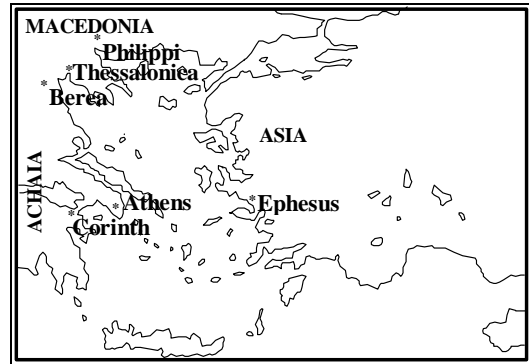


Notes on  
**Philippians**  
2004 Edition  
Dr. Thomas L. Constable

## Introduction

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The name of the city of Philippi was originally Krinides (lit. springs). It stood about 10 miles inland from the Aegean Sea in the Roman province of Macedonia. In 356 B.C. Philip II, king of Macedonia and father of Alexander the Great, renamed the town after himself and enlarged it.



In 42 B.C. the Romans Octavian, Antony, and Lepidus defeated Brutus and Cassius in a battle fought just west of Philippi. After that battle Philippi became a military colony. Subsequent battles in 42 and 31 B.C. resulted in Philippi receiving even higher status. The citizens enjoyed autonomous government, immunity from taxes, and treatment as if they lived in Italy.<sup>1</sup> Some commentators have seen indications of the pride the Philippians took in their city in Acts 16:20-21 and Philippians 1:27 and 3:20. Luke's description of Philippi as a "leading city of the district of Macedonia" (Acts 16:12) probably refers to its colonial status since it was the only colony in the area. Amphipolis was the capital of the district, and Thessalonica was the capital of the province.

The Via Egnatia, the main highway from Rome to the east, ran through Philippi and brought much commerce and many travelers to Philippi. Also the nearby Gangites (modern Angitis) River was another natural advantage since it constituted another ancient thoroughfare (cf. Acts 16:13).

The story of the founding of the church in Philippi appears in Acts 16. Philippi was the first town in which Paul preached after he crossed the Aegean Sea from Troas and entered Europe. Then (A.D. 50) the city had few Jewish residents and the first converts were Lydia, a Gentile businesswoman from Thyatira in the province of Asia Minor, and the Philippian jailer. The church evidently met in Lydia's home at first (Acts 16:15). Paul's companions on his first visit to Philippi included Silas, Timothy, and Luke. Luke may have stayed in Philippi to establish the new converts when the other members of

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<sup>1</sup>F. J. Foakes Jackson and Kirsopp Lake, eds., *The Beginnings of Christianity. Part I: The Acts of the Apostles*, 4:187-90.

Paul's missionary team moved on to Thessalonica.<sup>2</sup> The Philippian Christians sent financial support to Paul in Thessalonica more than once (Phil. 4:15-16).

Probably Paul visited Philippi again during his third missionary journey in A.D. 57. He travelled from Ephesus to Corinth by land and then from Corinth back to Miletus mostly by land. From there he took a ship to Jerusalem. The land route he took on both occasions would have led him through Philippi.

No serious question about the Pauline authorship of this epistle arose until the nineteenth century. Paul claimed to have written it (Phil. 1:1), and the references to his acquaintances, events in his life, and his way of thinking all point to him as the writer.

The apostle was a prisoner when he penned this letter (Phil. 1:7, 13, 16). References to the palace guard (1:13) and Caesar's household (4:22) have led most interpreters to conclude that Paul wrote from Rome rather than from Caesarea (cf. 1:19-24; 2:24).<sup>3</sup> The Marcionite Prologue (ca. A.D. 170) also refers to Paul writing Philippians from Rome. Evidently he did so during his first Roman imprisonment (A.D. 60-62) during which time he also wrote Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon, the other Prison Epistles.<sup>4</sup>

The primary purpose Paul had in mind in writing this epistle seems to have been to reassure the Philippians. Epaphroditus, whom they had sent with a gift for Paul and to minister to his needs in prison, had recovered from a serious illness and was about to return to Philippi. Paul built up Epaphroditus in the eyes of his readers (2:25-30), which suggests that they may not have appreciated him adequately for some reason. Secondary reasons for sending this letter include expressing thanks for the Philippians' gift to Paul in prison (4:10-14) and announcing Timothy's approaching visit (2:19).<sup>5</sup> Paul also wanted to explain his desire to revisit his readers (2:24) and to deal with the problem of the two women in the church who needed to reconcile (4:2). One commentator identified the genre of this epistle as a letter of friendship and moral exhortation.<sup>6</sup>

Of all Paul's epistles Philippians is the most consistently positive and personal. It reflects a joyful spirit.<sup>7</sup> Paul did not rebuke this church sharply nor did he refer to any major problems in it. His warnings are of a precautionary nature. His occupation with Jesus Christ also stands out. In 104 verses there are 51 references to the Lord Jesus by name.

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<sup>2</sup>Luke dropped the use of "we" from Acts 17:1 through 20:4.

<sup>3</sup>For defense of the Caesarean origin of the letter, see Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, pp. xxxvi-xliv. A third possible site is Ephesus, which G. S. Duncan, "A New Setting for Paul's Epistle to the Philippians," *Expository Times* 43 (1931-32):7-11, advocated.

<sup>4</sup>Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, p. 37, believed the internal evidence of Philippians puts its writing toward the end of this period.

<sup>5</sup>Robert P. Lightner, "Philippians," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, p. 647, suggested that the book "might be called a thank-you note to saints in Philippi for their generous gifts."

<sup>6</sup>Fee, p. 2.

<sup>7</sup>See Charles R. Swindoll, *Laugh Again*, a popular treatment of Philippians that stresses the importance of living joyfully in spite of circumstances.

". . . what is most noticeable in this letter is the general paucity of Paul's more specialized theological vocabulary and the infrequency of the explanatory 'for,' which is always a dead giveaway that Paul is involved in heavy argumentation."<sup>8</sup>

### **OUTLINE**

- I. Salutation 1:1-2
- II. Prologue 1:3-26
  - A. Thanksgiving 1:3-8
  - B. Prayer 1:9-11
  - C. Progress report 1:12-26
    - 1. Paul's present imprisonment 1:12-18
    - 2. Paul's anticipated deliverance 1:19-26
- III. Partnership in the gospel 1:27—4:9
  - A. A worthy walk 1:27-30
  - B. Unity and steadfastness 2:1—4:1
    - 1. Walking in unity ch. 2
    - 2. Walking in steadfastness 3:1—4:1
  - C. Specific duties 4:2-9
    - 1. Restoring unity 4:2-3
    - 2. Maintaining tranquillity 4:4-9
- IV. Epilogue 4:10-20
  - A. The recent gift 4:10-14
  - B. The previous gifts 4:15-20
- V. Greetings and benediction 4:21-23

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<sup>8</sup>Fee, p. 20.

## Exposition

### I. SALUTATION 1:1-2

Paul began this epistle by identifying himself and his companion and by wishing God's richest blessings on his readers.

"Almost all letters from the Greco-Roman period began with a threefold salutation: The Writer, to the Addressee, Greetings. Very often the next item in the letter would be a wish (sometimes a prayer) for the health or well-being of the addressee. Paul's letters, which generally follow this standard form, usually include a thanksgiving; in some of these, as here, he also includes a prayer-report. But in contrast to most of the ancient letters, which tend to be stereotyped, Paul tends to elaborate these formal items; and in so doing, everything Paul's hands touch come under the influence of the gospel, and thereby become distinctively Christian."<sup>9</sup>

1:1 Timothy was an associate of Paul's and may have served as his secretary as Paul wrote this letter (cf. 2 Thess. 3:17), but Timothy was not the co-author of it (cf. 1:3; 2:19-23). The Philippians knew him since he had been with Paul when Paul had founded the church in Philippi (Acts 16:1-12) and on subsequent occasions (Acts 19:22; 20:3-6).

Paul's lack of reference to his apostleship is in harmony with the overall emphasis of this epistle. This was a personal letter rather than one giving correction that needed apostolic authority behind it so the recipients would accept it and act on its instructions.

The writer characterized himself and Timothy as bond-servants (Greek *douloi*) of Christ, a favorite title of early Christian leaders (cf. James 1:1; 2 Peter 1:1; Jude 1:1). It stressed the strong commitment of the Christian to his or her Lord. The Septuagint translators of the Old Testament used *douloi* to describe Moses and other dedicated prophets (Ps. 105:26; Jer. 25:4; Amos 3:7) as did John when he described Moses (Rev. 15:3).

The apostle Paul was fond of addressing his fellow believers as saints (cf. Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:2; 1 Thess. 3:13; 2 Thess. 1:10; Phile. 5, 7). This title reflects the Christian's present justified standing before God though not necessarily his or her present sanctified standing in the sight of other people.

In no other of his epistles did Paul address the elders and deacons of the church specifically in the salutation. Perhaps they received special mention because Epaphroditus had come to Paul with money from the

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

Philippian church (2:25) and or because friction existed within this church (4:2-3). These are the two offices of the church that Paul expounded elsewhere (1 Tim. 3; Titus 1).

"Even though these titles occur only here and in the Pastoral Epistles in the Pauline corpus, one should not construe this to suggest either that the other Pauline churches did not have such leaders or that this is a later development in his churches."<sup>10</sup>

Normally Paul appointed elders in the churches that he founded (Acts 14:23). This was an office that carried over from Jewish synagogue life.<sup>11</sup> The elders whom Paul appointed were probably Jewish converts who had good backgrounds in the Old Testament. The terms elder, overseer, bishop, and pastor all refer to the same office.

The deacons were the official servants of the church who functioned as the elders' assistants. This is the only place in the New Testament beside 1 Timothy 3 where a New Testament writer mentioned both elders and deacons together as the leaders of the church. Note that in Philippi there was a plurality of both elders and deacons in the church. At this stage in the growth of the church probably there was only one church in Philippi and there was a plurality of both elders and deacons in the one assembly.<sup>12</sup>

This reference to elders and deacons does not prescribe that there must be a plurality of elders and or deacons in every modern church. The verse is descriptive rather than prescriptive. However it does indicate that there was a plurality of official leaders in this church. In this respect the Philippian church was typical of many others in its day (cf. Acts 14:13).

"No evidence exists for a single leader as the 'head' of the local assembly in the Pauline churches."<sup>13</sup>

1:2 Grace and peace were Paul's favorite words of blessing in his epistles. He wished that God would bestow these gifts on the Philippians even more than He had. Grace refers to God's unmerited favor and divine enablement. Peace is the cessation of hostilities and the inner tranquillity that are the result of God's grace. *Charis* (grace) is a variation on the word usually used in Greek salutations, namely, *chairein* meaning "greetings." *Shalom* (peace) was the traditional Jewish greeting that meant the full measure of divine blessing.

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>11</sup>Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, p. 154.

<sup>12</sup>J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, p. 74.

<sup>13</sup>Fee, p. 67.

The source of these blessings is God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul believed that Jesus possesses full authority with the Father.

". . . 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 fellows."<sup>14</sup>

## **II. PROLOGUE 1:3-26**

### **A. THANKSGIVING 1:3-8**

The apostle proceeded to express his sincere gratitude to God for his friends in Philippi. He did this to assure them of God's continuing working for them and his satisfaction with their partnership in the work of the gospel. In this section Paul introduced and summarized the main theme of Philippians, namely, partnership in the gospel. He stated it explicitly in verse 5 and developed it later in the body of the epistle (1:27—4:9).

- 1:3           The Christians in Philippi always caused Paul to give thanks to God when he prayed for them at his set times of prayer.<sup>15</sup> All of Paul's epistles begin with a similar commendation except Galatians. This thanksgiving is particularly warm.
- 1:4           Paul's imprisonment limited his ministry to the Philippian church, but he still prayed for his brethren in Philippi. His prayers were full of joy as he petitioned God for the saints there. Joy is a recurring motif in Philippians where the joy word group appears 16 times. The Greek word translated "prayer" (*deesis*) refers to requests. Several years of absence from these Christians had not led Paul to drop them from his prayer list. Every time Paul prayed for them, he did so with thanksgiving.
- 1:5           The reason Paul was always joyful as he prayed for the Philippians was their participation (NASB) or partnership (NIV, lit. fellowship, Gr. *koinonia*) in the gospel.

"It does not take much reading of Paul's letters to recognize that the gospel is the singular passion of his life; that passion is the glue that in particular holds this letter together. By 'the gospel,' especially in Philippians, Paul refers primarily neither to a body of teaching nor to

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<sup>14</sup>Hawthorne, p. 13. This commentator favored the view that the "and" between "bishops" and "deacons" should be interpreted epexegetically as "bishops who are deacons, i.e., servants." He saw only one type of church official in view, namely bishops.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., pp. 16-17.

proclamation. Above all, the gospel has to do with Christ, both his person and his work."<sup>16</sup>

The fellowship in view, as the use of this word in the New Testament indicates, means sharing together with mutual activity and mutual benefit in a close bond.<sup>17</sup> Partnership in the gospel includes partnership with God and with other believers that the gospel makes possible. It also involves participation in the work of getting the gospel to people. The Philippians had recently sent Paul a gift (4:10-14) and had done so more than once before (4:16; 2 Cor. 11:9). Even in Philippi he had received hospitality from Lydia (Acts 16:15) and the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:33-34). However, Paul's use of *koinonia* here implies a broader meaning than just physical assistance. It probably includes all that Paul and his readers shared as committed Christians who sought to disseminate the gospel.

"Paul's letter to the Philippians can be ranked as the second most important source for study of the biblical principles of financial stewardship. Only 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 provide a more extensive discussion of the topic."<sup>18</sup>

1:6 What was the good work to which Paul referred? If he had in mind only the generosity of his original readers, he may have meant that good work. However, as I have suggested, he seems to have had a much broader concept in mind, namely, what the work of the gospel produces: salvation. Who had begun this good work of salvation? It could only be God. Paul was confident that God would finish what He had begun in his beloved Philippians.

In the New Testament, God has revealed that salvation is a process. It involves justification when a sinner trusts Jesus Christ as his or her Savior. It includes progressive sanctification that occurs from the time of justification to the Christian's death or the Rapture. It culminates in glorification when the redeemed sinner finally sees Jesus Christ and experiences transformation into His image. Paul was confident that just as surely as God had justified the Philippians He would also continue to sanctify and eventually glorify them. Whereas we have a hand in the process of sanctification and can affect it by our obedience or disobedience, God alone justifies us. Regardless of our carnality or spirituality He will also glorify us (1 Cor. 15:50-57).

The aspect of sanctification that Paul had in view, considering verse 5, was the Philippians' partnership with him in the work of propagating the

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<sup>16</sup>Fee, p. 82.

<sup>17</sup>*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "koinonos," et al., by Friedrich Hauck, 3 (1965):798.

<sup>18</sup>John F. Brug, "The Principles of Financial Stewardship in Paul's Letter to the Philippians," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 86:3 (Summer 1989):215.

gospel. He was confident that God would continue His sanctifying work in them so they might become even more effective partners with him in this great task.

This verse does not teach that God will keep all Christians persevering in the faith and in good works faithfully until they die. Believers can and do resist, oppose, and limit God's sanctifying work in them (Eph. 4:30; 1 Thess. 5:19). Perseverance in faith and good works is not automatic for the Christian. The New Testament writers consistently urged us to persevere recognizing that some Christians will not do so (Titus 2:11-13; Heb. 2:1; 4:1; 6:1-8; et al.). Even some of Paul's fellow workers did not persevere faithfully (1 Tim. 1:18-20; 2 Tim. 2:17-18; 4:10). Even though some Christians do not persevere in faith and good works, God will persevere in bringing them to glory (i.e., will glorify them).<sup>19</sup> Thus it is God who perseveres in the work of salvation, not necessarily man.

Paul's reference to the day of Christ Jesus as the culmination of the Lord's work of salvation in the believer points to the day when He will return for His own, the Rapture. There are at least 18 references to this day in the New Testament (Rom. 13:12; 1 Cor. 1:8; 3:13; 5:5; 15:51; 2 Cor. 1:14; Phil. 1:6, 10; 2:16; 3:11, 20-21; 1 Thess. 4:17; 5:2, 4; 2 Thess. 1:10; 2 Tim. 1:12, 18; 4:8).

"The expression is similar to the 'day of the Lord' (1 Thess 5:2) and the OT 'day of Jehovah' (Amos 5:18-20). However, in contrast to the OT emphasis on judgment, the 'day of Christ Jesus' is mentioned in all cases with reference to the NT church. It will be the time when Christ returns for his church, salvation is finally completed, and believers' works are examined and the believer rewarded."<sup>20</sup>

This is one of the most comforting verses in the Bible for Christians. Our getting to heaven safely does not depend on us, on our ability to hold on and to persevere faithfully to the end of our lives. The Lord will see to it that we reach heaven safely in spite of our failures and shortcomings. Salvation is God's work, not man's (Jon. 2:9). As surely as He has already delivered us from the penalty of sin (Rom. 5:1), He will one day deliver us from the presence of sin (cf. Rom. 8:31-39).

Verses 3-6 summarize the entire epistle. They introduce the main theme, which is the Philippians' partnership in the gospel.

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<sup>19</sup>See Charlie Bing, "Does Philippians 1:6 Teach Perseverance?" *Grace Evangelical Society News* 6:2 (February 1991):2.

<sup>20</sup>Homer A. Kent Jr., "Philippians," in *Ephesians-Philemon*, vol. 11 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, pp. 105-6. See also the note on 1 Cor. 1:8 in the *New Scofield Reference Bible*.

"All the rest of the letter is concerned primarily with their development as *koinonoi* [partners] so that they may be blessed with a temporally fruitful, eternally rewardable partnership in the gospel."<sup>21</sup>

1:7 Verses 7 and 8 express the basis of Paul's confidence that he just expressed (v. 6). They also develop the theme of partnership in the gospel.

