanding, it seems more correct to link this second ὅτι, “that,” with οἶδα, “I know,” and not with ἐλπίδα, “hope”: (1) It should be clear from the discussion above that the prepositional phrase κατὰ τὴν ἀποκαραδοκίαν καὶ ἐλπίδα μου, “in harmony with my [own] eager hopeful expectation,” is grammatically dependent on τὸῦτό μοι ἀποβῆσεται εἰς σωτηρίαν, “everything that has happened to me will result in my release” (v 19), and therefore it follows that Paul’s hope is not that he will not be ashamed but rather that he will be set free. (2) Many times in the NT Ἐλπίς, “hope,” is used absolutely, that is, without any object, when it refers to the Christian hope (Acts 2:16 ; Rom 5:5 ; 8:24 ; 1 Cor 13:13 ; 2 Cor 3:12 ; Col 1:5 ; and so on). But when Ἐλπίς, “hope,” does have an object, that object is almost always expressed by the genitive case (Acts 16:19 ; 23:7 ; 26:6 ; Rom 5:2 ; 2 Cor 10:15 ; Gal 5:5 ; Col 1:27 ; 1 Thess 5:8 ; Titus 1:2 ; 3:7), even when the object is a verbal form (1 Cor 9:10). Ἐλπίς, “hope,” followed by ὅτι, “that,” to express the object of hope occurs only once in the NT (Rom
Thus, to take the ὅτι, “that,” here in Phil 1:20. with ἐλπίδα, “hope,” although possible, is not very probable. (3) Finally, the ideas that follow ὅτι, “that,” namely, that Paul will not be ashamed and that Christ will be glorified, so partake of the nature of certainty for the apostle that οἶδα, “I know,” is a more appropriate term to govern these ideas than ἐλπίς, “hope.”

The verb αἰσχύνεσθαι, “be ashamed,” is rarely used in the NT and only twice by Paul, here and in 2 Cor 10:8. αἰσχύνεσθαι, however, is found often in the Psalms, in the prophetic literature, and in the documents of the Dead Sea community (LXX Pss 24:3; 34:26–27; 39:15–17; 68:7; 118:80; Isa 1:29; 45:17; 49:23; 50:7; Jer 12:13; Zeph 3:11; 1QH IV, 23–24; V, 35; IX, 20; 1QS IV, 23; Odes Sol. 29:1, 11). These texts describe the humble pious, who, in the proper relationship of trust in God, count on him not to let them be disgraced, disappointed, disillusioned, or brought by him into judgment and thus be covered with shame before their enemies (see R. Bultmann, TDNT 1:189–90). Hence, when Paul says “I know, too, that I will not be put to shame by anything,” his words may mean that since (1) in the final analysis only God has the power to cover anyone with disgrace (αἰσχυνθήσομαι, “I will not be put to shame,” a “divine passive”; cf. Jeremias, New Testament Theology, 1, 9) and (2) those who trustingly wait for God will never be confounded (LXX Ps 24:3; Isa 49:23) and (3) Paul's own relationship with God was one of trusting dependence, he knew that in no way would it be possible for God to bring shame down upon him by disappointing his expectations. Or these words, “I will not be put to shame,” may mean that because of Paul's obedient trust in God, he could count on the fact that God would
never permit the “false brethren” who challenged his conduct to cover him with disgrace or force him to repent in shame for the course of action he had chosen (Collange). Or, as is more likely, these words may mean that Paul, having his release from prison (σωτηρία) in mind, realizing that he must first be brought to trial, and knowing that he must then give an account (ἀπολογίαν) of his involvement with the gospel (Phil 1:7, 16), viewed this trial not as a cause for personal embarrassment or as a threat to his life, but as an unexpected but welcomed platform for proclaiming the gospel.

ἀλλ’ ἐν πάσῃ παρρησίᾳ ώς πάντοτε καὶ νῦν μεγαλυνθῆσεται Χριστὸς ἐν τῷ σώματί μου, “but rather that with full courage now, as always, Christ will be praised because of me.” Instead of seeing the gospel as something that would bring shame upon him personally, Paul could say now, as he had always said before: “I am not ashamed [ οὐ ... ἐπαισχύνομαι ] of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation [ εἰς σωτηρίαν ]” (Rom 1:16 NRSV); and again, “since, then, we have such a hope, we act with great boldness [ πολλῇ παρρησίᾳ ]” (2 Cor 3:12 NRSV). It is with this same vocabulary and with this same ring of confidence that Paul now tells the Philippians, “I know, too, that I will not be put to shame by anything [ ἐν οὐδενὶ αἰσχυνθῆσομαι ], but rather that with full courage [ ἐν πάσῃ παρρησίᾳ ]” (v 20b) I will speak out not only in my own defense but “in the defense of the gospel [ εἰς ἀπολογίαν τοῦ εὐαγγελίου ]” (v 16). His trial before the Roman tribunal, therefore, could never succeed in embarrassing him but could only provide him with the occasion for his most important public testimony to Christ. παρρησία, “public boldness,” has a
spectrum of meanings, extending from “free and open speech” to “courage, forthrightness” (“telling it like it is,” in Osiek’s colloquial translation [43]). Both ends of the spectrum seem to be included here (van Unnik, BJRL 44 [1962] 466–88; Morrow, “Parrhēsia in the Pauline Epistles”). The phrase ὡς πάντοτε καὶ νῦν, “now, as always,” is, as Bockmuehl (85–86) remarks, easily overlooked. He extracts the maximum theological value (“the divinely significant Now”) from what appears as an innocuous phrase, with quotes from a list as far apart as Horace (1.11.8: carpe diem, “seize the day”) and movie actor Robin Williams.

Thus Paul can proceed to say “Christ will be praised because of me” (v 20b), i.e., because of my open witness to his person and power. The verb μεγαλυνθήσεται, “will be praised,” literally means “to make [something] large,” such as increasing the number of one’s enemies (Thucydides 5.98) or the size or length of the tassels on one’s garments (Matt 23:5). But when Paul uses this verb here, he does not mean that his trial will succeed in making Christ greater; rather he means that it will serve to make Christ, who is great, known to a larger audience. Thus many more will praise him who otherwise would have been silent, having known little or nothing about him. (For the meaning of μεγαλύνειν as “praise” see Ps 68:31; Sir 43:31; Luke 1:46; Acts 10:46.)

Paul uses the passive form of the verb μεγαλύνειν with Christ as the subject (μεγαλυνθήσεται Χριστός, “Christ will be praised”), not merely for rhetorical purposes to balance one passive (αἰσχυνθήσομαι, “I will [not] be put to shame”) with another (μεγαλυνθήσεται, “he will be praised”) and to keep the sounds
agreeably similar, nor because he found this pair of verbs in their passive forms coupled together in the Psalms—“May all those who rejoice together in my calamities be ashamed [αἰσχυνθεῖσαν].... Let the Lord be praised [μεγαλυνθήτω]” (LXX Ps 34:26–27; cf. Ps 39:15–17; 1QH IV, 23–24)—but because he cannot bring himself to say “I will magnify Christ.” With characteristic humility he makes Christ the subject of the verb and himself the means by which the action of the verb will be achieved. Paul wants his whole life (σῶμα, “body”; see E. Schweizer, TDNT 7:1065–66; Gundry, “Sōma,” argues for the notion of physicality in Paul’s use of this term; σῶμα as the “whole person” reflects the Heb. and Aram. bāṣār, 

εἴτε διὰ ζωῆς εἴτε διὰ θανάτου, “whether by my life or by my death.” It is difficult to see in this phrase anything more than an emphatic, perhaps stock, expression that means “total” or “all-encompassing” (cf. Rom 8:38; 1 Cor 3:22; see also 2 Sam 15:21; Sir 11:14; 37:18), somewhat like the modern expressions “for dear life” or “on your life.” The apostle has already stated that he knows he will be released from prison (v 19), and in a moment he will state with confidence that he will go on living and remain with the Philippians for their spiritual welfare (v 25). Thus this phrase carries in it no suspense regarding the outcome of his trial (Moule), nor
does it suggest the possibility of death as an alternative to life as a means of bringing glory to Christ (Hendriksen, Gnilka, Martin [1976], and most commentaries; see also Bigaré, AsSeign 56 [1974] 9–14). Rather, the expression simply means that Paul’s entire existence, as that of a responsible human being (σῶμα), is aimed at one goal, that of bringing praise to Christ.

21–24 The mention of these words, “life or death,” triggers a reverie within Paul on the subject of living or dying. The contrast is one familiar in Greek rhetoric (Vollenweider, ZNW 85 [1994] 93–115), which Paul uses by adopting the device of “comparison” (σύγκρισις); it is notably employed in the debate in 2 Cor 10–13 (see Marshall, Enmity in Corinth). But Paul is not musing because he is actually facing the immediate possibility of death (see Comment on v 20). Rather, the long, hard struggles of his life as a slave of Jesus Christ (2 Cor 11:23–27), the constant emotional strain on his soul arising from his concern for the welfare of the churches he founded (2 Cor 11:28–29), and the debilitating effects of a lengthy imprisonment (Acts 24:27) have wearied him and have forced him to think in a new way about the meaning of life and death, about their relative importance to him, and about which of the two he would prefer for himself. The position of ἐμοί, “to me,” which begins this excursus (v 21), is emphatic.

This section (vv 21–24) is tied together, as Gnilka has pointed out, around the alternating ideas already begun in v 20 of life and death, whose differing expressions serve to support and explain each other. We observe the parallelisms and assonance in the first syllables (anaphora):
v 21 a Living (τὸ ζῆν) is Christ.

v 21 b Dying (τὸ ἀποθανεῖν) is gain.

v 22 Living (τὸ ζῆν ἐν σαρκὶ) is worthwhile work.

v 23 Departing (τὸ ἀναλῦσαι), which is to be much preferred, is to be with Christ.

v 24 Remaining (τὸ ἐπιμένειν ἐν τῇ σαρκὶ) is for the benefit of others.

Such an alternation underscores the inner turmoil of the apostle as he wrestles with these ultimate issues, leaning now in favor of one, now in favor of the other. But it ends with a call to live in order to serve.

21 ἐμοὶ γὰρ τὸ ζῆν Χριστὸς καὶ τὸ ἀποθανεῖν κέρδος, “For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain.” Ἐμοὶ, “to me,” is the very first word in this new section. Paul purposely places it here in the emphatic position to draw special attention to his own personal understanding of life and death, irrespective of what others may think or say about them. His sentences in Greek are short, perfectly balanced, concise, verbless, powerful. τὸ ζῆν, “living,” is a present infinitive, accentuating the process of living. It answers to τὸ ἀποθανεῖν, “dying,” an aorist infinitive, accentuating the act of dying. The verb “to be” is absent from both sentences, but can and should be supplied; for Χριστός, “Christ,” and κέρδος, “gain,” stand in the predicate position to τὸ ζῆν, “living,” and τὸ ἀποθανεῖν, “dying,” respectively. Χριστός, “Christ,” in the first sentence, therefore, answers to κέρδος, “gain,” in the second.
By saying τὸ ζῆν Χριστός, “living is Christ,” Paul does not mean that Christ is the source of his physical existence (cf. Acts 17:28), or even of his spiritual life (Rom 8:2–11; 2 Cor 5:17), if the ideas are exclusive. He probably includes both. Nor does he mean that Christ is his life (Luther, Tyndale), in the sense that Christ lives in him—Gal 2:20 is not an explanation of this statement (see the comments of H. D. Betz, Galatians, Hermeneia [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979] 124; cf. R. Bultmann, TDNT 2:868–70). He does not even mean that living is to be with Christ (cf. Phil 1:23). Rather, without rejecting these ideas, but including them and embracing them in his thinking, Paul nevertheless puts the emphasis now in quite a different place. To say “living is Christ” is to say that for him “life means Christ” (GOODSPEED, KNOX, MOFFATT, PHILLIPS). Life, both physical and spiritual, is summed up in Christ. Life is filled up with, occupied with, Christ, in the sense that everything Paul does—trusts, loves, hopes, obeys, preaches, follows (Vincent), and so on—is inspired by Christ and is done for Christ. Christ, and Christ alone, gives inspiration, direction, meaning, and purpose to existence. Paul views his life in time (against Dibelius) as totally determined and controlled by his own love for and commitment to Christ. Overpowered by Christ on the Damascus road (which event, however, he never explicitly alludes to) and overwhelmed by his majesty, love, goodness, and forgiveness, Paul can see no reason for being, except to be “for Christ” (Rom 14:7–9).

“To me, living is Christ!” would be a slogan whose impact may well have been greater to Greek hearers of the letter, since the words τὸ ζῆν Χριστός, spoken in Koine Greek, may well have been
heard as the Greek motto ζῆν χρηστός, “life is good” (Droge and Tabor, Noble Death, 121). On this point we may observe that (1) the confusion between Christos and Chrestus is evidenced in the well-known reference in Suetonius, Claud. 25.4 (see also Dio Cassius, Hist. 60.6) and (2) as far as the present authors can remember, the only modern translator to follow the (non-attested) reading chrēstos is H. J. Schonfield (The Authentic New Testament [London: Dobson, 1955]), who renders the verse “To me life is useful.”

But for Paul to say this “does not thereby mean that his life [was] a carefree or blissful absorption into a transcendent realm of being” (Palmer, NovT 17.3 [1975] 217). Quite the contrary. Precisely because Christ was the goal of Paul’s life, he felt constrained (ἀνάγκη), not by external pressure but by the inner compulsion of love, to take up the tough task of preaching the gospel (Phil 1:7, 12, 16, 27 ; 2:16 ; 4:3). As a result, his life was marked by imprisonment (1:7, 13, 17), afflictions (1:17 ; 4:14), sufferings (1:29 ; 3:10), struggles (1:30), beatings, stonings, weariness, pain, privation, and dangers of every sort (2 Cor 11:23–27). Precisely because Paul’s life was so occupied with Christ, so totally given over to Christ, to doing the will of Christ, he found life a very heavy load to carry. Thus, he was led to say τὸ ἀποθανεῖν κέρδος, “dying is gain.” These words are not the words of the brave martyr, like Ignatius of Antioch crying out for “fire and cross and struggles with wild beasts” to come upon him in order that he might attain to Jesus Christ (Ign. Rom. 5.3) or in order that he might be carried up straight away from the place of execution into heaven without passing through any intermediate state (see Lohmeyer; Stauffer, New
Testament Theology, 186). They are the words of the very human Paul giving vent to a very human and universal sentiment: death is a gain to those whose life has become weighed down with well-nigh unbearable burdens.

For these reasons we should refuse the view that Paul is contemplating suicide as a way to decide his fate. Holloway (Consolation in Philippians, 114–15) commends his mentor’s view that Paul did in fact consider suicide (Droge, NovT 33 [1988] 268–86; cf. Jaquette, Neot 28 [1994] 177–92). The one point in favor of this interpretation is Phil 1:22, where life and death are Paul’s to choose (αἱρήσομαι), but that he might in the future choose death seems contradicted by the hope of a revisit to Philippi (1:26).

The universality of the sentiment that death is gain for the burdened life can be demonstrated by numerous quotations drawn from lyric poetry, drama, philosophy, and rhetoric, spread over several centuries of Greek and Latin literature. The vocabulary used to express this sentiment is almost identical with that which Paul uses here in Phil 1:21. Antigone, for example, says: “Whoever lives in as many ills as I—how does this one not get gain [κέρδος] by dying?” (Sophocles, Ant. 463–64). And Io, upon being told by Prometheus of sufferings still to come, cries out, “What gain [κέρδος] have I then in life? Why did not I hurl myself from this rugged rock?... Better it were to die [κρείσσον θανεῖν] once for all than linger out all my days in misery” (Aeschylus, Prom. 747–51; cf. Euripides, Med. 145–47; Plato, Apol. 40c–e; see Gnilka; Palmer, NovT 17.3 [1975] 203–18, for the best collection of similar expressions; see also Sir 41:2b–4).
If it is true that Paul by his statement τὸ ἀποθανεῖν κέρδος, “dying is gain,” is echoing the universal longing of a human being to be released by death from the burden life has placed upon him, (1) how does this square with his first statement τὸ ἔζην Χριστός, “living is Christ,” and (2) how, if at all, does Paul make any advance in thinking over his pagan counterparts? The answers to these questions seem to be as follows. Since for Paul “living is Christ,” meaning that life for Paul had no significance whatsoever without Christ, it follows that he never would have renounced Christ to save himself from those things that wearied him, hurt him, and made life a burden for him. Therefore, for him to go on and say that “dying is gain” required a firm belief on his part that death, although it had the power to free him from “lingering out his days in misery,” could not in any way separate him from Christ (see Rom 8:38–39). He was certain that even in death the Christian was still in vital relation with Christ. So certain was he that he put the two ideas together in one phrase, εἴς τὸ ἀναλύειν καὶ σὺν Χριστῷ εἶναι, “to depart [= to die] and to be with Christ.” (The verb ἀναλύειν means to “break camp” [a military term] or “weigh anchor” [a nautical expression]. As a metaphor for death, its usage is Hellenistic.) It is also this belief that spells the fundamental difference between Paul’s thinking and that of his non-Christian counterpart. The pagan viewed death as a release from earthly troubles and no more. It was for the pagan a walking away from present ills out into the unknown, perhaps into nonexistence, and hence a κέρδος, “gain,” in that sense (cf. Plato, Apol. 29.–c; 40.–). Paul also viewed death as a release from earthly troubles. But he saw death as more than this: in death there was a
continuing relationship with Christ. Life that is in Christ is thus not destroyed by death; it is only increased and enriched by death (GNB, PHILLIPS). Hence, for Paul τὸ ἀποθανεῖν, “dying,” is κέρδος, “gain,” in the ultimate sense of this word (cf. Antin, RSR 62 [1974] 259–60, for a somewhat different interpretation; cf. also Ridderbos, Paul, 498).

22 εἰ δὲ τὸ ζήν ἐν σαρκί, τοῦτο μοι καρπὸς ἔργου, καὶ τί αἰρήσομαι οὐ γνωρίζω, “But if to live on in the body means fulfilling some good purpose, then I cannot tell what I would choose.” At this point, for whatever reason (Bockmuehl, 89: “It may well be that the grammatical deterioration reflects something of Paul’s own inner conflict on the matter!”; cf. Martin [1959], 77), Paul’s sentence structure becomes quite broken and difficult to piece together. It is so difficult that Michael wishes to emend the text saying that none of v 22 except the last clause belonged to Paul’s original sentence. Michael’s reconstruction of vv 21–22 certainly makes everything flow smoothly—“as life means Christ to me, so death means gain; and which to choose I cannot tell”—but there is not a shred of evidence to support this radical treatment of excision to resolve a difficult problem. So it is necessary to try to make sense out of the verse as it stands.

Literally translated, v 22 reads as follows: “but if to live in the flesh, this to me fruit of work, and what I shall choose I do not know.” Apparently this verse is an elliptical sentence, a common phenomenon in Paul’s writings (Rom 4:9; 1 Cor 4:6; 2 Cor 1:6; Gal 2:9, and others). Something, then, must be supplied in order for the translated sentence to be intelligible. The simplest thing to
do is to add a second εἰ, “if,” immediately before τοῦτο, “this,” so that τοῦτο, “this,” clearly harks back to and explains τὸ ζῆν, “to live.” It also means that the καί introduces the main clause and must be translated “then” (cf. Luke 2:21; Acts 1:10; 2 Cor 2:3; BDF §442[7]). The result of this slight addition gives a perfectly understandable translation in harmony with the context: “but if to live in the flesh—if this is the fruit of my work—then I do not know what I would choose,” meaning that if to live is going to result in productive effort for Paul, then he is in a dilemma—he cannot tell which to choose, life or death (cf. Dibelius, Bonnard, Collange, GOODSPeed, GNB, JB).

Looking more closely at the text, one notices that the “if” clause, introduced as it is by εἰ, may not really be conditional in meaning at all, but may border on causal, “since” (BDF §372[1]). If so, then by using this construction, Paul underscores the idea already expressed (see v 19 and the Comment there). He assumes that he will be released from prison and that fruitfulness will be the natural consequence of his release.

ἐν σαρκί, “in the flesh,” is an expression often found in Paul with very negative overtones describing one’s sinful lower nature (cf. Rom 8:5; see Sand, Begriff ‘Fleisch’; Jewett, Paul’s Anthropological Terms). Here, however, linked as it is with τὸ ζῆν, “to live,” it means nothing more than life in the body—Paul’s physical life lived here on earth.

μοὶ καρπὸς ἔργου, “fruit of my work,” is also an ambiguous phrase. It may mean that as a result of his release Paul was confident that he would be able to reap the fruit of his efforts that
had been interrupted by his imprisonment. More likely, as Martin ([1959], 77) points out, by using this phrase Paul envisions “a further extension of his missionary labours and a greater opportunity to prove that Christ is his life.” ἔργον, “work,” is a word used frequently by Paul to describe his missionary activity (Martin [1959]; cf. Rom 15:18; 2 Cor 10:11; Phil 2:30).

Finally, in the last part of this verse, Paul admits to not knowing which to choose: death or life. The Greek verb translated “I can[not] tell” is neither εἰδέναι, “know,” nor γινώσκειν, “know,” but γνωρίζειν. γνωρίζειν is a Pauline word, used by him eighteen of the twenty-six times it appears in the NT and always in the sense of “to make known” or “to reveal” (Rom 9:22–23; 1 Cor 12:3; 15:1; Gal 1:11; Phil 4:6, and so on). Hence, there is no good reason to translate it here: “I do [not] know” (cf. KJV, LB, JB, NIV; BDAG). The selection of this particular word reflects the reality of the dilemma Paul faced. “I dare [not] reveal” my preference and “I can[not] tell” what I would choose (cf. GOODSPEED, MOFFATT, RSV, KNOX, NEB) are translations that come closer to the force of the Greek than the translation “I do [not] know.” As explained by Jones (21), “The Apostle will not venture to decide between the alternatives, and the choice must be left in his Master’s hands.”

23 συνέχομαι δὲ ἐκ τῶν δύο, “Indeed, I am torn between two desires.” The verb συνέχομαι, “I am torn,” serves to highlight the magnitude of Paul’s dilemma. It is a powerful word that can describe a person who is hemmed in on both sides so that he has no room to move (Luke 8:45) or a city encircled by enemies who are closing in on it from every side (Luke 19:43). It can describe
those who are attacked or tormented by pain, grief, or terror (cf. Job 3:24 LXX ; Luke 8:37). It can also describe those who are totally controlled or dominated by some external power (H. Köster, TDNT 7:882–85). Paul uses συνέχειν in this last sense in 2 Cor 5:14, the only other time he uses it, where he speaks of being completely “controlled” by the love of God. Hence, upon seeing this word one can easily picture the stress Paul felt with two desires like two equally strong external forces pressing in on him viselike from both sides (ἐκ τῶν δύο, “between two”).

Paul names these desires and at the same time accentuates how equal they are in terms of the pressure they place on him in a perfectly balanced construction, obscured by punctuation and by most, if not all, translations. It is best to set them out clearly as diagrammed in figure 2.

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\text{having the desire to} \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad 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preferring rather to use a euphemism (ἀναλῦσαί, “depart”) for death. The verb ἀναλῦσαί, although it does mean “to die,” nevertheless is a highly picturesque word that paints death in brighter colors. ἀναλῦσαί is used to describe an army “breaking camp” and moving on (2 Macc 9:1; cf. Haupt, who finds an allusion to the wilderness generation of Israel and to the tents in which they lived). Or it is used to refer to a ship “being released from its mooring,” “weighing anchor,” and sailing off (Polybius 3.69.14). Or it is used to speak of the “solution” of a difficult problem (see LSJ). Hence, with any or all of these images in mind, Paul says “I wish to depart this life” (see Lee, NovT 12 [1970] 361, for a note on the possible origin of this remark by Paul).

Now the reason for his longing “to depart” did not lie in the desire for immortality, such as the ancient Greeks had. Paul did not yearn simply for a state in which his soul would live on, freed at last from the hampering shackles of his body (cf. Plato, Phaed.). The idea of a disembodied soul was intolerable to him (2 Cor 5:1–5; see Harris, “Paul’s View of Death”; idem, Raised Immortal, 133–42). Rather, Paul’s longing to leave this earthly life lay in the belief that he would “be with Christ” (σὺν Χριστῷ Εἶναι). He could not possibly desire the one without the other, that is, death without Christ, even if death did bring him relief from all his troubles. Paul’s grammar here indicates that for him although “departing this life” and “being with Christ” are not necessarily identical (against Stauffer, New Testament Theology, 211–12), the latter being an advance over the former, they are nevertheless inextricably interwoven. He makes the two infinitives share one article in Greek
— τὸ ἀναλῦσαι καὶ σὺν Χριστῷ εἶναι, “the departing and being with Christ”—thus binding the two together.

But what did Paul mean by the phrase σὺν Χριστῷ εἶναι, “to be with Christ”? As simple as these words seem, they nevertheless have been the catalyst for many lengthy and bewildering discussions. The issue arises from seeing in Paul a consistent doctrine of life after death, namely, that Christians who die “sleep” until the second coming of Christ, at which time they will be awakened, raised to life again, and given new, incorruptible bodies in exchange for their old, corruptible, physical bodies, a view that sees Paul insisting on the resurrection as essential in order for one to be a complete person (1 Cor 15:35–55; 1 Thess 4:13—5:10; see Caird; Moule, NTS 12 [1965–66] 120–23; Cullmann, Immortality of the Soul; Ellis, Paul and His Recent Interpreters, 35–48; idem, NTS 6 [1959–60] 211–24). Here in Phil 1:23, however, Paul seems to suggest quite a different view, namely, that the Christian, upon dying, goes immediately into the presence of the Lord, where he enjoys conscious personal fellowship with him, a view that leads some to believe that a future resurrection is superfluous, to see the “resurrection” as taking place at death (cf. Davies, Paul and Rabbinic Judaism, 319; K. Barth, as quoted by Cullmann, Immortality of the Soul, 49).

No completely satisfactory resolution to the problem posed by these seemingly contradictory views has as yet been given, and perhaps none can be given. But there are several important things to notice before making a final decision:
The phrase σὺν Χριστῷ, “with Christ,” is a unique formula coined by Paul (W. Grundmann, TDNT 7:782) and is of fundamental importance in his thinking. Yet he is not always consistent in the meaning he attaches to it. (a) Sometimes he lets the expression σὺν Χριστῷ, “with Christ,” convey the idea of “incorporation” (cf. the interchange of ἐν Χριστῷ, “in Christ,” with σὺν Χριστῷ, “with Christ,” in Rom 6:11 and context), building on the concept of corporate solidarity—Christ is not only a single self but the last Adam, the new human being (1 Cor 15:45, 47), the embodiment of a new humanity. What happened to him happened also to that humanity: it was crucified with Christ (Χριστῷ συνεσταύρωμαι, “I have been crucified with Christ” [Gal 2:20]; cf. Rom 6:6), put to death with Christ (ἀπέθανομεν σὺν Χριστῷ, “we died with Christ” [Rom 6:8]; cf. Col 2:2), buried with Christ (συνετάφημεν αὐτῷ, “we were buried with him” [Rom 6:4]), and made alive (i.e., resurrected) with Christ (Col 2:13; cf. Rom 6:4). Death, burial, and resurrection have already taken place for the Christian because the Christian is “with Christ,” incorporate in Christ (but see also 2 Cor 4:14; 13:4; Col 3:4, where some of these ideas are expressed by the future tense). (b) At other times Paul uses σὺν Χριστῷ, “with Christ,” to express the simple notion of “association.” For example, in 1 Thess 4:13–17 Paul states that the dead in Christ, those who sleep in him (διὰ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ, “through Jesus”), will be resurrected and God will bring them with Jesus (σὺν αὐτῷ, “with him”) when he comes from heaven with a shout. They will join Jesus in his triumphal return. And what is more, those who are still alive at the Parousia of Jesus will be caught up to meet him in the air, and so, Paul concludes, “we will be with the Lord [σὺν κυρίῳ],” i.e., we
will be in his company forever. (c) And there are other, though fewer, instances where Paul uses the expression σὺν Χριστῷ, “with Christ,” to stress the idea of “fellowship with Christ.” Following hard on the heels of the clearest futurist eschatological passage in Paul’s writings (1 Thess 4:13–17) come these words of the apostle: Christ “died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him [ σὺν αὐτῷ ]” (1 Thess 5:10; see BDAG on καθεύδειν; also A. Oepke, TDNT 3:436). As in the Psalms, where prepositions, such as σὺν, “with,” convey the idea of vital communion with God (LXX Pss 138:18; 139:14), so here the idea of conscious personal fellowship with Christ looms large, whether considering those who are alive or dead (cf. 1 Thess 5:10, MOFFATT, JB). Thus it is clear that there is no single idea expressed by Paul’s important phrase “with Christ.”

(2) The context of Phil 1:23 and the very wording of the verse itself favors the idea of “fellowship with Christ” as belonging to the phrase σὺν Χριστῷ, “with Christ,” found here. In fact, Paul, musing about death, his own death, and the meaning of death, comes to combine the words “living is Christ and dying is gain” and the words “to break camp and to be with Christ” in such a way as to emphasize his growing conviction that death cannot in any way deprive believers of this “fellowship with Christ” (Rom 8:38–39); it can only provide them with the opportunity to enjoy this fellowship to a degree never before experienced. Paul’s focus on the supreme importance of Christ and fellowship with Christ and his own understanding of fellowship as living communion with Christ, based perhaps on his reflections on the Psalms (cf. Pss 16 [15 LXX]: 11; 73 [72 LXX]: 23–24; see the comment on Ps 16 by

(3) But Paul does not speculate on the nature of this “interim condition” or “intermediate state” (Cousar, 142). He goes no further than to say that it exists and that it signifies union with Christ (Cullmann, Immortality of the Soul, 51 n. 7). Nor will he allow this intermediate state to substitute for a future resurrection. When Paul wrote the Philippians, he had in no way surrendered his futurist eschatology. That is to say, his doctrine of a bodily resurrection at the last day (1 Thess 4:13–17) was still intact—the exchange of the Christian’s humiliating and humiliated body for a glorious body does not take place at death, but only at the Parousia of Jesus Christ (Phil 3:20–21). Thus Phil 1:23 (and 2 Cor 5:1–10) cannot at all indicate a development in Paul’s thinking, away from the expectation of a physical resurrection in the future toward a spiritual “resurrection” in the present coincident with one’s departing from this life (so Dodd, BJRL 18 [1934] 69–70; Schweitzer, Mysticism of Paul, 135–36; Stanley, Christ’s Resurrection; Moule, JTS
n.s. 15 [1964] 1–15; idem, NTS 12 [1965–66] 106–23, argues for a basic consistency in Paul’s various eschatological formulations). The two apparently conflicting views must be understood, as Kümmel (Theology of the New Testament, 242) has succinctly pointed out, in terms of Paul’s basic interest: “Paul obviously is interested only in the fact that the Christian always remains in fellowship with his heavenly Lord” (see also E. P. Sanders, Paul and Palestinian Judaism, 432 and n. 9). What Paul longs for, then, is the hope of the resurrection. As Ridderbos (Paul, 505–6) observes, “But though that day should not yet dawn, he would nevertheless be of good courage... to surrender his life in death.” This was in fact to be preferred in light of his trials, persecutions, and sufferings; “For then he might already take up his abode with the Lord” (Ridderbos, Paul, 506). Hence, “the idea of the ‘intermediate state’ is no Fremdkörper [foreign body] here. It comes to the fore of itself... when the future is still waiting and death is nevertheless an immediate reality” (Ridderbos, Paul, 506). And yet the intermediate state is not in itself a separate ground for comfort (cf. 1 Thess 4:18); it has no independent existence apart from the resurrection. Without the resurrection there is no hope at all for believers who have died (cf. 1 Cor 15:18 ; 1 Thess 4:13–16). Thus “to be with Christ” after death and before the resurrection “does not have the full redemptive significance in Paul’s epistles that the resurrection has” (Ridderbos, Paul, 506).

Cousar (142–43) has succinctly reviewed the proposals about Phil 1:21, 23 and categorized them: (1) Paul is not really concerned about life after death but is emphasizing the substantial “gain” (for the gospel; so Barth, who seems to follow Lohmeyer, 59–70, in
making death a martyrdom; this would make the verses relate to Paul sui generis, not to ordinary believers for whom death is common as mortals) in Paul’s hope of being with Christ. (2) Paul is viewing the intermediate state as one in which there is no interruption in Paul’s relationship with Christ but an enriching of it, akin to 2 Cor 5:6–8. Cousar refers to Lincoln (Paradise Now and Not Yet, 106), who remarks: “It is clear from a comparison of Phil 1:23 with 3:20, 21 that the state into which Paul will enter at death is far better, bringing with it a greater closeness of communion with Christ. As of yet that is a state of expectation, less than the fullness of redemption described in 3:20 f.” (3) Caird (113–14) finds category (2) unintelligible since “those who sleep in the grave cannot be said to be with Christ who has left it.” So, Caird argues, Paul must be using death as “sleep” in an analogical fashion to mean that believers sleep in death and are unaware of time’s passing. They fall asleep in death only to wake up at the Parousia. The problem here is that Paul does not use “sleep” as he does elsewhere (1 Thess 4:13–15). Cousar’s preference of these three options is for (2) since, with Collange (69), he holds that Paul’s thought is “exclusively Christocentric” and, with Fee ([1995], 149), that the Pauline emphasis lies on the confidence that nothing can separate Paul from Christ’s presence.

24 τὸ δὲ ἐπιμένειν ἐν τῇ σαρκὶ ἀναγκαίότερον δι’ ύμᾶς, “and [yet] I desire to remain alive in this body, which is a more urgent need for you.” The other desire, in addition to the desire to depart and be with Christ, that Paul had pressing in on him with equal force was the desire to go on living and to be with the Philippian Christians. Both desires are equally balanced grammatically by their
respective comparative expressions (see the diagram in the Comment on v 23 above). The one has πόλλῳ μᾶλλον κρείσσον, “very much better,” the other, ἀναγκαιότερον, “more urgent need.” It does not appear, therefore, that “the desire weakens before the necessity” (Gnilka) or that Paul’s “personal desire ‘to be with Christ’ in glory must be subordinated to his pastoral responsibility to the Philippians” (Martin [1959], 79), as though Paul himself decided through some sort of “pastoral altruism” (Martin [1976], 79) to say no to himself and yes to “the down-to-earth needs of his fellow-believers” (Martin [1959], 79; cf. Collange). Paul has already made clear that both these desires are equal in intensity, so much so that he himself was incapable of making a choice: τί αἱρήσομαι οὐ γνωρίζω, “I cannot tell what I would choose!” (v 22). Hence, it is not Paul who, martyrlike, sacrifices his personal desire on the altar of service to others and decides to keep on living, but God who chooses for him.

25 καὶ τοῦτο πεποιθώς οἶδα ὅτι μενῶ καὶ παραμενῶ πᾶσιν ὑμῖν, “Therefore, since I am convinced that this need exists, I know that I am going to stay, to remain on with all of you.” Because Paul is convinced that the Philippians need him (τοῦτο πεποιθώς, “being convinced of this,” the τοῦτο, “this,” pointing back to the very great necessity, “that this need exists,” and the πεποιθώς, “being convinced,” taken as a causal participle, “since I am convinced”), a conviction that perhaps grew out of things he had learned about problems at Philippi (cf. Phil 2:1–4, 14 ; 4:2–3), he knows (οἶδα, “I know”) what God’s choice for his immediate future will be. As an apostle, “part of the divine plan of salvation is
committed to him, and its seriousness consists in the fact that he
cannot evade it” (W. Grundmann, TDNT 1:346–47). ἀνάγκη, 
“necessity,” therefore, characterizes Paul’s apostolic office (1 Cor 
9:16). Need determines the direction his life is to take. In this 
instance the need of the Philippian church constitutes the divine 
call for Paul to go on living, a call to which he cannot say no and 
which he accepts with cheerfulness (against Lohmeyer). There is, 
thus, no need to debate the question “How can someone who has 
just been affirming the utter uncertainty of his fate now 
convincingly and without more ado make plans for the future?” 
(Collange, 69; see also Vincent, Michael, Dibelius, Bonnard, 
Lohmeyer, Martin [1959], Gnilka). For Paul was never uncertain 
about his fate. He was, however, uncertain about which choice to 
make, had he the chance to make it, whether to depart or to stay, 
to live or to die. He wanted the one equally as much as the other. 
Therefore, it must be repeated, Paul did not make the choice—he 
could not make the choice. God made it for him. Caught up in 
God’s redemptive plan, which is marked by healing and wholeness, 
Paul was certain that he would stay with (μενῶ, “I am going to 
stay”) and stand fast alongside (παράμενῶ, “remain on”) his 
friends. The wordplay of the synonyms μένειν/παράμένειν is 
preserved in NRSV: “remain and continue.” For similar wordplays 
see Rom 1:20; 5:19; 2 Cor 4:8; 5:4; Phil 3:2–3; 2 Thess 3:11.

εἰς τὴν ύμῶν προκοπῆν καὶ χαρὰν τῆς πίστεως, “in order that 
you may make progress and be glad in the faith.” This phrase 
expresses one purpose for Paul’s staying on. For the meaning of 
προκοπῆν, “make progress,” see the Comment on v 12, a 
oticeable example of chiasmus; and for the meaning of χαράν,
“be glad,” see the Comment on v 4. Both these nouns share one article (τὴν) and thus should be associated closely with τῆς πίστεως, “the faith.” It was important to Paul not only that the Philippians make progress in the Christian faith, growing in their appreciation for and in their understanding and practice of those things taught by him as the truth of God (τῆς πίστεως, “the faith,” is used absolutely in the sense of the Christian creed; cf. Phil 1:27 ; 1 Tim 3:9 ; 4:1, 6 ; 5:8 ; 6:10, 21 ; Jude 3), but that they also be glad while doing so. Joy for Paul was an indispensable element of the Christian faith.

26 ἵνα τὸ καύχημα ὑμῶν περισσεύῃ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ ἐν ἐμοὶ διὰ τῆς ἐμῆς παρουσίας πάλιν πρὸς ὑμᾶς, “and in order that your boasting in Christ Jesus might increase because of me through my presence with you once again.” The other purpose Paul had in mind for his stay in Philippi is now expressed by ἵνα, “in order that,” and the subjunctive. καύχημα, “boasting,” to be sure, stresses the object of one’s boasting (with suffix in - μα) rather than the act of boasting (καύχησις, “boasting,” with suffix in - σις ; BDF §109), but the idea of “pride” is present nonetheless. There are again some grammatical and lexical difficulties, a “kind of syntactical jumble” (Osiek, 45), involved in this sentence:

(1) The ὑμῶν, lit. “of you,” is probably a subjective genitive (“your boasting”) rather than objective genitive (“boasting about you”). The Philippians are doing the boasting, rather than someone else boasting in them or about them.

(2) But in whom were they boasting? The expressions ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, “in Christ Jesus,” and ἐν ἐμοί, “in me,” are prepositional
phrases that stand side by side in identical constructions. Forced to make a choice, some interpreters take the first phrase to be the object of καύχημα, “boasting”: “your pride in Jesus Christ on my account” (JB; cf. MOFFATT, NIV). Others, however, understand the second phrase to be the immediate cause of pride—“so that when I am present with you again, your pride in me may be unbounded in Christ Jesus” (NEB; cf. PHILLIPS, GNB). But the striking parallel in Phil 3:3 (καυχώμενοι ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, “who boast in Christ Jesus”) tips the scales in favor of the former of the two interpretations given here (so NRSV). Apparently, then, the Philippians were tempted to boast in other people or things rather than in Christ Jesus alone, and Paul purposed to be present with them so that by his efforts (ἐν ἐμοί, “because of me”) he might direct their pride toward the right person (cf. R. Bultmann, TDNT 3:646–54; Genths, NKZ 38 [1927] 501–21). Yet inasmuch as Paul’s confidence is based equally on his apostolic service and on Christ himself, it becomes a moot point whether the object of this exulting he longs to share with the Philippians is like one or the other. Probably both are to be included.

This verse is pivotal in R. Jewett’s interpretation (NovT 12 [1970] 387). As Paul is restored to the Philippians, his return in the providence of God will show his genuine apostleship, which the Philippians may well have doubted. So καύχημα, “boasting,” is the antithesis of “shame” in the well-known ancient contrast between honor and shame (see De Silva, Honor, Patronage, Kinship, and Purity). There is an OT background: Pss 25:3, 20; 31:1, 17; 119:6.
(3) Paul’s efforts would be brought to bear on the problem not by letter but by his presence (παρουσία) among them again. This word παρουσία, “presence,” is the same word Paul uses of the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thess 3:13; Craddock, 29: “Paul’s parousia would be a foretaste, a solid promise of Christ’s Parousia”). In classical Greek it referred to the pomp and pageantry that accompanied the arrival of a king or governor in a city. By using this special word Paul may indicate that he expects to receive a “king’s welcome” from the Philippians when he comes to their town (Beare).

Explanation

Paul still adheres to the standard form of letter writing. His phrase “I want you to know” is a typical expression used to introduce the personal, intimate parts of a letter. And yet unexpectedly he immediately turns attention away from himself to the gospel. The things that happened to him personally, however painful they may have been, are not worth detailing. Their effects, however, are of major consequence to him and to the cause of Christ: (1) everyone in the praetorium and those nearby learned that he was in prison (or in chains) simply because he was a Christian, not because he was a criminal, and (2) the majority of his fellow workers in Caesarea (or some other place of his detention) took heart because of his own courage and preached the word more earnestly and fearlessly than they had ever done before.

Some of these, unfortunately, preached from less than pure motives. For whatever reason—jealousy, envy, party spirit, or competitiveness (Ambrosiaster)—there were some who preached
specifically to make added trouble for Paul already in prison. These were professed Christian preachers, hardly non-Christian Jews, as Ambrosiaster (Phil. 1.17.1) thought. But others preached because they loved the apostle and knew he wanted them to preach irrespective of what might happen to him as a result. Thereby, by his chains, they have derived strength. And so, whether from good motives or bad, the gospel of Jesus Christ was being proclaimed abroad, and that fact made Paul glad. “Even those who preach out of envy inadvertently demonstrate how it is possible to do a good work even when one's motive is not good” (Chrysostom).

Paul's gladness is boundless as he lets the Philippians know that he will soon be released from prison because of their prayers and because of the help the Holy Spirit will give him when he gets to make his defense before the Roman tribunal. He knows that, as he is questioned about his part in spreading the gospel, he will not be ashamed of it but will boldly use the opportunity to let still more people hear about the saving power of Christ.

Paul then permits the Philippians to have a unique look into his own innermost being, to see the turmoil of his soul as he yearns equally for death, on the one hand, because life has become a very heavy burden and death would bring him into a closer, more intimate fellowship with Christ, and for life, on the other hand, because to go on living would mean for him continued productive work in general and in particular would serve to meet the great need of the Philippian church. He cannot make up his mind. So God makes the choice for him. Need dictates direction. Thus, because of the need of the Philippians, he knows he will be released to come and be with them, to help them forward in the
faith, to stimulate their joy, and to direct their boasting and pride increasingly toward his apostolic service as representing the person of Christ as well as conveying Christ's presence.
B. Instructions for the Church (1:27–2:18)
1. To Stability in the Faith (1:27–30)

Bibliography


Translation

27 Only and always show yourselves to be good citizens, worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or am separated
from you by distance, I may hear a [good] things about you—that you stand firm with one spirit, struggling together with one mind to preserve the faith brought about by the gospel, ²⁸ in no way letting your opponents intimidate you. For although your loyalty to the faith is proof to them b that you will perish, it is in fact proof to you c that you will be saved by God. ²⁹ For God has graciously given you d the privilege both of believing in Christ and of suffering in his stead. ³⁰ This is the meaning of the struggle you are in. It is the same sort of struggle you saw me once engage in and now hear that I e am still engaged in it.

Notes

27.a. The Majority Text reads the aorist subjunctive (ἀκούσω, “you may hear”) for the present tense, but this looks like a grammatical improvement on the original.

28.b. To the expression ἐστὶν αὐτοῖς, “is to them,” the Majority Text adds μὲν, “on the one hand,” or rearranges the word order and adds μὲν. This has the appearance of a stylistic improvement to balance the δέ, “on the other hand,” that follows.

28.c. The Majority Text has ὑμῖν, “to you,” for ὑμῶν, “your”; a few MSS have ἡμῖν, “to us.” These are further attempts to make the two phrases parallel to each other in every way possible (see Comment below).

29.d. A few MSS read ἡμῖν, “to us,” for ὑμῖν, “to you.”

30.e. Ὑ ⁴⁶ ⁸¹ omit the phrase ἐν ἐμοί, “in me.”
After discussing his own affairs and their consequences, and disclosing his own innermost feelings, Paul turns now, as is his custom, to give instructions to the entire community. The transition from personal matters to matters of encouragement is quite sudden, with simply the word μόνον, “only and always,” given as an introduction. Perhaps this adverb is a cliché meaning “even now.” Immediately one is in the middle of a parenetic section that calls the readers to respond to the gospel’s appeal to “live worthily”—a form of noblesse-oblige motif. The same call will be heard again in Phil 2:1–4, 5 and 2:12, and it centers on Christians’ conduct. Exhortations continue on to the rhetorical unit of 2:12–18 and are parallel with 1 Thess 2:12. In the structure of Philippians we should (with Bloomquist, Function of Suffering, 126–27) observe the way 1:27–30 links to section 2:12–18 and both point forward to 4:1 : “Stand firm!” Phil 2:12 echoes 1:27, playing rhetorically on the theme “absent/present.” Words of exhortation now control the thought. The musings about life and death are gone. Hesitation between two decisions is past, and everything is now directed toward life—the rigorous life of a Christian who is called to be loyal to the faith, to fight for the faith, and to live worthily of the faith. Battle terms or terms from the athletic games—στήκειν, “stand firm,” συναθλοῦν, ἀγών, “struggle,” πάσχειν, “suffer”—characterize this section. One is tempted to compare Paul with a commanding officer or a coach who is determined to inspire his troops or to encourage his contestants as he sends them into the fray, with the hope of getting back a good report about how they
conducted themselves in the fight (Gnilka). See Col 2:5, where Lohmeyer (Der Brief an die Philipper, an die Kolosser und an Philemon, ad loc.) describes Paul as a military commander reviewing his troops drawn up in battle formation. See Krentz (“Military Language,” 113), who wishes to show how Paul makes “consistent use of military, not athletic, language” in 1:27–30.

This section is highly rhetorical. Fee ([1995], 156–57), observing the chiastic structure, sees the interrelation of Phil 1:12—2:16 (18) as follows (simplified):

A Appeal to steadfastness and unity (1:27–30).

B Appeal to unity (2:1–4).

C Appeal to Christ’s example (2:5–11).

B´ Application of the appeal (2:12–13).

A´ Further application (2:14–16).

This is helpful, yet it begs the question of the location and thrust of Unit C, to which we may turn in due course. Cf. D. F. Watson, “A Rhetorical Analysis,” NovT 30 (1988) 57–88, who claims that 1:27–30 contains the “chief proposition” of the letter (narratio) and forms an inclusio with 3:17—4:1. The centrality of 2:6–11 is the thesis of Wick (Philipperbrief), and Reed (Discourse Analysis, 291) comments on the relation of 1:12–26 to 1:27–30 as that of background and petition.

Some see Paul lapsing into a particular strophic pattern or metrical style of speech (Lohmeyer, 72–73; Michaelis); chiasm is present in abundance (vv 27–28); even an unusual number of the words used here are metaphorical. Thus, although such rhetoric
drives home the need for concerted action, it also makes it difficult to determine the precise historical situation of the church at Philippi. Apparently, however, the Philippian Christians, like Paul, faced some sort of hostile opponents who were set on their destruction (ἀπώλεια [v 28]). The apostle sees a united firmness on behalf of the gospel and a disciplined life of self-sacrifice as the sure and certain way to overcome all adversaries. These twin themes bind this section (1:27–30) together with that which follows it (2:1–11) and beyond (2:12—or 2:18 [Fee (1995), 161]—on to 4:1). Martin (1976, 63) and Beare (53) view the conflict in spiritual (not realistic or physical) terms (so also Caird, 116, 127, who sees the issue as one of a struggle with spiritual enemies, while Gnilka, 101, relates it to a sacramental identity with Christ in his suffering as in 3:10). But Bloomquist (Function of Suffering, 157–58) argues tellingly against this, appealing to 1:15, 17 and 2 Cor 11:23–29. Here he is in line with Lohmeyer (79), who sees the leitmotif of this letter as one of persecution, both of the apostle and the church (his phrase is eine Gemeinde). Phil 1:7 would tip the scales since there the Philippians are συγκοινώνοι, “sharers together,” of Paul’s grace as a prisoner. Parallels are 1 Thess 1:3, 6 and 2 Thess 1:4–5.

The section 1:27–30 has been classified as containing five topoi (themes, rhetorically speaking) connected with consolation (so Holloway, Consolation in Philippians, 116–19): (1) The contrast present/absent suggests an indifference to Paul’s being with the readers or not. In either case, they should adopt a worthy life, (2) a way of life worthy (dignus) of their position. Cicero reminds Brutus of just this, as Seneca does to Claudius’s secretary: “do nothing unworthy [indignum] of [his] claim to be a sage and a scholar” (Seneca, Polyb.). (3) In 1:28 Paul
admonishes the Philippians not to be “frightened” by their opponents, as horses get startled and bolt, especially in face of the enemy in battle. Or, more tellingly, as Socrates hears of Axiochus, who “took fright” (πτυρείτης) on hearing of his mortal illness (Plato, Ax. 370a). If the Philippians were facing a deadly peril such as Paul endured (2:17), as 1:29, 30 implies, this admonition would be timely. The Stoic-Cynic attitude to adversity is reflected here, where unexpected trial or distress, catching one by surprise or stealth (insperatum et necopinatum malum, “unhoped-for and unexpected evil”), should be turned to good effect—a thrust that Paul connects with his belief in God’s overarching sovereignty and gracious providence. On providence in Stoic morality see Epictetus, Discourses (for orientation see Martin, New Testament Foundations, 2:41–48; the Stoic term ἐμψυχοῦν, “good cheer,” recurs in Phil 2:19 as ἐψυχῶ, “I may be cheered up”). (4) So, for Paul, suffering is a part of divine dispensation, given in grace (1:29), and (5) Paul is the living exemplum, “example,” of one who has endured distress and trial (ἀγῶνα, “struggle”), which the readers know well (1:30). The Stoic/Cynic view is that one should not lose composure in these untoward trials. See Seneca, Ep. 107.2–9, which “offers a striking parallel to Phil 1:28–31” (Holloway, Consolation in Philippians, 119). Seneca appeals to a divine decree (lex) that suffering is endemic to the human condition, and he quotes Cleanthes’ Hymn to Zeus. The Greek may be rendered:

Lead me, O Zeus, and thou, my Destiny,
To that place which you will have me fill.
I follow gladly. Shosld I strive with thee,
A recreant, I needs must follow still.
Comment

27 μόνον ἀξίως τοῦ εὐαγγελίου τοῦ Χριστοῦ πολιτεύεσθε, “Only and always show yourselves to be good citizens, worthy of the gospel of Christ.” Paul introduces this new section with the adverb μόνον, translated here “only and always.” Paul raises a warning finger (Barth, 45). This single adverb μόνον is variously construed. See Bockmuehl (97), who renders, “Always remember one thing.” In warning, Paul stresses that “the one essential thing” (see Gal 1:23; 2:10; 3:2; Bonnard, Collange) for the Christian is to live in a manner worthy (ἀξίως) of the gospel of Christ.

But what does it mean to live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ? (εὐαγγέλιον, “gospel,” is a central theme in Phil 1:12–26. The same commitment to the “gospel,” implying both a summons and a way of life, is required of the Philippians.) Paul answers this question in part by the special verb he uses to issue his command — πολιτεύεσθε, “show yourselves to be good citizens”— and in part by the subordinate ideas he attaches to this verb. In Greek vv 27–30 constitute a single sentence that contains only one main verb — πολιτεύεσθε. This verb is an unusual one, appearing only twice in the NT, here and in Acts 23:1, where it means little more than to live out one’s life. Originally, however, it meant “to live as a citizen of a free state” (πόλις, “state”), “to take an active part in the affairs of the state” (LSJ). Paul seems here to go back to this earlier meaning.
To the ancient Greeks, the state (ἡ πόλις) was by no means merely a place to live. It was rather a sort of partnership (κοινωνίαν τινά) formed with a view to having people attain the highest of all human goods (so Aristotle, Pol. 1252a). Here in the state the individual citizen developed his gifts and realized his potential, not in isolation but in cooperation. Here he was able to maximize his abilities, not by himself or for himself but in community and for the good of the community (see Beare). As a consequence, mutuality and interdependence were important ideas inhering in the concept of πόλις. πολιτεύεσθαι, “to live as a citizen,” therefore, meant for the Greek (and later the Roman) rights and privileges but also duties and responsibilities.

To the Jew the idea of πόλις had as its focal point the “city of the great king” (Ps 48:2 ; cf. Matt 5:32). Originally Jerusalem was this ideal city, localized and restricted in scope. But under the influence of psalmist and prophet the concept of “city” was expanded until Jerusalem was not only home for every member of the commonwealth of Israel but a spiritual fellowship into which the nations of the world eventually would enter (cf. Ps 87), a universal center of worship of Israel’s God, the God of the whole earth (Isa 66:20 LXX ; Amos 9:11–12 ; Zech 14:8–11 ; see Winter, Seek the Welfare of the City, esp. 98–100, on Phil 1:27—2:18).

Both these ideas appear to be combined in Paul’s studied choice (against Gnilka) of this rare verb πολιτεύεσθαι, “to live as a citizen,” over his customary verb περιπατεῖν, “to live” (e.g., Rom 6:4 ; 1 Cor 3:3 ; 2 Cor 5:7 ; Gal 5:16 ; Phil 3:17 ; 1 Thess 2:12 ; cf. Eph 2:2). Thus, to live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ
means to live as a good citizen of an earthly state, fully discharging one’s duties and responsibilities to that state (cf. Brewer, 76–83). But there is more. Through the gospel that proclaims Christ as Savior, the Christian is made a citizen of the heavenly Jerusalem (cf. Heb 12:22–23; Rev 21:2–3), a partner in a spiritual fellowship, a member of a new community, the Christian commonwealth, the church (Phil 3:20; cf. Eph 2:19). To live worthy of the gospel, then, also means that the Christians live as good citizens of this new state, governing their actions by the laws of this unique πολίτευμα, “body of citizens”—righteousness, peace, faith, hope, love, mutuality, interdependence, good deeds, service to one another, worship of the living God, and so on (cf. the use of this word in 1 Clem. 3:4; 21:1; Pol. Phil. 5:2; see also J. B. Lightfoot, “St Paul and Seneca,” in his commentary, 270–333, esp. 305–8).

The background of πολίτευμαι, “to live as a citizen,” has been variously discussed. Miller (JSNT 15 [1982] 86–96) challenges Brewer’s understanding of the word in its Greco-Roman setting (JBL 73 [1954] 76–83). He takes his cue from uses in the LXX and in Hellenistic Jewish writings in the pre-NT era, finding that the term relates to the Jews’ covenant relationship shown in obedience to Torah. A good example is Josephus, Life 2 §12, where he says that at nineteen years “I began to govern [πολίτευμαι] my life by the rules of the Pharisees” (see Martin, New Testament Foundations, 1:84). Then the point is made that for a Christian like Paul Christ replaces Torah as the norm (classically stated in Davies, Paul and Rabbinic Judaism, chap. 7), and this leads Miller (JSNT 15 [1982] 94) to paraphrase: “See to it that you are the true Israel,
people who live not according to Torah, but who live a life worthy
of the new law which is the Gospel about the Christ who is Jesus.”
O’Brien (147) thinks this extended, theological meaning is a bit
overdone, but it may help pave the way for the antithesis of Christ
versus Torah in Phil 3:2–7 (against Fee [1995], 162). On the other
hand, the relevance of the verb to those living in a Roman colony
(Acts 16:12) should not be discarded (Fee [1995], 162; see Roberts,

ἵνα εἴτε ἐλθὼν καὶ ἕδων ύμᾶς εἴτε ἄπων ἀκούω τὰ περὶ
ὑμῶν, ὃτι στήκετε ἐν ἑνὶ πνεύματι, μιᾷ ψυχῇ συναθλοῦντες τῇ
πίστει τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, “Then, whether I come and see you or am
separated from you by distance, I may hear [good] things about you
—that you stand firm with one spirit, struggling together with one
mind to preserve the faith brought about by the gospel.”
Furthermore, to live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ
means that the Philippians, it is hoped, will live in harmony with
one another, a meaning that springs quite naturally from the fact
that they are fellow citizens of a heavenly state (as in Phil 3:20–21
; see Lincoln, Paradise Now and Not Yet, 100–101), partners in a
new community. Thus Paul expects to hear that his friends in
Philiippi are standing firm ἐν ἑνὶ πνεύματι, “with one spirit,”
struggling together μιᾷ ψυχῇ, “with one mind.” Both of these
expressions are intended to remind the Philippians that as
Christians they are in a battle and that a united front is the best
strategy for victory.

στήκετε, “stand firm,” is a verb found first in the NT, newly
formed from the perfect tense of ἵσταναι, “to stand” (BDF §73;
Moulton et al., Grammar, 2:220, 259). It conveys the idea of firmness or steadfastness, or unflinching courage like that possessed by soldiers who determinedly refuse to leave their posts irrespective of how severely the battle rages (cf. 1 Cor 16:13; Gal 5:1; Phil 4:1; 2 Thess 2:15; cf. also Eph 6:13–17; see Lohmeyer, who has gathered evidence for this metaphorical meaning of στήκειν). The verb is used in Greco-Roman literature “to indicate the duty of the soldier in battle, or to describe the taking of a position vis-à-vis that of an adversary” (Geoffrion, Rhetorical Purpose, 55; Cousar, 146). Paul does not say who it is the Philippians are to stand firm against, but it is clear from the verses that follow that the church in Philippi is being challenged by adversaries, perhaps Jewish Christians (see chap. 3) or pagans, and are in danger of being shaken.

They can, however, resist the challenge and overcome the adversary by joint effort, by a community spirit. Thus, it is incorrect to say that the phrase ἐν ἑνὶ πνεύματι, “with one spirit,” refers to the Holy Spirit (Jones, Dibelius, Bonnard, Martin [1959], Gnilka, Collange); only the human spirit is in view here (so Melick, 89). The context, with its strong appeal to unity, and the carefully constructed chiastic form of this sentence that brings the phrase μιᾷ ψυχῇ, “with one mind,” immediately up against the phrase ἐν ἑνὶ πνεύματι, “with one spirit,” combine not merely to show that these two expressions are equivalent in meaning, but to stress that it is of extreme importance for Christians to coexist in community, work together in harmony, and resist the common enemy with common intention. (This interpretation is criticized by Fee [1995], 165–66. He prefers to translate ἐν ἑνὶ πνεύματι as “in one Spirit,”
where the capitalized word evidently relates to the Holy Spirit, appealing to Phil 2:1–4; 1 Cor 12:13, and the later Eph 2:18; 4:4. So Thielman, 93, and elaborated in Fee, God’s Empowering Presence, 743–46.)

Nor is it necessary to maintain that the phrase ἐν ἑνὶ πνεύματι, “with one spirit,” refers to both the human spirit and the divine Spirit (Scott; also opposed by Fee [1995]), as though Paul intended to convey by this single expression the twin ideas that “the Holy Spirit strengthens the human spirit under trial” (Martin [1959], 85). It is true, of course, that Paul does use this exact expression to refer to the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:13; cf. Eph 2:18). It is also true that he clearly teaches that Christian unity or Christian fellowship is the product of the creative activity of the Holy Spirit (Phil 2:1; cf. Eph 4:3). But here there is no signal to indicate that he means anything similar to this or that he intends anything more by πνεῦμα, “spirit,” than he does by ψυχή, “mind.” The two parallel phrases ἐν ἑνὶ πνεύματι, “with one spirit,” and μιᾷ ψυχῇ, “with one mind,” therefore, serve strictly to heighten the idea that Christian harmony, “a common spirit” (Moffatt), which believers themselves must strive for, is essential if the church in Philippi, or anywhere else, is to maintain a courageous witness against hostile opposition (see Michaelis, Lohmeyer, Beare; E. Schweizer, TDNT 6:435; O’Brien, 149–50, is ambivalent).

The verb στήκειν, “to stand firm,” is now explained by two participial phrases. Christians best stand their ground (1) when they are struggling and (2) when they are showing a certain kind of courage.
συναθλοῦν, “to struggle,” is a verb that underscores the ideas that play such an important part in this section and throughout the entire letter, that of fellowship and community, camaraderie and mutual understanding. συναθλοῦν means not only “to struggle” but “to struggle along with someone” (BDAG; so Fee [1995], 166, rightly renders “contend together” side by side, citing EDNT 3:296). It is a rare word, even in classical Greek, found in the NT only here and in Phil 4:3. With it Paul quickly changes the picture from soldiers at battle stations to athletes working as a team, side by side, playing the game not as several individuals but together as one person with one mind (μιᾷ ψυχῇ), for one goal (see Pfitzner, Paul and the Agon Motif, 114–18).

Here that goal is to preserve τῇ πίστει τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, “the faith brought about by the gospel.” This interpretation of the expression (unique in the NT [Bockmuehl, 99]) understands (1) that τῇ πίστει, “the faith,” here is an early example of the tendency for the word πίστις, “faith,” to become a technical term for “creed”—those things that the Christian believes (cf. also 1 Tim 3:9; 4:1, 6; 5:8; 6:10, 21; Jude 3). (2) It understands that the dative τῇ πίστει, “the faith,” is a dative of interest or advantage (so too O’Brien, 152), to be translated “for the faith,” “to preserve the faith,” and not a dative of association governed by the preposition σὺν, “with,” in the compound word συναθλοῦντες, “struggling together with,” to be translated “with the faith” (as does Hall, ExpTim 85 [1974] 119–20; see also Jones, Lightfoot). The context, with its stress on community, demands that ἀλλήλοις, “with one another,” be mentally supplied if one needs to see a substantive
governed by συναθλοῦντες, “struggling together with.” (3) It also understands that τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, “the gospel,” is a subjective genitive, meaning that the gospel is the generative power of the Christian’s creed, that the good news that God has acted in Christ for man’s salvation is the source and origin of the faith, the essence of what a Christian believes (i.e., “brought about by the gospel”).

The issue here then is the apostolic faith. The faith is being threatened. There are those who would nullify this faith, perhaps by proclaiming a message that is not founded on the free grace of God (Collange) and the finished work of Christ to which nothing can be added by way of human effort. Thus the plea for unity is no small matter. Only by the total cooperation of Christians striving together in unity with one another in this fierce contest can the true gospel be preserved against distortion or destruction by its opponents. But this is an extension of Paul’s thought, however legitimate.

28 καὶ μὴ πτυρόμενοι ἐν μὴ δεν ὑπὸ τῶν ἀντικείμενων, “in no way letting your opponents intimidate you.” The Christian also stands his ground by showing a certain kind of courage, by not allowing himself to be intimidated in any way by his opponents. The verb πτύρεσθαι, “to be intimidated,” is extremely rare, found nowhere else in the entire Greek Bible. But it is used on occasion in classical Greek of timid horses that shy upon being startled at some unexpected object (LSJ). Perhaps by the choice of this unusual word Paul shows himself anxious that his friends should
not “break loose in disarray” (Martin [1976], 84) or lose control of themselves as a result of the attacks of their adversaries.

It is not clear who these adversaries were. True, Paul’s own sufferings at Philippi had been caused by pagan Gentiles (Acts 16). It is also true that Paul’s plea here to united action against the enemy is reinforced by reminding the Philippians of the suffering he himself had experienced while at Philippi and which the Philippians had witnessed (v 30). Paul’s opponents at Philippi (from the record in Acts) were found in the hostile pagan world. The word ἀντικείμενοι, “adversaries,” seems to refer to mob violence such as Paul encountered at Philippi (2:15), strife engendered by their pagan neighbors (Bruce, 33). The hardships of the Macedonian Christians are described in 2 Cor 8:1–2 (θλίψις, “affliction”; cf. 1 Thess 1:6; 2:14; 3:3; 2 Thess 1:4; see Bormann, Philippi; Pilhofer, Philippi, vol. 1). But these facts do not of themselves prove that the present opposition facing the Philippian church came only from the pagan world (as Michael, Martin [1959], and Loh and Nida suggest). Rather the threat to the faith of the gospel that figures so prominently in this section, a threat that arose from the proclamation of a false “gospel” or from persecution promoted by the champions of that false gospel, seems to argue more forcefully for the view that these adversaries were evangelistically fervent Jews (i.e., non-Christian Judaizers) who either resided in Philippi or who had come from Thessalonica to attack the growing church (see Introduction, Paul’s Opponents and the False Teachers at Philippi; cf. Acts 17:1–5, 10–13). These adversaries, then, may be the same as those Paul speaks so sharply against in chap. 3. But there is no
definite indication that Paul is here debating with the so-called Christian Judaizers.

Heroes εστιν αυτοις ξενδειξις απωλειας, υμων δε σωτηριας, και τουτο απο θεου, “For although your loyalty to the faith is proof to them that you will perish, it is in fact proof to you that you will be saved by God.” These words that now follow are extraordinarily difficult to interpret. This difficulty is reflected in the translations, which either leave one still puzzled over their meaning or add details hard to justify textually in order to make sense of them (cf. PHILLIPS, GNB). Westcott and Hort found these words so disconcerting that they suggested that these words and the words in v 29 be put in a parenthesis, thus enabling v 30 to be attached directly to v 28 a. Such a suggestion provides a smooth flow of thought and treats the parenthesis as a Pauline aside that gives a theological explanation of Christian suffering. Yet O’Brien (157) finds no problem to be solved.

Perhaps the difficulty can be resolved in a different, less radical, way, resulting in a quite different interpretation of the text from the one generally accepted today. (Yet it has not commanded general endorsement; see below.)

(1) ηπις πιστει, “the faith” (v 27), is a reasonable antecedent for the relative pronoun ητις, “which” (noted in Martin [1976], 84; see Binder Glaube bei Paulus, 78; but not O’Brien, 154, nor Fee [1995], 168 n. 53). It is certainly as reasonable as making the idea of fearlessness in v 28 the antecedent. This latter idea was suggested by Lightfoot and is reflected in most translations. But ηπις πιστει, “the faith,” easily accounts for the form of ητις, “which,” which
agrees with its antecedent in number and gender (singular and feminine), as normally it should (Smyth, Greek Grammar, 562 §2501). There is no need then to search for a less normal, though also possible, grammatical explanation, i.e., that ἥτις, “which,” gets its number and gender not from its antecedent but from attraction to some noun (ἐνδείξις, “sign”) within its own clause (so Lightfoot; cf. Eph 3:13). Thus the Philippians’ adherence to the faith, not their courage, is the ἐνδείξις ἁπωλείας, “sign of destruction.”

(2) ἥτις, “which,” may in fact introduce two clauses that, although compressed, are nevertheless parallel to each other. With a minimal amount of reconstruction, it is possible to make this parallelism obvious.

Figure 3. Reconstruction of Phil 1:28

To justify this reconstruction, the following things should be noted: (a) In the NT it is possible to find antithetic parallel clauses with or without μὲν, “on the one hand,” as a correlative to δὲ, “on the other hand” (Rom 16:19; Gal 2:9; see BDF §447 [2, 5]). To insert μὲν, “on the one hand,” into the reconstruction for the sake of the obvious is, therefore, grammatically legitimate. (b) The verb ἐστι [ ν ], “is,” is frequently omitted from parallel phrases in classical and NT Greek. Its presence, though not visible, is always
understood (BDF §127[1]). This is the case here in Phil 1:28. The reconstruction, however, merely inserts ἐστί, “is,” for the sake of clarity, although it is superfluous to do so. (c) It is the same with ἔνδειξις, “sign.” ἔνδειξις (elsewhere only 3x in NT: Rom 3:25, 26; 2 Cor 8:4) clearly is modified by σωτηρίας, “of salvation,” as well as by ἀπωλείας, “of destruction.” Thus, to include ἔνδειξις in the reconstruction, although it too is superfluous, nevertheless increases the visibility of the parallelism. (d) ὑμῶν, “your,” in Paul’s text is placed directly between ἀπωλείας, “of destruction,” and σωτηρίας, “of salvation,” in an amphibolous position that permits one to see it as modifying both of these nouns, in spite of the fact that ὑμῶν, “your,” is followed by δέ, “on the other hand.” If the postpositive δέ, “on the other hand,” were intended to limit the ὑμῶν, “your,” only to the second clause, one would expect the word order to have been αὐτῶν ... ἀπωλείας ... σωτηρίας δὲ ὑμῶν, resulting in a neat chiastic construction of which Paul is fond. Therefore, to add ὑμῶν, “your,” to the reconstructed text after ἀπωλείας, “of your destruction,” is grammatically defensible, more so than importing αὐτῶν, “of their destruction,” with no basis, as the great majority of translators do. (e) The only real addition to the text, then, is ὑμῖν, “to you.” But this is now demanded by the clear antithetic parallelism of the two clauses. The dative αὐτῶν, “to them,” of the first clause is answered now by the dative ὑμῖν, “to you,” of the second. (f) The manuscript tradition supports this reconstruction, supplying μέν, “on the one hand,” and altering ὑμῖν, “your,” to ὑμῖν, “to you” (ἡμῖν, “to us”). Never was the αὐτῶν, “to them,” altered to αὐτῶν, “their,” in order to find a
parallel for ὑμῶν, “your”—never was the contrast understood as being “their destruction” over against “your destruction.” These variants, though rightly rejected as secondary, nevertheless indicate how early Greek scribes understood what Paul was saying. The result of this reconstruction shows that the real contrast is not between “their destruction” and “your salvation,” as is generally understood today, but between the different perceptions of two groups of people: the adversaries, on the one hand, perceive the willingness of the Philippians to fight for the faith of the gospel (v 27) as an indication of their destruction. The Philippians, on the other hand, perceive this as a sure proof (see Kümmel, ZTK 49 [1952] 154–67) of their salvation (cf. 2 Cor 2:15–16, and see Pss. Sol. 16:5).

(3) ἀπώλεια is generally used of eternal “destruction” (A. Oepke, TDNT 1:397) and σωτηρία of eternal “salvation” (W. Foerster, TDNT 7:992–94). But both words can and are used with less than such ultimate meanings (cf. Matt 26:8; Phil 1:19; but not for more recent commentators, such as O’Brien, 156: “Both nouns are to be understood eschatologically, i.e., of perdition and future salvation, with the first applying to the readers’ adversaries and the second to the Philippians themselves”). Hence, here, in these highly rhetorical phrases that appear in a context where the imagery of battle and contest is prominent, it may be that these words should be understood in the lesser sense of “defeat” or “victory,” “winning” or “losing” (so GNB, JB). It is even more likely that Paul, in making a play on these words, especially on their sounds (ἀπώλείας/σωτηρίας), may also be making a play on their meanings, going to the extreme with one and holding back on the other, seeing in
ἀπωλείας the immediate “destruction” of the body and in σωτηρίας the ultimate “salvation” of the soul (cf. 1 Cor 5:5).

(4) A free translation of v 28 will serve as a summary: “In no way let your adversaries strike terror in you. For although they see your loyalty to the truth as inevitably leading to your persecution and death [ἀπωλείας], you see it as leading through persecution to the salvation of your souls [σωτηρίας].”

Phil 1:28 is a complex sentence. The novel view just presented above (restated by Hawthorne, ExpTim 95.3 [1983] 80–81) has received criticism (O’Brien, 158 n. 72: “not convincing”; Fee [1995], 169 n. 53: “highly improbable”; but it is defended in part by Fowl, “Philippians 1:28b, One More Time”). The chief gravamen of resistance is (a) the eschatological nature of ἀπωλεία, “destruction,” which here does not seem to mean “your persecution” (cf. GNB; Fee [1995], 156 n. 74), and (b) the meaning of the controverted and little-used word ἔνδειξις, which means not “sign” but “demonstration,” and yet even if it is not a case of the synonymity of the two words (so Grudem, Gift of Prophecy, 194–96, but doubted by Fee [1995], 169 n. 55), a meaning of “an indication of God’s attitude” is attested. This relates not to human perception but to divine judgment when coupled with ἀπωλεία, “destruction.” Added to Hawthorne’s view, given above, is his understanding of Phil 1:29, which (as will be seen in the Comment on the next verse) is taken to mean that the Philippians are suffering in the place of Christ instead of “for his sake” or “cause.” This, however, may seem to make incomprehensible the idea that their Christian
standing is in peril, if suffering is a divine privilege accorded them and if they are somehow suffering “instead of” Christ.

29 ὅτι ὑμῖν ἐχαρίσθη τὸ ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ, οὐ μόνον τὸ εἰς αὐτὸν πιστεύειν ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ πάσχειν, “For God has graciously given you the privilege both of believing in Christ and of suffering in his stead.” The saying of Paul in v 28, if understood in the fashion just explained above (in spite of the objections also noted), leads on quite easily to the next saying. A Christian who is willing to stand up together with other Christians for the faith of the gospel (v 27) can expect to suffer. It has always been so. Redemptive history teaches that those who believe the word of God, who uncompromisingly speak this word and unyieldingly live in accordance with it, often pay for their courage and resolution with their lives—from the ancient prophets to Jesus (Matt 5:12; 23:29–37; cf. 21:33–46). πιστεύειν, “believing,” and πάσχειν, “suffering,” therefore, go together now as they have in the past (cf. 4 Macc 5–6; 9–15, esp. 15; the whole range of Jewish documentary material is given in Kleinknecht, Der leidende Gerechtfertige; see the report on this theme in R. P. Martin, James, WBC 48 [Waco, TX: Word Books, 1988] xciii–xcviii). Paul reminds his friends in Philippi of this fact. At the same time he encourages them by telling them, twice over, that their suffering is “for Christ” (ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ, “for Christ”; ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ, “for him”).

The prepositional phrase ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ, “for Christ,” may mean simply that the Philippians are suffering because they are on Christ’s side (BDAG). They have believed the gospel of Christ (v 27a). They have set themselves to preserve and propagate this
gospel (v 27b). They have taken their stand with Christ. As a consequence they have put themselves on a collision course with hostile forces that are opposed to Christ. It is inevitable then that they suffer.

ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ can also mean “for the sake of Christ.” If this is the sense here, then Paul is saying that the Philippians are willing to suffer because of their love for and devotion to Christ. Christ is the moving cause or reason for their willingness to endure. Like earlier disciples, these newer ones are able to view suffering for the sake of Christ as an honor and privilege (cf. Acts 5:41; so Moule, Origin of Christology, 120–21).

But this prepositional phrase can also mean “in place of,” “instead of” (BDAG; Atkinson, Theology of Prepositions). If this is the idea, then the phrase has reached its most profound meaning. ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ ... πάσχειν, “suffering... for Christ,” then would indicate that the Philippians are in some way permitted to suffer in Christ’s stead. To use the apostle’s own words: in that the Philippians are suffering, as he himself, they actually are filling up “what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s sufferings” (Col 1:24–25). By having joined the “fellowship of his sufferings” (Phil 3:10), they have chosen to be Christ’s replacements on earth in order to suffer in his place in his absence. It is not that anyone dares put oneself on the same level with Christ in this respect. Yet there apparently is a very real sense in which Christ needs people who are willing to take upon themselves the burden of his suffering in history that still remains to be borne. Paul, on the one hand, wishes to be such a person (Col 1:24–25)—to suffer in Christ’s stead that others may be consoled (2 Cor 1:4–6), to die that others might live (2
Cor 4:12), to endure hardships that others might be saved (1 Cor 4:13; the word περικάθαρμα, “rubbish” [NRSV], used in 1 Cor 4:13 is found in the LXX in the sense of “ransom” [Prov 21:18]; it was also used in the atonement rites of the Greek Thargelium; see Stauffer, New Testament Theology, 188, 307–8, although some might argue that Stauffer’s discussion is relevant only for the apostle himself, not the Philippians). The Philippians, on the other hand, can also share in this privilege. They, too, may suffer “in Christ’s place” (ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ).

Thus it is that Paul dares say that suffering ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ, “in Christ’s stead,” is a divine gift offered to them in love. The verb he uses, χαρίζεσθαι, “to give,” though far less common than διδόναι, “to give,” is nevertheless one of his special verbs. It is used by him sixteen of the twenty-three times it appears in the NT. Formed from the same root as χάρις, “grace,” it conveys the idea of the free, unmerited favor or kindness of God (Rom 8:32). It denotes privilege, therefore, and this idea is made explicit in many translations: “you have (graciously) been granted the privilege of suffering for Christ” (BDAG; cf. PHILLIPS, NEB, GNB, JB). The passive form of this verb, ἐχαρίσθη, “it was given,” is a “divine passive” and can be changed into an active statement with God as the subject (see Jeremias, New Testament Theology, 9). This use of the passive indicates Paul’s belief that, as Martin ([1976], 84) explains, “God is in control of all events. Therefore, the Philippians should not be upset by their bitter experience as if God had forgotten them or were angry with them. On the contrary, the verb... would remind them that even this trial comes to them as a gift of his grace” (cf. Beare). According to Vincent (35) “God
rewards and indorses believers with the gift of suffering” (cf. Heb 12:5–11 for a similar Christian understanding of suffering).

The idea of suffering and suffering “for Christ” is preeminent here. But it should be noted in passing that Paul incidentally says that the act of believing in Christ (εἰς αὐτὸν πιστεύειν) is also a gift of God (cf. Eph 2:8, where, however, the antecedent of τοῦτο, “this,” is problematic). πιστεύειν εἶς, “to believe in,” is a NT grammatical invention and is the most emphatic way of expressing absolute trust in Christ, infrequently used by Paul, but often by John (see G. F. Hawthorne, “The Concept of Faith in the Fourth Gospel,” BSac 116 [1959] 116–26).

Alternatively, recent commentators have found the idea that Paul is describing the Philippian church as suffering in place of Christ or enduring his sufferings hard to justify. In spite of the appeal to Col 1:24–25, itself a crux interpretum, “cross for interpreters” (see the range of possibilities for the notion that Paul’s readers are reminded of their privilege, implied in the verb ὑμῖν ἐχαρίσθη, “it has been granted to you”—a lexical expression unique in the NT), this view may be held to overlook the special role of Paul as the “divine apostle,” called to suffering as part of God’s saving plan (Acts 9:15) and as the “apostle to the Gentiles” (Rom 15:16). Paul’s language, especially in those places where he associates his congregations alongside himself (in 2 Cor in particular), has to be carefully regarded since his use of the pronouns “we” and “us” is not necessarily inclusive but may denote his office par excellence as the eschatological apostle (see Fridrichsen, Apostle and His Message; Barrett, Signs of an Apostle), playing a role and holding a
position unshared with his congregations. On the general linguistic question see Lofthouse, ExpTim 57–58 (1946–47) 179–82. It could thus be argued that there is no substantial reason to forsake the traditional interpretation of Phil 1:29. Paul is paving the way for his forthcoming recital of the way or story of Christ (2:6–11) and showing in advance how believers are called (2:5, 12) to make his story their own story. This is called the “fellowship of his sufferings” (3:10), but there is no confusion between the Savior and the saved.

30 τὸν αὐτὸν ἁγῶνα ἔχοντες, οἷον εἰδέτε ἐν ἐμṇ καὶ νῦν ἀκούέτε ἐν ἐμοί, “This is the meaning of the struggle you are in. It is the same sort of struggle you saw me once engage in and now hear that I am still engaged in it.” Paul concludes this section with a participial phrase that further explains the meaning of the Philippians’ suffering. Their struggle is an extension of the suffering he himself had experienced when he was in Philippi (Acts 16:16–24; cf. 1 Thess 2:2), which they then had seen at close hand and which he is even now enduring in Caesarea (Acts 24–25), or maybe earlier in Ephesus (1 Cor 15:32; 2 Cor 1:8–11) or later at Rome (Acts 28:30, 31), though it is hard to see this depiction of house arrest as represented in the strong term ἀγών, “fight, struggle.” Once more it is not implied that Paul and his readers are in identical circumstances, as if both groups are “in chains,” as Paul evidently was (Phil 1:7), but that they together share in one apostolic struggle (Gnilka, 102), about which they have only heard through Epaphroditus. It is a battle that results from preaching and defending the gospel, and in this battle the Philippians have joined. They, together with him, have formed a “fellowship of Christ’s
suffering” (3:10), since the gospel is itself “the word of the cross” (1 Cor 1:18; see Richardson, Introduction, 29; Güttgemanns, Der leidende Apostel). The word ἀγών, “struggle,” that Paul uses here originally applied to athletic contests in the arena. Eventually it came to mean any inward or outward struggle (Col 2:1; 1 Thess 2:2; cf. 1 Tim 6:12; 2 Tim 4:7; Heb 12:1; see Loh and Nida). The nominative participle ἔχοντες, “having,” agrees, not in form but in sense, with the dative ὑμῖν, “to you” (cf. Col 3:16; cf. Eph 3:18; 4:2; see Moulton et al., Grammar, 1:225). There is thus no reason for going back to στῆκετε, “you stand firm” (v 27), to find a “proper” word for the participle to modify, and therefore, there is no reason for treating vv 28b–29 as a parenthesis in order to save the grammar. The relative pronoun οἷον, “which sort,” that is used here by Paul instead of the more usual ὧν, “which,” indicates that he knew that the Philippians were pitted against the same foe as he was, but that their sufferings had taken a different form from his. He gives no indication that the Philippians or any of their leaders were in prison (as Lohmeyer thought), but he makes clear that they were nonetheless hurting and for the same reason as he — both his sufferings and theirs were the direct result of a determination to preach the gospel and make sure of its advancement (πρόκοπη, “progress” [Phil 1:12, 25]) throughout the world. And this determination stood firm in spite of strong opposition from aggressive adversaries (Phil 1:28; cf. 1 Thess 2:14–16).

Explanation
Paul encourages the Philippians under the threefold metaphors of citizens, soldiers, and athletes (language he will revert to in Phil 4:2–3), though the political and social dimension is played down (even if it does appear later [2:15]), to live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ at all times and especially when under duress. This means, among other things, that they will be good citizens both of the earthly state in which they live and of the heavenly state to which they ultimately belong. It also means that the Philippians must present a united front. They must be one in spirit and intent, fighting side by side for the preservation of the faith brought about by the gospel, those things most surely believed by the church. It means loyalty to this faith that in the eyes of their opponents seems a foolhardy allegiance to something that can bring them only persecution and death; yet there is no hint that Paul is switching his thought to put in peril the Philippians’ salvation. On the contrary, he has complete confidence that they will endure their hardships and that God will perfect his work at Philippi (1:6). In their own eyes, however, such loyalty is to something that will bring them salvation.

Herein the eschatological note is sounded. They believed that in response to their faith God would bring them safely to their desired end. Finally, living in a manner worthy of the gospel means that they must not fear their adversaries or grow discouraged because of the trouble heaped upon them. For suffering for Christ, as believing in Christ, is a gracious gift to them from God for which they should be thankful, although there is no masochistic longing to seek suffering for its own sake, as later in Ignatius of Antioch (Rom. 4:1–3). They and Paul form a community of sufferers with
the suffering Christ. Because of their whole-hearted allegiance to the gospel and their total commitment to Christ, they can fully expect to share in the sufferings of Christ. “A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master” (Matt 10:24–25 NRSV; cf. Phil 3:10).

One of the firmest conclusions in more recent studies of the letter is the isolation of Phil 1:27—2:30 as a thematic unit. Paul’s admonitions take their starting point in the reminders of his own absence from the beloved community he had founded under God and the Philippians’ perceived needs to face threats that loomed large, at least before his eyes (1:27). Paul’s departure from Philippi was not the end of troubles facing the infant church there. The Philippian congregation, like any religious community in a hostile society, was (in his pastoral vision) clearly in danger, both physically (1:28–30; as the later martyrs were to endure on Christ’s behalf; Mart. Pol. 14.2; Eusebius, Hist. eccl. 5.1.23) and as a group threatened from within—a theme to be addressed in 2:1–4, which seems to indicate that they were sorely divided.

Using a word of special relevance to those who lived in a Roman colony (Acts 16:12, 21), Paul recalls their citizen life in an outpost of the empire and applies this term to their life—together with a higher allegiance to God’s (Christ’s) kingly rule as his servants and citizens. This is the heavy, theological, ecclesiological, and ethical freight contained in his quasi-political term: “let your life in the polis of God’s realm be worthy of your allegiance to the good news,” that is, the work of Paul as preacher and church leader under God (Phil 1:5, 12, 27 [2x]; 4:3, 15). The “worthy life” (a theme
picked up in Pol. Phil. 5:9, which uses both the verb and the adverb, and developed more extensively in Diogn. 5.9: Christians “pass their time upon earth, but... have their citizenship in heaven”) is seen in two commendable and necessary virtues: courage and unity. The link between good citizenship and unity is made by Dio Chrysostom (A.D. 40–120). Augustine was influenced by this terminology of “worthy citizenship” (see Bockmuehl).

First, Paul’s readers are to conduct themselves in a hostile world with confidence that God is with them to drive out their fear (Phil 1:28). The church’s salvation, meaning their welfare and integrity, as in 2:12 at the conclusion and enforcement of the christological section, is in higher hands than those who would destroy them. Paul turns the tables on the persecutors with a well-known moral maxim: “Destruction to the destroyer” (see 1:28; see 1 Cor 3:17 for a clear example applied to failing professed Christians). In the light of this confidence, let the Philippians take courage and close ranks (Phil 1:27).

The call, however, is not simply on grounds of prudence and common sense, reminding them that they would be easy prey if they fell apart in disarray—and so incidentally Paul’s own work as church founder would go for nothing (2:16). Significantly, Paul provides a theological reason for his assurance that all will be well. He is not in the business of handing out simple bromides to boost faltering faith. Rather, he offers a theodicy (1:29) as a tonic to lift drooping and nervous spirits and sets the suffering of the Philippians within the framework of God’s all-embracing providence, as he viewed his own—and Christ’s—fate in terms of God’s
gracious provision (1:29: “it has been granted in grace”; cf. 2:9: “bestowed in grace”).
2. To Harmony and Humility (2:1–4)

Bibliography


Translation

¹ Therefore, if in any way a I have given you [or, there is] encouragement in Christ, if in any way [my] love has consoled you, if in any way you have enjoyed [or, you have] the fellowship created by the Spirit [or, in the Spirit], if in any way you have experienced the tenderness and compassion [of God in Christ], ² then make my joy complete: Think alike. Love alike. Be of one soul. Be of one b mind. ³ Do not act out of a spirit of rivalry, nor out of empty conceit. Act rather with humility and consider others better than yourselves. ⁴ Each c of you must look to d the interests of others rather than e to the interests of yourselves.

Notes
1.a. ἐᾷ τίς or ἐᾷ τί, “if in any way,” appears four times in v 1. The MS tradition, in some instances, is uncertain about whether the text should read ἐᾷ τίς or ἐῚ τί. BDF conjecture that ἐ_BITI was intended throughout, τί being understood as the stereotyped adverbial “in any way” (§137 [2]; see also Haupt; Moulton et al., Grammar, 1:59).

2.b. The MS tradition is divided between ἕν, “one,” and αὐτό, “same.” αὐτό, however, appears to be secondary, an attempt to harmonize τὸ ἑν φρονοῦντες, “be of one mind,” with τὸ αὐτὸ φρονῆτε, “think alike,” which one finds earlier in v 2.

4.c. ἐκαστος, “each [sg.],” at the beginning of v 4 is read as ἐκαστοι, “each [pl.],” by A B F G 33 81 and a few other MSS. Since ἐκαστος was the form more widely used by Greek writers, even with a plural subject (BDF §305), it seems that ἐκαστοι should be considered original and ἐκαστος secondary, a change made to conform the text to what was grammatically more familiar. It is possible to take the ἐκαστοι at the end of v 4 with the beginning of v 5.

4.d. Some MSS attempt to make the long sentence beginning at v 2 less awkward by changing the participle σκοποῦντες, “looking to,” into imperative forms: σκοπεῖτε, “look to,” or σκοπείτω, “let [each one] look to.”

4.e. This represents a change from the first edition of this commentary, which rendered this verse: “Each of you must look to the interests of others as well as [reading ἀλλὰ καί ] to the interests of yourselves.” The Western texts (D* F G it), however,
omit the καί, “also,” in ἀλλὰ καί, “but also,” thus reading: “Each one of you must look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.” This omission, whatever its textual pedigree, can be defended as required ad sensum, given what follows. Paul is rebuking self-interest in 2:3–4, not inviting his readers to have regard to their own interests. Here is a good illustration of where a decision in textual criticism speaks to a major theological point (see Martin [1976], 90). If this shorter version is accepted, it supports the interpretation that Paul is not making a general statement about Christians’ responsibility to live “each with an eye to the interests of others as well as to his own” (MOFFATT); rather—as will be evident—with the verb σκοπεῖν, “look to,” having a definite object in its sights (cf. Lightfoot), Paul is advocating that his readers fix their gaze on the good points of other Christians, with the negative warning that the Philippians should not be so preoccupied with their own concerns and the cultivation of their own “spiritual experiences” that they fail to see what should be emulated in others. Cf. Bockmuehl (113), who notes: “In the absence of monon, alla kai properly serves to denote ‘contrastive emphasis’... meaning ‘but actually’ or ‘but rather’—not ‘but also’ ” (citing L&N, §91.11). Paul is maybe correcting the self-centered preoccupations of a perfectionist group at Philippi (3:12–16 ; see Martin [1976], 31–32, and idem, Hymn of Christ, xxxiv–xxxvii).

Form/Structure/Setting

This new section is closely joined to that which precedes it, not only by the conjunction οὖν, “therefore,” but by Paul’s emphatic reiteration of the one idea that harmony is essential for Christian
community and for an effective effort to defend the gospel (cf. Phil 1:27; 2:2). Other concepts such as humility and self-sacrifice (2:3–4) are added, not to divert attention away from the fundamental concept of unity but to show that unity of spirit flows from humility of spirit and self-sacrifice flows from a willingness to restrain one’s own desires in order to satisfy the desires of others. And Paul’s appeal is based on the deepest experiences common to every Christian—encouragement in Christ, incentive of love, fellowship of or in the Spirit, tenderness, and compassion.

Unity dominates the thinking of the apostle in this section, and he makes full use of his skill as a writer to convey to the Philippians its consummate importance. (Or encouragement is the dominant theme, as Holloway, Consolation in Philippians, 121, proposes, looking back to Phil 1:12–30, though the idea of unity also looks forward to the present pericope. The twin ideas of ὀίκτιρμοί, “compassion,” and παράκλησις, “encouragement,” are linked in 2 Cor 1:3. Joy continues the topos in Phil 2:2.) He uses words big in meaning, compacted into brief verbless phrases, rare words, and words never found anywhere else in the NT. He piles clause on top of clause, beginning each clause with the same word. He does all this as if searching for ways to make his readers both think and feel deeply about the essential nature of harmony and its necessity within the Christian community. Even the exalted, solemn speech pattern of this section adds to the magnitude of this idea.

As Paul writes, his words have been seen to fall into three strophes (see the chart in Fee [1995], 176, who offers a different layout, incorporating a protasis in Phil 2:1 followed by an apodosis
“fulfill my joy” and a consecutive clause “so that you set your mind on the same thing”; this arrangement may be preferred). The chiastic structure of 2:1–4, especially 2:2b–4, is dealt with in Peterlin, Paul’s Letter to the Philippians, 59–65.

(1) The first strophe is recognized by the fourfold εἴ τις/εἴ τι, “if in any way,” introducing four phrases, each of which is composed of two nouns and no verbs (v 1).

(2) The second strophe also has four parts. The first half is composed of two imperatives (ἵνα, “that,” with the subjunctive may be taken imperatively; cf. Moulton et al., Grammar, 3:94–95), and the second half is made up of two participles, with the verb φρονεῖν, “think, be of [one] mind,” marking the end of each half (v 2).

(3) The third strophe has six parts. The first half is discerned by three important nouns, and the last half by two participles and the twice-used ἕκαστος, “each” (vv 3–4 ; so Gnilka, who adapts Lohmeyer’s [72–73] strophic arrangement as in 1:27–30 ; he is followed by Black, JETS 28 [1985] 300; Silva; and O’Brien; yet Fee [1995], 177 n. 15, is critical).

Whether this strophic pattern can be demonstrated to the satisfaction of everyone is doubtful, but unimportant. For it is clear, in any case, that Paul puts the force of fine rhetoric to work to impress upon his audience the importance of fundamental Christian ideas—unity based on humility and self-sacrifice. The exhortation (παράκλησις, “encouragement,” in 2:1–4) has connections with 2:12–30, especially as Epaphroditus is to be greeted with joy and accorded a measure of acceptance. He exemplifies the model of
Paul in his suffering and the Lord in his obedience to death in a paradoxical remark in 2:27, where the Philippian messenger in his obedient fidelity παραπλήσιον θανάτῳ, “nearly died,” but he did not actually die.

Comment

1 εἴ τις οὖν, “therefore, if in any way.” This verse has four brief clauses, each of which begins with εἰ, “if,” and contains two nouns and no verbs. As a result it presents the translator with unusual difficulties and the commentator with a bewildering number of possibilities of interpretation. For example, to translate these expressions into English as conditional clauses, each beginning with the word “if,” does retain something of the rhythm and the rhetorical repetitiveness of the Greek, but it may convey the wrong idea. When Paul introduced each of these clauses with εἰ, “if,” he did not intend by this to cast doubt at all on what he was saying. Just the opposite. The construction of these clauses in Greek, introduced by εἰ, is such that it becomes equivalent in meaning to an affirmative statement: “Since there is...” Some modern translations attempt to make this clear. Thus GOODSPEED translates, “By whatever appeal there is in our relation to Christ...” (see also MOFFATT, NAB; cf. Matt 6:30; 12:27; Rom 2:17–20; 1 Cor 9:11 for other examples of εἰ used in this way; BDF §372[1]).

A much greater difficulty, however, arises from attempting to understand exactly what Paul meant by the nouns he used in each of these four clauses, and how each noun in a given pair of nouns relates to the other. A further problem arises from the fact that the
personal character, which is so much a part of this letter, is obscured by the compressed nature of these four expressions, leaving one to ask, “Who is doing what to whom?” And yet that personal element is present, nonetheless.

παράκλησις ἐν Χριστῷ, “I have given you [or, there is] encouragement in Christ.” The noun παράκλησις is capable of conveying at least two very different ideas: (1) “comfort” or “consolation,” on the one hand, and (2) “exhortation” or “encouragement,” on the other. See the full discussion in O’Brien (167–70), who finally comes down on the side of “comfort” (along with Kemmler, Faith and Human Reason, 168–77). But since the verb from which this noun comes (παρακαλέω) is used especially by Paul for the exhortation he himself gives, based on the word of God and in the power of the Holy Spirit (O. Schmitz, TDNT 5:794–95; cf. Rom 12:1; 15:30; 16:17; 1 Cor 1:10; 4:16; 16:15; Phil 4:2; 1 Thess 2:11–12; 5:14; cf. Eph 4:1), it seems best to understand the noun παράκλησις here in the same sense (against Barclay, ExpTim 70 [1958–59] 4–7, 40–44; Collange, 77–78; and now Holloway, Consolation in Philippians, 120 n. 93, who notes that the preceding context of Phil 1:12–30 is consolatory, and so he opts, with Lohmeyer, 82, for “consolation”; cf. Bonnard, 38). See too Bjerkelund’s study, Parakalô, which emphasizes how the semantic field of the παρακαλεῖν/ἐρωτᾶν, “exhort/ask,” verbs shows the writer’s concern for both practical and “spiritual” [geistliche] interests (87) and goes on to define the scope of παρακαλεῖν as expressing a summons in a dignified, well-bred way, free from a tone of either injunction or submissiveness (110). Bjerklund further draws attention to 1 Thess 4:1, 4:10 b, which contain the sense of
exhortation as revealing Paul’s intention to “spur on [the Thessalonian Christians] to a way of life pleasing to God” (134). Collange (77) softens the appeal, calling it a “non-exhortation,” as if Paul is giving the appearance of a plea, not an order. Thus this compact expression seems to picture Paul as the one who has given the Philippians exhortations, words of encouragement “in Christ,” in the power of the Holy Spirit. His παρακλήσεις, “encouragements,” were not commands but appeals to Christians (those ἐν Χριστῷ, “in Christ”) by a fellow Christian (one who was himself ἐν Χριστῷ, “in Christ”)—moral strengthenings by one who was strong in the faith (see Caird). “If this is true, as indeed it is,” Paul says, “and if my words of encouragement have in any way helped you to stay true to the faith in the past, then respond accordingly in the present.”

εἰ τι παραμύθιον ἀγάπης, “if in any way [my] love has consoled you.” The first noun of the second clause, παραμύθιον, “consolation,” used only here in the NT (cf. παραμυθία, “consolation” [1 Cor 14:3]), has as its fundamental idea “to speak to someone” or “to speak to someone by coming close to the side” and always in a friendly way. Its meaning, like that of παράκλησις, “encouragement,” has also developed along two lines: with reference to what ought to be done, “to admonish,” and with reference to what has already happened, “to console” (G. Stählin, TDNT 5:815–16). Thus the words παράκλησις, “encouragement,” and παραμύθιον/παραμυθία, “consolation,” cannot be sharply distinguished. This is an argument for taking the sense of “consolation” as applicable to both nouns (see Fee [1995], 180,
noting how in 1 Cor 14:4 the two nouns are combined). Suffering—a theme in Phil 1:12–30—suggests that the consoling note will be sounded in the parenesis of Phil 2:1–4 (2 Cor 1:5). The verbs from which these nouns derive are regularly coupled together (1 Thess 2:12; cf. also 1 Cor 14:4). Since this is so and since παράκλησις, “encouragement,” was used in the first clause, it seems likely that here in the second clause the idea of “consolation,” “solace” (Fee’s word borrowed from BDAG), comes to the fore in παραμυθίον (cf. Wis 3:18).

The noun ἀγάπης, “of love,” is a subjective genitive (cf. O’Brien, 172), so the “consolation” is that consolation generated by love, i.e., “if... love has consoled you.” But by whose love? Paul’s or God’s? In this letter, where Paul’s affection for the Philippians seems so obvious and so much in the foreground, and from the verb παραμυθέσθαι, “to console,” which is never used directly for God’s comfort (so G. Stählin, TDNT 5:821), it is natural to suppose that it is Paul’s love that provided consolation for the Philippians and is in view here (so Michael; but see Barth, Martin [1976], and Fee [1995], 180, contrasted with Martin [1959]). “If my love has provided you with any consolation in your suffering, as indeed it has,” Paul says, “then please now respond properly to my request.” Alternatively, however, if Paul is basing his appeal on theological grounds, “objective realities” (Lohmeyer, 82), the referent is not Paul’s love but God’s love or Christ’s love for his people (cf. Spicq, Agape, 2:294). This is preferred in the revision of this commentary, where now the implied modifier “my” from the Translation in the earlier edition has been enclosed in brackets as a less viable option.
εἰ τις κοινωνία πνεύματος, “if in any way you have enjoyed [ or, you have] the fellowship created by the Spirit [ or, in the Spirit],” is the third clause piled up in rhetorical fashion on the preceding clauses. In the NT κοινωνία may mean that “fellowship” or that close relationship that exists between believers and here especially between Paul and the Philippians (cf. Phil 1:5, 7). It is that community made up of people who are fellow members of the heavenly politeuma, “body of citizens” (cf. Aristotle’s definition of πόλις, “state,” as κοινωνία; see Comment on Phil 1:27 and Reicke, “Unité chrétienne,” 203–12), and who share the common life of God (cf. 1 John 1:3; 2:6 NEB). But what is the meaning of πνεύματος, “of spirit,” in this expression and what is the connection between κοινωνία, “fellowship,” and πνεύματος, “of spirit”? Since πνεύματος, “of spirit,” has no definite article in Greek, some interpreters understand it merely as “spirit” or “mind.” The expression κοινωνία πνεύματος thus means no more than a “fellowship of kindred spirits,” “mutual harmony,” or perhaps “spiritual fellowship” (see BRUCE; Hendriksen). The genitive πνεύματος, “of spirit,” then is a descriptive genitive.

It is more likely, however, that πνεύματος, “of spirit,” refers to the Holy Spirit (so O’Brien, 174; Fee [1995], 180): (1) κοινωνία, “fellowship,” itself, as it is used in the NT, conveys the idea of “spiritual fellowship.” Hence, to add πνεύματος, “of spirit,” as an adjectival modifier is unnecessary. (2) On occasion when Paul clearly refers to the Holy Spirit, he will omit both the definite article and the adjective ἅγιον, “holy” (Rom 7:6; 1 Cor 2:4; Gal 3:3; 5:16, 18, 25). (3) The “presence or absence of the article is a
precarious index of reference when the substantive is a great and familiar word; context or parallels must be brought in” (H. C. G. Moule, 34). (4) The words of 2 Cor 13:13 — ἡ κοινωνία τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος, “the fellowship of the Holy Spirit”—are a parallel so unusually close to the expression found in Phil 2:1 that one is fairly forced to admit that here πνεύματος, “of spirit,” can only refer to the Holy Spirit.

Most interpreters proceed then to interpret the genitive πνεύματος, “of spirit,” which modifies κοινωνία, “fellowship,” as an objective genitive: “fellowship in the Holy Spirit,” a fellowship “which comes about through his indwelling presence in the church and the Christian’s personal communion with him” (Martin [1976], 87, who follows Seesemann, Begriff KOINWNIA ; cf. McDermott, BZ n.s. 19 [1975] 64–77, 219–33; Reed, Discourse Analysis, 300–301, on the evidence of 1 Cor 1:9 and Phil 1:7 ; O’Brien, 173–74; Fee [1995], 181–82). For a clear exposition of this interpretation of κοινωνία, “fellowship,” in this context, see George, Communion with God, and the more popular presentation in Martin, Family and the Fellowship, chap. 3: “Fellowship: the Anatomy of a Word.”

But the threefold benediction of 2 Cor 13:13 (“the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit”), where the only parallel to κοινωνία πνεύματος, “fellowship of spirit,” occurs, may argue against this interpretation and for interpreting πνεύματος, “of spirit,” instead as a subjective genitive. Thus, κοινωνία πνεύματος here, as in 2 Cor 13:13, may refer to that “fellowship created by the Spirit” (cf. Eph 4:3 and comments by T. K. Abbott, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary
on the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians, ICC 36 [New York: Scribner’s Sons, 1903]; and M. Barth, Ephesians, AB 34A [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974]). Cf. Lohmeyer (82–83), who opts for a genitivus auctoris, “genitive of source.” So Paul may be held to plead, “If you belong to that community brought into existence by the Holy Spirit, and enjoy any fellowship with one another as a result, then live accordingly.” The Translation above adopts the subjective genitive interpretation, with the objective genitive option given in brackets.

εἰ τις σπλάγχνα καὶ οἴκτιρμοῖ, “if in any way you have experienced the tenderness and compassion [of God in Christ].” The final clause (lit. “if any bowels and mercies,” KJV) is the most difficult of the four clauses to understand. The noun σπλάγχνα, “bowels,” has occurred already in Phil 1:8 and was translated there as “deep affection.” τὰ σπλάγχνα, “the viscera,” were thought of in the ancient world as the seat of one's deep feelings such as “affection” (RSV, NEB), “tenderness” (JB), “compassion” (NAB, NRSV), and “kindness” (PHILLIPS, GNB). οἴκτιρμοῖ, “mercies,” used only five times in the NT and almost exclusively by Paul, overlaps somewhat in meaning with σπλάγχνα, “bowels,” describing similar feelings, such as pity, mercy, and compassion. These two nouns together then may be translated correctly into English with the words “affection and compassion” (cf. NEB). The two nouns form a hendiadys, making Paul speak of “heartfelt sympathy” (so Dibelius, 70; R. Bultmann, TDNT 5:161). But whose affection and compassion are in view and toward whom are these feelings directed? Some interpreters understand these nouns to be referring to human emotions exhibited on the strictly human plane (H. C. G.
Moule), the feelings of the Philippians either for one another (GNB) or for Paul (Michael; Beare; R. Bultmann, TDNT 5:161) or the feelings of Paul for the Philippians (cf. Collange). However, since (1) Paul employs οἰκτιρμοί, “mercies,” twice (out of the four times he uses this word) to describe God’s tender mercies (Rom 12:1; 2 Cor 1:3, where it is based on OT -Judaic usage, as in the synagogue prayer “O our Father, merciful Father” to introduce the Shema and at Qumran [1QH X, 14; XI, 29: “God of mercies”]), (2) σπλάγχνα, “bowels,” itself is sometimes used of divine compassion (Luke 1:78; Phil 1:8; cf. Col 3:12), and (3) σπλάγχνα, “bowels,” and οἰκτιρμοί, “mercies,” form this hendiadys meaning “affectionate sympathy” (cf. Col 3:12; but O’Brien, 175, keeps the nouns separate), it is probable that Paul has in mind God’s or Christ’s warmth of affection and tenderness toward the Philippians.

Thus the four clauses divide into two distinct parts. The first focuses on the human side of things: Paul’s encouragement of and love for the Philippians, or, alternatively, God’s love for them. The second focuses on the divine: the unity among the Philippians created by or based on a common share in the Holy Spirit and leading to a strengthened sense of community life—their societas, “partnership,” as Sampley (“Societas Christi,” 167–68) defines it in relation to what he regards as “a Pauline watchword or slogan”—with God surrounding them with the warmth of his affection. “If then,” says Paul, “you know anything of the mercy and compassion shown to you by God in Christ, as you most certainly do, then please respond by saying ‘Yes’ to my request.”
2 πληρώσατε μου τὴν χάραν, “then make my joy complete.”
This clause appears at first glance to be the climax toward which the rhetorical clauses of v 1 were building. True, πληροῦν, “make complete,” is the only main verb in a very long sentence (2:1–4), but in reality it is simply prefatory to the main idea expressed through many subordinate constructions that repeat this idea in a variety of ways. Paul is concerned with his own feelings only as a byproduct. His main concern, his supreme request of the Philippians, is that they strive for unity or like-mindedness (O’Brien, 177; Peterlin, Paul’s Letter to the Philippians, 59) coupled with humility.

ἲνα τὸ αὐτὸ φρονῆτε, “think alike.” This statement (lit. “that you think the same”) strikes the theme. It is difficult to explain this clause grammatically: (1) It may be functioning as the direct object of a verb that must be supplied: “I ask [παρακαλῶ] that...” (BDF §392 [1c]). (2) It may be seeking to describe what Paul means by completing his joy (C. F. D. Moule, Idiom-Book, 145 n. 3, 145–46, and most translations). (3) It may be substituting for an imperative (Moulton et al., Grammar, 3:94–95).

The expression τὸ αὐτὸ φρονεῖν, “to think the same,” is common enough in Paul (Rom 12:16 ; 15:5 ; 2 Cor 13:11 ; Phil 4:2), but it is not for this reason any easier to understand or translate accurately. The verb φρονεῖν (used ten times in Philippians, twenty-three times in Paul, twenty-six times in the NT) means “to think,” but not only, or even primarily, in the intellectual sense. It equally involves one’s emotions, attitudes, and will (cf. G. Bertram, TDNT 9:220–35; Collange; Lohmeyer: it denotes both “interest and decision
at the same time”; J. Goetzmann, NIDNTT 2:616). Hence, this expression cannot mean that Paul here pleads for uniformity of thought or that he insists on everyone holding in common a particular opinion—a demand that by its very nature would contribute to dissension (see Phil 3:15–16 for an open-minded spirit and attitude), whose presence as the background to 2:1–4 is the leading occasion or “point” (denied by Bruce, 37, but not successfully). Rather, by his choice of the verb φρονεῖν, “to think,” he is asking for a total inward attitude of mind or disposition of will that strives after that one thing (τὸ αὐτό, “the same [thing]”; τὸ ἕν, “the one [thing]”) that is greater than any human truth—“mine, yours, his” (Barth), a unity of spirit and sentiment in which powerful tensions are held together by an overmastering loyalty to each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. Commenting on another text, C. E. B. Cranfield (The First Epistle of Peter [London: SCM Press, 1950] 75–76) observes,

Such unity will only come when Christians are humble and bold enough to lay hold on the unity already given in Christ and to take it more seriously than their own self-importance... and to make of those deep differences of doctrine, which originate in our imperfect understanding of the Gospel and which we dare not belittle, not an excuse for letting go of one another or staying apart, but rather an incentive for a more earnest seeking in fellowship together to hear and obey the voice of Christ.

On the issue of the nature of the dissension at Philippi, see Peterlin’s section (Paul’s Letter to the Philippians, §4.4) devoted to Phil 2:1–4.
τὴν αὐτὴν ἀγάπην ἔχοντες, “love alike.” This theme is reinforced by these words (lit. “having the same love”), where the adjective αὐτὴν, “same,” stresses the mutuality of love that is to pervade the Christian community, identical with the self-sacrificing love of Christ for the church (2 Thess 1:3; 1 John 3:16). The verb ἔχοντες, “having,” may also function here with imperatival force, as may the other participles that follow or must be supplied for sense (cf. C. F. D. Moule, Idiom-Book, 31, 179; Moulton et al., Grammar, 3:303).

σύμψυχοι, τὸ ἐν φρονοῦντες, “be of one soul. Be of one mind.” The theme of unity is pressed even further both by σύμψυχοι, “one soul,” and by the repetition, slightly strengthened now, of the initial clause—τὸ αὐτὸ φρονῆτε, “think alike,” becomes τὸ ἐν φρονοῦντες, “be of one mind.” σύμψυχος, “one soul,” found only here in the Greek Bible and perhaps coined by Paul, recalls the expression μιᾷ ψυχῇ, “with one soul” or “with one mind,” in Phil 1:27. But by its very uniqueness it underscores the idea that the Philippians are to share one soul, possess a common affection, desire, passion, sentiment for living together in harmony—“harmony of feeling” (WEYMOUTH), “acting together as one person,” placing emphasis on “unity in feeling as well as in thought and action” (EDNT 3:291). The rendering “wholeheartedly” is not so appropriate. Finally, Paul, so emphatic in his own longing for unity, repeats himself: τὸ ἐν φρονοῦντες, “mind this one thing,” is almost identical in wording to the clause he used earlier, ἵνα τὸ αὐτὸ φρονῆτε, “mind the same thing.”
Thus in four different ways Paul repeats the same idea over and over again, hoping that the Philippians will get the point. Unity is essential for the dispelling of fear (φόβος). Krentz ("Military Language," 124) writes, "Fear... is the great enemy of unity or purpose in war," i.e., for the spiritual growth of the church, the progress of the gospel, and the victory of believers over their adversaries, as also for the validation of Paul’s ministry that was under scrutiny and attack in his Ephesian period, as reflected, it may be, in this letter.

3 But unity is impossible if Christians are out for themselves, promoting their own cause, and seeking their own advantage. Thus in vv 3–4 Paul emphasizes certain attitudes and actions that must stop as well as those that must continue.

μὴ δὲν κατ’ ἐριθείαν μὴ δὲ κατὰ κενοδοξίαν, “do not act out of a spirit of rivalry, nor out of empty conceit.” This phrase has no verb, yet it carries within itself the force of a negative command (cf. Gal 5:13). Some interpreters wish to connect it with φρονεῖν, “to think, be minded,” from the preceding verse: “being in nothing factiously or vaingloriously minded ” (Vincent, 55; cf. Barth). Others wish to supply some verb of action to give the command greater force: “Never act for selfish ends” (cf. Ign. Phld. 8:2: μὴ δὲν κατ’ ἐριθείαν πράσσετε, “do nothing out of a spirit of rivalry”; and most translations).

Both ἐριθεία, “spirit of rivalry,” and κενοδοξία, “empty conceit,” belong to the traditional stock words in ancient catalogs of vices (see Gnilka, 105 n. 19, for references). Paul already has used ἐριθεία, “spirit of rivalry, selfish ambition,” in Phil 1:17. There, as
here, it carries overtones of a party spirit generated by selfish ambition (cf. F. Büchsel, TDNT 2:660–61). Rivalry is guaranteed to destroy unity. Therefore, it must go. κενοδοξία, “empty conceit,” used only here in the NT, is found several times in the LXX (Wis 14:4; 4 Macc 2:15; 8:18; cf. 4 Macc 5:9; Gal 5:26) and frequently in the writings of the Cynic philosophers (see Malherbe, ed., Cynic Epistles, 58.11; 176.15). It has as its root idea “empty opinion,” “error” (cf. Ign. Magn. 11, rendered by K. Lake “vain doctrine” [The Apostolic Fathers, LCL (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1912) 1:209]). A person, then, who is motivated by κενοδοξία, “empty conceit,” is a person who assertively, even arrogantly, claims to have the right δόξα, “opinion,” but who is in fact in error (κένος, “empty”). Yet the term has more of a moral connotation (BDAG). It refers to a person who is conceited without reason, deluded (A. Oepke, TDNT 3:662, has no basis for saying this sense of the word is not found in the NT, especially in light of Col 2:8: κενής ἀπάτης, “empty deceit”), ambitious for his own reputation, challenging others to rivalry, himself jealous of others (cf. Gal 5:26, where the corresponding adjective κενόδοξοι, “vainly conceited,” is used). Consequently this is a person who will fight to prove one’s idea is right. As Barth (55) supposes, “This all-too-human element could be behind the inability of the Philippian Christians to be united.” Was this in fact so? Paul, by asking that Christians do nothing from a cheap desire to boast (cf. GNB), is in reality asking that they look to themselves and reflect on this possibility. For where such “empty conceit” (BDAG) is present, unity is absent.
ἀλλὰ τῇ ταπεινοφοροσύνῃ, “act rather with humility.” Alongside the negative commands is one positive encouragement. This is the linchpin that guarantees the health (σωτηρία, “salvation” [2:12–13]) of the Christian community. Humility today, as in ancient times, tends to be regarded in sensu malo, “in a bad sense.” The noun used here, ταπεινοφοροσύνη, “humility,” is apparently not found in any Greek writing before the NT (H. C. G. Moule). But the adjective related to it (ταπεινός, “humble”) was frequently employed and especially so to describe the mentality of a slave. It conveyed the ideas of being base, unfit, shabby, mean, of no account. Hence, humility could not have been regarded by the pagan as a virtue to be sought after (see W. Grundmann, TDNT 8:1–27). This same understanding of ταπεινός, “humble,” survives in the LXX. But already in the OT a new note is struck: God chooses the unimportant and the insignificant for his plans (LXX 1 Kgs 18:23; Ps 118:67; Jdt 9:11; Wis 2:3). God saves the lowly and humble (Ps 17:28); God looks upon the lowly (Ps 112:4–6); God pays attention to the prayers of the lowly (Ps 101:18); God gives grace to the lowly while he opposes the scoffers (cf. Isa 2:11; Ezek 17:24). Lowliness and humility are thus evaluated as positive virtues by the Bible, especially as they affect the way in which people behave toward others and in which they approach God (cf. Isa 57:15).

In the Qumran community humility was valued as a virtue because it carried within itself the ingredients for unity and love within the fellowship. Repeatedly in the Rule of the Community the members are told that “they shall all be in the community of truth and virtuous humility and loving charity and scrupulous justice” (1QS II, 24 [trans. Dupont-Sommer, Essene Writings, 76]; cf. IV, 3;
V, 3, 25). Paul is heir to these ideas, agreeing especially with the Qumran concept of humility in so far as he too holds as indispensable for unity within the community that kind of behavior that is generated by an attitude of humility. The new contribution that Paul makes to the concept is that he connects this humility to Christ Jesus, to the self-humbling love of the one who existed in the form of God (cf. Phil 2:8; see Gnilka). Thus humility, as Paul understands it and advocates it, is not self-disparagement but an attitude inspired by the model of Christ and is therefore specifically Christian, an attitude of mutual love within the church, the antithesis of pride, empty conceit (κενοδοξία), and selfish ambition (ἐριθεία).

ἀλλήλους ἡγούμενοι ὑπερέχοντας ἑαυτῶν, “and consider others better than yourselves.” ταπεινοφροσύνη, “humility,” is defined more precisely by this expression, which immediately follows. The participle ἡγούμενοι, “considering,” is formed from a verb ἡγεῖσθαι that means “to calculate,” “to reckon.” It implies a consciously sure judgment resting on carefully weighed facts (Vincent). Here it points to a proper evaluation of others and of one’s self in light of the holiness of God, the Christian gospel, and the pattern of Christ. The result, Paul says, will be to set others above yourselves—not just the good, clever, earnest, pious ones to whom all willingly bow, but those who lack these characteristics as well. For the word ὑπερέχοντας, “better,” “superior,” “above,” that Paul uses here to describe one’s neighbor recalls the ἐξουσίας ὑπερεχούσας, “superior authorities,” of Rom 13:1, i.e., those who govern by virtue of their superior authority, not necessarily by virtue of their superior
quality. Christians, therefore, as Barth (56) notes, are to consider one another “without restriction [Einschränkung]”; problems of disunity end “when we discover respect for each other, not on this ground or that, perhaps without any grounds, counter to every ground, simply because we are bidden” to do so, ordered to reckon each other better than ourselves. Naturally one does not think this way. But the divine command directed, not toward all but to the Christian community, implies divine assistance to achieve the impossible. Such an attitude of utter respect for one another guarantees unity and binds believers together in a mutually enriching society.

4 μὴ τὰ ἑαυτῶν ἔκαστος σκοποῦντες ἀλλὰ τὰ ἐτέρων ἐκαστοι, “each of you must look to the interests of others rather than to the interests of yourselves.” Another negative factor that must go if the Philippian church is to live in harmony is a selfish looking out for one’s own interests or those of one’s special group to the exclusion of the interests of others. Paul on more than one occasion speaks out against this practice (1 Cor 10:24; Phil 2:21), reminding his readers that it is divisive (Phil 2:4) and that it is contrary to the nature of the God they worship (cf. 1 Cor 13:5 with 1 John 4:7–8). The normally recurring verb ζητεῖν, “to seek,” that he generally uses to warn against this seeking of one’s own he here replaces with the verb σκοπεῖν, “to look [out] for,” “notice,” “keep one’s eyes on.” Since the difference in meaning between these two verbs is slight and the construction involving them is exact (τὰ ἑαυτῶν σκοπεῖν/τὰ ἑαυτῶν ζητεῖν, “looking to the interests of others/seeking the interests of others”; cf. Phil 2:4 with 2:21; 1 Cor 10:24, 33; 13:5), it seems unnecessary, therefore, to
see here a different and more subtle meaning from what would be expected, namely, that the Philippians are to keep their eyes fixed on the good points of others rather than to concentrate on their own spiritual endowments (so Bonnard, Martin [1959], Beare). The problem at Philippi was not the same as the problem at Corinth, yet the coincidences in wording are remarkable (see the discussion in Martin [rev. ed., 1987], 74 n. 1, on Phil 1:15–17). It was not that people were overvaluing spirit-inspired manifestations and glorying in these (Collange; but this needs a second look in the light of Phil 3:18–19), but simply that people (ἕκαστος) or groups of people (ἕκαστοι) were selfishly interested only in themselves or their parties. Unity cannot coexist with individualism or partisanship. So underneath the negative form in which this warning comes, Paul in reality is making the appeal for each to pay concerned attention to the things that interest and deeply concern the other (Gnilka). For the wider issues of partisanship and leadership problems at Philippi as at Corinth, see Peterlin, Paul’s Letter to the Philippians, 52–75.

**Explanation**

Paul draws upon his rhetorical skills to encourage the Philippian church to strive for unity on the basis of a call to genuine humility. In four successive clauses, each beginning with “if,” he powerfully impresses upon his friends that they indeed are the recipients of his (or better, divine) encouragement and love; members of an extraordinary fellowship in union with, as well as created by (or sharers in), the Spirit of God; and objects of God’s affection and compassion. Consequently they are obliged to pay attention to God’s appeal through him to strive for harmony and
Paul is not seeking for uniformity of opinion here. He does not ask that the Philippians all think uniformly. Rather, he asks that they strive for an inner sentiment for one another that is full of love as well as reflecting God’s love (a generous attitude he will allude to several times and return to in Phil 3:15–16). He asks that they all possess a common soul, share a common affection for one another, have a common desire to live together in harmony by renouncing a party spirit that is coupled with empty conceit and self-interest, and adopt a humble attitude that estimates others as better than themselves and places their interests ahead of their own (unlike the bad models of Phil 2:21, where those around Paul are “seeking their own interests”). The interests of Jesus Christ are held up as a motivating force to check self-centeredness and to spur the readers on to pursue the interests of others (Phil 2:4). In such a climate unity thrives; the church grows; and, in contradistinction to self-interest and the individual Christian-in-fellowship, the church is strengthened in the faith.

In sum, Christians at Philippi have a responsibility to keep together in unity (a call reverting to Phil 1:27–30), born out of their shared possessions and their fellowship in stated objective realities, both personal and qualitative. These four realities (consolation, comfort, the Holy Spirit, love) are mentioned in Phil 2:1. Their life together would be marked by these things they have in common and what they think of themselves (Phil 2:3–4). The key is their selfless regard for others and an active desire for their neighbors’ well-being and interest in preference to their own. Above all, there is to be humility, a slippery word that defies definition, yet one we can more easily recognize in other people, even if we shy away
from a claim we wish to make for ourselves. As the saying goes, Who’s perfect? No one, according to Paul’s admission, as he will go on to remark in Phil 3:12–16. Yet we may see this perfection on display in the Lord of glory who became servant of all (Phil 2:6–11).
3. Kerygmatic Center of the Letter: Christ, the Supreme Encouragement to Humility and Unselfishness (2:5–11)

Bibliography

As a supplement to this detailed bibliography, see the extensive bibliography for this section in Martin, Hymn of Christ, 320–44; R. B. Strimple, “Philippians 2:5–11 in Recent Studies: Some Exegetical Conclusions,” WTJ 41 (1979) 247–68; and E. A. C. Pretorius, “A Key to the Literature on Philippians,” Neot 23 (1989) 125–53, esp. §§6.1.1–6.3.6 for a listing and summary of studies on Phil 2:5–11 since 1963. From that date forward to 2003, the following entries may be added, with the reminder that the flow of articles and studies continues, threatening to become a flood of biblical proportions.

Instead, therefore, of adding to an already lengthy list, the present revision calls attention to the following places where more recent listings may be found as a vade mecum to researchers, scholars, students, and inquirers. The old adage of being afflicted with paralysis is never more true than today, even when electronic information technology comes to the aid of those who wish to know more about this locus classicus of Christology in Philippians, as Lohmeyer (Kyrios Jesus, 4) once famously labeled it. The reviser of this commentary must, of course, confess to an interest in this passage, having devoted the major part of his academic pursuit to its investigation from 1959 to the present day. The terminus ad quem of what is already in print is 1997, when the third (and
final) edition of his earlier Carmen Christi was revised under the more appealing English title A Hymn of Christ. In that volume will be found a bibliographical coverage of studies extending to 1997, and some measure of interaction with them (xi–lxxiv), all of which he personally used in a hands-on experience. Merely to compile a list of articles and entries under Phil 2:5–11 seems now to be otiose in these days of electronic retrieval. Readers are, therefore, invited to consult the 1997 edition, A Hymn of Christ, and a disclaimer is hereby made that, as far as possible, the present volume will not tread on ground already covered. More recent commentaries, such as those of Bockmuehl (1998) and Hooker (2000), will be referred to, along with studies of more recent vintage, like Holloway, Consolation in Philippians (2001); Oakes, Philippians (2001); and MacLeod, BSac 158 (2001) 308–30, 437–50.

Three caveats may be entered to qualify this disclaimer:

1) No claim to omniscience was ever made in the aforementioned works, whether in Carmen Christi, A Hymn of Christ, or the first edition of this volume. That goes without saying, but it is reiterated, as lacunae remain.

2) At certain points in the text that follows, percipient readers will be able to spot traces of the reviser’s hand, much like what will be familiar to those acquainted with Pentateuchal or Synoptic criticism. Editorial criticism is now a discipline in its own right, and observant students who have the time, patience, and indeed the duty will find here a useful place to exercise their skills in seeking the reviser’s efforts.
(3) Finally, at key points where the discussion has entered new fields (such as rhetorical/structural criticism) and reviewed old issues, like the vexed meaning of Phil 2:5, the debate over ἀρπαγμός (rendered in the Translation “grounds for grasping” or “a prize to be seized”), the inclusion/exclusion of 2:8 b, ἃναντοῦ δὲ σταυροῦ, “even death on a cross,” and the wider question of the passage’s genre, whether it is poetic or a hymn or creedal or all three—these are the places to train the reader’s eagle eye.

Bibliographical data of significance in the reviser’s judgment will be given through the following pages to supplement the already full commentaries of O’Brien (1991); Seeley, JHC 1 (1994) 49–72; Fee (1995); Bockmuehl (1998); Hooker (2000), in English; in German the studies of U. B. Müller, ZNW 79 (1988) 17–44, and Brucker, ‘Christushymnen’ oder ‘epideiktische’ Passagen? (1997); and the international survey provided by Rissi, ANRW 2.25.4 (1987) 3314–26.

Note: Attention may be directed to the useful update of many of the issues thrown up by this passage supplied in R. P. Martin and B. J. Dodd, eds., Where Christology Began (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), and in particular the interpretative translations of two seminal works, Lohmeyer, Kyrios Jesus (1961), and Käsemann, “Kritische Analyse von Phil. 2, 5–11,” ZTK 47 (1960) 313–60, offered by C. Brown and R. Morgan, respectively. Up to 1998 English-speaking students have perforce been able to appreciate Lohmeyer’s fundamental work only at secondhand or through the eyes of his supporters or objectors (see J. R. Edwards, “Ernst Lohmeyer—ein Schlusskapitel,” EvT 56.4 [1996] 320–42). Now they may read his arguments firsthand and come to appreciate J. Moffatt’s evaluation
(“Calling Jesus Lord,’ ” ExpTim 40 [1929] 519–20) that “this [referring to Lohmeyer’s brochure Kyrios Jesus ] is one of the most brilliant and stimulating contributions to the discussions [of the lordship of Christ]... that have been made for long.” Moffatt praises the significance of Lohmeyer’s contribution, as evidence of “a vital original movement of religious faith [which] was flowing through the church and that this was not started by an excited enthusiast in Palestine, nor by any syncretistic eddy after [Paul’s death]” (ExpTim 40 [1929] 520).

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Translation

5 Act a in this way, as [it befits those who are] b in Christ Jesus.

6 Precisely because [or, although] he was in the form of God, he did not consider being equal with God grounds for grasping c [or, he did not regard it as a prize to be seized to be equal with God].

7 On the contrary, he poured himself out by taking the form of a slave, by being born in the likeness of human beings, d and by being recognized as a human.

8 He humbled himself, by becoming obedient even to the point of accepting death, [even death on a cross.]

9 As a consequence, therefore, God exalted him to the highest place, and conferred on him in an act of grace the e name that is above every name, in order that before the name that Jesus bears every knee might bow, [of heavenly beings,
and of earthly beings,

and of beings under the earth,]

¹¹ and in order that every tongue might openly acknowledge f that “Jesus Christ is Lord”

[to the glory of God the Father].

Notes

5.a. Ψ ⁴⁶ Ν ² D F G and the majority of Greek MSS add γάρ, “for,” after τοῦτο, “this” (2492: οὖν, “therefore”). This is an unnecessary attempt to link this new section (2:5–11) with the preceding verses. The witness of Ψ ⁴⁶ impresses Silva (112).


6.c. ἄπραγμον, “free from business, not troublesome” (Fridrichsen, RHR 3 [1923] 442: “une sinécure,” “a sinecure”; cf. ἄπραγος, Judg 9:4 Symm.), has been conjectured for ἄρπαγμόν, “grounds for grasping [or, prize to be seized],” but there is no textual evidence for this, and it is universally rejected. The word, however difficult, must be wrestled with.
7.d. ἃ ⁴⁶ reads ἀνθρώποι, “human being,” instead of ἀνθρώπων, “human beings,” as do the Vulgate, Marcion, and Cyprian, no doubt to make it parallel with the expression that follows.

9.e. D F G ψ some other MSS and the Majority Text omit the definite article τό, “a name” rather than “the name,” without noticing that the name is actually stated in v 10. ἃ ⁴⁶ ψ A B and other MSS have the article. See Lightfoot, 114.

11.f. A C D and many other Greek MSS have the future indicative ἔξομολογήσεται, “will confess,” instead of the aorist subjunctive ἔξομολογήσηται, “might confess.” The change is so slight in form that it could easily be accidental. But it could also be intentional. Some early scribe may have understood v 11 eschatologically and altered it from the aorist subjunctive to the future indicative to bring out this idea, making it harmonize with the Isaiah passage from which it is taken (Isa 45:23 : ἔξομολογήσεται, “will confess”). See Baarda, GTT 71 (1971) 137–79.

Form/Structure/Setting

Introduction

This is the most important section in the letter and surely the most difficult to interpret. The number of genuine exegetical problems and the sheer mass of books and articles it has called forth leaves one wondering where to begin, despairing about adding anything new and well-nigh stricken with mental paralysis (see Michael). It quickly becomes apparent, however, that although much has been written on these verses, there is little that can be agreed
upon, whether the topic discussed is the precise form of this section, its authorship, its place and purpose in the letter, the sources used in its composition, or any other aspect of the verses.

Nevertheless, there is at least one thing that calls forth almost universal agreement. It is that Phil 2:6–11 constitutes a signal example of a very early “hymn” of the Christian church. (Fee’s most recent challenge to this classification [BBR 2 (1992) 29–46], arguing that it is rather a species of an “exalted prose poem,” is not convincing; the remark in his commentary [1995], 126 n. 42, “[it] obviously sings,” is a giveaway. See Martin, Hymn of Christ, lv–lxv; Graves, Sermon as Symphony on 2:1–11 ; Kreitzer and Rooke, ExpTim 109.8 [1998] 231–33.) J. Weiss, Beiträge zur paulinischen Rhetorik (1897), was the first to notice the poetic, rhythmic nature of these verses (see Eckman, NTS 26 [1980] 258; O’Brien, 188). He has been followed by many scholars, the most well-known of whom are Lohmeyer (Kyrios Jesus and his commentary on Philippians), Jeremias (“Zur Gedankenführung”), and Martin (Hymn of Christ).

A. The Structure of the Hymn

Agreement, however, quickly disappears when one begins to analyze the hymn structurally. (An arrangement of how the hymn may well have looked in its original, pre-Pauline “form” has been offered in the Introduction, Christology in Philippians.)

(1) Lohmeyer sees the hymn as composed of six strophes of three lines each, with the first three strophes proclaiming the humiliation of Christ (vv 6–8) and the last three his exaltation (vv 9–11): A (v 6); B (v 7a–b); C (vv 7c–8, but omitting the words θανάτου δὲ σταυροῦ, “even death on a cross,” as not being part
of the original hymn); D (v 9); E (v 10); F (v 11 ; cf. Héring, RHP 16 [1936] 196–209; Benoit, Bonnard, Beare).

(2) Others see it as formed of a series of couplets in six pairs, arranged in such a way as to lend themselves easily to a kind of antiphonal chanting: A (v 6); B (v 7a); C (v 7b); D (v 8); E (v 9); F (vv 10a and 11a Martin, Hymn of Christ, 36–37). (See Norden, Die antike Kunstprosa, 1:55–57, for a description of and evidence for this practice of chanting in the ancient world, based on Hebrew psalmody. For some general orientation to NT hymnody see Karris, Symphony.) To make the hymn fit into this kind of structure, however, it is necessary to remove the following phrases and treat them as secondary additions: θανάτου δὲ σταυροῦ, “even death on a cross”; ἐπουρανίων καὶ ἐπιγείων καὶ καταχθονίων, “of heavenly beings, and of earthly beings, and of beings under the earth”; and εἰς δόξαν θεοῦ πατρός, “to the glory of God the Father.” Reasons for these elisions are given in Martin, Hymn of Christ, 24–41, remarking on the two-step development of the origin of the hymn.

(3) Still others, after careful quantitative metrical analysis of these verses, see only five strophes of varying length and with a change of length of lines within each strophe: A (vv 6–7a); B (vv 7b–8); C (vv 9–10a); D (vv 10b–11a); E (v 11b–c ; Eckman, NTS 26 [1980] 258–66; cf. also Dibelius; Gamber, Bib 51 [1970] 369–76). This kind of arrangement also requires modifying the text, such as deleting ὑπάρχων, “being”; altering ἐταπείνωσεν ἐαυτόν, “he humbled himself,” to ἐταπεινώθη, “he was humbled”; and omitting the
words ἐπουρανίων καὶ ἐπιγείων καὶ καταχθονίων, “of heavenly beings, and of earthly beings, and of beings under the earth.”

(4) Others yet see the hymn as composed of four strophes, each with four lines: A (vv 6–7a); B (vv 7b–8); C (vv 9–10a); D (vv 10b–11; Collange). This particular analysis omits no words or phrases but does violence to the grammar of the Greek by making a verse division where no verse division would ever be expected. Yet, of course, the supply of “verses” to the modern translations is simply a convenience for the reader. There were no divisions in the original Greek.

(5) Still others see in the hymn only three strophes that correspond to the three states of Jesus’ existence: his preexistent state (vv 6–7a), his earthly life (vv 7b–8), and his exaltation (vv 9–11; Cerfaux, Christ, 382; see Jeremias, “Zur Gedankenführung,” 152–54). Again, this kind of analysis often calls for the deletion of words and phrases from the hymn as it stands in order to have the proper balance in the strophes. But there are substantial theological reasons as well (see Martin, Hymn of Christ, 32–35).

These are but some of the suggested analyses of Phil 2:6–11. There are others. Together they demonstrate beyond doubt that these verses constitute an early hymn, or at least part of an early hymn, that had as its subject the persona of Christ Jesus, who is not named, however, until v 10. The introduction “It is he” may be added, following O’Neill (NTS 26 [1980] 80–100, esp. 90), who takes ὃς, “who,” to mean “it was he who” on the pattern of Sir 46:1, 48:1–2, 48; 49:8; 50:1. We may appeal to Col 3:16, Eph 5:19, and the interesting remark of Pliny the Younger, governor of
Bithynia-Pontus, written to the Emperor Trajan (A.D. 112–13), that Christians were in the habit of singing hymns “to Christ as to a god” (Ep. 10.96) as demonstrating the presence of hymns and the practice of singing songs in earliest Christianity (esp. cf. Phil 2:6–11). And this description is of great importance, whether historically, rhetorically, or liturgically.

But the very great lack of agreement among scholars about the exact structure of these verses makes one question the possibility of ever knowing for certain what this hymn looked like when it was first composed, if it did not look like it does now in the texts presently available. Such skepticism, however, may now be put aside in the light of studies in tradition and redaction as applied to biblical texts. We are reaching a consensus that the biblical documents went through a process of editorial adaptation, revision, and supplementation before they reached their present canonical shape. There is nothing inherently illogical or impossible in seeing the hymn of Phil 2:6–11 as existing in two versions, one a pre-Pauline composition already known and sung in the church at Philippi and conceivably judged to be inadequate in Paul’s eyes, and then a second edition resulting from Paul’s later “makeover” as he incorporated modifications to produce our present text. While this procedure has been doubted, and even ridiculed in dismissive language such as that of Fee’s (BBR 2 [1992] 29–46), it is defensible, and some concrete reasons (outlined in Martin, Hymn of Christ, 24–41) have been offered in support of this hypothesis.

The issue in various attempts to arrange the words into lines, couplets, and strophes is one greater than the bid to construct a perfectly symmetrical hymn (against Hooker, “Philippians 2, 6–11,”
and her later commentary on Philippians). It is the more theologically sensitive endeavor to see how Paul may well have been uneasy with a version of the hymn that promoted a victorious Christ who did not come in the form of a servant, did not die on a Roman cross with its ignominy and disgrace, failed to achieve his conquest of demonic powers that the first-century Hellenistic mind feared, and set up a rivalry to the one God of Jewish monotheism. These factors have led to a shortened version of the hymn (which is in fact its putative “original form”) that omitted or bypassed such cardinal Pauline teaching and gave Paul the task of revising—the technical term is redacting—the earlier form of the hymn to bring it more into line with his own attested theology, while preserving by minimal (but significant) additions the basic outline or Urschrift before him. For details we may refer again to Martin, Hymn of Christ, xlix, where it is suggested that the additional lines were:

(a) taking the form of a servant; (b) even death upon a cross; (c) of heavenly and earthly and subterranean powers; (d) to the glory of God the Father.

The necessity of omitting words and phrases or altering expressions to make the strophes come out right, according to some preconceived notion of what they should be, used to make one suspicious of the whole procedure and caused one to ask whether this is not just some sort of game that scholars play. Yet, as we just remarked, more serious issues are at stake than a sporting venture (see Lash, “Fashionable Sports”).
With these caveats, this commentary, while taking note of the basic hymnic nature of Phil 2:6–11, will make no attempt to reach a definitive conclusion regarding the precise strophic structure of its composition. It will (1) accept all words and phrases as part of the canonical hymn and essential to its Pauline meaning, while acknowledging the principle of tradition and redaction; (2) recognize from the four independent verbs in the hymn—the first two with Jesus as subject, and the last two with God as subject—that the hymn naturally falls into two parts: Jesus’ humiliation by his own act, and Jesus’ exaltation by the act of God (which is a striking feature, first noted by Lohmeyer, who observed that each stanza has a single predicate, usually with one verb, and even when the stanza in 2:9 has two verbs, the verbs contain a single idea, that of a divine act; each stanza is virtually the same length in syllabic content; there have been attempts to demonstrate this precisely, as in the case of the hymnic Col 1:15–20; see C. Masson, L’épître de S. Paul aux Colossiens, CNT 10 [Paris: Cerf, 1959] ad loc.); (3) allow for the possibility that such early Christian hymns as this one were not as perfectly constructed as modern scholarship might wish them to be (cf. Norden, Agnostos Theos, 257; cf. Gloer, PRSt 11 [1984] 115–32; yet subsequent scholarly enterprises have offered some sound reasons, beginning with the use of Ignatius’s “Song of the Star” [Ign. Eph. 19], for supposing that early hymns were well thought out and perfectly shaped, an insight that goes back to Lohmeyer, who noted that the Philippian hymn began with God and ended with God; see too Brucker, “Christushymnen”); and (4) refuse to accept as valid the proposition that a correct understanding of the hymn depends on an agreed versification of
the hymn. This last point is a generally accepted conclusion since arrangement into stanzas and couplets can, in itself, prove nothing. Yet if the omission of certain lines can be defended on theological grounds and the result is a more balanced versification, we may suspect that this case for Paul’s redaction is well-nigh proven.

The particular shape given to this hymn, and indeed the very existence of the hymn itself, may be the result of deep meditation (or correction, if the sentiments found in the original hymn were deemed unsatisfactory) by Paul, or some Christian before or contemporaneous with Paul, or even some anonymous Christian at Philippi (Hooker, 501). The next step in this speculation would be the more extreme piece of imaginative reconstruction, as maintained by Koester and Callahan (Philippi, 62), that the entire Philippian letter was written by Paul on the occasion of his return visit to Philippi (in Acts 20:3–6 or in the tradition behind the Pastorals), where, hypothetically, he learned of the hymn on his reacquaintance with the church there. Here over-dogmatism (“Paul’s martyrdom must have taken place in a city of Macedonia”) seems misplaced. The debated matter is still whether Paul is the author of the hymn (against Pauline authorship see Käsemann, ZTK 47 [1950] 313–60; Bonnard; Beare; Georgi, “Der vorpaulinische Hymnus”; Martin, Carmen Christi, 45–54 [more confidently in rev ed. (1983), xxxiv; 3d ed. (1997), lv–lxv]; Gnilka; for older suggestions of Pauline authorship see Michaelis; Dibelius; Scott; Furness, ExpTim 70 [1958–59] 240–43; Martin, Carmen Christi, 55–62). Those espousing Pauline authorship, while still found (e.g., O’Brien; Fee [1995]; Wright, “ ἀρπαγμός,” 57; Oakes, Philippians, 212), are really
swimming against the tide as far as European and American scholarship is concerned.

B. The Origin of the Hymn

As far as the origin of the passage in Phil 2:6–11 is concerned, the first edition of this commentary invoked one particular event from the life of Jesus as recorded in the gospel tradition—Jesus washing his disciples' feet (John 13:3–17; cf. also Hawthorne, “Imitation of Christ,” 170–72). It was argued that although verbal parallels between John 13:3–17 and Phil 2:6–11 were few, but nonetheless significant, the parallels in thought and in the progression of action were startling. So precise, in fact, were these parallels held to be that it was thought difficult to consider them the result of coincidence. (For an illustration of this parallelism the reader may be referred to the first edition of this commentary.)

As this proposal has been generally passed over and rejected, the revised edition of this commentary will consider it only briefly, laying out its strengths and weaknesses. The commonalities are clear: Jesus is said to play the role of a slave (δοῦλος), and he “strips off” his clothes/glory and speaks of his being “Lord” (κύριος). But that is all. The verbal links are coincidental when the two pericopes are compared. Admittedly the theme of humility is common—on the traditional view of Phil 2:6–11. Yet the scenarios are quite different. In John it is an event with a datable, identifiable topographical setting; in Paul’s hymn it is a piece of cosmic drama, involving a “descent” of a heavenly being and his elevation and enthronement, with all powers subservient to him as κύριος, “Lord” (a term that may carry overtones of such proportions in Johannine
theology, but more likely is coined in opposition to the emperor cult; cf. John 20:28). The comparison may be also found in John 13:1–2, where Jesus does come from God and return to God; yet John’s theology sees Jesus’ glory in his being lifted up on the cross, whereas the Philippian saga of salvation depicts the descent to the low point of the cross only to be followed by his exaltation in a subsequent event. (For Paul it is the enthronement after the nadir of descent. For John the abasement and exaltation coincide.)

The most that can be said is that the Johannine prelude to the passion is interesting and instructive. The Johannine account is an acted parable to summarize the essence of Jesus’ teaching: “Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all” (Mark 10:43–44 NRSV); the Philippian text is a hymn to illustrate powerfully Paul’s teaching, which at this point is identical with that of Jesus: Humble, self-sacrificing service to one’s fellow believers done in love is a must for a Christian disciple who would live as a Christian disciple should (Phil 2:3–4).

There are a multitude of other suggestions about sources of the hymn: (1) heterodox Judaism (Lohmeyer); (2) the Iranian myth of the Heavenly Redeemer (Beare; dismissed by Hooker, 501: this background “has almost nothing to be said for it”); (3) Hellenistic Gnosticism (Käsemann, “Critical Analysis,” 62, 66, 72; on this see Morgan, “Incarnation, Myth, and Theology”); (4) Jewish Gnosticism (J. A. Sanders, JBL 88 [1969] 278–90); (5) the OT servant passages (Coppens, ETL 41 [1965] 147–50; Dunn, Christology in the Making; Gundry, “Style and Substance”); (6) the OT story of Adam (Bonnard; Dunn, Christology in the Making, 114–21; idem, Theology,
281–88; idem, “Christ, Adam, and Preexistence” [see table 2 below for the First Adam-Last Adam typology]; but not Rissi, ANRW 2.25.4 [1987] 3318 n. 18, to whom Dunn responds [Theology of Paul, 282–88]); (7) speculation about Hellenistic Jewish Wisdom (Georgi, “Der vorpaulinische Hymnus”; Schweizer, Erniedrigung; for references see Martin, Hymn of Christ, xix, xxx, 191–94); and so on. These proposals only serve to send one off in pursuit of a question impossible to answer.

C. Conclusion

Perhaps the true answer to the origin of the hymn may be closer at hand. Here we need to pay regard to chronology. It can be scarcely maintained that Johannine Christology is earlier than Paul’s, let alone the pre-Pauline example in Phil 2:6–11. Most scholars agree that John’s “high” Christology stands at the apex of the NT trajectory, whereas the pre-Pauline hymn, whatever its sources, is to be placed at some beginning point or even to be designated where the title of the symposium Where Christology Began (ed. Martin and Dodd) locates it. The form and content of this passage may indeed owe their origin to the substance of the gospel tradition and notably to the life and death and vindication of Jesus as representing a climax in terms of the religious language current in any of these systems of thought. These elements in a symbolic universe—the god’s descent/ascent (in Hellenistic and gnostic ideology) and the temptation encountered in the Adam story to be reversed in the second Adam (contrast the humiliation and vindication of the Servant of Yahweh or in the Synoptic temptation stories as the frontispiece to the Gospel tradition)—were everywhere
present in the world of Paul, so that whoever composed the Philippian hymn would be heir to these ideas and able to draw on any or all of them to set forth the ultimate meaning of Jesus’ humble act of service. Yet there is no propter nos, “on our account,” in the “example” set forth in the humbled preexistent being. John’s use of exemplum teaching (John 13:15) is quite different from the alleged example portrayed in Phil 2:6–11, though it recurs in 1 Pet 2:20 and Rev 14:4, both, with John, having to do with the earthly Jesus.

On the other hand, the drama of Phil 2:1–11 is set on an otherworldly background as a prelude to the “historical” outworking in the preexisting one’s humiliation and eventual exaltation to cosmic authority and installation as Lord. As the contributors to the symposium Where Christology Began concur, it is in the Christ-event of what occurred in the coming of Jesus that the fons et origo (fount and origin) of this Christology are to be sought and found.

**Table 2. The popular First Adam–Last Adam typology**

*Philippians 2:5–11 (in Paul’s Redacted Version)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Christ</th>
<th>Adam</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Let the same mind be in you that you have “in Christ Jesus,”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>His Choice</strong> who, though he was in the form of God,</td>
<td><strong>His Choice</strong> who was made in the image of God (Gen 1:26–27),</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, and regarded to “be like God” something to be exploited (Gen 3:4–5),

but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, so he aspired to greatness, and the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 3:5).

**His Obedience**

being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, seeking to be in the likeness of God. But being found in human form,

he humbled himself he exalted himself,

and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. and became disobedient, seeking life (Gen 3:6, 22; Rom 5:19)—he was expelled and alienated.

**His Disobedience**

**His Exaltation**

Therefore God also highly exalted him as a consequence of his obedience, giving him a name above every name.

and gave him the name that is above every name, and gave him the infamy of death (Gen 3:16–19),

so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, so that at his name everyone will “curse” (a play on the word, leading either to salvation, Didache 16:5, or judgment, so “be cursed”; cf. Gal 3:10, 13, Deut 23:21; 27:26),

in heaven and on earth and under the earth, in all creation separated from God (Rom 5:12–14; 8:22),

and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, and no tongue will confess any salvation,

to the glory of God the Father. but will receive the wrath of God the Father (Rom 1:18).

(After an unpublished diagram by L. A. Losie, following Dunn, “Christ, Adam, and Preexistence,” 76.)
Comment

5 The Christ-hymn (Phil 2:6–11) presents Jesus as the supreme model of the humble, obedient, self-sacrificing, self-denying, self-giving service that Paul has just been urging the Philippians to practice in their relations one toward another (vv 1–4). Hence, although this hymn (1) is unquestionably a christological gem unparalleled in the NT, (2) may be considered soteriological, or better, kerygmatic, in character (yet with parenetic enforcement brought out in 2:12 as a call to obedience; there is no dichotomy between the two, as Martin, Hymn of Christ, lxxii–lxxiv, seeks to show), and (3) may have been originally composed for christological or soteriological reasons, Paul’s motive in using it here is not theological but ethical. Yet this disjunction may be granted to be chimerical since Paul’s ethics are always theological ethics; i.e., the call is to act because God in Christ has acted in the first place (see Martin, New Testament Foundations, 2:11–13). Paul’s grounding of Christian ethics is in the work or event of Christ, with the call being “Become in practice what you already are in Christ,” just as Christ, the heavenly one, became Lord only by way of self-abnegating surrender of his “form” and receiving his title to lordship as a consequence (v 9 : διὸ καί, “as a consequence, therefore”) of his obedience and elevation to cosmic authority. The Philippians are “in Christ” (v 5). Let them live it out (v 12). Paul’s objective is not to give instruction in doctrine but to reinforce instruction (parenesis) in Christian living. And he does this by appealing to the event of Christ.
Here we touch on a vexatious issue. Is the appeal to Christ's earthly conduct or to his act of transcendental significance? If the latter, which is the case, given that he alone enjoyed his being in the form of the divine, just as he received the unique name "Lord," it becomes a virtual impossibility to see how Christians can be said to imitate him. Conduct of a heavenly being who does something unique cannot, in all logic, be mimicked or made the model for replication, as Käsemann and his followers insist. The hymn, it is said, presents Christ as the ultimate model for moral action. This is the most obvious and natural explanation for its appearance at this point in the letter, and it is quite in keeping with Paul's practice elsewhere of using the life/death of Christ as a pattern for Christians to follow (Rom 15:1–7, especially v 5; 1 Cor 10:31—11:1 [but see B. J. Dodd, "Story of Christ," 157–59, for an objection to the use of 1 Cor 11:1]; 2 Cor 8:6–9; 1 Thess 1:6; cf. also 1 Pet 2:20–21; 3:17–18). See Lightfoot, H. C. G. Moule, Vincent, Plummer, J. J. Müller, Scott, Martin (1959, but not 1976), and Hendriksen. See also Enslin, Ethics of Paul, 107–19; Cerfaux, Christ, 375–76; De Boer, Imitation of Paul, 58–71; E. Larsson, Christus als Vorbild; Furnish, Theology and Ethics, 216–23; Dacquino, BeO 17 (1975) 241–52; Bruce, BJRL 63 (1981) 260–84; Stanton, Jesus of Nazareth, 99–110. For contrasting views see Beare; Martin, Hymn of Christ, 287–311, and idem, Philippians [1976], who follows Käsemann, "Critical Analysis," 45–88, but who is answered, in part at least, by Marshall, TynBul 19 [1968] 117–19; C. F. D. Moule, "Further Reflexions," 264–76; Hurtado, "Jesus as Lordly Example"; Fowl, Story of Christ, 77–101; O'Brien; Fee (1995). Bockmuehl, with some reservations, now joins the ranks of other
popular versions that maintain that Christ is presented as an exemplum ad imitandum, “example for imitating” (cf. Webster, TynBul 37 [1986] 95–120; for rejoinders see below and Martin, Hymn of Christ, xiii–xv). In honesty, the Pauline citation of the hymn as soteriological-ethical is still a minority opinion in an area where there is no communis opinio, “common opinion.” Yet it is an open question for the church still, as Hays (Moral Vision, 28–32) seems to conclude. The five ways to label interpretations of Phil 2:5 —imitative, paradigmatic, mystical, ecclesiological, and soteriological—are listed in Martin (1976), 91–93.

τοῦτο φρονεῖτε ἐν ὑμῖν ὡς καὶ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, “act in this way, as [it befits those who are] in Christ Jesus.” It is generally agreed that Phil 2:5 forms the link between the two sections of 2:1–4 and 2:6–11. It may be seen as the transition from exhortation to illustration (the verb φρονεῖν, “to hold an attitude,” which dominates this verse, also appears twice in v 2, and the word ταπεινοφροσύνη, “humility” [v 3 ], is echoed by ἔταπεινωσεν ἑαυτόν, “he humbled himself” [v 8 ]). Such an insight may be held to lessen, if not to resolve, the exegetical difficulties found in v 5. For even though no universally satisfying translation has as yet been provided or ever indeed can be (cf. Marshall, TynBul 19 [1968] 118), this verse (in the traditional rendering based on the KJV that adds “was” to join the two parts of a single sentence) may be understood to mean that the hoped-for attitude outlined by Paul in vv 2–4 corresponds with that exhibited by Christ Jesus, especially in vv 6–9, and that the Philippians are bound to act in accordance with this attitude toward one another if they wish to imitate (however that loaded term is understood; see Castelli, Imitating
Phrased like this, however, the appeal of the hymn is clearly a non sequitur. Aside from the question-begging verb imitate (how can one imitate, in any sense, an act that is unique, unrepeatable, and salvific?) we are left with a conundrum. If Paul is setting out the prospect of sharing in Christ’s final glory in this hymn, is he not playing into the hands of those who reasoned, to their own satisfaction, that they should be humble now so that they would gain the reward of such humility? This is the basis of prudential ethics or Stoic ethics (as Oakes, Philippians, 203, maintains), singularly absent from Paul (though found in some deutero-Pauline literature and in the Apostolic Fathers). Paul had already denied this ethical rationale in Phil 2:4 (“Each of you must look to the interests of others rather than to the interests of yourselves”), and he will go on to point to the models of his colleagues, Timothy and Epaphroditus, who did just that. How can Paul now contradict his ethical advice by invoking a version of the Greco-Roman maxim do ut des, “I give [my humility] to the gods that they may pay me back in that measure.” Similarly, he is no Stoic in his denial of “reward” (sometimes alleged, as by Oakes, Philippians, 203) in 2:9. Besides, as we shall see, vv 9–11 are a strange finale, because they celebrate the unique honor bestowed on the cosmic Lord, who, in this letter, reigns in unrivaled and unshared glory as victor over all cosmic forces.

On the understanding that the hymn provides an example to be imitated, ΤΟÛΤΟ, “this,” which begins the verse, is understood to
point backward to Paul’s exhortation and not forward to the Christ-hymn (against Losie, ExpTim 90 [1978] 52–54; but see Martin, Hymn of Christ, lxxi n. 66, for the connection with “the obedience of faith” implied in the counterpoint to the parenesis in Phil 2:8 and 2:12). It stands for τοῦτο τὸ φρόνημα, “this frame of mind,” that Paul has just described, and it serves as the subject of the imperative φρονείσθω, “let [this] way of thinking be adopted” (see Note b for this form of the verb). ἐν ὑμῖν, understood as modifying φρονείσθω, a passive verb, is then interpreted as expressing personal agent (“by you”; cf. BDF §219[1]). The clause that follows—ὅ καὶ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, “which also... in [or, by] Christ Jesus”—is elliptic, in that its verb is missing and must be supplied, probably with ἐφρονεῖτο, “[which] way of thinking [also] is adopted” (Lightfoot). Upon adding this verb, one may discover another of Paul’s balanced sentences, the neatness of which has been obscured through compression. When the sentence is expanded, however, it would appear as this:

τοῦτο φρονείσθω ἐν ὑμῖν

ὅ καὶ [ ἐφρονεῖτο ] ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.

Let this way of thinking be adopted by you,

which also was the way of thinking adopted by Christ Jesus.

Criticism no doubt will be leveled against such a reconstruction (and this view has not found much favor), especially because it opts for the alleged “inferior” reading φρονείσθω, “let [this] way of thinking be adopted” (a criticism of Bockmuehl, 121–22; occasionally, however, “inferior readings” are to be preferred, e.g.,
Acts 17:28), against φρονεῖτε, “adopt [this] way of thinking,” and it argues against taking ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ in the usual Pauline sense of “in Christ Jesus,” meaning “incorporated in Christ.” But the parallel nature of the two halves of this sentence, which could indicate that ἐν ὑμῖν and ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ should be treated grammatically alike (“in you”/“in Christ Jesus”; “by you”/“by Christ Jesus”), could push one to these conclusions: (1) It is difficult to maintain this grammatical parallelism here and at the same time give to ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ the “incorporation-in-Christ” meaning so common to Paul in other contexts. For ἐν ὑμῖν, “in you,” cannot reach such exalted heights and must therefore be assigned a quite different meaning (NEB: “Let your bearing towards one another arise out of your life in Christ Jesus” [italics ours]; cf. NRSV and Gnilka, 109). (2) The same difficulty of maintaining the parallelism between ἐν ὑμῖν and ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ is true if the reading φρονεῖτε, “adopt [this] way of thinking,” is insisted upon. For if φρονεῖτε is the preferred text, then ἐν ὑμῖν must mean “among you,” “toward one another,” “in your mutual relations with one another.” (This, incidentally, is in the typically Pauline manner, as evidenced in Phil 2:12, where the appeal is to work out the Philippians’ health/well-being in their churchly relations, “among themselves”; and for the precise sense of ἐν ὑμῖν meaning “among you” see Col 1:27: Christ ἐν ὑμῖν, “in you” = Christ in your church.) It cannot mean “in you” (i.e., “in your hearts”). For, as C. F. D. Moule judges, that is “at once an unlikely meaning for ὑμῖν and a redundant and unconvincing extension of φρονεῖτε (as though it were possible to think or adopt an attitude anywhere else but within oneself)” (“Further Reflexions,” 265). Thus again the
parallel is destroyed, as Moule so clearly, and perhaps unintentionally, indicates by his own translation: “Adopt towards one another, in your mutual relations, the same attitude which was found in Christ Jesus” (“Further Reflexions,” 265; italics ours). A translation that is more in keeping with the clear grammatical parallelism—ἐν ὑμῖν/ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ—and that reflects the reconstructed text suggested above is the following (which was adopted in the first edition of this commentary):

This way of thinking must be adopted by you,

which also was the way of thinking adopted by Christ Jesus.

Yet this rendering passes over the ecclesiological and soteriological meanings implied in ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, “in Christ Jesus,” and ignores how often Paul uses the “in Christ” formula to mean “in the company of Christ’s people,” an insight that goes back to Schweitzer (Mysticism, 101–40; see too Dunn, Theology of Paul, 401). We now prefer to set additional options before the reader:

In another discussion of this text the reviser of this commentary has rendered the verse in this way (Martin, Hymn of Christ, xiii–xiv):

Let this way of living be true of you (among you),

As it becomes those who are “in Christ Jesus” (i.e., as members of his community).

Meeks (“Man from Heaven,” 332) offers another rendering, which may be regarded as a mediating view. It runs as follows: “Base your practical reasoning on what you see in Christ Jesus.” This
translation has little to commend it. "φρονεῖν, “to adopt a way of thinking,” is a verb of moral endeavor, not one of intellectual deduction.

There have been other views of the hymn that have sought to secure a via media, finding problems with (1) the kerygmatic view, espoused in this revised commentary, and (2) the interpretation that may be called hortatory (but misleadingly, since there is an ethical appeal in the kerygmatic interpretation; the point of debate is the ground of Paul’s parenesis). The second view emphasizes how Jesus’ humility serves as a paradigm or model for the behavior of the Philippians. Fowl is one who adopts a mediating line, preferring the term “exemplar” (Story of Christ, 92–98, noted in Martin, Hymn of Christ, liv). Cousar (154–57) offers one of the latest (2001) bids to bring together the two seemingly polar views, but in our judgment he is no more successful than Fowl. It is laudable that he sets the hymn in a parenetic context (Phil 1:27—2:24) and sees it as addressing real moral concerns. It is also helpful that he rules out “ethical idealism” and sets Lohmeyer’s (Kyrios Jesus) and Käsemann’s (“Critical Analysis”) antagonism to this in the historical context of German scholarship. But his attempt to link Phil 2:6–11, where Christ did not regard divine equality as a prize to be seized, and 3:7–8, where Paul did regard as loss “his inherited and achieved status in Judaism” (Cousar, 156), breaks down on the simple fact that though the verbs are identical, the parallel is not exact, as Martin has argued (Hymn of Christ, livi). Nor is the use of 3:20–21, often cited as a parallel, strictly germane, since while Christ achieves his vindication in 2:9–11 and is glorified (3:20–21), there is no hint that in the hymn his
people share that radiance that will be theirs only at the Parousia. And, as scholars who follow Lohmeyer (Kyrios Jesus) and Käsemann (“Critical Analysis”) have pointed out, the presence of the church in the hymn is singularly missing, whatever application may be made.

In another recent study that briefly considers Phil 2:5–11, Schreiner (Paul, 168–73) thinks that the imitation view, which he wants to defend, is now making a comeback. He comments that “it is difficult to exorcise the theme of imitation in this text” (169; strange language, as though the text were demonic!). He pins a lot of weight on an analogy between the glorified Lord and the reward awaiting believers, but fatally concedes his case by remarking, “The reward in the case of believers will not mean that they reign over creation in the same way as Jesus the Messiah” (170), and so 2:9–11 should not be understood as a call to imitate the inimitable, since the applicatio, “application,” makes no reference to this. This entails considerable reading between the lines.

6 ὁς, “who.” The Christ-hymn proper starts here. Its initial word, the relative pronoun ὁς, “who,” recalls the way other hymnlike confessions in the NT begin (cf. Col 1:15; 1 Tim 3:16; Heb 1:3; see Norden, Agnostos Theos, 383–87, and more recently Karris, Symphony, passim; O’Neill, NTS 26 [1980] 80–100, cites the data from Sirach, as noted above in Form/Structure/Setting). The pronoun may be translated “it is he who.” More importantly, however, this pronoun may be interpreted to link and identify the “historical Jesus” (Phil 2:5; though “Christ Jesus” may not be the same as “Jesus Christ”) with the one who existed before the incarnation. But this may be questioned, if the hymn is an
independent piece, stitched into the fabric of the letter. Strangely, as commentators who follow Lohmeyer (Kyrios Jesus), Käsemann (“Critical Analysis”), and others note, the name Jesus/Christ is missing until we come to the creedal vv 10–11—a sure sign that this is a pre-Pauline composition used by Paul. It sets its scenario in the heavenly realm where it ends, and vv 9–11 are the hymn’s center of gravity. The burden of the remainder of v 6 describes Christ’s preexistence (pace Dunn, Christology in the Making, 113–21, though opposed by Rissi, ANRW 2.25.4 [1987] 3317 n. 10; Byrne, TS 58 [1997] 308–30) and tells what took place in that “earlier period.” So perhaps we should speak of pretemporal, not preexistent, to describe “what he was” before his incarnation.

ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων, “precisely because [ or, although] he was in the form of God.” During that period, as the hymn declares, Christ was ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ, “in the form of God”—a difficult phrase to interpret, if for no other reason than that the word μορφή, “form,” occurs only here and in v 7 in the NT (except for [pseudo-] Mark 16:12, ἐν ἑτέρᾳ μορφῇ, “in another form”; see C. A. Evans, Mark 8:27—16:20, WBC 34B [Nashville: Nelson, 2001] 540–51; this fragment, Mark 16:12–20, was once claimed to be Pauline, but proponents of Phil 2:6–11 as Paul’s own work would be hard pressed to use it). Apparently the author of the hymn did not wish to say outright that Christ was θεός, “God,” as older scholars would lead one to believe (not even Harris, Jesus as God, argues thus). The verb translated “was” (ὑπάρχων) is a widely used substitute in Hellenistic Greek for εἶναι, “to be” (BDF §414), and it could easily have been followed
here by a predicate noun such as θεός, “God” (cf. Gal 1:14 ; 2:14). But it is not.

Neither did the author mean to say by it that Christ was “the form of God,” as Paul said of the husband that he was εἰκὼν καὶ δόξα θεοῦ ὑπάρχων, “the image and glory of God” (1 Cor 11:7). For the author did not write μορφή θεοῦ, “form of God,” but ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ, “in the form of God,” as if the form of God were a sphere in which Christ existed, or the field of power in which he lived, his Daseinsweise, lit. “mode of being” (see Käsemann, “Critical Analysis,” 45–88, esp. 61–62, which is an occasion of some debate; see Morgan, “Incarnation, Myth, and Theology,” 59), or a garment with which Christ was wrapped or clothed (cf. Luke 7:25). Incidentally, Käsemann’s argument for ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, “in Christ Jesus,” meaning “in the realm” of Christ would be strengthened by an appeal to a parallel use of ἐν, “in,” + dative—the pretemporal being was in the divine realm—later developed in John’s prologue (John 1:1–14).

μορφή, “form,” based on its usage in Greek literature, refers primarily to that “which may be perceived by the senses” (J. Behm, TDNT 4:745–46). Yet when this word is applied to God, as here, such an understanding is quite inadequate. For God is invisible (Col 1:15 ; 1 Tim 1:17) and has not been and cannot be comprehended by the human senses. Furthermore, when the hymn says that Christ took the “form of a slave” after his kenosis (v 7), it is not likely that its author had in mind that Christ merely looked like or had the external appearance of a slave. Thus these two expressions, ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ, “in the form of God,” and
μορφὴν δούλου, “form of a slave,” together demand a new and fresh meaning for μορφή, “form” (cf. Schweizer, Erniedrigung, 96 n. 383). And this new meaning must be one that will apply equally well to both phrases since μορφῆ θεοῦ, “form of God,” may have been coined in antithesis to μορφὴ δούλου, “form of a slave” (J. Behm, TDNT 4:751; or vice versa, since who can tell which way the dependence in the pre-Pauline author’s mind went, if at all [see Martin, Hymn of Christ, xx (citing Tob 1:13); 105 n. 2]?).

(1) Some interpreters suggest δόξα, “glory,” as a new reference for μορφή, “form,” in this passage since the equivalent of the external form of God in the OT was God’s glory (Exod 16:10; 24:15; Lev 9:6, 23; Num 12:8; 14:10). If this is correct, then one can picture the preexistent Christ as clothed in the garments of divine majesty and splendor, and one can explain the words “existing in the form of God” as exactly corresponding to the words of the incarnate Christ when he referred to the glory (δόξα) he had with his Father before the world was (John 17:5; J. Behm, TDNT 4:751; Fitzmyer, 2:251). Attractive as this understanding of μορφή, “form,” is, it seems nevertheless to founder on the fact that it cannot be applied equally to the parallel phrase μορφὴ δούλου, “form of a slave,” in Phil 2:7. Yet it can be so interpreted, if a rendering like “state,” “status,” “rank” is acceptable (see [ 4 ] below). We do not wish to press the linguistic identities to imply exactly the same meaning, an insistence that Steenburg (JSNT 34 [1988] 77–86) wants to make (see the rejoinder in Martin, Hymn of Christ, xii–xiii n. 38). Dan 3:19 should be considered in this semantic field.
(2) Others suggest that μορφή, “form,” should be understood in terms of εἰκών, “image,” and the entire hymn explained in the light of Gen 1:26–27 and Gen 3:1–5 (see the attractive depiction of the parallels between the biblical and extrabiblical Adam and the last Adam in Form/Structure/Setting above and in Dunn, Theology of Paul, 281–88, with various responses to criticisms; Dunn reprises these replies in a debate with Hurst [NTS 32.3 (1986) 449–57] in “Christ, Adam, and Preexistence”). These interpreters view Paul, or the writer of the hymn if not Paul, working here with the familiar first Adam/second Adam motif (cf. Rom 5:18–19; 1 Cor 15:45–47). As the first Adam was in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26–27), so Christ, the second Adam, existed in the image of God (Phil 2:6). Whereas the first Adam wrongly tried to become like God (Gen 3:5), the second Adam either did not strive to be equal with God or did not regard equality with God as a thing to be retained (cf. Loofs, TSK 100 [1927–28] 28–30; Héring, Royaume de Dieu, 162–64; Cullmann, Christology, 176; Schweizer, Erniedrigung, 96 n. 383; Houlden; Ridderbos, Paul, 73–77; Hooker, “Philippians 2, 6–11,” 160–64; Caird; and most fully, Dunn, Theology of Paul, 281–88, who regards the case for two Adams as “persuasive” [282]). According to this interpretation, then, the phrase ὃς ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων, “who being in the form of God,” and the expression ὃς ἐστὶν εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ, “who is the image of God” (found in 2 Cor 4:4 and Col 1:15), are to be regarded as synonymous (but contrast Spicq, RB 80 [1973] 37–45; idem, TLNT, 2:523–25; Wallace, TZ 22 [1966] 19–25; subsequent discussion has not supported this denial of synonymity, pace Steenburg, JSNT 34 [1988] 77–86).
Again, however, this explanation of μορφή, “form,” comes to grief fundamentally on the fact that it cannot be adopted for its second occurrence—μορφὴν δούλου, “form of a slave”—in Phil 2:7 (Collange). In addition, it seems strained and unnatural to interpret μορφή, “form,” as εἰκών, “image,” in order to compare and contrast Adam with Christ, unless one holds the view that this hymn refers not at all to the preexistent Christ but only to the human Jesus, his life of humility and his exaltation to an earthly position of glory (Talbert, JBL 86 [1967] 141–53; Murphy-O’Connor, RB 83 [1976] 25–50; Howard, CBQ 40 [1978] 368–87; Dunn, Christology, 114–21, and, by implication, C. Brown, “Ernst Lohmeyer’s Kyrios Jesus,” 27–28, where he proposes that ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων, “in the form of God,” may be the counterpoint to εἶ υἱὸς ἐὰν τοῦ θεοῦ, “if you are the Son of God,” in Matt 4:3, 6; Luke 4:3, 9, which would make Jesus’ μορφή, “form,” consist in his facing temptation in the desert, with the entire phrase alluding to “the one whose earthly life was a manifestation of God” [his italics]). The basis of this view, in systematic theology, is that the subject of the hymn is the historical Jesus, a link that is found in some writers, both early (see Martin, Hymn of Christ, 63–66) and modern (Murphy-O’Connor, RB 83 [1976] 25–50, is a good representative of those who treat the passage as describing Jesus’ earthly ministry and sacrifice). See Martin, Hymn of Christ, xx–xxi, for a critique of Dunn’s two Adams typology that casts a doubt on Christ’s pretemporal estate in Phil 2:6, which finds the logic behind Dunn’s exegetical method wanting (Dunn, Theology of Paul, 281–88, does not respond to this critique, originally published in the 1983 edition of Carmen Christi). Those who wish to relate the “being in
the form of God” to Jesus’ human existence argue that only then is the comparison meaningful, only then are Adam and Christ on the same footing: both earthly and both human (cf. Cullmann, Christology, 177, who argues that Christ here is the preexistent heavenly Human Being, the pure image of God, the God-Human already in his preexistence; see also Glasson, NTS 21 [1974] 133–39). To argue against the view that the hymn can refer only to the earthly human Jesus is not to insist on the idea that the hymn presents Jesus as a model for Christians to follow, as we noted. Hurtado argues that though “there can be no direct duplication by mere humans of the action of a heavenly being who is seen as enjoying quasi-divine status, it is not impossible that such an action might be so described as to make it exemplary for earthly behavior, the differences notwithstanding” (“Jesus as Lordly Example,” 121, italics added; Martin, Hymn of Christ, xxiv, offers a response to this). But his concession is really fatal to the “imitation of Jesus” idea. It puts Christ and the Philippians on the “same footing,” just as Adam and Christ are held (erroneously, we believe, pace Dunn) to be comparable as equals. The reviser of this commentary has made exactly this point against Dunn in the essay “Some Reflections on New Testament Hymns.”

(3) “Mode of being” (Daseinsweise) is still another translation suggested for μορφή, “form,” especially by Käsemann (“Critical Analysis,” 59–63), who uses this very expression (cf. Morgan, “Incarnation, Myth, and Theology,” 59). This meaning is arrived at primarily by associating the Christ-hymn with gnostic texts (e.g., the Corpus Hermeticum) and understanding the hymn against the background of the gnostic myth of the “Heavenly Human Being,”
whose rank was equal with God (see Käsemann, “Critical Analysis,” 62, 66–67, 72, 78–80; Reitzenstein, Hellenistic Mystery-Religions, 454–56). Bultmann states: “The ‘form of God’ in which the pre-existent Christ existed is not mere form but the divine mode of being just as much as the ‘form of a servant’ is the mode of being of a servant” (Theology, 1:193; cf. also Dibelius, Gnilka, Collange). Although this meaning fits the context and applies equally well to ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ, “in the form of God” (v 6), and μορφὴν δούλου, “form of a slave” (v 7), one should perhaps be slow to adopt it because of its strong dependence upon the “Heavenly Human Being” myth for its origin (Morgan, in “Incarnation, Myth, and Theology,” 59, notes Käsemann’s caution). This “Heavenly Human Being” myth has been severely criticized by Georgi (“Der vorpaulinische Hymnus,” 263–66) and others (cf. also Black, SJT 7.2 [1954] 177; Colpe, Die religionsgeschichtliche Schule; J. T. Sanders, New Testament Christological Hymns, 66–69; Yamauchi, Pre-Christian Gnosticism; Martin [1976], 94–95, who summarizes Georgi’s criticisms).