How did Paul feel about the Philippians? He felt joyful (v. 4; cf. 1:9-11, 25, 27-28; 2:2, 12-18; 3:16-17; 4:17). The reason he said it was right for him to feel that way was the partnership in the gospel that they shared with him. The figurative use of "heart" (Gr. *kardia*) refers to the whole personality: intellect, emotions, and will, not just sentiment.<sup>22</sup> The Philippians were in Paul's prayers (vv. 3-4) and on his mind (not on his nerves). This is the proof that they were on his heart. Here is the first use of a key word in Philippians (Gr. *phroneo*) translated "to feel." The word means to hold a mind-set that expresses itself in proper action. Paul developed this concept later (cf. 2:1-5; 3:15, 19; 4:2, 10). The same "mind" is necessary if partners are to progress toward perfection (v. 6).

Even though many miles separated the writer and the original readers, Paul viewed their relationship as intimate since they shared salvation and their calling to spread the gospel. Not only were they bound together in the gospel (v. 5) but more specifically they were one in imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. The Philippians had not only been in prison with Paul in spirit, but they had been willing to associate with and minister to him in prison through Epaphroditus.

Defending and confirming the gospel are positive and negative aspects of proclaiming it. However, Paul may have meant more than that since these terms have legal connotations. A defense (Gr. *apologia*) elsewhere sometimes refers to a legal defense (e.g., Acts 22:1; 25:16; 2 Tim. 4:16). Moreover confirming (Gr. *bebaiosis*) meant to guarantee security (e.g., Heb. 6:16). Paul may have had his upcoming trial in mind. That occasion would be one more opportunity to herald the gospel. It was that great task that united Paul and the Philippians in such close bonds of fellowship.

"Partakers . . . with me" (NASB) and "you share . . . with me" (NIV) are translations of a Greek word (*sugkoinonous*) that means fellow partners. Paul and the Philippians partook together of the enabling grace that God provides for those who confirm and defend the gospel (cf. 1:29-30; 3:1;

<sup>21</sup>Robert C. Swift, "The Theme and Structure of Philippians," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 141:563 (July-September 1984):238. See also Robert Jewett, "The Epistolary Thanksgiving and the Integrity of Philippians," *Novum Testamentum* 12:1 (January 1970):53.

<sup>22</sup>*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "*kardia*," by Friedrich Baumgartel and Johannes Behm, 3 (1965):605-14.

4:4). Here Paul introduced the idea of suffering in the work of proclaiming the gospel, which he developed later.

"While suffering is not the dominant motif in Philippians, it constitutes the church's primary historical context *in Philippi* and thus underlies much of the letter. . . .

"Second, opposition and suffering probably lie behind a further—seldom noted—major motif in the letter: Paul's repeated emphasis on the believer's sure future with its eschatological triumph."<sup>23</sup>

1:8 Only God really knew how strongly Paul longed for his brothers and sisters back in Philippi. Consequently the apostle called on Him as his witness to his professions of affection. Paul's feelings were similar to those of his Lord Jesus Christ who generated them in the apostle.

". . . 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 (*pantas hymas*) 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)."<sup>24</sup>

These expressions of thanksgiving provide insight into the unity that exists among believers and between believers and our Lord. The gospel and salvation are the great unifying elements.

### **B. PRAYER 1:9-11**

Paul had already written that he prayed for the Philippians (vv. 3-4). Now he explained what he prayed so his readers would know specifically what the apostle was asking God to do for them. In response to God's working in them (v. 6) it was imperative that they continue to grow in the virtues identified here, specifically intelligent discerning love. Note the balance of divine sovereignty and human responsibility in this pericope.

1:9 By praying Paul acknowledged the importance of asking God to work (cf. James 4:2). We may not be able to explain fully why God has ordained prayer as a vehicle whereby He works in the world or how prayer works. Nevertheless Scripture is unmistakably clear that prayer does affect

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<sup>23</sup>Fee, p. 30.

<sup>24</sup>Hawthorne, p. 24.

objective change.<sup>25</sup> Consequently we should make use of this great privilege as Paul did.

Paul's petition was three-fold. He prayed that his readers would be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ (v. 10b). In order for them to be that he prayed that they would approve excellent things (v. 10a). To do that he prayed that their love would abound even more (v. 9). Self-sacrificing love (Gr. *agape*) should be the motive behind partnership (Gr. *koinonia*) in the gospel. Paul illustrated the importance of this shortly with examples of preachers who demonstrated improper and proper motives (1:15-18).

The Philippians had already given evidence of possessing the love that God alone can produce (1 Cor. 13:1-3; Gal. 5:22) in their dealings with the apostle. Paul asked God that that love might increase even more. He did not limit the objects of that love in this verse. They probably included God, Paul, other believers, and all people.

However, he did qualify that love as resting on real knowledge and all discernment. It should arise from an intelligent appraisal of reality. It should also rest on spiritual sensitivity to truth as God has revealed it in His Word and not on mere sentimentality. God's revelation and His Spirit were to guide their loving. This kind of loving becomes apparent when a Christian values highly the things that God loves and turns away from situations and influences that God hates. In the context this discernment applies primarily to what will advance the gospel best (cf. vv. 12-26).

1:10 Possessing this kind of abounding love would enable the Philippians to give approval to things of the greatest value and importance. Conversely they would disapprove things of lesser significance. Most of the choices that a spiritual believer faces are not between morally good and morally evil things but between things of lesser and greater value. The things that we choose because we love them reflect how discerning our love really is.

The ultimate end in view emerges in the second part of this verse. We need to love in harmony with God's revelation and with His Spirit's guidance (v. 9) so we will choose the best over the good (v. 10a). This will result in our being without flaw (sincere) and without blame (blameless) when we stand before God to give an account of the stewardship of our lives at the judgment seat (v. 10b; 2 Cor. 5:10; cf. 1 John 3:3).

*"Aproskopos* has to do with being 'blameless' in the sense of 'not offending' or not causing someone else to stumble."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>See John Munro, "Prayer to a Sovereign God," *Interest* 56:2 (February 1990):20-21, and Thomas L. Constable, "What Prayer Will and Will Not Change," in *Essays in Honor of J. Dwight Pentecost*, pp. 99-113.

1:11 This verse modifies the last half of verse 10. The only way we will be able to stand before God sincere and blameless is if we allow the Holy Spirit to control us. If we do, He will fill our lives with the fruit that is the product of His righteousness (Gal. 5:22-23). This righteousness and its fruit come to us through Jesus Christ, not as a result of our own good deeds. Therefore all the glory and praise for our righteousness, our fruit, and hopefully our flawless and blameless condition at the judgment seat of Christ, goes to God. He is the ultimate source of it all (cf. Eph. 1:6, 12, 14).

What an excellent prayer this is! In our day when we tend to voice prayer requests for physical needs primarily we need to follow Paul's example of putting the spiritual needs of others high on our prayer lists. Christians still need God's supernatural enablement to value highly the things of greatest importance as revealed in Scripture. Only then will we make choices that will prepare us to give a good account of ourselves at the judgment seat of Christ.

"Paul uses three thoughts in Philippians 1:1-11 that describe true Christian fellowship: I have you in my mind (Phil. 1:3-6), I have you in my heart (Phil. 1:7-8), I have you in my prayers (Phil. 9-11)."<sup>27</sup>

### **C. PROGRESS REPORT 1:12-26**

Paul proceeded from his introductory comments to explain his personal circumstances because these were of interest to his readers and profitable for them to understand. In relating them the apostle revealed a spiritual viewpoint that is a model for all believers for all time. This "biographical prologue"<sup>28</sup> illustrates how the principles for effective partnership in the gospel that Paul introduced in verses 3-11 were working out for the furtherance of the gospel in his own circumstances.

He began by relating what had happened because of his imprisonment in the past (vv. 12-18) and then explained what was happening in the present (vv. 19-26).

#### **1. Paul's present imprisonment 1:12-18**

1:12 This verse is a topic sentence for all that follows through verse 26. Whenever Paul wrote, "I want you to know," he introduced something important (cf. 2 Cor. 13:6; 2 Tim. 3:1).

His readers could very understandably have concluded that Paul's imprisonment had brought the building of the church of Jesus Christ to a standstill, or at least slowed its progress significantly. However the apostle

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<sup>26</sup>Fee, p. 102.

<sup>27</sup>Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Joyful*, pp. 21-22; idem, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 2:64.

<sup>28</sup>Swift, p. 241.

announced that this had not happened. Rather his imprisonment was resulting in the advancement of God's program. In relation to the progress of the gospel, Paul's imprisonment was really a good thing, a positive situation.

"The same God who used Moses' rod, Gideon's pitchers, and David's sling, used Paul's chains."<sup>29</sup>

1:13 The point of this verse is that because of Paul's imprisonment in Rome many people had heard the gospel who would not otherwise have heard it. The phrase, "my imprisonment in *the cause of Christ*,"<sup>30</sup> (NASB) or, "I am in chains for Christ," (NIV) in the Greek text stresses an important fact. Paul's relationship to Christ, not just his service for Christ, was what had become known. People had become aware of Paul's personal relationship with the Savior because he had shared his testimony with them.

Two groups had received the apostle's witness, the praetorian guard and many other people. The praetorian guard probably refers to the soldiers who were members of the regiment assigned to guard many of the high-ranking officials in the Roman government.<sup>31</sup> These soldiers were also responsible to guard prisoners who had appealed to Caesar such as Paul. It was an honor to be one of these guards. They would have been with Paul in his hired house where he was under house arrest 24 hours a day (cf. Acts 28:30-31). Paul had the opportunity to witness to many of these high-ranking soldiers, and he viewed this as a great blessing.

The "everyone else" group included unsaved members of the Jewish community (Acts 28:17-29), some Gentiles (e.g., Phile. 10), and Paul's fellow Christians. Paul evidently was communicating with many people even though he was a prisoner.

1:14 A second reason Paul felt encouraged even though he was in prison was this. His example of aggressive witness had inspired the Roman Christians to be more outspoken in sharing the gospel. Rather than taking a lower profile because their leader was in chains, most of the local believers felt inspired by Paul's courage. They were standing up boldly for Christ and trusting Him as they had not done before.

1:15 Of these local Roman Christians who were now witnessing and preaching more boldly there were two types distinguished by their motivation.<sup>32</sup> Some were hoping to advance their own reputations by their activities.

<sup>29</sup>Wiersbe, *Be Joyful*, p. 32; idem, *The Bible . . .*, 2:67.

<sup>30</sup>The translators added the words in italics.

<sup>31</sup>The praetorian guard was also a place. See the extended discussion of this reference in J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians*, pp. 99-104.

<sup>32</sup>Note the chiastic structure of verses 15-17.

They were envious of Paul's prominence and were striving with their fellow believers for selfish reasons.<sup>33</sup> Others had a sincere desire to reach the lost and to meet the needs that Paul's confinement had created.

- 1:16 Love for God and Paul motivated the members of this second group. Moreover they believed the apostle's present confinement was a situation that God had ordained for the defense of the gospel. They evidently accepted this by faith even though they may not have understood how Paul's imprisonment fit into God's plan for the building of His church.
- 1:17 Paul's arrival in Rome may have caused some of the self-seeking opportunists in the Roman church some distress. Attention would have shifted from them to him. Nevertheless with him in confinement they had an opportunity to regain the spotlight by becoming more active and outspoken. Evidently some of them thought that their prominence would distress Paul as his prominence distressed them, but Paul was much less selfish than they were.
- 1:18 The idiom *ti gar*, translated, "What then?" in the NASB, means, "What does it matter?" (NIV). While motivation is important, it is even more important that the gospel gets proclaimed. Paul believed that it was better for people with impure motives to preach Christ than that they not preach Him at all.

"The power of the gospel, therefore, does not depend on the character of the preacher."<sup>34</sup>

Paul's judgment here, by the way, is an example of seeking the best rather than just the good (cf. vv. 9-10). He rejoiced and would continue to rejoice that his imprisonment had resulted in the more extensive proclamation of the good news of salvation.

". . . when you have the single mind, you look upon your circumstances as God-given opportunities for the furtherance of the Gospel, and you rejoice at *what God is going to do* instead of complaining about *what God did not do*."<sup>35</sup>

Verses 12-18 present Paul as a positive model for all believers. Rather than valuing his own comfort, reputation, and freedom above all else, he put the advancement of God's plan first. He discerned what was best (v. 10). He could maintain a truly joyful attitude even in unpleasant circumstances because he derived his joy from seeing God glorified

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<sup>33</sup>This view seems more probable than that they were the Judaizers Paul spoke of later in 3:1-16.

<sup>34</sup>Hawthorne, p. 39.

<sup>35</sup>Wiersbe, *Be Joyful*, p. 34; idem, *The Bible . . .*, 2:68.

rather than from seeing himself exalted. His behavior in prison had been pure and blameless (cf. v. 10).

## **2. Paul's anticipated deliverance 1:19-26**

At this point Paul's thinking turned from what had already occurred because of his imprisonment to what he anticipated happening in the future. He referred to this so his readers would uphold him in their prayers and feel encouraged to adopt his viewpoint in their own situation in life.

1:19           The antecedent of "this" is probably the things that had happened to Paul to which he had just been referring in verses 12-18.

What deliverance did he have in mind, physical deliverance from imprisonment or some spiritual deliverance? Later in this epistle Paul said he anticipated release from prison (1:25; 2:24). However the verses that follow this one (v. 19) point to his thinking of the completion of salvation that he had referred to previously (v. 6). Earlier he had spoken of the completion of the Philippians' salvation. Here he spoke of the end of his own. The Greek word translated "deliverance" is *soteria*, the standard rendering of which is "salvation." Probably Paul meant that his prison experiences and the consequent furtherance of the gospel were all part of God's completing the good work that He had begun in him.

Two means were necessary for this salvation to reach fulfillment. Paul was counting on the prayers of the Philippians and the Lord's provision of enablement through His Spirit. Does this mean that if the Philippians failed to pray for Paul God's work in him would suffer? Yes, but the salvation in view is progressive sanctification, not glorification. God and people work together in the process of sanctification, but glorification is God's work alone.

By the provision of the Spirit Paul evidently meant the provision of grace that comes through the Spirit. God does not give His Spirit in measure (i.e., some now and more later, John 3:34). Obviously there is a vital connection between prayer and the Spirit's enablement. Paul referred to the Spirit as the Spirit of Jesus Christ here. Perhaps he did so because he had been thinking of Jesus Christ as the One before whom we will all appear when our salvation is complete (vv. 6, 10).

1:20           Paul did not want to feel ashamed when he stood before the Lord at His judgment seat.<sup>36</sup> Moreover he was confident that with the prayer support of the Philippians and the Holy Spirit's enablement he would not. Nevertheless he felt the need for courage. After all, he still had to stand

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<sup>36</sup>The phrase "my earnest expectation and hope" is probably a hendiadys meaning "my hope-filled eager expectation" (NEB).

before Caesar and undergo a Roman trial. His greatest desire, however, was that he would continue to exalt Jesus Christ whether that meant that he live or die.

"The believer's body is a 'lens' that makes a 'little Christ' look very big, and a 'distant Christ' come very close."<sup>37</sup>

The use of the passive "be exalted" rather than the active "I exalt Christ" is unusual. It reflects Paul's conviction that essentially the Christian life involves following the leading of God's indwelling Spirit rather than seizing the initiative and doing things for God (cf. Gal. 5:18).

1:21 This great testimonial affirmation succinctly summarizes Paul's philosophy of life. For him, regardless of the decision about whether he would continue to live or die or the opinions of other people, saved or lost, his whole life revolved around Jesus Christ. Jesus' work on the cross had become the reason for all that Paul did. Appreciation for Christ motivated all that he did. His present enablement through the Spirit was the source of his strength. The prospect of seeing Jesus Christ and standing before Him one day drew him and constituted the goal for all he did. Many people today, if they were honest, would have to say that for them to live is money, fame, happiness, family, or any of a multitude of idols.<sup>38</sup> However, Jesus Christ was the sun around which Paul's life orbited.

If the Emperor's verdict was death, Paul would be better off than if he continued to live. He would go into the presence of his Lord and be free forever from the shackles of sin, suffering, and sorrow. Furthermore he would have glorified God by persevering faithfully to the end of his life. The Christian can take a radically different view of death than the unbeliever who has no hope, as Paul did (cf. 1 Thess. 4:13-18).

"Paul's hope for the future, centered as it was in Jesus, kept him from making too much of his current circumstances. This hope enabled him to reassess his circumstances, not by suppressing his emotions, evident throughout this letter, but by relating them to God's sovereignty and to Jesus' centrality in life."<sup>39</sup>

1:22 The prospect of a few more years of life and service was not unattractive to the great apostle either. He saw living as an opportunity to continue serving the person of Christ and building up the body of Christ. He could continue to labor, and his work would produce fruit for eternity. Satanic

<sup>37</sup>Wiersbe, *Be Joyful*, p. 38; idem, *The Bible . . .*, 2:69.

<sup>38</sup>See Swindoll, p. 57.

<sup>39</sup>Darrell L. Bock, "A Theology of Paul's Prison Epistles," in *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, p. 322.

opposition had always marked Paul's labors, but he was willing to continue to face that. He was glad the choice of living or dying was not his to make since both options had positive features for him.

- 1:23 Paul felt himself in a bind. If forced to choose life or death, he faced a hard decision. On the one hand he desired to depart this life and go to be with the Lord forever (2 Cor. 5:8). That would be better for him personally. If Paul had believed in purgatory or soul sleep, he would hardly have said he regarded death as a preferable alternative to life.