There is still a case to be made for the hymn’s use of mythological, or better, mythopoetic, language on the basis that language that attempts to describe divine acts in human terms is bound to use the category of “myth,” without recourse to a doubtful “gnostic myth of a Heavenly Human Being.” All turns on how we interpret the key term myth. Obviously it does not mean fairy tale or the product of overheated imagination. The Greek myths were vehicles to interpret the divine in terms of the human. In the tradition of German idealism (reflected in Lohmeyer’s works) in which D. F. Strauss stood, myth has rather the connotation of
the “expression or embodiment of an idea; it is the form in which the idea is apprehended” (Dunn, “Demythologizing,” 289). Once one defines myth as a “symbolic idea with life-renewing force,” it becomes a requirement that the next step will be one of demythologizing. This is the point of entry into the background of the Philippian hymn for those who view it as mythic, not mythological.

The use of the term gnostic to describe this setting of the hymn is much debated. Gnōsis in the ancient world was syncretistic; that is, it drew into a common orbit ideas (the key word) taken from Greek thought and oriental mythology and cosmology, to which we should add now the Imperial Cult ideology, commencing with Alexander the Great and leading on to the deification of the Roman emperors in the Julio-Claudian dynasty. The basis of the gnostic myth is expressed in terms of bondage and liberation. The rescue mission is effected by the protagonist of a dramatic story that tells of the descent to this world of a heavenly figure who becomes enmeshed in matter and darkness. Yet he is successful in his mission, which is partly revelatory (announcing himself as the emissary of the high God) and partly redemptive (in the sense of gathering a body of men and women-become-men, called gnostics, who allow his call to activate the sparks of light in their mortal bodies and are thereby set free from matter and cosmic fears). He returns to heaven as a “redeemed Redeemer,” leading the way for his followers to rise with him to enlightenment and become conformed to his image. The thrust of this setting of Phil 2:6–11 is to see a number of terms that overlap with the Philippian hymn scenario and its dramatic retelling of one who secured deliverance
of humans caught in the web of mortality by identifying himself with them as a fellow slave and then being vindicated on his upward flight to the supreme God whose image he is said to carry. For a treatment of how this reconstruction (largely a scholars’ enterprise) may have been in the background of Phil 2:6–11, see Martin, Hymn of Christ, 120–33, which needs updating from the Nag Hammadi material. The starting point still remains Bultmann, “Gnostic Motifs in Paul,” in his Theology, 1:164–83, which uses Phil 2:6–11 as part of his data base. The legitimacy of myth in interpreting the hymn is criticized by Morgan, “Incarnation, Myth, and Theology.”

(4) μορφή has also been interpreted as “condition” or “status.” Schweizer’s contributions to the uses of μορφή, “form,” are particularly to be observed (Erniedrigung, 93–98). He sees the meaning as “rank, condition, status” in both Phil 2:6 and 8. Bockmuehl (JTS n.s. 48 [1997] 23) gives “state” as his rendering. Stellung is a parallel German expression accepted by Hofius (Christushymnus, 57–58). As such μορφή, “form,” refers to:

Christ’s “original” position vis-à-vis God. He was the “first man,” holding a unique place within the divine life and one with God. This sense of “condition” would fit the meaning required in verse 7b. He who was in the beginning... at God’s side... chose to identify himself with men and to accept the human condition, “in the form of a servant.” (Martin [1976], 95–96; see also Benoit, Bonnard)

An objection to this interpretation, however, is the absence of such an understanding of μορφή, “form,” in Greek literature (Beare;
Collange; J. Behm, TDNT 4:742–49; BDAG; MM). As was noted earlier, there is evidence in Tob 1:13 (cf. Martin, Hymn of Christ, xx; but questioned by Hawthorne, “In the Form of God,” 99) and in Corp. herm. 1.13–14, where the primal human being (Urmensch) is spoken of as “like God,” showing the glorious form of God (Käsemann, “Critical Analysis,” 63, uses this source, even if he is wary of using the tendentious terms like “gnostic” and “myth of the redeemer”). But the equating of “form of God” and “equality with God” is by no means proven, as we shall see. Käsemann later abandoned his confidence in the redeemer myth and was content to stay in the more general world of Hellenism (see Morgan, “Incarnation, Myth, and Theology,” 69).

In view of the objections to these four options, perhaps the best approach to the meaning of μορφή, “form,” is (a) to admit that it is a word whose precise meaning is elusive, but (b) at the same time to recognize that from the earliest Greek texts μορφή, “form,” was at least used to express the way in which a thing, being what it is in itself, appears to our senses (see Hawthorne, “In the Form of God,” 97–101). As Kennedy (436) maintained, μορφή “always signifies a form which truly and fully expresses the being which underlies it” (cited with approval by MM, 417). Thus, when this word is applied to God, his μορφή, “form,” must refer to his deepest being, to what he is in himself, to that “which cannot be reached by our understanding or sight, precisely because God is ἀόρατος: in fact the word has meaning here only as referring to the reality of God’s being” (Cerfau, Christ, 305). μορφή θεοῦ, “form of God,” then, may be correctly understood as the “essential nature and character of God” (Vincent, 57–58; cf. also Lightfoot,
110, and esp. the excursus “The Synonyms μορφὴ and σχῆμα ” [127–33]), though we would want to add that it is God in his manifestation, since God remains invisible in himself (Col 1:15). (Some may still ask, however, if this can be the sense of μορφή, “form,” used of humans expressed in μορφὴν δούλου, “form of a slave.”) To say, therefore, that Christ existed ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ, “in the form of God,” is to say that outside his human nature Christ had no other manner of existing apart from existing “in the form of God,” that is, apart from being in possession of all the characteristics and qualities belonging to God. This somewhat enigmatic expression, then, appears to be a cautious, hidden way for the author to say that Christ was God, possessed of the very nature of God (GOODSPEED, MOFFATT, RSV, KNOX, PHILLIPS, GNB, NIV; but NRSV reverts to the neutral “in the form of God”), without employing these exact words. It appears to be a statement made by one who perhaps, although reared as a strict monotheist and thus unable to bring himself to say “Christ is God,” was compelled nevertheless by the sheer force of personal encounter with the resurrected and living Christ to bear witness as best he could to the reality of Christ’s “divinity,” to use the language of later creedal formulations.

οὐχ ἀρπαγμὸν ἡγήσατο τὸ εἶναι ἵσα θεῷ, “he did not consider being equal with God grounds for grasping [or, he did not regard it as a prize to be seized to be equal with God].” That the interpretation of ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ, “in the form of God,” given above is correct is corroborated by the expression τὸ εἶναι ἵσα θεῷ, lit. “the being equal with God,” which follows. The definite
article in τὸ εἶναι, “the being,” implies that this second expression is closely connected with the first; for a function of the definite article here is to point back to something previously mentioned (BDF §399[1]). Therefore τὸ εἶναι Ἰσα θεῖω, “the being equal with God,” should be understood thus: “the equality with God of which we have just spoken equivalently by saying ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων [‘being in the form of God’]” (Cerfaux, Christ, 387 n. 60; see also Dibelius; Hawthorne, “In the Form of God,” 101–5).

On the other hand, this conclusion will not do for those who see the divine equality as the future prospect held out to the preexisting one. The chief criticism is that it loses the essentially dramatic quality of the saga, envisaged as the odyssey of Christ who held his “station” (μορφή) in the divine glory as a springboard from which he might have seized such equality with God but chose otherwise. He “decided”—here mythopoetic language really comes to the fore—not to use such a platform as a means of snatching the prize, but “chose” (again we use a human term of “volition” for want of a better way of putting it) to reject that advantage. He elected to take the “condition/station” of a slave, only to be exalted and accorded the very honor that against all probability, he might have grasped—equality with God—as a sharer in the divine presence of God’s throne and cosmic authority.

The next matter of inquiry is the question of the meaning of ἁρπαγμὸν in the sentence “he did not consider being equal with God ἁρπαγμὸν.” Much has been written about this rare word (cf. Vollenweider, NTS 45 [1999] 413–33), used only here in the NT, but no consensus has been reached as to what it means. Wright (“
ἀρπαγμός,” 56–98), has the fullest discussion of the wide range of meanings of this term (see Martin’s reply in Hymn of Christ, lxix–lxxiv).

(1) Some see it as referring to a thing not yet possessed but desirable, a thing to be snatched at, grasped after, as Adam or Satan, each in his own way, grasped after being equal with God (cf. Gen 3:5; Isa 14:12–13; see Michaelis). Such an understanding of ἀρπαγμός, however, implies that the preexistent Christ was not equal with God, but could have “forcibly” (a term that goes back to Barth) reached for and seized such equality had he chosen to do so (cf. NEB; cf. also Ehrhardt, JTS o.s. 46 [1945] 45–51; W. L. Knox, HTR 41 [1948] 229–49; and others listed in Martin, Hymn of Christ, 139–43), giving full weight to the Greek root in the verb ἁρπάζειν, “to seize, snatch,” as elsewhere in the NT (Acts 8:39; 2 Cor 12:2–4 for instance).

(2) Others see it as meaning a thing already possessed and embraced, a thing to be clutched and held on to (cf. JB, Barth). Such a meaning implies that Christ was already equal with God and that he possessed the right to hold tightly to this equality and use it to his own advantage (cf. Hoover, HTR 64 [1971] 95–119; see Martin, Hymn of Christ, lxvii, for some observations on Hoover’s ambivalence—or so it seemed to O’Neill, HTR 81 [1988] 445–49). Here might also be listed those other ideas suggested for ἀρπαγμός, such as “lucky find,” “a piece of good fortune,” “a windfall” (BDAG). All these meanings suggest that Christ held a position, that of being equal with God, which opened up the
possibility of future advantage for himself, of exploiting his status for selfish ends, if he were to make such a choice.

(3) Still others draw the meaning of ἀρπαγμός from its corresponding verb ἁρπάζειν, meaning, among other things, “to be caught up in a mystical rapture” (cf. 1 Thess 4:17, where it refers to a physical “catching up”). Paul, for example, had been caught away, without his own will or power, by the Spirit in a rapture (ἁρπάζειν) to be for a short while with God (2 Cor 12:2–4). But for the Son of God, according to Hammerich, “while he was in the form of God, the being with God was no rapture, no ἀρπαγμός; it was his nature. No spirit, no angel had brought him into this state of being with God,” and nobody else could ever bring him out of it. Only he himself could do this by voluntary choice (An Ancient Misunderstanding, from a review in ExpTim 78 [1966–67] 193–94; cf. Trudinger, ExpTim 79 [1967–68] 279).

(4) C. F. D. Moule argues that ἀρπαγμός refers rather to the act of snatching, to acquisitiveness: Jesus did not reckon equality with God meant snatching; on the contrary, he emptied himself. Human evaluation may assume “that God-likeness means having your own way, getting what you want, [but] Jesus saw God-likeness essentially as giving and spending oneself out” (Moule, “Manhood,” 97; idem, “Further Reflexions,” 271–74; with further considerations and modifications in idem, “Reflections on So-Called ‘Triumphantalism,’ ” 223–25; cf. Hawthorne, “In the Form of God,” 102). Jesus considered being equal with God not to be taking everything to himself, but (ἀλλά) to be giving everything away for the sake of others. This meaning for ἀρπαγμός is a plausible reading of the
context and is adopted in the Translation as one interpretative option.

On the other hand, Moule’s view, followed now by Wright (“ἁρπαγμός,” 76–77) and MacLeod (BSac 158 [2001] 308–30), may not be free from difficulty. In particular it may be seen to lose the tension between v 6 and v 7 and spoil the element of contrast. It also turns the hymn into a characterization of God rather than a hymn to/about Christ, as Martin (Hymn of Christ, xlv–xlvi) points out. If the hymn is really about the God-likeness of God, whose character is seen as one of sacrificial self-giving, not seizing or clutching one’s possession, it becomes difficult to explain why the term love is singularly absent from these six verses (hence the second interpretative option in the Translation).

Readers will need to ponder these issues as they move on to consider a further corollary of Moule’s view, which gives to v 6a a causative meaning. The usual interpretation of the participial phrase that begins v 6, ὃς ἔν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων, lit. “who, being in the form of God,” is concessive, as in the NRSV, “who, though he was in the form of God” (cf. GOODSPEED, WILLIAMS, NASB, BECK, NAB). This translation may still be preferred, as is indicated through one option in the Translation. On the other hand, Moule proposes that the participial phrase be translated as causative: “precisely because he was in the form of God he reckoned equality with God not as a matter of getting but of giving” ("Manhood," 97). This, then, makes clear that contrary to whatever anyone may think about God, his true nature is characterized not by selfish grabbing but by an open-handed giving (see also Ross, JTS o.s. 10
7 ἄλλα ἐαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν, “on the contrary, he poured himself out.” The preceding idea is now clearly spelled out in a profound statement introduced by ἄλλα, “but”: “Not this... but this!” There is an element of tension with v 6, which is slackened in Moule’s and Wright’s interpretation (noted in Wong, ETL 62 [1986] 267–82, who, however, opts for the causative sense of v 6a). Once we give full weight to ἄλλα, “but,” the two verses are expressing a real contrast, as Thekkekkara (LS 17 [1992] 312) notes. The translation “on the contrary” says as much. The being equal with God, does not mean filling oneself; rather (ἄλλα, denoting a stark contrast) it means emptying oneself (cf. Grelot, Bib 54 [1973] 25–42). Hence, the hymn states that Christ, who shared the nature of God, who was equal with God or was tempted to become equal with God by snatching, ἐαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν, “emptied himself.” The emphatic position of ἐαυτὸν, “himself,” and the form of the verb strongly suggest that this act of “emptying” was voluntary on the part of the preexistent Christ.

But what did this act of self-emptying entail? Of what did Christ empty himself? Sensing that this is a real question, some
interpreters are quick to answer: he emptied himself (1) of his glory (Plummer), (2) of his independent exercise of authority (Hendriksen), (3) of the prerogatives of deity (Lightfoot), (4) of the insignia of majesty (Calvin, Lightfoot), (5) of the “relative” attributes of deity—omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence (the kenoticists—e.g., C. Gore, P. T. Forsyth, H. R. Mackintosh), (6) of being equal with God (A. Oepke, TDNT 3:661), and so on. But there is no basis for any of these speculative answers in the text of the hymn, simply because it gives no clue as to the object of Christ’s self-emptying. These are mainly, with the exception of (6), issues in systematic theology or the history of Christian thought. The term kenosis is a way to account for the human Jesus in the light of his existence in the divine realm and his becoming human. (See the excursus below, On Kenosis.) It is concerned with problems that have defied final resolution because the modern interpreter is encumbered with the dogmatic, creedal matters of the centuries. The wide-ranging topic is best surveyed by Loofs (TSK 100 [1927–28] 1–102; ERE, 7:680–87) and, in a more popular vein, by Martin (DBR, 576–77; see too idem, Hymn of Christ, 169–72; Richard, Christ; strictly exegetical issues are handled in Henry, DBSup, 5:7–161).

A more fruitful approach to understanding this difficult phrase is to realize that the verb κενούν also means “to pour out.” Christ, then, who was in the rank of God but did not reckon that this status was a way to gain equality with God or that his nature was characterized by acquisitiveness, “effaced all thought of self and poured out his fulness to enrich others” (Jones—a moralizing interpretation to be sure). It is not necessary, therefore, to insist
that the phrase ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν, “he emptied himself,” demands some genitive of content be supplied from the context—e.g., “Christ emptied himself of something.” (The NIV offers “made himself nothing,” which is more a paraphrase, and a question-begging paraphrase at that; no sense of self-destruction or annihilation is in view. Some modern popular hymns, thankfully fading away, like “O to Be Nothing,” contain this impossible, dehumanizing sentiment. For other variants in modern hymnology, see MacLeod, BSac 158 [2001] 308–30.) One need not imagine that the phrase means that Christ discarded divine substances or essences (Keck). Rather, it is a poetic, hymnlike way of saying that Christ poured out himself, putting himself totally at the disposal of people (cf. 1 John 3:16), that Christ became poor that he might make many rich (2 Cor 8:9 ; cf. also Eph 1:23 ; 4:10). Classical, Hellenistic, and patristic writers furnish examples to support this meaning of κενοῦν (see Warren, JTS o.s. 12 [1911] 461–63; cf. τὰ ὑπάρχοντα κενοῦν, “to spend all one’s property on the poor” [John Chrysostom, Hom. 1 Tim. 13. cited by Jones], a meaning that harmonizes well with the exhortation to humility, which is a motif of Phil 2:3–11 ; Furness, ExpTim 69 [1957–58] 93–94). There is a play on words in κενοδοξία, “empty conceit” (Phil 2:3), which characterized those who were demanding their rights and insisting on their own way, and κενοῦν, “to empty” (2:7), which described the attitude and actions of Christ in terms of setting aside his rights and in not insisting on his own way, as by an act of “seizing.” We observe the OT parallels as worthy of consideration: Gen 24:20 LXX, for Rebekah’s action in pouring out (ἐκκενοῦν).
water from her jar into a trough; Jer 14:2, 15:9 LXX, both employing
the metaphorical and picturesque use of κενοῦν (Heb. ʾāmal).

μορφήν δούλου λαβών, “by taking the form of a slave.” The
expression ἐαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν, “he poured himself out,” is now
defined more precisely by the participial phrases that follow: “taking
[ λαβών ] the form of a slave,” “being born [ γενόμενος ] in the
likeness of human beings,” and “being recognized [ ἐὑρεθείς ] as a
human.” These participles, although aorists, are nevertheless
participles of simultaneous action (BDF §339[1]) and express the
means by which the action of the verb ἐκένωσεν, “poured out,”
was effected. Paradoxically, then, Christ’s self-giving was
accomplished by taking, his self-emptying was achieved by
becoming what he was not before, his kenosis not by subtracting
from but by adding to, if some literal sense is intended. Yet that
very act involves renunciation of what he did have, and this is the
point made by those interpreters who wish to see a parallel in Phil
3:7–11. B. J. Dodd (“Story of Christ”) shows that this parallel
cannot be sustained since Paul’s renunciation of his Jewish identity
badges, like circumcision, is in no way comparable (except by
extension) to Christ’s momentous “choice” in becoming a human
being. “He stripped off his image” may be a suggested paraphrase
and would connect with his becoming clothed “in human likeness,”
which comes perilously near to a docetic picture Paul would judge
inadequate. Later gnostic writers exploited this imagery of the
redeemer stripping off his mortal flesh in an attempt to distance
the heavenly emissary from human pain and suffering (see the
commentaries on Col 2:12–15 ; some of the texts, notably the
Gospel of Truth, are cited in R. P. Martin, Colossians: The Church’s
Christ took to himself voluntarily μορφὴν δούλου, “the form of a slave.” Once again, as in v 6, the noun μορφή, “form,” is used, and with the same meaning. There is no idea here that Christ possessed the external appearance of a slave or that he disguised himself as a slave. Rather, it may mean that he adopted the nature, “the characteristic attributes” (so C. F. D. Moule, “Further Reflexions,” 268), of a slave—i.e., he became a “slave.” Alternatively, if μορφή, “form,” means status/rank in v 6, then here it would mean that he accepted the role of a slave, having surrendered his rank as the divine form/image (Martin, Hymn of Christ, 38).

(1) Some interpreters, notably Käsemann (“Critical Analysis”), whose views are outlined in Martin, Hymn of Christ, 177–82, see here an enslavement to the demonic powers. O’Brien (219–20) is negative in regard to this interpretation since he holds that “taking the form of a slave” is to be understood in its immediate context and is opposed to any gnostic influence in Paul. He thinks that δοῦλος, “slave,” should not be taken in an “absolute sense” but must be related to what follows—exactly. Yet this begs the question of the extent of Jesus’ involvement with humanity in v 7 — ὁμοίωμα, “likeness” (cf. Rom 8:3)—and whether it pays due heed to the NT and specifically Pauline view of the state of humanity as in captivity to the “principalities and powers” that demonized Greco-Roman society as hostile and threatening (see Martin, Reconciliation, 48–67, for the apostle’s view of fallen humankind under the tyranny of “evil demons”). Käsemann’s interpretation
means that Christ, as a natural consequence of becoming human, accepted bondage to the στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου, “the elemental spirits of the universe,” in that he allowed himself to be born into a world dominated by powers of evil described as sin, death, and the law (Rom 5–8). He then subjected himself to these powers until by his death he could destroy them both for himself and for all humankind (cf. 1 Cor 2:6–8; Gal 4:3, 9; Col 2:8, 20; see Käsemann, “Critical Analysis,” 45–88; Beare, Keck, Caird). But this is not an obvious meaning of the expression, and it does not readily harmonize with the general thrust of Phil 2:3–11, though Käsemann, who pioneered this reading of Phil 2:7, gives a thought-provoking meaning to it. If the Philippian readers, living in a Greco-Roman environment, were alarmed at the malevolent powers of their human oppressors (1:28–30) and the corrupting influence of society around them (2:15; cf. Acts 16:12–40, with its implicit yearning for deliverance [σωτηρία] from evil), it could well have been Paul’s way of spelling out the range of his gospel to meet human need at its existential level.

(2) For others, the term “slave” as applied here to Christ is to be interpreted in terms of Isaiah’s Servant passages (esp. Isa 52:13—53:12). Thus the phrase “taking the form of a slave” means “exactly playing the part” of the Servant of the Lord (Martin [1976], 97; now elaborated in Bloomquist, Function of Suffering; Gundry, “Style and Substance”; and Wright, “ἄρπαγμός,” 60, who calls attention to the many occurrences of δοῦλος, “slave,” to render ‘ebed, “servant,” in the LXX of Isa 42:19; 48:20; 49:3, 5, as well as the use of the verb δουλεύειν, “to serve [as a slave],” in Isa 53:11). These more recent discussions seem to dispose of the
skepticism of O’Brien; see “Appendix D” in O’Brien’s commentary. Most commentators fail to come to terms with Fuller’s observation (Mission, 57) that whenever Paul appeals to the `ebed Yahweh texts he is quoting or alluding to tradition. If this identification may be accepted, it is one reason we may suspect Phil 2:6–11 to be pre-Pauline, and the line “taking the form of a servant” should be seen as Paul’s insertion (see Martin, Hymn of Christ, xlix, 51–52, for an elaboration of the servanthood theme in the entire letter). Thus the expression “he poured himself out” is equivalent to Isaiah’s “he poured out his soul to death” (53:12; cf. Jeremias, Servant, 97; but regarded as questionable by Rissi, ANRW 2.25.4 [1987] 3317). Note also that the Isaiah poem strikes the same theme as is sounded at the conclusion of the Philippian hymn: “See, my servant... shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high” (Isa 52:13 NRSV; cf. Phil 2:9–11). If this is the idea to be attached to δοῦλος, then “slave”/“servant” here is in reality an honorific title (see Lohmeyer, 94)—God’s specially anointed servant (cf. Isa 42). Yet the context demands that δοῦλος, “slave,” be understood as a term of extreme abasement, the exact opposite of κύριος, “Lord,” a title that later is to describe the exalted Christ (see K. H. Rengstorf, TDNT 2:278; Deichgräber, Gotteshymnus, 123–24).

If the incident from the life of Jesus where Jesus puts himself in the place of the slave and washes his disciples’ feet (John 13) played any part in shaping this hymn, if the context in which the hymn is inserted presents a call to serve one another, then δοῦλος, “slave,” emphasizes that in the incarnation Christ entered the stream of human life as a slave, that is, as a person without advantage, with no rights or privileges of his own, for the express
purpose of placing himself completely at the service of all humankind (cf. Mark 10:45 [on this connection, see Binder, ZNW 78 (1987) 230–43]; Luke 22:27; and see Hurtado, “Jesus as Lordly Example”; Briggs, Semeia 47 [1989] 137–53). Alternatively, if the parenetic appeal is rather in terms of obedience to the once-humbled, now-exalted Lord (v 12), the slavelike attitude is more to be seen in the way slaves/servants act out their relationship to the Lord (v 11), just as the earthly slaves were beholden to their masters (κύριοι). There is no reason to ask, as does Plummer (45), “to whom was Christ a slave—to God or to people?” For in serving people he was serving God, and in taking the role of a slave toward others, he was acting in obedience to the will of God. As Collange (101–2) concludes, “The incarnation is both humiliation and mission.”

ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἄνθρωπων γενόμενος, “by being born in the likeness of human beings.” This is the second participial phrase used to define more precisely the expression “he poured himself out.” The participle γενόμενος, “being born” (aorist), derived from γίνεσθαι, a verb that stresses “beginning” or “becoming,” stands in sharp contrast to the present participle ὑπάρχων, “being,” in v 6. There it was claimed that Christ always existed (ὑπάρχων) “in the form of God.” Here it is said that he came into existence (γενόμενος) “in the likeness of human beings.”

But the phrase ἐν ὁμοιώματι, “in the likeness,” does not mean that Christ only appeared to be a man or just seemed to be human. Nor can it give rise to such subtle interpretations as those that state that this phrase “suggests a mysterious appearance of
one who, since he came from God, still retains a secret relationship with him, and is, to that extent, removed from men” (Martin [1976], 98; cf. Vincent, 59; Michel, “Zur Exegese von Phil. 2, 5–11,” 91). Rather, ὁμοίωμα stresses “likeness,” “similarity,” but not quite “identity.” The notion of exact equivalence is not really shown in Paul’s use of the word in other places, e.g., Rom 8:3, on which much debate has centered in church history. Christ was in all respects like other human beings (cf. Heb 4:15; see Vanni, Greg 58 [1977] 431–70). On the question of the “human nature” that he assumed, whether “fallen” (Barth) or “unfallen” (so orthodoxy), see Johnson, Humanity.

καὶ σχήματι εὑρεθείς ὡς ἄνθρωπος, “and by being recognized as a human.” The meaning of “qualified identity” for ὁμοίωμα is reinforced now by the final phrase in the series of participial phrases that define the clause “he poured himself out.” Although the word σχήμα used here denotes that “outward form or structure perceptible to the senses” (J. Schneider, TDNT 7:954) and therefore generally refers to what is “external and changeable” over against what is “essential and permanent” (Plummer, 46), yet in this context its meaning is not to be so restricted. Etymologies aside, σχήμα, “appearance” (v 7d), in hymnic fashion, links with μορφή, “form” (v 7a), and ὁμοίωμα, “likeness” (v 7c), to form a threefold reiteration of the one fundamentally important idea: Christ in the incarnation identified himself with humanity (Collange), while he retained his distinctiveness as appearing in a form that could offer obedience to God (a more than human response since, as Lohmeyer, Kyrios Jesus, 41, pointed out, only a divine being can offer obedience to death; for mortals it is their destiny from which
there is no escape). He “truly became man, not merely in outward appearances but in thought and feeling” (J. Schneider, TDNT 7:956); he shared the human plight and was no mere “‘reasonable facsimile’ of a man” (Keck, 850). In this respect, the writer of the Philippian hymn is in full accord with other writers of the NT who insist on the genuineness and completeness of Christ’s humanity (cf. Luke 2:52; John 1:14; Rom 8:3; Gal 4:4; Col 1:22; Heb 2:17; 4:15; 5:7–8; 1 John 4:2–3; the Johannine characterization of Jesus’ full humanity has been denied by E. Käsemann, The Testament of Jesus: A Study of the Gospel of John in the Light of Chapter 17 [London: SCM Press, 1968], but not compellingly, as shown by M. M. Thompson, The Humanity of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988]). It is a doubtful piece of exegesis, therefore, to single out the phrase “as a human” (lit. “in appearance as a human being”), relate it to Dan 7:13, and interpret it as an allusion to Daniel’s heavenly Son of Man (Lohmeyer, Kyrios Jesus, 38–42; Michel, “Zur Exegese von Phil. 2, 5–11,” 90–92), thus lessening its force as the final element in an emphatically unequivocal, repetitive affirmation of the reality of Christ’s humanity. As summarized by Grayston ([1957], 94), “let there be no doubt, Paul says in effect; Christ was really and truly man, having to live the same kind of life as we live.”
Excursus: On Kenosis

It is the insistence on the reality of Christ’s humanness and the use of the verb κενοῦν, “to empty,” in Phil 2:7 that gave rise to and provided the name for the kenotic theory of the incarnation. This ancient theory (going back to H. Grotius in the seventeenth century), as recently expounded by Collange (102), claims that “at the incarnation Christ divested himself of the ‘relative’ attributes of deity, omniscience, omnipresence and omnipotence, but retained the ‘essential attributes’ of holiness, love and righteousness.” Such a theory, in spite of its worthy motive of attempting to do justice to the reality of Christ’s humanity and his being-in-God, cannot be supported by the statements in Phil 2 for the following reasons: (1) The significant statements regarding Christ’s kenosis are found in a hymn using mythopoetic idioms (2:6–11). (2) The hymn form cautions against building a doctrine on any single statement to be found in it. For, like a poem, the hymn is composed not to be analyzed word by word, but to be understood in its entirety. The full impact of its meaning, therefore, is found not in the part but the whole, and the whole thrust of the hymn is alien to the issues raised by the kenoticists (Thomas, EvQ 42 [1970] 142–51). (3) Although the verb κενοῦν, “to empty,” is used here (v 7), its meaning is too imprecise to permit one to say that Christ emptied himself of certain divine attributes. In fact, as was pointed out above, the Philippian text does not say that Christ gave up anything. Rather it says that he added to himself that which he did not have before—“the form of a slave,” “the likeness of human beings.” Thus the implication is that at the incarnation Christ
became more than God, if this is conceivable, not less than God. Yet that “more than” quality, represented by the preposition ὑπέρ (as in 2:9: “more than highly exalted him”), awaits the enthronement and gives point to the conclusion that the humbled Christ showed obedience, in a slavelike manner, by his destined death. It was only later (διὸ καί, “as a consequence, therefore”) that he was elevated to lordship over the cosmos, which is not in view in v 6 since it traces back Christ’s eternal, pretemporal state to a time when there was no cosmos to rule. And it is this exaltation that gives uniqueness to the Christ-event, making the imitation view difficult. What Tasker (Narrow Way, 50–55) says of the death of Christ—“There is only one Calvary”—is just as applicable to the entire range of Christ’s existence.

It is impossible to explain such a mystery—that the one who was on par with God could also be a human person to the fullest, a truly genuine human being possessing all the potential for physical, mental, social, and spiritual growth that is proper to humanity (Luke 2:52), and be both at the same time—divine and human, God and a human being. Here, of course, speaks the voice of creedal Christianity with Chalcedonian overtones. Nevertheless, the Philippian hymn seems clearly to set forth just such a paradox and affirm it, but does not try to explain it. Hence, anyone coming to the text in the hope of interpreting it must exercise the same kind of balance and reserve, neither tampering with anything relating to the divinity of Christ, nor calling into question any aspect of the reality of his humanity (cf. Dawe, SJT 15 [1962] 337–49, esp. 348; see also G. F. Hawthorne, The Presence and the Power: The

8 ἐταπείνωσεν ἑαυτόν, “he humbled himself.” The writer continues now, without a conjunction, to say that in the days of Christ’s earthly existence “he humbled himself.” This means that as a human being Christ did not strive for some pinnacle of earthly achievement. He did not stand where the people of Philippi apparently stood (cf. v 3)—“not where the battle was fought for honour, right and credit” (Barth, 64). Instead, his whole life was characterized by self-surrender, self-renunciation, and self-sacrifice: “he humbled himself by becoming obedient unto death.”

γενόμενος ὑπῆκοος μέχρι θανάτου, “by becoming obedient even to the point of accepting death.” Once again a participle is used to set forth precisely the meaning of the principal verb ἐταπείνωσεν, “humbled”: Christ humbled himself “by becoming [γενόμενος] obedient even to the point of death.” The concise phrase “obedient even to the point of death” measures the magnitude of Christ’s humility and conveys the idea that he was principally “obedient to God to the full length of accepting death” (Caird, 122). But is there not a sense, too, in which Christ was obedient to the wishes of people as well? It seems so. As a slave, he set himself not only to obey God but also to serve humankind. Or better, and this is supported from the pastoral and parenetic use of the verb that follows (v 12), he set himself to obey God by serving humankind. This service entailed a positive response to the fundamental, though inarticulate, demand of the human race: “Ransom us from death by your death!” To this demand Jesus’ answer was not only
“I have come to do your will, O God” (cf. Heb 10:7), but also “I have come to seek and save that which is lost” (interpreting Luke 19:10), to serve and to “give my life a ransom for many” (as is the thought of Mark 10:45), if we may interpret the hymn in idioms it does not in fact use and so fill the obvious lacunae. Christ’s acceptance of death, therefore, was his ultimate yes to God and humanity, his ultimate act of obedience to God in his self-giving service to people.

The death of Christ, according to its NT evidence, was also vicarious, i.e., a death in place of others (Cousar, Theology of the Cross), yet we must note the striking absence of any notion of any thought of propter nos, “on account of us,” or pro nobis, “for us”; in fact the readers or hearers or the hymn’s singers are not in view at all. Nonetheless, from the context we may conclude: (1) Paul’s appeal to the members of the Philippian church to renounce their individual rights for the benefit of the whole must get its impetus from Christ’s renunciation for the benefit of others. (2) It is difficult to imagine that God would require of Jesus that he would submit not only to death but to criminal death, unless that death was in some sense vicarious and so the consummation of God’s redeeming purpose for humankind. (3) There are other places in Paul’s writings where he omits a point or two in his argument simply because he is certain his audience knows enough to follow him (Rom 5:15–17). Therefore, that no explicit statement exists here stating that Christ’s death was vicarious does not necessarily mean it was not intended so to be understood (see Caird for these arguments, on whose language we have drawn; but see also Collange and Martin [1976] for an opposite view, which does not
require the implied readers to fill in the blanks and make the needed connections).

θανάτου δὲ σταυροῦ, “even death on a cross.” In any case, Christ’s death was not a natural death; it was death on a cross. The intensive or explicative conjunction δὲ, “even,” that introduces this phrase calls special attention to this most striking element in the humiliation of Christ. For crucifixion, borrowed from the Persians and perfected by the Romans, was an unusually cruel and humiliating means of capital punishment. It was generally reserved for slaves, robbers, assassins, rebellious provincials, and the like. Crucifixion was abhorred by the Jews, not only because of its pain and shame but because anyone thus hanged was considered accursed by God (Deut 21:22–23 [cf. Wilcox, JBL 96 (1977) 85–89]; 1 Cor 1:23; Gal 3:13; cf. Heb 12:2; 4Q169 [4QpNah] VII–VIII; see Hengel’s classic, Crucifixion, where he considers in detail the ancient sources both Hebrew-Jewish and Greco-Roman; Fitzmyer, CBQ 40 [1978] 493–513). It was no less abhorrent to the Romans. Cicero wrote: “Let the very name of the cross be far away not only from the body of a Roman citizen, but even from his thoughts, his eyes, his ears” (Rab. Perd. 5.10.16; see Cousar, Theology of the Cross, for the theological implication of Paul’s cross-kerygma; Oakes, Philippians, for a treatment of Paul’s use of Roman imagery). Christ’s death by crucifixion was, therefore, the ultimate in human degradation. Thus in these words the lowest point in the descent theme that marks the first section of the hymn is reached: he who was in the form of God and was equal with God emptied himself, humbled himself, and surrendered himself to a criminal’s death.
Lohmeyer (96; cf. idem, Kyrios Jesus, 43), it may be noted, came up with a novel interpretation of v 8. He saw the downward descent of the heavenly being as even more dramatically pictured. Noting how in Jewish theology death is often likened to a king or a kingdom (“king of terrors” is a portentous expression in Job 18:14 and elsewhere), he proposed that “obedience up to the point of death” should be construed in spatial terms (cf. Rev 1:18 for the realm of the dead). He entered the realm of the dead and permitted death to enslave him as a demon power that holds mortals prey. On the theme of the incarnation and the abasement of Christ to the death of the cross, Lohmeyer wrote that both have to do with “an entrance into the kingdom of the dead” (Kyrios Jesus, 43)—a view Käsemann (“Critical Analysis,” 66–67) exploited in his interpretation of “he took the morphē of a slave” (Phil 2:7). The drama is thus akin to that set out in Heb 2:15 and Rev 1:18. Jesus (if we may attach the human name to the otherworldly drama) identified himself to the full (and not simply took on human likeness) with the fate of humanity, but with one vital difference. He placed himself under the yoke of submission to the “elemental powers” by his own deliberate choice. When he was exalted by God (whose name is reintroduced from v 6), he broke the power of their control, shattered the Greco-Roman resignation to heimarmenē, “fixed fate,” and brought their regime to an end (exactly as in Ignatius, “Song of the Star,” Eph. 19). The cry “Jesus Christ is Lord” (Phil 2:11) is the response of faith and celebrates his role as Christus Victor, “Christ the Conqueror,” as even the demons acknowledge (Phil 2:10 ; Ign. Trall. 9:1). The turning point (Gk. peripeteia, a term borrowed from the theater) marks the
opening of the second major stanza. Commenting on the strophes (or stanzas; Lohmeyer uses the terms interchangeably) of Phil 2:6–8, Lohmeyer (86) says, “these three stanzas lead in one great sweep, from the highest height to the lowest depth, from the light of God to the darkness of death.”

9 At this point there is a radical change in the hymn. Now will come the reversal. Whereas the first half spoke of the unnamed Christ as the acting subject of all the verbs, now in the last half “it is God who acts and Christ is the object of the divine action” (Beare, 85). Whereas the first half of the hymn described Christ’s self-humiliation, the last half describes his exaltation by God, followed by his enthronement in the heavenly court, an imagery deriving from Psalm 110:1 (on this testimonium, “proof text,” see Hengel, “Sit at My Right Hand!” who claims that sitting at God’s right hand is earlier, in christological development, than the assertion that the exalted Lord has the title κύριος, “Lord”; but the present passage [vv 9–11 ] brings together the two ideas in such a way that they appear to be inseparable). The nexus between humiliation and exaltation is well known in Jewish pietistic circles. It is epitomized in the saying “The one who humbles (himself) will be lifted up” and belongs to the ideology of the “piety of the poor” (see Kleinknecht, Der leidende Gerechtfertigte, and the treatment of the Second Temple Jewish and NT passages in R. P. Martin, James, WBC 48 [Waco, TX: Word, 1988] xci–xcviii).

διό καί, “as a consequence, therefore.” This last half of 2:6–11 opens with a strong inferential conjunction (διό, “therefore”) followed immediately by a second conjunction (καί, “also”),
denoting that the inference is obvious. Together the words may be translated “as a consequence, therefore” (BDAG; BDF §442[12]; 451 [5]). They may be interpreted as saying, in effect, that the exaltation of Christ, soon to be mentioned, was not so much a reward for his self-abnegation (Michaelis, H. C. G. Moule) or a gracious gift that excluded any idea of merit on Christ’s part (Gnilka, Collange, Martin [1976]; criticized by Oakes, Philippians, 203, on the ground that to omit the motive of “reward” leaves one open to the charge of being a Stoic), since it was the natural or logical outcome of his humility. In other words, these conjunctions affirm what Jesus taught, namely, that in the divine order of things self-humbling leads inevitably to exaltation. It is an inexorable law of God’s kingdom that operates without variance, equally applicable for Christians at Philippi as for Christ himself. This interpretation may be supported by reflecting again on the prophetic act of Jesus, on the one hand (John 13:3–17), and by paying close attention to the words of Jesus, on the other: “those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who want to lose their life... will find it.... What will it profit them if they gain [κερδήσῃ] the whole world but forfeit [ζημιωθῇ] their life” (Matt 16:25–26 NRSV ; cf. Phil 3:7–8, where the same verbs, κερδάνειν, “to gain,” and ζημιοῦσθαι, “to forfeit,” are used). Again, “All who exalt [ὑψώσει] themselves will be humbled [ταπεινωθήσεται], and all who humble themselves will be exalted [ὑψωθήσεται]” (Matt 23:12 NRSV ; cf. Luke 14:11 ; 18:14 ; note the “divine” passives and their significance). Finally, in the traditional words of Jesus it is explicitly stated that humility leads to becoming the greatest in the kingdom
of heaven, i.e., to exaltation: “Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 18:4 NRSV).

On the other hand, these verses are not only illustrative of the principle that obedience to God leads to his recognition of such humility. As we are dealing with a unique event and exaltation, the Philippian hymn is best understood if the text has to do with cosmic lordship, not only the “cultic” veneration of Jesus as Lord, and we may prefer to follow Lohmeyer in placing the acknowledgment in a transcendental setting, not a moral one (see Martin, Hymn of Christ, 231–35, for the debate and references to Lohmeyer). Once more we may note the absence of any benefit accruing to humans.

On the basis of the citations from the gospel tradition given above, some interpreters may argue that it seems quite unnecessary to search for the source of the themes of the Christ-hymn in other places, for example, in the Adam story (Gen 1–3), in the Servant of the Lord passages (esp. Isa 52–53), or elsewhere (see Cerfaux, Christ, 390–92; Krinetzki, TQ 139 [1959] 157–93, 291–336; Dacquino, BeO 17 [1975] 241–52; Manns, ED 29 [1976] 259–90; Contri, Marianum 40 [1978] 164–68). The words and acts of Jesus themselves may be held to be a sufficient source for the principal humiliation-exaltation motif that characterizes Phil 2:6–11. This is certainly an arguable line to take, but it may also be argued that it undermines the classical Christian belief that incarnation and exaltation are unique events in God’s scheme of salvation. They cannot be scaled down to simple illustrations of a proverbial kind, familiar in rabbinic Wisdom literature, as “My humiliation is my exaltation” (Rabbi Hillel, cited in Str-B, 1:774; see Martin, Hymn of
Christ, 223–24). This leads to the alternative of Lohmeyer's view (98; cited in Martin, Hymn of Christ, 234).

ο̱ θε̱δς αὐ̱τῶν υ̱περ̱ψω̱σεν, “God exalted him to the highest place.” The exaltation of Christ, which is now the theme of the second half of the hymn, is not described in stages, as was his humiliation-descent. The hymn writer depicts God, who is introduced onto the scene for the first time, in one dramatic act, lifting Christ from the depths to the heights. (But there may be steps of elevation, as we shall see.) The verb he chooses to describe this astonishing turn of events is υ̱περψο̱ῦν, a compound word (ὑ̱πέρ, “beyond, much more” + υ̱ψο̱ῦν, “to exalt”) that has lost none of its intended composite force through usage (G. Bertram, TDNT 8:609). Found only here in the NT, υ̱περψο̱ῦν may be interpreted to mean “to super-exalt,” “to raise someone to the loftiest height” (BDAG). On this reading, the principal idea conveyed by this verb is not comparative, i.e., that Christ is now someone greater than he was before the incarnation or possesses a status superior to that which he had in his preexistent state (Dibelius; Cullmann, Christology, 174–81), but superlative, i.e., that Christ, who made himself so very lowly, was made by God very high, so high, in fact, that he is placed over (ὑ̱πέρ) all things (see Beare; Collange; G. Delling, NovT 11 [1969] 127–53). The verb υ̱περψο̱ῦν is used in the LXX to describe Yahweh as the one who is “exalted far above all gods” (Ps 96:9 [MT 97:9 ]; cf. Dan 3:52, 54, 57–88).

Alternatively, the verb may signify exalting beyond (ὑ̱πέρ) what the hymn’s protagonist previously had. This is the sense preferred
by the reviser of this commentary, given the flow of thought that begins with the pre-mundane choice to be “equal with God,” which the heavenly one refused to seize and which is now accorded him in grace. The “much more” element seems required not only on logical grounds, but may be held to be supported by the lexical form of the unusual verb, with its prefix (ὑπέρ) implying the possession of the supreme name and its implied thought that as ΚΥΡΙΟΣ, “Lord,” Christ is master of all parts of the cosmos. In the beginning, in his preexistent state, whatever dignity he had as God’s image, he could not in all logic be king of creation, which, ex hypothesi, did not exist before the worlds began. So we may conclude: he who existed as being in the rank of God chose not to snatch at divine equality, “to make himself equal with God” (a thought reminiscent of John 5:18; the verb ὑψωῦν, “to exalt,” without its compound is Johannine rather than Pauline; in John 5:18 the phrase “to make oneself equal with God” has its rabbinic equivalent in the expression used of a rebellious child who, in rejecting parental authority, is said to be “one who makes himself stronger than his father”; see Martin, Hymn of Christ, 148, for the Heb. text). On the contrary, he consented to become an obedient servant and, following his vindication, is exalted, with God granting him “a dignity superior to that which he enjoyed in his preexistence” (Héring, Le royaume de Dieu, 163; see too Cullmann, Christology, 180; Martin, Hymn of Christ, xxxi).

The aorist tense (ὑπερψωσεν, “exalted to the highest place”) is used to refer implicitly to that moment in history marked by the resurrection-ascension of Christ (the resurrection is not separately treated, another non-Pauline index, given that Rom 8:34 does make
the resurrection and the ascension two stations in the scheme of salvation). Jesus Christ, who humbled himself in obedience to God to the point of accepting death in its most horrible form, was resurrected from the dead by God and raised to the place of supreme authority (cf. Acts 2:32–33; 5:30–31; Eph 1:20–21; see W. Foerster, TDNT 3:1089). And this resurrection “was not resuscitation, not restoration to life, not an evasion of death, but death accepted and death defeated” (Synge, 31).

καὶ ἐχαρίσατο αὐτῷ τὸ ὄνομα τὸ ὑπὲρ πᾶν ὄνομα, “and conferred on him in an act of grace the name that is above every name.” This clause accompanies the statement that “God exalted him to the highest place.” It parallels the first statement, but serves both to reinforce the fact of Christ’s resurrection-exaltation and to measure its extent. In ancient thought the ὄνομα, “name,” was not only a means of distinguishing one individual from another but also a means of revealing the inner being, the true nature of that individual (cf. Gen 25:26; 1 Sam 25:25), “an index of character and status” (Beare, 86; cf. H. Bietenhard, TDNT 5:243–80). We may compare the use of the “name” in Acts, esp. chaps. 1–10 (see Thurston, Spiritual Life). Hence, for the hymn writer to emphasize that God conferred on Christ “the name that is above every name” is to declare that God not only graciously bestowed (ἐχαρίσατο) on him a designation that distinguished him from all other beings, a title that outranked all other titles, but also that he bestowed on him a nature or an “office” with authority that coincided with that title, giving substance and meaning to it. Or, rather, it may be said that God bestowed on him the right to rule, which is implicit in the title of Lord. If that title (name) is κύριος, “Lord,” as the
context indicates (v 11), it ultimately means that Christ has been
given the character and office of Lord. This is to say, not only
does Christ possess the title Lord, but he is Lord, the sovereign
over the entire universe (and that, it may be argued, by definition
is only possible after obedience and its vindication—not reward;
and the gaining of the title by God's “grace” confers an authority
he could not have had in eternity [Phil 2:6 ]; it is equality with
God he now enjoys). He exercises this sovereignty as Lord in the
regnum Christi, “reign of Christ,” eventually to be ceded to God as
the regnum Dei, “reign of God,” supervenes (1 Cor 15:25–28). All
authority in heaven and earth is his by gift and nature (Matt 28:18
; cf. Eph 1:20–21). This, then, is the extent of Christ's exaltation—
lifted by God to the position of supreme authority in the cosmic
realm.

10 ἵνα ἐν τῷ ὄνόματι Ἰησοῦ πᾶν γόνυ κάμψη, “in order that
before the name that Jesus bears every knee might bow.” God's
purpose in thus exalting Christ and bestowing on him this “all-
surpassing name” is twofold (for the Heb. formation šēm
hammĕpôrāš, “the special Name,” see the references given in
Martin, Hymn of Christ, 245 n. 3). The first thing that God
intended by his actions is expressed in the clause “in order that
before the name that Jesus bears every knee might bow.” Two
matters of importance are now brought to the front:

(1) One is the expression τῷ ὄνόματι Ἰησοῦ, “the name of
Jesus.” The hymn writer mentions the name Jesus at this point not
because he thinks that Jesus and not Lord is the name that is
above all names (pace H. C. G. Moule). For τῷ ὄνόματι Ἰησοῦ,
“the name of Jesus,” does not mean that everyone will bow before “the name, Jesus” (Ἰησοῦ understood as a dative), but that everyone will bow before “the name of Jesus” (Ἰησοῦ understood as a genitive), i.e., “at the name belonging to or that is borne by Jesus.” And that name is κύριος, “Lord” (cf. Lightfoot, Plummer, Michael, H. C. G. Moule; this is the universally agreed conclusion). He places the name of Jesus here because by doing so he is saying that lordly power has been put into “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 could give a face and a name” (Martin [1976], 101). He is saying that the one who emptied himself, who humbled himself, who became human in space and time, who became a slave, who was crucified, who died a criminal’s death—this one, Jesus, whom people so ill-treated, God has made both Christ and Lord (cf. Acts 2:36). He is saying that the one “who was completely obedient must now be completely obeyed” (paraphrasing Bonnard, 49, a key statement that clamps the appeal implicit in the hymn to the explicit exhortation in v 12).

(2) The other matter of importance is that the verb κύμπτειν, “to bow,” is followed by the preposition ἐν, “in,” and the dative—ἐν τῷ ὄνοματι Ἰησοῦ, “in the name of Jesus.” The significance of this lies in the fact that elsewhere, whenever this verb is used with γόνυ, “knee,” meaning “to bend the knee” as a sign of religious devotion to someone, the object of this devotion is usually expressed by πρός, “to,” and the accusative (cf. Eph 3:14) or by the dative alone (cf. Rom 11:4; Isa 45:23 LXX), but not by ἐν, “in,” and the dative, as here (BDAG; cf. Kennedy, Sources of New
This fact has led some to translate the expression “so that in the name of Jesus everyone should kneel” (RV, GOODSPEED) and to conclude that this clause means not that homage is to be paid directly to the name of Jesus but that in Jesus homage is to be paid to God. Jesus is “the mediator through whom created beings offer their worship to God”; for it is to God, not Jesus, that every knee shall bow (Beare, Caird). (b) The context, however, is opposed to such a translation and interpretation. Jesus has just been given the name that is above every name, the name ΚΥΡΙΟΣ, “Lord,” the OT name for God (YHWH). In addition, Isa 45:23 (NRSV), in which God says, “To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear,” is woven here into the structure of vv 10–11 and applied to Jesus. It is significant that this quotation is taken from one of the OT passages that most strongly emphasizes the sole authority of God (Isa 45:22 NRSV : “For I am God, and there is no other”; see Hengel, “Christological Titles,” 379–83). Hence, although the grammatical construction ἐν τῷ ὄνοματι Ἰησοῦ κάμπτειν, “to bow in the name of Jesus,” is unique (but cf. LXX 1 Kgs 8:44; Pss 62:5 [ ET 63:4 ]; 43:9 [ ET 44:8 ]; 104:3 [ ET 105:3 ]); see also C. F. D. Moule, Idiom-Book, 78) and the ideas are astonishing, it is nonetheless necessary to understand that the writer is here asserting that homage is indeed to be paid to Jesus as Lord, not through Jesus to God (Gnilka). Therefore, the expression ἐν τῷ ὄνοματι Ἰησοῦ must be translated “at the name of Jesus” (KJV, RSV, NEB, JB, NIV, NRSV) or “before the name of Jesus” (MOFFATT, KNOX), meaning that all must bring their homage to Jesus, all must fall on their knees before him to show honor to
him by acknowledging or acclaiming (the meaning of the verb ἐξομολογεῖσθαι) his lordship and right to rule.

ἐπουρανίων καὶ ἐπιγείων καὶ καταχθονίων, “of heavenly beings, and of earthly beings, and of beings under the earth.” The universality of this homage is now made clear by a series of three adjectives, literally translated “pertaining to heaven and pertaining to earth and pertaining to the underworld.” (1) These adjectives function as nouns and may be neuter, referring to things, animate and inanimate alike, creation in its totality (KJV, ASV, KNOX, Lightfoot, H. C. G. Moule; cf. Rev 5:13 and esp. Ign. Trall. 9:1 [Martin, Hymn of Christ, 260]). In antiquity people believed in a three-storied universe, and its all-comprehensive space was thus often expressed by phrases that embraced all three parts (cf. Homer, Odyssey 5.184–86). It is possible, therefore, that when Paul wished to proclaim the universality of worship due from creation to Jesus, he used the phraseology of his day (see E. G. Selwyn, The First Epistle of St. Peter, 2d ed. [London: Macmillan, 1947] 318–19). (2) Or these adjective-nouns may be masculine, referring only to rational beings (GNB, JB). The context may argue for the latter meaning since only rational beings can, in the true sense of the word, acknowledge and confess something to be true (v 11). Paul and early Christians in general found no problem in giving the power of rational thought to the demonic world and its denizens (the cosmic spirits that were thought to control the universe, the στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου, “elemental spirits of the universe,” of Col 2:8, 20; see Arnold, Powers of Darkness; Reid, DPL, 229–33). But these beings should not be limited exclusively to spirits, on the one hand (Beare), nor to humans, on the other. Rather, in this
series the writer describes angels, human beings, and demons as ultimately joining together in an act of worship (cf. 1 Cor 4:9). All—all principalities and powers (cf. Col 1:16, 20; 2:15; Eph 3:10; see W. Foerster, TDNT 2:571–74) as well as all people—are to bow their knees before Jesus and do obeisance to him in adoration and awe (cf. Eph 1:10). See C. F. D. Moule, Origin of Christology, 43–44, for answers as to how this “cosmic Christology” came about.

For more recent discussion see the essays in Martin and Dodd, eds., Where Christology Began; Hurtado, One God, One Lord; and most recently Kim, Paul and the New Perspective, whose “second thoughts” about the genesis of Paul’s Christology still do not embrace any serious recognition of Paul’s Hellenistic environment and the challenge that it presented Paul for delivering his message to the Greco-Roman world. Any quest for the fons et origo (fount and origin) of Pauline (or pre-Pauline) Christology must come to terms with Paul’s setting in the world of Hellenism, as earlier Tübingen scholars (e.g., Käsemann) were at pains to point out.

καὶ πᾶσα γλῶσσα ἐξομολογήσηται ὅτι κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, “and in order that every tongue might openly acknowledge that ‘Jesus Christ is Lord.’ ” The second part of God’s purpose in exalting Christ and giving him the name that is above all names is now expressed. In these words the hymn reaches the climax anticipated from its beginning, and it at last provides the reader with the name that is above every name—Lord. It is a title to require submission and even subjugation. Here Lohmeyer’s insights, as often, have been illuminating. He has shown (97; idem, Kyrios Jesus, 49–56) that the exaltation has to do with cosmic authority before which all demonic powers bow and to which they submit.
Christ is installed and acknowledged as Lord of the universe, not head of the church. It is true that, as the church sings this hymn, it too makes the confession of “Jesus Christ is Lord” and so places itself under his kingly power. But the primary “point” of the hymn’s climax is to show how no part of the refractory universe is untouched by his sovereign sway. The Philppian readers, whose lives were at the mercy of cosmic dread, would receive the news of the hymn with joy and find in the hymn a consolation and encouragement that Christ has triumphed over his foes—and theirs. This, we submit, is the center of the hymn, the foundational fact on which Paul’s parenetic application will be based (Phil 2:12), and he has been preparing for this by exposing the malady that necessitated the call to unity and courage (1:27—2:12), and later he will issue repeated summons to rejoice (4:4), as indeed he does constantly in this “epistle on joy” (Bengel, 425).

All evidence indicates that the affirmation “Jesus Christ is Lord” was the earliest confessional formula of the church (cf. Acts 2:36; Rom 10:9; 1 Cor 11:23; 12:3; 16:22; Kümmel, Theology, 157–60). And it is possible that the Sitz im Leben of the hymn was the liturgy of the Hellenistic church at worship, celebrating the saving acts of God through Christ and recalling its baptismal pledge to Christ as Lord (Marcheselli, EC 29 [1978] 2–42; Jervell, Imago Dei, 208). But what is important to notice here is that this confession is cosmic in its scope, as we have observed, and not confined to the church—“every tongue might openly acknowledge.” The phrase πᾶσα γλῶσσα, “every tongue,” is a poetic way of saying “everyone” or “all.” It especially refers to “all peoples” or all spirit forces, since γλῶσσα, “tongue,” is often used as a synonym of
φυλή, “tribe,” λαός, “people,” ἔθνος, “nation” (Isa 66:18 ; Dan 3:4, 7 ; Rev 5:9 ; 7:9 ; 10:11, etc.). But in the context (note especially v 10) some interpreters maintain that it quite possibly refers to all rational beings and in particular the alien powers, to everyone who is capable of making an intelligent acknowledgment concerning the lordship of Jesus Christ.

What then does this mean? Does it mean that eventually every created, intelligent being will in fact admit that Jesus is Lord, either voluntarily or by compulsion? These are questions that belong to the field of systematic theology that arise from the hymn (see O’Brien, RTR 33 [1974] 45–53; and for a different perspective Michaelis, Versöhnung des Alls). The issue is debated. One can come to the conclusion that all will confess Jesus as Lord only by choosing the reading ἐξομολογήσεται (future indicative: “will openly acknowledge”) over the variant ἐξομολογήσηται (aorist subjunctive: “might openly acknowledge”; for the variants see Note f) and by breaking v 11 free from v 10, thereby making v 11 an independent clause that asserts what will unquestionably happen in the future—“every tongue will openly acknowledge!” But even if ἐξομολογήσεται, “will openly acknowledge,” is preferred to ἐξομολογήσηται, “might openly acknowledge,” it can still be considered part of the subordinate ἵνα, “in order that,” clause of purpose, begun in v 10, since ἵνα, “in order that,” followed by the future indicative, though uncommon, is not unknown to the writers of the NT (Gal 2:4 ; Rev 22:14 ; see BDF §369[2]). And what is more, one should consider ἐξομολογήσεται, “will openly acknowledge,” if this is the reading to be preferred, part of this
subordinate clause, since it is joined to κἀμψη, “might bow,” by the coordinate conjunction καί, “and.”

V 11 means, then, that the hope of God is that every intelligent being in his universe might proclaim openly and gladly (Lightfoot) that Jesus Christ alone has the right to reign. This verse, together with v 10, makes clear what lay behind God’s action to exalt Christ and to share with him his own name, κύριος, “Lord” (i.e., YHWH). It was in order that every created being in heaven, on earth, and under the earth might ultimately be reconciled to God by voluntarily and joyfully pledging allegiance to the one who chose the lowly path of self-effacement and of humble service to others (cf. Eph 1:10). Clearly then the purposes of God behind the acts of God are good and for the good of every creature. But how these purposes will be fulfilled, or when they will be fulfilled, or whether they will be fulfilled are not questions that can be answered from the statements of the hymn itself. Suffice it to say in general that not always are purposes realized or goals attained—not even divine purposes and goals (cf. Luke 7:30; Ps 32 [ET 33]:10). Hence, it is conceivable that beings who are created with the freedom of choice may choose never in any circumstances to submit to God or to his Christ. And it is also conceivable that these beings will never be forced to do so against their wills (cf. Rev 9:20, 21; 16:9, 11).

Once again, we are at the junction of biblical studies and systematic theology. The lively debate on universal “restoration” (Herstellung is Michaelis’s term) continues, with no apparent solution. It has thrown into prominence the need to hold
apparently contradictory truths in equilibrium—or at least to give
due weight to evidence that points in opposite or complementary
directions. Perhaps there is no final decision on the scope of
Christ’s redemption and God’s plan of salvation possible. We must
hold to God’s sovereign power to fulfill his purpose that is
undefeatable and all-embracing, and equally we must respect the
voluntary nature of faith and acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
or else human freedom is illusory. We may find a resting place in
Bishop Butler’s wise dictum that Christian truth is neither in one
extreme nor the other, but in both.

εἰς δόξαν θεοῦ πατρός, “to the glory of God the Father.” Finally
it is to be noted that although Jesus bears the name κύριος,
“Lord,” the name of God himself (κύριος as a translation for
YHWH), and is thus obliquely declared to be God with all the
rights and privileges of God (e.g., sovereignty; cf. W. Foerster,
TDNT 3:1089), yet paradoxically Jesus does not in any way displace
God or even rival God. As the hymn makes clear, the authority of
Jesus Christ is a derived authority—God exalted him; God
enthroned him; God conferred on him the superlative title; God
purposed that created beings worship and obey him. Hence, only
God the Father has ultimate authority and sovereignty. As Ridderbos
notes, “The whole exaltation of Christ in the present and in the
future is directed toward this, that God shall be all in all” (Paul,
89–90; cf. John 13:31 ; 1 Cor 15:28 ; Rev 3:21). Therefore, whenever
the confession is made that “Jesus is Lord,” God suffers no
embarrassment; rather he is glorified—εἰς δόξαν θεοῦ πατρός,
“to the glory of God the Father”—for he has planned that this be
so. Collange (108) concludes:
The Lordship of Christ is therefore within the ambit of the divine glory and far from masking it actually reveals it, and this ultimate revelation is founded on the Fatherhood of God. The true glory of God is to be Father; the Father of Christ in the first place, but also through him of the entire creation. From this angle again... the hymn shows us that history could have consisted of relationships merely of power (v. 6b: ‘harpagmos’) whereas it culminates with the revelation of a fatherhood inspiring confidence and love.

Lohmeyer sums up the drift of the hymn in some memorable lines (98):

In order to snatch back the world from the power of Satan, and to reinstate God, he who was in the form of God took the road from heaven to earth. That he has become Lord is the sign that the victory is won, and therefore the word “Father” betokens that now God and the world are “reconciled” [versöhnt] and are one.

The last word of the hymn, which we may suspect is a line that betrays the editorial hand of Paul, given his strong emphasis on divine fatherhood and his appreciation of Christ as God’s son (though there is only slight attestation of this in Paul; see Hengel, Son of God; “Son” as a christological title is found 15 times [17 times in all the thirteen Pauline letters], whereas Paul’s clear favorite is “Lord” [184 times out of 275 in all the Pauline corpus]). The climactic word is “Father,” returning the climax of the hymn to its point of origin in v 6. As Lohmeyer observes, the hymn begins with God and ends with God, completing the rhetorical circle.
Explanation

Everything about this section, the way it begins, the rhythmic cadence of its words, the strophic patterning of its sentences, the uniqueness of its vocabulary, and so on, points to the fact that it was an early Christian hymn about Jesus, a carmen Christi to be sure, whether it is a song offered to Christ (it “is the earliest extant text in which the worship of Jesus is depicted,” concludes Bauckham, “Worship of Jesus,” 128, where it is the starting point of his essay) or a tribute about him. If one may clarify a clumsy sentence in Hymn of Christ, lxxiii n. 73, Phil 2 expresses either a hymn as part of liturgical worship or a hymn that expresses the course of Christ’s journey from what he was via what he did to what he has become. Or it covers both ideas. The source of its ideas may be found in the words and deeds of Jesus as preserved in the gospel tradition (see especially Matt 16:25–26; 18:4; 23:12; Luke 14:11; 18:4; John 13:3–17). Hence, there may be no need to look elsewhere to explain the themes of the hymn. Yet the hymn may have many sources, some Jewish, some Hellenistic, if it is ultimately true to the message of Jesus. It is well, however, to rehearse the most likely options.

Once we recognize the passage to be poetic, imaginative, and most certainly liturgical (Hurtado, At the Origin of Christian Worship), we may not be overly troubled by the variety of attempts to produce a versified structure that will meet universal approval. Lohmeyer’s arrangement into strophic form was groundbreaking in 1928. (It can be read in an English translation in C. Brown, “Ernst Lohmeyer’s Kyrios Jesus,” 8–9.) Other options are possible, with the
reviser of this commentary’s preference for a set of couplets as follows:

[This is the one] who was in the form/glory of God,
Yet he did not regard equality with God as a prize to be grasped.
On the contrary, he emptied himself,
(taking the form of a servant).
Being born in human likeness
And revealing himself as a human,
He humbled himself by obedience to death
(even death on a cross).
Therefore God super-exalted him,
And gave him in grace the name over all,
That in the name of Jesus
Every knee should bow
(of beings in heaven, on earth, under the earth)
And every tongue acclaim,
“Jesus Christ is Lord”
(to the glory of the Father).

So Phil 2:6–11 is a self-contained unit of Christian hymnody, an aretalogy in praise of the church’s Lord, who becomes such as he is acknowledged by all cosmic powers as their rightful ruler. The hymn sets down the “way” he took from the Father’s eternal
presence, where he enjoyed the privilege of reflecting God’s glory as his “image,” to his ultimate glory alongside God’s throne by way of his becoming human (v 7), his obedience to death (v 8), and then his being exalted to the divine throne as Lord of all creation (vv 9–11). Evocative metaphors are drawn from the OT (Adam who aspired to be “like God” [ Gen 3:5 ]; the suffering servant of Isa 53:12, who “poured out” his life in death; the vindicated king-Messiah of Ps 110:1) and almost certainly from some contemporary sources in the Greco-Roman social, political, theological, and maybe mythological world.

Two views, by way of application, may now be given and the two “versions” appraised. Both lead to a common ethical conclusion but by different routes. In a word, is it Paul’s clarion call to a refractory congregation, Be humble, there is a model to be followed (the view of the original author)? Or is it rather, Be obedient in humility to the obedient one, there is a Master (kyrios) to be acknowledged (the view of the reviser)?

A. Original Application

Who composed the hymn is a mystery. Paul may have been its author, or it may have been written by some unidentified Christian writer before Paul’s time—scholars are divided on this issue. But the identity of the author is unimportant. What is important is that Paul found it compatible with his own ideas about Christ—once he had, hypothetically, modified it—and precisely fit it to illustrate what he wished to teach the Philippians, namely, that the surest way up is by stepping down, the surest way to gain for oneself is by giving up oneself, the surest way to life is by death, the surest way
to win the praise of God is by steadfastly serving others, while safeguarding this idea from any prudential, self-serving motive, which Paul has reproved in Phil 2:1–4. The Philippians had been acting in a spirit of ambition, thinking themselves better than others, believing that they were above serving their fellows, studying how they might promote themselves and get ahead without giving adequate attention to the welfare of their neighbors. The Christ of the Christ-hymn, however, challenges every one of these false values of the Philippians. He becomes, therefore, for Paul, the ultimate encouragement for moral action.

The hymn begins by describing Christ before the incarnation—he possessed the nature of God and was equal with God. But contrary to what one might expect, the true nature of God is not to grasp or get or selfishly to hold on to things for personal advantage but to give them up for the enrichment of all. This is demonstrated by Christ, who, because he shared the nature of God, did not hold firm to the high position that was his by right but rather stepped down from it. That is to say, he deliberately placed himself in the humblest of positions: he who was in the form of God became a human being, fully human, a slave even, so that he might serve others. In the self-humbling act of the incarnation, God became a human being and thus set himself wholly to seek the advantage and promote the welfare of his fellows. Christ's intent was never to fight for his own honor, right, and credit, but through self-surrender, self-renunciation, and self-sacrifice to strive for the honor, right, and credit of others. To obey, as a slave must obey, was his delight. So radical was his obedience that he did not withdraw it even when he was faced with death—the most cruel of all deaths,
death by crucifixion. He must somehow have known, though, that his death was not his alone, but an act that worked for the good of others.

As a consequence God exalted him. Thus, in the divine economy of things, by giving people receive, by serving they are served, by losing their lives they find them, by dying they live, by humbling themselves they are exalted. The one follows the other as night follows day, but always in this order—self-sacrifice first before the self is exalted by God. This is the point Paul wishes to drive home to the Philippians, and it is made so eloquently and elegantly by the hymn that he prefers to quote it in full, rather than to attempt to paraphrase it in his own words of prose.

The remaining statements in the hymn are of great christological significance, but they are incidental to the one supreme lesson to be learned by Christians about how they are to live the Christian life. These statements confirm what Peter had preached (Acts 2:36), that God made Jesus, who was crucified, Lord and Christ. He appointed him sovereign over the universe, the one to be served by all, the object of universal worship. It is possible that some beings might refuse to yield to Christ as king, might refuse to own his sovereignty over them. But whenever anyone does confess openly and gladly that Jesus Christ is Lord, God himself is pleased, the Father is glorified; for his purposes are fulfilled, his hopes for the world realized.

B. Reviser’s Application

The two issues that have been prominent in recent discussion, especially since the first edition of the commentary appeared in
1983, are: What does the hymn mean on its own? How does Paul use it by inserting it, like a piece of stitched cloth, into the fabric of his letter-writing prose? Some clues to its being an independent, pre-formed composition, utilized by Paul, are evident—data such as hapax lego-men, rhythmical language engaging elevated themes, some non-Pauline ideas, and extended, self-contained pieces of cosmic Christology make it virtually impossible to regard it as Paul's own work, as has been mentioned earlier. The center of gravity of the hymn is a carefully constructed tribute—an "encomium," a tribute of praise, a laus Christi, "praise of Christ" (as Brucker, "Christushymnen," calls it; earlier Deichgräber, Gotteshymnus, asked the question, "What is a Christ hymn?" [see Martin, Hymn of Christ, xlii])—in honor of Jesus Christ, who is now elevated to share the Father's throne and is universal Lord. The church, like the one at Philippi, that sang this hymn did so to express its confidence in Christ's victory over all his foes—and theirs. In particular, they celebrated, as the Corinthian church did and pushed it to an excess of "realized eschatology," the reign of Christ now begun (1 Cor 15:25; maybe the Corinthians misunderstood Paul's emphasis, as he ironically points out in 1 Cor 4:8: "Already you have begun to reign! I wish it were so!" [paraphrased]). The Philippians seem to be already familiar with this hymn, else why would Paul cite it in full when, if he intended to draw out the sole lesson of the need for humility, he could have made his point simply by closing off at Phil 2:8? They may well have used the hymn to bring that reign of Christ to bear upon their situation as a divided, persecuted, and harassed community,
sharing the sense of spiritual oppression made visible by the venom of their persecutors (1:28–30; 2:14–15).

This is partly why Christians sing hymns today, as Paul and Silas found at Philippi (Acts 16:25), namely, to praise God for his mighty deeds in creation and redemption, and in so doing to make his once-for-all acts in salvation our story today. So Phil 2:6–11 traces the saga of salvation. He stooped in condescension (note the English word based on descend, “to go down”) to the utter limits of obedience. He is now enthroned as a token of the victory divine grace achieved and offers the foretaste of that final triumph once his kingdom is fully realized, but not yet (1 Cor. 15:20–28, against the errorists in 2 Tim 2:18 as well as 1 Cor 15:12). And that is why the Philippians, sorely racked by pride and self-seeking, need to conform their church life in obedience to the obedient Lord and live under his lordship, as in the call of Phil 2:12: “As you have already obeyed the message just rehearsed, now apply it!”

**Philippians 2:5–11 in Review**

Following on the lengthy exegesis of six verses, what has just been written could be extended in several ways. We refer to the Introduction, Christology in Philippians. Yet readers may be served to have some conclusions set down in summary fashion.

(1) The text is a self-contained piece, inserted into the fabric of Paul’s epistolary prose.

(2) Its form and style mark it as poetic, imaginative, hieratic, and probably liturgical. It could be classified in its genre as a christological “hymn” in praise of the church’s Lord.
(3) In content it covers the “way” of Christ (a term recognized in the Deutsche Bibel [1982] heading Der Weg Christi als Massstab für das Leben der Christen: “The Path of Christ as a Yardstick/Standard for the Life of Christians”) from God’s eternal presence to his ultimate glory alongside God’s throne by way of kenosis (v 7), obedience to death (v 8), and exaltation (vv 9–11).

(4) Evocative metaphors and intertextual resonances are drawn mainly from the OT (Adam who aspired to be “like God,” the suffering servant of Isa 53:12 who “poured out” his life in death, and the installed king-Messiah of Ps 110:1).

(5) Because it is a self-enclosed unit, it can be understood in a double setting: what its Christology/soteriology meant on its own (tradition) and what function the hymn played when it was incorporated into Paul’s pastoral letter (redaction). This is the well-attested distinction between a text’s “setting in life” (Sitz im Leben) and its later “setting in literature” (Sitz in der Literatur). See W. Stenger, “Two Christological Hymns (Phil. 2:6–11 ; 1 Tim 3:16),” in his Introduction to New Testament Exegesis, trans. D. W. Stott, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), chap. 12.

(6) The “laws” of tradition/redaction do not preclude the writer’s modifying the tradition as it is taken over to bend it to the writer’s immediate purpose. Thus, Phil 2:6–11 may originally be classed as aretalogy in praise of the enthroned Lord, while in Paul’s hands it serves also a parenetic role to address the Philippians’ problems (2:1–4, 12).

(7) The form analysis of Phil 2:6–11 suggests that the lines may be set down in couplets, with two stanzas (vv 6–8 ; 9–11). The
climax of strophe 1 is the obedience of Christ; the climax of strophe 2 his exaltation. So we conclude that Paul’s admonition is a call to obedience offered to the Lord (joining v 8 to v 11), exactly as in v 12 (correcting the NRSV).

(8) The use of the hymn by Paul, given the problems at Philippi, is to enforce the church’s obedience to its calling as those “in Christ” (as in the elliptical v 5), whose path to lordship is marked by humble obedience. In that sense, the motif is “conformity,” but not imitation understood as mimicry. The thrust is not “here is a model to be followed” so much as “here is a Master to be obeyed.” The latter joins the soteriological with the ethical, grounding the ethical in both the salvation act and the call to obey the obedient One (cf. Kraftchick, HBT 15 [1993] 1–37). And the most appropriate caption of Phil 2:5–11 is not, as in many English translations, “Imitation of Christ” or “Jesus Our Model,” “Christ the Model of Humility” (Houlden) or “The Appeal to Christ’s Example” (Cousar). Rather, we propose “Living under Christ’s Lordship,” with clear ethical implications and appeal.
4. Application: To Obedience, with Paul as Model (2:12–18)

Bibliography

Translation

12 Well then, [God’s] dear friends and mine, just as you always obeyed, so continue to obey. Obediently [lit. with fear and trembling] work at achieving [spiritual] health, not only in light of my coming to you again, but now even more in my absence from you. 13 For the one who effectively works among you, creating both the desire and the drive to promote goodwill, is God. b 14 Do everything without grumbling or arguing, 15 in order that you may become c blameless, flawless, [and] faultless, d the children of God surrounded by crooked and perverse people. Shine among them like lights in the sky. 16 Hold firm to the life-giving word, so that I may have good reason to exult in the day of Christ, knowing that I did not run the race in vain nor do my work in vain. 17 But if my sufferings are like a drink offering poured out to complement your sacrificial service—service prompted by faith—then indeed I am glad and share my gladness with all of you. 18 And you also should be glad for the same reason and share your gladness with me.

Notes

12.a. ὡς, “as,” “in light of,” is omitted by B 33 and a few other MSS, perhaps to ease an already difficult and cumbersome
sentence.

13.b. The definite article is inserted before θεός, “God,” by D Ψ and the majority of witnesses in order to make “God” the probable subject of the sentence. ⅈ B and other important witnesses omit the article, thus making θεός, “God,” predicate.

15.c. ἦτε, “you may be,” is read by ⅉ 46 A D* G instead of γένησθε, “you may become,” indicating that εἶναι, “to be,” and γίνεσθαι, “to become,” were sometimes treated as interchangeable verbs.

15.d. ἀμωμία, “faultless,” is read by D G and the Majority Text instead of the synonym ἀμωμα, “faultless.” This variant likely was influenced by τέκνα μωμητά, “blemished children,” which accompanies the expression γενεὰ σκολιὰ καὶ διεστραμμένη, “crooked and perverse people,” found in Deut 32:5, which also appears here in v 15.

Form/Structure/Setting

The detailed attention just given to the Christ-hymn must not obscure the fact that Phil 2:12–18 is part of a larger parenetic section—1:27–2:18. Exhortation is resumed again through the frequent use of the imperative mood or the use of participles with the force of the imperative, a literary device noted and discussed by Daube (“Participle and Imperative”). At Philippi the church was being torn apart because Christians were motivated by party spirit, selfishness, conceit, pride, and arrogance. But hoping to heal the breach, Paul begged the Philippians to live in a manner worthy of the gospel, to stand together, to work together, to think together, to
serve one another, to pay attention to the concerns of one another, humbly to consider one another better than themselves. And he appealed to them to do so on the basis of Christ’s own humble attitude and self-effacing action or their obedience to Christ’s authority as Lord (depending on how the thrust of the christological passage is viewed). The Christ-hymn, therefore, far from interrupting the hortatory flow, stimulates it and directs its course.

Vv 12–18, while reflecting the outlook of the hymn, cannot be thought of solely as a commentary on the hymn (Lohmeyer). Nor can these verses be thought of altogether as a new beginning (Gnilka). As Paul resumes his epistolary proselike style and offers a rhetorical applicatio, “application,” he is inspired by the central motif of the hymn—the obedience of Christ (cf. Fee [1995], 231–33; O’Brien, 273)—as he reaches back beyond the hymn to link up with and add to the many other injunctions he had already given the church at Philippi for positive Christian living (1:27—2:5). These are injunctions with which the Philippians themselves were in essential agreement (v 12), although they seem not to have been carrying them out to the extent that Paul would have desired. Nor indeed did they seem to appreciate what “living under Christ’s lordship” entailed in terms of a self-renouncing of rights and a disposition (φρόνημα) of humble self-disregard out of concern for the well-being of others. It is clear, too, that this section is bound to 2:1–4 and continues the plea for unselfish action already begun there.

Paul makes this plea not only in words but also by revealing his own willingness to have his life become a libation poured out in
sacrifice (v 17). The apostle, then, becomes a model for Christian behavior (cf. 1 Cor 4:16 ; 11:1). He has appealed to the Lord of glory (Phil 2:6–11), yet, as was argued above from one point of view, the Lord’s “way” from eternity to eternity stamps it as unique, and what is by definition unique stands in a class apart. Readers of Käsemann will recall the distinction that he makes through a play on words in German: “He [Christ] reveals obedience but he does not demonstrate it as something to be imitated. To put it succinctly, he is Urbild, not Vorbild; archetype, not model” (“Critical Analysis,” 74; cf. Martin, Hymn of Christ, 91). This is a leading theme in Martin, “Christology of the Prison Epistles.”

The rhetorical analysis of the section Phil 2:12–18 (– 24) finds the pattern of “fact” coupled with applicatio or “background” leading on to “petition,” as Reed (Discourse Analysis, 291) phrases it. Another way of expressing the rhetorical structure would be to see it more simply as the story of Christ (2:6–11) followed by the story illustrated in the lives of those (Paul, Timothy, Epaphroditus) who caught his spirit, who shared his “disposition” (φρόνημα), and whose sacrifices mirror the unique sacrifice of the heavenly Lord. Most rhetorical analyses note the unitary theme pervading Phil 1:27 —2:18 / 24. The text first calls the readers to live out their lives as citizens in a worthy manner. What that “worthy life” is Paul spells out, using as a counterpoint the malady that plagued the Philippian community within (2:1–4) after his call to courage in 1:28–30. The grounding of his parenetic appeal is provided in the recital of the (obviously) familiar hymn celebrating the “story of salvation” whose leitmotif is obedience (v 8). To that same motif he returns at 2:12, as he proceeds to introduce examples of how “life in Christ” is to
be understood and practiced, citing himself, Timothy, and Epaphroditus as living embodiments.

Again, there is a counterfoil to such glowing tributes of suffering obedience, with terminological links in each case to the Christ-song. This comes at Phil 2:21, where there are those who “seek their own interests” in contrast to Christ, who did not seek his own interest. The thrust, with powerful rhetorical force, would not be lost on those hearing this letter read out with its repeated phrase τὰ ἑαυτῶν, “the interests of yourselves,” in 2:4, 12, 19–21. These references are worth displaying:

2:4 Let each person look out, not for one’s own concerns. On the contrary, let the concerns of other people be yours.

2:12 Concentrate on the well-being of others in your community.

2:19–21 All those in the place of Paul’s captivity are looking after their own concerns, in contrast to Timothy who both is acquainted with your state and is a person of concern for your highest interests.

This verbal linkage is impressive and completes the circle in an inclusio or ring composition, with the case of Epaphroditus capping the appeal, since he μεχρὶ θανάτου, “nearly died” (2:30), rendering obedience to his commission, even if God’s providence saved him, unlike the extreme obedience of the heavenly Lord (2:8). A play on names rounds off the rhetoric: (1) Epaphroditus means “charming”; (2) hold such persons in honor (ἐντίμους in 2:29; cf. Τιμόθεος,
“Timothy,” in 2:19; note the wordplay of τιμ in the adjective ἐντίμους and Timothy’s name).

This section (2:12–18) is replete with word pictures, all designed to enforce the lesson of Paul and his colleague, Timothy, and emphasizes the costliness of their sacrificial service. Interestingly, Paul shies away from the actual word μαθητής, “disciple,” which is singularly absent from his vocabulary here and elsewhere in the Pauline corpus (Hawthorne’s attempt [“Imitation of Christ”] to trace the theme of discipleship in Philippians faces this difficulty; see Martin, Hymn of Christ, lxii n. 37; Luke uses the word [ μαθητής ] of Timothy in Acts 16). The metaphors pressed into service are (1) Paul the athlete (Phil 2:16), (2) Paul the weaver (2:16), and (3) Paul the martyr (2:17). They are all intended to serve a single goal: to enforce the point of Paul’s servanthood. Each word group pictures Paul’s strenuous effort (to be picked up in 3:14), his toil as a hard worker (his leather-working role is mentioned in Acts 18:3), and his ultimate self-surrender in death as he contemplates the issues of life and death (already in Phil 1:20–23) and fears the worst. If death supervenes, he will be “offered” as a sacrificial rite (cf. 2 Tim 4:6).

Comment

12 ὡστε, ἀγαπητοί μου, καθὼς πάντοτε ὑπηκούσατε, “Well then, [God’s] dear friends and mine, just as you always obeyed, so continue to obey.” The conjunction ὡστε, “therefore,” “well then,” joins this new section to that which has preceded it from Phil 1:27 onwards (cf. 2:12. with 1:27.), but especially to the archetype of
Christ set out in the hymn (2:6–11): “Well then, in light of the fact that Christ was obedient [ ὑπήκοος, 2:8], you also must be obedient [ ὑπακούειν, 2:12].” The object of the verb ὑπηκούσατε, “obeyed,” is left undefined. It is not “me” (as in the NRSV), but more likely, if there is an implied object, Christ himself. As Bonnard (49) put it, “Il a obéi, donc (καθὼς) obéissez!” (“He obeyed, so you obey!”). Paul, however, does not merely issue new commands unfeelingly, as an apostle with divine authority might be privileged to do. Instead, he gently introduces his commands by addressing the Philippians as ἀγαπητοί, “dear friends.” This is a favorite adjective of Paul’s by which he means to say “You are a people especially loved by God, but also by me” (cf. Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 15:58). His terms of endearment for this congregation are unique, matched only by those for the Thessalonian Christians (1 Thess 2:19–20). Yet the fulsome language in this verse and at Phil 4:1 makes this especially a letter of friendship (see White, “Morality”).

When Paul tells the Philippians that they have “always [ πάντοτε] obeyed,” he is not using hollow rhetoric as a tool to win their favor and thus force them to follow his commands (cf. Ign. Eph. 4:1; Magn. 1.1; Trall. 3.1–2). Rather, he is reminding them of the way in which they had in fact initially responded to the demands of God as contained in the gospel he had preached (cf. Acts 16:14, 32–33). In light of their earlier response, therefore, Paul expects that they will now continue to heed his apostolic orders seen (in default of any canonical documents then available) in his own lifestyle (Phil 4:4). They had heard of his conflict (Phil 1:30) and are called on now to appreciate his demeanor under duress, as were the
Thessalonians (1 Thess 2:2). Thus the elliptic sentence, begun with καθώς, “as,” “just as,” followed by the indicative, implies the correlative οὕτως, “so,” and an imperative: “just as you always obeyed, so continue to obey.” Past action becomes a model and a motivating force for present and future conduct. The verb Paul uses here, ὑπακούειν, “obey,” contains within it the twin ideas of hearing (ἀκούειν)—especially the divine word as proclaimed (cf. 2 Thess 1:8)—and submitting (ὑπό) to that word (G. Kittel, TDNT 1:224), akin to the Heb. verb šāmaʾ, to “hear and obey,” i.e., give attention to.

τὴν ἑαυτῶν σωτηρίαν κατεργάζεσθε, “work at achieving [spiritual] health.” Paul’s next command, in fact the only explicit command in v 12, is often translated “work out your [own] salvation” (cf. Fee [1995], 230–34; KJV, RSV, NEB, NIV, NRSV). Such a translation, however, is ambiguous and can lead to a misunderstanding of what Paul actually intended to say. Paul is not here concerned with the eternal welfare of the soul of the individual, as though he were addressing issues of “the perseverance of the saints” or donum perseverantiae (Augustine, Corrept. 12.33). The individual believer is not now being called “to self-activity, to the active pursuit of the will of God... to a personal application of salvation” (J. J. Müller, 91). Rather, the context suggests that this command, thereby returning to 2:5, is to be understood in a corporate sense. The entire church, which had grown spiritually ill (2:3–4), is charged now with taking whatever steps are necessary to restore itself to health, integrity, and wholeness. Several reasons lead to this conclusion:
(1) Paul has just spoken out sharply against Christians looking out for their own individual personal interests (Phil 2:4; so it is likely that he has in mind the “spiritual well-being of the church as a whole” [Caird, 125]). Hence, it is highly improbable that he here now reverses himself by commanding them to focus on their own individual salvation, as would be the case if he were introducing a lesson in personal ethics based on an object to be imitated. This view is opposed by Marshall (Kept by the Power of God, 113), but only if ἐν ὑμῖν in 2:13 means “in you.” Silva (135–40) takes issue with what he dubs the “sociological” interpretation, and he champions the so-termed theological one. He omits a third option, i.e., the “ecclesiological” reference, which is to be preferred, given the context of the passage. Paul’s concerns are not with patching up difficulties in any facile manner, nor is he a speculative theologian raising issues that would engage the church in later years (as Oropeza, Paul and Apostasy, 27–28, notes). His primary intent is to show to the fractious congregation what their life in Christ should be.

(2) The verb Paul uses, κατεργάζεσθαι, has the sense of working at something until it is brought to completion, hence “to accomplish,” “to achieve,” “to bring about” (BDAG). Its tense is present, which heightens this idea, denoting not so much present time as continuous action. Paul in effect commands the Philippians to keep working and never to let up until their salvation (σωτηρία) is achieved. Yet he is equally respectful that God’s purpose in bringing the church to final glory at the Parousia is assured (Phil 1:6; 3:20, 21).
(3) The verb κατεργάζεσθε, “work at achieving,” and the reflexive pronoun ἑαυτῶν, “your own,” are both plural (see Fee [1995], 234 n. 21). Once again there is the strong indication that the exhortation is not to individual but to corporate action, to cooperative effort in the common life together as a community.

(4) In the papyri and LXX, σωτηρία, “salvation,” is commonly used to convey the idea of health or well-being (MM, 622), ideas that are not unknown to the writers of the NT (Mark 3:4; Acts 4:9; 14:9; 27:34; cf. the Comment on Phil 1:19, 28). The wider context of Phil 2:12 strongly suggests (but does not prove) that σωτηρία, “salvation,” here is being used in this noneschatological sense. Perhaps there is no need to choose between salvation meaning the church’s protection in suffering and its coming to ultimate glory. Phil 1:28–30 points to the former; 3:20–21 support the latter. Thus the church at Philippi is urged to work at its spiritual well-being until its well-being is complete, until its health is fully established, and until every trace of spiritual disease—selfishness and dissension giving way to “the wholeness of the healthy person” (Dunn, Theology of Paul, 329)—is gone (Michael; see also a fuller discussion in Michael, Expositor, 9th ser., 12 [1924] 439–50; Loh and Nida; Martin [1976]; cf. also Bonnard, Gnilka, Collange; Bockmuehl, 151–52, rightly stresses the corporate aspect, yet notes how “deliverance from adversity” does not exclude “the eternal and transcendent dimension,” as in 1:28 as well as in 1:19).

μη ὡς ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ μου μόνον ἀλλὰ νῦν πολλῷ μᾶλλον ἐν τῇ ἀπουσίᾳ μου, “not only in light of my coming to you again, but now even more in my absence from you.” Two phrases modify
this command to work toward spiritual health within the church at Philippi. The first, literally translated, is “not [ μή ] as in my presence [ παρουσίᾳ ] but now much more in my absence.” This phrase is frequently taken with the verb ὑπηκοόσατε, “you obeyed,” rather than with the verb κατεργάζεσθε, “work at achieving.” The word “presence” is thus interpreted to mean Paul’s past presence with the Philippians: “as you always obeyed me when I was with you” (cf. NEB, GNB, JB, Michaelis, Bonnard). But several things are against such an interpretation: (1) The negative introducing this phrase is μή, which is rarely used with the indicative (ὑπηκοόσατε, “you obeyed,” is indicative) but is regularly used with the imperative (κατεργάζεσθε, “work at achieving,” is imperative; Moulton et al., Grammar, 1:281–82). (2) There are no verbs in this phrase, and thus there is no precise reference to time. If a time period is to be insisted upon, it can as easily be future as past. (3) The word παρουσία, “presence,” is often used in the NT as a technical term for the “return” of Christ and on occasion by Paul for his own anticipated future coming to his friends (Phil 1:26). This fact, coupled with Paul’s remarks in 2:23–24, indicates that παρουσία, “presence,” here is used to refer to the apostle’s anticipated return to Philippi (Lohmeyer; Collange; see Funk, “The Apostolic ‘Parousia’ ”). The best illustration of how the later church viewed Paul’s absence is in Pol. Phil. 3.2: “When he was absent [ ἀπών ] he wrote letters to you” to complement “when he was among you [ ἐν ὑμῖν ]” (K. Lake’s trans. in LCL). (4) The ὡς, “as,” that appears in the best MSS is difficult to explain; hence its omission from some texts (see Note a). Its difficulty, however, may be relieved if it is given its less frequently used meaning of
“when,” “in light of,” or “in view of” (Collange). All of this together argues for taking the entire phrase with κατεργάζεσθε, “work at achieving,” and translating: “Work at achieving [spiritual] health [within your community], not only in light of my anticipated coming to you again, but all the more now while I am absent from you.” Fear of the apostle and what he might say or do upon his return to Philippi (cf. 1 Cor 4:21) was not now to be the motivating factor for movement toward spiritual renewal (Collange). (This raises afresh the question of how firmly he expected to revisit Philippi. If he was in Rome, where Acts 28:30–31 leaves him, we have no certain knowledge of his return to the East, a prospect denied in Rom 15:23, 28, and plans to go west to Spain [Rom 15:24, 28]. If he is at Caesarea, his life is under “protective custody” of the Romans in the procurator’s praetorium [Phil 1:12; 4:22], and it is strange to read that he contemplates his martyrdom in Phil 2:17. If he is at Ephesus, the geographical movements in Acts [in 20:1–6, a return visit to Philippi] fall into place.) Besides, the importance of renewal was so great that it must not be delayed by waiting for Paul’s expected but uncertain return.

μετὰ φόβου καὶ τρόμου, “obediently.” The second phrase modifying κατεργάζεσθε, “work at achieving,” is literally translated “with fear and trembling.” In light of what has been said above, however, this has no reference to the anxious concern that individual Christians might be expected to have as they face the last judgment (contra Oropeza, Paul and Apostasy, 27). And thus there is no need to introduce an extra negative to relieve this tension: “work out your salvation not with fear and trembling” (see Glombitza, NovT 3 [1959–60] 100–106). Although φόβος can mean
“fear,” “alarm,” or “dismay” in the face of danger, it also carries
the meaning of “awe” and “respect.” Coupled with τρόμος, a word
that means “a trembling” or “a quivering,” the phrase could picture
a person standing with anxious fear or trembling awe before
someone or something. Yet Paul is the only NT writer to use this
phrase, and never does he use it to describe the attitude people
are to have toward God—only the attitude Christians are to have
toward one another or toward their leaders (1 Cor 2:3; 2 Cor 7:15;
cf. Eph 6:5; LXX Exod 15:16; O’Brien, 283–84, prefers to relate
the phrase to Christians’ attitude to God, “a sense of awe and
reverence in the presence of God,” and this neatly links to v 13: “
for [γὰρ] God is at work among you”; so too Dunn, Theology of
Paul, 526 n. 130; Gundry Volf, Paul and Perseverance, 268–71). It
seems, therefore, that this expression was a stock phrase that may
well have meant something far less forceful than the individual
words might indicate. The phrase comes from Jewish piety and may
mean, therefore, either (1) “a nervous anxiety to do one’s duty,” “a
fear of failure” (Plummer), (2) an attitude within the community of
“respect and reverence” toward one another (Burn, ExpTim 34
[1922–23] 562; Michael; Eichholz, “Bewahren und Bewähren,” 103;
Collange), or (3) an attitude of “obedience” or “holding oneself in
weakness” toward the will of God according to the pattern of Jesus
Christ (Pedersen, ST 32 [1978] 1–31). This last meaning excellently
fits the present context. One may translate “Obediently work at
achieving [spiritual] fitness within your community.” As in the life of
Jesus, so in the life of the church, obedience to the Father’s will
must be the supreme motivating force for action (but it is no
“blind obedience”; rather a glad acceptance of the divine will, as in Heb 10:5–10; cf. Heb 5:8).

13 θεὸς γάρ ἐστιν ὁ ἐνεργῶν ἐν ὑμῖν καὶ τὸ θέλειν καὶ τὸ ἐνεργεῖν ὑπὲρ τῆς εὐδοκίας, “For the one who effectively works among you, creating both the desire and the drive to promote goodwill, is God.” But the Philippian Christians are not left to themselves to achieve such high spiritual goals. For, as the conjunction γάρ, “for,” indicates, there is “among them,” rather than “within them,” an energizing force that is no less than God himself. In fact, the conjunction makes it clear that “God does not work and has not worked... because man has worked.... The contrary is true: because God works and has worked, therefore man must and can work” (Ridderbos, Paul, 255; cf. Gundry Volf, Paul and Perseverance, 268–71).

The verb translated “works” here is not κατεργάζεσθαι, “work at achieving” (v 12), but ἐνεργεῖν, the verb from which the English word “energy” comes. This verb is a special Pauline word, used eighteen times by the apostle of the twenty times it is found in the NT. It carries within it the idea of working mightily, working effectively (cf. Matt 15:2; Gal 2:8; 3:5; 5:6; Eph 2:2). The form this new verb takes is a participle used as a noun; thus it becomes another name for God. The Great Energizer, the one who is effectively at work, is God. And God is at work among the Christians (ἐν ὑμῖν, “among you”) at Philippi so as to effect a change in their wills (τὸ θέλειν, “the desire”) and in turn a change in their conduct. Thus they will be able to achieve (τὸ ἐνεργεῖν, “the drive”—note this verb again) the harmony and health that is
so much needed. As Michael notes, “An effective divine energy is at work in the community and if the Philippians only avail themselves of its presence, cooperate with it, and permit it to express itself in their working, the inevitable result will be not only the willing, but also the achieving, by them of the salvation of the community” (103, though some readers may take exception to the theology implied by his choice of the word “permit”). There is thus no inconsistency between Paul’s command for them to bring about their own “salvation” (v 12) and this statement that “God is at work” among them, creating their desire and their ability to fulfill their desire (cf. 1 Cor 9:27 ; 10:1–13 ; Gal 5:25 ; Col 3:3–5). As Houlden (87) maintains, “Paul never implies that God’s purposes for man can be fulfilled whether man co-operates or not.” Or, as stated by Collange (111), “Divine action does not curtail human action but rather provokes a reaction which it supports.”

The phrase ὑπὲρ τῆς εὐδοκίας, “to promote goodwill,” which modifies the participle ὁ ἐνεργῶν, “the one who effectively works,” presents new difficulties. εὐδοκία usually refers to the “benevolent purpose” or “goodwill” of God. Thus most commentators interpret ὑπὲρ τῆς εὐδοκίας, “to promote goodwill,” here as referring to God’s acting in accord with his loving purpose or in harmony with that which pleases him (see the alternative view below). But it is to be noticed (1) that there is no modifier for this word—the text does not explicitly say “God’s good purpose”; (2) that the word εὐδοκία, “goodwill,” may also be used of humans as well as of God and can mean “good understanding” or “goodwill”; (3) that the preposition used here, ὑπὲρ, which may mean “according to” or “in harmony with,” may also be used to introduce that which
one wants to attain (BDF §§231–32); and (4) that the context is a call to harmony, selflessness, and goodwill toward others. Hence, εὐδοκία may be interpreted as that “goodwill” that Paul desires the Philippians to attain and that should be the hallmark of any Christian community (Ewald and Wohlenberg, Michael, Collange).

On the other hand, εὐδοκία (Heb. rāṣôn), “goodwill,” is a term loaded with heavy theological emphasis and recalls God’s purpose in election and salvation. See Luke 2:14 and the Qumran evidence (G. Schrenk, TDNT 2:742–47). An alternative view, then, is to conclude that it is God’s good pleasure that is in view, which both grammar (see Note b) and context may also support (see Bockmuehl, 154, citing Eph 1:5–9).

14 πάντα ποιεῖτε χωρίς γογγυσμῶν καὶ διαλογισμῶν, “Do everything without grumbling or arguing.” Paul continues his appeal for harmony and goodwill within the Philippian community by forbidding grumbling (γογγυσμός) and disputing (διαλογισμός). γογγυσμός means “complaint” or “displeasure” expressed in murmuring, secret talk, or whisperings about someone (perhaps about leaders)—a kind of grumbling action that promotes ill will instead of harmony and goodwill (cf. Acts 6:1; 1 Pet 4:9; K. Rengstorf, TDNT 1:736). It is not necessary to imagine that the Christians at Philippi, like Israel in the wilderness (cf. Exod 15–17; Num 14–17; 1 Cor 10:10), were grumbling against God or doubting his promises (Scott; Beare; Gnilka; Caird). Rather, the Philippians may have been doing things that generated both inward and outward feelings of unfriendliness toward one another. The quarrelsomeness implied in Phil 2:1–4 points to this (Fee [1995],
243–44), and we are pressed to inquire what the occasion of the grumbling may have been. It has been suggested that this has to do with leadership issues (Phil 4:2–3; Oropeza, Paul and Apostasy, 161: the murmuring, as at Corinth, was directed against God’s representatives), or, more specifically, if Christians had taken their disagreements to the law courts (Peterlin, Paul’s Letter to the Philippians, 127, noting the suggestion of Winter, NTS 37.4 [1991] 559–72), the parallel with 1 Cor 6:1–11 may be apposite (Martin [1976], 104).

Another view suggests that the grumbling was caused by the absence of Paul as a prisoner and his role as a suffering apostle. Hence there was a need to establish a theodicy to explain the fierceness of the hardship the Philippians were undergoing (Phil 1:28–30). And so it may be that the Philippians’ attitude was one against God and his purposes. They could not tolerate the thought of a suffering apostle (cf. 2 Cor 10–13). In spite of the enforced separation because Paul was a prisoner on behalf of the Philippians (Phil 1:13), the lines of communication between apostle and congregation needed to be kept open. That was part of the reason for Paul’s letter writing in the first place (1:12), and would account for his desire to send messengers who would report to the Philippians the circumstances of his imprisonment and unpreventable absence (2:19, 25). If the readers’ grumbling or questioning was directed to the character of God, who both allowed their suffering and was powerless to save Paul from his captivity and chains, then it becomes reasonable to see in Paul’s argument for God’s overruling providence a response to and antidote for the Philippians’ attitude. And what better illustration of the way to
overcome the sour spirit than to remind the readers of Paul’s endurance of suffering and that of his co-workers as an experience patterned on the suffering Christ? “Life-in-Christ” is thus the panacea for their problems of disunity and querulousness, born of their “affliction” and shared with their leader (see Martin, Hymn of Christ, liii, developing the line in Martin [1976], 32, 104).

διαλογισμός, “arguing,” describes still another of these divisive actions. It is a word that embraces a wide range of ideas, from an evil thought to anxious reflection or doubt, to dispute or argument (G. Schrenk, TDNT 2:97–98). This last meaning, a meaning that is strongly supported by the papyri (MM, 151), is the one that best fits the context here. The Philippians, perhaps spurred on by false teachers (cf. Phil 3:2), were engaging in speculations (cf. Rom 1:21) that could only result in futile arguments that had the capacity to tear the community apart. These hurtful actions must go, and with them all other actions that promote disunity within the church (cf. v 3). The Christians at Philippi must not complain against one another (or God) or engage in futile arguments with one another while involved in any (πάντα, “everything”—note the comprehensiveness of this word) of those activities in which their “life together,” their koinonia, is expressed.

15 ἵνα γένησθε ἄμεμπτοι καὶ ἀκέραιοι, “in order that you may become blameless, flawless.” All the injunctions Paul lays upon the Philippians (Phil 2:3–4, 12–14) are for a purpose: that (ἵνα) they might become (γένησθε ; see Note c) better people than they are. If their lives are characterized by assertiveness (ἐριθεία), conceit (κενοδοξία), grumbling (γογγυσμός), and argumentativeness
(διαλογισμός), the Philippians are assured that improvement is possible. They can become blameless (ἀμεμπτος), flawless (ἀκέραιος), faultless (ἀμωμος) children of God. But for Paul this radical transformation is possible only when there is a humble positive response of the human will to the demands of God (note the preponderance of the imperative mood here) linked together with the creative force of divine grace (cf. vv 12–13; but contrast Barth).

The adjective ἀμεμπτος, “blameless,” derived as it is from the verb μέμφεσθαι, “to blame,” and prefixed with the α-privative (negative), means that anyone so described stands above accusation or blame, either by one's fellows or God; such behavior is free from the criticism of others (cf. PHILLIPS). ἀκέραιος, “flawless,” also prefixed with the α-privative (negative), is related to the verb κεραννύναι, “to mix,” “to mingle.” It was used in Paul's day to describe undiluted wine or unalloyed metal (Lightfoot). When applied to people, it conveyed the idea of simplicity of character, purity, guiltlessness, or innocence (cf. Rom 16:19). Together ἀμεμπτος and ἀκέραιος, if and when they could be applied to the Philippians, would mean that no one would be able to point to any flaw in them because none would exist. The external appearance of the Christian community would correspond exactly to what it was within, to what it was in its real nature. This used to be referred to in the maxim “Become what you are” (derived from Bultmann, Theology, 1:332), but this is individualistic ethics with a vengeance.

τέκνα θεοῦ ἀμωμα μέσον γενεᾶς σκολίας καὶ διεστραμμένης, “[and] faultless, the children of God surrounded by crooked and
perverse people.” One additional descriptive phrase completes Paul’s aspirations for the Philippians. The word τέκνα, “children,” derived from τίκτειν, “to give birth to,” stresses the idea of family resemblance, of sharing in the nature of the parent, in this case, God (cf. John 1:12). ἄμωμα, “faultless,” the adjective describing “children,” is frequently used in the OT in connection with sacrificial animals (e.g., Num 6:14). Only a sacrifice without blemish (ἄμωμος), one that is spotless or perfect, is worthy of being offered to God (cf. Heb 9:14; 1 Pet 1:19). Hence, Paul’s aim is that the Philippians would become truly “God’s children—sharing his nature—without a blemish!” (Michael, 106), thus fit to be presented to God and to be representatives of God.

The three adjectives are translated “blameless,” “flawless,” and “faultless,” maintaining the same sound at the end of each word without attempting to highlight their special nuances. This is done in an effort to preserve the studied rhetoric of the apostle, who begins each of these words with the same sound by using the ἀ-private—ἄμεμπτοι, ἀκέραιοι, ἄμωμα.

The words “[and] faultless, the children of God surrounded by crooked and perverse people” (v 15b) allude to Deut 32:5 LXX (see Note d). There Israel is called the τέκνα, “children,” of God, but they are μωμητά, “blemished,” children and a γενεὰ σκολιὰ καὶ διεστραμμένη, “crooked and perverse people,” who have forsaken God. Perhaps Paul, in referring to those words from Deuteronomy here, may be doing two things: (1) indicating that the church now has the privilege of replacing Israel, or better, restoring Israel to her true destiny, as God’s children—not as blameworthy children,
however, but as blameless children, and (2) hinting that Israel, robbed of this privilege by its own lack of humility before God, has nothing left to it “but to melt away into the ‘perverse and straying’ mass of the world’s... humanity” (Collange, 112). There is thus every reason for the church to divorce itself from everything that is twisted (σκολιά) and perverted (διαστραμμένη), i.e., that is not in line with the truth in Jesus (cf. Phil 3:2). We must be guarded, however, to leave no suspicion that Paul abandoned his Jewishness and believed that God had rejected Israel (see Rom 9–11). He remained au fond a Jew throughout his life and never lost his hope for the salvation of his people—in Christ (Rom 11:26). He had a lover’s quarrel with Israel, for whose salvation he yearned (Rom 9:1–5 ; 10:1–4) and whose “unbelief,” he was bold to state, was only temporary against the day when they did not remain in unbelief but were ready to be grafted back into the parent stem of the olive tree (Rom 11:23–24 ; see Munck, Christ and Israel; Martin, Reconciliation, 131–35). Gundry Volf (Paul and Perseverance, 161–201) takes another tack, namely, that πάς Ἰσραήλ, “all Israel,” in Rom 11:26 means a “complete collectivity,” consisting of the now hardened majority of the Jews and the believing remnant. It is difficult, on this showing, however, to see where the Gentiles fit into the Pauline schema.

ἐν σῶς φαίνεσθε ὡς φωστήρες ἐν κόσμῳ, “shine among them like lights in the sky.” It is right in the middle of (μέσον, “surrounded by” [v 15b ]) this twisted, perverse society, or a society that has twisted the truth of God and perverted the ways of God (cf. Matt 17:17 ; Acts 2:43 ; 13:10 ; 20:30), that the Philippians, having become true children of God, are commanded to shine as
lights, i.e., as people who know God’s truth and who live in accordance with that truth (see BDF §296 for an explanation of the form of the relative pronoun, ὁĩς, “among whom,” whose antecedent is γενεᾶς, “people”).

The middle voice of the verb φαίνεσθαι may mean “to shine” (BDAG), and it is this idea that best fits here. And although φαίνεσθε is usually treated as indicative, i.e., “you are shining” (cf. KJV, GOODSPEED, MOFFATT, RSV, KNOX, NEB, JB, NIV, NRSV), it may also be treated as imperative, i.e., “you must shine” (BARCLAY, GNB). The context favors this latter interpretation; for it is unlikely that Paul is merely reminding the Philippians of what they are already doing. There would be no purpose in that. Rather, he is again appealing to them to accept their responsibility as God’s children to be φωστήρες ἐν κόσμῳ, “lights in the sky.”

The word φωστήρ, “light,” means any light-bearing body (BDAG). It was used of a torch, a lantern, even of harbor beacons (Finlayson, ExpTim 77 [1965–66] 181). Adam, Israel, the Torah, important rabbis, and so on were called “light-bearers” in the world (Str-B 1:236–37; H. Conzelmann, TDNT 9:324, 327; see Martin [1976]). The people of Qumran were known as “children of light” (1QS I, 9; II, 16; 1QM XIII, 5, 9). Hence, Paul may have used this expression, φωστήρες ἐν κόσμῳ, “lights in the sky,” to remind the Philippians of their heritage. As children of light (1 Thess 5:5), they, like their illustrious forebears, are to carry the light of truth and goodness to their morally corrupt world.

But φωστήρ, “light,” is used especially of heavenly bodies (BDAG; cf. Gen 1:14, 16; Sir 43:7; Wis 13:2). It is more likely,
therefore, that Paul had this meaning in mind when he made the comparison. As the sun, or moon, or stars shine in the heavens, illuminating an otherwise dark sky (κόσμος understood in a physical sense), so the Philippians, who are themselves light (cf. Matt 5:14; Eph 5:8.), are to let their good works—of harmony, selflessness, service to others, and so on—shine out, so that they themselves will influence for good the people around them.

In any case, however the phrase is to be understood, one thing is clear: Paul did not intend his words to mean merely that the Philippians were “to stand out against” (Caird) the background of their society, so as to show it up by way of contrast. Rather, his words came as a challenge to change that society. As light dispels darkness, so Christians are to dispel the darkness of evil and ignorance that is everywhere around them.

16 There is a break in thought at this point. Paul continues his appeal to the Philippians, to be sure, but he shifts the basis of appeal from the “example” of Christ or “paradigm” of life in Christ (2:3–15) to himself and to the judgment he must face at the day of Christ. Therefore, he now asks them to do something for his sake.

λόγον ζωῆς ἑπέχοντες, εἶς καύχημα ἐμοὶ εἶς ἡμέραν Χριστοῦ, “hold firm to the life-giving word, so that I may have good reason to exult in the day of Christ.” The verb ἑπέχειν means either “to hold forth” or “to hold fast.” The latter meaning is to be preferred, as the context makes clear. Yet there is no denying the suitability of the former meaning, as the message of Christ is “held forth” for all to see; the Christian witness is one that is visible in human lives. The participle ἑπέχοντες, “hold firm,” is imperatival (Moulton
et al., Grammar, 1:343; Meecham, ExpTim 58 [1947] 207–9; Barrett, ExpTim 59 [1948] 165–67). The expression λόγον ζωῆς, “word of life,” coming first in the sentence, has the emphatic position and refers not to Christ as the Word, the Logos (John 1:1, 4, 14), but to the gospel that Paul preached, which the Philippians heard and believed and by which they had received the life of God (cf. Acts 16:32: “they spoke to him [the Philippian jailer] the word of the Lord”).

The construction εἰς καύχημα ἐμοί, “so that I may have good reason to exult,” is a common one to indicate purpose (cf. Rom 10:1; 13:4; 1 Cor 14:22; see C. F. D. Moule, Idiom-Book, 70). The word καύχημα is a “boasting,” and its cognates, καύχησις, “boasting,” and καυχᾶσθαι, “to boast,” are distinctly Pauline. Of the fifty times these words occur in the NT only four of them occur outside the letters of Paul. Here καύχημα does not mean a vanity that deserves condemnation, but it indicates a deep exultation or proper pride that only the Philippians can provide Paul by their obedience to God’s commands (cf. Phil 2:12; 4:1; 2 Cor 1:4; see Didier, Le désintéressement du chrétien, 152). The dative ἐμοί, “to me,” is a dative of possession, “so that I might have reason to be proud.”

The expression εἰς ἡμέραν Χριστοῦ, “in the day of Christ,” refers to that time when Paul, as all Christians, must stand before the tribunal of Christ (2 Cor 5:10; cf. the Comment on Phil 1:10), not for the purpose of finding out their eternal destiny (cf. Rom 8:1) but to give an account of their stewardship to their Lord (1 Cor 4:1–5; see Caird). Paul’s plea, therefore, is that the Philippians
will hold firmly to the gospel message that he had preached—a
message that brought them not only life for the future, i.e., eternal
life, but a change of life in the present. Only if they hold fast to
this gospel and continually obey its demands will he be able to
boast about them to Christ—and not have cause for shame—and
receive approval because of them from Christ at the day of his
appearing. “Please do this for me,” Paul asks the Philippians. On
the honor/shame motif in the NT against its Greco-Roman
background, see De Silva, Honor, Patronage, Kinship and Purity.

ὅτι οὐκ εἰς κενὸν ἔδραμον οὐδὲ εἰς κενὸν ἐκσπάσα, “knowing
that I did not run the race in vain nor do my work in vain.” If
they comply with his wishes, Paul will know (looking back from
that day) that he did not run or work in vain. Paul uses two
metaphors to describe his apostolic ministry. (1) One, that of
running, comes from the games or the military (so Krentz, “Military
Language”; on the interchangeability of the athletic and
political/military metaphors, see Geoffrion, Rhetorical Purpose, 80).
It is a favorite expression of Paul’s (Gal 2:2 ; 4:11 ; Phil 3:12–13).
With it he describes himself as an athlete who trains thoroughly,
runs hard, plays by the rules, and expends great physical and
emotional energies—all so that he may not come to the end of the
race and find himself needlessly disqualified (εἰς κένον, “in vain”;
cf. 1 Cor 9:27). (2) The other metaphor, that of working hard, could
easily come from Paul’s own experience as a weaver of tent cloth.
Deissmann (Light from the Ancient East, 317) explains:

We ought to place ourselves as it were within St. Paul’s own
class, the artisan class of the Imperial age, and then feel the force
of his words. They all become much more life-like when restored to their original historical milieu. “I labored more abundantly than they all”—these words, applied by St. Paul to missionary work, came originally from the joyful pride of the skilled weaver, who, working by the piece, was able to hand in the largest amount of stuff on pay day. The frequent references to “labor in vain” are a trembling echo of the discouragement resulting from a width of cloth being rejected as badly woven and therefore not paid for.

Neither of these metaphors highlights honor, dignity, or glory as the way of the apostle in the present struggle of life. They tell rather of toil and training, pain, striving, and suffering (Pfitzner, Paul and the Agon Motif, 99–108). Those who would run such a race must be content to train hard now and to wait for the finish for the prize. Thus Paul begs the Philippians to live in such a way that his efforts and difficulties on their behalf, which apparently were very great, may not be in vain: “May the prize be there when I finish!” And that prize is like a military victory (echoed in 2 Tim 4:7–8 as later in Phil 2:17). See Gundry Volf, Paul and Perservance, 262–64, for the eschatological dimension, as she calls it, in Paul’s fear, based on Isa 49:4, 8 LXX as the key: “To the servant who says κενῶς ἐκοπίασα [‘vainly I have worked’], the Lord answers, ‘In the day of salvation I have helped you’” (263). See too Bjerkelund, “Vergeblich”; Derrett, Bib 66 (1985) 560–67.

17 ἀλλὰ εἰ καὶ σπένδομαι ἐπὶ τῇ θυσίᾳ καὶ λειτουργίᾳ τῆς πίστεως ὑμῶν, χαίρω καὶ συγχαίρω πᾶσιν ὑμῖν, “But if my sufferings are like a drink offering poured out to complement your sacrificial service—service prompted by faith—then indeed I am
glad and share my gladness with all of you.” This verse does not begin a new paragraph (Jones, Barth, Lohmeyer, Gnilka), for it is joined to v 16 by a series of conjunctions— ἀλλὰ καὶ, “but even if.” Together, then, the thought in vv 16 and 17 runs somewhat as follows. Paul in essence is saying that as an apostle he has struggled hard to bring to the Philippians the word of life. He asks them to hold fast to it or all his struggles will be in vain. But (ἀλλὰ) lest they should think that he is too pessimistic about them, he hurries to add that he recognizes their sacrificial service to him as proof that they are indeed holding on and that his work will not be in vain. So even if (καὶ) he is suffering continually, he is glad because his sufferings are like a libation, which, when added to their sacrifice, serves to complete it. To make this summary statement viable it is important to notice the following things:

(1) Paul turns abruptly from the language of the stadium, the soldier’s engagement, and the weaver’s loom to the language of sacrifice. But in so doing he does not turn away from the idea of struggle and striving as the marks of an apostle—the figure is different; the fact is the same.

(2) Although all sacrifices were made obsolete by the single sacrifice of Christ (Heb 9:11–14, 24–26), yet Paul often speaks metaphorically of the need for Christians continually to offer up to God legitimate and acceptable sacrifices (cf. Rom 12:1 ; 15:16). It is not surprising, then, to learn that Paul calls the gifts the Philippians gave him out of their poverty (2 Cor 8:2) an act of “sacrificial service” arising out of their faith in God (ἐπὶ τῇ θυσίᾳ
καὶ λειτουργία τῆς πίστεως ὑμῶν, “to complement your sacrificial service—service prompted by faith,” taking θυσία, “sacrifice,” and λειτουργία, “service,” together by hendiadys, since both nouns share one article, and taking τῆς πίστεως, “of faith,” as a subjective genitive; see Lightfoot for the shades of meaning contained in λειτουργία, “service”).

(3) Paul speaks of what is happening to him also in sacrificial terms: σπένδομαι, “I am being poured out as a libation [to God].” This is the crux interpretum of v 17 and is generally misunderstood. In the ancient world, sacrifices, both pagan and Jewish, were usually accompanied and completed by a libation of wine poured out either on top of the sacrifice or at the foot of the altar to honor the deity (2 Kgs 16:13 ; Jer 7:18 ; Hos 9:4). Because this libation was at times called “the blood of the grape” (Wis 50:15) and because the use of σπένδεσθαι, “to be poured out as a libation,” in 2 Tim 4:6 and Ign. Rom. 2.2 suggests an offering in death, interpreters see in Paul’s use of σπένδομαι, “I am being poured out as a libation [to God],” here a clear allusion to his imminent martyrdom (BDAG, Lightfoot, Plummer, Barth, Michael, Bonnard, Synge, Beare, Gnilka, Caird, Martin [1976], and many translations: NEB, JB, GNB). But are these interpreters and translators, for all their number, correct? It is not likely for the following reasons: (a) the note of joy—χαίρω καὶ συγχαίρω πᾶσιν ὑμῖν, “I am glad and share my gladness with all of you”—would then strangely be sounded for martyrdom. Ignatius may have said this, but hardly Paul. Lohmeyer attempts to relieve this difficulty somewhat by supposing that the Philippians were also
suffering persecution and were glad to see Paul join them in martyrdom. Gnilka, too, tries to ease the problem by attaching ἐπὶ τῇ θυσίᾳ, “over [your] sacrifice,” to χαίρω, “I rejoice,” and not to σπένδομαι, “I am being poured out as a libation [to God]”: “I rejoice over your sacrifice,” not “I am being poured out as a libation [to God] over your sacrifice.” These overly subtle attempts at a solution simply point up the difficulty of understanding σπένδομαι, “I am being poured out as a libation [to God],” as a reference to Paul’s death. (b) It is doubtful that σπένδομαι, “I am being poured out as a libation [to God],” ever denotes a killing. True, libation accompanied most sacrifices in the Greek world, and in the Jewish cultus it concluded the entire liturgy, rounding off the daily sacrifices. But “never in the Greek Bible nor in the hellenistic world is this term ever used to denote offerings of blood (= ‘haimassein’)” (Collange, 113, citing the detailed study by Denis, RSPT 42 [1958] 630–45; cf. Manson, BJRL 23 [1939] 184–85; Martin [1976], 107–8; but see Cook, JTS n.s. 33 [1982] 168–71). (c) The tense of the verb σπένδομαι, “I am being poured out as a libation [to God],” is present and is describing what is currently happening to the apostle, not what will happen. The present tense may indeed be used for the future (BDF §323), but here there is no clue that points to future time other than that contained in one’s notion of what σπένδομαι must mean. (d) Finally, Paul has already used two metaphors—running and working—to describe the rigors of his current apostolic activities. It seems only likely then that this third metaphor would be in keeping with the others. Therefore, when Paul uses the libation metaphor, he does not have his death in mind—within a few sentences he will assure the Philippians with
confidence that he will soon be with them again (Phil 2:24; cf. 1:21–23 where the confidence of survival is less secure). Rather, he is picturesquely referring to his sufferings as an apostle. To the degree that his sufferings are for the sake of the gospel, for the sake of the church in general, and for the sake of the church at Philippi in particular, they act as a seal on whatever sacrificial service the Philippians may make, just as a libation completes any offering made to God. And thus Paul is glad. In other words, his apostolic sufferings and the Philippians’ sacrificial gifts to him because he is an apostle combine to form a complete sacrifice to God. There is therefore every reason for mutual joy and rejoicing (χαίρω καὶ συγχαίρω, “I am glad and share my gladness”). This is a truly Pauline paradox, rejoicing in suffering, as in Rom 5:1–11. Yet see Martin (1980), 107–8.

18 τὸ δὲ αὐτὸ καὶ ὑμεῖς χαίρετε καὶ συγχαίρετέ μοι, “and you also be glad for the same reason and share your gladness with me.” As Paul is happy about joining his sacrifice to that of the Philippians in order that together they may present an offering acceptable to God, so for the same reason (τὸ δὲ αὐτό) he calls upon them to share in his joy. That is to say, as he is glad to be a libation poured out to God through his sufferings, so he encourages them (χαίρετε, “be glad,” taken as an imperative) likewise to be glad to render service to God in their continued sharing in his work of defending and vindicating the gospel (cf. 1:7). The repetition here of words for joy (χαίρω, “I am glad”/χαίρετε, “you be glad”) and togetherness in rejoicing implied in the preposition σὺν, “with” (συγχαίρω, “I share my gladness”/
συγχαίρετε, “you share your gladness”)—twin themes of this letter—is striking. χαίρειν, “to be glad,” and its cognates occur more than sixteen times in Philippians (leading to Bengel’s well-known comment, Summa epistolae: gaudeo, gaudete, “the content of the letter [is] I rejoice, now you rejoice!” [425]), while the preposition σύν, “with,” and the long list of words compounded with it are numerous. These constitute evidence both of the apostle’s own joy and of the variety of experiences, including joy, that Paul shared together with his friends at Philippi.

**Explanation**

The Christians at Philippi, torn apart by conceit, pride, and selfishness, have been called upon by the apostle to change their ways and in humility to begin to serve one another (Phil 2:1–4), remembering Christ who humbly “emptied himself” and gave his life in obedience to God (2:6–11). Paul continues now (2:12–18) in this same tone of exhortation, pleading with the Philippians to obey their Lord, not only in light of Paul’s hoped-for return to Philippi, but even now while he is away. Further, he urges them to work obediently at bringing healing to their community and to keep at this task until it is accomplished. This is no impossible feat, however. If they do what he asks, they will discover that they are cooperating with God and that the saying is true: ὅταν σπεύδῃ τις αὐτός, χῶθεν συνάπτεται, “whenever anyone makes an effort, God also lends a hand” (Aeschylus, Pers. 742). They will find that God is already at work among them, stimulating their desires and giving them the energy to foster goodwill instead of ill will. In the light of this, Paul is bold to ask them to curb their grumbling
against God and their leaders and to stay away from arguments that generate division.

Paul exhorts them to do all these things in order that no one, either inside the church or on the outside, will be able to find any fault or insincerity in them. He wants them to be God’s children, so morally unblemished that they can affect for good the corrupt society in which they find themselves, dispelling evil and ignorance, as the lights in the sky, i.e., the stars, dispel darkness. But to be this kind of people they must hold firmly to the gospel, which they have received and which is God’s means to bring them life and give them direction for living.

Finally, Paul shares with the Philippians his personal hope that they will heed these exhortations, so that when he has run the race of life, he will not have striven in vain. But lest they should think that he has too many doubts about them because of this talk of “running in vain,” he hastens to assure them that he considers what they have already done an acceptable sacrifice of service to God—one that arises out of their faith in God. And he tells them that his own current sufferings as an apostle are but the libation that is customarily poured over a sacrifice to make it complete. They have done the right thing in the past; they have generously shared what was theirs in the advancement of the gospel. He asks now that they continue as they began. Thus he and they can be glad together, not in spite of self-sacrifice and whatever suffering it brings, but precisely because of it.
C. News about Timothy and Epaphroditus and Their Role as Models (2:19–30)
1. About Timothy (2:19–24)

Bibliography


Translation

¹⁹ Now I hope, under the lordship of Jesus, to send Timothy to you very soon, so that I also may be cheered up when I learn how things are going with you, [as you when you hear how things are going with me]. ²⁰ I hope to send him, because I have no one else who equally shares my feelings and who genuinely cares about your affairs. ²¹ For all the others here are concerned about their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. b ²² But you know c Timothy’s proven worth, how that, like a child with his father, he worked hard alongside me to advance the cause of the gospel. ²³ This one, then, is the person I
hope to send to you as soon as I see about my own affairs. 24 For I am confident in the Lord that I too will be coming to you very soon.

Notes

19.a. For κυρίῳ, “Lord,” a few MSS, including C D* F G read Χριστῷ, “Christ.” This appears to be an attempt to conform κυρίῳ ᾨσοῦ, “Lord Jesus,” to Paul’s more common expression Χριστῷ ᾨσοῦ, “Christ Jesus.”

21.b. B and the Majority Text have the word order Χριστῷ ᾨσοῦ, “Christ Jesus,” instead of ᾨσοῦ Χριστῷ, “Jesus Christ,” which is read by Ὑ Χ 46 Σ Α C D F 33 81 and others. This is a common exchange in the MS tradition.

22.c. Ὑ 46 has οἴδατε, “you know,” for γινώσκετε, “you know,” without in any way making a change in the meaning.

24.d. Ὑ * A C P 326 plus a few other MSS, along with some OL MSS and other versions, add πρὸς ὑμᾶς, “to you,” to ἐλεύσομαι, “I will be coming,” thereby making explicit what was deemed implicit in the text.

Form/Structure/Setting

In this section Paul focuses attention upon his co-worker, Timothy, and briefly touches on matters that concern himself. Since such things as these generally appear at the close of Paul’s letters (Romans, 1 Corinthians, Colossians, Philemon; cf. Ephesians), many commentators conclude that Philippians is a compilation of several
letters and that this reference to Timothy, along with personal notations, signals the beginning of the end of one of these letters (Beare, Gnilka, Collange; see Introduction, Integrity of Philippians). But this conclusion is weakened by the fact that personal matters and personalia concerning Paul’s co-workers are not kept exclusively for the end of his letters. Sometimes they are found in the middle as well (cf. 1 Cor 4:17–19 ; 2 Cor 8:16–19 ; but the latter is often regarded as a separate letter devoted to the collection; see H. D. Betz, 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, Hermeneia [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985]). This is especially true when matters like these are “relevant to the problems of the church or the agenda of the letter” (Culpepper, RevExp 77 [1980] 350; cf. Doty, Letters, 36–37, 43; White, Form and Function, 143–45). Such is the case here.

Paul is troubled because the Philippians seem too much concerned with their own interests (τὰ ἑαυτῶν) and too little with the interests of others (τὰ ἑτέρων [ Phil 2:4 ]). He combats this problem (1) with the Christ-hymn (2:6–11), which stresses the servant role (δοῦλος) of Christ; (2) with the example of his own life as a libation poured out for the sake of others (2:18); and (3) with the model of Timothy, who set himself to serve (ἐδούλευσεν [ 2:22 ]) and who was more genuinely concerned with the interests of the Philippians (τὰ περὶ ὑμῶν [ 2:20 ]) than he was with his own interests. And, looking on to 3:17, we may note that Paul will write “observe those who live according to the example you have in us” (he does not say “the example you have in Christ,” as though Christ were an example to be followed; this one verse, often disregarded by commentators, may be regarded to put a nail in the coffin of the “Imitation of Christ” view of 2:5–11).
Thus, in what at first appears as a simple act of informing the Philippians about the plans he has for Timothy, Paul continues to teach them from the quality of this man’s life that the mission of a Christian is to serve rather than to be served. Further, it becomes clear that the theme of 2:1–4 (grounded in the Christ-hymn of 2:6–11), illustrated immediately here in Timothy and later in Epaphroditus, continues on through the remainder of the letter (see Culpepper, RevExp 77 [1980] 351, and Oakes, Philippians, 126, who notes that Bockmuehl’s commentary is the latest work systematically to draw attention to passages where Paul [and his colleagues] act as a model for the Philippians). There is thus no good reason for seeing 2:19–24 as heralding the beginning of the end of one of several supposed letters contained now in the compass of the one Philippian letter. The points of connection between the christological hymn (2:6–11) and the examples of Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus are strongly emphasized and bind the epistle as a unity (see Martin, Hymn of Christ, li–lv).

Comment

19 ἐλπίζω δὲ ἐν κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ Τιμόθεου ταχέως πέμψαι ὑμῖν, “Now I hope, under the lordship of Jesus, to send Timothy to you very soon.” Paul is forced by circumstances to remain away from the church at Philippi (cf. Phil 2:12), at least temporarily. But (δὲ) in the meantime he has excellent contingency plans. He hopes soon to send Timothy to them (see Acts 16:1–3; Rom 16:21; 1 Cor 4:17; 16:10; 2 Cor 1:1; Phil 1:1; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1; Phlm 1 for information about this person). Timothy was evidently
well known at Philippi, and the “we” section beginning in Acts 16:10 includes Timothy.

It is striking that Paul should use the word ἐλπίζω, “I hope,” when he writes about Timothy’s journey to Philippi (Phil 2:19, 23) and πέποιθα, “I am confident,” when he writes about his own (2:24). This change in vocabulary, which seems deliberate and more than mere rhetoric, is often obscured in translation (KJV, RSV, PHILLIPS, JB; but see NEB, NIV, NRSV). But it may be a significant change and thus should be treated accordingly. For it may be Paul’s way of subtly assuring the Philippians that his own coming to them again, in spite of immense obstacles, is more certain than the expected arrival of Timothy.

Yet Paul makes it clear to the Philippians that his plans for Timothy and for himself are not made strictly on the human level without due recognition that Jesus is Lord (cf. 2:11). This is one further piece of evidence that, for Paul, the Christian life is to be lived under Christ’s lordship, as the second part of the hymn (2:6–11) makes clear. Hence, his hope for Timothy and his confidence about himself (v 24) are both ἐν κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ, “under the lordship of Jesus.” This is not a stock phrase, such as “the Lord willing,” tacked on unthinkingly. Nor is it an especially self-abnegating phrase, indicating that Paul was at a loss about what the future held and hence had to cast himself “upon the Lord.” That is to say, it does not indicate in any way that Paul’s outlook was “so unsettled” that he did not know what a day might bring forth (which is otherwise a truism for any reader of the Wisdom literature in Proverbs and the letter of James) and thus could “only
make his plans in the Lord Jesus” (Martin [1959], 122; cf. Lohmeyer). Rather, its presence here is to remind the Philippians of what Paul believed and practiced in good times and bad, that all his hopes and aspirations, his plans and expectations, were subject to the lordship of Jesus Christ (cf. Rom 14:14; 1 Cor 7:39; 1 Cor 16:7; Phlm 22; see Kramer, Christ, Lord, Son of God, §47, for the seminal definition of what lordship [κυριότης] meant for Paul; his “kyriiology” accentuates and spells out “the authority to whom men [sic] are answerable for their every action” [170]). Thus Paul could be hopeful, even confident, about the days ahead, precisely because he had already submitted himself and his future wholly to the Lord.

ἵνα κάγω εὖψυχῶ γνούς τὰ περὶ ὑμῶν, “so that I also may be cheered up when I learn how things are going with you, [as you when you hear how things are going with me].” Paul’s purpose in sending Timothy to Philippi was twofold: (1) that (ἵνα) he himself might be cheered (εὖψυχῶ) by good news about the Philippians and (2) that the Philippians might also be cheered by good news about Paul. This latter purpose is only stated implicitly in the word κάγω, “I also” (crasis for καὶ ἐγὼ), but it is present in this word nonetheless: “You will be cheered and I also.”

20 Apparently Paul knew that the Philippians would question his sending Timothy. Timothy seems to have played no significant role in founding the church at Philippi, although he was with Paul at that time (Acts 16). And it is conceivable that in the eyes of the Philippians he even may have contributed negatively to that mission. The book of Acts is strikingly silent about Timothy at Philippi while loudly proclaiming the activity of Paul and Silas (Acts
And although Timothy may have visited (or will visit) Philippi on other occasions (Acts 19:21–22; 20:3–6), no descriptive account is made of any of these visits. In any case, Paul felt compelled elaborately to justify his decision: “I am sending Timothy (1) because (γάρ) I have no one like him, (2) because (γάρ) he, unlike the others, is not chiefly concerned with his own interests, and (3) because (δέ) you know what his real value is to the advancement of the gospel.”

οὐδένα γὰρ ἔχω ἰσόψυχον, “I hope to send him, because I have no one else who equally shares my feelings.” The first reason Paul gives is expressed by a rare adjective, ἰσόψυχον, which literally means “of equal soul,” “feeling,” or “mind” (BDAG; cf. LXX Ps 54:14 [ET 55:13]: “a man my equal”). By choosing to use this word Paul intends to make clear to the Philippians that whatever Timothy says in his mission to Philippi and whatever decisions he makes “will be his (Paul’s) as well, and no one should oppose the disciple on the grounds that his master might not think as he does” (Collange, 117; cf. Vincent; Joüon, RSR 28 [1938] 302; Bonnard; Christou, JBL 70 [1951] 293–96; Loh and Nida; cf. also PHILLIPS, NEB, GNB). There is little reason to say that such an interpretation as this founders on Paul’s Greek construction, as though it could only mean “I have no one like Timothy ” and not “I have no one else [besides Timothy] like myself” (Martin [1959], 123–24; idem [1976], 117; Jones; Michael; Beare, Gnilka; cf. RSV, JB, NIV). Paul simply does not write as precisely as one might like. His style is often compressed (see Caird), which means that many things are taken for granted or must be inferred from the context. The context says, in effect, that Timothy was Paul’s son in the
faith, trained by him, his close companion and fellow servant in evangelism (Phil 2:22). Thus, in spite of what may be considered the roughness of Paul’s Greek construction, it is clear that Timothy knows the apostle’s mind better than anyone else, and for this reason Paul is sending him on the mission to Philippi.

ὅστις γνησίως τὰ περὶ ὑμῶν μεριμνήσει, “and who genuinely cares about your affairs.” Paul continues by saying that he is sending Timothy because Timothy genuinely cares about those things that affect the Philippians. The adverb Paul uses, γνησίως, “genuinely,” is one that suggests kinship. Literally translated, it would be “legitimately born.” Although it is most often rendered by words like “sincerely” (Gnilka) or “truly” (Vincent), one should not overlook its root idea. Timothy, then, is one who “legitimately” cares for the Philippians because he is Paul’s “legitimate” son (cf. 1 Tim 1:2; Titus 1:4). As a consequence, therefore, he is “the sole authorized representative of the apostle” (Collange, 117; cf. Lightfoot).

The verb used to describe Timothy’s feelings for the Philippians, μεριμνᾶν, “to care about,” is a strong verb. Elsewhere in this letter it is used for “worry” (Phil 4:6). Without such negative connotations here (nor in 2 Cor 11:28, where Paul’s “anxiety” is directed to the churches’ well-being, including Corinth and Philippi, which may provide another link connecting Paul’s Philippian letter with his stay in Ephesus), it does, nevertheless, carry with it overtones of the pressure or weight of anxiety that grows out of true concern for the welfare of others (see A. J. Malherbe, The Cynic Epistles [Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977] 282 line 11).
οἱ πάντες γὰρ τὰ ἑαυτῶν ζητοῦσιν, οὐ τὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ,
“For all the others here are concerned about their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.” The second reason Paul gives for sending Timothy is quite startling: “No one else cares! All [οἱ πάντες] are looking out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.” Does this statement reveal “a peevish and uncharitable tone” on Paul’s part, a good example of his own personal feelings of hostility against those Christians around him in his place of captivity (Synge, 37)? Is it hyperbole, designed to enhance Timothy’s worth and authority as opposed to any other person Paul might have chosen to send and the Philippians might have been willing to welcome (Collange)? Could it mean that of all the Christians around him there is no one else to whom he could entrust so important a mission (Martin [1959])? Is it a general parenthetical remark regarding the world around him, one that says nothing about his fellow Christians but is rather “his solemn reflection when he remembers that, in a world of selfishness and self-seeking (cf. Matt 6:32), it is such a rare thing to find a man like Timothy who is really anxious to promote the welfare of other people, and to give himself to a fatiguing journey and to the resolving of personal quarrels in the Philippian church” (Martin [1959], 125)? Is it a restrictive statement where “all” does not mean all Christians in the place of his confinement (cf. 1:16) or in the world but refers only to all those who were near at hand, available and in Paul’s judgment able to undertake such a difficult mission but were not willing to do so (Jones, Beare, Hendriksen, Caird)? Is it an example of how Christians can differ radically in their evaluation of a particular mission within the church? For Paul the journey to
Philippi was a number-one priority—to refuse this mission was to be seeking one’s own interests and to care nothing for the cause of Christ; for others the welfare of this distant church at Philippi was not nearly so important as the welfare of their own community in their town and its outreach to surrounding places. To drop their commitments to their immediate churches and to travel to Philippi, even if an apostle did desire this, would itself be to them a seeking of their own interests and not Christ’s. It is possible to speculate unceasingly about the meaning of Paul’s startling statement here. In the words of Vincent (74), “Without more information a satisfactory explanation seems impossible.”

22 τὴν δὲ δοκιμὴν αὐτοῦ γινώσκετε, “But you know Timothy’s proven worth.” The third reason Paul gives to justify his decision to send Timothy comes in the form of an appeal to what the Philippians already know about him. Although apparently they needed to be reminded of who Timothy was and what he had done, yet upon reflection they would discover that they after all did know certain important things about this person.

They knew his “proven worth” (δοκιμὴν). This noun is used only seven times in the NT and exclusively by Paul. It embraces the dual ideas of the process and the results of testing (Rom 5:4; 2 Cor 8:2; 13:1). Paul, therefore, is not simply saying to the Philippians that they knew “Timothy’s record” (NEB); they knew how he had stood the test (MOFFATT) and proved his worth (GNB). Thus they should realize immediately that no “mediocre substitute” was being sent to them (Beare). Paul’s practice was to send his colleagues as his alter ego, especially Timothy, his “son in
the faith,” notably on a delicate mission to Corinth (1 Cor 4:17). This raises another possibility that Paul’s sad remark is an oblique glance at the Philippian scene, where his readers—or some of them—were “concerned about their own interests [τὰ ἑαυτῶν ζητοῦσιν], not those of Jesus Christ” (Phil 2:21 ; see Martin, Hymn of Christ, lv, for this phrase as a key to chap. 2).

ὅτι ὡς πατρὶ τέκνον σὺν ἐμοὶ ἔδούλευσεν, “how that, like a child with his father, he worked hard alongside me.” They knew, too, Timothy’s intimate relationship with Paul. The sentence that describes this relationship is awkwardly expressed. Paul begins it as if he originally intended to say “Timothy served me as a child serves a father” (Vincent, 74). But he checks himself before this subservient idea can be expressed, remembering (1) that he too was a servant (δοῦλος), as was the Lord (2:7–8), (2) that Timothy and he were, in fact, co-workers (1:5), and (3) that it was important to commend Timothy to the Philippians as an equal. Though Timothy was no apostle in the sense of the Twelve and Paul (1 Cor 15:1–10), he ultimately writes “he worked like a slave [ἔδούλευσεν] with me [σὺν ἐμοί]” (cf. δοῦλος, “slave,” in Phil 1:1, used of Paul and Timothy and preparing for the Christ-hymn description in 2:7: μορφῆν δούλου λαβών, “taking the form of a slave”).

But Paul says that Timothy worked not only side by side with him but as a son or, more tenderly, as a child (τέκνον, “child,” instead of υἱόν, “son”) works alongside his father. The picture is drawn from the world of Paul’s day where it was expected that a son should learn his trade from his father (Caird: like any Jewish father, Paul would encourage his son, and the rabbis were no
The Philippians knew, therefore, that Timothy was coming to them having learned all that Paul could teach him. He was coming to them to express exactly the apostle’s mind and, more importantly, to exemplify both Paul’s self-sacrifice as a prisoner and Christ’s “model” (insofar as it can be portrayed by those who are his servants and acknowledge him as Lord). The link in Phil 2:20 —no one is ἴσόψυχον, “like him”—has a resonance of 2:6: the heavenly Christ refused the opportunity to be Ἰσα θεῷ, “like God.”

εἰς τὸ ἐὐαγγέλιον, “to advance the cause of the gospel.” Finally, the Philippians knew that Timothy was Paul’s colleague “in common service for a single cause, the gospel” (Martin [1959], 126, who points out how “the gospel” is a leitmotif in this epistle). Thus, if they reflect upon what they know about Timothy, they should welcome him gladly and not question why Paul would be sending him to them. His distinction rests upon a desire to serve by following in the footsteps of his Master (Phil 2:7; cf. Mark 10:45) and his mentor and father figure (1 Cor 4:14–17), Paul.

23 τοῦτον μὲν οὖν ἐλπίζω πέμψαι ὡς ἄν ἀφίδω τὰ περὶ ἐμὲ ἔξαυτῆς, “This one, then, is the person I hope to send to you as soon as I see about my own affairs.” Earlier Paul had said he would send Timothy ταχέως, “soon” (Phil 2:19), but not immediately. Now he returns to explain his reason for this delay: ὡς ἄν ἀφίδω τὰ περὶ ἐμὲ, lit. “whenever I look to the things concerning me.” There is nothing in the vocabulary that Paul uses here, nor in any grammatical construction, to say that Timothy’s proposed delay was caused by a lack of information about the
outcome of Paul's trial or that Timothy was required to wait until something definite could be learned about Paul's fate (JB, and the great majority of interpreters). In fact, the context points in quite a different direction. Paul was sure how his trial would turn out (though Phil 1:22–24 expresses more contingency) and was confident that he would soon travel to Philippi (v 24). Hence, he never would have delayed such an important mission as Timothy's to the Philippians just to have him present in his captivity to hear the final verdict of acquittal. There must, therefore, be some other meaning to his words.

(1) We note that the verb ἀφορᾶν (ἀπό, “away from” + ὅρᾶν, “to look,” are the components; see BDF §14 for its form) has as its primary meaning “to look away from all other things to one thing only,” “to exclude everything else and to concentrate on only one thing” (LSJ, BDAG, MM). It is used but two times in the NT — here and in Heb 12:2, where it has this very meaning: “Look away from all else and concentrate wholly on Jesus.”

(2) The phrase τὰ περὶ ἐμὲ, lit. “the things concerning me,” certainly does not in and of itself mean “my fate” or “how things are going to turn out for me.” Rather, this phrase belongs to a group of concise phrases involving the definite article that Paul is fond of using but that are difficult to translate: τὰ κατ’ ἐμὲ, “this business of mine” (1:12 NEB); τὰ ἑαυτῶν ... τὰ ἑτέρων, “your own interests... the interests of others” (2:4 NIV); τὰ περὶ ὑμῶν, “your welfare” (2:20 RSV); τὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, “the cause of Jesus Christ” (2:21 NEB). In light of these phrases and the variation of meanings they suggest, it is not unreasonable to understand the
phrase τὰ περὶ ἐμέ (v 23) as also within this range of meanings and to translate it “my interests,” “my cause,” or “my welfare.”

In other words, Paul is telling the Philippians that Timothy is presently indispensable to him in prison and that his stay with Paul for the moment is much more important than Timothy’s anticipated mission to Philippi. He does not give reasons for this, but one can conjecture that before the apostle is able to plan his own trip to Philippi (v 24), he must first take care of personal matters—perhaps the gathering of essential data for his final defense, or perhaps, more importantly, the working toward reconciling differences among local Christians that he had been responsible for creating (cf. 1:15–17; maybe 4:1–3). Since Paul was in prison and his own activities were curtailed, he needed Timothy to do his work for him. Hence he writes “When I look to my own affairs, then immediately I will send Timothy on to you.”

The striking thing is that Paul expresses the need for delaying Timothy’s trip in words reminiscent (as we have seen) of those he uses to criticize the Philippians for selfishly looking out for their own interests (cf. v 23 with v 4 in the Greek text). If one should ask why Paul does this, the answer must be either that he does it to underscore his criticism with a touch of irony and ad hominem argument—“I express my legitimate needs in the vocabulary of the selfish, so you can hear how bad it sounds!”—or that he does it to correct misconceptions of his criticism by showing (1) that it is not really wrong to look out for one’s own interests (an unlikely idea, in view of the Christ-hymn presentation in which Christ did not seek his own well-being in the interests of others) and (2) that it is not even wrong to look out for one’s own interests first (the
translation of the JB is incorrect here; but see our discussion of 2:1–4 above). What Paul criticizes, then, is a selfish concern for one's own affairs that excludes any concern for the affairs of others—exactly as the Lord of glory did, and his self-sacrifice in the unique act of incarnation and obedience thereby qualified him as Lord to require obedience to his authority, which shows itself in a surrender of the Philippians' rights, a plague spot according to 2:1–4.

24 πέποιθα δὲ ἐν κυρίῳ ότι καὶ αὐτὸς ταχέως ἔλεύσομαι, “For I am confident in the Lord that I too will be coming to you very soon.” The apostle reaffirms what he had stated earlier in Phil 1:25—his confidence (πέποιθα; see Comment on 1:6) that he would soon come to Philippi, not in proxy but in person (cf. 1 Cor 4:17, 19). He had no sense of imminent death (as seems likely in Phil 1:21–23), nor did he suspect that his hope for immediate release would be disappointed (in spite of 2:17). Nevertheless, as always, his plans for the future were subject to the wishes of his Lord and master, and were made ἐν κυρίῳ, “in the Lord.” Hence he could rest easy without worry (cf. 4:6). The problem of his future was not his to solve, but his Lord’s.

**Explanation**

Since Paul is not himself immediately free to come to Philippi, he decides to send Timothy in his place. For some unexplained reason he feels compelled to justify his decision by elaborately describing the inner and outer qualities of this emissary to people who should already have known him well: Timothy thinks and feels like Paul. Like Paul he genuinely cares for the Philippians, as a son
“genuinely born” through Paul’s ministry (cf. 1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:5). He stands out from all the rest as ready and willing to undertake a long and difficult journey to them to attempt to resolve a serious problem among them. None of the others who might have been free to travel shares Paul’s same sense of urgency or his desire that they drop what they are presently doing in the church where he is a prisoner to take up responsibilities at the church in Philippi. Paul interprets their reluctance to go as a selfish pursuing of their own interests rather than of Christ’s cause. But he judges Timothy’s readiness to go as a confirmation of his tried and proven character. Already he has shown himself to the Philippians as Paul’s co-laborer, having worked with Paul as a son learning his father’s trade. His eagerness to assume the mission to Philippi is proof that he has learned his trade well—that of selfless service to others. Thus he is coming to the Philippians with the blessing of Paul and with apostolic authority.

Paul intends to send Timothy to Philippi soon, but not immediately. He first needs him to handle important personal affairs that Paul cannot take care of. When these matters are cleared up, then Timothy will be on his way immediately. And Paul is confident that he himself will follow soon after. This promise is the one fulfilled in Acts 20:1–6, if Paul wrote from Ephesus. If he wrote from Caesarea or Rome, we have no means of knowing whether the promise was made good.

As we review this paragraph having to do with Timothy and with his relationship to Paul and the Philippians, we are struck by the close bond that united these persons (see Ollrog, Paulus und seine Mitarbeiter). It suggests a network of mutual service, which, for
Paul, became a model of how Christians should relate to one another as partners in the gospel and in suffering. There is a gentle rebuke to any notion of self-interest since the unseen model behind this section is Jesus himself, giving to Paul’s characterization an implicit christological dimension. Timothy serves, then, as a role model to the Philippians in their self-seeking since he set care for the Philippians above all else. The application of all this to ministry in the church is self-evident, and those who claim to be servants of the king who became the suffering, now exalted, Lord may learn from Timothy’s example of “living under Christ's lordship.”
2. About Epaphroditus (2:25–30)

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Translation

25 In the meantime I consider it necessary to send Epaphroditus to you —my brother, my fellow worker, my fellow soldier, and your envoy commissioned by you to take care of my needs. 26 I must do this because he was very homesick for all of you a and greatly distressed because you heard he was sick. 27 Indeed he was sick. He nearly died. b But God took pity on him. And not only on him, but on me as well, so that I might not have to suffer one grief after another. 28 I am sending him, therefore, sooner than expected, in order that when you see him again, you may be glad and I may be relieved of anxiety. 29 Welcome him, then, as [a brother] in the Lord with great gladness. Hold people like him in high esteem. 30 For he nearly died for the cause of Christ c by risking d his life to give me the help that you yourselves were not able to give.

Notes
26.a. Ν * A C D 33 81 et al. add ἰδεῖν, “to see,” here (“he longs to see all of you”). This looks like a reconstruction of the text to make it conform to the formula found in Rom 1:11; 1 Thess 3:6; 2 Tim 1:4.

27.b. The Majority Text has the dative θανάτῳ, “to death,” after παραπλήσιον, “near,” while a few other MSS (B P Ψ 81) have the genitive θανάτου, “of death.” The genitive may be the original reading, if for no other reason than that παραπλήσιον, “near,” is usually followed by the dative and not the genitive. No difference results in translation.


30.d. The TR reads παραβουλευσάμενος, “having had no concern for,” instead of παραβολευσάμενος, “having been exposed to danger/risk.” There is no reason to reject the weighty witness of Ψ 46 Ν A B D et al. and adopt the reading of the TR when παραβολευσάμενος, “having been exposed to danger/risk,” is a good word and makes excellent sense. “The nervous vigour of St. Paul’s style” (Lightfoot, 124) also argues for παραβολευσάμενος, “having been exposed to danger/risk.”
Form/Structure/Setting

This section is entirely devoted to remarks concerning another of Paul's associates. Although, as noted above, one usually expects to find such matters placed at the end of a letter, this is not the case here (nor in 1 Cor 4:17 in the letter body [so Dahl, “Paul and the Church at Corinth”] where Timothy is commended as Paul's delegate [“on a mission,” “I am sending”], as presumably the bearer of 1 Corinthians, just as Epaphroditus is the letter carrier [Gk. γραμματοφόρος ] to Philippi; see Llewelyn, TynBul 46 [1995] 337–56). Paul focuses attention upon Epaphroditus at this place in his letter. He does this not only to inform the Philippians about one of their own but to provide them with still another striking illustration of the self-sacrificing service that is demanded of all Christians and is so markedly the central theme of the letter (Phil 1:28—2:30). Thus it is connected with what has preceded not only by a conjunction (δὲ) but by content.

The Philippians had sent Epaphroditus as their envoy (ἀπόστολος [v 25 ]) to bring their gifts to Paul (cf. 4:18) and perhaps to stay on with him to provide him with whatever continued assistance he might need (v 25). Nothing is known about Epaphroditus beyond what Paul writes about him here—a man deserving of immense praise and respect for the service he gave to the apostle and to the work of Christ. (It is not likely that he should be identified with Epaphras, another of Paul's fellow workers, who came from Colossae [Col 1:7; 4:12; Phlm 23].) Epaphroditus fell ill, nearly died, recovered, and is now being sent to Philippi as the bearer of this letter. On the role and journeys of Epaphroditus, see
Buchanan, EvQ 36 (1964) 157–66, which is scrutinized by Martin (1979), 120–21.

That Paul writes in such a matter-of-fact manner about the journeys of Timothy (Phil 2:19–24) and Epaphroditus to Philippi is for some scholars proof that Paul could not be writing from Caesarea (or Rome). Surely he would not dare send Epaphroditus, a man who had recently been so grievously ill, on such a long and arduous journey. This journey is some 730 land miles one way, plus one or two days at sea across the Adriatic, based on the later journeys of Ignatius from Antioch-on-the-Orontes to Rome. Harrison (Polycarp’s Two Epistles, 113–16) discusses the question of how long it may have taken to travel from Philippi to Rome and back. Based on Ignatius's example, he reckons the one-way trip would be thirty-three days at an average daily speed of twenty-three miles a day with no breaks (113). So he concludes that the more realistic figure is forty-nine days each way. Building on the view that there are no fewer than nine journeys mentioned either in the past or in the future, then the time frame is $2 \times 49 \times 9$ days = 882 days, a grand total impossible to fit into Paul’s stay either in Caesarea ($2 \times 365$ days) or in Rome ($2 \times 365$ days), but just possible for Paul’s Ephesian sojourn of three years ($3 \times 365$ days [Acts 20:31, if this number is reliable]). According to Deissmann (“Zur ephesinischen Gefangenschaft”) the question of distance—what he called “those enormous journeys” (numbered by him as five journeys and communications between Philippi and Rome and required by the internal evidence of the letter itself, with four extra trips envisaged in the future plans of Paul)—is to be reckoned with. He remarked that these nine journeys could not be fitted into the period covered
in Acts 28:30–31, that the adverbs “soon” (Phil 2:19, 24) and “immediately” (2:23) gave the impression that the distance between the place of writing and the city of Philippi was not great, and that such rapid and repeated travel was more likely to be possible at the time of Paul’s imprisonment if the apostle was captive at a place nearer to Philippi than Rome or Caesarea. He named Ephesus as the most likely alternative. His arguments have been largely passed over, though there is a swing in the direction of placing Paul at Ephesus. This is the opinion of Koester (in Bakirtzis and Koester, Philippi, 52–53), who attributes this dating to W. Michaelis in 1925 (yet Deissmann argued his case in 1923). Ephesus may therefore be the place where Paul was in prison and from where he sends his friends.

Such an argument may be held to be weakened, however, by reflecting on (1) the possibility that considerable time had elapsed since Epaphroditus first became ill and that he was now fully recovered, (2) the fact that travel within the Roman Empire at this time was relatively easy and rapid (Bockmuehl, 172), and (3) the impropriety of judging people of the first century in the light of modern expectations of traveling comfort (Houlden). Caesarea, if it is a place from which this letter came, is thus not ruled out by the details concerning Epaphroditus. These considerations about journey times and travel conditions have been addressed in the Introduction, Place and Date of Writing, to which the reader is referred.

Comment
Paul thought it necessary to send Epaphroditus for at least four reasons: (1) Neither he himself nor Timothy was free to travel at this moment (as we may assume from Phil 2:19 and the fact that Timothy is a δοῦλος, “slave,” along with Paul, who was in prison, and Timothy was with him [ 1:1 ]; yet this is only one way to read the situation). Only Epaphroditus was immediately available to make the journey. (2) Epaphroditus was from Philippi and had become quite homesick, perhaps seriously so (ἐπιθυμῶν ἦν, “he was very homesick” [v 26 ]). (3) Epaphroditus had also become gravely ill.
News of this illness had reached Philippi—and Paul heard about it—and caused his friends to worry. The church there was most anxious to know how he was faring (vv 26–27, implying another communication to explain how Paul might have known that the Philippians were anxious about their messenger). (4) As long as Epaphroditus was in Paul’s charge, the apostle’s anxiety over Epaphroditus’s welfare was immense (cf. v 28). Paul’s decision to send Epaphroditus, who had recovered, home at this critical time resolved all these problems. (And in so doing, Paul’s recital of travel plans, both past and in prospect, gives evidence for Deissmann’s earlier point about “enormous journeys” with so much communication back and forth. Let us remind ourselves that this communication was not by e-mail, phone, fax, or even a postal system that in the Empire operated for military matters or government business, but by personal messenger on foot or aboard ship.)

Epaphroditus was a common name in the first century (BDAG, MM). Although it embodies the name of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love, beauty, and fertility—the personification of the sexual instinct—who was worshiped throughout almost all the Greek world, no believer, not even the apostle Paul, demanded that this leader of the church change his pagan idolatrous name to something more “Christian.” The name Epaphroditus, in fact, means “charming,” so there would be a reason to keep it, like Onesimus at Colossae, which was later adopted by the bishop of Antioch (see Ign. Eph. 1:3: Onesimus, “a man of inexpressible love and your bishop”; cf. Eusebius, Hist. eccl. 4.26.13), evidently because it meant “useful” (see Phlm 10–11 for another Onesimus). One
reason for such toleration may have been the awareness that a Christian is not one who merely possesses a Christian name. Rather, a Christian is one who practices the Christian life (as the later Diognetus will illustrate; see H. G. Meecham, The Epistle to Diognetus [Manchester: Manchester UP, 1949]). Epaphroditus was, in this sense, a true Christian, as Paul makes clear in a singularly emphatic way by the five nouns he uses to describe him.

This highly valued person is the person Paul decides to send to Philippi. The fact that he uses the absolute πέμψαι, “to send,” and not πέμψαι, “to send,” modified by πάλιν, “back,” or any other preposition or adverb meaning “to send back” (JB, NIV) may imply that the Philippians had given Epaphroditus to Paul on permanent leave, so to speak, as long as he needed him. As Michael (122) notes, “That Paul should have it in his power to decide that Epaphroditus is to return shows” this to be true—“that the Philippians had placed their messenger at the disposal of the apostle.” (The debate on whether “send” means “send back” is identical with the situation reflected in the note to Philemon. See Martin, Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon, Interpretation [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991] on Phlm 12, and ibid., 135, for the views of S. Winter and J. D. M. Derrett).

τόν ἀδελφόν καὶ συνεργὸν καὶ συστρατιώτην μου, “my brother, my fellow worker, my fellow soldier.” The first descriptive noun is ἀδελφόν, “brother.” This is Paul’s favorite synonym for “a Christian” (H. F. von Soden, TDNT 1:145; E. E. Ellis, NTS 17 [1970–71] 437–52, discusses this cluster of names of Paul’s associates; cf. idem, DPL, 183–89; Ollrog, Paulus und seine Mitarbeiter). By using
it, the apostle testifies that Epaphroditus is indeed one with him in the faith, a fellow member of the family of God and a person deep in his affections (see Comment on 1:12).

The second noun, συνεργόν, “fellow worker,” is a distinctly Pauline word. Paul uses it twelve of the thirteen times it appears in the NT. He does so primarily to describe associates who work with him in his effort to get the gospel to those places where Christ’s name has never been mentioned (G. Bertram, TDNT 7:871–76). Used here of Epaphroditus, it implies thus that he was not previously unknown to Paul (Caird; cf. Phil 4:18). Perhaps he was associated with him in the founding of the church at Philippi, or more likely—since Acts 16 is silent—he was a later convert. His name is Roman, but this is disputed (Oakes, Philippians, 63–64, yet his suspicions seem ill founded).

The third noun, συστρατιώτην, “fellow soldier,” implies this same idea of extended association. Only now the focus is on the conflicts they faced together, either at Philippi in earlier days or more recently in prison. συστρατιώτης, “fellow soldier,” is a military term, used in general of those who fight side by side and used specifically here by Paul of Epaphroditus and himself as those who fought together against the adversaries of the gospel (Phil 1:28–30 ; cf. Rom 16:3, 9 ; Phlm 2 ; cf. 2 Tim 2:3) or against all the powers of the enemy of God and Christ (cf. Eph 6:10–17 ; but see Lohmeyer and O. Bauernfeind, TDNT 7:710–11). This word is a reminder that the Christian shares not only in the work of the gospel but also in consequent suffering, a theme that pervades the letter to those in a hostile environment (Phil 2:15).
These three nouns are bound together grammatically with a single definite article (τόν) heading up the list and the personal pronoun μου, “my,” closing it: “My brother, [my] fellow worker, [my] fellow soldier.” So arranged, they serve to show the intensity of feeling that Paul had for this otherwise unknown person. His sterling character, his devotion to Paul, and his dedication to the cause of Christ unfold still further in the words that follow.

ὑμῶν δὲ ἀπόστολον καὶ λειτουργὸν τῆς χρείας μου, “and your envoy commissioned by you to take care of my needs.” The next set of nouns describing Epaphroditus begins (in the Greek text) with the personal pronoun ὑμῶν, “your,” immediately adjacent to μου, “my,” in an emphatic position that sharply contrasts what Epaphroditus was to Paul with what he was to the Philippians. He is ὑμῶν ... ἀπόστολον, “your envoy.” The word ἀπόστολος, “apostle,” “envoy,” is the very word Paul regularly uses to assert his apostolic authority (e.g., Rom 1:1 ; 1 Cor 1:1 ; 9:1–2 ; 2 Cor 1:1 ; 2:12) or to describe an elite group of authoritative persons within the church, probably the Twelve, but with Paul himself included, on his admission (1 Cor 9:5 ; 12:28–29 ; 2 Cor 11:5 ; 2 Cor 11:13 shows there were others who claimed the title, falsely in Paul’s eyes). That Paul now employs it of Epaphroditus is not adequately explained simply by saying that he uses it in the “loose sense” (Collange) of “messenger” (cf. 2 Cor 8:23 ; K. H. Rengstorf, TDNT 1:420–24). More likely, Paul, in harmony with his relationship with the Philippians, carefully chooses this word to stress again that relationships within the church must be measured not in terms of superiority or inferiority but in terms of equality and service, just as Timothy and he share the title “servant”/“slave” (Phil 1:1), patterned
on the servanthood of Jesus (2:7). Epaphroditus is equally an “apostle” with Paul, in that both were men commissioned and sent out with full authority to perform specific tasks of service. Yet Paul viewed his apostleship as unique (1 Cor 15:8: “last of all”—he is the eschatological apostle; and in a later endorsement it will be said that “the church is built on the foundation of [laid by?] the apostles” [Eph 2:20]; see too Eph 3:5; cf. Rev 21:14), so the term ἀπόστολος may be taken in a more general sense of “representative,” corresponding to the Heb. šālîaḥ (cf. Ellis, Prophecy and Hermeneutic, 13 n. 43).

The final noun describing Epaphroditus is λειτουργόν, “minister,” one selected and sent by the Philippians to minister to Paul’s needs. λειτουργός originally referred to public servants of all kinds, even to those who held public office at their own expense. The LXX, however, employed the word group to which λειτουργός belongs to describe the priesthood and the sacrificial system (cf. H. Strathmann, TDNT 4:219–22). Thus when Paul refers to Epaphroditus as λειτουργός, “minister,” he may do so because he views Epaphroditus’s mission to meet his material needs as a religious act, a priestly function, and Epaphroditus himself as performing the sacred duties of a priest. Support for this suggestion comes from observing that Paul calls the gifts Epaphroditus brought him a θυσία, “sacrifice” (Phil 4:18; see Comment later), and from reflecting on the fact that for Paul any practical aid given to those who strive to advance the gospel is worship that is acceptable to God (Rom 12:1–2; Collange). (Yet the language of priestly service is very rare in Paul, and as Phil 4:18
shows, he draws out the inner, spiritual significance of such idioms. See Rom 15:16 for another instance of Paul’s “spiritualizing” of priestly language.)

26 ἐπειδὴ ἐπιποθῶν ἐν πάντας ύμάς καὶ ἀδημονῶν, διότι ἠκούσατε ὅτι ἠσθένησεν, “I must do this because he was very homesick for all of you and greatly distressed because you heard he was sick.” Two of the reasons for Paul’s decision to send Epaphroditus to Philippi are discussed in this verse and in very strong words: ἐπιποθῶν ἐν, “he was very homesick,” and ἀδημονῶν [ ἐν ], “[he was] greatly distressed.” The first of these words, ἐπιποθεῖν, denotes a deep “yearning” or “longing” (cf. Phil 1:8). When the object of this yearning is one’s family or friends, as here, it may describe the painful experience of homesickness (Plummer, Martin [1959], Loh and Nida). The other of these words, ἀδημονεῖν, “greatly distressed,” is the same word used of Jesus’ anguish in Gethsemane (Mark 14:33). It “describes the confused, restless, half-distracted state which is produced by physical derangement or mental distress” (Lightfoot, 123). This distress seems to have been caused by Epaphroditus’s anxiety for the Philippians’ anxiety for him upon their learning that he was sick (v 26b). For some interpreters this is strange behavior for a grown man—that he should be worried about their worry for him (Barth). But a second-century papyrus letter, written by a soldier to his mother, who had somehow learned that he was sick (P.Oxy. 12.1481.4, cited in MM, 382, s.v. λυπέω), shows that this is quite a natural reaction, and it is plainly understandable in any age. This soldier’s words parallel the idea expressed in this verse: “So do not
grieve about me. I was much grieved to hear that you had heard about me, for I was not seriously ill.”

Like Epaphroditus, this soldier’s pain was increased by the knowledge of the pain that news of his illness had caused one who loved him (Moffatt, JTS o.s. 18 [1917] 311–12). Furthermore, both these verbs (ἐπιποθῶν ἦν, “he was very homesick”/ ἀδημονῶν [ ἦν ], “[he was] greatly distressed”) are periphrastic. This kind of construction gives voice to a persistent continuance in something—in this case, in homesickness and in mental distress. Hence, what Epaphroditus was experiencing was not an easily satisfied yearning, on the one hand, or a cavalierly dismissed state of the mind, on the other. Apparently only a trip home could relieve these deep-seated emotional tensions.

27 καὶ γὰρ ἡσθένησεν παραπλήσιον θανάτῳ, “Indeed he was sick. He nearly died.” Paul now confirms in writing what the Philippians had heard by rumor: Epaphroditus had indeed (καὶ γάρ) been sick, in fact, very sick, so sick that he nearly died (παραπλήσιον θανάτῳ, lit. “a near neighbor to death,” and again in v 30 : μέχρι θανάτου ἰγγισεν, “he nearly died”). But strangely Paul says nothing about when Epaphroditus was stricken, whether on the journey to visit Paul with the gifts (cf. Mackay, NTS 7 [1960–61] 161–70) or after his arrival; nor does he say anything about the nature of his illness or the cause of it. Was it the result of a fever he contracted en route? Was it due to overexertion on his part in giving assistance to Paul and in preaching the gospel? Was it the consequence of foolhardiness (Michael)? No one can say for certain. But whatever it was, Paul has no desire to mention it
explicitly. He even goes out of his way, it seems, to cast it in the best light possible. All of this suggests that Epaphroditus’s illness may have been such as to arouse criticism in the minds of the Philippian Christians. Perhaps it was an emotional instability that made him unsuitable for the work for which he was commissioned, a despondency that brought him to death’s door, hinted at in the reference to his homesickness and distraught anxiety for all those at Philippi, although this thought of depression leading to suicidal tendencies or a psychosomatic condition that brought him near death may seem strained. Whatever it was, Paul is nevertheless generously ready to say that Epaphroditus had subjected himself to this condition for the work of Christ and that therefore he is worthy of esteem and not disdain.

ἀλλὰ ὁ θεὸς ἠλέησεν αὐτόν, οὔκ αὐτὸν δὲ μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐμέ, ἵνα μὴ λύπην ἐπὶ λύπην σχῶ, “But God took pity on him. And not only on him, but on me as well, so that I might not have to suffer one grief after another.” Paul says nothing about what led to Epaphroditus’s restoration to health. Apparently, however, Paul himself could not command or even pray for his friend’s recovery (H. C. G. Moule), no more than in the tradition of 2 Tim 4:20, where the apostle has to leave Trophimus sick at Miletus, using the same Greek verb (ἀσθενεῖν, “to be sick”). Collange (121) observes (cf. Hendricksen):

He mentions neither faith nor prayer nor the laying on of hands any more than he does the effect of medicines or of a doctor. It goes without saying that these various procedures are more or less taken for granted, yet what concerns the apostle is not the healing
itself but its significance. He sees it as a sovereign, merciful act of God himself.

Paul’s words are ὁ θεὸς ἠλέησεν αὐτὸν, “God took pity on him,” “God showed him mercy.” In other words, Paul views Epaphroditus’s recovery as the direct merciful intervention of God, which not only spared a devoted servant for the work of the gospel but also spared Paul himself the pain of bereavement added to that of suffering with a much loved friend during his illness. God thus delivered Paul from λύπην ἐπὶ λύπην, “one grief after another.” As a servant of Christ, Paul was prepared to accept the pain of the death of a friend, recognizing that believers, too, can become ill and even die (2 Kgs 13:14 ; 20:1 ; John 11:1 ; Acts 9:37 ; 2 Cor 12:7–9 ; Gal 4:13 ; 1 Tim 5:23 ; 2 Tim 4:20 ; and, of course, the Lord himself was not spared [ Rom 8:32 ]). But as a normal person he was quite moved by the possibility of losing Epaphroditus to death, and he expresses his anxiety (Phil 2:28) over his colleague’s illness. Paul’s naturalness and self-revealing candor here are refreshing, and they serve to temper his words in Phil 1:23. In the final analysis, even for Paul death is an enemy (cf. 1 Cor 15:26) and sickness and death are bearers of pain and grief that are not at all anticipated or endured with joy (contrast Jas 1:2 ; Heb 12:7 : non-Pauline admonitions within the pluriform literature of the NT).

28 σπουδαιοτέρως οὖν ἔπεμψα αὐτὸν, “I am sending him, therefore, sooner than expected.” Because of this illness, then (ἂν), Paul is sending (ἔπεμψα, “I am sending”; again the “epistolary” aorist is used here) Epaphroditus home to Philippi
sooner (σπουδαιοτέρως) than either he or the Philippians had expected. σπουδαιοτέρως is a comparative adverb from σπουδαῖος, which, although through general usage comes to mean “earnest,” “serious,” has as its root idea “haste” (LSJ). σπουδαιοτέρως, therefore, while often translated “more carefully,” “more eagerly,” and so on, may in context be translated according to its fundamental concept: “more hastily” (Meyer, von Soden, Vincent, Michael, Scott). If so, it tends to confirm the supposition that the Philippians had sent Epaphroditus not only with their material gifts to Paul but as their additional gift to him as a permanent helper in his prison experience (and, if Paul is in Ephesus, to aid in the dissemination of the gospel from that base [Acts 19:10]; see Comment above on v 25). Now, however, to the disappointment of all involved and contrary to previous expectations Epaphroditus must go home to Philippi immediately. Alternatively, no such element of comparison may be intended in σπουδαιοτέρως, and Paul’s words may mean no more than “rather hastily, eagerly.” The implicit thought then would be that Paul wished to deflect criticism from Epaphroditus: “I am sending him, therefore, eagerly.”

ἵνα ἴδόντες αὐτὸν πάλιν χαρῆτε κἀγὼ ἀλυπότερος ὃ, “in order that when you see him again, you may be glad and I may be relieved of anxiety.” The intended result of this change of plans is twofold: (1) that upon seeing Epaphroditus again (taking πάλιν, “again,” with ἴδόντες, “when you see,” and not with χαρῆτε, “you may be glad”) the Philippians might be glad (ἵνα ... χαρῆτε, “in order that... you may be glad”) that he is alive and well rather than be angry with him that he apparently failed in his mission or
overstayed his time away, especially since he was carrying money from the Philippians, and (2) that he, Paul, might have less anxiety (Ἰνα ... ἀλυπότερος ὦ, “in order that... I may be relieved of anxiety”) than he would have if Epaphroditus were to stay on in his company or had died. This reducing of anxiety could be the result either of Paul realizing that he would no longer be responsible for Epaphroditus’s well-being, a thing that must have weighed heavily on his mind during the days of illness, or of his realizing that he would no longer need to be concerned about the state of the Philippian church since his valued and trusted friend would be there on his return to rally Christians and resolve their differences (Beare). But this observation may be reading a lot into Paul’s cryptic remarks.

29 προσδέχεσθε οὖν αὐτόν ἐν κυρίῳ μετὰ πάσης χαρᾶς καὶ τοὺς τοιούτους ἐντίμους ἔχετε, “Welcome him, then, as [a brother] in the Lord with great gladness. Hold people like him in high esteem.” The last two verses (vv 29–30) combine command and explanation in such a way as to indicate strongly that Paul anticipated problems at Philippi over Epaphroditus’s unexpected return or his delay in returning. Hence, he wards off such criticism with apostolic authority and orders the Philippians to welcome (προσδέχεσθε) Epaphroditus ἐν κυρίῳ, “in the Lord.” This is to say, Paul bids them to receive Epaphroditus “in the spirit of the Lord” exhibited in the Christ-hymn (Phil 2:6–11 ; cf. Collange; as we have seen, there is a link between Christ’s obedience “up to the point of death” [ 2:8 ] and Epaphroditus’s exposure to danger “up to the point of death,” with the obvious difference that the latter did not die), or as the Lord himself welcomes him, or as one
Christian should welcome any other Christian (cf. Rom 15:7; 16:2). Furthermore, he challenges them to welcome him μετὰ πάσης χαρᾶς, “with all joy,” that is, “wholeheartedly,” “without ill humor,” or “too facile reproaches” (Barth), and to do it with respect. Such people as Epaphroditus must be held in high esteem (ἐντίμους ἔχετε), especially because of what they have done.

30 ὅτι διὰ τὸ ἔργον Χριστοῦ μέχρι θανάτου ἠγγίσεν παραβολευσάμενος τῇ ψυχῇ, “For he nearly died for the cause of Christ by risking his life.” In this instance Epaphroditus nearly lost his life because of the important work he did in behalf of the Philippian Christians. He left home, undertook a long and difficult journey, subjected himself to physical and emotional stresses of the severest kind, and exposed himself to possible persecution—and he did all this (1) because of his desire to serve Christ (διὰ τὸ ἔργον Χριστοῦ, “for the cause of Christ”) and (2) because of his determination to fulfill the mission of his church, chiefly in bringing the Philippians’ gifts.