"It seems most likely, therefore, that Paul expected to be 'with the Lord' in full consciousness."<sup>40</sup>

The same Greek word translated "depart" (*analuō*) appears elsewhere describing the release of a prisoner from his bonds (Acts 16:26) and the departure of a guest from a wedding feast (Luke 12:36).

- 1:24 Viewed from a different perspective it might be better if he lived. The Philippians would profit from Paul's lengthened life and future ministry to them.

Note that Paul did not mention that life was preferable because he could avoid the pain and suffering of death. He did not refer to separation from his loved ones or from what he had worked so hard to accumulate either. These are reasons many people give for not wanting to die. His love for Jesus Christ and other people were the driving motives in Paul's life, not selfishness (cf. Matt. 22:37-39).

- 1:25 After weighing all the evidence it seemed to Paul that he would probably live a little longer. He evidently believed this because the case his accusers had brought against him was not strong (cf. Acts 23:29; 25:25; 26:31-32). The fact that he said, "I know that I shall remain," raises the question of whether he had received some special revelation. That is a possibility, but the Greek word translated "know" (*oida*) does not mean infallible knowledge necessarily (cf. Acts 20:25).

Statements in the Pastoral Epistles as well as in the writings of some of the early church fathers indicate that Nero released Paul from his first Roman imprisonment in A.D. 62. The apostle resumed his missionary labors and returned to Macedonia and probably to Philippi. However, the Romans arrested him again, imprisoned him in Rome a second time, and then executed him as a martyr there in A.D. 68.<sup>41</sup> If this information is true, he probably did contribute to the spiritual progress and joy of the Philippians as he said he hoped he could here.

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<sup>40</sup>Fee, p. 149.

<sup>41</sup>Consult the New Testament introductions listed in the bibliography for fuller discussion of these matters.

1:26 The idea contained in this verse is that Paul's renewed ministry among the Philippians would give them reasons to be even more joyful. His ministry among them would enable them to appreciate the riches of their salvation more fully. "Proud confidence" (NASB, Gr. *kauchema*) means ground for joy. "Coming" (Gr. *parousia*) is the same word Paul used to describe the Lord's return (1 Thess. 3:13).

"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)."<sup>42</sup>

The major value of this pericope (vv. 19-26) is its revelation of Paul's attitude toward life and death. When a person faces the possibility of dying soon, his or her real values often become obvious. Paul's Christ-centered life is certainly a fine example for all Christians to emulate.<sup>43</sup> Here he discerned what was best regarding his own desires and the Philippians' spiritual progress (cf. v. 9). Paul's desire to glorify Jesus Christ kept him pure (v. 10; cf. vv. 17-18). This section provides a smooth transition from Paul's thanksgiving and prayer into the body of the epistle.

### **III. PARTNERSHIP IN THE GOSPEL 1:27—4:9**

Paul had been saying he hoped to be able to revisit Philippi and to minister to his original readers again in person. However, he was not sure that he could do that. This uncertain state of affairs led him to exhort them now that he had the opportunity. Whether he came to them or not, their duty was the same. In the following verses he emphasized the importance of certain qualities essential to conduct worthy of the Lord. He did this so his readers would perceive the importance of these traits and give them proper attention.

#### **A. A WORTHY WALK 1:27-30**

The first sub-section (1:27-30) begins with a topic sentence that expresses Paul's desire for the Philippians. Then he proceeded to explain and to illustrate what constitutes a worthy walk (2:1—4:9).

"With this section we come to the heart of matters, the primary reason for having written this letter . . . And here in particular the three-way bond that holds the letter together stands out [i.e., Christ, Paul, and the Philippians]. The problem is not schism, but posturing and bickering—selfish ambition, empty conceit, complaining, arguing. At stake is the gospel in Philippi—Christ himself, if you will."<sup>44</sup>

<sup>42</sup>Hawthorne, p. 53.

<sup>43</sup>Note that Paul referred to Christ by name nine times in verses 13-26.

<sup>44</sup>Fee, p. 158.

"The Christian life is not a playground; it is a battleground. We are *sons* in the family, enjoying the *fellowship* of the Gospel (1:1-11); we are *servants* sharing in the *furtherance* of the Gospel (1:12-26); but we are also *soldiers* defending the *faith* of the Gospel. And the believer with the single mind can have the joy of the Holy Spirit even in the midst of battle."<sup>45</sup>

1:27            The first part of this verse gives the main command in the section (1:27—4:9) and the reason for it.

The phrase "conduct yourselves in a manner worthy" is just one word in the Greek text (*politeuesthe*). It means literally "to live as a citizen." This was a specially appropriate term to use in a letter to people who took great pride in their Roman citizenship (cf. Acts 16:12, 20-21). The Philippian Christians, however, were also citizens of a more important kingdom, a heavenly one. As such they needed to stand firm in one spirit. Philippi was a colony of Rome in Macedonia, and the church was a colony of heaven in Philippi.

"It [the Gr. word *stekete*, translated "stand firm"] 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 . . .)."<sup>46</sup>

The following explanatory phrase "with one mind" (lit. with one soul, Gr. *psyche*) points to Christian unity being in Paul's mind as well as their unity in the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 4:32).

Unity in the church is necessary so believers can work together effectively as a team carrying out the will of God. "Striving together" is an athletic metaphor. Specifically the church's task is to proclaim and promote the Christian faith embodied in the gospel message.

Paul identified two essential qualities in this verse, unity and steadfastness (cf. 1:5-6). He then proceeded to develop them more fully in the verses that follow.

"A 'worthy walk,' then, means specifically the achievement of true Christian unity among themselves, and steadfastness against enemies of the gospel."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>Wiersbe, *Be Joyful*, p. 41; idem, *The Bible . . .*, 2:70.

<sup>46</sup>Hawthorne, p. 56.

<sup>47</sup>Swift, p. 243.

1:28 The Christians in Philippi should not let the opposition of unbelievers frighten or detract them from their mission.

"The verb here translated 'to be intimidated' (*ptyresthai*) 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) or lose control of themselves as a result of the attacks of their adversaries."<sup>48</sup>

The adversaries in this case seem to have been outside the church, but exactly who they were is unknown.<sup>49</sup> Probably all external opponents to the work of God are in view.

The failure of the believers' enemies to intimidate them would be a sign of the final victory of the church. The opponents of the Christians and even the believers themselves might not perceive this, but this was true. "Salvation" has the connotation of vindication here (cf. v. 19).

The antecedent of "that" in the phrase "and that from (or by) God" cannot be "sign" or "salvation (or saved)" both of which are feminine in the Greek text. "That" is neuter and probably refers to the fact that God gives believers courage to stand firm when opposed. This is the main thought in the preceding verse.

1:29 All believers have received a gracious gift from God. It is the privilege of suffering for Jesus Christ. The Greek word *echaristhe*, translated "granted," comes from *charis*, meaning "grace." Few Christians view suffering for their testimony as a blessing, but that is really what it is. Suffering is one of the tools God uses to mold his children into vessels that bring glory to His Son (cf. James 1:3-4; 1 Pet. 1:6-7). Suffering even perfected the Lord Jesus (Heb. 2:10).

1:30 The Philippians were experiencing the same type of suffering that Paul had during his whole ministry. They had witnessed his struggles in Philippi when he had planted the church there and perhaps in his subsequent ministry there. They had also heard of his sufferings in Rome (2:26).

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<sup>48</sup>Hawthorne, p. 58.

<sup>49</sup>See Herbert W. Bateman IV, "Were the Opponents at Philippi Necessarily Jewish?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155:617 (January-March 1998):39-61.

"One of the reasons most of us in the West do not know more about the content of vv. 29-30 is that we have so poorly heeded the threefold exhortation that precedes . . ." <sup>50</sup>

In calling his readers to unite in steadfastly enduring the antagonism of unbelievers in their area, Paul was not asking them to do something he himself had not done. He was urging them to unite with one another, and with him, and to view suffering for their faith as a privilege that would glorify Jesus Christ. This exhortation is necessary today when we feel tempted to agree with unbelievers rather than taking a firm stand for our Lord.

## **B. UNITY AND STEADFASTNESS 2:1—4:1**

### **1. Walking in unity ch. 2**

In expounding on the importance of unity and steadfastness as essential for partnership in the work of the gospel, Paul dealt first with the importance of walking in unity.<sup>51</sup> He explained the basis for unity and illustrated this basis with the example of Christ. He then clarified the believers' responsibility and further illustrated with his own example and that of two of his fellow workers.

#### **The foundation for unity 2:1-4**

Paul advocated humility, namely, concern for the needs of others, not just one's own needs, as the basis for unity in the church (cf. 1:22-26; 2:21).

". . . someone well said: 'Love begins when someone else's needs are more important than my own,' which is precisely what Paul will urge in the elaboration that follows."<sup>52</sup>

2:1           The apostle introduced his comments on submissiveness by giving his readers four incentives. He stated each one in a conditional clause that he introduced with the word "if." He assumed each one to be true for the sake of his argument (a first class condition in Greek). The translators have supplied the verb that Paul did not state. The NASB has "there is," but the NIV gives a better sense of Paul's meaning with "you have." We could read each of the four clauses, "Since you have . . ."

The first reason Christians can and should be submissive to God and to one another is that Jesus Christ has exhorted (Gr. *parakalesis*) us to do so.

<sup>50</sup>Fee, p. 173.

<sup>51</sup>Several writers have suggested that unity is the major theme in Philippians. These include Robert Gromacki, *Stand United in Joy*; Frank Stagg, "Philippians," in *Broadman Bible Commentary*; Howard Vos, *Philippians: A Study Guide*; and Gerald Blazek, "Unity through Humility in Philippians," (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1977). I do not believe unity is a comprehensive enough theme in the book for it to be the main theme though it is certainly an important sub-theme.

<sup>52</sup>Fee, p. 185.

His teachings while on the earth, as well as those that followed through His apostles after He returned to heaven, specifically Paul, encourage us to be humble. His personal example during His earthly ministry also encourages us similarly.

Second, Paul's love for the Philippians, which came as a comforting gift from God, should impel them to respond positively to his request also.

Third, the fellowship that the Holy Spirit creates should also make us submissive (cf. 2 Cor. 13:13; Eph. 4:3). It seems best to take this reference as including both our participation in the Spirit and the common life that He has created for us.<sup>53</sup> The former incentives also come from being in Christ and from love. Another option is just our participation in the Spirit.<sup>54</sup>

Fourth, the tenderness (affection) and compassion, or the affectionate sympathy, of God and Christ toward the Philippians would make unity normal and expected for this congregation.

2:2 Paul stated his exhortation to submissiveness in the first part of this verse and then elaborated on it. The apostle wanted his readers to be one in their attitude and purpose so they could fulfill God's purpose for them individually and as a church. To accomplish this they would need to be humble and submissive in these areas of their lives. The result would be that Paul's joy because of this congregation, which was already great, would become complete.

Four participial phrases elaborate on this exhortation. The first is that the readers should maintain love for one another. The second is that they should maintain unity in spirit and purpose.

2:3 Third, they should view other people as more important than themselves (cf. 1:17).

"This is the linchpin that guarantees the success of the Christian community."<sup>55</sup>

The popular idea that we should put ourselves first goes all the way back to the Fall. Unsaved people in Paul's day did not view humility as a virtue

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<sup>53</sup>Kent, p. 121; William Hendricksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Philippians and Exposition of Colossians and Philemon*, p. 98, n. 73. We should probably regard the genitive as both objective and subjective rather than just objective.

<sup>54</sup>Ralph Martin, *The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians*, pp. 48-49, 91.

<sup>55</sup>Hawthorne, p. 69.

any more than most people today do.<sup>56</sup> Paul was not advocating an unrealistic view of life. He was not saying we should view everyone as better than ourselves in every way. His point was that we should view others as worthy of more consideration than we give ourselves (cf. Rom. 12:10).

2:4 Fourth, the readers should consider the interests and affairs of one another, not just their own. Verse 3 deals with how we *view* other people, and this one deals with how we *relate* to them. We have a duty to be responsible and to look out for the needs of our families (1 Tim. 5:8). However the believer's sphere of concern should be broader than this and should include the needs of the members of his or her extended Christian family as well. In a larger sphere this attitude should also encompass unbelievers.

"One must also be careful not to push this clause beyond Paul's own intent, which is not concerned with whether one ever 'looks out for oneself'—the 'also' in the final line assumes that one will do that under any circumstances—but with the basic orientation of one's life . . ."<sup>57</sup>

#### **Contrasts between a Helper and a Servant**

##### **A Helper**

##### **A Servant**

A helper helps others when it is convenient.	A servant serves others even when it is inconvenient.
A helper helps people that he or she likes.	A servant serves even people that he or she dislikes.
A helper helps when he or she enjoys the work.	A servant serves even when he or she dislikes the work.
A helper helps when the circumstances are convenient.	A servant serves even when the circumstances are inconvenient.
A helper helps with a view to obtaining personal satisfaction.	A servant serves even when he or she receives no personal satisfaction.
A helper helps with an attitude of assisting another.	A servant serves with an attitude of enabling another.

#### **The example of Christ 2:5-11**

This paragraph is the most important one in the epistle and the most difficult to interpret.

<sup>56</sup>*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "tareinos," et al., by Walter Grundmann, 8 (1972):11-12.

<sup>57</sup>Fee, p. 190.

"By anyone's reckoning, 2:6-11 constitutes the single most significant block of material in Philippians."<sup>58</sup>

2:5 Paul introduced an illustration of what he meant, namely, the example of Jesus Christ. He wanted his readers to remember that the very qualities he had been advocating were observable in the Lord Jesus. This verse introduces one of the great Christological passages in the New Testament (vv. 5-11).

". . . the secret of Christian joy is found in the way the believer thinks—his attitudes."<sup>59</sup>

2:6 This verse begins a section of exalted prose that continues through verse 11.<sup>60</sup> The parallels in thought and action between these verses, which describe Jesus' humility, and John 13:3-17, which records Jesus washing His disciples feet, are striking.

The Son of God's preincarnate state is quite clearly in view here (cf. 2 Cor. 8:9). He existed in the form of God. The word translated "form" (NASB) or "nature" (NIV, Gr. *morphe*) refers to outward appearance that accurately reveals the inward nature. It does not mean outward appearance that changes as a result of time and circumstances (Gr. *schema*, v. 7).

"To say that he was existing in the essential metaphysical form of God is tantamount to saying that he possessed the nature of God."<sup>61</sup>

The verb translated "existed" (NASB) or "being" (NIV) is in the present tense in the Greek text and points to the Lord's continuing existence with the full nature of God. His full deity is not something Jesus Christ gave up or laid aside when He became a man at the Incarnation.

"This, then, is what it means for Christ to be 'in the "form" of God'; it means 'to be equal with God,' not in the sense that the two phrases are identical, but that both point to the same reality. Together, therefore, they are among the strongest expressions of Christ's deity in the NT. This means further that 'equality with God' is not that which he

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<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>59</sup>Wiersbe, *Be Joyful*, p. 9.

<sup>60</sup>See Gordon D. Fee, "Philippians 2:5-11: Hymn or Exalted Pauline Prose?" *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 2 (1992):29-46; idem, *Paul's Letter . . .*, pp. 40-43. Most commentators, however, took this section as an early Christian hymn, but Fee's rebuttal of this view is convincing.

<sup>61</sup>Kent, p. 123.

desired which was not his, but precisely that which was *always* his."<sup>62</sup>

The Lord Jesus' equality with God did change in some sense, however. The manner in which He existed as God changed when He became a man. He willingly adopted a manner of existence that was different from His father's, namely, that of the God-man.

"Our doctrine of Christ's humiliation will be better understood if we put it midway between two pairs of erroneous views, making it the third of five. The list would be as follows: (1) Gess: The Logos gave up all divine attributes; (2) Thomasius: The Logos gave up relative attributes only [i.e., omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence]; (3) True View: The Logos gave up the independent exercise of divine attributes; (4) Old Orthodoxy: Christ gave up the use of divine attributes; (5) Anselm: Christ acted as if he did not possess divine attributes."<sup>63</sup>

". . . while it is not true that Christ in the incarnation surrendered the relative attributes of omnipresence, omnipotence and omniscience, He did embark upon a program where it was necessary to submit to a voluntary nonuse of these attributes in order to obtain His objectives. Christ does not seem to have ever exercised His divine attributes on His own behalf though they had abundant display in His miracles. This is qualified to some extent by the fact that His omniscience is revealed in His prophetic ministry, but He did not use His divine knowledge to make His own path easier. He suffered all the inconveniences of His day even though in His divine omniscience He had full knowledge of every human device ever conceived for human comfort. In His human nature there was growth in knowledge, but this must not be construed as a contradiction of His divine omniscience. Limitations in knowledge as well as limitations in power are related to the human nature and not to the divine. His omnipotence was manifested in many ways and specifically in the many miracles which He did, in some cases by the power of the Holy Spirit and in others on the basis of His own word of authority. Here again He did not use His omnipotence to make His way easy and He knew the fatigue of labor and travelling by walking. Though in His divine nature He was

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<sup>62</sup>Fee, *Paul's Letter . . .*, pp. 207-8.

<sup>63</sup>A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, p. 704.

omnipresent, He did not use this attribute to avoid the long journeys on foot nor was He ever seen in His ministry in more than one place at a time. In a word, He restricted the benefits of His attributes as they pertained to His walk on earth and voluntarily chose not to use His powers to lift Himself above ordinary human limitations.

"The act of kenosis as stated in Philippians 2 may therefore be properly understood to mean that Christ surrendered no attribute of Deity, but that He did voluntarily restrict their independent use in keeping with His purpose of living among men and their limitations."<sup>64</sup>

"Voluntarily he chose not to use some of his divine attributes during his earthly pilgrimage (Matt. 24:36)."<sup>65</sup>

"It seems to me that even evangelicals blunt the point of the passage by missing its principal emphasis as suggested above and focusing on trying to delineate what limitations Christ experienced in His earthly state. To be sure, the *God-Man* experienced limitations; but equally sure the *God-Man* evidenced the prerogatives of Deity. Therefore, conservatives suggest that the *kenosis* means the veiling of Christ's preincarnate glory, which is true only in a relative sense (see Matt. 17:1-8; John 1:14; 17:5). Or they suggest it means the voluntary nonuse of some of His attributes of Deity. This was true on occasion but certainly not always throughout His life (see [John] 1:48; 2:24; 16:30). Neither did He only do His miracles always in the power of the Spirit, but sometimes in His own power (Luke 22:51; John 18:6). So if our understanding of *kenosis* comes from Philippians 2, we should get our definition of the concept there. And that passage does not discuss at all the question of how or how much Christ's glory was veiled. Nor does it say anything about the use or restriction of divine attributes. It does say that the emptying concerned becoming a man to be able to die. Thus the *kenosis* means leaving His preincarnate position and taking on a servant-humanity."<sup>66</sup>

Jesus Christ did not regard His former manner of existence something that He wanted to hold onto. In view of the context this seems to be the correct interpretation. Another possibility is that He did not need to grasp after

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<sup>64</sup>John F. Walvoord, *Jesus Christ Our Lord*, pp. 143-44.

<sup>65</sup>Robert P. Lightner, *Evangelical Theology*, p. 84.

<sup>66</sup>Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, p. 262.

equality with God since He already possessed it. A third alternative is that He did not grasp equality with God prematurely as Adam did but waited for the Father to bestow it on Him after His passion.

Jesus was willing to alter His behavior for the welfare of others, and in this He is an example of submissiveness for us.

". . . his true nature is characterized not by selfish grabbing, but by an open-handed giving . . ." <sup>67</sup>

2:7

Instead of maintaining His former manner of existence our Lord "emptied Himself" (NASB), "made himself nothing" (NIV), or "laid aside His privileges" (NASB margin, Gr. *ekenosen*).<sup>68</sup> What did He lay aside? It was not His deity. Jesus did not cease to be God when He became a man. This is clear from the context as well as from other Scriptures (e.g., John 10:30; Col. 1:15-20; et al.). He did not lay aside His dependence on the Father either. As the terms "Son" and "Father" reflect, the Son was always dependent on His Father within the administrative order of the Godhead.

Taking humanity imposed certain restrictions on Jesus Christ including those involved in possessing a physical body and a human, though not a sinful, nature. He laid aside the freedom that His former manner of existence afforded Him when He became a man. He became dependent on the Father in a different sense than had been true formerly. However, Paul did not say that Jesus emptied Himself of something. He simply said that He emptied Himself, He poured Himself out.<sup>69</sup>

Paul described Jesus' self-emptying as taking the form of a bond-servant. "Taking" (Gr. *labon*) does not imply an exchange but adding something. The Lord did not lay aside the form of God. He did not cease to be God. He added the "form" of man. The same Greek word, *morphe*, occurs in verse 6 where it describes outward appearance that accurately reveals inward nature. Earlier Paul described himself and Timothy as bond-servants (1:1). Bond-servants are not just men. They are servants. The Messianic title "Servant of the Lord" reflects this humility and condescension of our Savior.

Furthermore Jesus Christ became in the likeness of men. "Likeness" (Gr. *homoiomati*) does not mean exactness (Gr. *eikon*). Even though Jesus had

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<sup>67</sup>Hawthorne, p. 85. Contrast Adam, who considered equality with God something to be seized. Adam tried to become like God by grasping, but Christ, who was God, became man by releasing. Fee, *Paul's Letter . . .*, p. 209, noted that this analogy is only conceptual since there are no linguistic parallels to the Genesis narrative here.

<sup>68</sup>From this word we get the term "kenosis," which refers to the doctrine of Christ limiting Himself when He became a man. The kenosis theory in theology deals with this subject.

<sup>69</sup>Fee, *Paul's Letter . . .*, p. 210.

a fully human nature, that nature was not sinful. Every other human being has a sinful human nature. Moreover Jesus had a divine nature as well as a human nature.

As an example to the readers, this verse is an advance on the previous one. It shows that Jesus Christ was not just willing to change His behavior for others, but He really did so by becoming a man who was a servant.

2:8 Jesus Christ appeared to other people just as any other man. This was another mark of His humility. There were no visual clues in His appearance that He was sinless or divine.

". . . having said that Christ came in the 'likeness' of human beings (v. 7b), Paul now moves the narrative on to its next point, by saying he 'appeared' in a way that was clearly recognizable as human. Together the two phrases accent the reality of his humanity, just as the first two phrases in the preceding sentence accent his deity."<sup>70</sup>

He further humbled Himself by becoming obedient to His Father's will to the point of laying down His life in death (cf. Heb. 5:8).

Beyond that He was willing to undergo death by crucifixion, a form of execution that was without equal in its pain and humiliation.

"It is difficult after sixteen centuries and more during which the cross has been a sacred symbol, to realize the unspeakable horror and loathing which the very mention or thought of the cross provoked in Paul's day. The word *crux* was unmentionable in polite Roman society . . .; even when one was being condemned to death by crucifixion the sentence used an archaic formula which served as a sort of euphemism: *arbori infelici suspendito*, 'hang him on the unlucky tree' (Cicero, *ibid.* 13)."<sup>71</sup>

The Phoenicians and Persians practiced crucifixion before the Greeks and Romans adopted it. It was a form of execution from which Roman citizens were exempt. Only the worst criminals among the slaves and foreigners underwent crucifixion.<sup>72</sup> Hanging on a tree was a sign to the Jews that the person so disgraced was under the curse of God (Deut. 21:23; cf. Gal. 3:13).

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<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 215.

<sup>71</sup>F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, p. 271.

<sup>72</sup>See *New Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Crucifixion," by D. H. Wheaton, pp. 281-82.

The advance on Christ's example in this verse is the extent to which He was willing to go in humble submissiveness in obedience to His Father's will. All believers should be willing to do the same.

"Several years ago, while I was engaged in a study of the Philippian Epistle, a letter came to me bearing news of the death of a friend and former classmate who had laid down his life for Christ in foreign missionary service. He had been a brilliant student, was wealthy in his own right, and at the completion of the seminary course he was married to a beautiful and talented young woman. In this country he might have had everything ordinarily desirable to men—business success, comfort, ease, and luxury. But there was in him the mind of Christ; if I may dare to use the word reverently, he freely 'emptied himself' of all these prospects, becoming a servant of the cross in Egypt. There, having given what he could in service, he was obedient 'unto death.'"<sup>73</sup>

"The test of the submissive mind is not just how much we are willing to take in terms of suffering, but how much we are willing to give in terms of sacrifice."<sup>74</sup>

2:9 In view of the Son's submission to the depths of humiliation, God the Father raised Him to the height of exaltation. He literally super-exalted (Gr. *hyperypsosen*) Him. This process included Jesus' resurrection, ascension, and glorification in heaven.

The name that the Father has given to Jesus that is above every name is evidently "Lord Jesus," as the following two verses make clear.<sup>75</sup>

". . . it is not merely the *possession* of status but rather the *use* of status or power for the benefit of others which should be honored in congregations today."<sup>76</sup>

2:10 The purpose of the Father's having given the Son great exaltation and a name suitable to such a position is that every person will bow in submission to His authority (cf. Isa. 45:23 where all bow before

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<sup>73</sup>Alva J. McClain, "The Doctrine of the Kenosis in Philippians 2:5-8," *Biblical Review* 13:4 (October 1928):524-25.

<sup>74</sup>Wiersbe, p. 57; idem, *The Bible . . .*, 2:76. See also David J. MacLeod, "Imitating the Incarnation of Christ: An Exposition of Philippians 2:5-8," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158:631 (July-September 2001):308-30.

<sup>75</sup>See John Eadie, *A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistle of Paul to the Philippians*, p. 121.

<sup>76</sup>Joseph H. Hellerman, "The Humiliation of Christ in the Social World of Roman Philippi, Part 2," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160:640 (October-December 2003):433.

Yahweh).<sup>77</sup> The beings in heaven that Paul referred to evidently are believers who have died and whose spirits have gone into the Lord's presence. Those on earth are people still alive on the earth. Those under the earth are unbelievers awaiting resurrection. Hades (the same as Sheol, the Old Testament term) is the place where the spirits of the unbelieving dead go until God resurrects them and judges them. The ancients thought of Sheol or Hades as being under the surface of the earth. All angelic beings will acknowledge Jesus' lordship too (1 Cor. 15:27).

Various groups will acknowledge that Jesus is Lord at different times. Christians do so at conversion, and we will do so when we see the Lord following the Rapture (Rev. 4—5). Those living on the earth and Old Testament saints resurrected at the Second Coming will do so then (Rev. 19:11-21). Most of those living on the earth during the millennial reign of Christ will submit to Him then (Ps. 2). At the end of the Millennium everyone on the earth and all resurrected unbelievers will bow the knee to Jesus Christ (Rev. 20:7-15).

2:11 Verbal confession of Jesus' lordship will accompany symbolic physical submission. Every being that has a tongue and can do so will acknowledge Jesus as Lord. 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).<sup>78</sup> God will by this universal confession receive glory. Jesus Christ's purpose is, always has been, and always will be to glorify the Father (1 Cor. 15:27).<sup>79</sup>

"Verse 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."<sup>80</sup>

The exaltation of Jesus Christ is as much a motivation for the Christian to live a life of submissive humility as is His incarnation. God will reward a life of self-denial now in the future. That is the obvious implication of Paul's illustration.

Is it not selfish to serve the Lord for a reward? Was it selfish for Jesus to endure what He did because He knew He would receive a reward?

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<sup>77</sup>Ibid., "The Humiliation of Christ in the Social World of Roman Philippi, Part 1," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160:639 (July-September 2003):321-36, showed that "residents of first-century Philippi felt strongly compelled to proclaim their social location publicly in the pecking order of this highly stratified Roman colony" (p. 336). Thus Paul's contrast between the humiliation and exaltation of Christ to the Philippians would have had unusual impact on these readers.

<sup>78</sup>Hawthorne, p. 93.

<sup>79</sup>See John V. Dahms, "The Subordination of the Son," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37:3 (September 1994):351-64.

<sup>80</sup>Hawthorne, p. 93.

Motivation is the key. If we submit to God and to one another for the glory of God rather than for selfish glory, as Jesus did, our motivation is correct.

The power of a positive example is very strong. Paul had previously used himself as an example of steadfastness (1:30) and he would do so again. Here he pointed to Jesus Christ, the greatest example of submissiveness (2:2-11). He would use Timothy and Epaphroditus as examples for his readers later (2:19-23, 25-30).<sup>81</sup>

### The responsibility of the believer 2:12-16

"The detailed attention just given to the Christ-hymn must not obscure the fact that vv 12-18 are part of a larger parenthetic section—1:27—2:18. Exhortation is resumed again through the frequent use of the imperative mood, or through the use of participles with the force of the imperative."<sup>82</sup>

2:12 The Philippian Christians had been obedient to the Lord and to His servant Paul in the past (cf. 1:27). Even though Paul was no longer with them and might be unable to return to them, he wanted them to continue to obey. The Greek word translated "obey" (*hypakouein*) contains the ideas of hearing, especially the divine word as proclaimed (cf. 2 Thess. 1:8), and submitting to what is heard.<sup>83</sup> It was even more important that they purpose to obey with Paul absent since his presence among them provided a measure of external motivation for them.

Specifically they were to work out their salvation. Note that Paul did not say "work *for* your salvation." We obtain salvation by receiving it as a gift (Eph. 2:8), but having received it freely we have a responsibility to perfect it. The apostle had in mind the present aspect of our salvation, sanctification, in which we are laborers together with God (1 Cor. 3:9; cf. Titus 3:8).<sup>84</sup> In justification and glorification, God does all the work (Eph. 2:9; Jude 24). We work out our salvation by keeping in step with the Holy Spirit who leads us in the will of God (Gal. 5:16). In the context the particular aspect of sanctification in view involves achieving unity through humility.

"Paul is not here concerned with the eternal welfare of the soul *of the individual*. 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' (Müller).

<sup>81</sup>See David J. MacLeod, "The Exaltation of Christ: An Exposition of Philippians 2:9-11," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158:632 (October-December 2001):437-50.

<sup>82</sup>Hawthorne, p. 97.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., p. 98.

<sup>84</sup>See Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings*, pp. 114-16; Robert N. Wilkin, "Working Out Your Salvation," *Grace Evangelical Society News* 8:3 (May-June 1993):2-3; Fee, *Paul's Letter . . .*, p. 235.

Rather the context suggests that this command 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 and wholeness."<sup>85</sup>

"Perhaps it is best to see *both* the outworking of personal salvation and the corporate salvation or deliverance of the whole assembly from whatever held them back from experiencing God's best."<sup>86</sup>

As we work out our own sanctification, we must remember certain things. We serve a holy God, we have a strong and wise adversary, and we are weak and dependent on God for all that we need. Such an awareness will produce the attitude of fear and trembling that Paul advocated. This attitude is not inconsistent with joy and confidence in the Lord.

2:13 In the preceding context Paul had been urging his readers to do right even though he was not in Philippi to motivate and enable them to do so (1:27; 2:12). Here he reminded them that God was at work not just with them but in them to provide motivation and enabling strength (Gr. *energein*, from which we get the word "energy"). He would enable them to work out their own salvation. God carries out this work through the indwelling Holy Spirit, and His main tool is the Word of God.

"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."<sup>87</sup>

This verse is one of the most comforting in the New Testament. Sometimes we want to do right but seem to lack the energy or ability. This verse assures us that God will help us. At other times we cannot even seem to want to do right. Here we learn that God can also provide the desire to do His will when we do not have it. If we find that we do not want to do right, we can ask God to work in us to create a desire to do His will. This verse gives us confidence that God desires both to motivate and to enable us.

2:14 The first word in this verse in the Greek text is "all things" (NASB) or "everything" (NIV), which by its position indicates the writer's emphasis. Most of us can learn to grumble and argue less than we do now, but such activities should be totally absent from our lives.

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<sup>85</sup>Hawthorne, p. 98.

<sup>86</sup>Lightner, "Philippians," p. 655.

<sup>87</sup>Herman N. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, p. 255.

The first of these words looks at the initial activity and the second what results from the first (cf. 1 Cor. 10:10; Phil. 2:2; 4:2). The great warning of what complaining and disputing can lead to is Israel's 10 instances of complaining in the wilderness. That behavior culminated in the Israelites' refusal to enter and occupy the Promised Land from Kadesh-barnea (Num. 13—14). We frustrate God's work of producing unity, which He does by reproducing the mind of Christ in us (i.e., humility), when we complain and argue (cf. 1:19, 28).

2:15 By working out their own salvation with fear and trembling rather than with grumbling and disputing, the Philippians would show themselves to be blameless and innocent (pure, NIV). "Blameless" (Gr. *amemptos*) means without blame (cf. 3:6). It does not mean unblemished (Gr. *amomos*) nor unblameable (Gr. *anegkletos* and *anepileptos*).<sup>88</sup> "Innocent" or "pure" (Gr. *akeraioi*) means unadulterated, unmixed with anything defiling (cf. Rom. 16:19).

Paul then added the idea of being unblemished (Gr. *amomos*). The children of God are to be free from defilement and so not chargeable with justifiable criticism even though we live in the midst of a twisted and perverted generation (cf. Deut. 32:5). The word "generation" (Gr. *geneas*) can refer to a group of people several generations long, not just to one generation of people. Here it probably refers to unbelievers as a whole (cf. Matt. 17:17; Acts 2:40).

Christians are lights in a dark world (Matt. 5:14; cf. Dan. 12:3). The Light of the World now indwells us (John 8:12). Paul wanted his readers to bear a strong witness rather than having their light shaded by sin or uncleanness (cf. Matt. 5:15-16).

2:16 "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 Jesus (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."<sup>89</sup>

Believers are also to hold out the word of life, the gospel (John 6:68), as the Statue of Liberty holds out her torch. This is another way in which we are lights in a dark world. In view of the context, however, it seems more likely that Paul was urging his readers to hold fast to the word rather than to hold forth the word. The former interpretation is possible, nonetheless.

<sup>88</sup>See Richard C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament*, pp. 354-56.

<sup>89</sup>Hawthorne, p. 103.

Paul wanted the Philippians to continue serving as he explained so when he stood before the judgment seat of Christ (cf. 1:6, 10) he would have legitimate cause for justifiable pride (cf. 1:26). His investments in their lives would not have been in vain. Running pictures all of Paul's energetic activity as a Christian, and toiling highlights the hard labor that he expended.<sup>90</sup>

### **The example of Paul 2:17-18**

2:17 The prospect that Paul might receive a death sentence soon arose again in his thinking. He described his present life as the pouring out of a drink offering in Israel's worship (cf. 2 Tim. 4:6; Num. 15:1-10; Num. 28:4-7). After the priest offered a lamb, a ram, or a bull as a burnt offering, he poured wine beside the altar. This was the last act in the sacrificial ceremony all of which symbolized the dedication of the believer to God in worship. The pouring out of the wine pictured the gradual ebbing away of Paul's life that had been a living sacrifice to God since his conversion.

The phrase "sacrifice and service of (or coming from, NIV) your faith" is a figure of speech (hendiadys) meaning the sacrificial service arising from your faith.

Even if Paul would die, he could rejoice that he had made a contribution to the Philippians' sacrificial service to God. He viewed himself and them as priests offering sacrifices to God, namely, themselves (cf. Heb. 13:15).