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 [παραβολευσάμενος τῇ ψυχῇ] to give me the help you were not able to give me yourselves” (cf. NEB). The vigor of Paul’s vocabulary here could not but totally overcome any remaining prejudice the Philippians may have had against Epaphroditus. The participle παραβολευσάμενος, translated here
“staked,” is especially powerful, and in all likelihood Paul coined it. No lexicon cites it earlier than Phil 2:30. It seems, however, to have been created from the verb παραβάλλεσθαι, “to throw down a stake,” “to make a venture,” or from the noun παράβολος, “gambling,” “rash,” “reckless,” or from παραβολάνοι, “persons who risk their lives to nurse those sick with the plague” (LSJ, Lightfoot). Deissmann notes that this hitherto unknown word—in fact the very participial form Paul uses here—has been discovered in an ancient (second century A.D.) inscription found at Olbia on the Black Sea, meaning “to daringly expose oneself to danger” (Light from the Ancient East, 84–85, 88; cf. de Jonge, NovT 17 [1975] 297–302, who calls attention to Scaliger’s conjecture, now confirmed). 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. He did not “save” his life but rather hazarded it to do for Paul and for the cause of Christ what other Philippian Christians did not or could not do. Such a word as παραβολεύεσθαι, then, “brings its own challenge and rebuke to an easy-going Christianity which makes no stern demands, and calls for no limits of self-denying, self-effacing sacrifice” (Martin [1959], 134).

But in coining this gambling term Paul may have been influenced by Epaphroditus’s name. Lees (ExpTim 37 [1925] 46) has pointed out that Aphrodite (or Venus) was the goddess of gamblers, and whenever a Greek made the highest cast, he cried out Ἐπαφρόδιτος, “favorite of Aphrodite (Venus),” hoping by this “invocation” to be blessed with gambler’s luck in the throw of the dice because the divine hand was behind it (cf. Plutarch, Sulla 34;
see LSJ). This then may be the meaning behind Epaphroditus’s name. If so, Lees (ExpTim 37 [1925] 46) suggests that Paul may have written παραβολευσάμενος “with a smile as he did when he played on the name Onesimus in his letter to Philemon. He says Epaphroditus gambled with his life, but won because God was there.”

ἵνα ἀναπληρώσῃ τὸ ύμων ὑστέρημα τῆς πρὸς με λειτουργίας, “to give me the help that you yourselves were not able to give.” The purpose behind Epaphroditus’s gambling with his life is stated in the clause introduced by ἵνα, “in order that,” “to.” It is a difficult clause to translate into English. Literally it reads “in order that he may fulfill your lack of service to me.” But such a literal translation leaves one with a rather bad impression of the Philippians. There is nothing in the Greek, however, to indicate that Paul was annoyed with those at Philippi or was censuring them for failing to do for him what they could and should have done. Rather, the opposite is the case (cf. RSV, NEB, GNB, NIV). Paul gratefully recognizes that they had done all they could. Thus in praising Epaphroditus he praises them; for he sees in Epaphroditus the whole Philippian congregation engaged in a sacred ministration (λειτουργία) to meet his needs (cf. 1 Cor 16:17). Epaphroditus was their envoy to him, their way of telling him that they cared enough to send their very best (cf. Phil 2:25). As Vincent (78) concludes, “He thus, in this single sentence, recognized the devotion of Epaphroditus and the good-will of the Philippians, and expresses the pleasure which he himself would have had in their personal presence and ministry” (cf. also Michael, Beare, Gnilka; Martin [1976]). (The last phrase [in Phil 2:30 ], rendered “the help that you
yourselves were not able to give,” may have something to say about the place of Paul’s imprisonment and the dating of the letter. If Paul were writing from Rome and even Caesarea, it is strange that he would remind the Philippians of their inability to send funds. See Introduction, Place and Date of Writing.)

**Explanation**

Neither Paul nor Timothy is free to set off immediately for Philippi to help bring about harmony among the Christians there and to carry news of the apostle’s conditions. Paul’s solution to the problem is to let Epaphroditus go in their place. In many respects this is a happy solution: (1) Epaphroditus is from Philippi. (2) He is valued and trusted both by the Philippians and Paul (v 25). (3) Paul thus can count on him to plead for the unity Paul desired, and the Philippians will listen to him as a spokesperson whom they respect. (4) Epaphroditus is homesick and longs to be with his Philippian friends once again. (5) The Philippians have heard of Epaphroditus’s near-fatal illness, and they anxiously await news of his condition. For Paul to send him home at this time, therefore, answers Epaphroditus’s need, the Philippians’ questions about his health, and Paul’s own desire for an authoritative spokesperson on his behalf in a division-troubled church.

And yet this decision to send Epaphroditus to Philippi sooner than expected carries its own peculiar risks. Apparently the Philippian church had commissioned Epaphroditus to carry their gift to Paul and to stay on with him as a continuing friend. To be sent home, as it were, would very likely raise many questions: Why is he here? Why did he become sick? Could he not stand the strain?
Was he unable to get along with the apostle? Or had he overstayed his time away, assuming he came specifically to carry the money gifts? And, in a further speculation, perhaps he had stayed away so long that the Philippians thought he had run off with the money. For these reasons, and perhaps others, such as the fear that Epaphroditus may have gone missing with the gift, Paul purposely says nothing about the nature of Epaphroditus’s illness. At the same time he goes out of his way to extol him with the highest praise. It is clear, therefore, that Paul wants no misunderstanding at Philippi about this good man. He wants no underrating of his worth, no questioning of his character, no erosion of his authority, and no criticism that he may have been away too long. Epaphroditus is a man worthy of the greatest esteem, deserving to be thrust into leadership positions at Philippi, not slighted or treated with disdain. After all, had he not nearly died doing what the Philippians themselves could not do?

Questions of sickness (for the work of Christ, it should be noted, not sickness in general, “the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,” common to all people) and recovery are prominent here and pose issues at several levels in the later church (see Bloomquist, Function of Suffering, 18–34, for patristic evidence of martyrdoms and Christian suffering from Ignatius to the Reformers and Catholic writers and to the modern period)—indeed as part of the human condition. Why do people intent on doing good have to suffer? And what is the Christian response? The answer here in Phil 2:25–30, as at 1:28–30, is in theodicy, a bid to account for undeserved suffering in a world of pain. Epaphroditus fell ill; Paul was grieved and anxious; the Philippians shared this natural
reaction. How does the passage help us to account for the ills of life for the godly and to see God’s hand at work? There is no mention of prayer here, though Paul will devote a later section to prayer (4:6). There is no hint of a healing ministry, yet Paul both healed the sick (e.g., Acts 28:7–10, as Luke delights to show, as part of his purpose to paint the Roman authorities in a good light) and also left people sick, like Trophimus (2 Tim 4:20, a reliable Pauline reminiscence?). There is no certain way to a cure. All that we may glean, faced with the mystery of suffering, is that God allowed it and that he is merciful (Phil 2:27). Beyond that, in this pericope, we cannot go.
III. Digression: Warning against False Teachings with Paul’s Experience and Life as a Model to Follow (3:1–21)
A. Warning against Circumcision and Pride in Human Achievements (3:1–3)

Bibliography


Translation

Well then, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord! To keep writing this same command is never wearisome to me, and for you it is a safe course to follow. Observe those dogs! Observe those evildoers! Observe those mutilators! I call them “mutilators”; for we are the circumcision—we who worship God by his Spirit, and who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in ourselves.

Notes

1.a. A few minor MSS add the definite article τὸ, “the,” before ἄσφαλές, “safe course to follow.”

3.b. Ἐ 2 D* P Ψ and a few other MSS read θεῷ, “God” (dative), instead of θεοῖ, “of God” (genitive). This reading should be rejected because (1) it is poorly attested and (2) it is an
obvious attempt to ease an apparent difficulty: λατρεύειν, “to worship,” takes the dative, not the genitive, as its object. The only dative in the sentence is πνεύματι [ θεοῦ ], “Spirit [of God].” To avoid the possibility of anyone thinking that Paul meant to say “We worship the Spirit of God,” θεοῦ, “of God,” was changed to θεῷ, “God,” and πνεύματι, “spirit,” then could only be construed as instrument (“by [his] Spirit”), not as object. P 46 has neither θεοῦ, “of God,” nor θεῷ, “God.” Neither word is necessary; for in context λατρεύειν, “to worship,” of necessity means “to worship God.”

Form/Structure/Setting

This section, along with the rest of chap. 3, continues the body of the letter. Admittedly it is not always easy to outline the flow of Paul’s thought or adequately to account for the swift changes of subjects that occur without warning. But it is not necessary to resort to a theory of multiple letters in order to explain these phenomena (see Introduction, Integrity of Philippians; Mackay, NTS 7 [1961] 161–63; Pollard, NTS 13 [1966] 57–59; Reed, Discourse Analysis, 228–65). In an informal letter like Philippians, written from prison at a distance from one’s friends, without full knowledge of the problems they faced, with emotions running high, one can expect to find just such violent breaks in structure and thought as those that are present here. Paul’s style “corresponds not with the desire to express a homogeneous conception, but with the requirement proper to private speech” (Dibelius, Fresh Approach, 166–67). Thus it should not be surprising to discover in these verses a radical and rapid shift in Paul’s tone from that of joy and
affection for the Philippian Christians (v 1) to that of violent hostility against those who would undermine his gospel and threaten the Christian standing of his friends. Nor is this swift alteration of the apostle’s mood unique to this section. It is found in another of his letters (cf. Gal 3:1 ; 4:21) and elsewhere in Philippians (1:16–17). The best discussion of the abrupt and unexpected shift in the change of “tone and voice” (Bonnard’s phrase [60]) at Phil 3:1–2 is by Reed, who notes that 3:1 lies “at the centre of the debate over the literary integrity of Paul’s letter to the Philippians” (Discourse Analysis, 239). Reed finds the hesitation formula to be a mark of Paul’s friendship, not irritation (251). The links connecting Phil 2:29 to 3:1–2 are suggestively drawn by Reed (264). This would moderate the tone of 3:2 and explain the transition from Paul’s commendation of his colleagues to his polemic and self-evaluation in chap. 3. This is an ingenious proposal and would buttress the case for the letter’s unity.

That Paul’s emotions are running high can be seen not only in the vivid and even abusive language he uses to describe his opponents (“dogs,” “evildoers,” “mutilators”), but also in the large number of figures of speech that appear in so brief a paragraph: (1) anaphora, the repetition of the same word (βλέπετε, “observe”) at the beginning of three successive clauses; (2) paronomasia, the clever play on words that are similar in sound (κατατομή, “mutilation”/ περιτομή, “circumcision”) but set in opposition to each other so as to provide heightened antithetical force; (3) polysyndeton, the repetition of the same conjunction (καί, “and”) in close succession; (4) alliteration in κ (κύνας, “dogs,” κακούς, “evil[doers],” κατατομήν, “mutilation”); (5) short disjointed cola,
sentences of approximately the same length; and (6) chiasm, where
the noun phrases alternate positions in a crisscross fashion with
the participles—all employed for rhetorical effect. Thus Paul, who
prefers not to use the clever techniques of the sophists (cf. 1 Cor
2), is nevertheless quite able to do so. In fact, it appears that his
passionate reaction to those who wish to lead the Philippians
astray breaks down whatever rhetorical restrictions he might
normally place upon himself and allows him to give verbal vent to
his feelings. But unfortunately translators either cannot preserve or
are unwilling to express these figures in translation. As a
consequence, the vigor of the apostle’s emotions is moderated so
that its full force escapes the English reader.

The opponents of the gospel of grace that Paul preached appear
to be visitors from outside who were threatening to undo the work
of the apostle at Philippi. Apparently they required that men be
circumcised before they could acceptably worship God and be
regarded as part of the “true Israel,” the covenant people whose
identity marker was circumcision. According to Paul their religion
was a ritual of externals that fostered pride in their own
achievements instead of a boasting in Christ Jesus and that
encouraged a confidence in themselves (their σάρξ, “flesh,” i.e.,
human pride) instead of a reliance upon the Spirit. Who were
these opponents? It is not possible to say with certainty, but
everything known about them points to the assumption that they
were Jewish—evangelistically oriented Jews, whether non-Christian or
Christian, who had their own missionaries (cf. Matt 23:15; but
more likely we should find parallel references in the Galatian
teachers and in 2 Cor 10–13) and were insisting on physical signs
of initiation, priding themselves on their privileges of pedigree (Phil 3:5–6) and proclaiming a message of righteousness and perfection that was attainable now simply by submitting to circumcision and complying with certain food laws (see Introduction, Paul’s Opponents and the False Teachers at Philippi). Their identity as Gentiles, which is sometimes maintained (see Gunther, St Paul’s Opponents; Grayston, ExpTim 97 [1986] 170–72), is far less likely given the Jewishness of the debate Paul conducts.

Comment

1 τὸ λοιπόν, ἀδελφοί μου, χαίρετε ἐν κυρίῳ, “Well then, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord!” Although most translators render τὸ λοιπόν, “well then,” as “finally” or “in conclusion” (KJV, RSV, GNB, JB, NIV) and the phrase may on a rare occasion be used to signal the end of a letter (cf. 2 Cor 13:11), the words also serve equally well to mark a transition to a new topic (cf. 1 Thess 4:1; 2 Thess 3:1). Since the integrity of Philippians is assumed here (see Introduction, Integrity of Philippians) and there is no doubt that Paul is introducing new subject matter, it is best, therefore, to translate τὸ λοιπόν as “and now” (GOODSPEED, KNOX), “furthermore” (Houlden), or “well then” (MOFFATT; see Moule, Idiom-Book, 161–62).

χαίρετε, which would be wrongly translated here as “good-bye” (GOODSPEED) or “farewell” (NEB), is Paul’s special imperative, “rejoice!” which runs like a friendly refrain throughout his letter to the Philippians (Phil 2:18; 3:1; 4:4; cf. also 1:18; 2:17, 28; 4:10, with some sixteen allusions to joy, gladness, and cognates). The preference for “rejoice” is now well accepted (Schenk, 242, but
seeing it as a sign of the letter’s closure; cf. Reed, Discourse Analysis, 241–42). Here, however, for the first time Paul adds to this verb χαίρετε, “rejoice,” the phrase ἐν κυρίῳ, “in the Lord,” and by doing so indicates both the true basis of Christian joy and the sphere in which it thrives (see Comment on 1:4).

τὰ αὐτὰ γράφειν ὑμῖν ἐμοὶ μὲν οὐκ ὁκνηρόν, ὑμῖν δὲ ἀσφαλές, “To keep writing this same command is never wearisome [or, a hesitation] to me, and for you it is a safe course to follow.” But to make certain the Philippians understand that he does not write this word χαίρετε, “rejoice,” with unthinking repetitiveness, Paul stops briefly to comment on what he is doing. He tells them in an aside that his persistence in this matter is no onerous chore that wearies him (ὁκνηρόν, “wearisome [or, a hesitation]”), but a happy task. Indeed, it is a mark of friendship, as we have seen. For he sees his repeated appeals to joy (τὰ αὐτὰ, “this same [command]”) as a means of guaranteeing their safety (ἀσφαλές, “safe course to follow”), a safeguard to their souls (PHILLIPS). That is to say, Paul believes that if only the Philippian Christians will obey his call to rejoice, they will discover that this positive Christian attitude will save them from the ills that plague their church—murmurings, dissensions, empty conceit, and so on. For “joy of any kind is a safeguard against the utilitarian attitude which judges people and things wholly by the use that can be made of them; and Christian joy, the exaltation of spirit that flows from acceptance of the free gifts of God’s grace, is the best protection” of all against such a negative and divisive outlook upon life (Caird, 132; see also Ellicott; Alford; Dibelius; Lohmeyer; MOFFATT). But, in
opposition to this explanation, other interpreters (cf. Jones; Barth; J. J. Müller; Martin [1959]; Furnish, NTS 10 [1962–63] 80–83; Collange) understand v 1b either as an introduction to what is to follow or as a reference to something outside this particular letter, i.e., to warnings given orally by Paul or written to the Philippians in previous letters now lost. In reality, v 1b is quite enigmatic, and one cannot be absolutely certain about its meaning. Bockmuehl (181) notes that the interpretation that sees the “safeguard” as directed to disunity and selfishness is open to doubt. Two pointers in the opposite direction are given: (1) Paul is here not concerned with congregational problems, last alluded to in Phil 2:14, and (2) the antidote to selfishness is not the call to rejoice but the call to live “in Christ” (2:1–5).

2 βλέπετε τούς κύνας, βλέπετε τούς κακούς ἐργάτας, βλέπετε τὴν κατατομήν, “Observe those dogs! Observe those evildoers! Observe those mutilators!” Three times over in quick succession Paul now uses the imperative βλέπετε, “observe,” followed by the accusative case—noun phrases, each with the definite article and each beginning with a κ sound: τούς κύνας, “those dogs,” τούς κακούς ἐργάτας, “those evildoers,” τὴν κατατομήν, “those mutilators.” Thus Paul gives rhetorical expression to the very deep concern he has about the seriousness of the problem that faces his friends. (Every effort should be made clearly to articulate this concern in translation, preserving the form in which it comes as much as it is possible to do so.)

βλέπετε here is traditionally translated “beware of,” “be on your guard against.” But for it to have this meaning it should be
followed by an objective clause introduced by μὴ, “lest” (Matt 8:4; 18:10; Mark 1:44; Heb 3:12; BDF §§364 [2]; 369 [2]), or by the preposition ἀπό, “of,” “from” (καὶ σὺ βλέπε σατὸν ἀπὸ τῶν Ἰουδαίων, “you too beware of the Jews”—from a letter dated A.D. 41; see Hunt and Edgar, Select Papyri, 1:298). A more accurate translation, therefore, notwithstanding the threefold repetition of βλέπετε, and one more in harmony with Greek usage is “consider,” “take proper notice of,” “pay attention to,” or “learn your lesson from” (cf. 1 Cor 1:26; 10:18; 2 Cor 10:7; Col 4:17; see Kilpatrick, "ΒΛΕΠΕΤΕ," 146–48; but see also the critical review in Reed, Discourse Analysis, 244–46). Thus Paul is not so much warning the Philippians to be on guard against their opponents as he is asking them to pay careful attention to them, to study them, so as to understand them and avoid adopting their destructive beliefs and practices (Caird). Yet the tenor of the warning suggests that the traditional rendering “look out for” is also not far from the mark (Fee [1995], 203 n. 36).

The Jews were in the habit of referring contemptuously to Gentiles as κύνας, “dogs”—unclean creatures with whom they would not associate if such association could be avoided (cf. Matt 15:21–28; O. Michel, TDNT 3:1101–04; Str-B 1:724–25; 3:621–22). Paul now hurls this term of contempt back “on the heads of its authors” (Caird, 133; cf. Barth, Dibelius, Collange); for to Paul the Jews who promoted their ethnic identity were the real pariahs that defile the holy community, the Christian church, with their erroneous teaching (Jewett, NovT 12 [1970] 386). Less likely is Grayston’s view (ExpTim 97 [1986] 170–72) that the “dogs” are
Gentile opponents since this identification does not account for Paul's recital of Jewish privileges in Phil 3:3–6.

The Jewish opponents prided themselves on keeping the law. Their sense of superiority, therefore, was due in large part to the fact that they performed accurately the works (ἔργα) demanded by God's law (cf. Rom 3:20). They thus viewed themselves as good workers (καλοὶ ἔργαται), noble observers of the law in the sense of honoring the boundary markers of Judaism, i.e., Sabbath, kosher diet, and, above all, circumcision (cf. Dunn, Theology of Paul, 354–59). This would explain the following reference to the κατατομῆ, “mutilation”/ περιτομή, “circumcision” contrast. But instead Paul calls them κακοὺς ἔργατας, “evildoers,” “not because they do what is morally wrong, nor because they act out of malice, but... because their reliance on ‘works’ is in the end harmful both to themselves and to others” (Caird, 133). It is harmful in that such reliance is ultimately self-reliance and tends to obscure the need for God, who alone is the source of true life and goodness. Like the Christian missionary, a worker (ἔργάτης) sent to harvest the grain (Matt 9:38), these Jewish opponents, too, were ardent propagandists, sent out to preach a gospel that in Paul's understanding was no gospel (cf. Gal 1:6–9). The effects of their efforts could only be disastrous, endangering the relationship of the Christian with Christ and with God (Beare, 104), undermining the very foundation of Paul's message, namely, that no one is justified in the eyes of God by the works of the law, but one is justified only by faith in Christ. Hence, they are nothing less than κακοὺς ἔργατας, “evildoers.”
The Jews originally understood circumcision as a symbol of the covenant relationship that existed between themselves and God, going back to Gen 17. In time, however, many lost sight of its symbolic nature and made it a thing of value in itself as an external rite indispensable for establishing a correct standing before God and a “boasting” in ethnic privilege. The nub of Paul’s argument here, says Bockmuehl (188), is “The works of the law, the ‘badge’ of grace and covenant membership, had in his view become an exclusive ethnic ‘boast.’ ” As a consequence the inner devotion and dedication of the heart that God required and that the prophets had long since insisted must accompany the rite (Jer 4:4; Ezek 44:7; cf. also Lev 26:41; Deut 10:16; 30:6; 1QS V, 5, 26) was neglected, if not removed altogether, by Jewish teachers who gave preeminence to the practice of the rite of circumcision. But for Paul this practice was done away with in Christ. The covenant relationship once symbolized by circumcision was now perfectly realized in Christ, in his death and resurrection (cf. Col 2:11–13; see the exposition in R. P. Martin, Colossians: The Church’s Lord and the Christian’s Liberty [Exeter: Paternoster, 1972; reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2000] ad loc.). Hence, the external rite was no longer required. For as the ancient prophets had perceived, “a man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart by the Spirit, not by the written code” (Rom 2:28–29 NIV; cf. Col 3:11). Thus, for Israel to insist on a purely physical and external rite as the means of securing salvation, now that the Christ had come, was not only mistaken; it was lethal in the sense
of Gal 5:2. Paul therefore attacks these champions of circumcision by using a pun filled with bitter irony: they are the κατατομή, “mutilation” (used to describe “the cutters,” “those who mutilate the body”; cf. 1 Kgs 18:28 on the priests of Melkart, but it was also a common practice in the Greek mysteries [e.g., Euripides, Bacchae, on the worship of Dionysus]; Gal 5:12; see also De Vries, “Paul’s ‘Cutting’ Remarks,” 115–20), instead of the περιτομή, “circumcision” (cf. Glasswell, ExpTim 85 [1973–74] 328–32; Köster, NTS 8 [1961–62] 320–31).

3 ἡμεῖς γάρ ἐσμέν ἡ περιτομή, “I call them ‘mutilators’; for we are the circumcision.” Paul now explains why he uses the term κατατομή, “mutilation,” to describe ancient Israel and not περιτομή, “circumcision.” As is often the case elsewhere, Paul’s explanation here is so compact that it needs expansion to be understood readily. When one does so, the apostle’s argument seems to proceed as follows: Because (γάρ) Israel lost sight of the spiritual significance of circumcision, focused on the external ritual, and failed to boast in the Lord alone (cf. Jer 9:23–25), it has forfeited its right to the title “The Circumcision.” The church of Jesus Christ, however (against Tillmann), is the true Israel (Gal 6:16), heir of all the rights and privileges belonging to it (Rom 9:24–26; cf. 1 Pet 2:9–10), including the right to the title περιτομή, “circumcision.” “We,” says Paul emphatically, “are the circumcision,” and not they, an echo later to be picked up in Justin in his polemic against Judaism in the second century of our era (Dial. 18, 41).

οἱ πνεύματι θεοῦ λατρεύοντες, “we who worship God by his Spirit.” Paul now enlarges upon this idea by means of a series of
participial phrases. The first participle λατρεύοντες, “worshiping,” is formed from the verb λατρεύειν, which originally meant “to work for wages,” then simply “to render service” with no thought of reward or whether the one who serves is slave or free. This word was often employed by the LXX translators to denote the worship or service rendered to Yahweh by his chosen people Israel (e.g., Exod 23:25; Deut 6:13; 10:12, 20; Josh 22:27; cf. Rom 9:4; H. Strathmann, TDNT 4:58–61). In this last fact lies the significance of its use here. The proud privilege of ancient Israel, to love and serve God from the heart (Deut 10:12: ἀγαπᾶν ... καὶ λατρεύειν, “to love... and to serve”), has now been transferred to the new Israel. And why? The traditional interpretation has been that the Jews turned from this inner spiritual worship of God from the heart (cf. Ps 51:17) to an external religion of ritual, where human ordinances displaced divine commands and where people honored God with their lips but not with their hearts (Isa 29:13; cf. Matt 15:8–9; Mark 7:6–7). But modern interpreters of Second Temple Judaism are less sure that this emphasis on the external really does justice to the piety of Jewish leaders, in spite of their “covenantal nomism” (see Sanders, Paul and Palestinian Judaism; Dunn, BJRL 65 [1983] 95–122; with a critique by Hagner, BBR 3 [1993] 111–30; Schreiner, Paul; Kim, Paul and the New Perspective).

The Christian, whatever outward forms and ceremonies may be used in worship, is not to be deflected by these from worshiping God “in spirit and truth” (cf. John 4:23–24). This is to say that Christians are those whose actions, including worship of God, are directed not by some external law that they must strive to live up to or external ritual they can perform and about which they can
boast, but by the impulse of the Spirit of God within them (for the
phrase “Spirit of God” in Paul, cf. Rom 8:9, 14; 1 Cor 7:40; 12:3;
2 Cor 3:3; see Scott, Spirit in the New Testament; Lampe, God
as Spirit). The Spirit promised by the prophets (Ezek 36:25–27),
dwelling within Christians, gives life, power, and love, so that they
can offer to God true and acceptable worship from the heart (John
4:23–24; Rom 12:1; 1 Pet 2:5). But yet there is more involved
here in Paul’s words than a simple contrast between external and
internal religion (Michael, J. J. Müller). The apostle’s choice of the
verb λατρεύειν, “to worship,” modified as it is by πνεύματι θεοῦ,
“by the Spirit of God,” stresses that the Spirit of God is the divine
initiator at work in the depths of human nature, profoundly
transforming a person’s life so as to promote a life of love and
service, and generate a life for others; for “such a life is the only
worship (“latreō”) acceptable to God” (Collange, 125). “Christians
worship through the Holy Spirit” (Bockmuehl, 192).

καὶ καυχώμενοι ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, “and who boast in Christ
Jesus.” In the second participial phrase, the verb καυχάσθαι, “to
boast,” used only once in Philippians (the noun καύχημα,
“boasting,” is in Phil 1:26, 2:16), is a favorite of Paul’s. He uses it
at least thirty times in his letters, and other NT writers only use it
twice. Translated here “rejoice in” (KJV) or “glory in” (RSV, NIV), it
is only proper to give to it in this context “its noblest meaning”
(Michael; cf. H. D. Betz, Galatians, Hermeneia [Philadelphia:
oneself in” (BDAG; PHILLIPS, NEB). For here Christians are
rightfully described as possessing a triumphant, exultant, boastful
attitude, not in themselves, however, nor in their accomplishments
or personal goodness (cf. Gal 6:13), but in Christ Jesus. Theirs is no hollow confidence in an external rite or “heritage of law or privilege of race” (Beare). Rather, their basis of pride, their reason for boasting, their grounds for full and exultant confidence is God himself, who acted in grace and mercy toward all people in Christ Jesus (Gal 6:14; cf. Jer 9:23–24; 1 Cor 1:31; 2 Cor 10:17). Christians are the circumcision precisely because they take pride not in what they may do by themselves to earn God’s favor, but only in what God in his favor has already done for them in Christ Jesus. The Christian’s boasting begins where knowledge of the law and the corresponding ceremonial and moral righteousness cease, namely, “at the point where... man lays down his arms, [and] where God entirely alone begins to speak, utters his Word of grace which man can do no more than believe” (Barth, 94, echoing Calvin [italics Barth]).

καὶ ο죤 ἐν σαρκὶ πεποιθότες, “and who put no confidence in ourselves.” The final participial phrase negatively qualifies the immediately preceding claim that the Christian has grounds for confidence: this confidence is not ἐν σαρκί, lit. “in the flesh.” The word σάρξ, “flesh,” is in itself an ambiguous word embracing a whole range of meanings, from physical flesh or earthly presence (Luke 24:39 and earlier Phil 1:24) to human nature (John 1:14), to fallen human nature (Rom 7:5; 8:9, 19) or the believer’s self-life, the gravitational pull of evil, akin to the rabbinic yēṣer hāraʿ, “evil impulse” (see E. Schweizer, TDNT 7:98–151). By using it here, Paul seems to cast at least a passing glance at the rite of circumcision, an operation performed on the body—in the flesh—as the sign and seal of membership within the covenant community of God (cf.
Davies, Christian Origins and Judaism, 145–77). It is more likely, however, that Paul is using σάρξ, “flesh,” in his customary way to denote “man’s lower, unredeemed nature, not inherently bad but the target of sin’s attack and the occasion of his becoming a victim under sin’s dominion” (Martin [1976], 126; and idem, Reconciliation, chap. 3). Here, then, σάρξ, “flesh,” really pictures humankind at its highest and best, striving to achieve an adequate status before God, but without dependence upon God. It pictures humankind counting on its privilege, position, and ability to fulfill the law of God and to attain to the righteousness that God requires, but without realizing that such righteousness can be attained only by abandoning self and throwing oneself wholly on the mercy and grace of God. As Beare (106) notes, “It is this self-reliance, this confidence in his own capacity to please God and earn a favorable verdict from the Judge, which vitiates the religion of the Jew even when he follows it with the utmost devoted zeal for God and the most sincere striving to fulfil his law” (cf. Rom 10:3). Therefore, Christians are the circumcision because they do not make such a fatal error. Instead of arrogantly relying on themselves (ἐν σαρκὶ πεποιθότες, “putting confidence in ourselves”), they humbly submit to God and accept the gracious gift of righteousness offered them in Christ Jesus. They thus become “the seed of Abraham” (Gal 3:29), the “sons of Abraham” (Gal 3:7), through faith in Christ Jesus (cf. Jer 4:4; Gal 6:14–15; Col 2:11–13; see Fitzmyer; Moehring, SE IV [= TU 102 (1968)] 432–36; Ridderbos, Paul, 138).

**Explanation**
In this transitional pericope, Paul’s writing may be viewed in a number of different ways. There is the literary and rhetorical situation seen in the style of his prose. Paul leaves the topic of the commendation of his co-workers and turns to address the need of his implied readers at Philippi. In doing so, he writes in a pungent, forceful style, employing the rhetorical devices we have noted.

Yet the importance of this small unit in the letter is much more than that. As Paul is obviously moved with emotion as he writes of imminent dangers, he is not content simply to sound negative alarms, with the threefold call, “observe” those who are (in his eyes) mischief makers at the threshold of the Philippian community. As ever, the Christian apostle loses no opportunity to move onto positive ground.

While the issue (in front of the text) is the rite of circumcision practiced as a Jewish identity marker and a sign of inclusion in God’s covenant (going back to Gen 17), a larger concern may be sought behind the text. Such concern may be stated thus: What is the essence of religion? In using this term religion, we are aware that most readers today will give it a pejorative meaning. It suggests a human attempt to reach out for the divine and practice rituals that show how serious is our bid to please God. Yet there is another sense of the word religion, based on the derivation of the noun from the Latin religare, “to bind.” If we take this cue, then religion means not so much our endeavor to seek God as God’s purpose in uniting us with God.
At this point, the brief verses of 3:2–3 take on a profound meaning and bring us to the heart of Paul’s religion. As he saw it, God has brought into being a new relationship through Jesus Christ, based not on our bid to please him but on what we have received, and issuing in how we are to live in grateful response. So in Paul’s memorable words, in a modern key, we are his people. We worship as the Holy Spirit moves in us; we place our only hope in Christ, and in that act we renounce all claim to being accepted by God on the basis of ethnic or cultural superiority. Here, then, is a thumbnail sketch of what Paul’s gospel is all about as far as human relationship to God is concerned.
B. Paul’s Own Life, Past and Present: An Answer to Opponents (3:4–11)

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Translation

4 Although I have good reasons for putting confidence in myself, I will not do so. But if any other people a think that they have reasons for confidence in themselves, I have more reasons than they: 5 I was circumcised on the eighth day of my life. I am an Israelite by birth. I belong to the tribe of Benjamin. I am a Hebrew born of Hebrew parents. With regard to the Jewish law I was [and am] a Pharisee. 6 With regard to zeal b I was a persecutor of the church. c With regard to a righteousness based on the law I was a blameless person. 7 But d what things were then gains to me I now count as loss because of Christ. 8 And what is more, e I continue to count everything as loss because of the one supreme value, namely, a personal knowledge of Christ Jesus f my Lord. For him I did in fact lose everything. But I
consider it all as unspeakable filth for the goal of gaining Christ and of being found in him, not with my own righteousness, earned by keeping the law, but with God’s righteousness given through faith in Christ—the righteousness that is given by God and is obtained through faith. [Yes, I consider everything as unspeakable filth] for the goal of knowing Christ in the power of his resurrection, and in the fellowship of his sufferings, continually conforming myself [or being conformed] to his death in the hope of attaining the resurrection from among the dead.

Notes

4.a. Plurals are added for inclusive language.

6.b. The Majority Text reads ἐπιθυμία, “zeal” (masculine), for ἐπιθυμίας, “zeal” (neuter). There is no difference in meaning, but the masculine form is the more common form in the NT.

6.c. F G and a few other MSS add θεο, “of God,” after ἐκκλησία, “church”—an attempt, perhaps, to harmonize this text with 1 Cor 10:32; 11:16, 22; 15:9; 2 Cor 1:1; Gal 1:13; 1 Thess 2:14; 2 Thess 1:4; see also 1 Tim 3:5, 15.

7.d. Ψ 46 Ν ≠ 33 and other MSS omit ἀλλά, “but,” while B D Ï and the Majority Text include it. ἀλλά, “but,” seems to be the lectio facilior, “easier reading,” and therefore secondary.

8.e. Ψ 46 (apparently) Ν ≠ 33 and other MSS omit the καί, “and,” “also,” possibly because of the superfluity of conjunctions at the beginning of this verse.
8.f. Ψ 46, 61 and B add the definite article τὸς, “the,” before Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, “Christ Jesus.”

8.g. A Ψ and the Majority Text add εἶναι, “to be,” after ἤγοϋμαι σκύβαλα, “I consider [to be] unspeakable filth,” but this addition of the infinitive in indirect discourse is quite unnecessary.

10.h-h. Ψ 46 * B omit the articles τὴν, “the [fellowship],” and τῶν, “the [sufferings],” while Ψ 2 D F G Ψ and the Majority Text include them. It appears that scribes, understanding κοινωνίαν, “fellowship,” as a totally separate entity exactly parallel with τὴν δύναμιν, “the power,” added the article τὴν, “the,” to make this distinction and parallelism clear: “the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings.” Hence, the τὴν, “the,” should be considered secondary.

11.i. τῶν νεκρῶν, “of the dead” (Majority Text), is read instead of τὴν ἐκ νεκρῶν, “which is from the dead” (¹⁶, Ψ 46 Χ A B D P Ψ 33 81 and Latin and Sahidic versions). The mild τῶν νεκρῶν, “of the dead,” though the more common phrase, eliminates the striking emphasis of ἐξανάστασιν ... ἐκ, “resurrection... from.” It must be considered secondary.

**Form/Structure/Setting**

In this section, linked as it is to the previous one by the cognate ηὐν πεποίθησιν, “confidence” (πεποίθησιν, “putting confidence” [v 3]... πεποίθησιν, “confidence” [v 4]), Paul begins to explain to his friends why he has spoken so harshly against the Jewish opponents. Using himself, “an authentic Jew” (Benoit, cited in Martin [1959],...
141), as an example, he draws back the curtain on his past religious life to permit the Philippians to understand, not abstractly but concretely, what it means to consider oneself no longer religious except through the Spirit, no longer able to boast except in Christ Jesus, and no longer able to rely on human privilege or achievement to gain favor with God (see Barth). One is not surprised, therefore, to note the preponderance of the first-person singular pronoun running throughout this section. Such a phenomenon not only accords well with the highly personal character of Philippians, but it accentuates the intensely personal nature of Paul’s own religious experience. Nowhere else in his letters does Paul make so clear, and with such feeling, how vitally important the person of Christ was to him and how tremendous was the impact of the resurrected Christ upon his life and outlook as he does here in these verses. Here is “one of the most remarkable personal confessions which antiquity has bequeathed to us” (Bonnard, as quoted by Martin [1959], 140).

But as a preface to this humble confession of reliance upon Christ, Paul, in what seems to be a rather surprising way, first presents his own pedigree, listing his heritage and achievements as bases for personal boasting (καύχημα; cf. v 3) or as grounds for showing that he is “somebody” (cf. Betz, “On Self-Praise”; on the whole subject of “boasting,” see R. Bultmann, TDNT 3:645–54). Paul may be doing this to “put down” his adversaries since the form he uses is somewhat reminiscent of epideictic oratory—a speech form designed to praise or blame (on this theme in Paul and the moralists, see P. Marshall, Enmity in Corinth). Topics for such oratory on which praise was founded—descent, education, wealth,
kinds of power, titles to fame, citizenship, and so on—could also serve as bases for blame (see Rhetorica ad Herennium [LCL 403] 173–75; Plato, Gorg. 477C; Phileb. 48E; Leg. 697B, 727A–C; Aristotle, Eth. nic. 1.8 §1098b; Ps.-Aristotle, Rhet. Alex. §1440b.13). Hence, Paul in praising himself may simply be attempting to diminish the status of his opponents by implicitly faulting them for not being his equal. Paul uses the ancient technique of comparison (ἐγὼ μᾶλλον, “I more than they” [v 4]) in his favor and to the disadvantage of those with whom he compares himself (see H. D. Betz, Galatians, Hermeneia [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979] 303; and on this rhetorical feature in the “Fool’s Speech” [Narrenrede] see Zmijewski, Der Stil der paulinischen “Narrenrede,” discussed in R. P. Martin, 2 Corinthians, WBC 40 [Waco, TX: Word Books, 1986] 356–424).

Whether this can be satisfactorily demonstrated may not be certain. But one thing can be said with assurance: Paul recounts matters of his descent, rights and privileges, titles of distinction, and so on at this crucial point in his letter not really to exalt himself (boasting about himself is distasteful to the apostle—2 Cor 11:16–29; 12:1–10) but to make clear to all that when he proceeds to disparage personal assets that can make one proud and self-reliant, he does so not because he is a “have-not,” a frustrated person lashing out in envy owing to his own lack of resources or achievements, but because he is one who, although having everything, learned he had nothing when he did not have Christ.

There are themes and words in this section that link it with earlier parts of Philippians and that argue still more strongly for its integrity (see Mackay, NTS 7 [1961] 161–63; Pollard, NTS 13 [1966–67] 57–59; Garland, NovT 27 [1985] 141–73). For example, the
expression “being found in human form” (Phil 2:8) is echoed in the words “that I may be found in him” (3:9). The purpose of God in exalting Jesus—that every being should openly and gladly acknowledge him as Lord (2:11)—is answered by Paul’s confession “Christ Jesus my Lord” (3:8; this is a noteworthy title since it is the only place in the generally accepted Pauline letters where Paul refers to “my Lord”). The rare word κέρδος, “gain,” is found in both 1:21 and 3:7. Houlden (106) observes:

More broadly, it is certainly the case that the themes of humility and obedience are common to both parts of the epistle. 2:1–11 and 3:8 make the parallel between Christ’s self-abasement and Paul’s own personal surrender of what was dearest to him on the worldly plane.

(Yet it may be argued that this appeal to a suggested parallelism fails because, while Christ’s refusal to grasp his prize was affirmed, Paul’s choice had different results; see Martin, Hymn of Christ, 145–46.) There is thus no good reason for separating this section from the rest of Philippians or for failing to consider it a part of the main body of the letter.

The strong emotions so apparent in vv 1–3 continue in vv 7–11. Once again Paul expresses his feelings most powerfully in a rhetorical fashion that is almost poetic—short verbless phrases, rhythmic expressions successively introduced with κατά, “according to,” chiasm (esp. in v 8d–9 a; so Schenk, 310), polysyndeton, hapax legomena (words used only once in the NT or in Paul), a piling up of conjunctions, the careful choice of tense, the extended fuguelike playing with the themes of profit (κέρδος, “gain”; κερδαίνειν, “to
gain”) and loss (ζημία, “loss”; ζημιοῦν, “to lose”)—both are commercial terms—and so on. Thus, with all his considerable skill with words, Paul shares with the Philippians the all-surpassing worth of Christ Jesus his Lord. Once again he employs the tools of the rhetorical schools to serve him in powerfully expressing his conviction that no person profits who does not surrender to Christ and no person loses who surrenders everything for Christ. For a study of the Pauline uses of prepositions in this passage, see Reed, Discourse Analysis, chap. 5.

Comment

4 καίπερ ἔγὼ ἔχων πεποίθησιν καὶ ἐν σαρκί, “Although I have good reasons for putting confidence in myself, I will not do so.” Paul has said (v 3) that believers, those who alone can rightly lay claim to the title “the circumcision,” are those who, among other things, do not rely on themselves to earn the favor of God. Their “confidence” for this does not lie at all within themselves (οὐκ ἐν σαρκὶ πεποιθότες, “who put no confidence in ourselves”). In fact, an even stronger rendering may be mandated by Paul’s use of σάρξ, “flesh,” for “self-life”: “We have no confidence in any object of trust.” In this case Paul is referring to the “badges” of his Jewish heritage, of which circumcision is selected as an example. And yet, surprisingly, having just made this important statement, he proceeds to write “although I have good reasons for putting confidence in myself” (πεποίθησις can mean “ground of confidence” as well as “confidence”; BDAG; Vincent). It is not proper to weaken this remark by translating it “though I might have confidence” or “I could have confidence,” and so on (cf. KJV, GNB,
JB), for the construction indicates that Paul fully intends to say that he does indeed (καὶ περὶ) have whatever it takes to boast in or rely upon himself. But his sentence is elliptical—a subordinate participial phrase without a main verb upon which it can depend. And the ellipse must be supplied from the context before it becomes clear what Paul is driving at, e.g., οὐ δὲ ἔσομαι πεποιθῶς ἐν σαρκί, “but I will not put confidence in myself.” The apostle for a moment “places himself on the same standing ground” with the Jews (Lightfoot) or Judaizers to show that he is fully on a par with the best of them. But he immediately removes himself from that place, refusing to trust in himself, that is, in his self-life, his σάρξ, “flesh.” Why? Because he has discovered through his encounter with the living Christ that nothing he received by way of heritage or did by way of human achievement can be the means of life or the grounds of his righteousness before God—only the redeeming significance of Christ’s death and resurrection can become these for him or anyone (see Ridderbos, Paul, 138). Thus, although as an authentic Jew he has every reason to rely upon himself (ἐν σαρκί, “in the flesh,” “in myself”) and make a proud claim to his identity markers as a pious, Torah-abiding Pharisee, he will not do this!

εἴ τις δοκεῖ ἄλλος πεποιθέναι ἐν σαρκί, ἐγὼ μᾶλλον, “But if any other people think that they have reasons for confidence in themselves, I have more reasons than they.” Paul refuses to rely upon himself to establish the righteousness demanded by God not because he thinks that he is inferior to anyone else, lacks a proper pedigree, or is devoid of significant accomplishments, if that is what it takes. Without hesitation the apostle proceeds to say that he possesses personal advantages greater than (ἔγὼ μᾶλλον, “I
more than [they]”) any others who consider (δοκεῖ, “think”) that they have grounds for boasting in themselves. The theme of “boasting” (καυχᾶσθαι) has links with 2 Cor 10–13, which places Paul in opposition to the “emissaries from James,” who are branded in 2 Cor 11:4, 13–15 as Satan’s envoys. Since 2 Corinthians was written shortly after Paul’s near death at Ephesus (1 Cor 15:32; 2 Cor 1:8–10, 4:11), this may suggest (1) that the opposition in Philippians is from the Judaizers, i.e., Jewish messianists who appealed to James, the Lord’s brother, as their authority, and (2) that the letter to the Philippians was composed in Ephesus (see Collange, Enigmes; but cf. also Collange, 17–19).

5 περιτομῇ ὀκταήμερος, “I was circumcised on the eighth day of my life.” Paul now begins to list his advantages, the first of which is contained in a terse verbless expression, lit. “with respect to circumcision an eighth-day-er.” περιτομῇ, “circumcision,” a noun with passive force in the dative case (here a dative of reference: “with respect to”; BDF §197), is coupled with ὀκταήμερος, an adjective not found elsewhere in the NT but used substantivally here to mean “an eighth-day person” (cf. John 11:39). Together the words describe one who was circumcised on the eighth day of his life. With only two words, then, the apostle has made for himself the proudest claim any Jew could make, namely, that in strict conformity with the law he was circumcised on precisely the right day (Gen 17:12; Lev 12:3; cf. Luke 1:59; 2:21). Unlike Ishmael, who was circumcised when he was thirteen years old (Gen 17:25; contrast Gen 21:4), as were his descendants (cf. Josephus, Ant. 1.12.2 §§213–14), and unlike heathen proselytes to Judaism who were circumcised as adults, Paul was circumcised on the eighth day by
parents who were meticulous in fulfilling the prescriptions of the law. He was a true Jew, a Jew by birth. He was no proselyte converted to Judaism in later life, no “Johnny-come-lately,” we may say.

ἐκ γένους Ἰσραήλ, “I am an Israelite by birth.” Next, Paul proudly affirms that he descended from the nation of Israel. He means by this that he possessed all the rights and privileges of God’s chosen people because he belonged to them by birth, not by conversion. Ἰσραήλ, “of Israel,” a genitive of apposition, refers here to the race (γένος) and not to the patriarch. It was the sacred name for the Jews as the nation of the theocracy, the people in covenant relationship with God (J. B. Lightfoot, Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians, 7th ed. [London: Macmillan, 1881] 224; Rom 9:4 ; 11:1 ; 2 Cor 11:22). The name Israel calls to mind the glorious history of an illustrious nation (see G. von Rad, K. G. Kuhn, and W. Gutbrod, TDNT 3:356–91) and was of such continuing significance that apparently Hellenistic Jews, or more likely Jewish Christians as in 2 Cor 11:22, used it prominently in their propaganda efforts (Georgi, Opponents, 46–49; Collange; Martin [1976]; Bruce; O’Brien).

φυλῆς Βενιαμίν, “I belong to the tribe of Benjamin.” Again there is a note of pride expressed as the apostle writes these words; for the tribe of Benjamin, though small (Ps 68:27), was nevertheless highly esteemed: (1) Its progenitor was the younger of the two sons born to Rachel, Jacob’s favorite wife (Gen 30:23, 24 ; 35:16–18). (2) Of all the sons of Jacob, only Benjamin was born in the Promised Land (Gen 35:9–19 ; see Str-B 3:622) and singled out as a tribe
specially “loved by Yahweh” (Deut 33:12; Fee [1995], 307). (3) From this tribe came Israel’s first anointed king (whose name the apostle carried; Beare, Moule; cf. 1 Sam 9:1–2). (4) The holy city of Jerusalem and the temple were within the borders of the territory assigned to Benjamin (Judg 1:21). (5) The tribe of Benjamin remained loyal to the house of David at the time of the break-up of the monarchy (1 Kgs 12:21). (6) After the exile, Benjamin and Judah formed the core of the new colony in Palestine (Vincent; cf. Ezra 4:1). (7) The tribe of Benjamin always held the post of honor in the army, a fact that gave rise to the battle cry “Behind you, O Benjamin!” (Judg 5:14; Hos 5:8). (8) The famous Mordecai, responsible for the great national deliverance commemorated in the feast of Purim, was a Benjamite (Esth 2:5). (9) Benjamin resisted the inroads that pagan culture made among the other tribes and remained “pure” (Gnilka). (10) It is possible that respect for Benjamin can be traced further back to an even earlier period than that indicated in the references cited above (see Parrot, Abraham, 42–51; Collange). Paul, then, seems to revel in the fact that he is a Benjamite (as in Rom 10:1; 11:1). He seems also to have inherited the good qualities of strength, courage, purity, and loyalty that characterized his tribe.

Ἅβραῖος ἑξ Ἑβραίων, “I am a Hebrew born of Hebrew parents.” In addition, Paul can say that he is a “Hebrew of Hebrews.” He may have meant by this that he was a “Hebrew born of Hebrew parents” (JB; note the force of the preposition ἐκ, “from,” “out of”), i.e., that there was no non-Jewish blood in his veins. Or he may have meant that, like his parents and grandparents before him, he was brought up to speak the Hebrew language (Moule, ExpTim
and carefully to observe the Jewish national way of life. He may, then, in effect be contrasting himself with the Hellenists, who were Jews who usually spoke Greek and who allowed their style of life to be affected by Gentile customs and culture (Acts 6:1; 22:2; cf. 2 Cor 11:22; the identity of “Hellenists” in early Christianity continues to be debated; see Hengel, “Between Jesus and Paul”; C. C. Hill, DLNT, 462–69). Although Paul himself was born outside of Palestine (in Tarsus) and therefore could rightly be labeled a Hellenist, he in essence rejects this label, because not only was he the son of Pharisees (Acts 23:6), who saw to it that he was educated precisely in the ways of the Jewish law in Jerusalem under a Hebrew teacher (Acts 22:3), but he himself gladly adopted the Hebrew language as his own language (Acts 21:40; 22:2) and accepted the customs and manner of life of his forefathers (Acts 26:4–5). Paul claims, therefore, to be a Hebrew of Hebrews, one belonging to the elite of his race, tracing his ancestry beyond Tarsus to Palestine (see van Unnik, Tarsus or Jerusalem? 46–47). While this may be taken to have provided a safeguard against the influences of hellenization by the protective walls of Jewish tradition (Dibelius), this alleged “protection” of Second Temple Judaism in a cocoon of isolation may be less than once thought, as the walls of cultural and linguistic separation have now been shown to be porous (I. H. Marshall, NTS 19 [1972–73] 271–87; Hengel, Judaism and Hellenism). Paul may have been a “true Jew,” yet at the same time he was open to Greek influences emanating from the Diaspora.
κατὰ νόμον Φαρισαῖος, “With regard to the Jewish law I was [and am] a Pharisee.” Paul turns now from the things that he enjoyed as a result of his birth and upbringing to describe those advantages he possessed by virtue of his own choice and diligence. He does this with a series of three terse phrases, none of which has a verb and each of which begins with the preposition κατά, “according to,” “in relation to,” “concerning,” “as far as it concerns,” “in respect to,” and so on. The first of these, lit. “according to law, a Pharisee,” means “with regard to the Jewish law I was [and am] a Pharisee.” Although the word Φαρισαῖος, “Pharisee,” is used ninety-nine times in the NT, this is its only occurrence outside the Gospels and Acts. The Pharisees were a “small” religious party in Paul’s day (Josephus, Ant. 17.2.4 §§32–45; 18.1.3 §§12–15; J. W. 2.8.14 §§162–63), but they were the strictest of the Jewish groups (Acts 26:5) as far as adherence to the law was concerned. Not content merely to obey the law of Moses, the Pharisees bound themselves also to observe every one of the myriad of commandments contained in the oral law, the interpretive traditions of the scribes (see O'Brien, 375–76). The most ardent of the Pharisees scrupulously avoided even accidental violations of the law and did more than they were commanded to do (Caird; Moore, Judaism, 1:66; Jeremias, Jerusalem, 246–67). Paul, a son of Pharisees (Acts 23:6) and a disciple of the great Pharisee Gamaliel (Acts 5:34; 22:3), chose to be a Pharisee himself and set himself to be the most earnest of the earnest observers of the Jewish law (Gal 1:14). Pharisee for Paul was not a term of reproach but a title of honor, a claim to “the highest degree of faithfulness and sincerity in the fulfillment of duty to God as prescribed by the
divine Torah” (Beare). On Paul’s revised attitude to Torah religion see 2 Cor 3:1–18, yet Acts portrays him as still continuing to claim Pharisee status, “I am a Pharisee” (23:6); Paul would have added: not a converted Pharisee, but a completed one.

6 κατὰ ζῆλος διώκων τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, “With regard to zeal I was a persecutor of the church.” But Paul was not satisfied with merely keeping the law. His zeal as a Pharisee drove him to persecute the church (lit. “according to zeal, a persecutor of the church”). ζῆλος, “zeal,” for God, for the purity of his covenant community, for his law, marked the true servant of God (cf. Num 25:1–18; Ps 106:30, 31; Sir 45:23; 4 Macc 18:12; cf. also 1 Kgs 19:10, 14; Ps 69:9; especially Phinehas in the verses mentioned [Bockmuehl, 199–200]), and it was a “well-known characteristic of the Pharisees, who in part traced their line to the Maccabees” (Martin [1976], 128; cf. 1 Macc 2:24–29; T. Asher 4:5; 1QH XIV, 14) or maybe back to the Essenes (see Martin, New Testament Foundations, 1:84–89, to be updated by Saldarini, ABD 5:289–303). Hence, not because Paul was evil, but precisely because he was “good,” an ardent Pharisee, zealous for God, inflamed with zeal for the law and committed to keeping the community of God pure, he did what he later came to lament, namely, persecute the church (1 Cor 15:9; cf. Acts 22:2, 5; 26:9–11; cf. 1 Tim 1:13).

The verb διώκειν, “to persecute,” has as its basic idea “to cause something to run,” “to pursue or chase.” It pictures an army pursuing its enemy and setting it to flight or a hunter tracking down his quarry and putting it on the run. In much the same way Paul harried the church, only he did so, on his own confession
according to Luke, with a maniacal (ἐμαυνόμενος [Acts 26:11])
zealousness that brought prison and death to innocent men and
women of the Way, those who belonged to the church of Jesus
Christ (Acts 8:3; 9:1; 22:4–5; 26:9–11). On Saul’s conversion (Gal
1:13, 23) as a redirecting of a determination to pursue divine
righteousness with a “zeal” that caused Saul to hurt the church,
see Dupont, “The Conversion of Paul.”

The word ἐκκλησία, “church,” is used in the OT (LXX) for the
people of Israel (1 Kgdms [= 1 Sam] 17:47; 3 Kgdms [= 1 Kgs] 8:14,
55; 1 Chr 13:2; Ps 21:23 [ET 22:22]; Mic 2:5; Joel 2:16), and what
is more, it is used for the people of Israel gathered to conclude
the covenant at Sinai (Deut 1:4; 9:10; 23:2–4), the people of Yahweh
bound to him by the rules he has given them to keep, but more
particularly as the qĕhal YHWH, the people gathered for worship
(qāhal = “to call”). Thus, the word ἐκκλησία, “church,” perhaps
more than any other, reveals the irony with which Paul writes this
section. He seems to be saying that while he, an ardent young
Pharisee, a new Phinehas (cf. Num 25:1–18), attempted to preserve
the purity of the church (i.e., the ancient Israel of God, the holy
community), he ended up persecuting the church (i.e., the new
Israel, the true heir and successor of God’s chosen people and so
a universal society; pace O’Brien, 376–78). The origin of the church
idea in Paul is best traced to his “conversion,” according to the
Acts narrative in a threefold repeated story (Acts 9, 22, 26). The
heavenly voice (bat qôl) addressed him, “Saul, Saul, why do you
persecute me?” (Acts 9:4 NIV). This is an identity Paul was to
exploit and theologize as the church, thought of as the “body of
With regard to a righteousness based on the law I was a blameless person.” This is the third achievement Paul could point to with pride as a result of his diligence. Like the rich young ruler in the gospel story (Luke 18:21), Paul had kept all the commandments from his youth up. He had met the standards necessary for achieving a righteousness that was rooted in the law. Here Paul is using δικαιοσύνη, “righteousness,” in the sense of conformity to external rules that are considered to be the requirements of God (on the meaning of this difficult word in Paul see D. Hill, Greek Words, 139–62; and for a treatment of the word in Phil 3:7–11 see Koperski, Knowledge, chap. 4). Since he had worked to achieve complete conformity to these rules, leaving nothing undone, no outsider could blame him, nor did he blame himself (γενόμενος ἰμέμπτος, “having been blameless”; ἰμέμπτος, “blameless,” is related to the verb μέμφεσθαι, “to blame someone,” for sins of omission [Lightfoot]). In this sense of omitting nothing that was required of him, Paul, then, could claim without presumption that he had become faultless (cf. W. Grundmann, TDNT 4:573; Goguel, JBL 53 [1934] 257–67). This statement by Paul leaves no place for the view—once popular, now universally rejected—deduced from Rom 7 “that before his conversion Paul was a Jew who had an uneasy conscience over the stoning of Stephen and a growing dissatisfaction with his own religion” (Keck, 853; see also Mitton, ExpTim 65 [1953–54] 78–81, 99–103, 132–35; Stauffer, New Testament Theology, 93; Ridderbos, Paul, 129 n. 3; against Deissmann, Paul,
93–95). In every way he considered himself to be a model Jew, quite satisfied with himself until he met the living Christ.

The shift in views on Rom 7 can be traced to Kümmel, whose book on Rom 7 and Paul’s conversion (Römer 7 und die Bekehrung des Paulus) made the popular idea untenable. More recent discussions on Rom 7 as a conceivable piece of Pauline autobiography are listed in Dunn, Theology of Paul, 346–54, and idem, Romans 1–8, WBC 38A (Dallas: Word, 1988) 374–412. See too Lohfink, Conversion of St. Paul. All the recent NT theologies include ample discussion of Paul’s conversion, usually noting the popular view found in Stewart, Man in Christ, only to reject it out of hand as reflecting a reading of Paul through Reformation lenses. Saul had no “introspective conscience” (to use Stendahl’s famous phrase [HTR 56 (1963) 199–215]), a troubled soul whose inner conflict was resolved psychologically on the Damascus road.

Issues of Paul’s self-confessed “blamelessness” still pose a conundrum, given his clear teaching that “there is none righteous, no, not one” (Rom 3:10). The reviser of this commentary has tried to state the matter in clear terms in Reconciliation, from which, since this is an important exegetical crux, the following may be quoted (26):

But Philippians 3:6 must also be read in context. There Paul is viewing his past life from the position of his new life in Christ. The turning point came in a renunciation of his former “gains” of heredity, birth and religious zeal. But also his acceptance of God’s way of dealing with men and women—devout Jews as well as pagans—made an end to all efforts at securing his own
righteousness, whether on the basis of Torah or elsewhere, and cast
him without qualification on the free favour of God. “My own
righteousness” is now seen to be an impossible claim, not so
much because it eluded his grasp as a devout Pharisee but
because it ministered to “confidence in the flesh” (Phil 3:4) which
as a Christian he decisively renounced in his becoming a Christian
(v 3). This was the great discovery implied in the Damascus road
experience. Attainment of nomistic righteousness which he claimed
as a Pharisaic pietist is now seen to be invalid, not because he
was self-deluded or had lowered the standard but precisely because
it represented a mistaken goal for which he was then striving “in
the flesh.” The result was that he secured his objective but at the
price of “boasting” in the very achievement that can only be
granted (viz. divine salvation) as God’s gift and received in the
pure gratitude of faith (Phil 3:9 ; it is righteousness that depends
on faith).

7 ἀλλὰ ἄτινα ἦν μοι κέρδη, ταῦτα ἢγημαι διὰ τὸν Χριστὸν
ζημίαν, “But what things were then gains to me I now count as
loss because of Christ.” Whether or not the conjunction ἀλλὰ,
“but,” belongs to the original text (see Note d), there is,
nevertheless, a marked transition at this point. Suddenly all those
good things Paul enjoyed, all those advantages he possessed from
his parents and from his own efforts that made him proud and
self-reliant, are considered now not as assets but as liabilities.
Suddenly there is set before the Philippians a startling “re-evaluation
[ or, transvaluation] of values” (Umwertung der Werte; Gnilka) on
Paul’s part, and any conjunction, however strong, may serve only to
weaken the radicalness of this change in his outlook. Barthians
used to speak of Paul’s conversion as “a perpendicular from above” (Senkrecht von Oben), which emphasizes the miraculous nature of Paul’s radical shift, later theologized as a “new creation” (2 Cor 5:17).

Paul stresses the importance of human decision and judgment in any radical change of outlook on life such as he has experienced. The verb ἡγεῖσθαι means “to think, consider, regard” (BDAG), and the perfect tense that Paul uses here, ἥγημαι, “I count,” implies that he has come to a final decision only after considering matters “with deliberate judgment” (Vincent). As Collange (129) notes, “It is still true that divine grace far from annihilating the faculties of man stimulates them rather and recreates them in freedom.”

Paul describes this change in outlook on his part in business terms (so now Bockmuehl, 204), using the familiar motifs of profit (κέρδος) and loss (ζημία; see MM, 273, 341)—motifs also used by the rabbis, who used the idioms of profit (šākār) and loss (hepsēd; Str-B 3:622, citing m. Ṭʿabot 2:1), and by Jesus (Matt 16:26). The metaphor is the familiar one of the balance sheet with its columns marked “assets” and “liabilities.” Paul admits that there were certain things in his past that were in fact gains for him or things that he did in fact consider as gains. They were not merely potential or supposed gains (cf. GNB)—the verb ἦν, “were,” is indicative and μοι, “to me,” is dative of advantage. Pedigree, covenant connection, zeal, and the like, Paul actually valued. They did contribute to his well-being on the human plane or when he considered his life “in the flesh”—a double entendre on σάρξ, “flesh” (v 4). Nevertheless, Paul now bundles up these many gains (κέρδη, plural) and treats
them all as a single loss (ζημία, singular). One might have expected him to say, in light of what he said before, that his previous personal advantages, although still good, are being left behind because he has found something better. But no! In Paul’s thinking, the decision he made was not the decision to go from good to better, nor was it the surrender of a valued possession; it was an abandoning to ζημία, “loss.” In the process of reevaluation he perceived with horror that the things he had hitherto viewed as benefiting him had in reality been working to destroy him, because they were blinding him to his need for the “real righteousness” (that is, his identity as a member of the elect people) that God required, which he himself could in no way achieve by his own efforts, however earnest they may be (cf. Rom 10:1–4; Gnilka; H. Schlier, TDNT 3:672).

This radical transvaluation took place within the apostle διὰ τὸν Χριστόν, “because of [the] Christ.” But what precisely does Paul mean by this prepositional phrase? He does not mean that he made this reassessment “for Christ” (KJV) or “for Christ’s sake” (RSV, GNB, NIV), as though somehow Christ would in any way benefit by his decision. Rather, he means that his own outlook on life was radically altered “because of the fact or the work of Christ.” That is to say, Paul, encountering the risen Jesus on the Damascus road, understanding there that he was the Christ, the Messiah whom he had longed for and worked for totally unawares, gladly gave up all his former advantages to gain this one person of supreme worth. According to Acts, the recognition on the road to Damascus was that “Jesus is Lord”—“Who are you, Lord?” (Acts 9:5)—and this confession became Paul’s chief message (Rom 10:9,
The impact of Christ upon Paul thus was life altering. And, as Michael (144) observes, “from that moment on the Damascus road he never wavered in his fidelity to the decision then made.” (On messiahship in Paul see N. A. Dahl, “Messiahship of Jesus in Paul”; Hengel, “‘Christos’ in Paul.”)

A parenthetical cautionary note, as a pastoral observation, may be helpful at this point. Paul’s conversion experience, including the sudden and dramatic renunciation of his heritage and achievements, is not offered here as a model to be emulated, except, of course, that he does appeal to himself notably in this epistle (Phil 3:17; as Hawthorne, “Imitation of Christ,” 172–74, and O’Brien have shown). Believers need not feel less Christian than Paul if, unlike Paul, the course and conduct of their life, their occupation, and their aspirations are not radically different from what they were before encountering the living Christ. If, however, the observance of religious ritual, status due to birth, outstanding accomplishments owing to innate intelligence or sustained effort, and so on should ever make a person proud or self-reliant, unaware of a need of God and of the righteousness that only Christ can provide, then, upon being made aware of this danger, that person should jettison such privileges and achievements, as one would jettison a valuable cargo to save a ship that would otherwise sink in a storm. Paul had to abandon his past advantages precisely because they were the very things that kept him from coming to God. They kept him from surrendering to Christ, who is the only access to God, as Eph 2:18 remarks in a different context.

8 ἀλλὰ μενοῦνγε καὶ ἡγοῦμαι πάντα ζημίαν εἶναι, “And what is more, I continue to count everything as loss.” Now in a long and
involved sentence, extending through v 11, Paul enlarges on this theme of the “loss” of his “gains” because of the fact of Christ. It begins with an extraordinary accumulation of particles— ἀλλὰ μὲν οὖν ἡκαὶ—that are impossible to translate, but that in Greek, nevertheless, powerfully emphasize the shift from the perfect tense ἔγημαι, “I have counted” all my advantages as loss (indicating enduring action or result [v 7]), to the present tense ἔγονμαι, “I continue to count” them as loss, and from the particular ᾧτινα, “what things” (v 7), to the universal πάντα, “everything” (see BDF §448[6]; Thrall, Greek Particles, 11–16). This change from the perfect tense to the present tense of the same verb, then, is deliberate. In it Paul is saying that the settled decision he made in the past, as the result of careful reflection (perfect tense), is not enough. It must be reinforced daily by continuous conscious moral choices (present tense) against depending upon himself—who he is, the things he possesses, what he has accomplished—for gaining favor with God. Further, Paul expands on his statement in v 7 by saying that those things he listed as “gains” in vv 5–6 are not the only things that he now considers as “loss.” Rather, he considers all things (πάντα) as loss, whatever they may be that might compete with Christ for his allegiance or might be thought of as meritorious and claimed as acceptable to God by the “religious” person (Martin [1959]; see also Michael; Dibelius; Bonnard; Collange; Fee [1995], 310–11; but contrast Vincent).

διὰ τὸ ὑπερέχον τῆς γνώσεως Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ τοῦ κυρίου μου, “because of the one supreme value, namely, a personal knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.” Paul’s extraordinary evaluation of things
that are normally considered “gains”—privilege, family, religious heritage, comfort, position, wealth, power, and so on—as one gigantic loss is not made without good reason. Paul now states his reason in a single prepositional phrase, but one so compact that it is necessary to analyze its parts fully to get at what Paul is saying.

The preposition διά followed here by the accusative case should be translated “for” or “because of.” It simply and clearly introduces the reason for Paul’s decision, nothing more, and therefore should not be translated “for the sake of” (GNB), “compared to” or “compared with” (GOODSPEED, MOFFATT, KNOX, PHILLIPS, LB, NIV).

τὸ ὑπερέχον, the neuter singular participle of the verb ὑπερέχειν, “to surpass, excel,” is functioning as an abstract noun that serves more graphically than can its cognate noun ὑπεροχή, “superiority,” to accentuate the worth of that for which Paul abandoned everything else (see BDF §263[2]; but Koperski, Knowledge, 161, argues that the corresponding adjective is the counterpoint of the participle). It is the object of the preposition διά, “because of.” τὸ ὑπερέχον, “the surpassing greatness” (BDAG), “the supreme advantage” (GOODSPEED, JB), “the one supreme value,” then, is that for which Paul gave up all those things the world holds on to for dear life.

This ultimate value is immediately qualified by the genitive τῆς γνώσεως, “of the knowledge,” which in turn is qualified by the genitive Χριστοῦ ᾿Ιησοῦ, “of Christ Jesus,” which in turn is qualified by the genitives τοῦ κυρίου μου, “of the Lord of me.” All three of these genitives need explanation. (1) The first of these, τῆς
γνώσεως, “of the knowledge,” is a genitive of apposition, which means that τὸ ὑπερέχον, “the one supreme value,” and τῆς γνώσεως, “of the knowledge,” are the same thing; i.e., “the one supreme value” is “knowledge.” (2) The second genitive, Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, “of Christ Jesus,” is more difficult to explain because of its potential ambiguity. It could be a subjective genitive, meaning, then, that for Paul “the one supreme value” is “to be known by Christ Jesus” (as in 1 Cor 13:12; see Vallotton, Christ, 86–87; this is a kin of the genitive in πίστις Χριστοῦ, “the faith [or, faithfulness] of Christ,” as Hays, Faith, has maintained, though this is challenged by Dunn and others; see Dunn’s bibliography in his Theology of Paul, 335). But Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ could also be, and most likely is, an objective genitive, meaning that Christ Jesus, in this instance, is not the one who knows but the one who is known: “knowledge of Christ Jesus.” Thus the surpassing worth Paul is thinking of is to know Christ—Christ Jesus is the ultimate object of his quest. (Although this latter interpretation of the genitive best fits the context, perhaps in choosing such an ambiguous construction Paul intends to include both ideas—to know Christ as well as to be known by Christ [cf. Gal 4:9].) (3) The third set of genitives, τοῦ κυρίου μου, “of the Lord of me,” “of my Lord,” is merely appositive to Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, “of Christ Jesus,” and not in any sense predicate. In other words, it is not the mere objective intellectual awareness that Christ Jesus is Lord that Paul has in mind here. Rather, it is the personal knowledge or intimate acquaintance of Christ as “my” Lord (the only place in Paul’s uncontested writings where this intimate expression occurs) that for him makes all other “values” appear worthless.
Knowledge, "knowledge," had such a wide range of meanings in Paul's day that it is difficult to sort out exactly what he meant when he used it. Among the contemporary pagan religions, "knowledge," was a key word, referring to a kind of mystical knowledge of or communion with the god—"a revelation of the god in which the vision (granted in the mystery cults) leads to a transformation of the beholder" (Dibelius, 69; Beare; cf. 2 Cor 3:18; 4:6; see Gärtner, NTS 14 [1967–68] 209–31). It apparently also was used by gnostic Jewish Christians of some "higher" salvific knowledge accessible only to themselves and to their initiates (cf. 1 Cor 8:1–11; 13:2, 8; 14:6; cf. also Gal 4:9; see Schmithals, Paul, 90–92). Knowledge, "knowledge," has been understood by some to have been used in a peculiar, if not unique, way to refer to the experience of the martyrs (Lohmeyer). It is possible, therefore, that knowledge, "knowledge," may have been chosen by Paul precisely because it embraced a combination of ideas, rather than a single one, and would have had significant meaning to a wide range of people (Gnilka; see also Forestell, CBQ 18 [1956] 123–36; Gärtner, NTS 14 [1967–68] 209–31; Tannehill, Dying and Rising, 114–23; and for a full discussion Koperski, Knowledge, 22–65). Much more probable, however, is the view that Paul's meaning for knowledge, "knowledge," here was controlled exclusively by his understanding of the OT concept of knowledge (as in the phrase da'at YHWH, "knowledge of Yahweh")—both God's knowledge of his people "in election and grace" (Exod 33:12, 17; Amos 3:2) and his people's knowledge of him "in love and obedience" to his self-revelation (Martin [1959]; cf. Jer 31:34; Hos 6:3; and see also Davies, Christian Origins, 141; Dupont, Gnosis, 34–36; Koperski's conclusion
is that “Paul’s use of this expression in Phil 3:8–11 does seem to come... from his Jewish heritage” [Knowledge, 65]). Such knowledge involves more than an acquisition of facts. It also involves “loyalty, repentance, love and service” (Beare, 114)—the “yes” of the soul to the address of God (see Bockmuehl, 205–6, for the Jewish and postbiblical literature, where “knowledge of God” and obedience in love are dominant ideas). Knowledge, then, is not primarily intellectual but experiential. Thus, as Loh and Nida (99) explain, in the context of Phil 3:

The knowledge of Christ is personal and intimate, as the expression “my Lord” shows, certainly more than an intellectual apprehension of truth about Christ. Rather, it is a personal appropriation of and communion with Christ himself. “The knowledge of Christ” no doubt does involve one’s thoughts, but in its distinctive biblical usage it may be said to involve primarily one’s heart.

δι’ ὃν τὰ πάντα ἔζημιώθην, “For him I did in fact lose everything.” The reason Paul gives for considering his former “gains” as loss has now been stated with clarity. It is because of the one thing that now has ultimate value, namely, a personal knowledge of Christ Jesus—an experiential encounter with the Savior—that the apostle is led to respond to him in loyalty, love, and obedience as Lord of his life, and to set himself to serve Christ with all his heart. But this glad acceptance of Christ Jesus as Lord had its cost. Paul not only considered all things as “loss” because of Christ; he actually experienced the loss of all things. By placing the definite article τὰ, “the,” before πάντα, “all things,” and both words before the verb, Paul emphasizes that he lost everything.
Furthermore, the verb he uses, ζημιοῦν, “to cause loss to,” “to punish,” “to fine” (a play on the noun ζημία, “loss,” in vv 7–8), is an aorist passive, which may point to a particular time when this loss occurred, namely, his conversion, and hint at the possibility that he was stripped of all his advantages by the Jewish authorities or even his family (yet his nephew showed him sympathy, in the Acts narrative [Acts 23:16–22]). Since, however, ζημιοῦν, “to cause loss to,” is found only in a passive form in the NT with a somewhat shifted meaning (i.e., not “to be punished,” but “to lose”; BDF §159[2]), it is more likely that Paul is thinking of those things, such as his high status within Judaism and the like, that he himself voluntarily renounced (cf. 2:6–7). In any case, his loss was a real loss, and his claim to consider everything as “loss” is therefore no empty boast nor a purely academic exercise (see earlier for the suggested parallelism between Phil 2:6–7 and 3:6–8; see too Craddock, 58).

καὶ ἠγοῦμαι σκύβαλα, “but I consider it all as unspeakable filth.” Paul did not lament this loss. For him it was a welcomed relief. In fact it was the freeing of himself from something that he unwaveringly continued to consider σκύβαλα, “unspeakable filth.”

The derivation of this word, σκύβαλον (used only here in the NT), has never been cleared up. Although traced to the expression τὸ τοῖς κυσὶ βαλλόμενον, “that which is thrown to the dogs” (queried by Bockmuehl, 207–8), it seems to have meant by usage (1) “dung,” “muck,” both as excrement and as food gone bad; (2) “scraps,” i.e., “what is left after a meal”; or (3) “refuse,” “trash” (Koperski’s translation [Knowledge, 154]). It is also used to describe
a pitiful and horrible thing, like a half-eaten corpse, or “filth,” such as lumps of manure. Thus, when Paul uses it here as the final object of his studied threefold use of ἡγεῖσθαι, “to consider,” it provides the climax of a crescendo. According to F. Lang’s analysis (TDNT 7:446–47; against Lightfoot, Michael),

The perfect ἡγημαί (v. 7) relates to conversion; since this Paul has learned to regard all his former κέρδη as ζημία ... for Christ’s sake. The present ἡγοῦμαι (v. 8a) confirms that this is his judgment now. The second present ἡγοῦμαι (v. 8c) strengthens this by substituting σκύβαλα for ζημία. The intensification lies in the element of resolute turning aside from something worthless and abhorrent, with which one will have nothing more to do. The choice of the vulgar term stresses the force and totality of this renunciation.

Therefore, Paul’s deliberate choice of the word σκύβαλα, “unspeakable filth,” over ζημία, “loss,” shows the utter revulsion he now feels toward those “advantages” he surrendered. It is quite improper to weaken its meaning in any way by translation or by interpretation (cf. Martin [1959]; idem [1976]; see also Vincent, who draws attention to how some of the patristic writers, embarrassed by this passage, attempted to modify the meaning of σκύβαλα).

ἵνα Χριστὸν κερδῆσω, “for the goal of gaining Christ.” Finally now, Paul states his motives for counting everything as loss (v v 8c–10). They are (1) that he might gain Christ, (2) that he might be found in Christ, and (3) that he might know Christ and the power of his resurrection. The first of these is a strange expression that must be understood in light of the imagery of a profit-and-loss
system and the balancing of accounts that Paul uses throughout this section. The verb κερδαινειν, “to gain,” is a play on the noun κέρδη, “gains” (v 7). Paul has given up all other forms of “gain” (κέρδη) in order that he might get the true “gain” (κερδήσω), which is Christ, that is, Christ himself, not merely the favor of Christ. Or in other words, were Paul to place the whole world, with its wealth, power, and advantages, its prestige, accolades, and rewards, in one scale pan of the balance and Christ in the other, Christ alone would overwhelmingly outweigh everything else in terms of real worth. Hence, from the standpoint of simple logic Paul cannot afford to gain the whole world if it means losing Christ (cf. the words of Jesus in Mark 8:36 par. Matt 16:26 par. Luke 9:25). Paul’s use of commercial terminology will reappear in Phil 4:10–20.

Although Paul, somewhat caught in the web of his rhetoric, does speak of “gaining” Christ, he does not intend to convey solely the idea of a personal profiting from Christ. “To gain Christ” must also have involved for Paul the concept of bowing before Christ in humble repentance (though this is not a Pauline word; it is found only in two places, Rom 2:4, 2 Cor 7:9–10, and there used of a response to God on the part of professed believers, not outsiders, of recognizing him as the only Lord [a Pauline title, found 164 times], of claiming him as the only basis for a right standing before God, and at the same time of being accepted by him in “justification,” which is a restored relationship; on the modern discussion, see Martin, Reconciliation, with bibliography). It must also have embraced the idea of communion with Christ in an ever-deepening relationship that will continue until it reaches its
consummation at the Parousia. And yet there is in these words of Paul the unmistakable idea that to know Christ in the intimacy of personal trust and surrender is indeed to benefit personally from him (so Melanchthon, as cited by Martin [1959], 148; for the reference to Melanchthon’s tag, “to know Christ is to know his benefits,” see Martin, “Christology of the Prison Epistles”).

The construction Paul uses to express this goal—ἵνα, “in order that,” with the subjunctive—implies more than that Paul surrendered all to gain Christ and that he has therefore fully gained Christ. There is also in this construction the idea of the future, the sense that Paul has both gained Christ and is yet to gain Christ. As stated by Collange (130), “Christ, who has already given himself in many ways, is still to be ‘gained’ (‘kerdēsō’). Experience of his Lordship is therefore essentially a dynamic experience which sets one on the road. That road, from self to Christ, is a long one.”

9 καὶ εὑρεθῶ ἐν αὐτῷ, “and of being found in him.” That the future element attends Paul’s expression “for the goal of gaining Christ” (v 8) is corroborated now by this coordinate expression. εὑρίσκειν here means “to be found when surprised by death” (cf. 2 Cor 5:3; see Moffatt, ExpTim 24 [1912–13] 46; Koperski, Knowledge, 164–70). Here the apostle’s mind seems to focus on the coming day of judgment, when he must stand before God who is the Judge of his people. But as a result of his conversion and the enlightening experience stemming from his encounter at that time with the living Christ, it is obvious that Paul fears now to stand before God ἐν σαρκί, “in the flesh,” i.e., by himself. He desires (and fully intends) to be found ἐν Χριστῷ, “in Christ,” incorporate
in him (see Comment on Phil 1:1, where the sense of ἐν, “in,” is that of “incorporation into Christ,” one of several nuances; see Moule, Origin, who brings out the idea of being in the company of Christ’s community), and thus to stand before the Judge, not presenting himself and his claims to God’s favor, but because he is in Christ, presenting Christ and the all-prevailing merits of Christ (although the formula, we are saved propter meritum Christi, “because of the merit of Christ,” is a later theologizing). He no longer has aspirations to be a self-reliant person who has (ἔχων) only his own goodness (δικαιοσύνην) to offer to God. He understands now that his is an inadequate goodness that can in no way commend him to God.

μὴ ἔχων ἐμὴν δικαιοσύνην τὴν ἐκ νόμου ἀλλὰ τὴν διὰ πίστεως Χριστοῦ, τὴν ἐκ θεοῦ δικαιοσύνην ἐπὶ τῇ πίστει, “not with my own righteousness, earned by keeping the law, but with God’s righteousness given through faith in Christ—the righteousness that is given by God and is obtained through faith.” Thus it is that Paul is led back to a favorite topic of his—δικαιοσύνη, “righteousness”—but one he does not develop at this point. Unquestionably Paul had thoroughly instructed the Philippians in what it means to be righteous before God. But for others to understand the meaning of δικαιοσύνη, “righteousness,” here in Phil 3:9 they must attend carefully to Romans and Galatians, which provide the necessary commentaries on this important concept.

Often, both in Hebrew and Greek, the words Ἰσραήλ, Ἰσραήλ, “righteous,” and Ἰσραήλ, Ἰσραήλ, “righteousness,” and the related verb Ἰσραήλ (in hip‘il), Ἰσραήλ, “to justify,” were used as
legal terms. In a court of law the judge, who had to decide between two parties, was forced “to justify” the one and “to condemn” the other. That is to say, he had to decide in favor of the one and against the other. Thus “to justify” often meant “to give someone their rights,” “to vindicate or exonerate,” or “to declare someone in the right.” What is important to observe is that this decision did not necessarily depend on the moral character of the person involved.

Now when these terms are employed in a religious context, the question naturally arises: “What must a man do if God is to declare that he is in the right and so give judgment in his favor?” (Caird, 138). For the Jew the answer was: “I must obey the law of Moses!” Paul’s answer, stemming from his new understanding of the OT (cf. Pss 14:1–3; 53:1–3; 143:2; and esp. Hab 2:4, cited in Rom 1:17) in the light of his Damascus-road experience, is that human beings are too sinful ever to be able to do enough good to be declared good by God. What is more, God does not ask for good works; he asks for faith (cf. Gen 15:6). The trouble with a righteousness based on what a person can do is that it is always self-righteousness (cf. Rom 10:1–3), providing a basis for self-boasting. Paul’s argument may be paraphrased thus:

If I try to earn God’s favorable verdict by my own goodness, I am aiming at a righteousness of my own (ἐμὴν δικαιοσύνην), one that is my own achievement and that will give me a claim on God’s recognition. But as long as I am doing this, I disqualify myself from the true righteousness, which is not based on merit (although not a Pauline expression; cf. Isa 61:10). For faith is not an alternative way of earning God’s favor; faith is the opposite of
merit or, as Paul says, boasting, an admission that I cannot earn God’s approval, but can only accept his free offer of forgiveness, grace, and love. And since the offer is made in the life and above all in the death of Christ, true righteousness, the condition of being truly right with God, must come through faith in Christ.

πίστις, “faith,” in its strictest sense, therefore, is not intellectual assent to a series of propositions about Christ but the act of personal trust in and self-surrender to Christ (for a discussion see Ljungman, Pistis; Binder, Glaube). It is the movement of one’s whole soul in confidence toward Christ. It is the “yes” of the whole personality to the call of Christ. (For this and similar additional ideas see Michael; Bultmann, Theology, 1:270–84; Richardson, Introduction, 23–25; Beare; Conzelmann, Int 22 [1968] 178–82; Caird; C. E. B. Cranfield, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, ICC [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975] 1:91–102, passim. But for other perspectives on the righteousness of God see also Käsemann, “Righteousness,” 168–82; idem, Commentary on Romans, trans. G. W. Bromiley [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980] 91–129; Stuhlmacher, Gerechtigkeit Gottes; Kertelge, Rechtfertigung; Sanders, Paul and Palestinian Judaism, 474–523; Brauch, “Perspectives on ‘God’s Righteousness’ ”; McGrath, DPL, 517–23, building on earlier treatments, especially in Reumann, Righteousness; and Koperski, Knowledge, 191–238 [note esp. 322 n. 80].) Hence when Paul writes of the righteousness that is διὰ πίστεως Χριστοῦ, lit. “through faith of Christ,” one must take the genitive Χριστοῦ, “of Christ,” as an objective genitive (cf. Mark 11:22; Acts 3:16; Gal 2:20 for similar constructions). Paul does not have in mind here a righteousness that is based on the
faithfulness, loyalty, or fidelity of Christ to the Father (Vallotton, Christ, 88–89; D. W. B. Robinson, RTR 29 [1970] 71–81; Longenecker, “Obedience of Christ”; and esp. Hays, Faith, and his debate with Dunn [see bibliography in Dunn, Theology of Paul, 335]). Rather, he has in mind a righteousness that has its origin in God (ἐκ θεοῦ, “from God”) and that is humbly appropriated by a person through faith in Christ. It is questionable to reject this interpretation simply by claiming that if so interpreted, Paul creates a tautology when he then adds the phrase τὴν ἐκ θεοῦ δικαιοσύνην ἐπὶ τῇ πίστει, “the righteousness that is given by God and is obtained through faith,” thus twice calling attention to the human response without once stating the objective grounds for God’s justifying action (Martin [1976]). Such a rejection hangs by too thin a thread, because the phrase “the righteousness that is given by God and is obtained through faith” may be simply added for clarification and emphasis, without any concern for being tautological, and because just such emphatic redundancy is in keeping with Paul’s style of writing. In Gal 2:16 he seems to do exactly what he does here, though in a much more awkward fashion. There he repeats three times over the phrase “faith in Christ Jesus”—διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ... εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐπιστεύσαμεν ... ἐκ πίστεως Χριστοῦ—referring each time to the human reaction to God’s gift without once specifying the objective ground of God’s action (see H. D. Betz’s translation in his Galatians, Hermeneia [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979] 113). But for a different interpretation see Hays, Faith, on Gal 2:16.

In this one verse, then, Paul distills his great fundamental doctrine of justification by faith: (1) All human beings are alienated from God, in the sense of being out of relationship. (2) They
cannot possibly reestablish the necessary right relationship with God by their own efforts (ἐμὴν δικαιοσύνην τὴν ἐκ νόμου, “my own righteousness, earned by keeping the law or based on Torah piety,” is for Paul an impossible feat). (3) God must take the initiative to restore this right relationship; the source of true righteousness is the redemptive action of God himself (τὴν ἐκ θεοῦ δικαιοσύνην, “God’s righteousness,” is less a forensic, more a dynamic, creative power; so Käsemann, “Righteousness”). (4) God has indeed taken this initiative in Christ, in his life, death, and resurrection. (5) God’s initiative must be met with a human response. Right relationship with God is established by one’s faith in Christ (διὰ πίστεως Χριστοῦ, “through faith in Christ”), that is to say, by one’s continual confession of total dependence upon Christ for the necessary true righteousness, by one’s personal trust in and surrender to Christ. (6) Faith in Christ, then, is another way of stating what it means to be found in Christ (ἐὑρεθῶ ἐν αὐτῷ, “I might be found in him”), incorporated in him, and united with him to such a degree that all that Christ is and has done is received by the person who trusts in Christ (Silva, 187).