". . . his apostolic sufferings and the Philippians' sacrificial gifts to him because he is an apostle combine to form a perfectly complete sacrifice to God."<sup>91</sup>

2:18 The Philippians would not rejoice over the prospect of Paul's death, of course, but over the knowledge that they as Paul had offered themselves as acceptable sacrifices to God (Rom. 12:1). The apostle urged them not to sorrow over their own trials and his, but to rejoice as they worked out their own salvation adopting his attitude toward their situation in life. They could share their joy with Paul as they communicated with him and assured him of their joy in the Lord.

### **The example of Timothy 2:19-24**

The apostle's reference to his present sufferings (vv. 17-18) led him to tell the Philippians about his plans. He wanted to send Timothy and Epaphroditus to Philippi. He said things about those two faithful fellow workers that would assure their warm reception when they arrived. Paul's descriptions of them have lasting value because they were such good

<sup>90</sup>See Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, pp. 313-14.

<sup>91</sup>Hawthorne, p. 106.

examples of men who possessed the mind of Christ. They were, therefore, true partners in the gospel.

"In this epistle every single reference Paul makes to another person is made in connection with that person's *koinonia*, his partnership in the gospel. Timothy and Epaphroditus, except for Paul himself, stand as the most prominent of these."<sup>92</sup>

2:19 Paul explained that his plan was subject to the will of God when he said that he hoped "in the Lord Jesus" to send Timothy shortly. The apostle alluded to his submission to the lordship of Christ frequently in this epistle (1:8, 26; 2:24, 29; 3:1, 3; 4:1, 10; cf. Rom. 14:14; 1 Cor. 7:39; 16:7; Phile. 22). These references were probably specially numerous in this epistle because of the indefiniteness of Paul's release.

The primary purpose of Timothy's visit was to learn the condition of the Philippian believers and to report that to Paul. This would enable Paul to pray for, minister to, and lay plans to help this church better.

2:20 Paul did not write these words to introduce Timothy to the Philippians. They knew him well.<sup>93</sup> Probably he wanted this glowing testimonial to give his original readers confidence that Timothy had their best interests at heart. Timothy would represent their situation to Paul accurately.

Probably Paul meant that he had no fellow worker with him then who would do a better job in this assignment than Timothy. Timothy consistently shared Paul's general outlook and specific concern for the welfare of the Philippians.

2:21 This must be a general statement. Paul had many fellow workers whose commitment to Jesus Christ was complete at this time one of whom was Epaphroditus. Paul would commend him shortly (vv. 25-30). Perhaps Paul was thinking of those local Roman Christians who were serving the Lord at least partially to advance their own reputations. He had referred to them previously (1:14-18). He probably meant that of all the people whom he might have sent to the Philippians, none put the interests of Christ above their own as Timothy did. A believer who puts the interests of Christ before his or her own is still a rare individual (cf. 1:21).

2:22 In contrast to most believers, Timothy had demonstrated his worthiness as a servant of Christ and of Paul over more than 10 years.<sup>94</sup> He had served as the apostle's fellow worker and as his protégé. He had established a

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<sup>92</sup>Swift, p. 246.

<sup>93</sup>See my comments on 1:1.

<sup>94</sup>See George W. Murray, "Paul's Corporate Witness in Philippians," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155:619 (July-September 1998):316-26.

good reputation not only in Philippi but wherever he had served. Such a fine record stands a young servant of the Lord in good stead when others consider him for another ministry.

2:23 The verse begins "This one" in the Greek text, which draws attention to Timothy's qualifications. Paul hoped, the Lord willing, to send Timothy to Philippi with a report of the apostle's situation and plans as soon as he knew the result of his trial. Evidently Paul expected that a decision in his case would be forthcoming soon. Both for the love of the Philippian church and for the effectiveness of his ministry, Paul wanted his friends to know about his situation. In this he set us a good example.

2:24 Paul believed that he would receive his freedom and would be able to return to Philippi fairly soon (cf. 1:25). However, he qualified his hope with the realization that justice does not always prevail in legal courts. As mentioned previously, there is evidence that Nero did release Paul and that the apostle resumed his missionary work.

"The submissive mind is not the product of an hour's sermon, or a week's seminar, or even a year's service. The submissive mind grows in us as, like Timothy, we yield to the Lord and seek to serve others."<sup>95</sup>

### **The example of Epaphroditus 2:25-30**

Another messenger would arrive in Philippi before either Paul or Timothy. Epaphroditus would carry this epistle to its destination. Paul wrote this pericope to prepare for a proper reception of its courier and to draw attention to Epaphroditus' humility.

2:25 Rather than waiting, Paul thought it necessary to send Epaphroditus immediately. He would explain shortly why he did this. First, he wanted to commend his messenger.

Epaphroditus' name appears nowhere else in the New Testament other than in Philippians (cf. 4:18). Paul described him here in five relationships. He was Paul's brother in the faith, a sharer in spiritual life by God's grace. Second, he was Paul's fellow worker, more than a brother but one who joined in the service of building the church of Jesus Christ, a partner in the gospel ministry. Third, he was Paul's fellow soldier. He was not just a worker but a worker who had entered into spiritual warfare by standing up for Christ in a hostile environment and boldly proclaiming the gospel.

In relation to the Philippians, Epaphroditus was their messenger to Paul. He had carried their gift to him as their representative. Translators usually render the Greek word translated "messenger" as "apostle" (Gr. *apostolos*).

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<sup>95</sup>Wiersbe, *Be Joyful*, p. 75; idem, *The Bible . . .*, 2:82.

This word has a general meaning and a specific meaning in the New Testament. Generally it means a messenger and describes such people as Barnabas (Acts 14:14), James, the Lord's brother (Gal. 1:19; 1 Cor. 15:7), probably Silas and Timothy (1 Thess. 2:7; cf. Phil. 1:1), and Epaphroditus here. Technically it refers to the 12 apostles and Paul, those whom Jesus had specially commissioned with the ministry of planting and establishing the church. This second usage is more common in the New Testament. Many men functioned as apostles in the early church, but only 13 were official apostles (i.e., occupied that office).

Finally, Epaphroditus was the Philippians' "minister" to Paul's needs in prison. This word (Gr. *leitourgon*) sometimes describes the kind of ministry a priest performs (Rom. 15:16; Heb. 8:2). Consequently Paul may have been thinking of Epaphroditus' ministry to him as similar to a priest's. He presented the Philippians' offering to Paul as a sacrifice (4:18).

"Epaphroditus was their envoy to him, their way of telling him that they cared enough to send their very best . . ."<sup>96</sup>

2:26 Paul decided to send Epaphroditus immediately because word had reached Epaphroditus that his fellow Philippians had learned that he had been ill. This knowledge had created a longing in his heart for his brethren and had distressed him. His feelings were intense. Paul used the word translated "longing" (NASB) or "longs" (NIV, Gr. *epipotheo*) earlier to describe his own feelings for the Philippians (1:8; cf. James 4:5; 1 Pet. 2:2). "Distressed" (Gr. *ademonon*) also described Jesus' feelings in Gethsemane (Matt. 26:37; Mark 14:33).

"It describes the confused, restless, half-distracted state, which is produced by physical derangement, or by mental distress, as grief, shame, disappointment, etc."<sup>97</sup>

Epaphroditus may have been a specially sensitive Christian. On the other hand his concern may reflect a misunderstanding that had put him in a questionable light since he had left Philippi.<sup>98</sup>

2:27 Paul gave God the credit for restoring Epaphroditus to health when he had been at death's door. Epaphroditus' death would have increased Paul's sorrow over his brother's illness. Note that Paul did not have the ability to heal everyone whom he wished would be healthy, even his fellow workers.<sup>99</sup> Divine healing has always been subject to the will of God.

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<sup>96</sup>Hawthorne, p. 120.

<sup>97</sup>Lightfoot, p. 123.

<sup>98</sup>Kent, pp. 135-36.

<sup>99</sup>H. C. G. Moule, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Philippians*, p. 53.

- 2:28 The concern of Epaphroditus and the Philippians for one another led Paul to send their messenger back to them at once. He may have done so earlier than he would have otherwise. This would lessen Paul's concern about the Philippians knowing that Epaphroditus' return would relieve his readers' anxiety.
- 2:29 Paul wanted Epaphroditus' homecoming to be a joyous occasion. He had carried out his mission successfully and had ministered to Paul with distinction. He urged the Philippians to regard him highly and to welcome him wholeheartedly.
- 2:30 Specifically, Epaphroditus had become sick because of his service for Christ, apparently his service of travelling to Rome and ministering to Paul there. He had daringly exposed himself to danger.<sup>100</sup> It was as he had labored for his absent Philippian brethren, to make up their deficiency in this sense (4:14-18; cf. 1 Cor. 16:17), that he had become ill.

Aphrodite (Venus) was the goddess of gamblers. When a pagan Greek threw the dice he would cry out "*epaphroditos!*" meaning "favorite of Aphrodite." Epaphroditus' name may have connections with this custom. If so, Paul may have written that Epaphroditus "risked [gambled] his life" as a play on his friend's name.

"He says Epaphroditus gambled with his life, but won, because God was there and 'had mercy on him.'"<sup>101</sup>

Paul's emphasis in chapter 2 was on the importance of unity and its necessary prerequisite, humility. For there to be true partnership in the work of the gospel there must be unity among the workers. The key to achieving unity is for each believer to adopt the humble mind of Christ.

## **2. Walking in steadfastness 3:1—4:1**

Paul now turned to the second major quality that he introduced in 1:27-30, namely, steadfastness in the face of opposition to the gospel (cf. 1:7, 28). He had introduced the idea of joy in the face of opposition earlier (1:19, 28-30; 2:17-18). He would discuss how to face overt persecution later (4:4-9).

There were two main sources of opposition that the Philippians faced as they sought to have fellowship with Paul in the proclamation of the gospel. Paul dealt with both of these. However, he began with a charge to rejoice in the Lord and ended this section with a summary exhortation.

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<sup>100</sup>See Deissmann, p. 88.

<sup>101</sup>Harrington C. Lees, "Epaphroditus, God's Gambler," *Expository Times* 37 (1925):46.

### **The introductory charge to rejoice in the Lord 3:1**

Having created joy in his readers by referring to the sterling examples of Timothy and Epaphroditus, Paul warned them about certain other people who professed to be servants of God.

He introduced this section of his epistle with a transitional statement. "Finally" (Gr. *to loipon*) introduces such a statement here as well as elsewhere (cf. 1 Cor. 1:16; 4:2; 2 Cor. 13:1; 1 Thess. 4:1; 2 Thess. 3:1; Gal. 6:17). Usually this word does not mark a conclusion so much as a transition on the way to a conclusion.<sup>102</sup> It introduces what remains to be said.<sup>103</sup> Anyone who has listened to much preaching knows that Christian communicators often say "finally" long before the message ends.

The apostle's primary exhortation here was that his readers should rejoice in the Lord. Paul, a prisoner, besought free people to be joyful. We might have expected it to be the other way around. They might rejoice in Epaphroditus' return, or in his recovery, or in Paul's prospect of release and return to Philippi. All of these were legitimate though less important reasons for rejoicing. We have noticed the consistent emphasis on joy and rejoicing that has marked this letter so far (1:3, 4, 18, 25; 2:1, 2, 17, 18, 19, 28, 29; cf. 4:1, 4, 10, 18). Joy is the prevailing mood of Philippians, but it is not its major theme. Paul gave the importance of rejoicing special emphasis here. Regardless of circumstances the Christian can and should always rejoice in the person and work of Jesus Christ. He is the basis of true joy and the sphere in which it thrives.<sup>104</sup>

False teachers can rob Christians of joy. Paul proceeded to deal with this threat in the rest of this chapter.

He introduced his comments by assuring his readers that he did not regard the need to warn them as a burden even though he had already instructed them on this subject. Paul may have been alluding to what he had just written about unbelievers who opposed the Philippians' witness (1:27-30). He may have been referring to previous instruction he had given them in person or in writing. Further exhortation would be an additional safeguard against their capitulating because of this evil influence.

### **The Judaizing danger 3:2-4a**

Paul proceeded to deal with a significant group of antagonists that the Philippians faced.

3:2 Jesus and other prophets used the term "dogs" to refer to opponents of God's truth (Matt. 7:6; cf. Deut. 23:18; 1 Sam. 17:43; 24:14; Prov. 26:11; Isa. 56:10-11). The Jews habitually referred to Gentiles contemptuously as dogs (cf. Matt. 15:21-28). In ancient times many dogs were unclean, wild, vicious animals that threatened the safety of everyone.

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<sup>102</sup>Moule, p. 56.

<sup>103</sup>Fee, *Paul's Letter . . .*, p. 291.

<sup>104</sup>Hawthorne, p. 124.

"Paul now hurls this term of contempt back 'on the heads of its authors' . . . , for to Paul the Jews were the real pariahs that defile the holy community, the Christian church, with their erroneous teaching."<sup>105</sup>

"This metaphor is full of 'bite,' . . . Paul thus reverses the epithet; by trying to make Gentiles 'clean' through circumcision, the Judaizers are unclean 'dogs.'"<sup>106</sup>

The phrase "evil workers" (NABS) stresses the evil character of their labors. However "false circumcision" (NASB) or "mutilators of the flesh" (NIV, cf. Gal. 5:12) gives us the most insight into exactly whom Paul had in mind.

These were evidently the Judaizers that plagued Paul and his converts throughout his ministry.<sup>107</sup> They taught that people could only enter the church through the vestibule of Judaism, and that once inside they needed to submit to the Mosaic Law.<sup>108</sup> They emphasized circumcision because it was the rite that brought a person into Judaism, which they viewed as a prerequisite to justification (cf. Acts 15:1). False circumcision refers to circumcision for the wrong reasons, namely, circumcision contrary to the revelation of God in Scripture.

3:3 The Philippians and Paul, and all true believers, belong to a different camp, that of the true circumcision. Paul was referring to the circumcision of the heart that happens when a person trusts in Jesus Christ. The alternative is trusting in self and in rite-keeping for salvation (Rom. 2:25-29; Col. 2:11, 13; cf. Lev. 26:41; Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4; Ezek. 44:7).<sup>109</sup>

Paul used three terms to describe the false teachers (v. 2). He used three others to characterize the true circumcision. We worship (Gr. *latreuein*) God in the Spirit. The alternative is going through certain physical rituals (cf. John 4:23-24). Probably Paul meant that the Holy Spirit initiates worship with the result that love and service result (cf. John 14:17).<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>105</sup>Ibid., p. 125. Cf. R. Jewett, "Conflicting Movements in the Early Church as Reflected in Philippians," *Novum Testamentum* 12 (1970):386.

<sup>106</sup>Fee, *Paul's Letter* . . . , p. 295.

<sup>107</sup>P. T. O'Brien, *Commentary on Philippians*, pp. 101-6, gave six options that scholars have suggested concerning the identity of this group, and he defended their being different from the opponants whom Paul mentioned in 1:14-17.

<sup>108</sup>This was the so-called "Galatian heresy" that Paul dealt with extensively in his epistle to the Galatians.

<sup>109</sup>For refutation of the non-dispensational view that the "true circumcision" refers to the church as the new Israel, see Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, pp. 202-5.

<sup>110</sup>Hawthorne, p. 127.

Those who rely on rites and ceremonies to make themselves acceptable to God do not have the Spirit of God. They are not believers in the gospel.

Second, we glory in Christ Jesus. That is, we look to Him as the one who makes us acceptable to God rather than looking to works (cf. Jer. 9:23-24; 1 Cor. 1:31; 2 Cor. 10:17). We focus on Him and find our satisfaction in Him because He is our Savior.

Third, we put no confidence in the flesh to make us acceptable to God. The New Testament writers used the term "flesh" (Gr. *sarx*) in a literal and in a metaphorical sense. Literally it refers to our bodies (Luke 24:39). Figuratively it refers to human nature (John 1:14) and to sinful human nature (cf. Rom. 7:5; 8:9, 19). Here Paul probably meant our lower unredeemed nature that is not inherently bad but the target of sin's attack and the occasion of our becoming sin's victim.<sup>111</sup> We do not have confidence that anything we do to our bodies will make us acceptable to God but realize that trusting in Jesus Christ is what is necessary. Yet primarily we have no confidence in what we are by nature to make us acceptable to God. We understand that we cannot save ourselves, and we acknowledge that God must save us.

- 3:4a Paul proceeded to explain to the Philippians why he had spoken so harshly against the Jews (vv. 4-11). The apostle rejected confidence in the flesh because it cannot provide the righteousness that God requires (v. 9). He possessed what the Judaizers claimed was essential, namely, circumcision, but he did not trust in it for salvation.

#### **Paul's privileged position 3:4b-6**

- 3:4b For the sake of the argument Paul adopted the Judaizers' attitude of confidence in the flesh. He did this to show that his rejection of Jewish advantages was not because he lacked them.<sup>112</sup>
- 3:5 Circumcision of the flesh was one thing that the Judaizers trusted in for acceptance by God. Paul had been circumcised on the eighth day after his birth, as the Law of Moses prescribed (Lev. 12:3; cf. Gen. 17:12). He had not received circumcision later in life as many people did who converted to Judaism (e.g., Acts 16:3).

Paul was also an Israelite by birth, not a Gentile Jewish proselyte.

Furthermore he was a member of the tribe of Benjamin. Benjamin was the younger of the two sons born to Jacob's favorite wife, Rachel. Benjamin was the only son of Jacob who was born in the Promised Land. The tribe

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<sup>111</sup>Ibid.

<sup>112</sup>Paul used the same approach in 2 Corinthians 11:26—12:12.

of Benjamin provided many noble warriors throughout Israel's history (cf. Hos. 5:8). Israel's first lawful king came from Benjamin. Jerusalem and the temple stood within Benjamin's territory. This tribe alone, beside Judah, remained loyal to David's house when the monarchy divided. The feast of Purim celebrated the salvation of the Jews by a Benjamite, Mordecai. After the Exile, Benjamin and Judah formed the core of the restoration community. Of course, this tribe's history was not without its shame as well (e.g., Saul's failures, the Gibeans' atrocity that led to the civil war that almost wiped this tribe out, etc.). Nevertheless Paul could legitimately take pride in his Benjamite heritage.

A "Hebrew of Hebrews" means that Paul's parents brought him up as a strict Jew. Specifically he learned the Hebrew language and studied the Old Testament in the original tongue, not like so many other Jews of the Diaspora who could only speak and read Aramaic.

Paul had chosen to join the party of the Pharisees, the most orthodox of the sects within Judaism in his day. The Pharisees were punctilious in their observance of the Mosaic Law.<sup>113</sup>

"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. The most ardent of the Pharisees scrupulously avoided even accidental violations of the Law and did more than they were commanded to do . . . . 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 fulfilment [*sic*] of duty to God as prescribed by the divine Torah' (Beare)."<sup>114</sup>

3:6 He had been a zealous promoter of Judaism even to the point of persecuting Christians to death. He had been an outstanding Pharisee.

Paul's obedience to the Law of Moses as it regulated external behavior had been without blame (Gr. *amemptos*, cf. 2:15). Clearly Paul was not claiming that he had done all that God required in the Law. Had this been true of him he would not have put Christians to death. However, he was very conscientious about what the Law required.

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<sup>113</sup>This is the only occurrence of the word "Pharisee" outside the Gospels and Acts.

<sup>114</sup>Hawthorne, pp. 133-34.

"Like most 'religious' people today, Paul had enough morality to keep him out of trouble, but not enough righteousness to get him into heaven! It was not bad things that kept Paul away from Jesus—it was good things! He had to lose his 'religion' to find salvation."<sup>115</sup>

### Paul's self-humbling 3:7

Paul formerly regarded all these things that he possessed and others as contributing to God's acceptance of him. Yet he had come to learn on the Damascus road and since then that such fleshly "advantages" did not improve his position with God. Rather they constituted hindrances because the more of them that Paul had the more convinced he was that God would accept him for his works' sake. Each of his fleshly advantages strengthened his false hope of salvation.

"While Christ did not *consider* God-likeness to accrue to his own advantage, but 'made himself nothing,' so Paul now *considers* his former 'gain' as 'loss' for the surpassing worth of knowing Christ. As Christ was 'found' in 'human likeness,' Paul is now 'found in Christ,' knowing whom means to be 'conformed' (echoing the *morphe* of a slave, 2:7) to his death (2:8). Finally, as Christ's humiliation was followed by God's 'glorious' vindication of him, so present 'suffering' for Christ's sake will be followed by 'glory' in the form of resurrection. As he has appealed to the Philippians to do, Paul thus exemplifies Christ's 'mindset,' embracing suffering and death. This is what it means 'to know Christ,' to be 'found in him' by means of his gift of righteousness; and as he was raised and exalted to the highest place, so Paul and the Philippian believers, because they are now 'conformed to Christ' in his death, will also be 'conformed' to his glory."<sup>116</sup>

### Paul's greater goal 3:8-11

3:8 Paul had regarded his advantages over other people as what put him in a specially good position with God. However, he had come to realize that absolutely nothing apart from Jesus Christ's work on the cross was of any value in his gaining God's acceptance. No good works improve our standing before God. They are all as filthy rags (Isa. 64:6). Consequently Paul came to regard them as "rubbish." From then on he continued to take this view of things.

The Greek word translated "rubbish" (*skybalon*) occurs only here in the New Testament. Its derivation is uncertain, but it appears to have referred to excrement, food gone bad, scraps left over after a meal, and refuse. In extrabiblical Greek it describes a half-eaten corpse and lumps of

<sup>115</sup>Wiersbe, *Be Joyful*, p. 81; idem, *The Bible . . .*, 2:84.

<sup>116</sup>Fee, *Paul's Letter . . .*, p. 315.

manure.<sup>117</sup> Thus Paul meant that his former advantages were not only worthless but strongly offensive and potentially dangerous.

What he had learned to value was Christ Jesus his Lord. Consequently coming to know Christ, entering into a deeper and fuller appreciation of His person and work, was of primary importance to Paul. This knowledge (Gr. *gnosis*) is the kind that one obtains only by personal relationship. It is different from the knowledge we gain through objective academic study (Gr. *oida*), though information is part of our growing personal knowledge of Christ. To gain this fuller knowledge of Christ Paul had let everything else in life go. To use the language of 2:6, Paul did not regard anything else in life worthy of retaining. All he wanted was a fuller and deeper experiential appreciation of his Savior.

"You and I know *about* many people, even people who lived centuries ago, but we know personally very few."<sup>118</sup>

3:9 Paul's vision turned again to the future and the judgment seat of Christ. He had made his choices in life since his conversion because of the essential value of getting to know Christ better and because God would evaluate his life one day. On that day Paul wanted to be found "in Him," namely, standing in the merit of Christ rather than in his own merit. His own merit rested on his own righteousness as the Mosaic Law defined it. The merit of Christ is His righteousness that God credits to the believer's account when we place our trust in Him (cf. Rom. 3:20-23). This righteousness comes to us "through faith" in Christ, and it comes to us "on the basis of" (or "by," NIV) "faith" from God.

"Faith' is the very opposite of human works; it is the reception of God's work by those who acknowledge the futility of their own efforts to attain righteousness."<sup>119</sup>

3:10 This verse resumes the thought of knowing Christ in verse 8. The tense of the Greek infinitive *tou gnonai* ("to know") is aorist, probably an ingressive aorist, which sums up the action of the verb at the point where it begins.

"It suggests that for Paul just the *coming* to know Christ outweighs all other values, that 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

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<sup>117</sup>Hawthorne, p. 139.

<sup>118</sup>Wiersbe, *Be Joyful*, p. 88; idem, *The Bible . . .*, 2:86.

<sup>119</sup>Kent, p. 141.

him is more important than anything else in all the world."<sup>120</sup>

Among all the other things that Paul wanted to learn in His relationship with Christ, he mentioned first the power of Christ's resurrection. Paul probably did not mean that he wanted to experience resurrection supernaturally as Jesus Christ had done. He knew that if he died he would experience such a resurrection. He probably meant that he wanted the power that resurrected His Savior and was within himself because of the indwelling Christ to manifest itself in his life for God's glory (cf. Rom 6:4; Col. 3:1; Eph. 2:5-6).

Paul also wanted to grow in his experiential knowledge of the fellowship of Christ's sufferings. He did not mean that by suffering in the service of His Lord he could add to the merit of Christ's sufferings. Such an idea is completely foreign to biblical teaching (cf. Heb. 10:14). Rather he saw suffering for the sake of Christ as only fair since the Savior had suffered so much for him. The Christian who suffers because of his or her faithful testimony for Christ can enter into Jesus' feelings when He suffered for faithfully obeying His Father. There is a fellowship in that kind of suffering (cf. Rom. 6:8; Gal. 2:19-20). A believer who never suffers for the Lord's sake cannot do that.

The last phrase in this verse modifies the fellowship of Christ's sufferings. Complete dedication to the will of God, which resulted in Jesus' sufferings and which will result in the believer's suffering, means death ultimately. It means death to one's own agenda for life (Rom. 6:4-11), and it may result in physical death. Death is a grim prospect, but Paul did not have a morbid, unhealthy fascination with suffering and death for its own sake. He so loved Jesus Christ that he wished to share all aspects of His life, to know Him as intimately as he could. He even was willing to follow Him into the valley of the shadow of death.

"Christian life is cruciform in character; God's people, even as they live presently through the power made available through Christ's resurrection, are as their Lord forever marked by the cross."<sup>121</sup>

3:11 This verse does not contain a purpose clause as the NASB translation "in order that" implies. A better translation would be "if somehow" (NASB margin) or "and so, somehow" (NIV). It expresses expectation.

Superficially this verse seems to suggest that Paul had some doubt about the certainty of his resurrection. However elsewhere in his writings he was

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<sup>120</sup>Hawthorne, p. 143.

<sup>121</sup>Fee, *Paul's Letter . . .*, pp. 334-35.

very confident that God would resurrect him and all believers (e.g., Rom. 8:11, 23; 1 Cor. 6:14; 15:12-57; 2 Cor. 4:14; 5:1-5; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; 2 Tim. 2:18). The Bible teaches that God will resurrect all people, believers and unbelievers, if they have died (e.g., Dan. 12:2; Matt. 22:29-32; Luke 20:37-38; John 6:39-40, 44, 54; 11:25; Acts 4:2; 17:18; 23:6; 24:15; Heb. 6:2; Rev. 20:4-6, 13). Consequently we must look for another explanation of this verse.

"Now, if Paul believed in one general resurrection at the end in which all people, the saved and lost, would participate, it is difficult to understand his use of this language in relation to his personal participation. There would be no question of his being a part of such a resurrection."<sup>122</sup>

One possibility is that Paul was thinking of his spiritual co-resurrection with Christ.<sup>123</sup> In the context he had been speaking of his suffering and dying with Him. Yet these were evidently physical experiences, not spiritual realities. Furthermore the resurrection he said he hoped to attain was still future whereas he had already experienced spiritual resurrection with Christ to newness of life (Rom. 6:1-11).

Another view is that Paul was hoping that he would persevere faithfully in his quest to know Christ until he died. The logical progression in Paul's thought in verses 10 and 11 was from suffering to death to resurrection. Perhaps he meant he wanted to experience suffering for Christ's sake and was even willing to die for Him to arrive at his resurrection in a manner that would enable him to face His master unashamed.<sup>124</sup> The problem with this view is the unusual word used for the resurrection (Gr. *exanastasin*, lit. out-resurrection).

The words that Paul used seem to indicate that he was thinking of a resurrection from among those who were dead.<sup>125</sup> The NASB translators captured this idea when they rendered this phrase "the resurrection from among the dead." The NIV translators simply translated it "the resurrection from the dead."<sup>126</sup> This would point to the resurrection of believers that will result in Christians rising from among the unbelieving

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<sup>122</sup>Saucy, p. 287.

<sup>123</sup>W. E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, 1:86.

<sup>124</sup>E.g., Hawthorne, pp. 146-47.

<sup>125</sup>The Greek phrase is *ten exanastasin ten ek nekron*. The use of the preposition *ek* twice in the phrase, the first usage being in *exanastasin*, suggests a resurrection out from a group not resurrected.

<sup>126</sup>This is a good example of the characteristic difference between these two translations. Generally the NASB is more literal translating a Greek word with the same English word wherever the Greek word occurs. The NIV is more paraphrastic translating a Greek word with any number of English synonyms to make the English translation more readable.

dead. However this is not a resurrection that Christians need to strive to attain. God will provide it for all believers.<sup>127</sup>

Paul may have been speaking of the Rapture.<sup>128</sup> When that event takes place God will snatch dead Christians' bodies out from among other corpses. This would explain the unusual word Paul employed that appears only here in the Greek New Testament.

"Perhaps he was using this word to refer to the Rapture, thus expressing the hope that the Lord would return during his lifetime."<sup>129</sup>

In other words Paul meant that he hoped he would live to experience the Rapture, the "out-resurrection from among the dead," rather than dying. The verb *katavtao* ("attain") means to come to, to arrive at, or to attain to something.

Another view is that Paul hoped he would arrive at and participate in the resurrection that will happen at the Rapture rather than experiencing translation while still alive. To do this he would have to die before the Rapture. Maybe the apostle wanted to die and experience resurrection rather than translation because if he experienced resurrection he could better share the experiences of his Savior. Paul evidently expected the Rapture to happen before he died (1 Thess. 4:16-17). Perhaps he wanted to die before the Rapture. This may have been another dilemma for him in which he saw advantages in either case (cf. 1:23-24). This view seems unlikely, however, since elsewhere Paul spoke of death as an enemy that everyone seeks to avoid (1 Cor. 15:54-57).

Another possibility is that Paul meant faithful Christians will experience a better resurrection than unfaithful believers.

"The out-resurrection is a special reward which only faithful believers will receive. While the exact nature of that reward is unclear here, it can generally be understood as a sort of abundance of life. All believers will be resurrected and have joy forever. Faithful believers only will obtain this out-resurrection and have abundance of joy forever. Hebrews 11:35 is instructive here. It speaks of believers who 'were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.' All believers will be resurrected, but there is a better one for those who

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<sup>127</sup>See Gerald B. Stanton, *Kept from the Hour*, pp. 165-77, for refutation of the partial rapture view.

<sup>128</sup>See John F. Walvoord, *Philippians*, pp. 87-88; S. Lewis Johnson Jr., "The Out-Resurrection from the Dead," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 110 (1953):139-46.

<sup>129</sup>Lightner, "Philippians," p. 661.

endure. Obviously this out-resurrection is something which is capable of many degrees depending on the measure of one's faithfulness. Thus the degree to which we are faithful to use our talents, treasures, gifts, abilities, resources, and opportunities in life to please Him is the degree to which we will obtain this out-resurrection abundance of life."<sup>130</sup>

There is no question that there will be differences of rewards at the judgment seat of Christ (1 Cor. 3:12-15). However there is no other Scripture that teaches a difference in the resurrection of faithful and unfaithful believers. It seems strange that if Paul wanted to distinguish between faithful and unfaithful believers here he would use the resurrection to do so. Other Scripture points to the judgment seat of Christ as the time when God will make this distinction, not the resurrection. Moreover the term "out-resurrection" seems to stress separation from others at the time of resurrection rather than separation from others following resurrection.

Robert Wilkin, the writer quoted above, later changed his view and adopted the "spiritual resurrection view."

"The spiritual resurrection view posits that the out-resurrection refers to the attainment of Christlike character in this life."<sup>131</sup>

However *exanastasis* seems to be a very unusual word to use to describe the attainment of Christlike character. I prefer the view that the "out-resurrection" refers to the Rapture.

### **Paul's persistent zeal 3:12-14**

3:12 Paul had said that he had not already grasped the intimate knowledge of His Savior that he sought to obtain (v. 10). He did not want his readers to understand him as saying that his conversion brought him into the intimate personal relationship with Christ that he desired. At conversion his views about what is important in life changed drastically, however. He did not believe he was perfect. There are some Christians who believe that after conversion they do not sin (cf. 1 John 1:6-10).

Paul realized his responsibility to pursue greater personal experiential knowledge of Christ, intimacy with Christ, conformity to Christ, and holiness. One of the reasons that God has saved us is that we might enjoy fellowship with Christ (John 15; 1 John 1:1-3). Practical sanctification

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<sup>130</sup>Bob Wilkin, "Philippians 3:11: Is Our Resurrection Certain?" *Grace Evangelical Society Newsletter*, November 1987, p. 2.

<sup>131</sup>Idem, "Raised to Run," *Grace Evangelical Society News* 6:8 (August 1991):2.

does not come automatically by faith, as justification and glorification do. We must pursue it diligently by following the Lord (vv. 13-15; cf. Gal. 5:16; 2 Pet. 1:5-11).

"To know the incomprehensible greatness of Christ demands a lifetime of arduous inquiry."<sup>132</sup>

"A divine dissatisfaction is essential for spiritual progress."<sup>133</sup>

3:13 Again Paul disclaimed having attained conformity to Christ. He viewed his experience as similar to a runner's. He did not look back. The apostle did not mean that he refused to remember things that had happened to him in the past. He had just reviewed some of those things. He meant that he did not rest in his heritage (vv. 5-7) or in his past attainments (vv. 9-12). He had abandoned the unworthy goal that he had pursued in the past. Now he had a new goal toward which he was looking and running.

"Forget those wrongs done, e.g. the persecution of the church (v 6), and so on, whose memory could paralyze one with guilt and despair. Forget, too, those attainments so far achieved as a Christian, the recollection of which might cause one to put life into neutral and to say, 'I have arrived.' Forget in such a way that the past, good or bad, will have no negative bearing on one's present spiritual growth or conduct."<sup>134</sup>

3:14 Paul's goal (Gr. *skopos*, lit. goal marker, the post at the end of the course on which the runner fixes his gaze) was complete knowledge of Christ. He would receive a prize when he reached that goal. He would only reach that goal when he entered the Lord's presence and saw Him face to face (1 John 3:2-3). Nevertheless he pursued the goal while living on the earth because he wanted to get to know the Lord as well as possible before dying.

The prize would come at the end of the race, when he had attained the goal, but not before then. Therefore "the prize of the upward call" probably does not refer to the Rapture. There is another reason this is not a proper identification. The Rapture is not a reward. God will catch up (rapture) into heaven every living Christian regardless of how he or she has run the race (1 Cor. 15:51-52; 1 Thess. 4:15-17). The prize probably refers to the reward faithful believers will receive at the judgment seat of

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<sup>132</sup>Hawthorne, p. 151.

<sup>133</sup>Wiersbe, *Be Joyful*, p. 96; idem, *The Book . . .*, 2:89.

<sup>134</sup>Hawthorne, p. 153. Fee, *Paul's Letter . . .*, p. 347, believed Paul was referring to looking at the other runners in the race when he spoke of not looking back.

Christ (2 Cor. 5:10). God has called every believer to salvation so we *may* obtain that prize. However only those who run the race as Paul did, namely, to gain an ever increasing experiential knowledge of Christ, *will* obtain it (1 Cor. 9:24).