Alternatively, the thrust of Paul’s argument may be interpreted to be: restoring a right relationship is indeed God’s doing (2 Cor 5:18); the groundwork is laid in Christ’s fidelity (πίστις) to his Father’s will to save; and human faith is based on “Christ’s faithfulness” (Bockmuehl, 211–13). This seems eminently logical, though the impasse is faced by Hooker (NTS 35 [1989] 321–42), who links the two kinds of πίστις, “faith,” with her notion of “interchange,” derived from Luther.
Paul considers all his personal advantages and everything else, for that matter, as unspeakable filth “for the goal of knowing Christ in the power of his resurrection, and in the fellowship of his sufferings.” This final goal is expressed differently from the previous two (vv 8–9), which were introduced by ἵνα, “in order that,” and the subjunctive: ἵνα Χριστὸν κερδήσω καὶ εὑρεθῶ ἐν αὐτῷ, “in order that I might gain Christ and be found in him.” This goal is expressed by an infinitive with the genitive definite article: τοῦ γνῶναι αὐτόν, lit. “to know him.” For this reason several commentators understand τοῦ γνῶναι, “to know,” as an explanatory infinitive, more precisely defining the nature and power of faith (v 9): ἐπὶ τῇ πίστει, τοῦ γνῶναι αὐτόν, “through faith, which is to know him” (see Keck, Hendriksen, Collange, Martin [1976]). There is certainly a sense in which faith and knowledge are close in idea, and the meaning of the one is strengthened by sharing in the meaning of the other. And it is true that the infinitive may be used to explain or define more precisely another word (Moule, Idiom-Book, 129). But it is not likely that this is the case here: (1) Nowhere else in the NT is the noun πίστις, “faith,” followed by an explanatory articular infinitive (although it may be admitted that Paul is writing here in a cryptic way). (2) On the other hand, the infinitive with the genitive definite article, as here, is often used to express purpose in the NT, especially in Luke and Paul (Luke 24:29; 1 Cor 10:13; cf. BDF §400[5]). (3) Furthermore, to change constructions in the same sentence from ἵνα, “in order that,” and the subjunctive to an infinitive in order to show purpose is not an uncommon change in
Paul’s writings (Rom 6:6; Col 1:9–10). (4) By taking τοῦ γνῶναι, “to know,” as an infinitive of design, parallel in idea to ἵνα Χριστὸν κερδήσω καὶ εὑρεθῶ ἐν αὐτῷ, “in order that I might gain Christ and be found in him,” one sees immediately in this expression a fitting climax to Paul’s passionate willingness to treat everything as “refuse” that would prevent him from achieving his objective, which is “to gain Christ,” “to be found in Christ,” and “to know Christ.” “To know Christ,” therefore, is the ultimate goal toward which the apostle sets the course of his life (on the grammar here see Fee [1995], 327).

The tense of the infinitive γνῶναι, “to know,” is aorist and very likely an ingressive aorist, i.e., an aorist that sums up the action of the verb at the point at which it commences (but see Beare, opposed by Fee [1995], 326). This suggests a crisis of knowledge where for Paul just the coming to know Christ outweighs all other values. For him the significance of Christ “in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:3) is so vast that even to begin to know him is more important than anything else in all the world. The crisis, however, implies a process. The coming to know Christ results in a growing knowledge of Christ, as Paul makes clear here and elsewhere (Moule).

The verb γινώσκειν/γνῶναι, “to know,” and its cognates (cf. v 8) often focus attention upon the ideas of understanding, experience, and intimacy, even the intimacy of the sexual relationship in marriage (cf. Matt 1:25), based on the Heb. yādaʿ. Hence, when Paul speaks of his desire to know Christ, he does not have in mind a mere intellectual knowledge about Christ (Paul had that
when he was persecuting the church). Rather, he is thinking about a personal encounter with Christ that inaugurates a special intimacy with Christ that is life-changing and ongoing (cf. John 17:3; 1 Cor 2:8; 1 John 2:3, 4; 4:8; 5:20).

καὶ τὴν δύναμιν τῆς ἀναστάσεως αὐτοῦ, “in the power of his resurrection.” That this knowledge of Christ is personal and relational is now made clear by the phrases that follow, the first of which is lit. “and the power of his resurrection.” Here, however, the καί, “and,” is more than a simple conjunction. It serves to link the words that follow together with αὐτόν, “him,” in such a way as to define and more fully explain what is meant by αὐτόν, “him” (cf. BDAG: καί, 3). It is not that Paul is saying “I want to know him and the power of his resurrection,” as though “him” and “power” were equally worthy objects of his knowing. Rather, he is saying “I want to know him in the power of his resurrection” (GOODSPEED, MOFFATT). That is to say, Paul is not content merely to know Christ as a figure of history (κατὰ σάρκα, “according to the flesh”), but he desires to know him personally as the resurrected ever-living Lord of his life (κατὰ πνεῦμα, “according to the Spirit”). This is the formulation of 2 Cor 5:16. And the δύναμις, “power,” he wishes to know is not something separable from him, but the power with which the risen Christ is endowed. He wishes to know Christ “by experiencing the power he wields in virtue of his resurrection” (Michael). He wishes to know him alive and creatively at work to save him from himself, to transform him from “bad” to “good,” to propel him forward toward a life of service to others, to inaugurate “newness of life,” life in the Spirit, in a word, to
resurrect him from death in sin to life in God, to quicken and stimulate his whole moral and spiritual being (cf. Rom 6:4–11; Lightfoot, Michael, Dibelius, Gnilka).

καὶ κοινωνίαν παθημάτων αὐτοῦ, “and in the fellowship of his sufferings.” This second phrase is to be taken closely with the first phrase, not only because it is linked with the connective καί, “and,” but especially because the word κοινωνίαν, “fellowship,” shares the same definite article with the word δύναμιν, “power”: τὴν δύναμιν ... καὶ κοινωνίαν, “the power... and fellowship” (see Note h-h). This suggests that the power of the resurrected Christ and the fellowship of his sufferings are to be thought of not as two totally separate experiences but as alternate aspects of the same experience (so Tannehill, Dying and Rising, 84–90). Now if the first phrase is interpreted to mean that Paul wishes to know the power of the resurrected Christ at work within him and the second phrase is as closely related to the first as the sentence structure seems to suggest, then it is not plausible to interpret the one of an inner subjective experience and the other of an external objective happening. Paul is not now thinking of his own physical sufferings as in any way completing the full tally of Christ’s afflictions (Col 1:24; on this text see R. P. Martin, Colossians: The Church’s Lord and the Christian’s Liberty [Exeter: Paternoster, 1972; reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2000] ad loc.), nor does he here have in mind the principle he enunciates elsewhere: “to suffer with Christ is to be glorified with him” (Rom 8:17–18; cf. 2 Cor 4:7–11). Rather, this phrase in its context of being found in Christ, clothed with his righteousness, is highly reminiscent of Rom 6:4–11 in a baptismal context (but see Koperski, Knowledge, 266–69). Thus, just as
knowing Christ in the power of his resurrection is an inward experience that can be expressed in terms of being resurrected with Christ (cf. Rom 6:4), though outwardly and sacramentally expressed in baptism (see Schnackenburg, Baptism), so knowing Christ in the fellowship of his sufferings is equally an inward experience that can be described in terms of having died with Christ (cf. Rom 6:8 and see Gal 2:19–20). This is not to deny that Paul’s prison experience is also much in the background here.

This becomes especially clear when one remembers (1) that the Greek word κοινωνία, “fellowship,” followed by the genitive case, as here, also carries with it the idea of “participation or sharing in” something objective (cf. Seesemann, Begriff KOINΩΝΙΑ. BDAG) and (2) that a favorite theme of Paul is that of Christ as the last Adam. As such, Christ embodies the whole of humankind or a redeemed humanity. He identified himself so completely with human beings in their state of sin and helplessness that as a result they might be equally identified with him in his resurrected new life of goodness (cf. Rom 5:12–18; 8:3; 1 Cor 15:22, 49; 2 Cor 5:21; Phil 2:7). In Christ’s suffering and death the old humanity came to an end; in his resurrection the new humanity began (2 Cor 5:14–17). Therefore, for Paul to say that he wishes to know Christ and the fellowship of his sufferings is not that he seeks to know Christ and to experience physical sufferings of martyrdom (cf. RSV: “that I may share his sufferings”), but that he seeks to know Christ who suffered and died for him (cf. 1 Pet 3:18; 4:1), to know that he therefore has suffered and died in Christ, only to be resurrected in him to a new and superlative kind of life (Jones, Michael, Caird, Loh and Nida; see also Jervell, Imago Dei, 206–8, 261–75; Barrett,
From First Adam to Last; Scroggs, Last Adam; Seesemann, Begriff KOINΩNIA). (But see Jewett, NovT 12 [1970–71] 198–212; Siber, Mit Christus Leben, 111, 115, 118; Collange; Martin [1976] for a different view that interprets these phrases polemically as Paul’s rebuttal to the wrong-headed teaching of a group or groups of religious leaders who oppose him on the ground that he was an apostle who suffered—a similar charge brought in 2 Cor 10–13, whose commonality with Philippians may postulate an origin of both epistles in Paul’s Ephesian and post-Ephesian ministry.)

συμμορφιζόμενος τῷ θανάτῳ αὐτοῦ, “continually conforming myself [or being conformed] to his death.” That the phrase “the fellowship of his sufferings” has been correctly interpreted, in our view, is corroborated now by this participial expression that immediately follows. To understand this there are several things to note: (1) In a crisscross chiastic structure Paul equates Christ’s “sufferings” with Christ’s death (see fig. 4). (2) συμμορφίζομαι, “to conform oneself,” “to make oneself like,” is a hapax legomenon, a word occurring only here in the NT. Nevertheless, in spite of its uniqueness, it immediately brings to mind the vocabulary of Rom 6:1–12: “For if we have become united [σύμφυτοι, lit. ‘growing or planted together’] with him in the likeness [ὁμοιώματι] of his death, we shall also be in the likeness of his resurrection” (Rom 6:5, Hawthorne’s translation); “If we died with [σύν] Christ, we believe that we will also live with [συζήσομεν] him” (Rom 6:8, Hawthorne’s translation). (3) Therefore, by coining this word and using it here, Paul is not dramatically claiming that he is expecting to suffer physically as Christ suffered or to die as he died (WEYMOUTH, PHILLIPS, JB; see also Meyer, Plummer, Lohmeyer).
Rather, captivated by the idea that he and all believers are caught up into Christ and are indissolubly linked together with him to share with him in all the events of his life, including his death and resurrection, Paul creates a new word capable not only of stating that he has died with Christ (cf. Rom 6:10, in baptism?) as a fact of the past, but also of stating his conscious glad choice to identify himself with that death and to conform his life to the implications of that death now in the present. He expresses this great fundamental concept by words compounded with σύν, “with,” such as συσταυροῦν, “to crucify together with” (Rom 6:6); συνθάπτειν, “to bury together with” (Rom 6:4); συζωοποιεῖν, “to make alive together with” (Eph 2:5), and so on (see W. Grundmann, TDNT 7:786–87, for a complete listing of these compounds; see also Moule, Origin, 124).

Figure 4. Chiastic diagram of Phil 3:10

συμμορφιζόμενος, “continually conforming myself [or being conformed],” is a participle, middle voice and present tense. As such it says that Paul, already dead to sin by virtue of Christ’s death, nevertheless strives to make the effects of that death an ever-present reality within himself by his own constant choice to consider himself in fact dead to sin and alive to God (cf. Rom 6:11), to conform his practice in the world to his position in Christ,
to renounce his own selfish desires and say yes to Christ, who calls him to take up his cross daily and follow him as a servant of God for the good of humankind (cf. Phil 2:6–8 where μορφὴν δούλου, “form of a slave,” is recalled by συμμορφιζόμενος, “continually conforming myself [or being conformed]”; for the baptismal context of both Philippian texts, see Jervell, Imago Dei, discussed in Martin, Hymn of Christ, 81–82).

This interpretation does not totally rule out the thought of physical sufferings or death playing out their transforming role in the Christian’s life. In fact, the mystical union with Christ in his sufferings and death, as outlined above, is but strengthened and deepened by any physical pain that may be experienced because of faith in Christ. The hazards that Paul faced in his apostolic work, the batterings he was subjected to as a Christian, had the potential for being “the concrete external means” by which he could be conformed to Christ’s death (Beare, 124). Thus, the expression “conforming oneself to his death” can be enlarged to include “costly discipleship,” the kind of suffering expressed so poignantly by the apostle in his letter to the Corinthians (2 Cor 4:10–11, Hawthorne’s translation):

Always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus’ sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

(See 2 Cor 1:8–10; 6:8–10; 11:21–33. It has been noted earlier that Paul’s suffering in Ephesus is reflected in the Corinthian correspondence.) This setting would answer the criticism of Fee
11 εἰ πως καταντήσω εἰς τὴν ἐξανάστασιν τὴν ἐκ νεκρῶν, “in the hope of attaining the resurrection from among the dead.” If by reading v 10 one should think that Paul has shifted from a futuristic eschatology (cf. 1 Thess 4:13–17) to a “realized” eschatology, where the Christian’s resurrection has already taken place (cf. 1 Cor 15:12; Col 3:1–3; and the error of Hymenaeus and Philetus in 2 Tim 2:7–18) in Christ’s resurrection (cf. Gal 2:20), clearly this is not the case. The apostle does assert that the Christian died and rose with Christ, and is now living in the power of Christ’s resurrected life (Dibelius, Gnilka, Collange). But this conviction does not lead him to surrender the hope of a future resurrection, when all conflicts will be resolved; all ills healed; all human frailties, both moral and physical, eliminated; and all wrongs forever set right (cf. 3:21). Paul’s “eschatological proviso” (Vorbehalt), i.e., the tension between what is already experienced by believers and what lies ahead, is one of the most axiomatic conclusions in recent Pauline studies.

Paul expresses this hope of a future resurrection in an unusual way. He begins with the words εἰ πως καταντήσω, lit. “if somehow I might attain.” These words seem to convey an element of doubt or uncertainty, however slight (see Bockmuehl, 217, who comments, “There is a degree of contingency often underrated by commentators”). But if there is any doubt in Paul’s mind, it is not about the reality of the resurrection to come (cf. 2 Cor 5:1–8; Phil 3:20–21), or about the trustworthiness of God (Rom 8:38–39), or about the way in which he will attain the resurrection, i.e., by
martyrdom (cf. Otto, CBQ 57.2 [1995] 324–40, who thinks the doubt is real that Paul will fail to be resurrected as a martyr), or by some other way (Martin [1976]), or about himself (Michael, Vincent, Collange) as to whether he might be rejected for his own defects (1 Cor 9:27; but see Phil 3:9; Rom 5:17–18, 21). Rather, it would appear that Paul uses such an unexpected hypothetical construction simply because of humility on his part, a humility that recognizes that salvation is the gift of God from start to finish and that as a consequence he dare not presume on this divine mercy (Caird). A translation such as GOODSPEED’s “in the hope of attaining” adequately and accurately expresses Paul’s feeling of awe and wonder as he wrote the phrase (cf. Acts 27:12; Rom 1:10; 11:14 for similar expressions of expectation; BDF §375). Such an attitude of humility is not in any way weakened by the active voice of the verb καταντήσω, “I might attain” (akin to 3:12–14), as though Paul were thinking that by himself and his own efforts he could attain the resurrection. His expression as it stands implies the following modification: “If by the grace and goodness of God I might be privileged to participate in the resurrection” (see Gundry Volf, Paul and Perseverance, 254–60).

The expression Paul uses here for the resurrection, ἐξανάστασις, does not appear in the LXX, nor is it found elsewhere in the NT. Paul coined it, perhaps, compounding the preposition ἐκ, “out of,” with the usual word for resurrection (ἀνάστασις), so that by using this strengthened form along with the repeated ἐκ, “out of”— ἐκ νεκρῶν, “out of the dead”—he might stress in a striking way that it is precisely the rising from among the dead he has in mind here, not the mystical rising with Christ that is the present
experience of all believers. That future resurrection, which will be in incorruption, glory, and power (1 Cor 15:42–44), now has the focus of his attention, and only this resurrection is in view. See the full note of the unusual term “resurrection from the dead” in Bockmuehl (218–20); he emphasizes its polemical background.

Explanation

In this section, Paul makes it clear that Jewish Torah piety presented advantages, such as birth, religion, and position in society, and that Jewish boundary markers, however arduously achieved, ultimately are things without value. He says this not because of pique owing to a personal lack of distinction or because of failure in his occupational pursuits or religious endeavors. By human standards he was the best of the best, the most religious of the religious, with every right to boast in himself and to believe in his own goodness. Rather, he says this in light of what occurred to him on the Damascus road and the life-altering happening that took place there. Suddenly he encountered the very Christ whose followers he had been harassing. As a result, his life was never to be the same again.

Immediately he experienced a radical transvaluation of values. At once he realized that those “good” things he had cherished and striven for were not “gains” at all. They were losses that had bankrupted him. They were “evil” things bent on destroying him, because they made him self-reliant, self-satisfied, content to offer to God his own goodness. They acted as an opiate, dulling his awareness of his need for the real righteousness that God requires and that only God can supply. The blinding light of the Christ-
encounter (Acts 9:3–5) paradoxically opened Paul’s eyes to see everything clearly and in proper perspective. As a result he came to realize that to know Christ Jesus as his Lord was the one thing in life of ultimate worth—everything else that would compete for his allegiance was not only “loss” but “filth” by comparison, things to be abhorred and abandoned. And the actual loss of all those things he once lived for in no way altered his thinking. He continued with happy resolve to value only Christ. He considered himself a person who profited to the extreme by having gained Christ, by having become incorporate in him. Now there was no longer any doubt in his mind about whether his own goodness within the limits of Torah religion, based on keeping the law, was good enough for God; it was not. Instead, Paul came to see that by faith, that is, by his “yes” to the address of Christ, he stood now before God in Christ and in his goodness. He came to understand that the ultimate goodness that God demanded has been provided by God himself, but only in Christ. Thus, he came to understand that to have gained everything and lost Christ would have been to profit not at all, whereas to have lost everything and yet gained Christ was to have become the richest of the rich, not obviously in material possessions, but in spiritual enrichment (2 Cor 8:9).

Hence Paul desired to come to know Christ more fully, not as a theological topic to be discussed, much as he used to discuss different points of the Jewish law, but as a person to be enjoyed, echoing what Luther would later say in contrasting “using God” and “enjoying God.” He desired to experience in practice what he knew to be true in theory, i.e., that when Christ died, he died; when Christ was resurrected, he, too, was resurrected. He desired to
sense within himself the power of the resurrected, living Christ. He desired to realize in personal experience the fact that Christ’s suffering for sin had indeed put to death his own sin. To this end Paul, although indeed dead to sin by virtue of Christ’s death for him, nevertheless, by his own continuous, conscious choice, was prepared to take this fact seriously, to take sides with Christ against himself, to bring his practice in the world in line with his position in Christ, to renounce his own selfish desires and say yes to Christ, who was calling him to conform himself to his death by daily taking up his cross in self-sacrificing service to others. Thus it was in a deep sense of humility and trust, expectation and hope, that Paul looked forward to the future and to his own bodily resurrection from among the dead. This thought points on to Phil 3:20–21.

The issue of “religion” is brought into prominence in this section. Here, while we should not seek to read Paul through Reformation spectacles and see the opposition to “works” as part of the debate between medieval Catholicism and the Protestant reformers, it still remains true that one’s trust in external props (for Paul, Torah religious observances, such as the distinctives of circumcision, sabbath keeping, and kosher observance, and for Luther, his fierce polemic against papal Rome) may constitute a threat to living faith. Karl Barth voiced this reliance on externalities (in his day, of the Confessing Church in the Third Reich) as an evil to be resisted. Hence we may understand his stark axiom: “religion is a concern of the godless” (Religion ist eine Angelegenheit... des gottlosen Menschen; Church Dogmatics 1.2, 299–300 [trans. G. T. Thomson and H. Knight, adapted]). The “godless” in this context were not
evil people but religious folk, and especially their leaders in the German Christian movement that supported Hitler. This section in Paul speaks, then, with a timeless relevance to any situation in which Christ is being replaced by “religion,” whether Torah or civil or cultural-patriotic loyalty to which human beings cling for support and by which they seek to gain acceptance with God who “justifies the ungodly” (Rom 4:5).
C. Warning against Perfection Now (3:12–16)

Bibliography


Translation

¹² I do not say that I have at this time grasped a [the meaning of] Christ, or that I have already become perfect [in my knowledge of him]. But I keep pressing on to see whether b I may apprehend Christ Jesus, c inasmuch as [or, since] I was indeed apprehended by him. ¹³ Brothers [and sisters], I do not d reckon that I have fully apprehended him yet. But I focus on one thing only: while forgetting what is behind me, and stretching out to what lies before me, ¹⁴ I keep running toward the goal-marker, straight for the prize to which God calls me up, e the prize that is contained in Christ Jesus. f ¹⁵ So this is the attitude all of us who are “perfect” must g have. But since you have a somewhat different attitude, God will surely reveal to you the truth even about this. ¹⁶ In any case, let us live up to whatever truth we have already attained. h

Notes
12.a. \(Psi\) 46 D and a few other witnesses add ἢ ἢδη δεδικαίωμαι, “or have already been justified,” perhaps influenced by 1 Cor 4:4 or compensating for the lack of any objects for the verbs in this verse. If this phrase is an omission, it can be explained as an error due to homoioteleuton (see Silva, 203–4). Its inclusion would provide a good example of paronomasia with διώκω, “I keep pressing on” (see Fernández, Est Bib 34 [1975] 121–23). For a defense of the inclusion of this phrase (as in NA ²⁷), see Bockmuehl, 220.

12.b. Many MSS add καί, “and,” “indeed,” at this point. \(Sigma\) * D* F G and a few other witnesses omit it.

12.c. B F G 33 and a few other witnesses omit Ἰησοῦ, “Jesus.” As is often the case, this name, “Christ Jesus,” generates variant readings. \(Psi\) 46, 61 \(Sigma\) A \(Psi\) and the Majority Text read Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, “Christ Jesus.”

13.d. \(Sigma\) A D* P 33 81 and apparently \(Psi\) 16, 61 read οὔπω, “not yet,” for οὐ, “not,” which is supported by \(Psi\) 46 B F G and the Majority Text. οὔπω, “not yet,” is the easier of the two readings and should be rejected as secondary.

14.e. 1739 mg and Tertullian have ἀνεγκλησίας, “irreproachability,” instead of ἄνω κλήσεως, “upward call,” perhaps an early emendation of the text to make sense out of an otherwise difficult expression (cf. Phil 1:10 ; 2:15 ; 3:6 to see that the idea of “irreproachableness” is a concern of Paul).

14.f. Some few MSS add κυρίῳ, “Lord,” to the phrase ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, “in Christ Jesus”— ἐν κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ, “in
the Lord Jesus Christ.”

15.g. L and a few other witnesses read φρονοῦμεν, “the attitude we have” (indicative), instead of φρονῶμεν, “the attitude we must have” (hortatory subjunctive). This kind of variant appears elsewhere (cf. Rom 5:1), perhaps as a result of confusion in sound or sight. The two meanings may well be combined, as in MOFFATT’s rendering of Rom 5:1, “Let us enjoy the peace we have.”

16.h. Some witnesses read τῷ αὐτῷ στοιχεῖν κανόνι, αὐτὸ φρονεῖν, “to walk by the same rule, to think it,” or τὸ αὐτὸ φρονεῖν, τῷ αὐτῷ κανόνι στοιχεῖν, “to think the same thing, to walk by the same rule,” or other various combinations of these same words. The shorter reading, adopted for this translation, is supported by the oldest MSS: A B 33 and others.

Form/Structure/Setting

Paul’s Greek at this point is difficult. Hence it is not possible to see precisely how it relates to what has gone before. True, the new section does begin with a conjunction, ὅτι, but the ambiguous nature of this conjunction (it can mean “that” or “because”) does not permit one to speak with any assurance. This ambiguity of meaning and the fact that the several verbs in v 12 are without objects compound the problem of relationship. One can only hope, therefore, to make an intelligent guess as to how vv 12–16 fit with vv 4–11. One such surmise may be the common catchword διώκειν, rendered “persecute” (in v 6) and “keep pressing on” (in v 12).
The dominant theme in the previous section (3:4–11) was the superlative significance of Christ. Although Paul also recites his own worthy attributes, he does so simply to accentuate the values of Christ; for he considers these attributes of his to be worse than nothing when compared with Christ. They can be easily set aside, abandoned even, if this is necessary to gain Christ. Paul is obsessed with Christ. Nothing else matters but Christ. He can afford to lose all, but not Christ. For him to gain the world but not Christ is to have lost everything, whereas to gain Christ and lose everything is to possess all. Hence the apostle's desire is to gain Christ, to be found in Christ. In a word, the total focus of his life is to know Christ intimately. Paul closes this section by giving expression to his hope of attaining the resurrection from the dead. But this mention of the resurrection is made more like an aside than anything else. Certainly it is not the burden of vv 4–11. Christ is the chief theme. Any hope for resurrection and standing before God in a goodness acceptable to God is based wholly upon Christ.

Hence vv 12–16 may be viewed as relating to the previous section in this way: they provide a caution about past experiences and a plan of action for the future. Paul has just said that his supreme desire is to know Christ (and this is a worthy goal for any Christian). But lest some should assume that he (or anyone else for that matter) had already attained complete knowledge of Christ, he immediately proceeds to disabuse them of such an assumption. Christ is too great to be grasped in a single lifetime. And yet this fact does not discourage Paul or dampen his ardor. Rather, it drives him on to know more. The more he knows about Christ, the more he wishes to know. Hence he views his future as
a race course stretching out before a runner who is pressing on to reach the goal and win the prize. Thus, the incomprehensible majesty of Christ is no deterrent to Paul’s quest, but a spur, urging him to press on to a still greater knowledge of Christ until it is finally complete when he is called up to receive the prize.

At the same time that Paul continues to bare his soul and disclose the motive that drives him, he may also intend his words to be a warning against any claim that “perfection” is possible in the present. Those same Jewish teachers, whom he attacked so vehemently in vv 2–3, were known to state repeatedly that a person who has been circumcised and is true to the law can reach perfection (Rigaux, NTS 4 [1957–58] 237–62). Hence if they were teaching this in Philippi, Paul, who now knows that “perfection” cannot be attained in this way, surely would wish to remind his friends that “perfection” comes only through Jesus Christ and at the resurrection at the last day (cf. Phil 3:21). There is no need, then, to suppose that in addition to such Jewish or Jewish-Christian propagandists the Philippian Christians were beset by still another group of opponents—gnostics, who also believed and taught that perfection could be attained on earth now without waiting for, or without any need for, the resurrection (Friedrich, 120; Koester, NTS 8 [1961–62] 324). This is not to say there was no gnostic influence present in Philippi or that Paul did not know and use gnostic key words and phrases in his teaching. But there seems little need here to ferret out a new opponent for Paul to attack in addition to the Jewish faction in order to justify the statements he makes.

Rather, the elegance of Paul’s rhetoric, the depth of feeling he emotes, the unique intimate revelation of his own consuming desire
to know Christ and to follow on to know him better—all breathe more the spirit of parenetic, or better, epideictic, rather than polemical rhetoric. Paul seems more like a pastor who gladly risks being ridiculed or misunderstood in order to care properly for his flock than a warrior fending off an enemy. He seems more concerned to consolidate converts to Christ than to win an argument with his opponents. (Yet he did face an array of deviationists who attacked his congregations [see Gunther, St. Paul’s Opponents, for a survey; also see Sumney, Identifying Paul’s Opponents].) His style of writing appears designed powerfully to affect his readers, to move them to change, to create within them the same appreciation for and pursuit of Christ that he himself experienced, rather than to put down any enemies one can imagine. Christ is so real to him and so ultimately significant that he wants the Philippians (and the whole world, for that matter) to know what he knows and feels.

Comment

12 οὐχ ὅτι ἐδέλαβον, “I do not say that I have at this time grasped [the meaning of] Christ.” Paul continues his passionate writing, beginning his new sentence abruptly with οὐχ ὅτι, “not that”—a distinctively NT formula, meaning “I do not say that” or “I do not claim that” (cf. John 6:46 ; 7:42 ; 2 Cor 1:24 ; 3:5 ; 2 Thess 3:9). But what is it that Paul here so emphatically disclaims? To answer this question is not an easy matter. First, it is difficult because the verb of the subordinate clause introduced by ὅτι, “that,” is ἐλαβον, a verb with a wide range of meanings: “to take hold of,” “to receive or accept,” “to get or obtain,” “to make one’s
own,” “to apprehend or comprehend [mentally or spiritually].”

Second, it is difficult because this verb has no direct object to say what it was that Paul obtained or apprehended. As a consequence, many answers to the question have been suggested. (Further options in addition to what follows are mentioned by Bockmuehl, 221, with special reference to Qumran.) (1) Some say that Paul disclaims having already attained to the resurrection of the dead (cf. v 11; Lütgert, Vollkommenen im Philipperbrief). (2) Others say that he denies having fully achieved righteousness (Klijn, NovT 7 [1964–65] 281; Pfitzner, Paul and the Agon Motif, 142–53, supported by the variant reading of ἔλαβεν 46 and D, which add ἔδωκι ἄνω δεδικαίωμαι, “or have already been justified”; see Note a), moral and spiritual perfection (Vincent, J. J. Müller), or the prize at the end of the race (Moule, Bonnard, Synge, Beare). (3) Still others say that Paul deliberately left the object of the verb unexpressed to counter the arrogance of the gnostics, who claimed to know everything, to have attained everything, to have reached the goal, to have become perfect (Haupt; Ewald; Gnilka; Collange; Schmithals, Paul and the Gnostics, 97; Koester, NTS 8 [1961–62] 317–32).

None of these interpretations of Paul’s concise statement, however, does justice to its vocabulary or to its context. Hence one more suggestion may be permitted: Paul means to say that he does not lay claim to having fully grasped the meaning of Christ at this point in his experience. Christ—the full significance of this person—is the missing object of the verb ἔλαβον, “I have grasped.” In justification of this interpretation we may note the following factors: (1) The verb λαμβάνειν can indeed mean, among other things, “to comprehend mentally or spiritually” (BDAG). (2)
The strengthened form καταλαμβάνειν, which appears twice in immediately succeeding clauses (καταλάβω, “I may apprehend”/κατελήμφθην, “I was apprehended”), also carries the idea of “to grasp” in the sense of “to comprehend” (cf. John 1:5; Acts 4:13; 10:34; Eph 3:18; Plato, Phaedr. 250d; Polybius 8.4.6; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Ant. rom. 5.46.3; Josephus, Life 11 §56; see also the helpful remarks in R. Bultmann, The Gospel of John, trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971] 47–48; Dyer, JBL 79 [1960] 170–71). (3) The aorist tense ἔλαβον, “I have grasped,” that is used here is a constative aorist, collecting Paul’s past experiences up to the time of the present and viewing them as a single whole. This is confirmed by the temporal adjunct ἤδη, “at this time,” that accompanies it (BDF §332[1]). (4) The past experiences that are especially envisaged are those described in Phil 3:8–11, but especially the experiences involving Christ—gaining Christ, being found in Christ, and coming to know Christ. Paul’s encounter with the resurrected and living Christ created within him not only a consuming desire to know Christ intimately and fully, but also an awareness that this was something that could not be achieved in a moment. To know the incomprehensible greatness of Christ demands a lifetime of arduous inquiry.

ἦ ἤδη τετελείωμαι, “or that I have already become perfect [in my knowledge of him].” It is in just such a context of thought that the next verb, τετελείωμαι, “I have become perfect,” must also be interpreted. With it Paul carries further and underscores his disclaimer by saying that he is not “perfect” in his knowledge and understanding of Christ. (Cf. ἤδη τέλειος, “already perfect,” which
seems to have been a catchphrase of the gnostics, who considered themselves the only ones to have been fully instructed and so to have reached the proper level of illumination, knowledge, or understanding, especially at Corinth. See Schmithals, Paul and the Gnostics, 99; idem, Gnosticism in Corinth, 30; cf. also J. B. Lightfoot, Saint Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians and to Phililemon, 3d ed. [London: Macmillan, 1879] on Col 1:28.) The apostle is keenly aware that his knowledge of Christ is partial and that he must wait for a future day, the eschatological day (\(\tau\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\), “the perfect,” in 1 Cor 13:9–10, although the allusion here may be christological: when the returning Christ brings God’s purposes to fulfillment [ 1 Cor 15:20–28 ]). The sights of the apostle are evidently trained on those who espoused some form of “realized eschatology” (which may provide another link uniting Paul’s opponents at Corinth and Philippi, if his intention includes the polemical along with the hortatory).

\(\delta\iota\iota\omega\ \delta\epsilon\ \epsilon\iota\ \kappa\alpha\iota\ \kappa\alpha\tau\alpha\lambda\alpha\beta\omega\), “but I keep pressing on to see whether I may apprehend Christ Jesus.” The realization that there is too much to know about Christ for one’s knowledge of him ever to be complete this side of the future resurrection incites Paul to keep pressing on to see how much understanding he can achieve. The adversative conjunction \(\delta\epsilon\), “but,” emphasizes this determination: the immensity of the task might indeed paralyze some, but not Paul. \(\delta\iota\iota\omega\kappa\epsilon\iota\nu\), “to keep pressing on,” belongs to the world of the hunter rather than that of the athlete. It does not properly mean “to run”; rather it means “to pursue,” “to chase,” “to hunt down.” Nevertheless, because Paul uses \(\delta\iota\iota\omega\kappa\epsilon\iota\nu\), “to keep pressing on,” in
v 14 of an athlete running a race, it is quite likely that he already had this metaphor in mind in v 12 (Beare, Caird). In any case this verb gives expression to the greatness of the effort required, whether it is to make a catch, to win a race, or, in this instance, to know Christ.

διώκω, “I keep pressing on,” is followed by εἰ ... καταλάβω, “whether I may apprehend,” an example of the subjunctive employed in a dependent construction to express a deliberative question (BDF §368). εἰ, therefore, is to be translated “whether.” καταλαμβάνειν, which is the truly difficult word, may mean “to seize, win, attain,” as a runner in a race might run to win the prize (1 Cor 9:24). But it can also have the very different meaning, even in its active form, of “to grasp an idea with one’s mind,” hence “to understand” (BDAG; Dupont, Gnosis, 501–21). It is this latter meaning that makes the most sense here. Paul’s one desire is to know Christ. But he is keenly aware that he has not yet grasped (οὐχ ... ἔλαβον, “not [that] I have 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 (καταλάβω, “I may apprehend”) Christ fully.

ἐφ᾽ ὧν καὶ κατελήμφθην ὑπὸ Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, “inasmuch as [or, since] I was indeed apprehended by him.” The reason Paul gives for this lifetime quest is stated in this clause. (For ἐφ᾽ ὧν as an idiom meaning “because” see BDF §235[2]. For its use in the theologically important phrase in Rom 5:12 see J. A. Fitzmyer, Romans, AB 33 [New York: Doubleday, 1993] 413–17; idem, NTS 39 [1993] 321–39, where he argues for a consecutive reading more than
a causal one. Bockmuehl, 221, agrees. For a full discussion of this text, whose significance for “Ambrosiaster” and Augustine was momentous, see Williams, Ideas of the Fall. See Fee, 346 n. 31, 430 n. 28.) Once again Paul’s rhetorical skill becomes obvious as he plays with two forms of the same verb: καταλάβω, “I may apprehend”/ κατελήμφθη, “I was apprehended.” First, Paul states his goal: it is to grasp Christ Jesus for good and all, but to grasp (καταλάβω, “I may apprehend”) him with his mind and heart and to comprehend him with the full comprehension of faith (cf. R. Bultmann, The Gospel of John, trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971] 48). But second, in giving a motive for this driving force within him, Paul states that it was because he himself had been grasped (κατελήμφθη, “I was apprehended”) by Christ. Now the meaning of this verb shifts slightly. As Paul uses it here, he may intend it to retain some overtones of grasping with the mind, hence of being known by Christ, i.e., of being chosen by Christ for a specific task (Gal 1:15–16 ; 4:9 ; cf. Amos 3:2). But Paul seems now to be using it primarily to refer to that Christ-encounter he experienced on the Damascus road, at which time Christ laid hands on him, so to speak, forcefully arresting him and setting him off in a new lifelong direction (1 Cor 15:8–10 ; Michael; Dupont, “Conversion of Paul”). Perhaps, then, the English verb “to apprehend” is the one best suited to express the idea involved in Paul’s use of καταλαμβάνειν. For “to apprehend” can mean both “to lay hold of with the understanding” as well as “to arrest or seize.”

13 ἀδελφοί, ἐγὼ ἐμαυτὸν οὐ λογίζομαι κατειληφέναι· ἐν δὲ, “Brothers [and sisters], I do not reckon that I have fully
apprehended him yet. But I focus on one thing only.” Once again, with repetitive emphasis, Paul makes it clear to his fellow Christian family members (Ἀδελφοί, “brothers [and sisters]”) at Philippi that even after a further careful weighing of the evidence (λογίζεσθαι, a verb meaning “to calculate precisely”) he must reaffirm his former conclusion that he has not completely grasped the full significance of Christ (οὐ ... κατειληφέναι, “not... fully apprehended”). And if this is true for Paul, it is equally true for all others, some of whom may have claimed that they had reached perfection under the influence of teachers Paul opposes and whose advocacy of perfection led to disunity in the church (see Peterlin, Paul’s Letter to the Philippians). What then is to be done? There is only one thing (ἔν; but see Fridrichsen, ConNT 9 [1944] 31–32) that can be done. Having come to know Christ partially, his implied readers must press on to know Christ perfectly.

τὰ μὲν ὑπίσω ἐπιλανθανόμενος τοῖς δὲ ἐμπροσθεὶς ἐπεκτεινόμενος, “while forgetting what is behind me, and stretching out to what lies before me.” Paul expresses this idea in a highly rhetorical, emotion-filled, passionate way. Even the form and structure of his sentence radiate the depth of his feelings. It begins with two concise participial phrases that are perfectly balanced:

τὰ μὲν ὑπίσω ἐπιλανθανόμενος,

τοῖς δὲ ἐμπροσθεὶς ἐπεκτεινόμενος

on the one hand, forgetting the things behind,

on the other hand, stretching out to the things in front
The μέν, “on the one hand,” in the first phrase is answered by the δέ, “on the other hand,” in the second; the article and the adverb τὰ ... ὄπιστ, “the things behind,” in the one, by the article and the adverb τοῖς ἔμπροσθεν, “to the things in front,” in the other; and ἐπιλανθανόμενος, “forgetting,” by ἐπεκτεινόμενος, “stretching out.” One can easily imagine that Paul took special pains in selecting the double prepositional compound ἐπ—ἐκ—τεινόμενος, “stretching out,” a word found nowhere else in the Greek Bible (ἐκτείνειν, “to stretch out,” however, is often found in the Gospels, e.g., Matt 8:3 ; 12:13, 49). With it he carefully matches the corresponding participle ἐπιλανθανόμενος, “forgetting,” and uses it to express precisely what he intends the future course of his life to be.

What is it then that Paul wishes to express so powerfully by such carefully chosen phrases? (1) He wishes to express the importance of completely forgetting (ἐπιλανθανόμενος, “forgetting”—note the present tense) the past: to forget those wrongs done, e.g., the persecution of the church (Phil 3:6), and so on, whose memory could paralyze one with guilt and despair; to forget, too, those attainments achieved, the recollection of which might cause one to put life into neutral and to say “I have arrived”; and to forget in such a way that the past, good or bad, will have no negative bearing on one’s present spiritual growth or conduct. (2) He wishes also to express the importance of continuous concentration on the things that are in front, i.e., on the goal of the full and complete knowledge of Christ Jesus. His summons is unceasingly to reach out toward something other than
oneself (Collange). The participle ἐπεκτεινόμενος, “stretching out,” is a graphic word, chosen from the arena (Pfitzner, Paul and the Agon Motif, 139–56), and pictures Christians as runners with their bodies bent over, their hands outstretched, their heads fixed forward, never giving a backward glance, and their eyes fastened on the goal, as in the famous statue of “The Discus Thrower” by Myron (Moule, Vincent, Michael). It powerfully describes the need for concentration and effort in the Christian life if one is to advance in the knowledge of Christ. It pictures the ceaseless personal exertion, the intensity of the desire of Christian participants in the contest if they are to achieve the hoped-for goal, namely, the full and complete understanding of the object of faith.

14 κατὰ σκόπον διώκω, “I keep running toward the goal-marker.” The participles in v 13 are circumstantial participles of manner. With them Paul tells how he has determined to run the race, by not looking back over his shoulder but straining forward, stretching every nerve and muscle. Now he describes the actual race itself by the verb διώκω, “I keep running.” The fundamental idea underlying διώκειν (cf. v 12), “to pursue,” and the present tense in which this verb now appears underscore once again the incompleteness of Paul’s present situation (Beardslee, Human Achievement, 68). They remind the reader of the constant alternation between the “already” and the “not yet.” διώκω, “I keep running,” stresses the “not yet” of this dialectical tension of the life of faith (cf. Bultmann, Theology, 1:322).

Since Bultmann, this has been a constant theme of NT theology, namely, the tension between what believers have now and what will
be theirs at the Parousia. Cullmann (Christ and Time, 3) used the now familiar imagery, drawn from World War II, of D-Day, when the Allied troops landed on the Normandy beaches in 1944, and VE-Day, when they entered Berlin at the close of the war a year later. The church lives between these poles of an initial event and the final outcome, and in the interim there are battles to be fought and both gains and reversals to be registered. The imagery, now dated, is taken from Western European history, but it has appeal to American or Russian students. For the former, we should also appeal to the initial engagement in Saratoga and the final surrender at Yorktown. Or since global communications make the appeal to history a worldwide phenomenon, in Russian history the turning point came at Stalingrad in January 1943 and the resolution of the conflict was reached in May 1945, when, to close the Great Patriotic War, the Soviet forces took Berlin after the unconditional surrender of the German military leaders on May 7. The twentieth century of conflict and surrender helps us understand both the Philippian text and more broadly 1 Cor 15:20–28. It focuses on the necessity of constantly striving for the goal. It represents the necessity of constantly pursuing the end of the course with resolute determination. διώκω, “I keep running,” then, characterizes one very important aspect of Paul’s (and the Christian’s) life, that of progressively discovering what it means to know Christ and so of pressing forward to reach the “not yet.”

Yet Paul’s running is not aimless; it is directed toward the goal (κατὰ σκοπόν). To be precise, however, the word σκοπός, found only here in the NT, is not the goal, but the “goal-marker.” It is that post at the end of the race upon which the runner fixes his
attention (cf. σκοπεῖν, “to keep one’s eyes on”). Unfortunately, Paul in his intensity and desire to make full use of the stadium imagery fails to say what this “goal-marker” corresponds to in his or the Christian’s life. But since it originally was intended to give direction to the runner and incentive to his flagging energies, one might guess, then, that Paul meant by σκοπός, “goal-marker,” anything or anyone that kept the believer from straying from the course of the Christian life or from slackening in the believer’s moral strivings.

εἰς τὸ βραβεῖον τῆς ἀνω κλήσεως τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, “straight for the prize to which God calls me up, the prize that is contained in Christ Jesus.” While keeping the goal-marker in view and taking full advantage of its benefits, Paul races for τὸ βραβεῖον, “the prize.” This word is qualified by the genitive phrase τῆς ἀνω κλήσεως τοῦ θεοῦ, lit. “of the upward call of God.” But what is intended by this striking expression? Does it refer to God’s invitation to enter the kingdom (1 Thess 2:12), which is perpetually offered and is ἀνω, “upward,” in its action and result (RSV; Plummer; Hendriksen)? Does it refer to an invitation “to a life which is to be lived above, i.e. in God’s own eternal presence” (Caird, 143), “our heavenward calling” (Lightfoot, 153; cf. Gnilka; NEB; cf. Philo, Planting 6 §§23–27; Heb 3:1)? Does it refer to the high vocation to which God called Paul and calls all Christians (Beare, 130)? Apparently all these explanations view the genitive τῆς ἀνω κλήσεως τοῦ θεοῦ, “of the upward call of God,” as appositional to τὸ βραβεῖον, “the prize” (see Bockmuehl, 222), meaning that the “prize” is identical with God’s “call.”
In keeping with the vivid imagery drawn from the Greek games that pervades this section, there is still another explanation of the “upward call of God” that seems the most reasonable explanation of all. It sees in the expression τῆς ἀνω κλήσεως τοῦ θεοῦ, “of the upward call of God,” an allusion to the fact that the Olympian games, originally foot-races, were organized and presided over by the ἀγωνοθέτης, “judge,” and highly respected officers called Ἑλλανοδίκαι, “chief judges.” According to Glotz (DAGR, 3.1.60–64; cited by Collange, 134), “after each event they had a herald announce the name of the victor, his father’s name and his country, and the athlete or charioteer would come and receive a palm branch at their hands.” This is the call to which Paul is now alluding (but Bockmuehl, 223, doubts this). Such an explanation as this has the virtue of not identifying the “upward call” with the “prize” and allows the force of the context to determine what Paul had in mind when he spoke of that prize. For him it was to be found in Christ (ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, “in Christ Jesus”); i.e., Christ was his prize. To know Christ fully and completely was the prize for which he had been striving ever since his encounter with Christ on the Damascus road. Hence the entire verbless expression (v 14b) can be paraphrased as follows: “The prize that God, the Judge [ ἀγωνοθέτης ], will give me when he calls me up and announces my name, the prize that is contained in Christ Jesus”; or “that I may respond to the call, ‘Come up and receive the prize.’ ” And it may be that such a prize is the same as Paul’s faithful response to the initial call that came on the Damascus road, when Christ laid hold of him.
15 ὁσοὶ οὖν τέλειοι, τοῦτο φρονῶμεν, “so this is the attitude all of us who are ‘perfect’ must have.” With a touch of irony coupled with gentleness Paul exhorts his friends (οὖν, “so”) to remember that to be apprehended by Christ does not put the human will out of action but rather raises it to its highest power, that as the power of Christ’s will grows, the effort of the Christian’s will does not decrease but grows accordingly (Stauffer, New Testament Theology, 184). This is the meaning of the imperative idea with which the apostle now directly addresses the Philippians.

Paul’s gentleness is expressed by the hortatory subjunctive φρονῶμεν, “the attitude... we must have.” He does not say φρονεῖτε, “the attitude... you must have”; rather more delicately he says φρονῶμεν, “the attitude... we must have.” He includes himself along with those to whom he is writing: he and they together stand equally under the same ethical demand of not holding an attitude (φρονεῖν) that assumes such a level of spiritual attainment that further striving becomes unnecessary (see Comment on Phil 1:7 for the meaning of φρονεῖν). It is this gentle tone of exhortation that argues against viewing this section (vv 12–16) as a polemic written to oppose Jewish Christian gnostics (Schmithals, Paul and the Gnostics, 99–104), nomistic Jews who asserted that only they had perfectly kept the law and were thus perfect (Klijn, NovT 7 [1964–65] 282), Judaizers who boasted in circumcision as an indication of their being “complete” Christians (Gnilka; Koester, NTS 8 [1961–62] 322–23), or martyrs whose death for the faith made them “perfect” (Lohmeyer; cf. Ign. Rom. 1.2; 2.1). (See further Introduction, Paul’s Opponents and the False Teachers at Philippi.)
It seems more reasonable to suppose that what Paul wrote here he wrote because some of his friends at Philippi misunderstood his teaching about justification by faith alone and as a consequence believed that they had “arrived” and had ceased from that moral striving so characteristic of and essential to the Christian life. He wished to set the record straight and prompt them to exert themselves once again.

Paul’s irony is expressed by his use of τέλειοι, “perfect.” Only a few sentences earlier he had stated unconditionally that as for himself he had not yet reached “perfection” (οὐχ ... ἦδη τετελείωμαι, “not [that] I have already become perfect” [v 12]). But now he includes himself among the τέλειοι, “perfect.” How can this be? (1) Some suggest that it is because in v 12 Paul was speaking of absolute perfection, the ultimate level of understanding he could only deny having already attained, whereas in v 15 he is speaking of relative perfection, i.e., “maturity” as over against a childish immaturity in spiritual matters, a level of understanding he could justly claim for both himself and other Christians (cf. 1 Cor 2:6 ; 15:20 ; Heb 5:14 ; note also Matt 5:48 ; Jas 1:4 ; 3:2 and see Vincent, Hendriksen; RSV, NEB, LB, GNB, JB, NIV). (2) Others, slightly modifying this interpretation, see the “perfection” of v 12 as ethical perfection and that of v 15 as perfection in principle (cf. Paul’s use of the word ἅγιος, “holy”). J. J. Müller (126) states:

Just as a little child is a perfect human being, but is still far from perfect in his development as man, so the true child of God is also perfect in all parts, although not yet perfect in all stages of his development in faith. In verse 12 Paul confessed that he was
not yet perfect in all stages, but here he confesses his perfection in all parts, as a child of God.

It is best, however, to see in Paul’s use of τέλειοι, “perfect,” a touch of reproachful, though loving, almost whimsical, irony (Lightfoot, Jones, Moule) for the following reasons: (1) There is no indication whatsoever that the apostle is using the terms τελείοῦν, “to become perfect”/ τέλειος, “perfect,” in two different senses within such a short span of words, and thus there is no reason to translate one “perfect” and the other “mature.” (2) It seems certain that there were those at Philippi who, for whatever reasons, believed that they had reached the very kind of “perfection” that Paul denied was attainable this side of the resurrection. Hence the meaning “perfect” in both places is necessary fully to understand what he is saying. (3) Irony is a favorite technique of the apostle, by which he prods his readers on to still greater moral action (Rom 15:1; 1 Cor 8:1; Gal 6:1; and it is a rhetorical device that pervades 2 Cor 10–13; see Marshall, Enmity in Corinth). He means to say, therefore, that as many of us “as suppose we have reached perfection” (cf. JB) must nevertheless take the following view of things: we must forget the past and continuously push forward toward the goal. He is saying that “Christian perfection really consists only in this constant striving for perfection” (Weiss, ad loc.), that “it is the mark of the perfect man, not to reckon himself perfect” (Chrysostom, cited in Beare, 131), that “the nature of a Christian does not lie in what he has become but in what he is becoming” (Luther, cited in Beare, 131). This view of Paul’s language as ironical, however, has been challenged, and some recent interpreters (O’Brien, Fee [1995], Bockmuehl) prefer to see
Paul's language as inclusive, not polemical, since he includes himself among the τέλειοι, “perfect.”

καὶ εἴ τι ἐτέρως φρονεῖτε, “but since you have a somewhat different attitude.” Paul continues once again in words and phrases that are difficult to understand. To try to grasp what he means, it is necessary to look carefully at each part of this clause: (1) The καὶ is most likely an adversative conjunction, emphasizing a fact that is surprising, but nevertheless true (BDAG). It should be translated “but,” rather than “and”: “All of us who are perfect must have a certain attitude, but. ...” (2) The conjunction εἰ, “if,” followed by the indicative (φρονεῖτε, “you have [an]... attitude”) can introduce a condition of reality, in which case the “if” clause is assumed to be true (BDF §372). εἰ, therefore, is more accurately translated “since” (cf. Matt 4:6 ; 6:30 ; Luke 11:19–20 ; 1 Cor 9:11 : Phil 2:1): “but since something is so.” (3) The “something which is so” is that the Philippians actually did have a somewhat different attitude about perfection from the attitude Paul demanded of those who claimed to be “perfect” (τι is used adverbially, meaning “somewhat” [BDF §137(2)], and is coupled with ἐτέρως, a word used only here in the NT, meaning “differently” or “wrongly” [BAGD; Lightfoot]). (4) φρονεῖτε, “you have [an]... attitude,” which answers to φρονῶμεν, “the attitude we... must have,” in v 15a is a key word in this letter to the Philippians (Phil 1:7 ; 2:2, 5 ; 3:19 ; 4:2, 10)—a word that primarily describes attitudes (“adopting a stance,” as Bockmuehl, 226, helpfully translates), rather than specific thoughts about points of doctrine. In adding up all these details, one arrives at the conclusion that Paul is saying: “All of us
who claim to be perfect must have the attitude that Christian perfection is in reality a constant striving for perfection. But since you have a somewhat different attitude about this matter ...” It is, therefore, yet another illustration of the apostle’s dialectic of “become what you already are,” expounded by Bultmann (Theology, 1:332–33).

καὶ τοῦτο ὁ θεὸς ύμῖν ἀποκαλύψει, “God will surely reveal to you the truth even about this.” The sentence, which in the beginning sounded discouraging, finishes with this note of confidence. By this clause the apostle says, in effect, to the Philippians: (1) I know what the correct attitude toward “perfection” is that must be held by all who would be “perfect.” (2) I know, too, that you hold a different attitude from mine. (3) I know I cannot convince you to change your attitude by logical arguments or apostolic commands. (4) But I know that God can; for he is at work within you. By his gracious activity of unveiling he will reveal (ἀποκαλύψει) even this (καὶ τοῦτο; καὶ has other meanings than the simple copulative, as here and in Phil 2:5; see Comment on Phil 2:5) to you as he did to me, namely, what the truth about perfection really is. The verb ἀποκαλύπτειν, “to reveal,” has a rather special sense here (cf. A. Oepke, TDNT 4:582–87), meaning that “the revelation of divine truth is not conveyed solely through the apostolate, nor indeed can it be made effective by virtue of external authority of any kind; it requires also the [divine] enlightening of ‘the eyes of the heart’ (Eph 1:18)” (Beare, 131).

16 πλὴν εἰς ὃ ἐφθάσαμεν, τῷ σὺντῷ στοιχεῖν, “In any case, let us live up to whatever truth we have already attained.” The final
sentence in this section is the most difficult of all, and its difficulty has been the cause of numerous alterations of the Greek text (see Note h). This sentence begins with the particle πλήν, a word that is used here to break off the discussion in order to emphasize what is truly important (BAGD; BDF §449[2]) and is translated “in any case.” The main verb of the sentence is really an infinitive, στοιχεῖν, “to live up to,” used with the force of an emphatic imperative (for this use of the infinitive see BDF §389, based on the pioneering study of Daube, “Participle and Imperative”). It is derived from a verb that originally meant “to be drawn up in a line,” but which came to be used metaphorically in the sense of “to be in line with,” “to follow in someone else’s steps,” “to hold to,” or “to agree with” (BAGD; cf. Gal 6:16). In choosing this verb Paul once again stresses the importance of harmony and mutual cooperation in spite of whatever divergence of opinion may exist.

The remaining words, εἰς ὃ ἐφθάσαμεν, τῷ αὐτῷ, lit. “toward that which we have attained, by the same,” although certainly awkward, are nevertheless fairly understandable. εἰς, “toward,” with the accusative indicates the direction of the Christian’s moral movement. The relative pronoun ὃ, “that which,” has no clear and certain antecedent, but based on the context one may correctly infer that it points back to whatever knowledge God will reveal and whatever level of knowledge has already been attained (ἐφθάσαμεν, “we have attained”). τῷ αὐτῷ, “by the same,” is a pronoun that refers to the preceding clause, εἰς ὃ ἐφθάσαμεν, “toward that which we have attained,” and the dative case is the dative of the norm or standard (cf. Acts 15:1 ; Gal 5:16, 25 ; 6:16 ; Vincent).
Together these words constitute Paul’s appeal to the Philippians to fall into step with him and together with him begin to live up to whatever level of knowledge they have already acquired by revelation (for this “gift of the Spirit” see Rom 12:3–8; 1 Cor 12:1–10; 14:30; see M. B. Turner, VE 15 [1985] 7–64). Granted there may be differences of opinion, different levels of understanding, different degrees of apprehension of truth, and need for further revelations, yet these differences must not be allowed to create dissension or generate criticism of one another. They must not cause Christians to fall back from high spiritual attainment. What Christians are and claim to be (i.e., men and women of the Spirit, as in Gal 5:25) must govern how they live (Martin [1976]). The conduct of Christians must be consistent with the level of truth they have already reached (cf. NEB). And that conduct should conform to the pattern of life they are to follow as those “in Christ Jesus” (Phil 2:5; for a full discussion see Fee [1995], 357–62).

**Explanation**

After having expressed to the Philippians his all-consuming desire to know Christ, Paul proceeds now to disclaim that he has reached that goal. Intense as his desire may be, he has not yet grasped the full significance of Christ, nor has he come to a perfect knowledge of him. He emphatically refuses to place himself among any who might claim such perfection. But this falling short of a complete knowledge of Christ in no way dampens his ardor. Rather, it causes him to set out on a course, much like a runner in a race, to see whether he might indeed fully comprehend the meaning of this majestic person. He is spurred on in his endeavor not only
because he is fully known by Christ but also because he was forcefully taken hold of by Christ, saved from ruining his life, and set off in a new direction of useful service to God and people. Christian hymnody has made this a stirring call to endeavor and action. As an example we may cite the once-popular hymn “Fight the Good Fight with All Thy Might” (J. S. B. Monsell [1863]) with the stanza:

*Run the straight race through God’s good grace.*

*Lift up thine eyes to seek His face.*

*Life with its path before thee lies.*

*Christ is the path and Christ the prize.*

Thus, although Paul again disclaims having achieved perfect knowledge of Christ, even after a careful evaluation of his successful life as Christ’s apostle, he also reaffirms the one course of action open before him: to forget the past with all its failures and successes—all those things that could paralyze him with guilt or impede him with pride—and to stretch out to the future. Like an athlete with every nerve and muscle taut, with body thrust forward, with eyes firmly fixed on the goal, so Paul pictures his own ceaseless exertion, his own intensity of desire to reach the end of life and gain the prize. Every part of his existence is thrust wholly into the contest to win. Just as the victor in the Olympian games was called up to the judges’ stand to receive the crown at the hands of the judge (agōnothetēs), so Paul hopes to be called up to receive from God the award he coveted: full knowledge of Christ Jesus. Such perfection, he had come to realize, could only be achieved beyond this life at the end of the race.
As a consequence he urges all who claim already to be perfect to realize that for the time being true Christian perfection “consists only in... striving for perfection” (Weiss, ad loc.). He fears that “the perfect” will cease their moral striving, falsely believing that they have achieved their goal, whereas Paul knows that the goal is at the end of the course, at the end of life. Consequently, he knows that the mark of the perfect person is not to reckon oneself perfect but to realize that there still is a long way to go and much good still to do. But since there were those at Philippi who had a different attitude about perfection from that which Paul championed and they could not be convinced by logical argument or won over by apostolic demands, Paul lovingly commends them to God, who alone can reveal the truth to them by enlightening their minds. The apostle is certain that God will do this for them. In the meantime he asks only that together and in harmony they march forward into the future, living up to the level of understanding they have already reached.

We may summarize the thrust of the preceding paragraphs in a topical way. The title may well be “Eyes on the Prize.” Part of the problem Paul addresses in this chapter has to do with claims made by certain opponents that in this life perfection is attainable. Perfection is, of course, a loosely used term and one that changes its meaning according to the context. The call “Be perfect” (Matt 5:48) is heard in both the OT and the NT, and is said to be a possibility in human experience. Yet most of us would run away from such a claim for ourselves, as the saying goes, “Nobody’s perfect.” In Scripture, as distinct from everyday speech, perfect means “mature, well-rounded, complete” (Heb. tāmîm; Gk. teleios),
not sinless or even blameless (contrast Phil 3:6). This explains why Paul can confess that perfection is a goal to be striven for, yet at v 15 the same word (teleios) is used of “those of us who are perfect” (referring to all Christians). We are on the road to full salvation that awaits the resurrection (v 11), as Tertullian remarked (Christians “long for the resurrection” [spectare resurrectionem]). Yet we are to seek and strive for the best God has for his people.
D. Paul’s Life: A Model to Imitate (3:17)

Bibliography


Translation

17 Continue to join with one another in imitating me, my brothers [and sisters]. Keep your eyes constantly on those who live according to the pattern I [or, we] gave you.

Form/Structure/Setting
In accordance with the form of instruction established within the letter, namely, warnings followed by encouragement through example, Paul again encourages his Philippian friends (ἀδελφοί, “brothers [and sisters]”) by giving them a model (or models) to follow as they set about organizing their lives within a pagan world where values differ radically from Judeo-Christian values. Against ambition, conceit, pride, and a self-serving attitude, Paul holds before the eyes of the Philippians the humility, self-emptying, and self-giving conduct of Christ, whose whole life was dedicated to obeying God and serving others (Phil 2:6–8). Against the cry of “perfection now” (3:12–16) Paul shows, by the striking and authoritative example of his own personal experience, that this is a false call, harmful to progress, and an impediment to the life of constant moral struggle that must characterize the Christian’s entire existence.

On the other hand, it may be noted, as an alternative interpretation, that it is striking that Paul should remark “join with one another in imitating me,” not Christ. To draw in the “example of the incarnate Lord” in the interpretation of 3:17 is a theological decision not required in the text, and it may be open to several objections, which have been rehearsed in the previous pages (see the Reviser’s Application in the Explanation of 2:5–11). There it was argued that Christ’s display of humility in 2:6–8 is unique since he is the preexistent One who became incarnate by an act all Christians regard as sui generis and is honored by elevation to a station of lordship, also believed to be unique since he is proclaimed as Lord of the universe and cosmic powers. In 3:17 Paul’s appeal is to himself as one with his implied readers and a
fellow worker of the divine family, still struggling in via, “along the way,” in hope of reaching perfection in patria, “at home.” Thus Paul denies a “realized eschatology,” suggested in 2 Tim 2:17–18 as earlier at Corinth (1 Cor 4:8 ; 15:12).

On the role of Paul as example, using 1 Cor 11:1 and Phil 3:17, 4:9, see the brief, but interesting, survey in J. Moffatt, The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, MNTC (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1938), 146–49. He writes of Paul (146):

He had been the first Christian they knew. He was the founder of their church. He had stood, and he claims that he still stands, for them as an embodiment of the faith. Let them recollect his behaviour and the principles he had exhibited in his conduct.

This one verse, then, stands as a warning by example against two wrong emphases originating from Paul’s Jewish opponents (cf. Phil 3:2). It is a warning against the belief that one can be perfect now (3:12–16) and against the belief that external rituals can be a necessary means of grace (3:18–19). Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, not having yet attained perfection, is thereby driven on to still greater moral endeavors. He calls the Philippians to follow his example, quit claiming perfection, and get busy living the Christian life. Paul, a Jew par excellence (3:5–6), having seen the all-sufficiency of Christ, is thereby forced to surrender confidence in the effectiveness of the observance of food laws or rites of circumcision (3:19) to establish a right relationship between himself and God. The Philippians should follow his example and abandon thinking only of things that belong to this world. They should forsake putting confidence solely in human accomplishments (ἐν
σαρκὶ πεποιθότες, “putting confidence in ourselves” [ 3:3 ]). This verse stands as a transition point between these two errors of perfection and of trust in Judaism’s boundary markers. It forms the conclusion to the one and the introduction to the other.

**Comment**

17 συμμιμηταί μου γίνεσθε, ἀδελφοί, “continue to join with one another in imitating me, my brothers [and sisters].” For the third time now in chap. 3 Paul addresses the Philippians as “brothers [and sisters]” (cf. vv 1, 13), reminding them that they belong to the same spiritual family with him, in which equality is the hallmark. This reminder is important to prevent any irritation at or misunderstanding of what the apostle is now about to say, namely, “Imitate me!” In this statement Paul does not intend to say that he is better than anyone else. In calling for imitation, it is not for people to emulate his privileges, achievements, or advantages; rather he calls for them to copy his self-denying and self-giving acts (1 Cor 11:1), willingness to suffer for the sake of others (1 Thess 1:6 ; 2:14 ; cf. 2 Thess 3:7–9), losing all for Christ, imitation of Christ (1 Cor 11:1 ; 1 Thess 1:6 ; cf. Eph 5:1 ; Phil 2:6–11), seeking for a goodness not in himself but in God, and admission that perfection is not yet his, but is eagerly pursued by him (cf. 1 Cor 4:16–17). (1 Cor 11:1, however, may yield a different sense if the translation “Be imitators of me, as I belong to Christ [ καγώ Χριστοῦ ]” is accepted, pointing back to 1 Cor 1:12.)

In calling for imitation Paul uses an ambiguous expression that is open to more than one interpretation: συμμιμηταί μου γίνεσθε, lit. either “become fellow imitators of me” or “become fellow
imitators with me.” The noun συμμιμητής, “fellow imitator,” is found only here in all of Greek literature, hence the ambiguity. (1) Some have pursued its meaning by studying each of the nouns in the NT that are similarly compounded with the preposition σύν (συμ -), “with.” They conclude from their study that Paul means “Become imitators along with me of something or someone,” i.e., Christ (cf. 1 Cor 11:1; and see McMichael, ExpTim 5 [1893–94] 287). (2) Others suggest that the prepositional prefix σύν (συμ -), “with,” in συμμιμητής has no meaningful value whatsoever. συμμιμηταί, therefore, is equivalent to μιμηταί, “imitators,” on the analogy of ἔπομαι and συνέπομαι, both of which mean “to follow along with.” Paul, then, is saying nothing more than he has said elsewhere, simply, “Become imitators of me” (cf. 1 Cor 4:16; and see W. Michaelis, TDNT 4:667 n. 13), adding that his appeal is to “my ways in Christ” (Phil 4:17). (3) More likely, however, the noun συμμιμητής was coined by Paul from the verb συμμιμεῖσθαι, “to join in imitating” (see LSJ), to stress his desire that there be a community effort in following his example: “Imitate me, one and all of you together!” (Betz, Nachfolge, 145–53; see also De Boer, Imitation, 169–88; Schulz, Nachfolgen, passim). Such an interpretation (a) best accounts for the origin and meaning of the compound word συμμιμητής as “fellow imitator,” (b) does justice to the genitive μου, “of me,” by taking it as the object of the action implied in the noun it modifies: συμμιμηταί, “fellow imitators of me,” (c) takes into consideration that there is nothing in the context to indicate that Paul wishes the Philippians to imitate him as he imitates Christ, and (d) reinforces Paul’s emphasis on the
importance of the Christians’ corporate life, doing things together and in harmony.

καὶ σκοπέτε τοὺς οὕτω περιπατοῦντας καθὼς ἔχετε τύπον ἡμᾶς, “keep your eyes constantly on those who live according to the pattern I [ or, we] gave you.” Paul, however, recognizes that it may be difficult for some to imitate one who is absent from them. Hence, he continues by urging the Philippians to fix their eyes on those nearer at hand, on those, perhaps, within their own community, like Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25–30), whose lives conform to his teaching. Yet Paul remains within the trio of persons to whom he is appealing (Timothy, Epaphroditus, and himself; see O’Brien, “Gospel and Godly Models,” esp. 278–82, for a full discussion).

The verb Paul uses here, σκοπεῖν, “to keep one’s eyes on,” picks up on the theme introduced by σκοπός, the “goal-marker” upon which runners fix their eyes, in v 14. It conveys the idea of close observation, fixed attention. Sometimes it means “to mark” and stay away from (Rom 16:17). Here, however, it means “to mark” and follow (Lightfoot). Paul’s concern is that his friends will notice and follow people who consistently walk (τοὺς περιπατοῦντας, “those who live,” a present participle), i.e., who continuously behave in such a way (οὕτω, “in this way”) that their daily conduct embodies the essence of the Christian faith as he, Paul, has experienced it and modeled it (τύπον, “pattern”). The apostle asks them to “look at men they know and see the proof of his teaching in their lives” (Martin [1976], 143), and that advice would surely include himself.
The Greek καθώς ἔχετε τύπον ἡμᾶς, however, raises a question. Literally it says, “as you have us [ἡμᾶς] for a pattern [τύπον].” Does the ἡμᾶς, “us,” here mean Paul and others or simply Paul by himself? Should it be translated “us” (as most translations) or “me” (cf. MOFFATT, LB)? Several factors point to “me” as the correct translation: (1) The word τύπος, originally meaning an “impression left by a blow” (cf. John 20:25), comes through usage to mean an “archetype,” “pattern,” or “model” (BDAG). In Paul’s letters it refers to “the determinative ‘example’ of the obedience of faith... the model which makes an impress because it is moulded by God” (L. Goppelt, TDNT 8:248–49). (2) τύπον, “pattern,” is singular and ἡμᾶς, “us,” is plural. If ἡμᾶς, “us,” were a real plural, one might have expected τύποις, “patterns” (plural), to match it: “us as patterns.” (On the other hand, one example can serve as a model to several people.) (3) The order and choice of words in this sentence imply that Paul differentiates between himself as model and others, and considers himself to be the supreme model (τύπος, “pattern”) on a plane above other worthy models. His words are συμμιμηταί μου, “be fellow imitators of me,” on the one hand, but σκοπεῖτε τοὺς οὕτω περιπατοῦντας, “mark and follow those who walk in this way,” on the other. (4) The Philippians are to follow “those who walk in this way” only because their teaching and lifestyle accord with the pattern laid down by someone other than themselves. The Philippians have a standard by which they can judge any so-called leader: καθώς ἔχετε τύπον ἡμᾶς, “as you have us [i.e., me] for a pattern.” (5) If the “us” in this phrase is pressed, one is immediately at a loss to know who it is that Paul elevates along with himself to this high place of
“determinative example.” In the immediate context he gives no hint about who this might be. (Yet he does appeal to Timothy and Epaphroditus in the previous chapter.) (6) The literary plural, i.e., the use of “we/us” instead of “I/me,” was a widespread tendency among Greek authors (BDF §280). (7) Paul himself sometimes uses “we/us” when he really means “I/me” (Rom 1:5; 2 Cor 11:6 [φανερώσαντες, “[we] having made this evident”]; 1 Thess 2:18; 3:1–5, especially vv 3 and 5; see Moule, Idiom-Book, 118–19). As a consequence it is not always possible to determine when he is referring to his own life and personal experiences and when he is identifying himself with some or all of the group he mentions (but see Lofthouse, ExpTim 58 [1947] 179–82). (8) It has been suggested that the context indicates that Paul intends by his remarks here in v 17 to assert his apostolic authority in order to counter conflicting ideas and practices at Philippi (cf. vv 16, 18–19). “Be fellow imitators of me” means, then, not only “Walk as I do, but... also... (and primarily): Recognize my authority, be obedient” (W. Michaelis, TDNT 4:668; against De Boer, Imitation, 184–87). When all these elements are put together, it appears that Paul is here using the plural pronoun ἡμᾶς, “us,” but has in mind the singular ἐμέ, “me.” He uses the literary “us” to mean “me.” Alternatively, the plural “us” may refer to Paul and his associates (see Bockmuehl, 22).

Explanation

Paul’s instruction “Continue to join with one another in imitating me” appears on the surface to be an expression of intolerable conceit. But it is not (and perhaps less so if Paul’s use of the
personal pronoun is broadened to include his fellow workers). The apostle is fully aware of his potential to fail (1 Cor 9:27), lack of “perfection,” and struggle to attain (Phil 3:12–14). Nevertheless, confident that his own manner of life—characterized by self-renunciation, humility, and service to others—and his own presuppositions—namely, that God is, that Christ is the only way to approach God, and that the Holy Spirit provides the power to live acceptably before God—are so thoroughly right and true, he is unafraid to present himself, in whom these characteristics and beliefs are embodied, as a model for others to follow. Like an experienced craftsman who shows an apprentice how to do a difficult job (Grayston) or a scout who knows the way and leads a caravan through perilous terrain, he is in no way ashamed to say “Follow me!” nor is he arrogant in doing so.

But if the Philippians find it difficult to imitate Paul because he is many miles removed from them, he urges them to seek out others whose conduct is wholly in accord with the pattern he himself has established. All of this shows the importance of models for the early church. Those first Christians, coming as they did from a pagan society with values often totally antithetical to Christian values, needed not only to hear what was right but also to see it done. It was inadequate for them to have Christian truth presented in a code of precepts and maxims. They needed to observe it embodied in the lives of Christ’s ministers. Hence Paul was keenly conscious of his own responsibility to give the Philippians tangible proof of the truth of the gospel as truth made concrete, quantifiable, and measurable in a human life, his life and the lives of those who followed his example.
We are reminded that Christian influence, seen in the lives of other people, is of inestimable value in every age. And this is especially so when we have the authoritative persons of the apostolic figures, both men and women, to be our guides. The background here is the rabbinic idea of hālākâ, lit. walking, as setting a pattern for behavior. So the apostles, and Paul preeminently, serves as a living hālākâ to guide the lives of his people. The Philippians had no written scriptures and so were dependent on human lives to be their “model,” and it is as such that Paul claims to have lived among them since his first visit (in Acts 16:12–40) when he bore the shame of a beating and an imprisonment. The evidence for this event in Acts, as reflected in his letters, is seen in 1 Thess 2:2, and this is linked with the theme of modeling in 1 Thess 2:14. It is a pleasing sidelight on Paul the human being that he can (with some risk of immodesty) point thus to himself and his missionary team (Timothy and Epaphroditus included).
E. Warning against Imitating Other Teachers
(3:18–19)

Bibliography


Translation

¹⁸ For many are living a as enemies of the cross of Christ. I told you about them many times before, and I tell you about them again, weeping as I do so. ¹⁹ Their end is destruction. Their observance of
food laws and their glorying in circumcision has become their god. They are people whose minds are set on earthly things.

Notes

18.a. Ἑ 46 inserts βλέπετε, “look out for,” before τοὺς ἔχθρούς, “the enemies,” perhaps in an unnecessary attempt to explain the accusative τοὺς ἔχθρούς, “the enemies,” or perhaps to make βλέπετε τοὺς ἔχθρούς, “look out for the enemies,” analogous to βλέπετε τοὺς κύνας, “look out for [or, observe] the dogs,” in Phil 3:2. The theme of “looking” runs through the chapter, with models to imitate and avoid.

Form/Structure/Setting

This section relates to the preceding section as cause to effect. Why does Paul press the Philippians to join together in imitating him (Phil 3:17)? Why is he concerned that they mark and follow those who “walk” (i.e., live, according to the Heb. idiom) according to the pattern he has set out (3:17)? Because ( γάρ, “for”) there are many would-be leaders, teachers, and models who “walk” contrary to this pattern. They are people who teach wrong doctrine, model wrong behavior, and who, if followed, would carry to destruction all who pay heed to them.

Once again, as in 3:2, the apostle breaks out into the harshest kind of language to describe these persons, these “enemies of the cross of Christ”: “Their end is destruction. Their observance of food laws and their glorying in circumcision has become their god. They are people whose minds are set on earthly things.” Once again his
passionate feelings against them are registered in his rhetoric. Its features are short, verbless sentences; constructions that are broken off without proper completion; clipped phrases whose meaning defies precise explanation; and strong words whose force lies not in lexical definitions but in the sound and suddenness with which they address the reader. Once again he writes furiously about people whom he does not name. And this suggests that they are the same opponents in both instances (3:2–3 par. 3:18–19), as noted below.

Because Paul does not name these “enemies,” no one today can be certain of their identity. This fact, however, does not stop speculation about who they were, nor should it. The understanding of the “enemies” determines to a large extent the meaning of the words he uses to describe them. Therefore, any attempt to identify them can only be met with appreciation. (1) Some interpreters see these as Jewish Christians (Judaizers), who opposed the gospel of free grace as Paul preached it, refused to believe that the death of Christ on the cross was sufficiently adequate in itself to secure the favor of God, and required, therefore, the keeping of the law as a necessary supplement for salvation (J. J. Müller). (2) Others understand them to be pagans, who opposed the Christian gospel because it disturbed their life of shameful lust (Weiss). (3) Others believe that they were antinomian Christians, people who had distorted Paul’s doctrine of grace and interpreted Christian liberty as license to gratify the lusts of the flesh (Jones; Michael; Scott; Beare; Betz, Nachfolge, 151), or Christians with gnostic tendencies, people who believed they had reached such a degree of spiritual perfection that what they did on the physical plane was
inconsequential (cf. Koester, NTS 8 [1962] 328). (4) Others think that Paul had in mind those who were willing to deny Christ in the time of persecution and threat of martyrdom (Lohmeyer). (5) Others view these as Christians who refused to recognize the decisive eschatological nature of the event of the cross and resurrection of Christ, which inaugurated a radically new order of things and which stamped this new way of life as a life of self-sacrifice and service (Collange, Martin [1976]). (6) Others are certain that Paul had in mind here the same group of people he addressed at the beginning of chap. 3 and to whom he alludes again in vv 12–16. They may have been Jews who were ardent propagandists seeking to win converts to their religion in every part of the world (Houlden) or Jewish Christians who were insisting on physical signs of initiation, priding themselves on their privileges of pedigree (3:5–6) and proclaiming a message of righteousness and perfection that was attainable now simply by submitting to circumcision and complying with certain food laws. This last view, with these two possible variations, is the one formerly adopted here, and it is in light of such a view that vv 18–19 will be interpreted in the Comment that follows (see Form/Structure/Setting on Phil 3:1–3 and Introduction, Paul’s Opponents and the False Teachers at Philippi). Paul can be seen to give a serious reminder of the need to avoid those teachers who resisted his message and led others astray.

Comment

18 πολλοὶ γὰρ περιπατοῦσιν, “for many are living.” If one should inquire why Paul so urgently asked his Philippian friends to
imitate him and closely to follow other worthy leaders like himself, the answer is quickly given. The conjunction γάρ, “for,” with which this new section begins, states the reason: It was because, in contrast to the few who conducted themselves (τοὺς οὕτω περιπατοῦντας, “those who live in this way” [v 17]) in accordance with the pattern of teaching and living set forth by the apostle, there were many (πολλοί) who conducted themselves (περιπατοῦσιν, “are living”) in a very different way that was not only wrong-headed, but evil (κακῶς, “in an evil way”: although this word is not in the text, it may correctly be inferred from the context; see Vincent). This statement is not necessarily a comment on their moral performance, however. These people may have been, and probably were, very religious, honest, sincere Christians. But if their “goodness” and the religious acts that they faithfully performed in any way tended to keep them from casting themselves wholly upon God and asking for the righteousness that he supplies only through Jesus Christ, if their beliefs and practices set them in opposition to the gospel of salvation by Christ alone and its outworking in a life of obedience and earnest moral endeavor, if their doing the law threatened the exclusiveness of the forgiveness of sins by faith in Christ, then, for Paul, their conduct was indeed “evil” because it brought ultimate harm both to themselves and to others (see Comment on v 2; Richardson, Israel, 114; see also Sanders, Paul and Palestinian Judaism, 426–28, 550). And even if these Jewish missionaries had not yet reached Philippi with their teaching, Paul nevertheless considered it necessary to warn against them simply because he knew of their numbers (πολλοί, “many”) and the zeal with which they propagated
their religion (cf. Harnack, Mission, 1:1–10; Moore, Judaism, 1:93–121; Schürer, History, 3:1:150–76 [§31, V]; and see Martin [1976], 143–44, for a review of options).

οὐς πολλάκις ἔλεγον ύμῖν, νῦν δὲ καὶ κλαίων λέγω, “I told you about them many times before, and I tell you about them again, weeping as I do so.” So numerous were these missionaries, and so persuasive their message that Paul had often (πολλάκις, “many times”) warned the Philippians about them, believing that repetition was an excellent preventative. He used to warn them (note the imperfect ἔλεγον, “I used to tell”) in speech when he was present with them in Philippi and in letters (cf. Pol. Phil. 3.2) when he was absent. He warns them again now (νῦν). And he does so with tears. This is rare for Paul, who does not often show his emotions, especially in dealing with his adversaries. The participle κλαίων, “weeping,” is a circumstantial participle of manner, formed from the verb κλαίειν, “to weep.” This verb implies not only tears “but lamentation, audible grief” (Moule; BDAG; cf. Matt 2:18). It was chosen by Paul to express the depth of his emotion at this point, as he reflects on these people.

Paul does not say that he weeps for anyone (cf. Matt 2:18; Rev 18:9 TR). This may indeed have been the case, that is, that he wept for those who rejected the cross of Christ; for Paul witnesses elsewhere to the deep grief he has for the Jews who do not believe the gospel, the ceaseless pain he has in his heart for them, expressing the wish that he himself might be accursed, could this effect the salvation of his brothers and sisters (Rom 9:1–5). It is easy, therefore, to imagine his pain here spilling over once again
into lamentation for these about whom he writes (cf. Acts 20:31; 2 Cor 2:4 to see the tenderness that characterized Paul’s dealing with people; but these references are to Christian people, not his declared opponents). But the verb κλαίων, “weeping,” in fact is used here without any object, indicating perhaps that Paul’s tears were tears not of compassion for his opponents but tears of frustration at their obduracy. His experience with them in the place of his confinement showed to him more clearly than ever how impervious they were to the gospel and how vigorously they opposed—to the point of persecution—anyone who dared to proclaim it (Acts 23:1–3, 12–15; 24:1–9; 28:25–29; at Ephesus Paul had met with deadly opposition to the point of his life being at risk [1 Cor 15:32; 2 Cor 1:8–10, 4:11–12]).

τούς ἐχθροὺς τοῦ σταυροῦ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, “as enemies of the cross of Christ.” Thus in frustration and anguish Paul labels them not merely “enemies of the cross of Christ” but “the enemies [τούς ἐχθρούς] of the cross of Christ.” And why does he so label them? Because the message of the cross—which is nothing other than the gospel, indeed an exhaustive statement of the content of the gospel, namely, that Christ must be crucified, that the Messiah had to die in order for sinners to be forgiven by God—was the very thing that scandalized the Jews and was treated as folly by the Greeks (1 Cor 1:23). The gospel was an “offense” to them and “foolishness” because in the cross God did precisely the opposite of what they expected him to do (cf. C. K. Barrett, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, HNTC [New York: Harper & Row, 1968] 51, 55; H. Conzelmann, 1 Corinthians, Hermeneia [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975] 41, 47). They, therefore, could not accept the message of the
cross, nor could they tolerate its dissemination. Nor could professed believers tolerate the idea of a suffering apostle, as we know from 2 Cor 10–13 (where the attack on his ministry came while he was at Ephesus). Paul himself had experienced their hostility. He knew firsthand their opposition to the gospel and their determination to stamp out that message that struck at the very heart of their religion (cf. Acts 17:5, 13 ; 18:6 ; 19:9) or that brought his own ministry of “strength in weakness” into disrepute (2 Cor 12:1–10). In those earliest days of the history of the church the Jews or Jewish messianic preachers could thus rightly be termed “the enemies of the cross of Christ” (and 2 Cor 11:13–15 is equally emphatic).

19 ὥν τὸ τέλος ἀπώλεια, “their end is destruction.” If “the cross of Christ,” i.e., “Christ’s death on the cross,” is the one essential thing for salvation and the Jews, or anyone else for that matter (especially Christian leaders who treat a suffering apostle as a contradiction in terms), reject this as absurd and scandalous, then they, by the nature of things, have turned away from salvation to its opposite because they have espoused an alien gospel (2 Cor 11:4). Paul says of them, not with any sense of delight but rather of pain, that ὥν τὸ τέλος, “their end” (as in 2 Cor 11:15), as the natural result, the inevitable consequence of their sustained decision, is ἀπώλεια, “destruction” (cf. 1 Cor 1:18). ἀπώλεια originally was used in the sense of “loss.” Later it came to mean “waste” (Mark 14:4), or “destruction,” “annihilation,” “ruin.” It was especially used of eternal destruction as punishment for the wicked (Matt 7:13 ; 2 Pet 3:7 ; Rev 17:8, 11). Paul seems to be using it here in this last sense since he couples it with τὸ τέλος, “the
end,” “the goal.” Even so, the precise meaning of ἁπώλεια is difficult to pin down. Hence, as often is the case, it is best explained in terms of its opposite: σωτηρία, “salvation” (Phil 1:28); περιποίησις ψυχῆς, “the preserving of one’s soul” (Heb 10:39); ζωή αἰώνιος, “eternal life” (John 3:16). For Paul, then, to reject the crucified Christ and live a life not shaped by the diaconal character of Jesus and its cruciform pattern 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 τὸ ... τέλος ἐκείνων θάνατος, “their end is death” (Rom 6:21 ; he is speaking here of antinomian Christians, not Jews), 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 (A. Oepke, TDNT 1:396–97), “the absolute antithesis of the life intended by God and saved by Christ” (Ridderbos, Paul, 112–13).

Bockmuehl (232) wisely comments, citing the argument in Galatians: “The logical progression in this chapter (3), from the rejection of legalistic righteousness to a commendation of trust in Christ and then a warning against licentiousness, is in fact a familiar one in Pauline theology (pace Silva 209).”

ἐὰν ὁ θεὸς ἡ κοιλία καὶ ἡ δόξα ἐν τῇ αἰσχύνῃ αὐτῶν, “their observance of food laws and their glorying in circumcision has become their god.” Paul continues his description of these “enemies” with words that are ambiguous in nature and with a sentence structure capable of mistranslation. The key words in this clause are κοιλία, “belly,” and αἰσχύνη, “shame.” On the surface they seem to say that these people are licentious individuals who
“conceive of no higher good than the satisfaction of their bodily appetites” (Scott, 99), who take delight in sexual sins (see Schmithals, Paul and the Gnostics, 110–11; cf. also Weiss, Jones, Michael, Beare). But if the exegesis of this passage is correct thus far, then κοιλία, “belly,” and αἰσχύνη, “shame,” must mean something in addition to gross self-indulgence.

In Rom 16:18 κοιλία is used “for that sphere of things which is opposed by Christ and which is passing away” (Houlden, 103; cf. J. Behm, TDNT 3:788), things that in Paul’s mind could and did include devotion to the law. Early Christian commentators, such as Theodore of Mopsuestia, “Ambrosiaster,” and Pelagius took κοιλία as a reference to Jewish laws about food (see J. Behm, TDNT 3:788 n. 14). The NT does not elsewhere describe a licentious person in terms of one who “serves his belly.” It does make clear, however, that the Jews were people very much concerned about laws relating to food and drink, what they could and could not eat, and how they were to eat (Col 2:16, 20–21, 23; cf. Heb 9:10). The NT indicates, too, that the Jews on occasion had elevated traditions having to do with “the belly” to such an exalted place that they took precedence over the laws of God (cf. Mark 7:1–16). In this sense, then, it could be said that their god, i.e., that which they devoted themselves to, was their belly. Their scrupulous observance of food laws became their belly-god (see Feine, Abfassung, 26–28; Ewald and Wohlenberg; Barth; J. Behm, TDNT 3:788; J. J. Müller, who understand κοιλία, “belly,” indeed as a reference to food laws, but see the persons involved as Judaizers rather than Jews). Alternatively, as another possibility of interpretation, κοιλία can mean “sexual organs” and so refer to immoral practices, a view
that has now gained ground and sees the reference to be either to “gluttony” (less probable) or “licentiousness.” Indeed, Schenk (288) relates κοιλία to the frequent Pauline moral term σάρξ, “flesh”/“self.”

If Paul is alluding to punctilious, law-keeping Jews rather than to libertines, then αἰσχύνη, “shame,” is more likely to be a reference to “nakedness,” one’s private parts, meaning those parts of the body that are unpresentable (cf. 1 Cor 12:23), than it is to shameful lusts. αἰσχύνη, “shame,” therefore, becomes Paul’s way of pouring bitter scorn on the rite of circumcision (cf. Phil 3:2) when in his judgment circumcision becomes that in which a person boasts (cf. Gal 6:13) and upon which one depends for salvation (Barth, 113: “‘Their god the belly and their glory in their shame!’—a further allusion to circumcision, which for concreteness leaves nothing to be desired”). In other places Paul gives a higher value to circumcision (Rom 2:25–29; 1 Cor 7:19; Gal 6:15), though it is inadequate and lethal if it is trusted for salvation (Gal 5:1–12).

One further observation about the structure of the sentence is needed. The conjunction καί, “and,” links ἡ κοιλία, “the belly,” and ἡ δόξα, “the glory,” together as a single subject, with ὁ θεός, “the god,” as the predicate. The entire clause, literally translated, should be as follows: “whose god is the belly and the glory in their shame” (see, however, the disagreement of Silva, 212). When interpreted, this concise expression means not “god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame” (cf. RSV, NEB, GNB, JB, NIV) but “they have made their stomach and their glory in their shame their god.” This is to say that these people have
permitted food laws and the rite of circumcision to become god to them. (Or it may be that they have made their sexual fixations and their unbridled appetites their object of worship. Paul does not mention circumcision per se in this text, nor indeed in the whole of 2 Corinthians.) They have become so preoccupied with scrupulous observance of ritual detail, so obsessed with the supreme importance (δόξα, “glory”) of circumcision, seeing that it was carried out and carried out correctly, that they have had no thought for anything or anyone higher. God has become obscured by religion. The true God has been replaced by a false god, whether a covenant marker or an antinomian slogan (“Anything goes!”), to whom devotion is duly paid.

οἱ τὰ ἐπίγεια φρονοῦντες, “they are people whose minds are set on earthly things.” It is no wonder then that Paul sums up his attack on these “enemies of the cross of Christ” with his most stinging criticism, presented in a nominative participial phrase that, without any grammatical connection, expresses his strongest feelings of amazement (Lightfoot). Again it must be pointed out that “this is not a comment on their moral performance; it simply states that for Paul ‘they are concerned with values which pass away, having neither divine origin or eternal quality’ ” (Houlden, 103–4, citing Koester, NTS 8 [1961–62] 328; see also Klijn, NovT 7 [1964–65] 278–80; the resonance with 2 Cor 4:16–18 is to be noted, which may suggest a common place of origin). What stands as a judgment against the Jews becomes a warning to everyone. There exists always the tragic possibility of exchanging the glorious immortal God for some lesser deity. Strangely, this potentiality has the greatest chance of becoming reality in the realm of the
religious, where doctrine and ritual so easily become that to which people wholly devote themselves and to which they commit themselves completely (cf. Rom 1:21–23, an exposé of Gentile morality written from Corinth, where Paul moved after a spell in Ephesus).

Recent discussion of these verses is summarized in O’Brien, 450–58. He finds the key thought to be that of “boasting” (common in 2 Corinthians), and this suggests that the issue between Paul and his opponents was eschatological more than simply moral. They boasted that their powerful presence in the church was based on their “realized eschatology” (the claim that they were “perfect”), and so they were not subject to moral restraints. The attraction of this view is that it links directly to Phil 3:20–21.

**Explanation**

In this section Paul explains why he asks the Philippians to imitate him and to follow closely those leaders who adhere to his teaching and practice. It is because there are many other leaders who go off in a very different and wrong-headed direction, and who would gladly take the Philippians along with them. The apostle has often spoken to his friends about these teachers, though his “lost” letters have disappeared. He does so once again with tears of frustration as he realizes finally that these teachers will not change and their hostility toward him and his gospel will never abate. They are enemies. Not Paul’s enemies only, but more accurately enemies of the cross of Christ, i.e., the fact that the Messiah died on a cross and his death set a pattern of self-denying service, as seen in the Christ-hymn of Phil 2:6–11. They are non-Christian or
Christian Jews who have set themselves against Paul’s gospel that says that salvation is exclusively through the crucified and resurrected Christ. They are enemy “Number One” of the cross, the enemy, to whom the message of the cross is a σκάνδαλον, “stumbling block,” a cause of utter revulsion, a reason for anger and opposition. They will have nothing to do with it, and they will try to do everything they can against it. Thus, because these Jews reject out of hand the only one who can save them, preserve their souls, and give them life, there is nothing left but for them to experience the opposite—loss, destruction, and death, the utter ruin of their lives. They seem to resemble the people denounced in Paul’s strongest language in 2 Cor 11:13–15 (NIV) as “false apostles... and [Satan’s] servants” whose τέλος, “end,” is eternal ruin.

Destruction will most surely be their end if they persist in their rejection of the crucified Christ, even though they are scrupulously precise in keeping the law. The care with which they observed every last precept concerning food and drink and their glorying in the ancient covenantal rite of circumcision (according to one understanding of the text) did not solve their problem, but rather exacerbated it. Why? Because those who faithfully performed such religious practices made them their god. They overlooked the true God by paying too much attention to ritual. Their minds became set on earthly things, and they lost any ability to look up (cf. Col 3:2, although here antinomian ideas are in view [ 3:5 ] and future judgment is threatened [ 3:6 ], which is an alternative understanding of Phil 3:18–19 ; the Colossian letter may be dated to an Ephesian captivity).
What makes this section so poignant is that Paul takes the most exalted religious and ethical austerity of those he would warn against and describes it in terms that if found in any other context would have to be understood as a description of the basest of bodily sins. But this is intentional. That is precisely how Jewish piety, as Barth (114) observes,

really does look, seen from the standpoint of the preaching of the cross.... Of course Paul is speaking of depravity, but the fact that he brands as depraved those who, bypassing the cross of Christ and bypassing faith and its righteousness, call for holiness and cleanness —that he drags their glory in the mire (he may well and truly do it, after having done exactly the same with his own glory in vv 7–9)— that is the bitter point of vv [ 18–19 ].

The emotional tenor of these sober words is almost unique in Paul’s pastoralia. If, on an alternative understanding of the text, the people in mind are professed believers and teachers masquerading as Christian leaders, then the gravamen of the charge is one of being antinomian, i.e., offering a relaxed morality on the mistaken assumption that religion and righteousness have nothing in common. This error, confusing “freedom from sin” with “freedom to sin” and condoning the latter, dogged Paul’s steps in several of his churches, as we know from Rom 3:8 ; 6:1–14 as well as Gal 5:13–15. There is a sad line of mistaken teachers and leaders in the history of the church who have seen no incompatibility between indulgence and the practice of devotion and who have divorced religion from righteousness. The line extends from the early centuries to the prophets of Zwickau and Bunyan’s Ranters to Rasputin in the Russia of the Romanovs. Paul does not mince
words in condemnation, as in 2 Cor 11:13–15, and remains in every period of subsequent church history the implacable foe of a teaching on “cheap grace” (Bonhoeffer) that may be presumed to offer an easy forgiveness for sins and refuses a strenuous call of “die to live,” echoing Jesus’ words in Mark 8:34–38.
F. Paul’s Hope in the Future and Unseen (3:20–21)

Bibliography

Translation

20 For our citizenship is in heaven,

and from heaven we eagerly wait for a Savior,

the Lord Jesus Christ.

21 He will transform our lowly bodies

so that they might become a like his glorious body.

And he will achieve this goal by the outworking of his ability to subject everything to himself. b
Notes

21.a. D ² S and the Majority Text add εἶς τὸ γενέσθαι αὐτό, “so that it might become,” before σύμμορφον, “having the same form.” S A B D and several other witnesses omit these words. The addition apparently is secondary, in that it serves to smooth out and make clear an otherwise awkward but understandable construction.

21.b. S L Ψ and other MSS read ἑαυτῷ, “to himself,” for αὐτῷ, “to him.” This change simply makes precise the ambiguity contained in αὐτῷ, “to him.”

Form/Structure/Setting

This section seems not to fit easily with the context in which it is placed. Its apocalyptic theme of the church as a colony of heaven, eagerly expecting a savior to come from above to set everything right, to deliver it from its present mortal weakness, and to transfigure it from lowliness to glory is unexpected, to say the least. Nothing that has immediately preceded these verses has prepared the reader for this kind of joyous outburst. There has been no recounting of suffering, no tale of woe, no despairing of life as things that would naturally give rise to such an affirmation of hopeful confidence of deliverance in the future (cf. 2 Cor 1:8–10; 4:7–14). Yet the contrast between the “earthly” (Phil 3:19) and the “heavenly” (3:20) seems clear and shapes Paul’s thinking in a notable way.
In addition, conjunctions are particles designed to connect sentences or groups of sentences logically to each other. But the conjunction that connects this section with the section before it (vv 18–19) hardly seems capable of doing so. It is the conjunction γάρ, “for,” whose normal function is to introduce the reason or cause for that which has just been mentioned. Paul has just finished saying that the enemies of the cross of Christ are people whose minds are fixed on earthly things. Now he continues: “For our citizenship is in heaven.” This presents such a difficulty that the earliest quotations of this passage by Greek authors substitute δέ, “but,” for γάρ, “for” (Lightfoot), and modern versions translate as “but” (so NRSV).

Furthermore, a careful examination of the language and style of writing found in this section and a study of its unusual words and rhythmic patterns suggest that it is another christological hymn, perhaps composed early in the church’s existence, that was found and used by Paul because it precisely expressed his own ideas. If he used it in its entirety, quoting it exactly, then the conjunction γάρ, “for,” with which it begins is inconsequential and should be ignored as not originally being intended to do what translators must now try to make it do (see Becker, TZ 27 [1971] 16–29; Lohmeyer; Flanagan, CBQ 18 [1956] 8–9; Strecker, ZNW 55 [1964] 75–78; Güttgemanns, Der leidende Apostel, 240–47). Like the Christ-hymn (2:6–11) this hymn, too, has a cosmic sweep, seeing Jesus Christ as the sovereign Lord with everything subject to him and everything under his control (see table 3). But now for the first time in Paul’s extant writing—and indeed the only time, if Eph 5:23 is deuteroc Pauline—the title σωτήρ, “savior,” is added to Jesus’
name (Becker, TZ 27 [1971] 16–29). Even the vocabulary of this new hymn, its words and phrases, and its essential ideas parallel those of the earlier hymn (cf. Flanagan, CBQ 18 [1956] 8–9; Güttgemanns, Der leidende Apostel, 214; Martin [1976]; Dalton, Bib 60 [1979] 97–102, who argues that Paul wrote 3:20–21 with “the thoughts and phrases of the Christ-hymn still fresh” in his mind [100], noting the link between ἐπιγείων, “earthly beings” [ Phil 2:10 ], and ἐπίγεια, “earthly things” [ 3:19 ], and σταυροῦ, “cross” [ 2:8 ], and σταυροῦ, “cross” [ 3:18 ]; Reumann, NTS 30 [1984] 593–609; Oakes, Philippians, 30, adds to the list of parallels: πᾶν ὄνομα, “every name” [ 2:9 ], πᾶσα γλῶσσα, “every tongue” [ 2:11 ], and τὰ πάντα, “everything” [ 3:21 ]). Thus, when translating, one is fully justified in setting this section forth in poetic form to call attention to its hymnlike characteristics.

Table 3. Parallels on the Christ-hymn of Phil 2:6–11 and the hymn of Phil 3:20–21

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phil 2:6–11</th>
<th>Phil 3:20–21</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>οὐμορφον, “having the same form” (3:21)</td>
<td>μορφή/μορφήν, “form” (2:6, 7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ὑπάρχει, “is” (3:20)</td>
<td>ὑπάρχων, “being” (2:6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>μετασχηματίσει, “transform the likeness” (3:21)</td>
<td>σχήματι, “likeness” (2:7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ταπεινώσεως, “humble state” (3:21)</td>
<td>ἐταπείνωσεν, “humbled” (2:8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>δύνασθαι ...ὑποτάξαι ...τὰ πάντα, “able to subject everything” (3:21)</td>
<td>πᾶν γόνυ κάμψῃ, “every knee might bow” (2:10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν, “the Lord Jesus Christ” (3:20)</td>
<td>κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, “Jesus Christ is Lord” (2:11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>δόξης, “glory” (3:21)</td>
<td>δόξαν, “glory” (2:11)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although, as has been pointed out, this section does not fit easily into its context and it may originally have been part of a very different context with a very different train of thought, it is here, nevertheless, and one is compelled to ask why Paul puts it here. Paul does so because it provides the final answer to his verbal contest with the opponents. See table 4.

**Table 4. Paul’s comparison of his opponents and true Christian believers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opponents</th>
<th>Pauline Christians</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Their πολίτευμα, “colony,” “citizenship,” is here in this world.</td>
<td>Their πολίτευμα is in heaven (cf. 1:27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Their minds are earthbound since the earth is the limit of their mental horizon.</td>
<td>Their minds are fixed on heaven, from where they eagerly expect the savior to come.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They expect perfection now by keeping the law.</td>
<td>They yearn for the future, at which time perfection will be achieved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They stand as enemies of the crucified Christ.</td>
<td>They own Christ as crucified Lord and see him as sovereign over the universe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They will find their end to be destruction, however ecstatic and glorious their present may be.</td>
<td>They may be straining now, morally struggling to attain, but their goal will be so full of richness that nothing can compare with it. Their weak mortal bodies will be transformed and made like Christ's resplendent body.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This section, thus, is a capstone to Paul’s teaching: in Christ the Christian has been brought into a new, ethically controlled relationship to God. This new relationship commits the believer to a life-style in which suffering and hardship are his present lot in anticipation of the day when he will be set free. The Pauline
disciple is like a runner in a race, or an athlete at the games. He struggles and exerts himself now, by God’s assistance, in the hope that he one day will reach the winning post and gain the prize. He is thus faced with a paradox: already “saved” and with the race begun, he awaits and strains forward to attain his resurrection, which will be the completion of his salvation under God... (1:6 ; 2:16 ; 3:11–14). (Martin [1976], 150–51)

To this statement may be added the endorsement of Garland (NovT 27 [1985] 160–62), who argues that the links between earlier parts of the letter (1:27–28) and the section opening with 3:18 support his contention that the letter is a rhetorical and literary unity. Above all, the theme of the nexus between “abasement” (ταπείνωσις) and “exaltation” (δόξα, “glory”) in both Christ’s life and the believers’ was pointed out by Dibelius (72), though there is no thought of Christians becoming κύριος, “lord,” over the universe.

Comment

20 ἡμῶν γὰρ τὸ πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς ὑπάρχει, “for our citizenship is in heaven.” The pronoun ἡμῶν, “our,” stands first in this new section. It has the emphatic position (as in v 3) in order again to draw sharp contrast between “them” and “us,” between Jews or Jewish Christians and Pauline Christians. Their citizenship is on earth (v 19); ours is in heaven.

The word πολίτευμα, “citizenship,” found only here in the NT, is more accurately translated “commonwealth” or “state” (see Stauffer, New Testament Theology, 296–97). Often πολίτευμα was used to
designate a colony of foreigners or relocated veterans (BDAG) whose purpose was to secure the conquered country for the conquering country by spreading abroad that country’s way of doing things, its customs, its culture, and its laws. When Paul wrote his letters, Rome was the conqueror, and its empire spread over the Mediterranean world. Macedonia was under its domination. But the Macedonian city of Philippi had been designated a Roman colony and had been awarded the ius italicum, “Italian law,” the highest legal privilege obtainable by any provincial municipality (Lemerle, Philippes, 7–10; Bockmuehl, 3–4, drawing on Pilhofer, Philippi, 1:121–22). Its citizens, therefore, were also citizens of Rome with all of the rights and privileges awarded to any Roman born in the imperial city (see further in Introduction, Recipients and Their City). In writing this word, πολίτευμα, “citizenship,” to the Philippian church, Paul was thus using a word that would appeal to them and to which they could easily relate. With it, as Caird (147–48) observes, Paul pictures the world as an empire over which Christ rules de jure, though not yet de facto. Each local church is a colony of heaven, its members enjoying full citizenship of the heavenly city (cf. Gal 4:26; Eph 2:19), but charged with the responsibility of bringing the world to acknowledge the sovereignty of Christ. Neither the Roman colonist nor the Christian depended for the meaning, character and purpose of his life on the ethos of his alien environment, nor did he allow that environment to determine the quality of his behavior.

(See also de Zwaan, ThSt 31 [1913] 298–300; Engers, Mnemosyne 54 [1926] 154–61; Dibelius; but see Volz, Eschatologie, 114–16; H. Strathmann, TDNT 6:535; Sherwin-White, Roman Society, 184–85).
Note Dibelius’s paraphrase of v 20 a: “Our home is in heaven, and here on earth we are a colony of heavenly citizens” (cited in BDAG, s.v.).

Paul also may have chosen the word πολίτευμα, “citizenship,” conscious still of his contest with the Jews or Jewish-Christian opponents. He knew that the Jews were a favored people, treated in a special manner by the Romans. He knew that they were allowed to live a more or less independent existence as small colonies surrounded by ethnically different populations. He knew that the Jews made up their own πολιτεύματα, “colonies,” wherever they settled and that they were permitted to live according to their own laws and follow their own religious practices (Fuchs, Juden Ägyptens, 89; Klijn, Introduction, 110; Stegner, DPL, 211–13; Barclay, Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora). But Paul believed that these Jews, irrespective of what they might have speculated about themselves, belonged only to colonies that were linked to Palestinian Jerusalem—earthbound, time-bound colonies without any enduring quality. By contrast, he says that Christians are a colony of heaven, living here on earth, to be sure, but belonging to a heavenly city that is enduring. Therefore, they enjoy all the rights and privileges of that city, including the privilege of eternal life.

ἐξ οὗ καὶ σωτῆρα ἀπεκδεχόμεθα κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν, “and from heaven we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.” Then, with language that is characteristic of apocalyptic literature, Paul proceeds to say that Christians are eagerly anticipating a savior to come from heaven. (The relative pronoun οὗ, “which,” formally agrees with πολίτευμα, “citizenship,” but by sense it agrees
with οὐρανοῖς, “heaven.” For this kind of constructio ad sensum, “construction according to the sense,” see BDF §§134, 296; cf. also Michaelis; Gnilka; O’Brien, 461.) The verb that expresses the church’s eager anticipation, ἀπεκδεχόμεθα, “eagerly wait for,” is used six times by Paul of the eight times it appears in the NT (Rom 8:19, 23, 25; 1 Cor 1:7; Gal 5:5; Phil 3:20). It is his special word, the one that for him best describes the Christian’s persistent yearning for, happy expectation of, and earnest desire for the second coming of Christ, when this travailing creation will be freed from its “thraldom to decay” (Rom 8:21 MOFFATT) and restored to its pristine wholeness once again (cf. Rom 8:19–25). Thus the church’s expectation focuses on a person who is σωτήρ, “Savior.” The absence of the definite article before σωτήρ does not mean “a savior,” as though any savior would do. Rather, its absence is to be understood in a qualitative sense, where a single individual represents an entire class (BDF §252[2]). So it may be rendered “he will come as Savior.” That single individual is “Jesus Christ,” who is confessed by the church as “Lord” (cf. 2:11). It is he who will bring about the final stage of God’s saving work that was also begun by him, namely, the “decisive laying aside of the coming wrath (Rom 5:9; 1 Cor 3:15; 5:5; 1 Thess 5:19) or, as here, the ultimate acquisition of Glory” (Collange, 140; see also W. Foerster, TDNT 7:993, 1015–18).

σωτήρ, “savior,” is a term that also reaches back into, and gains substance from, the OT. There it is used of God himself who is described as Vindicator of his people, the one who will ultimately deliver them from all their adversaries (cf. Isa 35:4). Surprisingly, the word σωτήρ, “savior,” is found only here in the letters of Paul;
it does, however, have a special place in Ephesians (5:23), the Pastorals, and 2 Peter. Why Paul uses it so sparingly as a title for Jesus and why he uses it here are questions difficult to answer. Perhaps its rarity can be explained by noting that (1) σωτήρ, “savior,” was a word frequently used by the masses to refer to their pagan gods or to designate the emperor (Taylor, Names of Jesus, 109; see Martin [1976]). Paul may then have been reluctant to use such a common term of someone so unique as Christ (cf. Collange; but he uses κύριος, “Lord,” which was a title of both emperors and cult deities). Or (2) for Paul the word σωτηρία, “salvation,” is not generally used of that state in which believers now find themselves in this life. Rather, salvation is that state into which they will be brought at the return of Christ. Christians have been justified, but not yet saved. They are “being saved” (1 Cor 1:18), but salvation is a process that will not be completed until the Parousia. Hence, Paul prefers “justification” or “reconciliation” to describe what has already been done in the Christian by God’s action in Christ, while he reserves “salvation” for what yet remains to be done (Beare; cf. Rom 5:9–10). Yet this future salvation is an assured fact (1 Thess 1:10; 5:9–10; cf. Eph 2:1–10, esp. v 8). Or (3) while Paul does use the term “Jesus” many times, it would be tautologous for him to say “Jesus Savior” since he would be repeating the name twice: Jesus (OT “Joshua”; Heb. yĕhōšûaʿ or yēšûaʿ) means “God saves,” and that is, of course, exactly what is conveyed by the noun σωτήρ, “Savior.”

On the other hand, the presence of the word σωτήρ, “Savior,” here may be explained variously: It may be explained by noting that
it is fittingly placed within the context of the end times; and that placement would confirm the idea that it is used in a descriptive way—“as Savior.” Or (2) this section may be an early Christian hymn not composed by Paul, and hence σωτήρ, “Savior,” is really not his choice of title. Or (3) the imagery of this section inevitably sets up a contrast with the Roman emperor. Paul, therefore, opposes the head of imperial Rome with the true Emperor-Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ (Martin [1959]; cf. Bornhäuser, Jesus Imperator Mundi; Oakes, Philippians, 138–47). We may note that in an inscription in Ephesus dated A.D. 48 there is a designation of Julius Caesar as a visible “god and political savior of human life” (MM, 621). And later, Nero will be hailed as “savior and benefactor of the world” (MM, 621; the last two references are noted by Thielman [2002], 3:362).

21 ὃς μετασχηματίσει τὸ σῶμα τῆς ταπεινώσεως ἡμῶν σύμμορφον τῷ σώματι τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ, “he will transform our lowly bodies so that they might become like his glorious body.” In any case, the Savior will perform his saving work on τὸ σῶμα τῆς ταπεινώσεως ἡμῶν, “our lowly bodies,” more literally, “the body of our humiliation.” This expression, of all expressions, describes the fallenness, the weakness, the corruptibility, the mortality of everyone, including all Christians. τὸ σῶμα, “the body,” for Paul is not some sort of outer husk covering the human spirit, a covering that he hopes will some day be discarded, nor some prison-house of the soul (as in Wis 9:15 and in the Orphic tag σῶμα σῆμα, “the body is a tomb”) that might better be done without. Rather, for Paul a person’s body is that person (see Gundry, Sōma, who emphasizes
the physicality of σῶμα, “body”). And that person, every person, this side of the Parousia, is marked by frailty, suffering, sorrow, vanity, death, and corruption. The body can only be described by ταπείνωσις, “humiliation.” But when Christ returns, described here as when the Savior comes from heaven, the thing he will do for Christians that gets singled out for special attention is that he will transform (μετασχηματίζει) their bodies of humiliation and make them like his own body of glory. This thought may be indebted to Jewish mysticism, as Bockmuehl (JTS n.s. 48 [1997] 1–23) suggests.

The blessed state is never described by Paul as a separation of the soul from the body. Salvation for him is not the survival of the soul alone, but the preservation and restoration of people in their wholeness—spirit, soul, and body (1 Thess 5:23). See Kreitzer, DPL, 71–76, for discussion of relevant passages. Paul believed that when Christ was resurrected, his physical body was transformed into a spiritual body. But he did not mean by this that Christ no longer had any part in the corporeal. Rather, he was freed from the weakness and limitations and humiliation of the flesh, so that his new mode of existence could be identified with that of the Spirit (2 Cor 3:17 ; 1 Cor 15:45).

Paul also believed that just such a radical transformation would be effected in the bodies of Christians by the Lord Jesus Christ at his return. Paul does not describe the exact nature of these transformed bodies here, except to say that they will be like (σύμμορφον, “having the same form”) Christ’s body of glory; i.e., they too will be spiritual bodies—not bodies consisting of spirit merely but bodies with a new determining or motivating force. They
will be bodies brought forth and determined by divine, heavenly power. As a consequence, it will be possible to say of these bodies—these transformed people, rather—that they are imperishable and immortal, models of glory and power (cf. 1 Cor 15:42, 43, 48, 53; see Ridderbos, Paul, 538–39, 544–45).

κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν τοῦ δύνασθαι αὐτὸν καὶ ὑποτάξαι αὐτῷ τὰ πάντα, “and he will achieve this goal by the outworking of his ability to subject everything to himself.” Thus this section closes with a liturgical confession ascribing all power to Jesus Christ as Lord (cf. Norden, Agnostos Theos, 240–42; Martin [1976]). He who will raise the dead and transform their bodies of humiliation into incorruptible glorious bodies will do so by means of divine ἐνέργεια, “outworking.” ἐνέργεια, most frequently translated “power,” is more dynamic than such a translation might lead one to believe. In classical Greek it was used of physiological “function” (Galen, 6.21) or of the “activity” of drugs (Galen, 6.467). Diodorus Siculus (20.95) used it of the “driving force” of an engine (LSJ). Hence, ἐνέργεια is not merely “power” but “power in action,” “power in operation,” “power working” (cf. KJV). It is not simply supernatural “power” that Paul has in mind here, but supernatural “action.” The resurrection and transformation of the body are but the “outworking” of Christ’s ability (τοῦ δύνασθαι αὐτόν, “him to be able”) even to subject (ὑποτάξαι, “to subject”) the entire universe (τὰ πάντα, “everything”) to himself. The genitive infinitive τοῦ δύνασθαι, “of... to be able,” with its accusative of reference (αὐτόν, “him”) is descriptive of this divine ἐνέργειαν, “outworking,” while the infinitive ὑποτάξαι, “to subject,” is complementary to
δύνασθαι, “to be able”: “the outworking of his ability to subject.” The resurrection of the body, then, is to be viewed not as an isolated event “but as the last act in the drama of cosmic redemption” (Caird, 149; cf. Rom 8:19–25; Eph 1:7–10, 19, 22).

**Explanation**

Paul concludes his polemic against the opponents with what might have been one of the earliest hymns of the church (Phil 3:20–21). It begins with the triumphant but challenging claim that Christians compose a colony of heaven on earth. As such, they enjoy full citizenship rights in the City of God, but they are also responsible for spreading abroad in this “conquered” world the customs, culture, manner of life, and laws of their heavenly home. As a colony of heaven, Christians may be contrasted with Jewish communities in the Roman world. Often the Jewish communities were allowed by the Roman government to form little enclaves, colonies of Jerusalem, so to speak, to keep their own traditions and obey their own laws. But for Paul these colonies were strictly earthbound and time-bound because they were entirely fixed on earthly matters, such as survival in a hostile world. But Christians live in eager expectation of the future. They have a persistent yearning, a joyful anticipation of a coming day when the crucified Christ will return as Savior and Lord.

When that day comes, when the Savior arrives, his special saving act will be utterly to transform their bodies. From bodies of humiliation—i.e., from bodies marked by limitation, frustration, feebleness, mortality, and corruption—Christ will transfigure them into bodies like his own glorious resurrected body, that is, bodies
infused with a new determining force of the Spirit that is heavenly and divine, bodies that are imperishable and immortal, models of glory and power. But this Christ is not merely the Savior of Christians. He is also Imperator mundi, “Ruler of the world.” The energy by which he transfigures mortal bodies is the energy by which he subdues the universe and subjects all things to his authority. The resurrection of the dead and the transformation of broken persons are but one part, the most significant part, to be sure, of the great drama of cosmic redemption.

The climax, reached in Phil 3:20–21, also in a sense looks back to 3:14. Paul pursues the goal of winning the prize, which is not yet attained. That will come with the Parousia, which in turn ushers in the resurrection of the dead and the achievement of God’s saving purposes for both cosmos and church. The link word is “look.” What began the chapter as a summons and caution to “look out” (3:2) moves to the call “look at us” (3:17–21) and closes with both a warning (3:18–19) of teachers to be avoided (“look away” from such persons) and an eschatological aspiration (“look up” to the fulfillment of the Christian’s hope in 3:20–21). In contrast to the “earthly things” (3:19), the concluding picture is one of eternal realities, where true citizen-life (1:27, a term suitable to Paul’s readers in a Roman colony) is to be found and from where Christ will come to bring resurrection power to mortal existence (cf. 1 Cor 15:42–57). Only then will the prize be won (Phil 3:14) at the resurrection (3:11). (Interestingly the call in 1 Cor 15:58 to be “steadfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord” is matched by the way Paul proceeds in Phil 4:1. This is one
further indication of the close affinity between both letters and may suggest a common origin in Paul's Ephesian period.)
IV. Exhortations to Harmony and Joy (4:1–9)

Bibliography

Translation

¹ Well then, my Christian friends, you whom I love and long for, my joy and my crown—this, my Christian friends, a is how you must stand firm in the Lord: ² [First,] I beg Euodia and I beg Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. ³ Yes, and I ask you, my loyal yokefellow[s], b to help them, because they are women who fought at
my side in [the spread of] the gospel along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers. c All their names are in the book of life. ⁴ Second, rejoice in the Lord at all times. Once again I will say it, rejoice! ⁵ Next, let your magnanimity be known to everybody. The Lord is near! ⁶ Do not worry about anything, but in every situation make your requests known to God by prayer and petition with thanksgiving. ⁷ As a result God’s d peace, which excels all human planning, will stand guard over your thoughts e and feelings in Christ f Jesus. ⁸ And last of all, my Christian friends, since there is moral excellence and since there are things worthy of praise, g focus your minds on these things—on whatever is truthful, whatever is majestic and awe-inspiring, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever calls forth love, whatever is winsome. ⁹ And keep putting into practice the lessons that you learned from me and the traditions that I passed on to you, and the things that you heard about me, and the things that you saw in me. If you do, the God of peace will be with you.

Notes

1.a. B 33 add μου, “my,” after this second ἄγαπητοί, “Christian friends,” at the end of the verse. Its presence is not needed to preserve the possessive idea. D* and a few other witnesses omit this second ἄγαπητοί, “Christian friends,” and the μου, “my,” perhaps as useless redundancy.


3.c. Ν* and apparently Ψ 46, because of scribal inadvertence, have a slightly longer text: καὶ τῶν συνεργῶν μου καὶ τῶν
λοιπῶν, “and my co-workers and the rest,” for καὶ τῶν λοιπῶν συνεργῶν μου, “and the rest of my co-workers.”

7.d. A and some early versions have ἡ εἰρήνη τοῦ Χριστοῦ, “the peace of Christ,” for ἡ εἰρήνη τοῦ θεοῦ, “the peace of God.” There is no substantial reason to consider seriously this reading.

7.e. For νοήματα, “thoughts,” F G read σώματα, “bodies,” and apparently

¹⁶ reads νοήματα καὶ σώματα, “thoughts and bodies.” Again there is no good reason for adopting these changes, in spite of the fact that Lohmeyer considers them favorable to his thesis about martyrdom. But see Silva, 228.

7.f. ᾿Ψ ⁴⁶ has κυρίῳ, “Lord,” for Χριστῷ, “Christ.” Titles for Jesus, as usual, are extremely susceptible to variation.

8.g. Whereas most MSS read ἐὰν τις ἐπαινοῦ, lit. “if there is any praise,” D* F G, apparently uncomfortable with leaving ἐπαινοῦ, “praise,” without an object, add ἐπιστήμης, “of understanding,” after it: “if there is any praise of understanding.”

**Form/Structure/Setting**

Upon the assumption that Philippians is a single letter and not a compilation of letters that Paul wrote to the church at Philippi (see Introduction, Integrity of Philippians), one can easily view 4:1 as a transitional verse. The apostle now shifts from theological or polemical matters to concluding remarks, i.e., exhortations, expressions of gratitude, and words of farewell. Thus he brings his letter to a close, but in a rather protracted way. In this first section
(4:1–9) familiar motifs are echoed: ἀγαπητοί, “beloved” (4:1 [2x]; cf. 2:12), ἔπιπόθητοι, “longed for” (4:1 ; cf. 1:8 ; 2:26), χαρά, “joy” (4:1 ; cf. 1:4, 25 ; 2:2, 29), στήκετε, “stand firm” (4:1 ; cf. 1:27), τὸ αὐτὸ φρονεῖν, “to agree” (4:2 ; cf. 1:7 ; 2:2, 5 ; 3:15, 19), ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ συναθλεῖν, “struggling together in the gospel” (4:3 ; cf. 1:27), and τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, “the gospel” (4:3 ; cf. 1:5, 7, 12, 16, 22 ; 2:22). They serve to bind the whole of the letter together and at the same time show how unstructured it is and how difficult a task it is to outline any logical flow of the apostle’s thought from first to last, except that we should observe how certain themes recur and the letter conforms to some pattern set by a “letter of friendship.” Once again there is here a sharp reminder of the very personal nature of this letter, not only in the affectionate language Paul uses in addressing his friends, but also in his frequent use of the first-person pronoun that appears again and again: “my brothers,” “my crown,” “I beg,” “I ask,” “I will say,” “with me.”

Paul customarily brings his letters to a close with a section dealing with practical and personal matters and greetings. So here in Philippians. However, the contrast between the theoretical and the practical, the didactic and the personal application, so prominent in other Pauline letters, is not nearly so pronounced here because (1) it is such a personal letter in all its parts and (2) practical matters have been dealt with throughout. Nevertheless, this final chapter is more pronounced in its practical application and in its attention to personal notices than those that have preceded it. In this it shows itself to be in harmony with the Pauline style and pattern of writing. Thus, as is to be expected, the imperative mood is predominant. And as is usual, too, the
exhortations given here are given to the entire Christian community. If individual Christians are singled out for special instruction, it is always with the understanding that they are part of the church and that behind them—to support, encourage, guide, and be responsible for them—is the congregation, which with them is equally the recipient of the apostolic commands.

There have been indications throughout the letter that all was not well at Philippi. Hints have been given of selfishness, self-interest, conceit, and pride existing with harmful effects within the Christian community. Now one of these problems surfaces: intense disagreement, along with the names of those who are party to the quarrel (see Peterlin, Paul’s Letter to the Philippians, for a discussion of the nature and extent of this disagreement). Two women could not agree, and the church may have been in danger of taking sides and dividing. Equally troubling to Paul, the spiritual leaders within the congregation were not taking the problem seriously enough to become involved in solving it. He was forced to ask them specifically to do what they should already have been doing.

In the rapid-fire commands that Paul now flings out in all directions, one gets the impression that there were many other spiritual irritants present at Philippi, such as depression, harshness of spirit, anxiety, failure to take prayer seriously, troubled minds, minds filled with all the wrong kinds of things, and, above all, confusion over moral values and their competing claims (see Martin, Hymn of Christ, xxxv). Paul is confident that there are solutions to the problems at Philippi, and thus he encourages them
to change not only their actions, but, more fundamentally, their attitude.

Comment

1 ὦστε, “well then.” This verse is a transitional verse. The ὦστε, “well then,” is a conjunction designed to ask the readers to look back and to take action in light of what has just been said: in light of the fact that Christians are a colony of heaven, that they eagerly expect the Lord Jesus Christ to come as Savior, that their hope is in him for a complete transformation of their bodies from frailty to glory, they must “therefore” stand firm. But in what way are they to stand firm? οὕτως, “thus,” “in this way,” is Paul’s answer. And with this word the apostle points them in the opposite direction (cf. BDAG)—not backward now, but forward and onward to undertake immediately those things he is about to introduce with a set of imperatives. Hence this verse is no more linked with what precedes (Haupt, Barth, Bonnard, Friedrich, Collange, Martin [1976]) than it is with what follows. For vv 2–9 state precisely how Christians are to stand firm (cf. Lohmeyer).

ἀδελφοί μου ἀγαπητοί καὶ ἐπιπόθητοι, χαρὰ καὶ στέφανός μου, “my Christian friends, you whom I love and long for, my joy and my crown.” But before the apostle begins his commands, he first commends. He does so with an extraordinary, long series of appellatives designed to express powerfully to the Philippians his feeling of closeness to them and his great affection for them: (1) ἀδελφοί, lit. “brothers” (cf. also Phil 1:12 ; 3:1, 13, 17 ; 4:8, 21 —a feature in Hellenistic letters of friendship), reminds them that they and he belong to the same divine family and hold equal status in
relation to God as Father (see Comment on 1:12). (2) ἀγαπητοί, lit. “beloved,” is a verbal adjective with passive force (BDF §112), and appearing in this context twice over, it focuses attention on the Philippians as the object of Paul’s love. It is his humble way of saying “I love you,” but it is not less powerful for being so humbly expressed. (3) ἐπιπόθητοι, lit. “longed for,” like ἀγαπητοί, “beloved,” is also a verbal adjective with passive force, but unlike ἀγαπητοί, “beloved,” this word occurs nowhere else in the NT. Its rarity perhaps adds intensity to the emotion of “homesick tenderness,” especially to the pain of separation that Paul feels and expresses here (cf. 1:8 where Paul uses the cognate verb ἐπιποθεῖν, “to long for,” and see the Comment there; cf. also 2:26). (4) χαρά, “joy,” is a word that belongs to the special vocabulary of Philippians (1:4, 25; 2:2; cf. also 1:18; 2:17, 18, 28; 3:7; 4:4, 10) and gives expression to a fundamental Christian emotion. But what is worth noting here is that the Philippians are Paul’s joy, which is a striking way of saying that they are his source or cause of joy. People, not things—these friends, his children in the faith, even with all their failings—are what stimulate within him this great gladness. (5) στέφανος, “crown,” as Paul uses it here, is not to be thought of as the diadem (διάδημα) worn by a king (cf. Rev 19:12; and see Deissmann, Light from the Ancient East, 315) or the martyr’s crown (Lohmeyer), but as either the garland placed on the head of a guest at a banquet (Aristophanes, Ach. 636; Plato, Symp. 212; see Vincent) or a victor’s wreath presented by the judges to the winner in the Olympian games (Pfitzner, Paul and the Agon Motif, 104–6), or both at the same time. With this single word, then, Paul may be reinforcing the idea that the Philippians are a cause for his
festal-like joy, on the one hand, and informing them that they are also a source of great honor for him, on the other. There is no need to push this idea of “crowning” exclusively into the eschatological period, as though the continued fidelity of the Philippian church would only then result in a reward, a crown, being given Paul for the success of his pastoral work (Collange; Martin [1976]; W. Grundmann, TDNT 7:615–36; Bockmuehl, 237, who notes the eschatological setting in 1 Thess 2:19, another Macedonian congregation, and that the connective ὥστε, “well, then,” links with 3:20–21 and places the greeting in the frame of the future). The Philippians already are a cause of Paul’s boasting and honor. They are his crown. Yet, like the Corinthians, who are both called “saints” (1 Cor 1:2) and in serious danger of falling short of this calling, Paul’s people are in constant need of both praise and blame.

οὕτως στήκετε ἐν κυρίῳ, ἀγαπητοί, “this, my Christian friends, is how you must stand firm in the Lord.” Now, after so powerfully expressing his affection for them, Paul asks the Philippians to stand firm. By this word, στήκετε, “stand firm,” he describes them as soldiers (Krentz, “Military Language”) who are to stand at their post irrespective of the pressures to abandon it (cf. Phil 1:16) or as runners who must adhere without deviation to the course marked out by the gospel. With it he calls upon them to live thoroughly Christian lives (cf. 1:27). But how are they to “stand firm”? What will this thoroughly Christian life look like? Paul’s answer: “Stand firm thus [ οὕτως ].” Then in a series of imperatives he puts meaning into the word οὕτως, “thus.” The course marked out by the gospel will look like this.
2 Εὐοδίαν παρακαλῶ καὶ Συντύχην παρακαλῶ τὸ αὐτὸ φρονεῖν ἐν κυρίῳ, “[first,] I beg Euodia and I beg Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord.” “First”—and this word is added to the translation to make clear the connection between v 1 and v 2 —unity among believers is an essential element in a truly Christian way of living. Paul appeals to Euodia and Syntyche “to agree with each other in the Lord.” The earnestness of his appeal is seen (1) in the verb he uses to make it, παρακαλεῖν, “to urge, exhort, appeal to,” “to implore or beg,” and (2) in the fact that Paul uses it twice so as to heighten its effect by repetition, as though he were addressing the women each in turn, and to emphasize the idea that his apostolic exhortation is made to both parties equally. This exhortation to live harmoniously together is for a way of life that is fit and proper for all who claim to have placed themselves under the Lordship of Christ (τὸ αὐτὸ φρονεῖν ἐν κυρίῳ, “to agree with each other in the Lord”). Once again the important Pauline word φρονεῖν, “to have an interest in,” “to pay sympathetic attention to,” “to have concern for,” “to think,” “to form or hold an opinion about,” “to set one's mind on, to be intent on,” appears (Phil 1:7 ; 2:3, 5 ; 3:15, 19 ; 4:2, 10). And the richness of meaning in the phrase τὸ αὐτὸ φρονεῖν exceeds any single translation, such as “to agree with each other”; for it embraces not only the idea of possessing “a common mind” but also the idea of having identical feelings and attitudes toward each other, a total harmony of life (see Comment on 1:7).

The principal parties involved in this quarrel, Euodia and Syntyche, were women. The names appear quite frequently in
inscriptions, always in the feminine form (BDAG), and Paul refers to them in v 3 with feminine forms of the pronouns, αὐταῖς, “them [fem.],” and αἵτινες, “who [fem.].” There are thus no grounds for taking one or both of these names as names of men, as did Theodore of Mopsuestia (ca. A.D. 350–428). He claimed to have heard that Syntyche should be spelled Syntyches, a man’s name, and that Syntyches was in fact the Philippian jailer of Acts 16, the husband of Euodia. But this is an admitted rumor and is totally without support in fact (Michael, Vincent). Nor is there any support for the fanciful view of the Tübingen School that saw Euodia and Syntyche not as two individuals but as symbols for the Jewish Christians, on the one hand, and the Gentile Christians, on the other, and the σύζυγε, “yokefellow,” of v 3 (Syzygos = “the Unifier”) as the apostle Peter, who was charged with mediating between these two factions within the church and with bringing them together (cf. Barth).

Nothing is known about these two women or the nature of their quarrel. Just possibly one of them could have been the Lydia of Acts 16 (cf. vv 14, 40). Λυδία, “Lydia,” is an adjective meaning “the Lydian,” i.e., the woman from Lydia of Asia Minor, and either “Euodia” or “Syntyche” could have been her proper name. (Hemer, Book of Acts, 114, 231, takes the view that Lydia was in fact a personal name, based on inscriptional evidence in Asia Minor.) Lydia’s prominent role in the founding of the church at Philippi lends a certain credibility to this conjecture (but this is doubted by Bockmuehl, 17). In any case, these two women appear to have been important persons within the church and among its most active workers, perhaps deaconesses; perhaps within each of their
homes a separate congregation met for worship. Certainly it is clear from the Acts account that women played a noteworthy role in the founding and establishing of the Macedonian churches (Acts 16:14, 40; 17:4, 12; see Thomas, ExpTim 83 [1971–72] 117–20; Gilman, Women). Thus that these people in particular, two influential women who had the potential for upsetting the harmony of the larger community, were quarreling caused Paul to beg each, face to face as it were, to make up their differences. Their differences may have had to do with church leadership and which of the two women was to have the greater voice and influence within the church at Philippi (see Portefaix, Sisters Rejoice). Paul’s plea here for them to be of the same mind (τὸ αὐτὸ φρονεῖν, “to agree with each other”) recalls Phil 2:1–5, where the general problems that plagued the Philippians—self-serving, self-seeking attitudes—were set over against (τοῦτο φρονεῖτε, “act in this way” [2:5]) the self-sacrificing, self-giving attitude of Christ, who was in the form of God but who poured himself out unselfishly in obedience for the good of others. Nor should the models of Timothy and Epaphroditus be overlooked, as Paul holds up these “patterns” that the two women were failing to emulate. These two colleagues would have more immediate appeal, as they were known at Philippi as Paul’s fellow workers.

3 ναὶ ἐρωτῶ καὶ σέ, γνήσιε σύζυγε, “yes, and I ask you, my loyal yokefellow[s].” Paul was a realist. He understood how difficult it would be for Euodia and Syntyche to reach agreement on their own. Hence he solicits the help of a third party, whom he addresses simply as γνήσιε σύζυγε, “true yokefellow” (RSV). But who was this mysterious person, and why did Paul suddenly
address a single individual in a letter otherwise addressed to a whole church (Phil 1:1)? These questions have given rise to almost endless and sometimes absurd answers: (1) Paul’s wife (Clement of Alexandria), who Renan (Saint Paul, 148) conjectured was Lydia; (2) the husband or brother of Euodia or Syntyche (Chrysostom); (3) Epaphroditus (Lightfoot); (4) Timothy, of whom it was said that he γνησίως, “genuinely” (2:20), cared for the Philippians (Collange); (5) Silas (G. Delling, TDNT 7:749–50); (6) Luke (Manson, BJRL 23 [1939] 199; Hájek, CV 7 [1964] 261–62; Fee [1995], 393–94); (7) the chief bishop at Philippi (Ellicott); (8) Christ, with the ναί, “yes,” introducing a prayer to the one who joins people together (Wieseler, Chronologie); or (9) a person named Σύζυγος, “Syzygos” (Michael, J. J. Müller; cf. JB : “I ask you, Syzygus, to be truly a ‘companion’ ”). See the discussion in Bockmuehl (241). But the simplest, and perhaps the best, answer is to say that Paul sees the entire Philippian church as a unit, as a single individual, who shares with him the burden of his apostolic work, and he addresses them so (Fee [1995], 393–94, however, challenges this, stressing the singular vocative form of the term). He sees the Philippian church yoked together with him as two oxen teamed up to accomplish an important task (Houlden). Paul places subtle, though nonetheless powerful, stress on the importance of community effort by using five words compounded with the preposition σύν, “with,” within the space of two verses (vv 2–3). Thus he asks (ἐρωτῶ, “I ask”) them to cooperate with him now by resisting division and by effectively working to restore harmony.

συλλαμβάνου αὐτάις, “to help them.” Together the Philippians are to help these women reconcile their differences. Even the verb
Paul chooses, συλλαμβάνειν, “to help” (used sixteen times in the NT but only one time by the apostle, i.e., here), implies this unity of effort. Although through usage it has simply come to mean “to aid or assist,” yet compounded as it is with σύν (συλ -), “with,” the idea of “taking hold along with someone” (cf. Acts 26:21) in order to provide needed assistance still lingers. And the construction of ἐρωτῶ, “I ask,” followed by a finite verb (an imperative: συλλαμβάνου, “help”), where the infinitive or ὅτι recitativum, which introduces a direct quotation, would have been expected, intensifies the sense of urgency: “Help them! You must! It is an order, even though I ask [ ἐρωτῶ ] you!”

αἵτινες ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ συνήθλησάν μοι μετὰ καὶ Κλήμεντος καὶ τῶν λοιπῶν συνεργῶν μου, ὡν τὰ ὀνόματα ἐν βίβλῳ ζωῆς, “because they are women who fought at my side in [the spread of] the gospel along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers. All their names are in the book of life.” One very important reason for helping Euodia and Syntyche is now given: they had fought together side by side with Paul in the struggle to preach the gospel. This reason is introduced by the relative pronoun ἀἵτινες, “who.”

Relative pronouns can introduce subordinate causal clauses (see Dana and Mantey, Manual Grammar, 275; cf. Acts 10:41, 47 ; Rom 6:2 ; Phil 2:20 ; O’Brien, 481; but Fee [1995], 395, cites BDAG, 2, for a “qualitative” sense of the relative pronoun: “assist them, inasmuch as they belong to those who...”). συναθλεῖν, “to fight together side by side with,” is a metaphorical word drawn from the games or the gladiatorial arena (Malinowski, BTB 15 [1985] 62). It appears in the NT only here and in Phil 1:27 (see Comment on
1:27). It implies a united struggle in preaching the gospel, on the one hand, and a sharing in the suffering that results from the struggle, on the other (Pfitzner, Paul and the Agon Motif, 116, 119–20). There is also contained in the choice of this verb more than a hint of cooperation on the same level. By using it Paul wishes to say that these women are not in any way to be degraded for their disagreements; rather they are to be respected highly for their energetic cooperation with him, working at his side as esteemed members of his team. There is no justification whatsoever for making the limiting comment that “these two must have been among those [women] who, having believed, labored among their own sex for” the spread of the gospel (Alford, 179, italics added). They were, rather, Paul’s συνεργῶν, “co-workers,” equal in importance to Clement and τῶν λοιπῶν, “the rest,” of Paul’s fellow laborers. The phrase “with Clement and the rest of my co-workers” should be connected with the statement “they are women who fought at my side” (so Fee [1995], 396) and not, as Lightfoot suggests, with “to help them.” The structure of the sentence argues for this, as does the understanding that the σέ, “you,” though singular, probably refers to the church as a whole, which would then already have included Clement and the rest.

Who was this Clement? It is impossible to answer this question, other than to say that in all likelihood he was a Philippian Christian. Evidently he was so well known within the church that Paul did not need to identify him, and he did not think to do so for strangers who might chance to read his letter. Clement was a common Roman name. Hence to say that he was the Clement who later became the third bishop of Rome (cf. Eusebius, Hist. eccl.
is simply to be making a guess. Such identification rests solely on agreement in name, not at all on historical evidence.

Who were τῶν λοιπῶν συνεργῶν μου, “the rest of my co-workers”? Again it is a question impossible to answer. They too must have been Philippians, but too numerous to mention by name (cf. Ellis, NTS 17 [1970–71] 437–52). Yet they did have names, and although time and space (and perhaps his very knowledge) did not permit Paul to list them, God had listed them all in the “book of life.” Just as Philippi and other cities like it must have had a civic register that included all the names of their citizens, so the heavenly commonwealth (cf. Phil 3:20 ; Fee [1995], 397, citing Caird) has its own roll, where God inscribes the names of those to whom he promises life. Thus it is not important that succeeding generations know the names of Paul’s co-workers; it is important that “God knows them and knows they belong to him” (Barth, 120). The expression “book of life,” often found in late apocalyptic literature (cf. Dan 12:1 ; 1 Enoch 47:3; Rev 3:5, 20 ; 15:21, 27; 17:8 ; 20:12, 15 ; 21:27) and at Qumran (1QM XII, 3), is drawn from Exod 32:32 ; Pss 69:28 ; 139:16, where in the figurative language of the OT it refers to the register of God’s covenant people (Lightfoot; Martin [1976]).

The pronoun ἥν, “whose,” might seem to have as its antecedent only συνεργῶν, “co-workers”—i.e. “co-workers whose names are in the book of life”—since both terms are masculine and plural. But this interpretation is too restrictive and unnecessary, for ἥν, “whose,” can be a generic use of the masculine, intended to refer not only to the remaining co-workers but also to Clement and
Euodia and Syntyche. The names of all these are inscribed in the book of life: all are God’s children. Nor is there anything about the expression “whose names are in the book of life” to indicate that those people so designated had already died in the faith (cf. Luke 10:20), although many interpreters assume this to be the case (cf. Michael, J. J. Müller, Beare). For later references, see Herm. Vis. 1.3.2; Herm. Sim. 2:9; 1 Clem. 53.4.

4 χαίρετε ἐν κυρίῳ πάντοτε· πάλιν ἔρω, χαίρετε, “second, rejoice in the Lord at all times. Once again I will say it, rejoice!” Paul once again tells the Philippians to rejoice in the Lord on all occasions (πάντοτε, “at all times,” not ἀεί, “constantly”). And with emphatic determination he insists on repeating this injunction. χαίρειν, the verb translated “rejoice,” seems also to have been used as a formula of farewell (cf. Beare; Goodspeed, Problems, 174–75; cf. Bruce; Witherington, 112; NEB). Hence it is possible that at this juncture in the letter the imperative χαίρετε “combines a parting benediction with an exhortation to cheerfulness. It is neither ‘farewell’ alone, nor ‘rejoice’ alone” (Lightfoot, 159–60).

Nevertheless, whatever appeal there is here to joy, it is made with the realization that a Christian’s faith ἐν κυρίῳ, “in the Lord,” is what makes such an appeal meaningful, especially when that one is faced with situations that are conducive to sorrow and marked by difficulties, hurts, and trials (see the treatment of “joy” in the Comment on Phil 1:4).

5 τὸ ἐπιεικὲς ὑμῶν γνωσθῆτω πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις, “next, let your magnanimity be known to everybody.” The Christian life, furthermore, is to be characterized by ἐπιεικές, “magnanimity.” This
quality is such an important one that the apostle demands that it become evident among the Philippian Christians to such a degree that it will be seen and recognized (γνωσθήτω, “let [it] be known”) by everybody (πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις, lit. “to all people”), not just by their fellow believers (cf. John 13:35). ἐπιεικές, “magnanimity,” a neuter adjective used as an abstract noun, is almost untranslatable (cf. MM). Related as it is to εἰκός, “reasonable,” it radiates the positive ideas of magnanimity or “sweet reasonableness” (to use Matthew Arnold’s phrase [Literature and Dogma, xii, 2]). Aristotle contrasted it with ἀκριβοδίκαιος, “strict justice.” For him it meant a generous treatment of others that, while demanding equity, does not insist on the letter of the law. Willing to admit limitations, it is prepared to make allowances so that justice does not injure. It is a quality, therefore, that keeps one from insisting on one's full rights, “where rigidity would be harsh” (Plummer, 93; cf. Aristotle, Eth. nic. 5.10 §1137b.3), or from making a rigorous and obstinate stand for what is justly due to one (Vincent). In the NT ἐπιεικής, “magnanimity,” keeps company with such words as ἀμαχος, “peaceable” (1 Tim 3:3 ; Tit 3:2), ἀγαθός, “good” (1 Pet 2:18), ἀγνή, “pure,” εἱρηνική, “peace-loving,” εὐπειθής, “open to reason,” and μεστή ἐλέους, “rich in mercy” (Jas 3:17). Thus ἐπιεικές, “magnanimity,” “is that considerate courtesy and respect for the integrity of others which prompts a [person] not to be forever standing on his rights; and it is pre-eminently the character of Jesus (2 Cor 10:1)” (Caird, 150; cf. H. Preisker, TDNT 2:588–90). This term has something to contribute to the debate on Jesus and Paul (see Wenham, Paul) in view of the word’s use in Matt 11:29 (see Leivestad, NTS 12 [1966] 156–64).
ὁ κύριος ἐγγύς, “The Lord is near!” Without warning and without any conjunctions to join it either with what precedes or with what follows, Paul suddenly interjects this phrase. Its meaning is rendered elusive by the ambiguity contained in ἐγγύς, “near,” which can refer both to space and time. Thus, “the Lord is near” may mean that the Lord is close, present, and hence aware of a person’s conduct, concerned about a person’s attitude, available to come to a person’s aid, and at hand to assist (cf. LXX Pss 33:19 [ET 34:18 ]; 118:151 [ET 119:151 ]; 144:18 [ET 145:18 ]; see Caird, Michaelis, and especially note 1 Clem. 21.3). Or these words may mean that the return of the Lord Jesus Christ is imminent, as in the prayer call Marana tha, “Our Lord, come” (1 Cor 16:22 ; Rev 22:20 ; Did. 10:6). There would thus be good reason to rejoice, magnanimously to put up with the harassment of pagans, and to live worry free. It is that the Lord is coming soon to reward the faithful, to punish the evildoers, to heal all ills, and to right all wrongs (cf. 1 Cor 16:22 ; Heb 10:24–25 ; Jas 5:8 ; Rev 1:7 ; 3:11 ; 22:20 ; cf. 2 Thess 1:7–8 ; Barn. 21.3). Thus the shortness of time and the nearness of salvation heighten the earnestness of the exhortations (Haupt, Dibelius, Bonnard, Beare, Gnilka, Houlden, Martin [1976]; Ridderbos, Paul, 490). It may be wrong, however, to choose between these two interpretations and to remove all ambiguity by translation (cf. GOODSPEED, LB, GNB). Just possibly Paul deliberately chose this particular word, ἐγγύς, “near,” with all its ambiguity precisely to include both ideas, of time and of space, together: the Lord who will soon return is the Lord who once came so close to humanity (Phil 2:6–8) as actually to share the human lot and who though absent now in body is still near at
hand in his Spirit to guide, instruct, encourage, infuse with strength, assist, transform, and renew (cf. John 14:12, 16–18, 26; 16:12–13; Rom 8:9–11; 2 Cor 3:17–18; see Collange; Bruce, 117–18; O'Brien, 488–90).

6 μὴ δὲν μερίμνατε, “do not worry about anything.” Paul continues his exhortation by adding still another imperative without any conjunction. The figure of speech, called asyndeton, runs throughout this section, where commands are given in rapid-fire fashion without any connecting words to link one command to the other (see Witherington, 110). Now the order is “do not worry about anything,” or more accurately “stop worrying.” Once again Paul echoes the teaching of Jesus and reveals his familiarity with the Gospel tradition (cf. Matt 6:25–34; see Hunter, Paul and His Predecessors, 52–61; Davies, Paul and Rabbinic Judaism, 136–41; Dungan, Sayings of Jesus; Kim, DPL, 474–92, who does not list Phil 4:6 in his list of “Possible Echoes”; Wenham, Paul). The verb μερίμναν, “to worry,” was used in Phil 2:20, where it had the positive sense “to be solicitously concerned for” the welfare of others. Now, however, it has the negative connotation “anxious harassing care” (Lightfoot, 160), attempting “to carry the burden of the future oneself” (Caird, 151), or “unreasonable anxiety” (Plummer, 93), especially about things over which one has no control. Paul and the Philippians had ample reason for anxiety since the one was in prison and the others were threatened with persecution (cf. 1:28). So he is not speaking of imaginary troubles or phantom anxieties. Hence, when he tells them to stop worrying, to be overly anxious for nothing, leaving them no exceptions (μὴ δὲν, “nothing”; cf. 1 Cor 7:32), it is not because he makes light of the troubles
that they face but because he knows that God is greater than all their troubles (Beare; cf. LXX Ps 54:23 [ ET 55:22 ]; 1 Cor 7:32 ; 1 Pet 5:7 ; and the “Q” teaching in the Synoptic Gospels [ Matt 6:25–34 par. Luke 12:22–32 ]).

ἀλλ’ ἐν παντὶ τῇ προσευχῇ καὶ τῇ δεήσει μετὰ εὐχαριστίας τὰ αἰτήματα ύμῶν γνωριζέσθω πρὸς τὸν θεόν, “but in every situation make your requests known to God by prayer and petition with thanksgiving.” What then is the alternative to worry? How does one gain and keep one’s equilibrium in a world heaving with anxiety-creating situations? Paul’s answer: by prayer. With the use of three synonyms strung together in a row—προσευχῇ, “prayer,” δεήσει, “petition,” and αἰτήματα, “requests” (see Comment on Phil 1:4, 9)—Paul emphatically urges the Philippians to find release from anxiety in prayer and yet more prayer (cf. 1 Thess 5:17 ; Pol. Phil. 4.3; 7.2). From personal experience he had learned that “the way to be anxious about nothing was to be prayerful about everything” (Rainy, cited by Michael, 197, who gives a telling illustration from the life of Principal Rainy). “Make your requests known to God”—as though God needed to be informed (cf. Matt 6:8)—is but the apostle’s quaint way of expressing the very personal nature of prayer. He is saying, in effect, that prayer is a conversation with, a plea directed to, a request made of, and information given to the supreme Person of the universe, who can hear, know, understand, care about, and respond to the concerns that otherwise would sink people in despair.

It may be, however, that the real accent of this sentence is not on Paul’s command for the Philippians to pray but on his
instruction that they are to do this μετὰ εὐχαριστίας, “with thanksgiving” (cf. Rom 1:21 for the importance of thankfulness). Such God-directed gratitude accords with the tenor of Phil 1:12–18 and 2:17–18. Barth (122) observes:

To begin by praising God for the fact that in this situation, as it is, he is so mightily God—such a beginning is the end of anxiety. To be anxious means that we ourselves suffer, ourselves groan, ourselves seek to see ahead. Thanksgiving means giving God the glory in everything, making room for him, casting our care on him, letting it be his care. The troubles that exercise us then cease to be hidden and bottled up. They are, so to speak, laid open to God, spread out before him.


7 καὶ ἡ εἰρήνη τοῦ θεοῦ, “as a result God’s peace.” The καὶ here is consecutive: “as a result.” The expression ἡ εἰρήνη τοῦ θεοῦ, “the peace of God,” is found nowhere else in the NT. With it Paul is not now referring to the peace with God that the Philippians had as a result of their being justified by faith in Jesus Christ (τοῦ θεοῦ, “of God,” viewed as an objective genitive, as in Rom 5:1); such peace is presupposed. Nor is he exclusively referring to that “inward peace of soul which comes from God, and is grounded in God’s presence and promise... the fruit of believing prayer” (Vincent, 135; τοῦ θεοῦ, “of God,” viewed as a subjective genitive; cf. Rom 14:17; 15:13; Col 3:15). Paul seems here to be referring to the tranquility of God’s own eternal being (Caird), the peace that God himself has (Barth), the calm serenity that
characterizes God’s very nature and that grateful, trusting Christians are welcome to share (τοῦ θεοῦ, “of God,” viewed as a descriptive genitive; cf. Phil 4:9; Gnilka cites Sipre 42 on Num 6:26; cf. W. Foerster, TDNT 2:411–17). If they do, then not only will inner strife resulting from worry cease, but external strife resulting from disagreements among Christians has the potential of coming to an end as well. εἰρήνη, “peace,” here reflects the Heb. šālôm, harmony and good order, when all parts of life are working according to God’s plan and purpose (for the Greco-Roman background, see Dinkler, Eirene, and for an overview of Paul’s teaching, see Porter, DPL, 695–99).

ἡ ὑπερέχουσα πάντα νοῦν, “which excels all human planning.” Paul now describes this peace by a participial phrase, lit. “which rises above every mind.” This phrase is open to more than one interpretation: (1) the peace of God “surpasses all human understanding” (cf. MOFFATT, RSV, PHILLIPS, GNB, NIV); i.e., it is so marvelously vast that no human mind can ever fully comprehend its significance. (2) God’s peace is able to produce exceedingly better results than human planning, or it is far superior to any person’s schemes for security, or it is more effective for removing anxiety than any intellectual effort or power of reasoning (Plummer). Any of these interpretations is possible, although the latter one better fits the context in which this phrase appears. The context certainly argues against the attempt to see in these words a subtle rebuke to Paul’s enemies who claimed superior knowledge or to those Philippians who were jockeying for position by wanting to surpass or to outstrip their fellow Christians. The fact that the verb ὑπερέχειν, “to go beyond,” appears three times in this letter,
out of the total of four times Paul uses it in all of his letters (Phil 2:3; 3:8; 4:7; Rom 13:1), although striking, cannot override the context. However, it allows one to say that the expression “the peace of God which passes all understanding” means that “the ‘understanding’ (‘nous’) which the Philippians put into their dissensions ought in the end to be subjected to the peace which God gives” (Collange, 145; cf. Bonnard; Martin [1976]; O’Brien, 497, argues for the thought of God’s peace surpassing all our powers of comprehension; Black, NovT 37 [1995] 41–45, however, seeks to explain the verses as another bid by Paul to encourage the Philippians to live “in harmony with one another”). This expression is found in a section where the apostle seeks to help his friends to cope with anxiety through prayer and thanksgiving and to begin to share in the profundity of God’s peace, rather than to rebuke them for their self-centeredness. He has done that elsewhere (Phil 2:1–4; so O’Brien, 497–98).

φρουρῆσει τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν καὶ τὰ νοήματα ὑμῶν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, “will stand guard over your thoughts and feelings in Christ Jesus.” The verb φρουρεῖν is a military term picturing God’s peace as a detachment of soldiers “standing guard over” (cf. 2 Cor 11:32) a city so as to protect it from attack. Philippi in Paul’s time housed a Roman garrison (see Oakes, Philippians). Thus the metaphor would have been easily understood and appreciated by the Philippian Christians who read it: God’s peace, like a garrison of soldiers, will keep guard over our thoughts and feelings so that they will be as safe against the assaults of worry and fear as any fortress.
καρδία, “heart,” in the NT never means the physical organ that pumps the blood. Nor is it used solely to refer to the center of one’s emotions (Rom 9:2 ; 10:1 ; 2 Cor 2:4 ; 6:11 ; Phil 1:7). It is sometimes used to describe the source of thought (Rom 1:21 ; Eph 1:21) and moral choice (1 Cor 7:37 ; 2 Cor 9:7)—that which “gives impulse and character to action” (Vincent, 137; J. Behm, TDNT 3:611–13). But here, where Paul places καρδία, “heart,” alongside νόημα, “thought,” grammatically in such a way as to distinguish the one from the other—τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν καὶ τὰ νοήματα ὑμῶν, “your hearts and your thoughts” (note the definite articles with both nouns and also the pronoun ὑμῶν, “your”)—καρδία, “heart,” very likely has its meaning narrowed to the “seat of one’s emotions or deepest feelings” or simply to the “emotions” and “feelings” themselves. νοήματα, however, are the products of the νοῦς, “mind,” and hence “thoughts” (2 Cor 2:11 ; cf. NEB, JB ; but see J. Behm, TDNT 4:960–61). Together these words refer to the entire inner being of the Christian—emotions, affections, thoughts, and moral choices (cf. Stacey, Pauline View of Man). This inner part of a person, then, so vulnerable to attack by the enemy, is that which God’s peace is set, like battle-ready soldiers, to protect.

But this peace that acts as guard of one’s emotions and thoughts, Paul says, is reserved for, or available only to, those who are ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, “in Christ Jesus” (see Comment on this phrase in Phil 1:1). That is to say, only in union with Christ, “in obedience to his authority and submission to his will” (Martin [1976], 157), can anyone have the secure assurance that he is indeed the object of the protection of God’s peace.
8 τὸ λοιπὸν, ἀδελφοί, “and last of all, my Christian friends.” Vv 8–9 constitute a single sentence in Greek that is marvelous for its rhetorical expression and for the loftiness of the moral standards it sets forth. It begins with τὸ λοιπὸν, “and last of all,” which signals not the end of the letter or even its near end, but rather the last of the imperatives in a parenetic section that has stated in detail how one is to “stand firm in the Lord” (Phil 4:1; so too O’Brien, 499). This sentence is a conditional sentence. Its protasis (“if” clause) is constructed in such a way that, at least for the sake of argument, what is said must be assumed to be true (BDF §372[1]): εἴ τις ἁρετὴ καὶ εἴ τις ἔπαινος, “if there is any moral excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise,” means “since there is moral excellence and since there is anything worthy of praise.” Based on this assumption—namely, that moral excellence and things worthy of praise do exist—Paul proceeds to declare that there are two matters binding upon Christians. They fairly well sum up what is involved in standing firm in the Lord: (1) λογίζεσθε, “focus your minds,” and (2) πράσσετε, “keep putting into practice.” Paul then spells out in a highly rhetorical fashion precisely how a Christian should think and act, making use of several figures of speech (anaphora, asyndeton, polysyndeton, and homoioteleuton), in order to make his point with emphasis. The main part of the sentence may be diagrammed as follows so that these figures may be seen clearly:

- ταῦτα λογίζεσθε focus your minds on these things
- ὅσα ἐστίν ἀληθῆ on whatever is truthful
- ὅσα σεμνά whatever is majestic and awe-inspiring
ὅσα δίκαια  
whatever is just

ὅσα ἁγνά  
whatever is pure

ὅσα προσφιλῆ  
whatever calls forth love

ὅσα εὔφημα  
whatever is winsome

tαύτα πράσσετε  
keep putting into practice

ἄ καὶ ἐμάθετε  
the lessons that you learned from me

καὶ παρελάβετε  
and the traditions that I passed on to you

καὶ ἴκούσατε  
and the things that you heard about me

καὶ εἴδετε ἐν ἐμοί  
and the things that you saw in me

ἐν τις ἁρετή καὶ ἐν τις ἔπαινος, “since there is moral excellence and since there are things worthy of praise.” Returning now to discuss first the subordinate (“if”) clause of this sentence, one is immediately struck with the two nouns that Paul uses to set the stage for what is to follow: ἁρετή, “moral excellence,” and ἔπαινος, “something worthy of praise.” They are comprehensive qualities that the apostle says must characterize a Christian’s attitude and actions. The first of these words, ἁρετή, “moral excellence,” is rarely used in the NT (1 Pet 2:9 ; 2 Pet 1:3), and only here by Paul. It is variously translated “virtue,” “excellence,” and “goodness.” Among classical writers it was an all-inclusive term to describe excellence of any kind, whether that of a person, an animal, or a thing. (Perhaps it was this “very width of significance” that kept NT writers from using it to any great degree; it did not have “precision enough for large use in Christian language” [MM, 75].) In the LXX
it had the restricted meaning of “glory” or “praise” (Hab 3:3), while to the Stoic philosophers ἀρετή, “moral excellence,” meant the highest good of humanity, “the only end to which a man should devote himself” (Beare, 148). Very likely Paul, in using this word, had in mind the Stoic sense of “moral excellence or goodness,” in spite of the fact that for the Stoic ἀρετή, “moral excellence,” tended to focus attention on the excellence, merits, and achievement of humankind rather than upon God’s deeds (Sevenster, Paul and Seneca, 152). This was part of the Stoic ideal of living κατὰ φύσιν, secundum naturam, “according to nature.” “Virtue” is the only good, and the good is that which leads to happiness (εὐδαιμονία), based on an even flow of life (εὐποια βίου).

The other word, ἔπαινος, means both “praise” and “something worthy of praise” (BDAG). Often Paul used it of things that merit the praise of God (Rom 2:29 ; 1 Cor 4:5). But here in this particular context, where he puts it in the company of ἀρετή, “moral excellence,” a word from the vocabulary of the Stoic moralists, and where he discusses the acknowledged good in pagan culture, he seems rather to have in view those things that merit the praise of humankind. Such was its meaning in contemporary public life, where it was used of conduct that called down universal human approval (cf. H. Preisker, TDNT 2:586–88).

Thus Paul seems to be drawing upon the cultural background of the Philippians and is saying to them:

*If there is such a thing as moral excellence (and you believe there is), if there is a kind of behavior that elicits universal approval (and you*
believe there is), then continue to strive for this goodness and attain to this level of behavior that will command the praise of humankind and God. You must not fail to live up to the ideals of your fellow men and women, which were also your ideals before you were converted. (Cf. Sevenster, Paul and Seneca, 156.)

In all probability the apostle is here acknowledging that there was much good in pagan life and morality, and he urges his friends (once again he addresses the Philippians as ἀδελφοί, “brothers [and sisters]”) not to be blind to this fact, nor to repudiate it. He asks, rather, that they recognize and incorporate all that is good in natural morality into their own lives, to pay heed to quite simple but solid truths, even if they first learned them from pagan sources. For as Justin Martyr put it a century later, “The truth which men in all lands have rightly spoken belongs to us” (2 Apol. 2.13).

The reason for Paul’s appeal to Stoic morality is elusive. One explanation is that he is shifting the ground of his strategy to make his appeal to non-Christian ideals, while at the same time incorporating a list of terms that have their parallel in the OT. If Acts 17:22–31 (Paul’s Areopagus speech) represents how Paul would address a pagan audience, or was thought by Luke to do so, then we have a parallel. Paul takes his starting point in the altar inscription and uses Aratus’s remark (“we are divine offspring”) to make his entry into his audience’s sympathies. At the same time he quickly “christianizes” this Stoic belief by setting humankind’s origin not in Athenian soil but in the biblical story of Adam (Acts 17:26), thereby combining both Greco-Roman elements and OT theology, just as he does in Phil 4.
Other options for the source of Paul's moral teaching, in addition to Stoicism, are possible. For example, there are parallels in the Jewish apocalyptic Wisdom literature and in Qumran (so Wibbing, Tugend- und Lasterkataloge; Kamlah, Form der katalogischen Paränese). The notion of duty, based on “unwritten laws” (nomina agrapha), i.e., duties to gods, heroes, the elderly, parents, and so on, is often remarked on and seen to be applied to Christian families and church contexts (Weidinger, Haustafeln). Lists of virtues (as in Phil 4:8) and vices (as elsewhere in the Pauline literature) are commonplace (see Easton, Pastoral Epistles, 201). The “two ways” teaching is evident in the Didache 1–5 (cf. 6.1–2), with parallels in Barnabas 18–20, but the idea of a list of contrasting virtues (as in Philippians) and vices goes back a long way, to Pythagoras and then to the early Stoic teachers, who got it from Heraclitus (fifth century B.C.; see further in Martin, NIDNTT, 3:928–32).

ταῦτα λογίζεσθε, “focus your minds on these things.” Paul continues his sentence by coming now to its first main verb and object. λογίζεσθαι, “to focus the mind on,” is a strong word and a favorite of the apostle, used by him thirty-four of the forty times it appears in the NT. It means “to reckon, calculate, take into account,” and as a result “to evaluate” a person, thing, quality, or event (cf. BDAG; MM). It includes also within the range of its meaning the ideas of “to ponder or let one's mind dwell on” something. Perhaps Paul employs it here to imply that the Philippians must ever be critical toward heathen culture and evaluate carefully its standards of morality. But certainly he does not intend by its use any encouragement to reflection without
action. Rather, he intends to say that the Philippian Christians must carefully consider certain things and evaluate them thoughtfully for the ultimate purpose of letting these things guide them into good deeds (cf. H. W. Heidland, TDNT 4:289).

ταῦτα, “these things,” that the Christians at Philippi are asked to evaluate and put into practice are now expressed in sonorous fashion, full of fervor and eloquence. Paul lists each “virtue” separately and thus gives each one individual attention by the constant repetition of the relative pronoun ὅσα, “whatever things.” (These clauses that enumerate the virtues and are introduced by ὅσα, “whatever things,” actually come first in the sentence for emphasis, but grammatically they are subordinate to ταῦτα, “these things,” which comes at the end of the sentence: “focus your minds on these things, namely, the things which are true....”) The apostle does this listing in much the same way that the moral philosophers of his day taught, by reciting catalogues of virtues and vices. This fact, added to the datum that many of the words in Paul’s list are not elsewhere used by him or at least not by him in the same sense as here, seems to confirm the suggestion, made above, that Paul probably at this point has taken over these qualities, these “virtues,” from popular moral philosophy familiar to his contemporaries in order to show that there was much in heathen views that might and ought to be valued and retained by Christians (Plummer; Michael; Dibelius; Beare; Sevenster, Paul and Seneca, 154; cf. Vögtle, Tugend- und Lasterkataloge; Wibbing, Tugend- und Lasterkataloge, 80, 83–84, 101–3; 118–19; Kruse, DPL, 962–63, to whose bibliography may be added Engberg-Pedersen, “Stoicism in Philippians”; Fitzgerald, Friendship; but see Lohmeyer
and Michaelis, who attempt, rather, to show the influence of the Greek Bible on the choice of words found in v 8; cf. Martin [1976]). The list of virtues, then, includes in order the following:

ὅσα ἐστὶν ἀληθῆ, “on whatever is truthful.” Since the whole series refers to ethical qualities, ἀληθῆς must mean “true” in the sense of “truthful,” and “truthful” in every aspect of life, including thought, speech, and act. “Truth telling” may be the implication, or rather “truth believing” and practicing, in line with the OT Wisdom tradition.

ὅσα σεμνά, “whatever is majestic and awe-inspiring.” σεμνός, found only here and in the Pastorals (1 Tim 3:8, 11; Tit 2:2), has such a richness about it that it is impossible to equate it with any one English word: “honest,” “honorable,” “noble,” “worthy,” “venerable,” “that which wins respect or commands reverence,” “esteemed” (Malherbe, Cynic Epistles, 180.23 [Diogenes, To Charmides]) are some of the suggested translations. Since it was often associated with gods, temples, and holy things (cf. BDAG; LSJ), it of necessity included ideas of majesty, dignity, and awe. Hence, although it may not be possible to translate σεμνά with a single word, its basic idea is clear. It refers to lofty things, majestic things, things that lift the mind from the cheap and tawdry to that which is noble and good and of moral worth. Perhaps “awe-inspiring” is a good rendering (see Bruce, 147, for Greek parallels).

ὅσα δίκαια, “whatever is just.” δίκαιος means “just,” but in the widest sense possible, not only in the relation of one person to another, but also in the relation of that person to God (cf. Acts 10:22; Rom 5:7). It concerns giving to God and our fellow human
beings their due. It involves duty and responsibility. It entails satisfying all obligations, and we respond to what is “dutiful” (cf. W. Wordsworth, Ode to Duty: “stern daughter of the voice of God”).

όσα ἁγνά, “whatever is pure.” ἁγνός means “pure,” but this meaning is not to be restricted to the idea of “chaste” (as in 2 Cor 11:2; Tit 2:5), in the sense of freedom from bodily sins. It may also refer to ceremonial cleanness that prepares someone or something for God, for his presence and service. And certainly it embraces the idea of purity in motives and actions, including purity in every part of life (cf. 2 Cor 7:11; 1 Tim 5:22; Jas 3:17; 1 Pet 3:20; 1 John 3:3). It touches the mainspring of action.

όσα προσφιλή, “whatever calls forth love.” προσφιλής is used only here in the NT and is not found at all in the lists of virtues that were current in the ancient world (see Wibbing, Tugend- und Lasterkataloge, 101). It has as its fundamental meaning “that which calls forth love,” hence, “lovely,” “amiable,” “attractive,” “winsome.” “Make yourself attractive [προσφιλή] to the congregation” is the advice of the sage to his child (Sir 4:7), something a wise person can do, for example, by gracious speech (Sir 20:13). Thus, the Christian’s mind is to be set on things that elicit from others not bitterness and hostility but admiration and affection.

όσα εὐφήμα, “whatever is winsome.” εὐφήμος is a word found only here in the Greek Bible (including the NT) and variously translated as “of good report,” “of good repute,” “admirable,” “gracious,” “gracious in the telling,” “honorable,” “kindly,” “highbrowned,” “auspicious” (Malherbe, Cynic Epistles, 150.17 [Diogenes, To
Timomachus]. Apparently, however, this word is never used elsewhere with a passive meaning, e.g., “well-spoken of, well-reputed,” as some of the meanings listed above might indicate, but only in an active sense of “well-speaking,” hence “winning, attractive” (Lightfoot). It is used, therefore, of “expressing what is kind and likely to win people, and avoiding what is likely to give offence” (Plummer, 97; so Bockmuehl, 253, who offers the translation “winsome, attractive,” akin to προσφιλής, “majestic, awe-inspiring”). “Not giving offense” may be the implication.

These then are the excellent qualities that were held in esteem by the culture of Paul’s day (not at all unique to Christianity), which the apostle appropriated and commended to his friends at Philippi (see Marshall, Challenge, for an older, but still valuable study). He asked them continuously to focus their minds (λογίζεσθε) on these things, to give full critical attention to them, 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. Yet Sevenster (Paul and Seneca, 155–56) observes:

what may be gathered from the fact that [these virtues are] followed immediately by verse 9 is that obedience to “what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me” is what is ultimately of most importance for the church.... Life and fellowship, as it is here formulated with the aid of terms taken from Greek moral philosophy, entails obedience to God’s commandments, an obedience which... proceeds from belonging to Christ and from the possession of the Spirit which is at work in the church. And so it
is that there is something rather provisional about verse 8: in appealing to the Philippians Paul takes into account their environment in order to obtain every possible support and understanding for what he wishes to say in verse 9.

This means that for Paul, excellent as natural morality may be, those qualities mentioned in v 8 must always be viewed in the light of v 9. There is no disjunction between the two verses since the connective ἃ καί, “and those things which,” introduces “a further and specific elaboration of the preceding subject at hand” (Bockmuehl, 254). The last word, therefore, lies with distinctively Christian teachings. V 9 gives a greater purpose to Paul’s ethical teaching and, as Fee remarks ([1995], 420 n. 33), “summarizes much of the letter.”

9 ἃ καὶ ἐμάθετε ... ταῦτα πράσσετε, “and keep putting into practice the lessons that you learned from me.” Thus Paul insists that the Philippians continuously put into practice—that is to say, they loyally stand by, hold unswervingly to, allow their lives to be controlled and altered by—the things that they learned (ἐμάθετε) from him. This new series is introduced by ἃ, “those things which,” the definite relative pronoun, not by ὅσα, “whatever things which,” the quantitative relative pronoun. General matters are not now in view; rather Paul addresses those particular things that he himself had taught and which the Philippians had learned from him. This teaching is not spelled out here, but one can imagine that what the apostle told the Ephesian elders would be applicable to the Philippian elders as well (Acts 20:20–21):
I never shrank from letting you know anything that was for your good, or from teaching you alike in public and from house to house, bearing my testimony, both to Jews and Greeks, of repentance before God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. (Hawthorne’s paraphrase)

καὶ παρελάβετε, “and the traditions that I passed on to you.” They must also put into practice the things that they “received” from Paul (RSV). The verb παρελάβετε, “you received,” is not merely a repetition of ἐμάθετε, “you learned,” for rhetorical effect. Rather, παραλαμβάνειν, “to receive,” in this context is a technical term for the receiving of a tradition for the purpose of handing it on intact to others (see Norden, Agnostos Theos, 288–89; Cullmann, “Tradition”; Davies, Paul and Rabbinic Judaism, 248–49; cf. m. ’Abot 1:1: “Moses received the Law from Sinai and committed it to Joshua, Joshua to the elders” [trans. Danby, Mishnah; cf. Str-B 3:444]). With this word Paul in effect is saying that he passed on to the Philippians not only the things that had come to him by revelation, but also those established elements of the Christian message that had first been carefully passed on to him by others, e.g., “that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas” (1 Cor 15:3–5). Paul classifies himself, then, as a link in the chain of tradition (H. Conzelmann, 1 Corinthians, trans. J. W. Leitch, Hermeneia [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975] 195–96), and the word παρελαμβάνειν, “to receive,” implies that the obligation of the Philippians was not only to receive it, believe it, and act upon it but also to pass it carefully on to others.
καὶ ἠκούσατε, “and the things that you heard about me.” They are also to act on what they heard. This is a cryptic remark that may mean either “what you heard me preach” (but then it simply repeats what has already been said), or “what you heard me saying when I was present with you, not through my preaching, but informally through my many conversations with you” (but this is improbable), or “what you heard of as being characteristic of me, the kind of person I am, the things I do, how I face trials.” This last understanding is the most probable meaning because it goes hand in hand with the next phrase in this series. (For a way in which this verse has a later repercussion in the Philippian church, see Pol. Phil. 3.2.)

καὶ εἶδετε ἐν ἐμοί, “and the things that you saw in me.” They are also to do what they have seen in Paul. Thus, the command to do all this that the Philippians have learned and received is not given apart from a pattern that shows how it can be done. Paul believed that those who tell others to become Christians are obliged to show them what it is to be a Christian. Hence, because there always existed such a close connection between the word Paul preached and the life he lived (Gnilka), he could say without embarrassment or arrogance: “Look to me! Follow my example! Imitate me!” (cf. 1 Cor 11:1 ; Phil 3:17). Although ἐν ἐμοί, “in me,” strictly relates to εἶδετε, “you saw,” and one may wish to add “from me” after the other clauses (“what you learned and received and heard from me” ) in order to gain smoothness in translation, it may be that Paul deliberately placed ἐν ἐμοί, “in me,” at the end of the list, not only for rhetorical effect, but to say as forcefully as possible that everything he knew, believed, and taught
was embodied in himself, so that those who learned, received, and heard could see what doctrine looked like in living form. It appears that he was of the conviction that the truths of the Christian gospel must never be abstracted from action and put into high-toned words and phrases, but must always be expressed in the life of the teacher.

καὶ ὁ θεὸς τῆς εἰρήνης ἔσται μεθ’ ὑμῶν, “If you do, the God of peace will be with you.” One might have anticipated that Paul would write “the things that you saw... in Christ,” harking back to Phil 2:6–11, if the appeal of the hymn is a call to exemplum ad imitandum, “an example to be imitated.” But it is not so. Paul’s wish is that the Philippians might enjoy productive, worry-free lives (μηδὲν μεριμνᾶτε, “do not worry about anything” [4:6]) with their thoughts and feelings guarded by the peace of God. He has told them that they might attain this goal with the aid of prayer and thanksgiving (4:6). But that is not all that is required. In vv 8 and 9 he adds still other important steps. He says that fear, worry, anxiety, depression—all the countless concerns that assail the Philippian Christians’ minds—can be kept at bay, if they will continuously reckon up, think over, estimate aright, and fill their minds with all things good and true, and then rise up and put into practice the demands of the Christian gospel. “Then indeed” (again, as in v 7, καί is consecutive), Paul says, “the God of peace will be with you.” The expression ὁ θεὸς τῆς εἰρήνης, “the God of peace,” means either that God is the source and origin of peace or that he is himself characterized by peace, or both at once. It is an advance in thought over the promise provided in v 7. There it was said that God’s peace would be with them; now it is said that God
himself, who gives peace, or who himself is peace, will be with them (cf. Bigaré, AsSeign 58 [1974] 11–15). God is both the author and giver of shalom, as in T. Dan 5.2: “you will be at peace, since you have with you the God of peace, and contention will have no hold over you” (cited in Bockmuehl, 255). To think of God as “the God of peace” was a most refreshing and encouraging exercise for Paul, who lived constantly in the center of turmoil and trouble (cf. 2 Cor 11:23–33). As a consequence, he often found himself writing this very phrase to his friends who also were experiencing difficulties of various kinds. It became for him a prayer of benediction: “The God of peace will be with you!” (cf. Rom 15:33; 16:20; 2 Cor 13:11; 1 Thess 5:23; cf. 1 Cor 14:33; 2 Thess 3:16; Heb 13:20; for an overview see O’Brien, DPL, 68–71).