"Each believer is on the track; each has a special lane in which to run; and each has a goal to achieve. If we reach the goal the way God has planned, then we receive a reward. If we fail, we lose the reward, but we do not lose our citizenship."<sup>135</sup>

"In keeping with the vivid imagery drawn from the Greek games that pervades this section there is still another explanation of the 'upward call' that seems the most reasonable explanation of all. It sees in the expression *tes ano kleseos* ["the upward call"] an allusion to the fact that the Olympian games, which included foot-races, were organized and presided over by agonothetes, highly respected officers called *Hellenodikai*. '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' (G. Glotz, 'Hellenodikai,' in C. Daremberg and E. Saglio [eds.], *Dictionnaire des antiqués grecques et romaines* [Paris: Hachette, 1900-1963] 3,1,60-64). This is the call to which Paul is now alluding (Collange)."<sup>136</sup>

### Paul's charge to adopt his attitude 3:15-17

3:15 In conclusion, Paul urged those who were mature among his readers to recognize that what he had said was true. He also promised that God would enlighten those who thought differently about minor matters if their attitude was right.

"The sentence is thus predicated on their mutual friendship and mutual trust, which is so secure that Paul can simply leave it in God's hands to 'reveal' to them what further understanding they may need on matters wherein they might not be ready fully to agree with him."<sup>137</sup>

"Perfect" (NASB) means "mature" (NIV, Gr. *teleios*). It does not mean sinless. In verse 12 Paul used the same root word and claimed he was not perfect. Probably there he meant that he was not absolutely perfect or

<sup>135</sup>Wiersbe, *Be Joyful*, p. 94; idem, *The Bible . . .*, 2:88.

<sup>136</sup>Hawthorne, p. 154.

<sup>137</sup>Fee, *Paul's Letter . . .*, p. 359.

mature, and here he meant that he was relatively mature compared to the immature.<sup>138</sup> He may have been using "perfect" here somewhat ironically.

". . . for the time being true Christian perfection 'consists only in striving for perfection.'"<sup>139</sup>

3:16 All Christians, but especially the immature who are in view here, need to maintain a consistent life in harmony with our understanding of God's truth. We should not wait until we have a complete knowledge of what God has revealed to put into practice what we do understand.

3:17 This verse is transitional. It applies equally well to what precedes and to what follows.

Paul's advice might appear to some as egocentric. Nonetheless the reason he encouraged others to follow his example was that he was following Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 11:1). Those who walked after Paul's pattern of life included Timothy and Epaphroditus. In Philippians Paul typically gave warnings and then followed them up with encouragements in the form of good examples.

"At issue throughout is living a cruciform existence, discipleship marked by the cross and evidenced by suffering on behalf of Christ."<sup>140</sup>

Paul introduced this section with an exhortation to rejoice (v. 1) and a warning against Judaizing false teachers who would rob the readers of their joy (v. 2). He then explained his own view of the Christian life (vv. 3-14) and gave a final admonition to adopt his attitude (vv. 15-17). This was appropriate since his view differed radically from what the Judaizers taught, and it expressed the mind of Christ (2:5-11).

Paul had previously used the examples of Jesus Christ (2:5-11), himself (2:17-18), Timothy (2:19-24), and Epaphroditus (2:25-30) to challenge his readers. In this section his own example encourages us again to make Jesus Christ the focus of our lives. Many Christians are not very effective because they try to do too many different things. Paul had one clearly defined goal in relation to Christ: to get to know His Savior better and better.

### **The antinomian danger 3:18-19**

Another threat to the joy and spiritual development of the Philippians was people who advocated lawless living. This is, of course, the opposite extreme from what the Judaizers

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<sup>138</sup>See Jac J. Muller, *The Epistles of Paul to the Philippians and to Philemon*, p. 125.

<sup>139</sup>Hawthorne, p. 158.

<sup>140</sup>Fee, *Paul's Letter . . .*, p. 363.

taught (v. 2). Paul warned his readers of this danger next. These verses give the reason for Paul's exhortation in verse 17.

3:18 Who these enemies were becomes clear in the next verse. Here we learn that there were many of them though they were probably not in the Philippian church or Paul would probably have addressed them differently. These individuals caused the apostle much grief because they misled Christians. Perhaps he described them as enemies of the cross because what they taught was contrary to the spirit of obedience to God that had led Jesus to the cross (cf. v. 10).

3:19 The context does not specify whether these people were Christians or not, but antinomianism was common among both groups in Paul's day as it is today.<sup>141</sup> Consequently we should probably understand "destruction" in a general sense. The same Greek word (*apoleia*) occurs in 1:28 where it probably refers to unbelievers and eternal destruction. Nevertheless believers can experience premature death as discipline if they continue to resist the will of God (Acts 5:1-11; 1 Cor. 11:30; 1 John 5:16).

Three characteristics mark these people (cf. vv. 2-3). First, they give free rein to the satisfaction of their sensual appetites and do not restrain the flesh (cf. Rom. 16:18; 1 Cor. 6:13; Jude 11). Second, they find satisfaction and take pride in things that they do that should cause them shame (cf. Eph. 5:12). Third, they involve themselves almost totally in physical and material things, things pertaining to the present enjoyment of life, to the exclusion of spiritual matters. In short, their ritualistic observances had taken God's place in their lives. They had become idolaters.

"He [Paul] is probably describing some itinerants, whose view of the faith is such that it allows them a great deal of undisciplined self-indulgence. . . . In any case, they have not appeared heretofore in the letter, and do not appear again. They have served their immediate purpose of standing in sharp relief to Paul's own 'walk' and to his heavenly pursuit, so crucial to this letter, and toward which Paul now turns once more as he begins to draw this appeal to an end."<sup>142</sup>

### The forward look 3:20-21

3:20 The reason we should follow Paul's example and not that of these sensualists is that as Christians we have a citizenship in heaven as well as one on earth. Our heavenly citizenship and destiny are far more important

<sup>141</sup>See Robert A. Pyne, "Antinomianism and Dispensationalism," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153:610 (April-June 1996):141-54.

<sup>142</sup>Fee, *Paul's Letter . . .*, p. 375.

than our brief earthly sojourn (cf. Gal. 4:26; Heb. 11:10). The Roman citizenship the Philippians enjoyed meant a great deal to them (Acts 16:12, 21). All believers need to learn to live as foreigners and pilgrims on this earth (Heb. 11:13; 1 Pet. 2:11).<sup>143</sup>

"Jews expect perfection now by keeping the Law; Christians yearn for the future at which time perfection will be achieved."<sup>144</sup>

The Greek word *apekdechometha*, translated "look for," is a strong compound.

"The compound emphasizes the intense yearning for the Parousia . . ."<sup>145</sup>

"The expectation of the Lord's personal and imminent return gave joy and power to the early Christians and to the Christian communities."<sup>146</sup>

Furthermore it is from our heavenly kingdom that a Savior will come to deliver us out of this present evil world and take us to our home with Him above (John 14:1-2). The prospect of our Lord's return should motivate us to live as citizens of heaven even while we are still on earth (1 John 3:2-3).

". . . Paul prefers 'justification' 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)."<sup>147</sup>

3:21 When Christ returns for us at the Rapture He will transform our present mortal bodies into immortal bodies such as our Lord's resurrected body. The comparison between these two bodies is striking. One is lowly, weak, and susceptible to all kinds of evil influences. The idea that it is sinful, which the AV implies by using the word "vile," is absent in the Greek word (*tapeinoseos*). The other new body will be glorious, more expressive of our true state as the children of God, and incorruptible. This transformation will occur whether we are alive or dead when the Lord returns (1 Cor. 15:51-54; 1 Thess. 5:9-10).

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<sup>143</sup>See John A. Witmer, "The Man with Two Countries," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 133:532 (October-December 1976):338-49.

<sup>144</sup>Hawthorne, p. 170.

<sup>145</sup>H. A. A. Kennedy, "The Epistle to the Philippians," in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, 3:463.

<sup>146</sup>James Montgomery Boice, *Philippians*, p. 247.

<sup>147</sup>Hawthorne, p. 172.

This amazing change will transpire because of the same divine power by which God will eventually subject everything in the universe to Himself.

### **The concluding charge to stand fast in the Lord 4:1**

The key word "Therefore" (Gr. *hōste*) and the repetition of "stand firm" (cf. 1:27) point to a conclusion of the main subject. This verse begins the rather protracted conclusion of the letter. The apostle did not want his readers to lose their balance and tumble spiritually because of bad influences. Instead he wanted them to adopt the mind of Christ as he had and so continue with him in the partnership of the gospel.

Paul's strong affection for the Philippian Christians comes through very clearly in this verse. He called them "brethren" four times (1:12; 3:1, 17; 4:8), "beloved" twice (2:12 and here), and "beloved brethren" once (here). Again he affirmed his desire to visit Philippi and see them again (cf. 1:8; 2:24). Moreover he referred to them as his present source of joy and his future crown when he would stand before the judgment seat of Christ. He would receive a reward for establishing them in the faith.<sup>148</sup>

In this section on walking steadfastly (3:1—4:1) Paul urged his readers to rejoice in the Lord and warned them about false teaching of two kinds that would limit their joy. On the one hand, there was teaching from Judaizers, some of whom may have been Christians but most of whom were probably not. These false teachers wanted to limit the Philippians' legitimate liberty by persuading them to submit to laws that God did not intend to govern them. On the other hand, there were antinomians, many of whom seem to have been believers but some of whom may not have been. They were urging the abandonment of legitimate law and were advocating self-indulgence. Paul's example in the middle section of chapter 3 (vv. 4b-16) provides a path that leads us safely between these extremes.

Standing firm involves living in harmony with one another (vv. 2-3), rejoicing on all occasions (vv. 4-7), and developing the quality of sweet reasonableness (vv. 8-9). This is clear because three imperatives in the Greek text explain "so stand firm" or "stand firm thus" (Gr. *houtos*).

### **C. SPECIFIC DUTIES 4:2-9**

This last section (4:2-9) of the body of the epistle (1:27—4:9) deals with the same two subjects as the preceding two sections, unity and steadfastness, but in more detail. Paul gave his readers specific instructions about what they should do. Unity needed restoring, and tranquillity needed maintaining.

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<sup>148</sup>See Joe L. Wall, *Going for the Gold*, pp. 129, 152-63, for a practical discussion of the crown of life.

### **1. Restoring unity 4:2-3**

4:2 Euodia ("Success") and Syntyche ("Lucky") were evidently two women in the Philippian congregation.<sup>149</sup>

"For the Pauline letters, this is a remarkable moment indeed, since Paul does here what he seldom does elsewhere in 'conflict' settings—he names names."<sup>150</sup>

God did not reveal the reason for the estrangement that existed between these two women. Regardless of the reason the will of God for them was to establish a harmonious relationship. Unanimity in the church is not always possible, but unity is. Paul urged each of these two women individually perhaps so neither would feel that responsibility for healing the breach lay with the other. Urging was all Paul felt he had to do, not commanding (cf. 1:27—2:4). He assumed they would respond to gentle persuasion. The addition of "in the Lord" would remind them that they were under His authority and had much in common as sisters in Christ.<sup>151</sup>

"Having 'the same mindset *in the Lord*' has been specifically spelled out in the preceding paradigmatic narratives, where Christ (2:6-11) has humbled himself by taking the 'form of a slave' and thus becoming obedient unto death on a cross, and Paul (3:4-14) has expressed his longing to know Christ, especially through participation in his sufferings so as to be conformed into the same cruciform lifestyle. The ways such a 'mindset' takes feet is by humbly 'looking out for the interests of others' within the believing community (2:3-4)."<sup>152</sup>

4:3 Paul appealed to another person in the Philippian church to help Euodia and Syntyche restore their fellowship. Most translations interpret *suzuge* ("comrade" or "yokefellow") as a description rather than as a proper name. Probably it referred to the leading elder (pastor) in the church.<sup>153</sup>

Euodia and Syntyche had evidently labored for the Lord with Paul (cf. Acts 16:13-15). Here the main theme of the epistle comes out clearly again as partnership in the gospel. Clement had been a partner in the

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<sup>149</sup>Other less acceptable identifications are that they were two men (Theodore of Mopsuestia) or that they were symbols of Jewish and Gentile Christians (the Tübingen school).

<sup>150</sup>Fee, *Paul's Letter . . .*, p. 389.

<sup>151</sup>See A. Boyd Luter, "Partnership in the Gospel: The Role of Women in the Church at Philippi," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39:3 (September 1996):411-20.

<sup>152</sup>Fee, *Paul's Letter . . .*, p. 392.

<sup>153</sup>There are many other views of who this person was all of which, I think, are less probable. See the commentaries.

gospel as well. The Scriptures do not identify who he was. Clement was a common Roman name. Others had also worked with Paul, probably in Philippi and perhaps elsewhere. The fact that their names appeared in the book of life seems to be an allusion to their honored status among the citizens of heaven.

"Practically every city of that day maintained a roll or civic register of its citizens, and in that record was entered the name of every child born in the city. If one of the citizens proved guilty of treachery or disloyalty or of anything bringing shame on the city, he was subjected to public dishonour by the expunging of his name from the register. (The name was, in any case normally obliterated at death.) He was deemed no longer worthy to be regarded as a citizen of the city. If, on the other hand, a citizen had performed some outstanding exploit deserving of special distinction, honour was bestowed upon him, either by the recording of the deed in the city roll or by his name being encircled in gold (or overlaid in gold) in the roll."<sup>154</sup>

## **2. Maintaining tranquillity 4:4-9**

Paul gave his readers five other brief positive exhortations all of which are vitally important for individual and corporate Christian living. They all result in the maintenance of peace in the body so the saints can work together effectively as partners in the gospel even in the midst of opposing unbelievers.

4:4 Rejoicing in Christ is something the apostle had commanded earlier (3:1) and had illustrated abundantly for his readers throughout this epistle. He must have felt that there was a great need for this attitude in Philippi. There were many reasons the Philippian saints could have felt discouraged. Paul's imprisonment and the possibility of his death, Epaphroditus' illness, and the antagonism of unbelievers were a few. The attacks from legalists on the one hand and libertines on the other plus friction among certain members of the church contributed to this spirit. To counteract this attitude Paul prescribed rejoicing in the Lord. He repeated this charge in this verse for even greater emphasis.

Paul was not urging us to be unrealistic. He was not saying that we should never feel sad. Even Jesus wept (John 11:35). However, he was

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<sup>154</sup>Frederick A. Tatford, *The Patmos Letters*, pp. 116-17. See Charles R. Smith, "The Book of Life," *Grace Theological Journal* 6:2 (Fall 1985):219-30. The Bible refers to more than one book of life: the book containing the names of people presently alive (Exod. 32:32-33; Ps. 69:28), and the book containing the names of God's elect (i.e., all believers; Luke 10:20; Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27) and the names of faithful believers (Phil. 4:3; Rev. 22:19).

advocating focusing on the blessings we have in Christ and being grateful for these regardless of how sad we may feel at any particular time.<sup>155</sup>

"The truly godly person both *longs* for God's presence, where one pours out his or her heart to God in joy, prayer, and thanksgiving, and *lives* in God's presence by 'doing' the righteousness of God. Otherwise piety is merely religion, not devotion."<sup>156</sup>

4:5 We should also demonstrate forbearance (Gr. *epieikes*) to everyone, saved and unsaved alike. The Greek word contains connotations of gentleness, yielding, kindness, patience, forbearance, leniency, and magnanimity. It recalls Jesus Christ's humility in 2:5-11. The forbearing person does not insist on his or her own rights or privileges. He or she is considerate and gentle toward others. Of course, there is a time to stand for what is right. The forbearing person is not spineless but selfless. In this connection Paul reminded his readers of the imminence of the Lord's return at the Rapture. When He comes, He will right wrongs and vindicate those who have given up their rights for the glory of God and the welfare of others (cf. 3:20-21; James 5:8).

"The Apostle is not speaking of the nearness of the Lord in his abiding presence with us, but of the imminence of his coming."<sup>157</sup>

"In all we do we must always remember that the Lord may return at any time. His coming is always at hand, yes, but we do not know when, and so we must always live in the realisation that he is coming."<sup>158</sup>

"At any moment they may have to answer for their conduct."<sup>159</sup>

"In light of the concept of the imminent coming of Christ and the fact that the New Testament does teach His imminent coming, we can conclude that the Pretribulation Rapture view is the only view of the Rapture of the church that comfortably fits the New Testament teaching of the imminent coming of Christ. It is the only view that can honestly say that Christ could return at any moment,

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<sup>155</sup>The book *Happiness Is a Choice*, by Frank Minirth and Paul Meier, has been a help to many people in cultivating this attitude. You may want to use it in your ministry.

<sup>156</sup>Fee, *Paul's Letter . . .*, p. 402.

<sup>157</sup>F. W. Beare, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Philippians*, p. 146.

<sup>158</sup>D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Life of Peace*, p. 162.

<sup>159</sup>Alfred Plummer, *A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians*, p. 93.

because it alone teaches that Christ will come to rapture the church before the 70th week of Daniel 9 or the Tribulation period begins and that nothing else must happen before His return."<sup>160</sup>

4:6 Earlier Paul commended Timothy for being anxious over the welfare of the Philippians (2:20). Here he said we should not be anxious about anything. The same Greek word (*merimnate*) appears in both places. The resolution of this problem probably lies in viewing anxiety as concern that may become fretful and inappropriate if taken too far. Paul's point here was that rather than becoming distraught over a particular situation we should take it to the Lord in prayer (cf. Matt. 6:25-34). We should pray about everything that concerns us. Someone has said, "Why worry when you can pray?" Prayer needs to replace worry in the Christian's life.