**Explanation**

In light of the fact that the Philippians are in reality a colony of heaven and that they eagerly anticipate the return of Christ, who will transform their frail, mortal bodies into glorious bodies, they must take their stand as Christians, not only holding firmly to the truth of the gospel but behaving in a manner consonant with that truth. Everywhere within this brief letter Paul’s affection for the Philippians is obvious. But nowhere is it more obvious than here. He addresses them not only as “brothers [and sisters]” (Phil 4:1), i.e., family members, but also as people whom he loves, whom he is longing to see, the source of his joy and honor. It is his deep affection for the Philippian Christians that prompts him to describe in detail how they are to stand firm and live consistent with the truth of the gospel.
“Standing firm” means living in harmony with one another. Hence Paul begs Euodia and Syntyche, two fractious—and most likely, factious—women, to settle their dispute quickly. What little is known about these women indicates that they were prominent people within the Christian community at Philippi. They may even have held important positions of leadership in the church. Once they had been united in working together side by side with Paul in the arduous task of spreading the gospel as his co-workers. Now, however, some unknown thing had set them at odds with each other, and the quarrel between these two people threatened to destroy the unity of the whole. The apostle appeals, therefore, not only to Euodia and Syntyche, but beyond them to a third party, whom he simply addresses as his “loyal yokefellow.” He asks this one to come to their aid and to help them find a solution to their problem. Who was this mysterious person? Many different answers have been offered, but the best of these is the suggestion that perhaps the single individual was in reality the entire Philippian church, viewed by Paul as one person, yoked together with him to pull hard to resist every inroad of division and strive to restore harmony.

“Standing firm” also means that the Philippians must rejoice on all occasions, even when those times are a cause not for merriment but for mourning. But the thing that keeps such an appeal from being ridiculous is the fact of the Christian’s faith. It is a faith in Jesus Christ as Lord, who as Lord has the power to subdue all things to his authority (cf. Phil 2:11; 3:21). It is a faith in Jesus Christ as Lord, who permitted this situation to occur as it
is. It is a faith in Jesus Christ as Lord that causes the Christian willingly to submit and say “Yes!”

In addition, “standing firm” includes the development of an extraordinary quality that must be so much a part of the Christian’s life that it will be obvious to everyone, Christian and non-Christian alike. It is the quality of “sweet reasonableness,” which enables one to be just without being harsh. It is the spirit of magnanimity that was so characteristic of Jesus Christ himself (2 Cor 10:1, which some interpreters would read in the light of the incarnational appeal in 2 Cor 8:9).

In the middle of everything Paul interjects the exclamation “The Lord is near!” But what did he mean by this? Did he mean that the Lord is close by, present to aid and give assistance, thus providing further reason for joy and gentleness? Or did he mean that the return of Christ is imminent, thus heightening the earnestness of his commands by calling attention to the shortness of time? Most likely Paul was intentionally vague, so that both ideas might be fused into one sharp sentence: the Lord, who will come again, is presently very near in his Spirit.

Finally, “standing firm” means not giving way to anxiety but allowing the peace of God to stand guard over one’s thoughts and feelings, protecting against attack, as a garrison of soldiers protects a city against its enemies. The cure for worry is (1) prayer and thanksgiving, which gives to God every care, every unreasonable anxiety (in contrast to a pastor’s concern for others [Phil 2:20; 2 Cor 11:28]), and every harassing burden, and trusts him to take care of these worrisome matters; (2) deliberately filling one’s mind
constantly with good thoughts that are praiseworthy, true, majestic and awe-inspiring, just, pure, attractive, and high toned; and (3) putting into practice the supreme teachings of the gospel that have been learned, both from having heard them spoken and having seen them lived out in the lives of Paul and his colleagues. If the Philippians, or any other Christians, will be careful to observe and follow these three things, then they will encounter peace through the presence of the God of peace.
V. Gratitude Expressed for the Philippians’ Generosity (4:10–20)

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O yes, and I rejoice in the Lord greatly because now at last you caused your a thoughtful care of me to blossom once again. Indeed, you have always cared about me, but you have not always had the opportunity to show it. I am not saying this because of any need I had. For I have learned to be self-sufficient in every situation in which I find myself. Hence I know how to be humbled, and I know how to abound. In every and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well fed and of going hungry, of having more than enough and of having too little. I have the power to face all such situations in union with the One b who continually infuses me with strength. And yet it was good of you to become partners with me in my
hardships. ¹⁵ Now c you Philippians know, as well as I, that when the
gospel was in its beginning, when I set out from Macedonia, no other
church entered into a partnership with me in an accounting of
expenditures and receipts except you alone. ¹⁶ You know, as well as I,
that when I was in Thessalonica, you sent money to meet my needs d
more than once. ¹⁷ I do not say this meaning that I have my heart
set on your giving. But I certainly do have my heart set on interest
increasing that may accrue to your account. ¹⁸ Here, then, is my
receipt for everything you have given me. I have more than enough. I
am fully supplied, e now that I have received from Epaphroditus the
gifts you sent me. They are a fragrant odor, a sacrifice that God
accepts and that pleases him. ¹⁹ In return, I pray that God may meet
f every need you have in accordance with his marvelous wealth in
Christ Jesus. ²⁰ Now surely the glory belongs to God our Father forever
and ever. Amen!

Notes

10.a. F G use the genitive definite article τοῦ, “the,” which with
the infinitive forms a consecutive clause after the intransitive
ἀναθάλλειν, “to blossom once again” (ἀνεθάλετε τοῦ ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ
φρονεῖν, “you blossomed once again so that you thoughtfully cared
for me”), instead of the accusative definite article τό, “the,” which
would be the object of the transitive ἀναθάλλειν, “to cause to
blossom once again” (ἀνεθάλετε τὸ ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ φρονεῖν, “you
causedit your thoughtful care of me to blossom once again”).

13.b. ☼ ² D ² and the Majority Text add Χριστῷ, “Christ,” to
make clear who it is who strengthens Paul. If “Christ” had been
part of the original text, however, there would have been no reason
to omit it, except by accident or possible haplography, i.e.,
unintentional omission, given the similarity of sounds in the case
endings.

15.c. Ψ 46 D* and a few other witnesses omit δέ, “but, now,”
perhaps seeing it as superfluous along with καί, “and, also.”

16.d. B F G Ψ and the majority of witnesses read εἰς τὴν
χρείαν μοι ἐπέμψατε, “you sent to me for my need”; Ψ 46 A 81
read τὴν χρείαν μοι ἐπέμψατε, “you sent what I needed,” omitting
the preposition εἰς, “for,” either by accident after δίς, “twice”
(ΔΙΣΕΙΣ), or on purpose so as to provide a direct object for the
verb. D* has τὴν χρείαν μου ἐπέμψατε, “you sent my need,” and
D ² L P have εἰς τὴν χρείαν μου ἐπέμψατε, “you sent for my
need,” both replacing the less usual, but better attested μοι, “to
me,” with the genitive μου, “my.”

18.e. Ψ 46 adds δέ, “but,” after the verb πεπλήρωμαι, “but I am
fully supplied.”

19.f. Ψ 46 A B D ² and the Majority Text read πληρῶσει, “will
meet” (future indicative), whereas D* F G 63 33 81 104 326 365 and
other witnesses read πληρώσαι, “may [God] meet” (aorist optative).
Although less well attested than πληρῶσει, “will meet,” there are
nevertheless good witnesses in support of πληρώσαι, “may [God]
meet,” a reading that better reflects the apostle’s own reverent
attitude. He does not say categorically what God will do for his
friends, but he prayerfully asks God to come to their aid (see
Comment).
Form/Structure/Setting

This part of the letter is Paul’s response to the gift sent to him by the Philippian church through the good offices of their own emissary Epaphroditus (Phil 4:18). In a sense it is the apostle’s formal receipt (note the use of the technical term ἀπέχειν, “to receive in full” [4:18]), acknowledging that the things, whether in money or goods as a “care package,” had arrived intact and had been duly received by him. He has alluded to their kindness earlier in the letter (1:5), and at that point thanked God for them and for their generosity (cf. 1:3, 5). But not until now does he discuss the gift of the Philippians in any detail. The reason for this delay has been variously interpreted: (1) These verses constitute a separate letter of thanks, sent to the Philippian Christians months earlier than the letter in which it now appears. Only at a much later time, when some unidentified scribe wished to collect all of Paul’s correspondence to the church at Philippi and weave it all into a single epistle, was it by chance placed in this unexpected spot. (This suggestion has been noted and rejected above [Introduction, Integrity of Philippians].) (2) Paul, as was the custom of his day, dictated the early part of his letter, but picked up the stylus to sign it in his own hand and in doing so wrote his own personal “thank you,” quite naturally at the end (cf. Bahr, JBL 87 [1968] 27–41). This explanation accounts for the particle δέ, “but,” with which this section begins. As Lightfoot (163) observes: “The δέ arrests a subject which is in danger of escaping.... It is as if the apostle said ‘I must not forget to thank you for your gift’ ” (see further in the Comment on 4:10). (3) A more likely reason is that which
suggests that the whole matter of giving and receiving was a touchy subject with Paul (on the Greco-Roman background see Peterman, Paul’s Gift from Philippi, chap. 3). And reading between the lines here—listening to what is said and what is not said—one might easily infer that there was something about the Philippians’ gift that was troubling to the apostle. He, therefore, delays discussion of it until the end of his letter, as one naturally tends to put off bringing up sensitive issues by leaving them to the very last moment possible (although there has been an allusion to this matter in 1:3–5).

It is known from elsewhere that although Paul championed the right of an apostle to be supported financially by those to whom he preached the gospel and he never renounced that right, he preferred to support himself and his mission by manual labor. He jealously insisted on doing so in order that (1) he might offer the gospel of God’s free grace without charge (1 Cor 9:18), (2) no opponent of his could ever accuse him of using his mission as a pretext for greed, and (3) he might set the proper example for others to follow (see 1 Cor 4:8–13, esp. v 12 ; 8:1–18 ; 2 Cor 11:7–10 ; 1 Thess 2:5–12, esp. v 9 ; 2 Thess 3:7–12, esp. vv 8–9 ; cf. Pratscher, NTS 25 [1979] 284–98). Paul had no hesitation about asking for money from his churches to aid others, e.g., the needy Christians in Jerusalem (1 Cor 16:1–3 ; 2 Cor 8–9), but he refused to do so for himself (see Dodd, “Paul and Money”). And yet the Macedonian Christians, who surely would have included the Christians at Philippi, not only made a generous contribution out of their own deep poverty to the needy saints’ fund (2 Cor 8:1–5 ; for the “collection for the saints” see R. P. Martin, 2 Corinthians, WBC
[Waco, TX: Word Books, 1986] 248–96, and bibliography there), but they also more than once (Phil 4:16) made generous contributions to Paul’s own personal funds (2 Cor 11:8–9). It may be suggested, therefore, that this violation of one of Paul’s strict principles, entailing giving of a personal gift to him which was not only unsolicited, but which the Macedonian churches knew from personal experience he opposed (1 Thess 2:9 ; 2 Thess 3:8–9), was the very thing that prompted him to leave this matter of the gift until the last. It was this that caused him to write a careful reply that combined cautious gratitude with a gentle but firm demand that they not henceforth infringe on his own self-reliance. Not elsewhere in all of Paul’s letters, nor in all of the letters of antiquity that have survived until the present, is there any other acknowledgment of a gift that can compare with this one in terms of such a tactful treatment of so sensitive a matter (von Soden; see Plummer; Michael; Best, Paul, 99–104).

The very structure of this section makes clear what has just been said. It exhibits a nervous alternation back and forth (Bockmuehl, 257, speaks of Paul’s “vacillation”) between Paul’s appreciation, on the one hand (Phil 4:10, 14–16, 18–20), and his insistence on his own independence and self-sufficiency, on the other (4:11–13, 17). It is of utmost importance to him that this matter of personal independence should not be compromised in any way. Thus he cannot write as one who is wholly free to express his thanks without reservations or qualifications (Michael). In fact, it is remarkable that in this “thank you” section, Paul does not use the verb εὐχαριστεῖν, “to thank” someone for something (cf. Rom 16:4 ; Lohmeyer, 178, speaks here of Paul’s danklose Dank, “thankless
thanks,” a phrase picked up by Dibelius and Gnilka). Yet this section is masterfully written, constructed neither to offend those who gave their gift out of love nor to encourage their continued violation of his strict instructions not to send him assistance (cf. Buchanan, EvQ 36 [1964] 161–63; Mayer, BZ 31.2 [1987] 176–88). He admits that he is very glad in the Lord that they once again were able to show their concern for him, but he never praises them directly for the tangible form this concern took (Phil 4:18–19 is full of liturgical terms taken from the OT sacrificial rites [Exod 29:18; 25:41; Lev 1:9, 13; Ezek 20:41], where thanksgiving is given to God as part of the response in worship). He readily acknowledges that these Philippians alone, of all the churches he founded, became partners with him in the matter of giving, but he tempers this potentially laudatory remark by reminding them that he never asked for their gift. He feels free to boast about the generosity of the Philippians to other churches (2 Cor 8:1–4; 11:8–9), but he is restrained when he addresses the Philippians directly about this matter. He informs them that what they did for him was accepted by God as a costly sacrifice, but he weakens this praise by the businesslike tone in which he personally responds to this very same act: “Here, then, is my receipt for everything you have given me. I have more than enough. I am fully supplied” (Phil 4:18). These are words that imply that he wants no more of their assistance (but see Glombitza, NovT 7 [1964–65] 135–41). Yet Paul’s hesitancy does not repudiate the appreciation for the Philippians that he has expressed earlier (Phil 2:25–30).

The close literary parallelism between Phil 1:3–11 and 4:10–20 is demonstrated by Peterman (Paul’s Gift from Philippi, 91–93), with
some link terms uniting the sections. See table 5 for some noteworthy terms.

Table 5. Parallel words and phrases in Phil 1:3–11 and 4:10–20

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Greek Term</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>εὐχαριστῶ</td>
<td>“I thank” (1:3); χαράς, “joy”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>κοινωνία</td>
<td>“partnership” (1:5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>φρονεῖν</td>
<td>“feel” (1:7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>περισσεύη</td>
<td>“may keep on increasing” (1:9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>πεπληρωμένοι</td>
<td>“be filled” (1:11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>καρπόν</td>
<td>“fruit” (1:11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ἰησοῦ</td>
<td>“Jesus” (1:11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>δόξαν</td>
<td>“glory” (1:11)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comment

το €χάρην δὲ ἐν κυρίῳ μεγάλως, “O yes, and I rejoice in the Lord greatly.” Once again Paul strikes the keynote of the epistle, €χάρην, “I rejoice” (an epistolary aorist). The particle δὲ, translated here “O yes, and,” is often ignored and passed over by the translators but is an important word here (contra O’Brien, 516 n. 7; Fee [1995], 428, rightly describes δὲ as “contrastive,” to mark a transition to a new section). As we saw, it “arrests a subject which is in danger of escaping” (Lightfoot, 163). It indicates that
something has just occurred to the writer that, if let go any longer, might be forgotten altogether. Yet very likely Paul used it for rhetorical effect. It may have been the coming of Epaphroditus with the gift from Philippi that occasioned this rejoicing. Paul could never really forget what the Philippians had done for him, nor could he even come close to sending his letter off without these important remarks. But he approaches the whole matter of thanking them for their gift as if it were possible for him not to do so. The assistance provided him by the Philippians and the supposed problems it created for him were subjects very much in his mind, even matters he could not possibly forget, but he waits until the last moment to broach them, and then he does so in what appears to be an offhand way. The δέ might be paraphrased “O yes, and I must not forget” (cf. 1 Cor 16:1 ; Gal 4:20). In light of allusions to the Philippians’ generosity earlier in the letter (Phil 1:3–5 ; 2:25–30), however, some would interpret δέ as simply a connective—“and” or “but.”

Paul says that his joy is immense. Although the idea of “great joy” is consonant with the Christian gospel and often associated with it (Matt 2:10 ; Luke 2:10 ; 24:52 ; Acts 8:8 ; 15:3), this is the only place where the apostle quantifies his own experience of joy. The adverb he uses, μεγάλως, “greatly, immensely,” is found nowhere else in the NT, and its very uniqueness intensifies what he is saying about the depth of his feelings at this point.

Furthermore, Paul says that his joy is ἐν κυρίῳ, “in the Lord.” If one expected him to say instead that his joy was in the generosity of the Philippians, this is not the case. Paul never says this. He
never thanks them directly for anything they gave him. Yet by saying that his joy is “in the Lord” he is saying that it is thoroughly Christian, flowing out of his union with Christ and therefore totally free from ingratitude or resentment (cf. Michael). It is an expression of joy that has marked the entire letter, some sixteen times.

ὅτι ἡδη ποτε ἀνεθάλετε τὸ ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ φρονεῖν, “because now at last you caused your thoughtful care of me to blossom once again.” Even though for Paul the final, the ultimate, cause of his joy was “the Lord,” there was also a more immediate cause as well. This is stated now by the apostle in a clause introduced by ὅτι, “because.” But again it is remarkable that Paul does not say that this immediate cause of his joy was the Philippians’ gift. It was rather what that gift pointed to, namely, the care and concern (φρονεῖν) of the Philippians for him and their determination to see to his welfare and, more particularly, to see his ministry flourish. What gave him joy was not goods, however necessary for his work, but people and how they behaved. If a gift of money troubled him because it was against his principle to take such a gift for himself from any of his churches, the loving thoughtfulness that prompted his friends to override his wishes and give sacrificially (cf. 2 Cor 8:1–3) pleased him greatly since these offerings were an act of “liturgy,” a worshipful response to God’s mission through his servant.

The verb φρονεῖν is used by Paul to express his “thoughtful care”—the key verb of this letter (Phil 1:7 ; 2:2, 5 ; 3:15, 19 ; 4:2, 10). Fundamental to its meaning is the idea of “thinking.” Paul,
therefore, was never out of the thoughts of the Philippians. But φρονεῖν means more than merely “thinking” about someone; it also describes an active interest in that person’s affairs—“thinking leading to action.” Thus, because φρονεῖν, “thoughtful care,” characterized the relationship of the Philippian Christians to Paul, it meant that they of necessity would be personally involved in promoting the welfare of the apostle by whatever means they had at their disposal.

For some unknown reason the Philippians were cut off from Paul for an extended period of time, and he from them. As a consequence, doubts may have arisen, as would only be natural, about the genuineness of their concern for him. Hence it was with a great sense of relief that this silence of uncertainty was broken with the arrival of Epaphroditus from Philippi (4:18). Ἡδὴ ποτέ, “now at last” (cf. BDAG), Paul writes his friends, ἀνεθάλετε τὸ ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ φρονεῖν, “you caused your thoughtful care of me to blossom once again.” (Manson, BJRL 23 [1939] 182–200, considered this a sarcastic rebuke if the letter was written from Rome, since there had been many opportunities, including Paul’s second visit to Macedonia [Acts 20:1–6; see further in Introduction, Place and Date of Writing]. This remark is sometimes taken as an ironic one, as by Capper, TZ 49 [1993] 207, who thinks that Paul faults them for going back on their promise to support him.) The verb ἀναθάλλειν, “to cause to blossom once again,” is a highly metaphorical word, filled with poetic boldness and colorful in its idea. It was chosen no doubt to convey affectionate understanding. This is its only occurrence in the NT, but it is used elsewhere to describe trees and flowers “bursting into bloom again” in the
springtime, or plants “sprouting afresh” from the ground (cf. BDAG). To translate it as “renew,” “revive,” or “show” (RSV, PHILLIPS, GNB, JB, NIV) is almost to mistranslate it. Paul here is not complaining but marveling. Like a person rejoicing over the signs of spring after a hard winter, so Paul rejoices to see again the signs of personal concern from Philippi after a long interval of silence. (Just how long is, of course, a relative term, depending on the place of origin of the epistle.) His carefully chosen word expresses his delight: “Your care for me has now blossomed afresh!” (NEB). Whether this verb is considered intransitive, “you blossomed once again” (Haupt; Gnilka; Baumert, BZ 13 [1969] 256–62; cf. LXX Ps 27:7; Wis 4:4), or transitive, “you caused [something] to blossom once again” (Dibelius, Bonnard, Scott, Beare; RSV, GNB, JB, NIV ; cf. LXX Sir 1:18 ; 11:22 ; 50:10), makes little difference. Paul is most happy because of this “blossoming.”

ἐφ’ ὧν καὶ ἐφρονεῖτε, ἥκαιρεῖσθε δέ, “indeed, you have always cared about me, but you have not always had the opportunity to show it.” By giving powerful expression to a fresh reason for joy, Paul makes clear that the words “now at last you caused your thoughtful care of me to blossom once again” were not in the least intended as a criticism. It is introduced by the phrase ἐφ’ ὧν, “because, for” (cf. BDF §235[2]; Rom 5:12 ; 2 Cor 5:4 ; Phil 3:12 ; but see Baumert, BZ 13 [1969] 256–62), followed by a balanced chiastic (crisscross) sentence that begins with the conjunction καί, “indeed,” and ends in an unusual fashion with the conjunction δέ, “but.” The conjunctions at the beginning and end bracketing these words; the short, abrupt, precise clauses; the imperfect tenses highlighting the continuous, uninterrupted flow of the thought and
action described here; the chiastic structure of the sentence—all combine to state afresh and with force this new reason for joy. It was this: Paul had come to realize that the Philippians were not to blame for the slow arrival of help, but rather the circumstances were beyond their control (for the various reasons for the delay, see the helpful summary in Fee [1995], 422 n. 3). The verb ἀκαίρεσθαι, “to be without opportunity,” a late and rare word found only here in the NT, means that the Philippians were “without opportunity” (α-privative with καιρός) to exhibit their willingness and readiness to send aid. It alludes to those unfavorable circumstances—whether the lack of the right person to send on the long and difficult journey to the place of Paul’s detention (which is true of Rome, but less so of Ephesus and Caesarea), or the lack of funds (cf. 2 Cor 8:2–4; Caird, 153), or the lack of suitable weather for travel—that robbed the Philippians of doing for Paul what they wished to do. Or, as Bruce (124) suggests, it may allude to Paul not being willing to accept the Philippians’ gift.

11 οὐχ ὅτι καθ’ ὑστέρησιν λέγω, “I am not saying this because of any need I had.” But having praised the Philippians to this extent, Paul immediately begins a disclaimer. As Beet (Expositor, 3d ser., 10 [1889] 174–89) translates: “my gratitude is not a beggar’s thanks for charity” (cited by Jones, 72). οὐχ ὅτι, “not that,” with which this sentence begins, is a distinctively NT expression. It usually appears without a verb of “saying,” which must be supplied by the reader (cf. John 6:46; 7:22; 2 Cor 1:24; 3:5; 2 Thess 3:9), but Paul chooses to include it here (λέγω, “I am saying”; cf. BDF §480[5]). The prepositional phrase καθ’ ὑστέρησιν, lit. “in
accordance with need,” merges the idea of norm or standard with that of reason (cf. Rom 2:7; 8:28; 11:5; 16:26; cf. Eph 1:11; 3:3; 1 Tim 1:1; Tit 1:3), and thus is more properly to be translated “because of any need I had” (BDAG, κατά, II.5 δ). The noun ὑστέρησις is another of those rare words that show up regularly in this carefully phrased section. Used only here and in Mark 12:44, it denotes “need, lack, or poverty.” Thus, Paul is making very clear that his joy at the gift from the Philippians was not on account of his being in dire straits at the time it arrived (apparently he either did not need or did not want their money), but because he saw in this act of generosity a truly Christian deed of sacrificial self-giving love (cf. 2 Cor 8:5). He says in effect, “I am glad that you assisted me, yes, but I do not say this because I lacked anything or needed your help.” How is it that Paul was able to say this? Was it because he had become heir to family property that enabled him to pay all his expenses, including those involved in a costly appeal to Caesar, and thus had no need for outside assistance (cf. Ramsay, St. Paul the Traveller, 310–13)? Possibly, but that is not the answer that he himself gives.

ἐγὼ γὰρ ἐμαθὼν ἐν οἷς εἰμι αὐτάρκης εἶναι, “for I have learned to be self-sufficient in every situation in which I find myself.” Paul’s denial that he needed anything is based on what he had learned. The pronoun ἐγώ, “I,” is used emphatically: “whether or not others have learned, I have.” The aorist tense ἐμαθὼν, “have learned,” is constative, used here for linear actions that, having been completed, are regarded as a whole (BDF §332[1]). It implies that Paul’s whole experience up to the present, especially as a
Christian, has been a schooling whose lessons he has not failed to master (K. H. Rengstorf, TDNT 4:410).

The primary lesson Paul learned from the school of experience (cf. 2 Cor 11:23–29) was to be αὐτάρκης, “self-sufficient,” in all the circumstances of the moment (ἐν ὅσῳ ἐμι, “in every situation in which I find myself”). The adjective αὐτάρκης, usually translated “content” or “satisfied” (KJV, MOFFATT, GOODSPEED, RSV, KNOX, PHILLIPS, GNB, NIV), along with its corresponding noun αὐτάρκεια, “self-sufficiency” (cf. 2 Cor 9:8), was used to describe the person who through discipline had become independent of external circumstances and who had discovered personal resources that were more than adequate for any situation that might arise. It was a favorite word in the vocabularies of the Stoic and Cynic philosophers to refer to that independent spirit and free outlook on life (ἀταραξία, “tranquillity”) that characterized the wise man (cf. Malherbe, Cynic Epistles, 124.25 [Diogenes, To the So-Called Greeks]; 176.12 [Diogenes, To Plato, the Sage]; 244.4 [Antisthenesto Aristippus]). It expressed the doctrine “that man should be sufficient unto himself for all things, and able, by the power of his own will, to resist the force of circumstances” (Vincent, 143; cf. Plato, Tim. 33d). Paul, familiar with the vocabulary of the Stoics and himself in harmony with many of their ideals (see Comment on Phil 4:8), appears also to have borrowed αὐτάρκης, “self-sufficient,” from them (this is the only place it appears in the NT) to declare that he too has acquired the virtue of a spirit free from worry, untroubled by the vicissitudes of external events, independent of people and things. And Paul cherishes this self-sufficiency. But the difference between Paul, the self-sufficient Christian, and the
self-sufficient Stoic, is vast. Findlay makes the following comparison (Christian Doctrine, cited by Jones, 73):

The self-sufficiency of the Christian is relative: an independence of the world through dependence upon God. The Stoic self-sufficiency pretends to be absolute. One is the contentment of faith, the other of pride. Cato and Paul both stand erect and fearless before a persecuting world: one with a look of rigid, defiant scorn, the other with a face now lighted up with unutterable joy in God.... The Christian martyr and the Stoic suicide are the final examples of these two memorable and contemporaneous protests against the evils of the world.

The Stoic saw suicide as the highest form of human freedom, independence, and moral dignity, leading to an escape from slavery (Seneca, Ep. 77.15: nam vita, si moriendi virtus abest, servitus est, “For life is slavery if the courage to die is lost”). Seneca, a contemporary of Paul, rejected suicide, however, for trivial reasons (ex frivolis causa [ Ep. 4.4]) or if part of a libido moriendi, “passion for dying” (Ep. 24, 25), yet in certain circumstances suicide was justified as part of necessitates ultimae, “extreme necessities” (Ep. 17.9). (Cf. 2 Cor 9:8 ; 1 Tim 6:6 ; see also Bonhöffer, Epiktet, 109–10, 291, 335–36; G. Kittel, TDNT 1:466–67; Sevenster, Paul and Seneca, 113–14; Glombitza, NovT 7 [1964–65] 135–41; Malherbe, “Paul’s Self-Sufficiency.”)

12 οἶδα καὶ ταπεινοῦσθαι, οἶδα καὶ περισσεύειν, “hence I know how to be humbled, and I know how to abound.” Paul now begins to explain in detail what he means when he says “I have learned to be self-sufficient in every situation.” Some interpreters claim that
this explanation, which extends through v 13, is stated in a poetic fashion that makes use of two three-lined strophes (Lohmeyer, Friedrich, Gnilka, Martin [1976]). Although the passage is indeed rhythmical in form, a poetic verse structure is not obvious (Collange). Hence the passage can best be interpreted by taking the first three finite verbs—οἶδα, “I know,” οἶδα, “I know,” μεμύημαι, “I have learned the secret”—as exactly parallel to each other, developing the idea already expressed by έμαθον, “I have learned” (v 11), and the last verb—Ἰσχύω, “I have the power”—as a summary statement, qualifying what Paul means by his idea of self-sufficiency. With rhetorical repetitiveness Paul twice uses the verb οἶδα, “I know,” giving it here the meaning of “I know how” or “I am able” (BDAG) and showing by its use what it was he had learned: “I have learned; therefore I know: I know how to cope.”

The things he learned to cope with are expressed by infinitives, the one either middle or passive in voice (ταπεινοῦσθαι, “to humble myself” or “to be humbled”), the other active in voice (περισσεύειν, “to abound”).

The verb ταπεινοῦν literally means “to lower,” as one would lower the level of water behind a dam or the height of a mountain or hill (cf. Luke 3:5; see BDAG). Figuratively it means “to humble,” both in a good sense and in a bad sense (cf. Matt 18:4; 2 Cor 12:21). Here Paul uses the infinitive ταπεινοῦσθαι with οἶδα, “I know,” to mean either (1) that he knows how “to discipline himself,” “to humble himself” (middle voice), e.g., by fasting (cf. Isa 58:5; see Deissmann, Light from the Ancient East, 419), or (2) that he knows how “to be humbled, to be brought low” (passive
voice) by want or poverty. It denotes a going down into deprivation, whether self-imposed or imposed by external forces, and Paul is saying “I know how to cope with this; I am able for this.” There is also in this choice of ταπεινοῦσθαι, “to humble oneself” or “to be humbled,” an echo of the self-humbling of Christ (ἐταπείνωσεν ἑαυτόν, “he humbled himself” [Phil 2:8]), already so poignantly described by the apostle and with which he associates himself (cf. Rolland, AsSeign 59 [1974] 10–15; on the meaning of the whole word see W. Grundmann, TDNT 9:16–18; Schweizer, Lordship).

The very antithesis of this deprivation is expressed now by περισσεύειν, although one might have expected ὑψοῦν, “to exalt.” By contrast to ταπεινοῦσθαι, “to humble oneself” or “to be humbled,” it means “to abound, to overflow, to have more than enough, to be extremely rich.” By linking this infinitive with οἶδα, “I know,” Paul says “I also know how to cope with abundance.” Not all of Paul’s life was marked by a cramping and oppressive want of resources. He also experienced great prosperity. But in the same way that privations could do him no harm, so “he was equally immune from harm when fortune smiled” (Michael, 215). He knew that grace was needed to handle prosperity, as well as penury, properly. But there is no indication that he favored the one state over the other. In the use of περισσεύειν, “to abound,” there is also an echo of the overflowing abundance that Paul envisions as characteristic of the new age, inaugurated by Christ’s coming (Phil 1:9, 26). It is a distinctively Pauline word (sometimes with special reference to suffering, as in 2 Cor 1:3–8), used by the apostle twenty-six of the thirty-nine times it appears in the NT. The
business metaphors in these verbs are less important than the
terminology of the messianic age when there is to be “abundance”
(e.g., Amos 9; see Silva, 62, 238).

ἐν παντὶ καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν μεμύημαι, “in every and all circumstances
I have learned the secret.” A third thing that Paul knew as a result
of his learning experience is expressed now by a verb found
nowhere else in the NT. It is μυεῖν, “to initiate,” a technical term
referring to those initiatory rites required of any person who wished
to enter into the secrets and privileges of the mystery religions
(BDAG). Once again Paul appears to borrow just the right word
from the vocabulary of his pagan environment that would be readily
understood by his readers to express the precise idea he wished to
impart. He does not mean to say that he automatically knew the
secret of a contented life; rather he makes clear that he came to
know this secret through a difficult process that could be described
as an initiation (μεμύημαι, “I have learned the secret” [perfect
tense]): “I have been very thoroughly initiated into the human lot
with all of its ups and downs” (NEB). Thus, ἐν παντὶ καὶ ἐν
πᾶσιν, “in every and all circumstances,” with which this new
sentence begins should be connected adverbially with μεμύημαι, “I
have learned the secret.” In a different genre of literature we find
τὸ τροχὸν τῆς γενέσεως, “the course of human existence” (Jas
3:6), which echoes the κύκλος τῆς γενέσεως, “circle of becoming,”
or “wheel of nature”—a term found in the mystery religion of the

καὶ χορτάζεσθαι καὶ πεινᾶν καὶ περισσεύειν καὶ ύπερείσθαι,
“of being well fed and of going hungry, of having more than
enough and of having too little.” Now these inclusive and varied circumstances are described in part by two sets of paired infinitives, the first two of which are also linked in Matt 5:6. χορτάζεσθαι, “to be well fed,” was used of force-feeding animals for the purpose of fattening them, of birds gorging themselves on their prey (Rev 19:21), and of satisfying the needs of a hungry crowd (Matt 14:20). Above all, it denotes amplitude, and Paul uses it to refer to his having plenty to eat without any overtones of brutishness (cf. Plummer). πεινᾶν, “to go hungry,” is the direct opposite of this first verb. Instead of portraying plenty of food, it pictures the absence of food and the hunger that results (cf. Matt 4:2; 12:1). More than once Paul experienced the grim, literal reality of this word as he engaged himself in the work of carrying out the Christian mission (1 Cor 4:11–13; 2 Cor 4:8–12; 6:4–5; 11:23–29). To drive home further his point on the alternating nature of human life, Paul repeats himself in the next pair of infinitives. He had earlier written ὑστέρησιν, “need” (Phil 4:11), and περισσεύειν, “to abound” (4:12); now he writes περισσεύειν, “to have more than enough,” “to abound,” and ὑστερεῖσθαι, “to have too little,” “to be in need.” It is as if Paul were saying: “I have been initiated into all the mysteries of life. I know the secrets of everyday reality. God has taught me through good times and bad how to cope not only with hunger and privation, but with plenty to eat and an abundance of wealth.” It is as if he were saying that “the vicissitudes of his life were the rites of admission to a secret society” (Beare, 153).

13 πάντα ἰσχύω ἐν τῷ ἐνδυναμοῦντί με, “I have the power to face all such situations in union with the One who continually
infuses me with strength.” Paul now both reaffirms his self-sufficiency and qualifies it in these famous words, often misunderstood as a type of triumphalism (O’Brien, 526; Fee [1995], 434). Those translations that give the impression that Paul meant he could do anything and that nothing was beyond his powers (KJV, ASV, MOFFATT, GOODSPEED, RSV, KNOX, NEB, NASB, NIV) are misleading to the point of being false. πάντα does literally mean “all things.” But the real meaning of this or any word is determined by its context. Thus, irrespective of whether Paul wrote πάντα, “all things,” or τά πάντα, “all these things,” the context does not permit one to say that he has moved without warning from the particular to the general, from “all these things” to “all things” (but cf. Alford, Vincent). πάντα as used here can only refer to “all these situations,” both good and bad, that have just been described, “all the prosperous and adverse circumstances” that one must encounter in the course of everyday living.

Paul says that he has the power to cope with, or is competent and able to handle, all these things. The verb ἴσχύω, “I have the power,” is not a favorite of the apostle and is used by him only two of the twenty-eight times it occurs in the NT (here and in Gal 5:6). Nevertheless, by using this word Paul reaffirms his own sufficiency: “I have the power to face all conditions of life [cf. GNB], humiliation or exaltation, plenty to eat or not enough, wealth or poverty, as well as all other external circumstances like these. I can endure all these things [cf. Gnilka]. I have the resources in myself to master them. I am strong to face them down. I can prevail over and be absolute master of all the vicissitudes of life.” This indeed is the force of the active voice of
the verb ἵσχύω, “I have the power.” And if this were all Paul had in mind, the charge of triumphalism would be in order.

But then Paul adds a most important qualifying phrase ἐν τῷ ἐνδυνάμωντι με, “in union with the One who continually infuses me with strength.” And thus is established a grand paradox. The secret of Paul’s independence was his dependence upon Christ. His self-sufficiency came from being in vital union with the One who is all-sufficient. Who is this Other, this all-sufficient One? Paul does not say. He simply identifies the source of his confidence by means of a present active participle used as a noun: τῷ ἐνδυνάμωντι, “the One who continually infuses with strength.” The verb ἐνδυνάμων, “to infuse with strength,” however, is used elsewhere to denote the powerful activity of the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Eph 6:10; 1 Tim 1:12; 2 Tim 2:1; 4:17). Thus, those later scribes who added Χριστῷ, “Christ,” to the text properly understood Paul’s intent (see Note b). He whose life was seized by Christ, who gladly gave up all for Christ, who paradoxically gained all by losing all for Christ, who longed to know Christ and the power of his resurrection (3:7–10), could only envision Christ as his true source of inner strength. So although Paul had carefully disciplined himself and had discovered within himself untapped resources of power that, when drawn upon, made him independent of outward circumstances, he could never bring himself to deny his need of Christ and his reliance upon the strength that Christ supplied. The truth of the matter is that in himself Paul did not perceive a strong, independent life. But united with Christ, the source of ultimate power, he was able to face life bravely. In 2 Cor 12:9–10 Paul speaks of his weaknesses as advantages because they made
him all the more receptive of Christ’s strength, which is made
perfect in weakness (see Black, Paul, Apostle of Weakness; cf.
Beare): “Most gladly, then, will I rather glory in my weaknesses,
that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I am
content with weaknesses... and hardships for the sake of Christ; for
when I am weak, then am I strong” (Hawthorne’s paraphrase).
Paul, thus, never allowed his weaknesses or perceived weaknesses
to be an excuse for inactivity or for a failure to attempt the
impossible task. They, in a sense, became his greatest assets, and
in surrendering them to Christ he discovered that they were
transformed for his own enrichment and for the enrichment of
others. As Bousset observes, “The work is great, but help is equal
to the task. God, who calls you, even though he is so high, lends
you his hand. His son, his equal, comes down to carry you” (cited
by Plummer, 102; author’s trans.).

14 πλὴν καλῶς ἐποίησατε συγκοινωνήσαντές μου τῇ θλίψει,
“and yet it was good of you to become partners with me in my
hardships.” With the word πλὴν, “but,” “yet,” “even so,”
“nevertheless,” “all the same,” “notwithstanding,” Paul does two
things: (1) he underscores for the Philippians that he could just as
well have done without their contributions, and (2) he returns to
the task of affirming them for the personal care and concern they
showed him by these contributions. Paul sees it as very important
that his desire for and insistence upon independence should not be
interpreted by the Philippians as indifference to the love they
displayed for him in their giving. And so he says in effect,
“Although I did not need what you sent, yet you did the right,
even the beautifully right [ καλῶς ], thing in sharing with me in
my troubles.” Thus, in the idiomatic expression καλῶς ἐποιήσατε, “it was good of you” (cf. Acts 10:33 ; 2 Pet 1:19 ; 3 John 6), Paul comes as close to saying “thank you” as he ever does in this letter (Martin [1976]; Bruce, 154).

The aorist participle συγκοινωνήσαντες, “having become partners with” (recalling Phil 1:5–7, 3:10), refers exclusively to this most recent gesture of love and is used circumstantially to denote manner: “you did the right thing in that you became partners with me.” In this instance they became his partners τῇ θλίψει, “in [my] hardships.” The word θλίψις, “hardship,” although on occasion used of the disaster that is to come on the world at the end of the age (Matt 24:29 ; Mark 13:19 ; 2 Thess 1:6), is used here in the nontechnical sense of severe hardships, afflictions, and burdens, which is the sense in which Paul most frequently uses this word (cf. Phil 1:17 ; 2 Cor 1:4, 8 ; 2:4 ; 4:17 ; 1 Thess 1:6). Thus, it seems strained (so also Fee [1995], 438 n. 9) to argue that the apostle, in praising the Philippians, may have chosen this word in order to commend them for their support of him “as ‘eschatological apostle,’ destined to promote God’s purposes in the spread of the gospel to the Gentiles and so prepare the way for the dénouement of history” (Martin [1976], 164, following Fridrichsen, Apostle, and Munck, Paul, 36–68). Rather, by the practical sympathy of the Philippians in providing material help for Paul and in sending Epaphroditus to him, they had indeed become partners with him in his imprisonment and sufferings, although they were many miles removed from him. They had taken some of his burden upon themselves in their genuine and deep sense of concern that expressed itself in constructive action on behalf of the
apostle and therefore on behalf of the gospel (Phil 1:12–17; see Seesemann, Begriff KOINΩΝΙΑ, 33–34; Glombitza, NovT 7 [1964–65] 135–41; Collange, 151). And it was exactly this sympathy and companionship that the apostle valued far more than any financial relief that came to him as a result (cf. Lightfoot). On the grammatical point of the dative τῇ θλίψει, “in [my] hardships,” Fee ([1995], 439) comments: “Paul puts θλίψις in the dative as his way of emphasizing the ‘togetherness’ inherent in the σύν [‘with’ in συγκοινωνήσαντες, ‘having become partners with’].” Note too how μου, “my,” is brought into prominence to stress the close relationship of Paul: “to become partners with me in my hardships.”

15 οἶδατε δὲ καὶ ὑμεῖς, Φιλιππησίοι, “now you Philippians know, as well as I.” Vv 15–16 constitute one long sentence in Greek. It is simple in its construction and basic idea, having one main verb, οἶδατε, “you know,” with two direct objects, each introduced by ὅτι, “that”: “You know that ... no other church entered into a partnership with me... except you alone [and] that ... you sent money to meet my needs more than once.” Yet within this simple structure there are difficulties that need explanation. If the text is correct, the sentence begins with two particles: δὲ, “now,” and καί, “also” (see Note c). The first of these, δὲ, is often used to set up a contrast between two clauses and is then translated “but.” Here, however, it is a simple connective, a transitional particle that moves the reader on (BDAG) to the acts of kindness done by the Philippians. It cannot be translated at all, or at best by the word “now.” The second particle, καί, “also,” compares the Philippians
not with other witnesses to the Philippians’ generosity, whom Paul might mention, but with himself: “You know as well as I,” not “You know as well as others” (cf. Vincent). The very fact that Paul feels compelled to say this reinforces the idea that he sensed the possibility of the Philippians interpreting his faint praise as a rebuke, which to some extent it was (contra O’Brien, 530). As we have already pointed out, the apostle deliberately restrained himself in extending his thanks because he wished to maintain his independence. But at the same time he had no desire to offend by what might be conceived of as ingratitude, on his part, for what was an obvious act of love, on their part. He therefore looked for a middle course between effusiveness, on the one hand, and rebuke, on the other. Hence without a straightforward “thank you” he nevertheless tells them that they did the right thing in sharing with him (v 14) and reminds them also that what good things they did in the past are in his judgment quite sufficient to prove their love for him (cf. Gnilka), to which nothing further need be added.

This is the first and only time Paul directly addresses his friends with the vocative form Φιλιππήσιοι, “Philippians.” Rarely does he ever do this, that is, address the readers of his letters by name. In fact, the only times he does so are in letters where he rebukes them and then softens the rebuke by addressing them as “Corinthians” (2 Cor 6:11) or “Galatians” (Gal 3:1). In each case this manner of direct address seems to strike a note of exasperation tempered by obvious earnestness and great affection. His address here to the Philippians by name appears to be extended in the same vein. The form Φιλιππήσιοι, “Philippians,” rather than the more regular Φιλιππεῖς or Φιλιπηνοί, indicates
that if Paul intended any rebuke, he intended it to be a gentle and loving one (contra Fee [1995], 439 n. 10). For Φιλιππήσιοι is a Greek transcription of the Latin Philippenses, the name by which Roman citizens living in the colony Augusta Julia Victrix Philippensium, “Julia Augusta Conqueror of Philippi,” designated themselves. Thus Paul in using this word, which is a monstrum, “monstrosity,” in Greek, was nevertheless courteously respecting a feeling of justifiable pride on the part of the Philippians by acknowledging the Latin character of their city and the dignity that was theirs as Roman citizens (see Ramsay, JTS o.s. 1 [1900] 116; Collart, Philippi, 1:212–13; Beare; Bockmuehl, 263, referring to Pilhofer, Philippi, 1:117, who thinks Paul coined the expression; see also Oakes, Philippians, 66–67). He does everything possible to praise them without encouraging them to do more for him than they have already done.

ὅτι ἐν ἀρχῇ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, ὅτε ἐξῆλθον ἀπὸ Μακεδονίας, “that when the gospel was in its beginning, when I set out from Macedonia.” What can Paul mean when he writes that the gospel had its “beginning” when he went out from Macedonia? Had he not already been preaching the gospel for many years, at least for fourteen years, in Syria and Cilicia (Gal 1:18—2:1), in Cyprus and Galatia (Acts 13–14), before ever he came over into Macedonia? Several answers have been suggested: (1) Paul, contrary to what is generally supposed, actually began his ministry of preaching the gospel in Macedonia in the 40s (Suggs, NovT 4 [1960] 60–68). (2) Paul in fact had preached the gospel elsewhere for many years before he came to Macedonia, but by comparison with his work now he considered his earlier mission of no consequence; it could
be set aside and forgotten as though it had never occurred (Glombitza, NovT 7 [1964–65] 140). (3) Paul was thinking of “the beginning of the gospel” from the standpoint of the Philippians, i.e., “the beginning of the gospel in their vicinity” (cf. the NIV: “In the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel”; see Dibelius; Scott; and Fee [1995], 440 n. 12, for a full note). (4) Paul for the first time became entirely responsible for the mission of the gospel only when he came into Macedonia and moved out from there (Gnilka). In his earlier activities he took second place behind Barnabas (Acts 13–14). Now that he is fully in charge “it is possible that he may have regarded Europe as the mission field which fell particularly to his lot and the true starting point of his ‘Gospel’” (Collange, 152). Although none of these suggestions is completely satisfactory, the last of them is perhaps the best, if for no other reason than that Paul’s move to Macedonia is described in Acts as a “decisive turning-point” for the gospel (Meyer, Ursprung, 3:80, cited by Gnilka). Thereafter Macedonia remains in the foreground of Paul’s mission strategy and is mentioned by him in his letters some thirteen times (Martin [1976]).

οὐδὲμία μοι ἐκκλησία ἐκοινώνησεν εἰς λόγον δόσεως καὶ λήμψεως εἰ μὴ ὑμεῖς μόνοι, “no other church entered into a partnership with me in an accounting of expenditures and receipts except you alone.” Paul tells the Philippians that they were uniquely his partners in his missionary endeavors. Once again there is evidence that Paul deliberately tempers his thanks to the Philippians in the fact that he employs so many financial terms when he refers here to the assistance that they gave him (cf. Kennedy, ExpTim 12 [1900–1901] 43–44). It is almost as though he viewed the entire
matter as a strictly business affair: the Philippians had entered into a partnership (ἐκοινώνησεν) with him (cf. Seesemann, Begriff ΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΑ, 33). And this partnership involved a strict accounting (ἐίς λόγον, “in an accounting”) of all transactions between them (see Lightfoot for references to this meaning of λόγος). All expenditures and receipts (δόσεως καὶ λήμψεως) were carefully recorded. δόσις, “giving,” and λήμψις, “receiving,” are words that belong to the commercial vocabulary of the ancient world and refer to the debit and credit sides of the ledger. They invariably refer to financial transactions (see MM, and the examples from the papyri texts collected by Lohmeyer; but cf. also Str-B 3:624). So it is unlikely that Chrysostom and those many commentators who follow him can be right in saying that this expression means that the Philippians gave (δόσις) material goods and in turn received (λήμψις) spiritual goods from Paul (cf. 1 Cor 9:11 ; Rom 15:27 ; Martin [1976]), because this mixes two different things, material and spiritual, and thus alters the normal meaning of δόσεως καὶ λήμψεως, “expenditures and receipts.” More likely, then, these words refer to the financial gift of the Philippians, on the one hand, and the receipt they received back from the apostle acknowledging its safe arrival, on the other hand. (Note in this connection the word ἀπέχειν, “to receive in full,” in Phil 4:18, a technical term meaning to receive a sum in full and give a receipt for it [BDAG].) Paul will use still more of these commercial terms as he continues. Recent studies (Sampley, Pauline Partnership; Stowers, “Friends and Enemies”; Malherbe, “Paul’s Self-Sufficiency”; Witherington) have shown that these terms are also signs of friendship uniting Paul and the Philippians.
Now Paul reminds them that they know and he knows as well that (ὅτι) they had sent things to meet his needs when he was in Thessalonica. This is an amazing fact, and it shows the immense concern the Philippians had for Paul, their loyalty to him, and their commitment to the advancement of the gospel he preached. For when Paul, after founding the church in Philippi, left there, he went immediately to Thessalonica, a city only a short distance away, to carry on his mission (Acts 17:1–9). Thus, soon after their own beginning as a church, the Philippians began their pattern of giving by sending help to relieve the pressure of his needs (ἐἰς τὴν χρείαν, “to meet my needs”; ἐἰς, “to,” with the accusative to denote purpose).

It is possible that Paul was in Thessalonica for a longer period of time than one might imagine from reading the Acts account (Gnilka; Collange: cf. E. Haenchen, The Acts of the Apostles, trans. B. Noble, G. Shinn et al. [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971] 511–12). Paul's reference to the labor and hardship he experienced in Thessalonica, working day and night so as not to be a burden to anyone, paying all his own expenses by working at his trade by day and preaching the gospel by night (cf. 1 Thess 2:9; 2 Thess 3:8), implies that his mission there was an extended one. This then gave the Philippians opportunity to learn of the apostle's strenuous schedule of activities and a chance to make it lighter. They did so by sending gifts, welcomed or not, to meet his needs. Paul acknowledges that they sent gifts to him καὶ ἂπαξ καὶ δίς, a
phrase that may be understood in the restricted sense of “once or twice” (Vincent, Lohmeyer, Bonnard), probably meaning “twice” (cf. Job 5:19 ; Eccl 11:2 ; Amos 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13), or more generally “more than once,” i.e., repeatedly (Lightfoot; Gnilka; B. Rigaux, Saint Paul: Les épîtres aux Thessaloniciens [Paris: Gabalda, 1956] 461; Morris, NovT 1 [1956] 205–8). Perhaps the more restricted meaning is the intended meaning for this phrase, because from Paul’s remarks written to the Thessalonian church (1 Thess 2:9 ; 2 Thess 3:8), one might readily infer that the aid that came from the Philippians fell far short of meeting all his needs (cf. Collange).

17 οὐχ ὅτι ἐπιζητῶ τὸ δόμα, “I do not say this meaning that I have my heart set on your giving.” Once again Paul intermingles his unswerving determination to be free from the gifts of anyone with his desire to show his appreciation for the affection that obviously lies behind the giving. Hence, because his acknowledgment of the past generosity of the Philippians must not be interpreted as an eager desire on his part for more, he quickly moves now to deny that he ever was anxious for (ἐπιζητῶ) the gift. He introduces this disclaimer with the idiomatic formula οὐχ ὅτι, “I do not say this meaning that...” (see Comment on Phil 4:11 ; BDF §480[5]), and follows it with the verb ἐπιζητῶ, “I have my heart set on.” The preposition ἐπί, “on,” here compounded with the verb ζητεῖν, “to seek,” is in part intensive (“to seek eagerly ”) and in part directional, especially marking the direction of the action (“to seek eagerly for ”; cf. NEB).

ἀλλὰ ἐπιζητῶ τὸν καρπὸν τὸν πλεονάζοντα εἰς λόγον ύμῶν, “but I certainly do have my heart set on interest increasing that
may accrue to your account.” By way of emphasis Paul repeats the
verb ἐπιζητῶ, “I certainly do have my heart set on.” The real
object of his intense desire Paul now expresses in a phrase filled
once more with commercial terms. The first of these is καρπόν,
which literally means “fruit” (cf. KJV, RSV) in the sense of the
“produce” of the land generally. But in light of the meaning of its
cognates καρπεῖαι, “profits,” and καρπίζεσθαι, “to reap the return,”
and the present context in which it appears, καρπός must be
understood in the sense of “profit” or “credit” (see MM, 321). And
the participle that modifies it, πλεονάζοντα, lit. “increasing,”
although it does not appear elsewhere as a technical word
belonging to the vocabulary of commerce (against Martin [1976],
167, who says that it is “a regular banking term for financial
growth”), nevertheless appears to have a commercial meaning
thrust upon it by the business words and phrases that surround it.
The prepositional phrase εἰς λόγον ὑμῶν that immediately follows
is one of these, meaning “to your account.” Paul therefore views
this gift to him as a spiritual investment entered as a credit to the
account of the Philippians, an investment that will increasingly pay
them rich dividends (Hendriksen). This, then, is what Paul really
had his heart set on. And although he could do without the gift
and would prefer to do so, he is nevertheless jealous for the
welfare of his friends at Philippi. For this reason, namely, that he
knows that such an attitude of liberality pays great dividends in the
lives of those who give (cf. 2 Cor 9:8–11), he accepts their
generosity.
18 ἀπέχω δὲ πάντα καὶ περισσεύω· πεπλήρωμαι δεξάμενος παρὰ Ἑπαφροδίτου τὰ παρ’ ὑμῶν, “here, then, is my receipt for everything you have given me. I have more than enough. I am fully supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent me.” Paul was not at all eager for this most recent gift that came to him from the Philippians. But he did accept it. Now he sends back with Epaphroditus his receipt, saying the gift has been duly received. Everything still is done in a very businesslike manner. ἀπέχω πάντα, often translated quite literally “I have all” (KJV, cf. also PHILLIPS, LB, JB), really means “here then is my receipt for everything” (GNB). ἀπέχειν, as has been shown by Deissmann (Light from the Ancient East, 110–12) from examples in the papyri and ostraca, was a technical expression used in drawing up a receipt, meaning “to be paid in full,” and regularly appeared at the bottom of the receipt (cf. MM; BDAG; Lohmeyer; Bonnard; Gnilka). The two verbs that immediately follow, περισσεύω, “I have more than enough,” and πεπλήρωμαι, “I am fully supplied” (which repeats and intensifies the idea expressed in περισσεύω), seem to imply a pleading for no more gifts. Paul has all that he needs and more, and thus could not possibly ask anything further from the Philippians. The bearer of this final gift (τὰ παρ’ ὑμῶν, lit. “the things from you”) was Epaphroditus, whom Paul earlier had described as a messenger sent by the church at Philippi to provide for him the things that were lacking (Phil 2:25 ; cf. 2:30).

Ὅσμὴν εὐωδίας, θυσίαν δεκτὴν, εὐάρεστον τῷ θεῷ, “they are a fragrant odor, a sacrifice that God accepts and that pleases him.” Suddenly Paul turns from the vocabulary of banking to the
language of worship in order to finish his description of this gift from the Philippians. Of first importance is Paul’s remark that although he himself was the immediate recipient of their generosity, the ultimate recipient was God (τῷ θεῷ, “to God”). With this statement he lifts their gift from the level of mere mutual courtesy and compassion and looks upon it in its relation to God (Jones). At the same time he enunciates an important principle, namely, that whatever is done for the servant is in reality done for the Master; that whatever is given to a child of God is given to God himself (cf. Matt 10:40–42; 25:31–40; Acts 9:3–5).

With sacrificial language Paul describes τὰ παρ’ ὑμῶν, “the gifts you sent me,” as ὀσμὴν εὐωδίας, lit. “an odor of fragrance,” “a fragrant odor,” and θυσίαν, “a sacrifice.” The first of these is a common expression taken over from the OT. It pictures God as literally taking pleasure in the smell of the sacrifices offered by his people (cf. Gen 8:21). Symbolically it refers to the quality an offering must possess in order for it to be pleasing and acceptable to God (Exod 29:18, 25, 41; Lev 1:9, 13; Ezek 20:41; cf. Eph 5:2). Thus, in describing their gift as ὀσμὴν εὐωδίας, “a fragrant odor,” Paul makes clear to the Philippians that it is of the first rank, of the highest quality.

The second of these terms, θυσίαν, “a sacrifice,” again is a common OT word to refer literally to the multitude of animal sacrifices offered to God (cf. Lev 1:2–13), e.g., the sacrifices of birds (Lev 1:13–17), grain (Lev 2:1–10), and the firstfruits of the harvest (Lev 2:12–13). Yet even within the OT itself this word began to be spiritualized so that “a crushed and humbled spirit” (LXX Ps 50:18–
19 [ ET 51:16–17 ] could be viewed as an equally valid sacrifice acceptable to God, in fact, the kind of sacrifice that God preferred. Such a spiritualizing of the Levitical sacrifices continued and was broadened in meaning as time went on to include prayer and praise (1QS VIII, 7–9; IX, 35; X, 6), doing good deeds, and sharing of possessions (Heb 13:16). Thus, it was but natural for Paul to interpret the assistance provided him by the Philippians at great cost to themselves (cf. 2 Cor 8:1–2) as the proper sacrifice that would be pleasing and acceptable to God (cf. Rom 12:1). Here again both the terminology and the thought of Phil 2:17 recur. Collange (153) concludes, “The apostle’s activity and the financial help of the Philippians which supports it form a unity the ‘judge’ of which is God.”

19 ὁ δὲ θεός μου πληρώσει πᾶσαν χρείαν ύμῶν κατὰ τὸ πλοῦτος αὐτοῦ ἐν δόξῃ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, “in return, I pray that God may meet every need you have in accordance with his marvelous wealth in Christ Jesus.” This verse is closely and carefully linked with what has just been said, not only by the conjunction δέ, “and,” “now,” “in return,” but also by the deliberate repetition of two highly important words from the immediate context: πεπλήρωμαι, “I am fully supplied [or have been filled]” (v 18), par. πληρώσει, “[God] will meet [or will fill]” (v 19), and χρείαν μοι, “my need” (v 16), par. χρείαν ύμῶν, “your need” (v 19). Thus, in v 19 Paul has in mind exactly the same kind of needs that he was talking about in v 16, namely, present material needs that can only be met right now by material resources. He has not suddenly shifted to discuss spiritual needs (ἐν δόξῃ, “in
glory,” understood as placing them in glorious union with Christ Jesus [Lightfoot]) or to promise his Philippian friends that God will meet their needs in the future ἐν δόξῃ, “in glory,” understood as the glorious age to come (Michaelis, Lohmeyer). The phrase ἐν δόξῃ, “in glory,” must not be taken with the verb πληρώσει, “will meet,” in such a way as to point to the future kingdom (“God will meet every need you have in glory”) but be perceived only as reflecting a Hebrew adverbial construction (“God will meet every need you have in a glorious manner”). Or ἐν δόξῃ, “in glory,” may be understood as an adjective modifying the noun πλοῦτος, “wealth,” meaning “glorious or marvelous wealth.” The needs that are under consideration here are similar to those kinds of needs that Paul himself had experienced due to hardships, suffering, deprivations, and afflictions (θλίψεις [v 14]) that could be alleviated only by earthly goods and services and by human associates.

A textual question concerns whether Paul wrote ὁ ... θεός μου πληρώσει πᾶσαν χρείαν ύμῶν, “my God will meet [future indicative] every need you have,” or ὁ ... θεός μου πληρώσαι πᾶσαν χρείαν ύμῶν, “may my God meet [aorist optative] every need you have” (see Note f). The future indicative (πληρώσει) states a fact promising the Philippians what God will do; the aorist optative (πληρώσαι; not the aorist infinitive as Collange, 148, identifies it) expresses a wish, offers a prayer to God, makes a request of him. Manuscript evidence alone favors the future indicative πληρώσει, “[God] will meet,” reading, though there are some excellent witnesses in support of the aorist optative
πληρώσαι, “may [God] meet.” But the following considerations favor the aorist optative reading here (so too Schenk, 51–54): (1) Material, physical needs are exclusively under discussion here. (2) Paul elsewhere, in a similar context, refuses to say what God will do in meeting such material needs, although he confidently says what God can do (2 Cor 9:8). (3) Although the optative mood was dying out in Koine Greek, Paul nevertheless is familiar with its usage (he uses it thirty-one times; BDF §65[2]) and is quite capable of employing it correctly. (4) Paul occasionally comes near the close of his letters with a prayer asking God to do something favorable for his friends and using precisely the same formula that appears here in 4:19: δέ, “and, but” (postpositive) + ὁ θεός, “God”/ ὁ κύριος, “the Lord” + optative verb (Rom 15:5; 1 Thess 5:23; 2 Thess 3:16). (5) Paul’s final benedictions (Rom 15:33; 1 Cor 16:23; 2 Cor 13:13; Gal 6:18; Eph 6:24), asking that God’s presence be with his readers and his grace upon them, imply the optative εἴη, “may [it] be,” even when the optative is not present. Even if the future indicative πληρώσει, “[God] will meet,” reading is accepted, the verse must still be translated so as to express a wish prayer, not a simple statement of fact (cf. Wiles, Paul’s Intercessory Prayers, 101–7, who notes how Paul’s prayer here harks back to Phil 1:9–11): “In return for [δέ] your meeting my needs, I pray that my God will meet every need that you have” (cf. KNOX, NAB). Such an interpretation (a) does not have Paul saying what God will or will not do, (b) allows God the freedom to be God, to fulfill needs or not as he sees best, even the needs of the Philippians, (c) wards off disappointment or disillusionment when material, physical needs are not met, and (d) keeps one from having to
make excuses for God, from drawing fine lines of distinction between needs and wants, and from pushing off the fulfillment of needs until the eschatological day to avoid any embarrassment (so O’Brien, 546, but contra Fee [1995], 452 n. 12).

God’s ability to meet the Philippians’ need is κατὰ τὸ πλοῦτος αὐτοῦ ἐν δόξῃ, lit. “according to his wealth in glory.” κατά, “according to,” with the accusative means that “the rewarding will not be merely from his wealth, but also in a manner that befits his wealth—on a scale worthy of His wealth” (Michael, 226, italics original). Since God’s wealth is limitless, it is therefore impossible to exhaust it. Paul thus cannot ask too much from God as he prays for the needs of his friends. As has already been argued, these needs are present material needs that the Philippians have here and now (cf. 2 Cor 8:2). Hence ἐν δόξῃ, “in glory,” should not be given any futuristic meaning but should be curtailed and limited here to a description of God’s wealth: it is magnificent, eye-catching, splendid, renowned (cf. BDAG).

The prepositional phrase ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, “in Christ Jesus,” is in the emphatic position at the end of the sentence. But it is to be taken with the verb πληρώσαι, “may [God] meet,” because the treasures of God are unlocked and made available in Christ. God makes his wealth known and fulfills needs only because of and in Christ (cf. Col 2:10 : ἐστε ἐν αὐτῷ πεπληρωμένοι, “you are filled up in him,” i.e., Christ; 1 Cor 1:5 : ἐν παντὶ ἐπλουτίσθητε ἐν αὐτῷ, “you have been made rich [by God] in him,” i.e., Christ).

20 τ体育投注 καὶ πατρὶ ἡμῶν ἡ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων, ἀμήν, “now surely the glory belongs to God our Father
forever and ever. Amen!” In v 19 Paul used a rare expression ὁ ... θεός μου, “my God” (only here and in Phil 1:3), so as to distinguish himself and his needs from the Philippians and their needs. But now, as he breaks out into a doxology, he addresses the doxology τῷ ... θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ ἡμῶν, “to God our Father,” uniting himself once again with his converts in a song of praise to the one who provides for the needs of all his people.

In the doxologies of the NT, δόξα, “glory,” usually has the definite article, as it does here (Rom 11:36; 16:27; Gal 1:5; Eph 3:21; 2 Tim 4:18; Heb 13:21; 1 Pet 4:11; 2 Pet 3:18; but also Luke 2:14; 19:38). The definite article signals to the reader that it is “that glory,” “that honor,” “that splendor” that properly belongs to God and is rightly ascribed to him that is in focus. δόξα, “glory,” as it is used in the Bible (OT and NT), is an elusive word with meanings ranging from “divine honor,” “divine splendor,” “divine power,” “visible divine radiance,” to the “divine mode of being.” Thus, when people give glory to God (cf. Jer 13:16; Pss 18:1; 28:1–2; 113:9; Rev 4:9; 5:13; 7:12) or burst out in a doxological refrain, as here, they are not adding to God something that is not already present but are actively acknowledging or extolling God for what he already is (cf. Isa 42:8 with 41:12; see also Luke 2:14; 19:38; Rom 11:36; cf. G. Kittel, TDNT 2:244–48). Therefore, this doxology presupposes that the verb ἔσται, “to be,” which is missing and must be supplied, is the indicative ἔστιν, “is,” “belongs,” rather than the optative ἔσῃ, “may [it] be,” “be” (cf. 1 Pet 4:11).
The doxology is presented τῷ ... θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ ἡμῶν, “to God our Father.” Very likely the definite article (τῷ) is used only with the noun θεῷ, “God”: “to the God, the one supreme God of the universe.” But by adding πατρὶ ἡμῶν, “our Father,” Paul reminds the Philippians that this God, so magnificent and splendid, is “our Father,” a tender phrase picked up from the prayer Jesus taught his first disciples (cf. Matt 6:9; Luke 11:2, reflecting the Aramaic ʿābba) and cherished by his church ever since.

This praise to God is εἰς τοὺς αἰώνας τῶν αἰώνων, lit. “into the ages of the ages.” The idea expressed by the Greek “is of cycles consisting of, embracing, other cycles, ad infinitum; the ever-developing ‘ages’ of heavenly life” (Moule, 89). This phrase, unique to the NT, represents a long, indefinite period. Praise to God, therefore, is not restricted to “this age” but belongs appropriately to “the age to come” as well—and to ages upon ages yet to follow, to “an incalculable vastness of duration” (Plummer, 106).

And to this is added the ἀμήν, “amen,” that spontaneous and joyful endorsement of all that has been said. It is the “yes” of the worshiping church to God and the acknowledgment and acceptance of the promises he has made in Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Cor 14:16; 2 Cor 1:20; see H. Schlier, TDNT 1:336–38).

**Explanation**

Some commentators consider that this section (Phil 4:10–20) was originally a separate letter of thanks written by Paul before he wrote the main part of his epistle to the Philippians. This submission, if accepted, would meet the objection that Paul leaves his thanks
until the close of the letter and also that a lengthy period of time has elapsed since his mission to Philippi and arrival in Rome (assuming the Roman provenance of the letter). The arguments for this view, however, are not convincing (see Introduction, Integrity of Philippians), and thus the exegesis here proceeds on the assumption that vv 10–20 are an integral part of the whole letter.

If we are asked why then did Paul leave his “thank you” to the last, several answers are forthcoming: (1) The fact of the matter is that he did not do this. At the beginning of his letter he thanks God and the Philippians for their generous partnership with him in the spread of the gospel (1:3, 5). (2) If Paul dictated this letter, as was his custom, and took up the stylus, as usual, to sign it, it would be most appropriate for him to express more fully his appreciation in his own handwriting at the end of the letter (see H. Y. Gamble, Jr., The Textual History of the Letter to the Romans [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977] 94, 145–46, cited in O'Brien, 551). (3) But most likely Paul left his thanks to the last because the whole matter of receiving gifts from the churches he founded was a very sensitive issue with him. And as one who hesitates to bring up a delicate matter, the apostle waits until he can wait no longer. Thus, in a carefully worded statement he thanks the Philippians for their kindness to him, without ever really thanking them. One senses in this section a nervous alternation back and forth between acknowledging his indebtedness to the Philippians, on the one hand, and asserting his independence from them, on the other.

Paul begins by telling the Philippians that he is glad that their concern for him has blossomed again. For some unstated reason the Philippians were unable to make contact with Paul for a period
of time. And just how long depends on the dating of the letter. No message of any kind came through to let the apostle know how his friends at Philippi fared or if they cared at all for him or for the gospel he preached. Doubts arose. Then all of a sudden there came a breakthrough. Epaphroditus arrived on a mission by the church to be his co-worker and fellow soldier, not only carrying instructions to do whatever Paul needed to have done (cf. 2:25), but also bringing an abundance of material goods or financial resources (4:19) so as to free him from whatever sufferings or hardships that poverty might have inflicted upon him. This overwhelming generosity made him very happy, but only because it showed that all during the silent period the Philippians had never stopped thinking of him and planning how they might help him. Vincent (152) observes, “He values their gift principally as an expression of the spirit of Christ in them, and as an evidence of their Christian proficiency.”

But this gift caused him problems. It violated his principle of paying his own way by working with his hands, so that he might himself be free of depending on others, and to make the gospel free of charge to everyone (though he forsook the principle as well as observed it, as we see from Acts 18:5, which suggests that the money that came with Silas and Timothy set him free from the necessity of tentmaking [Acts 18:3]). Consequently he swings suddenly from praising the Philippians to informing them that he did not need their gift, that he had learned self-sufficiency, that he knew how to cope with all the ups and downs of life, that he had been initiated into the vicissitudes of existence—hunger and fullness, too much and too little, privation and plenty—and was
able to accept and survive either without preference. He affirms, almost too emphatically it seems, that he has the power to face all such situations on his own, without help from anyone. But then he catches himself, stops, and gladly acknowledges that in reality his independence comes only from his dependence upon Christ. It is Christ who continuously infuses him with strength.

Then Paul turns back to affirming the Philippians not only for what they had just given to him but also for what they had given to him on previous occasions as well. But even as he praises them, his praise seems checked, reined in somewhat by the businesslike way in which he discusses what they have done. They alone, of all the churches he founded, entered into a partnership with him. Between them and him there was a strict accounting of expenditures and receipts. They were generous in their giving, but he never asked for their gifts. The only thing he sought was that the Philippians might follow the principle that the generous will be treated generously, that those who sow bountifully will reap bountifully, that they might get a good return on their investment, and that interest might increase and be credited to their account. He speaks in banking terms of sending them a receipt for the gifts they sent him through Epaphroditus, duly marked by him “paid in full.” One last time, it seems, he pleads for his independence and implicitly begs that they send no more. His words are “I have more than enough. I am fully supplied!” (Phil 4:18).

But Paul’s greatest praise for their gifts comes when he likens them to the fragrant odor that arose from proper sacrifices, properly prepared and offered so as to measure up to the quality standards required of them to be pleasing and acceptable to God.
Furthermore, he says, the things that had come from them to him actually had come from them to God and were accepted by God. By this statement he is saying that their gifts were of the very highest quality. So in return for supplying his needs out of their poverty (cf. 2 Cor 8:2), he asks God to meet all their needs out of his riches, in accordance with his vast assets “on a scale worthy of his wealth” (Phil 4:19). And as he reflects then on the limitless resources that exist in God, he cannot refrain from breaking out in a joyous doxology: “The glory belongs to the supreme God who is also our Father. Amen!”

The language of this section (4:10–20) is at once “priestly” (Newton, Concept of Purity, 60–68), liturgical, commercial, and personal, showing Paul’s versatility in his command of speech. These features lend a timeless appeal on giving and receiving, while they pose a challenge to Christians in a rich society. The text will be read in a different way by those who study the Scripture in a world of poverty and economic distress. Elements that go to make up the three-way network of Paul, the Philippians, and God (Fowl’s characterization [Int 56.1 (2002) 45–58]) present a challenge to interpret Scripture both theologically and contextually.
VI. Conclusion (4:21–23)

Bibliography


Translation

21 Give my greetings to every one of the saints in Christ Jesus. The brothers [and sisters] who are with me here send you their greetings, as do all the saints, especially those of the imperial household. 22 May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you each one. a Amen. b, c

Notes

23.a. Instead of μετὰ τοῦ πνεύματος ὑμῶν, “with your spirit,” Ψ and the Majority Text read μετὰ πάντων ὑμῶν, “with you all.” The change may have been because there was misunderstanding of the anthropology expressed here. Why would “grace” be ascribed
only to the “spirit,” when human beings are both body and spirit?
Or the change may have been accidental due to similarity in appearance.

23.b. ἀμήν, “Amen,” although omitted by NA ²⁷, following B F G, is nevertheless strongly attested by Ὑ ⁴⁶ Ν A D Ψ and the Majority Text (so also O’Brien, 555, and Bockmuehl, 271).

23.c. Most MSS add a subscriptio, “subscription”: (1) Πρὸς Φιλιππησίους, “To the Philippians” (Ν Α Β* Ψ 33), or (2) Πρὸς Φιλιππησίους ἐγράφη ἀπὸ Ρώμης (ἐξ Ἀθηνῶν 945) (διὰ Ἐπαφροδίτου 075 1739 1881 Majority Text), “To the Philippians, written from Rome (from Athens) (through Epaphroditus)” (B ¹ 6). Ὑ ⁴⁶ and a few other Greek MSS have no subscription.

Form/Structure/Setting

Paul now concludes his letter. It is time to say farewell. And although he does this essentially in accordance with the pattern of ancient letter writing, he does not here, nor in any of his letters, use the standard ἔρρωσο/ἔρρωσθε, “farewell,” εὐτύχει, “good luck,” or εὐπράττετε, “good-bye” (as in P.Oxy. 115) that one is accustomed to find at the end of pagan or even Christian letters (cf. Hunt and Edgar, Select Papyri, 1:269–395; Acts 15:29 ; 23:30 ; Ign. Eph. 21.2; Ign. Magn. 15; Ign. Rom. 10.3). Instead, his favorite word is some form of the verb ἀσπάζεσθαι, “to greet,” by which he not only signs off but sends personal greetings from himself, his associates, and other Christians around him to his dear friends who will read what he has written (cf. Rom 16 ; 1 Cor 16:19–20 ; 2 Cor 13:12 ; Col 4:10–15 ; 1 Thess 5:26 ; Phlm 23 ; cf. 2 Tim 4:19,
21; Tit 3:15). Paul’s letters not only accord with the pattern of ancient letter writing, but they radically differ from that pattern as well. The Epistle to the Philippians shows this to be true. The stark ἔρρωσο/ἔρρωσθε, “farewell,” or some such formula with which other contemporary letters were brought to a close is amplified by Paul in such a way as to reveal the warmth of Christian relations, the marvel of Christian ideas and ideals, and the One who motivates and gives meaning to all (cf. Collange). In this simple farewell appear such profoundly important words as “saints,” “brothers [and sisters],” “grace,” “Christ Jesus,” and “Lord.”

The doxology in v 20, which has the appearance of a proper ending to a letter, confirms in the minds of some that vv 10–20 constitute a separate letter of thanks to the Philippian church. Vv 21–23, therefore, are out of order and belong as a conclusion to one of the other letters contained in Philippians, perhaps to that letter made up of chaps. 1–2. This suggestion has already been rejected in favor of seeing each part of Philippians as integral to the whole (Introduction, Integrity of Philippians). A considerable number of NT epistles end much like Philippians in a four-part structure made up of (1) personal information and instructions (vv 10–19); (2) a formal benediction or doxology (v 20); (3) brief personal counsel, expressed less formally (vv 21–22); and (4) a simple benediction as a final greeting (v 23; cf. F. V. Filson, “Yesterday”: A Study of Hebrews in the Light of Chapter 13, SBT 2.4 [Naperville, IL: Allenson, 1967] 22–24; see 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, 2 Timothy, Hebrews). As Houlden (115–16) notes:

This structure seems almost as stereotyped as the opening pattern of greeting followed by thanksgiving. It arises from the dual
purpose of nearly all the New Testament letters; they were both
general communications to a congregation or group of
congregations and also personal letters to friends. The first two
sections of the fourfold pattern spring from the first purpose, the
last two from the second.

The letter to the Philippians is the most intimate of all of Paul’s
letters. Here the personal pronouns “I” and “you” abound. The
generosity of the church at Philippi exceeded that of all the
churches Paul founded or was associated with (Phil 4:15), and this
generosity reflected the deep affection the Philippians had for Paul.
Obviously the feeling was mutual. Thus, it is surprising to discover
in a section reserved for greetings that not one person is greeted
by name (contrast Rom 16). (Some scholars doubt whether Paul
knew all the names of those sending greetings and receiving them
in Rom 16 since he had not visited Rome. Manson, BJRL 31 [1948]
224–40, has argued that Rom 16 is part of a letter to Ephesus.
See the commentaries on Romans and Gamble, Textual History,
who supports the Roman provenance of chap. 16.) One could wish
it had been otherwise, i.e., that instead of a comprehensive general
greeting some of the Christians might have been singled out and
identified by what they had done. If this had happened, those living
at a distance from Philippi in space and time, unfamiliar with the
believers there, would have had a better chance of understanding
the people and events associated with this church. Paul’s reason for
greeting no one in particular no doubt stemmed from his wish that
all his readers might feel that they were each one equally dear to
him (Scott), an inclusiveness evident especially in Phil 1:3, 7, 8,
which emphasize the word “all.”
Comment

21 ἀσπάσασθε πάντα ἁγιὸν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, “give my greetings to every one of the saints in Christ Jesus.” This letter of Paul was addressed “to all God’s people [ ἁγίοις, lit. saints]... with the overseers who serve” (Phil 1:1). It is this address that makes the final greeting striking. For now Paul is not writing directions to the Philippian church as a whole, as he did at the beginning, but to certain individuals within the church, who in turn are to pass along his greetings to πάντα ἁγιὸν, “every one of the saints,” belonging to that church. The verb ἀσπάσασθε, “give my greetings to,” is second person plural: “ you all give my greetings to [them].” But who are these individuals to whom Paul gives these final instructions? It is impossible to give a definitive answer to this question, and “a trifle such as this makes us realize how little we know about the organization in these early churches” (Beare, 157; cf. Bockmuehl, 268). But we can probably say more than that “the best guess is that the Philippians are to greet one another, and so cement cordial relations as they are brought together by Paul’s letter” (Martin [1976], 169). Paul not only had the linguistic tools available to him to say “greet one another,” if that is what he intended to say, but on more than one occasion he actually used the salutation ἀσπάσασθε ἀλλήλους, “greet one another ” (1 Cor 16:20 ; 2 Cor 13:12). It is likely, then, that Paul calls upon the leaders, the overseers of the church, to pass along his greetings to the Christian fellowship. In spite of the wording of the opening address (Phil 1:1), this letter would not have been handed over by Epaphroditus to the church as a whole; he would have given it to
the responsible officials of the church, who would then have read it aloud to the assembled congregation.

These officials were to give Paul’s greetings to πάντα ἁγιον, “every one of the saints.” His wording here, although surprising, is nonetheless precise. The phrase πάντα ἁγιον, lit. “every saint,” is singular, and its uniqueness must not be lost by translating it as “all the saints” (NIV, NRSV; cf. GNB). For with the singular Paul conveys his love and affection to each individual Christian alike (Alford). None is to be treated differently from any other. In a church troubled by disunity the apostle will not take sides; every believer is, as it were, the sole object of his greeting. Perhaps then, as has been suggested, this is why Paul, contrary to his usual custom, mentions no one by name in these final greetings (Collange).

The initial greeting concludes with the familiar Pauline phrase ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, “in Christ Jesus” (for its meaning see the Comment on Phil 1:1; 2:5). It is variously taken with the verb ἀσπάσασθε (“give my greetings in [the fellowship of] Christ Jesus to...”; cf. NEB, and see Alford, Jones, Lightfoot, Plummer, Dibelius) or the noun phrase πάντα ἁγιον (“every one of the saints who are in Christ Jesus”; cf. RSV, and see Moule, Hendriksen, Martin [1976]). Although the matter may be regarded as of no great importance (Vincent), for the sake of precision the following observations may be made: (1) The phrase “in Christ Jesus” is taken with “saints” in Phil 1:1. (2) Since the phrase stands in closest proximity to “every one of the saints” here and to be a “saint” in the Pauline sense of the word means to be one of
God's special people by virtue of being united to Christ, being “in union with Christ,” it is better to link the phrase “in Christ” with the phrase “every one of the saints” than with the verb “give greetings to.”

ἀσπάζονται ύμᾶς οἱ σύν ἐμοὶ ἀδελφοί, “the brothers [and sisters] who are with me here send you their greetings.” Paul is not alone in sending greetings to the Philippians; he belongs to a community of faith that joins him in saluting the congregation at Philippi. How large this group was or the nature of its composition is information that is not provided and cannot be recovered. Certainly the group must be restricted to such people as Timothy (Phil 2:19) and perhaps Luke (cf. Acts 20:1–6 ; 27:1), close personal associates of the apostle, as distinguished from the Christians who lived in the place of his captivity and were not so intimately identified with the apostle and his work. These latter will be referred to in the next verse (cf. also Phil 1:15–17 ; 2:20–21).

22 ἀσπάζονται ύμᾶς πάντες οἱ ἁγιοί, μάλιστα δὲ οἱ ἐκ τῆς Καίσαρος οἰκίας, “as do all the saints, especially those of the imperial household.” Greetings come to Philippi from Paul, from his close companions, and now from πάντες οἱ ἁγιοί, “all the saints,” in the place of his writing. But there is a group here that is singled out as sending its special greetings: οἱ ἐκ τῆς Καίσαρος οἰκίας, “those of the imperial household.” The expression οἰκία Καίσαρος, “household of Caesar,” is used in the literature to refer both to the highest officials in the Roman government and to the lowest servants in the emperor’s employ (Lightfoot, especially the detached note “Caesar’s Household,” 171–78). Since there is no
evidence that members of the royal family or any high public officials attached to the praetorium had converted to Christianity as early as this letter of Paul (cf. Phil 1:13), it is likely that Paul is speaking now of Roman soldiers stationed in the barracks or slaves or freedmen handling the domestic affairs of the emperor or proconsul, or both. The reason these are singled out may be to show that the gospel was beginning to penetrate even these loftier circles, or to indicate that there was a link “between the Christian members of the imperial staff on government service at the place of Paul’s imprisonment and the citizens of Philippi, which was a Roman colony” (Martin [1976], 170; Michaelis, Scott; see Pilhofer, Philippi, and Introduction, Place and Date of Writing, for the bearing of this phrase on the letter’s place of origin).

23 ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ μετὰ τοῦ πνεύματος ὑμῶν, “may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you each one.” Paul begins his letter with χάρις, “grace” (Phil 1:2); he now concludes it with that same rich word. With few exceptions (Col 1:2; 1 Thess 1:1), whenever Paul begins his letters, he speaks of “the grace of God our Father and of the Lord Jesus Christ.” With equally few exceptions (Eph 6:23; 1 Tim 6:21; 2 Tim 4:22; Tit 3:15 within the Pauline corpus), in the benediction at the close of these same letters Paul only speaks of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. This fact leads one to conclude that for Paul Christ has the right to perform the divine role with full authority. He is the source of grace, the fountainhead of free beneficent saving love (χάρις, “grace”). He is the one who bestows this grace freely on his church. He is the one through whom undeserving humankind
comes to know the mercy, love, and favor of God. He is the Lord whom the church confesses (cf. Comment on Phil 2:11).

Paul’s final benediction (see Champion, Benedictions, and more generally O’Brien, DPL, 68–71), then, is that this grace of Jesus Christ as Lord may be μετὰ τοῦ πνεύματος ὑμῶν, lit. “with your spirit.” This expression sounds strange to modern ears. Thus, several things should be noted: (1) The fact that πνεύματος, “spirit,” is singular and ὑμῶν, “your,” is plural does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that Paul is stressing “the unity of the body of believers in which one spirit is to be found” (Martin [1976], 171). The distributive singular—as in πεπωρωμένην ἔχετε τὴν καρδίαν ὑμῶν, “you [plural] have a hardened heart” (Mark 8:17), meaning, “each of you has a hardened heart”—is a common enough phenomenon in both classical and NT Greek (Smyth, Greek Grammar, 269 §998; BDF §140). Hence the singular here has no significant meaning beyond the fact that Paul’s prayer is for Christ’s grace to rest and abide upon the spirit of each one of his readers (cf. Bockmuehl, 271). (2) The word πνεῦμα, “spirit,” is frequently used in the NT of the whole person, but especially of the mental and spiritual aspects belonging to personality (cf. E. Schweizer, TDNT 6:435). (3) The phrase μετὰ τοῦ πνεύματος ὑμῶν, “with your spirit,” is not unique to Philippians (against Beare); it appears also in Gal 6:18; Phlm 25 (cf. 2 Tim 4:22). It stands in the same position in these benedictions as—and replaces the more usual—μεθ’ ὑμῶν, “with you.” (4) Hence in all likelihood Paul means to say nothing more profound by the expression “with your spirit” than to say “with you.” It should thus be translated accordingly.
ἀμήν, “Amen.” If this is part of the original, and the evidence for it is strong (see Note b), it reflects either Paul’s own response to the benediction, authenticating what has just been pronounced (“Amen!” “It is true!”; cf. Rom 16:22; 1 Cor 16:21; Gal 6:11; Col 4:18; 2 Thess 3:17; see Collange; Wu, DPL, 557–60), or the affirmative response of the congregation to the divine promise on which the hoped-for blessing rests (“Amen!” “Yes, let it be so!”; cf. Rev 1:7; 1 Cor 14:16; 2 Cor 1:20; see H. Schlier, TDNT 1:336–38).

**Explanation**

In a style characteristic of all his letters Paul brings this one addressed to the Philippians to a close with a greeting and benediction. He may be asking the leaders of the church to convey his personal greetings to each and every Christian at Philippi, irrespective of who they may be or what they may have done or failed to do. So important is it that none be excluded from this greeting that Paul refuses to name anyone, lest he offend any by an accidental omission of their names. What is more, his close associates (such as Timothy and perhaps Luke), those persons intimately involved with him in his apostolic work, send their greetings along with his. There is a bond of affection there that strengthens the good wishes that come from Paul. Paul wants the Philippians to know that not only he and his fellow workers care for them and are interested in their welfare, but every Christian in the local church has the same attitude as well. They, too, want their greetings passed along.

But within this church there is a special group, one especially interested in the Christians at Philippi. These may have been
soldiers, slaves, or freedmen who, because they had been involved in the service of the emperor or proconsul in provincial matters for an extended period of time, had come to know many of the believers in the Roman city of Philippi. These wish to be remembered to them in a special way. This seemingly casual remark shows that the gospel was beginning to make its way into the imperial household or civil service. (And the cordiality of the greeting may suggest that the distance between Philippi and the place of the apostle’s imprisonment was not too great.)

The letter ends with a benedictory prayer, calling down upon the church at Philippi the gracious, saving activity of God that comes to them solely through Jesus Christ, whom they confess as Lord. This theme has pervaded the letter, whose “ruling motif” may well be “living under Christ’s lordship” (so Phil 2:6–11). With the concluding “Amen” Paul affirms the truth of what he has said, and the congregation responds with its “yes” to the promises of God heard in the benediction.