Paul used several different words for prayer in this verse. "Prayer" (*proseuche*) is the most general term for our communications to God. "Supplication" (NASB) or "petition" (NIV, *deesis*) refers to requests for particular benefits. "Thanksgiving" (*eucharistias*) is grateful acknowledgment of past mercies. "Requests" (*aitemata*) looks at individual requests of God that form part of the whole prayer.<sup>161</sup> Paul offered strong encouragement to seek release from anxiety in prayer and more prayer.<sup>162</sup>

"Lack of gratitude is the first step to idolatry (Rom 1:21)."<sup>163</sup>

Howard Hendricks called verses 2-6 "a five-part recipe for conflict resolution: (1) 'Rejoice in the Lord,' that is, get beyond yourselves and look to the Lord. (2) 'Let your gentleness be evident to all.' In other words speak with kindness to each other. (3) 'Do not be anxious.' Relax, and give it all to God. (4) 'Be thankful.' The simple act of expressing gratitude for our blessings takes the heat out of infection. (5) Present your requests to God. Prayer realigns us and restores peace . . ."<sup>164</sup>

<sup>160</sup>Renald E. Showers, *Maranatha: Our Lord, Come! A Definitive Study of the Rapture of the Church*, p. 149. See also Stanton, ch. 6: "The Imminency of the Coming of Christ for the Church," pp. 108-37.

<sup>161</sup>See Trench, pp. 176-80; and Bryan Gordon Burtch, "The Greek Words for Prayer in the New Testament" (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1951).

<sup>162</sup>Hawthorne, p. 183.

<sup>163</sup>Fee, *Paul's Letter . . .*, p. 409.

<sup>164</sup>Howard G. Hendricks, *Color Outside the Lines: A Revolutionary Approach to Creative Leadership*, p. 96.

4:7 Peace in the heart will follow praying about what concerns us. The phrase "the peace of God" occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. This is peace that comes from God rather than peace with God. It is a peace that comes to us when we pray because we enter into the tranquility of God's own presence. Those doing the praying are believers. This peace or release from tension is something that we cannot fully comprehend. Nevertheless this peace acts as a sentry to guard the believer's heart (personality) and mind (thoughts) under the sovereign influence of Christ Jesus.

"Together these words refer to the entire inner being of the Christian, his emotions, affections, thoughts and moral choices. 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."<sup>165</sup>

Most of us have experienced lack of complete peace from time to time when we pray. Paul was not saying that we will feel absolutely at ease and relieved after we pray as he directed here. Still a measure of peace will be ours. At least we will have the confidence that we have laid the matter before the Lord and sought His aid.

Note that this verse does not promise peace as the indicator of God's will when we are praying about what we should do. Paul did not say that if we need to make a decision God will make His will known to us by giving us peace about the right choice. The promise of this verse is that if we pray rather than worry (v. 6) God will give us peace. Anxiety brings no peace, but praying does.

4:8 This "Finally" signals the last of the three imperatives that explain how to stand firm (v. 1; cf. vv. 2, 4). It also introduces Paul's next to the last exhortation in this list that deals with what the believer should spend his or her time thinking about. This subject obviously relates to prayer since both activities involve mental concentration.

"True" (*alethe*) means valid, honest, and reliable (cf. Rom. 3:4).

"Honorable" or "noble" (*semna*) means worthy of respect (cf. Prov. 8:6; 1 Tim. 3:8, 11; Titus 2:2).

"Right" (*dikaia*) refers to what is just and upright.

"Pure" (*hagna*) denotes cleanness and connotes moral purity.

"Lovely" (*prospBILE*) means what is amiable, agreeable, or pleasing.

"In common parlance, this word could refer to a Beethoven symphony, as well as to the work of Mother Teresa among

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<sup>165</sup>Hawthorne, p. 185.

the poor of Calcutta; the former is lovely and enjoyable, the latter is admirable as well as moral."<sup>166</sup>

"Of good repute" or "admirable" (*euphema*) refers to what is praiseworthy because it measures up to the highest standards.

Paul listed these virtues as contemporary moral philosophers of his day taught, namely, by reciting catalogues of virtues and vices.<sup>167</sup>

The conditional clause structure at the end of this sentence is a rhetorical device. It places the responsibility on the reader to make his or her own decision regarding what is excellent and praiseworthy.<sup>168</sup>

". . . 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 to attain to this level of behavior that will command the praise of men and of God."<sup>169</sup>

4:9 Wholesome conduct (v. 9) should follow wholesome thinking (v. 8).

Paul organized his thoughts on this subject by constructing two pairs. The Philippians had learned and received many helpful lessons from Paul, their teacher. They had personally heard his verbal instructions and seen his individual example. They needed to put these things into practice, not just think about them and discuss them.

"It appears that he [Paul] 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 always expressed in the life of the teacher."<sup>170</sup>

When they did so, the God of peace would be with them. Obviously God is always with His people (Matt. 28:20). Paul's phrase is a way of saying that they would experience God's presence by enjoying the peace that comes when we walk in fellowship with God. This was undoubtedly a play on words in view of verse 7. Both the peace of God and the God of peace guard the believer who is a partner in the work of the gospel.

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<sup>166</sup>Fee, *Paul's Letter . . .*, p. 418.

<sup>167</sup>Hawthorne, p. 187.

<sup>168</sup>Kent, p. 152.

<sup>169</sup>Hawthorne, p. 186.

<sup>170</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 190.

In this section of collected exhortations (vv. 4-9) Paul urged five things. These are rejoicing in Christ always, being forbearing with all people, praying about difficult situations, thinking about wholesome subjects, and practicing apostolic teaching. These are fundamental revelations of God's will for all Christians that are especially relevant to our calling to proclaim the gospel.

The exhortation in verses 8-9 also concludes the main body of the epistle begun in 1:27. The reference to Paul's conduct in verse 9 ties back into 1:12-26.

"The body of the letter begins with a topic sentence in 1:27a. The Philippian Christians, to be perfected in their partnership for the gospel, were to conduct themselves worthy of the gospel. Specifically two things are in view—unity with one another and steadfastness against their opponents. They need not fear, for God will supply grace (1:27-30). Chapter 2 takes up the unity motif, and chapter 3, steadfastness. The main body of the epistle then concludes with a hortatory paragraph which again addresses the same two subjects. All this is freed from any topical 'loose ends' by the summarizing double conclusion of 4:8-9."<sup>171</sup>

#### **IV. EPILOGUE 4:10-20**

The apostle began this epistle by sharing some personal information about his situation in Rome (1:12-26). He now returned from his concerns for the Philippians (1:27—4:9) to his own circumstances (4:10-20). Notice the somewhat chiasmic structure of the epistle. This epilogue balances the prologue (1:3-26).

"Nowhere else 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 . . .

"The very structure of this section makes clear what has just been said. It exhibits a nervous alternation back and forth between Paul's appreciation on the one hand (vv 10, 14-16, 18-20), and his insistence on his own independence and self-sufficiency on the other (vv 11-13, 17)."<sup>172</sup>

". . . Paul's point is that his joy lies not in the gifts per se—these he really could do with or without—but in the greater reality that the gifts represent: the tangible evidence, now renewed, of his and their long-term friendship, which for Paul has the still greater significance of renewing their long-term 'partnership/participation' with him in the gospel."<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>171</sup>Swift, p. 249.

<sup>172</sup>Hawthorne, p. 195.

<sup>173</sup>Fee, *Paul's Letter . . .*, pp. 425-26.

### A. THE RECENT GIFT 4:10-14

First, Paul thanked his brethren for their recent gift that Epaphroditus had delivered to him (vv. 10-14).

4:10 The "But" (Gr. *de*) that opens this section in the NASB is a bit misleading. It does not imply a contrast with what precedes but simply introduces a new idea.

Paul was glad that the Philippians had again expressed their loving concern for him by sending him a gift. Their care of him had "blossomed afresh" (NEB). It had been some time since they had done so.

"Like a person rejoicing over the signs of spring after a hard winter, so Paul rejoiced to see again the signs of personal concern from Philippi after a long interval of silence."<sup>174</sup>

Their failure seems to have resulted from some apparently unavoidable circumstance. The apostle understood this and did not chide them for their lack of attentiveness to his needs.

"In this section we see that the first attitude which makes giving and receiving a joy is concern for the work of the gospel and for those who do the work of the gospel. When the minds of the givers and receivers are focused on the work and on the workers rather than on the gift itself, financial matters will be kept in the right perspective."<sup>175</sup>

4:11 Paul did not want the Philippians to misunderstand him. He was not rejoicing primarily because their gift had met his need, but because their gift expressed their love and concern for him. Paul had learned to be content and to rejoice regardless of his physical circumstances. Such contentment is not a natural gift.

"It [the aorist tense of the Greek verb *emathōn*, translated "learned"] implies that Paul's whole experience, especially as a Christian, up to the present has been a sort of schooling from which he has not failed to master its lessons."<sup>176</sup>

Every Christian needs to learn to be content. Evidently when Paul urged his readers to rejoice in the Lord always (v. 4) he was preaching what he

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<sup>174</sup>Hawthorne, p. 197.

<sup>175</sup>Brug, p. 219.

<sup>176</sup>Hawthorne, p. 198.

practiced (vv. 5-8). The apostle's contentment and joy even in prison indicate his spiritual maturity, and it challenges us all.

- 4:12 Specifically Paul could be equally content with little or with much materially because he was rich spiritually. Both poverty and wealth bring temptations with them (Prov. 30:7-9). The apostle had learned how to handle both need and abundance in every individual situation (*en panti*) and in all situations (*en pasin*).

"Prosperity has done more damage to believers than has adversity."<sup>177</sup>

- 4:13 How could Paul be content? His contentment did not come through will power or the power of positive thinking. Paul was not a member of the Stoic philosophic school. It was Jesus Christ who enabled him to be content.

"The secret of Paul's independence was his dependence upon Another. His self-sufficiency in reality came from being in vital union with One who is all-sufficient."<sup>178</sup>

Earlier in this letter Paul explained that the most important thing in life was to center on Christ (2:7-11). Contentment is a fruit of doing so. "All things" in the context included being content with little or much materially, but Christ can enable His children to do much more than this (cf. Matt. 19:26; Luke 1:37).

"Paul . . . 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 surrendering them to Christ he discovered that they were transformed for his own enrichment and for the enrichment of others."<sup>179</sup>

- 4:14 In view of Paul's attitude the Philippians might have wondered if they should have bothered to send him the gift. Paul hastened to add that it was good of them to send it. He evidently appreciated it more because it showed a proper spirit in the givers than because it eased his discomfort (v. 18).

"We know that God loves a cheerful giver, but I believe we also need to stress that God loves a cheerful receiver. Cheerful receivers make giving and receiving a joy. It is especially important that the called workers of the

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<sup>177</sup>Wiersbe, *Be Joyful*, p. 123; idem., *The Bible . . .*, 2:97.

<sup>178</sup>Hawthorne, p. 201.

<sup>179</sup>Ibid., pp. 201-2.

church learn to be gracious, cheerful receivers. This is not necessarily an easy task. The art of being a gracious, cheerful, thankful receiver may be even more difficult than being a cheerful giver. If we learn to accept the compliments and the special personal gifts which we receive in a gracious, cheerful manner, we will help make giving and receiving a joy for ourselves and for our people."<sup>180</sup>

### **B. THE PREVIOUS GIFTS 4:15-20**

Paul seems to have intended the references in these verses to previous gifts that the Philippians had sent him to dispel any doubts they may have had about the genuineness of his gratitude.

4:15           The Philippians had been very thoughtful and generous with Paul when he left their town after planting their church on his second missionary journey. He had travelled south into the province of Achaia. Probably the gift to which he referred in this verse is the same one he mentioned in 2 Corinthians 11:8, the gift that reached Paul in Corinth.

4:16           Even before Paul arrived in Corinth the Philippians had sent him gifts in Thessalonica, the next town he visited after leaving Philippi (Acts 17:1). Perhaps these were smaller gifts since they were not as memorable.

"There is good evidence from the Greco-Roman world that the actual expression of 'thank you' was not a part of friendship as such. As strange as it may seem to us, true friends did not need to express thanksgiving directly in order for it to be received. What Paul is most likely doing here in keeping with social convention is thus expressing his 'thank you' indirectly, but even more tellingly, by rehearsing their history in this way."<sup>181</sup>

4:17           However the most important thing to Paul was not the gifts themselves. It was the spiritual reward that would come to the Philippians because of their financial investments in his ministry.

"They themselves will be Paul's eschatological 'reward' (2:16; 4:1); their gift to him has the effect of accumulating 'interest' toward *their* eschatological 'reward.'"<sup>182</sup>

Throughout this section dealing with gifts Paul used common business terminology (i.e., "the matter of giving and receiving," v. 15; "profit" [NASB] or "credited to your account" [NIV], v. 17; "received . . . in full"

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<sup>180</sup>Brug, p. 221.

<sup>181</sup>Fee, *Paul's Letter . . .*, pp. 446-47.

<sup>182</sup>*ibid.*, p. 447.

[NASB], v. 18). Paul was very aware of business matters. Perhaps this reflects his Jewish heritage. His writings reveal a consistent concern over good investments that he regarded mainly as investments yielding eternal rewards.

- 4:18 Paul felt fully satisfied. He had received the Philippians' recent gift in full. This acknowledgment was his written receipt for their donation as well as a thank you note. He also viewed their gift as an offering ultimately made to God that was acceptable to Him. Sweet savor offerings in Israel were sacrifices made in worship more than to atone for sin. The Philippians were serving as believer-priests by sending their gifts to Paul.

Other sacrifices Christians can make to God beside our material possessions (v. 18) include our bodies (Rom. 12:1-2), our converts (Rom. 15:16), our praise (Heb. 13:15), and our good works (Heb. 13:16).

- 4:19 This promise harmonizes with previous revelation concerning how God supplies the needs of His people (cf. Prov. 11:25; Matt. 5:7; 6:33). Note that it is needs that He will meet, not "greeds." God will supply them all. He will do so commensurate with His riches in glory, not simply out of them. As His riches are lavish, so He will give lavishly.

Why do so many Christians suffer because they lack food, clothing, or money in view of this promise? Perhaps it is because some of our greatest needs are not material. To meet these needs God sometimes does not make us rich or even financially comfortable. Remember too that God gave this promise to generous and sacrificial givers. We may be able to think of examples that appear to be exceptions to this promise. However, I believe if we could see things from God's perspective we would realize that God has been completely faithful to His Word.

Note too that the supply of our needs comes through Jesus Christ. They come through His sovereign control, through His vast resources, through His infinite wisdom, through His loving heart, and through our union with Him.

- 4:20 Paul closed this section with a doxology in which he praised God for His providential care. God's care comes to us through His Son, and He often uses His people as His channels of blessing. Nevertheless ultimately God is the provider of His people's needs. May we ever be mindful of this truth and be grateful to Him!

We cannot read this pericope (vv. 10-20) thoughtfully without appreciating the apostle Paul's sensitivity to his Philippian readers. He was careful to balance what he said. He wanted them to understand his genuine gratitude for their gifts on the one hand and his contentment with whatever God sent his way on the other. In our day we tend to go to

one of these extremes or the other in dealing with those who give us gifts. We may give these people the impression that we do not appreciate their gift, or we may lead them to conclude that we are greedy. A proper balance must rest on genuine contentment and must communicate both appreciation and faith.

William Dalton identified four elements common in both the prologue (1:3-26) and the epilogue (4:10-20). The return to these ideas in the epilogue ties the book together and gives it unity.

". . . we seem to have evidence of an inclusion which binds the whole letter into one unit. First of all, the idea of partnership is strongly expressed at the beginning and the end. Thus in 1:5 Paul is 'thankful for your partnership (*koinonia*) in the gospel'; and in 4:15 he records that 'no church entered into partnership in giving and receiving except you only.' This partnership is reiterated in another parallel: in 1:7 the Philippians are sharers (*sugkoinonous*) of grace with Paul; in 4:13 they are sharers (*sugkoinonesantes*) with him in his trouble. At both beginning and end we have the same idea expressed in different ways: the long-standing partnership of the Philippians with Paul: 'from the first day until now' (1:5), and 'in the beginning of the gospel' (4:15). And finally the reciprocal attitude of sympathy between Paul and the Philippians is expressed in the same phrase; in 1:7 he says 'it is right for me to feel this about you' (*touto phronein huper panton humon*), and in 4:10, 'You have revived your concern for me' (*to huper emoi phronein*)."<sup>183</sup>

## **V. GREETINGS AND BENEDICTION 4:21-23**

Paul concluded this warm, positive epistle with some greetings and a final benediction. He did this to cement good relations with the Philippians and to point them again in closing to the Lord Jesus Christ. This closing section of the epistle balances the salutation that opened it (1:1-2).

4:21        The apostle wished that the Philippians would pass his greetings to every individual believer whom they would touch. He probably meant Christians in nearby towns as well as in Philippi. He used the same term to describe them as he employed in his opening greeting: "saints in Christ Jesus" (1:1). We have seen that the believer's position "in Christ" is an important theme in Philippians. Christ Jesus was both the source and focus of Paul and the Philippians' common life together.<sup>184</sup>

The brethren with Paul in Rome included Epaphroditus and probably Timothy. They would have also included the Roman Christians with whom Paul had contact and perhaps other fellow workers such as Luke.

<sup>183</sup>William J. Dalton, "The Integrity of Philippians," *Biblica* 60:1 (1979):101.

<sup>184</sup>Fee, *Paul's Letter . . .*, p. 458.

4:22 "All the saints" probably refers to the Christians at Rome. Of these, some were employees of the imperial government. Paul had already referred to the praetorian guards some of whom had evidently become believers (1:13). Since Philippi as a colony had close ties with Rome, it is likely that some of the Roman Christians had friends in the Philippian church.

4:23 This benediction is similar to Paul's initial greeting (1:2; cf. Phile. 25; Gal. 6:18). God's bestowal of the unmerited favor and supernatural enablement of the Lord Jesus Christ on the spirits (persons) of the Philippians would enable them to succeed. God's grace would enable them to do all that the apostle had exhorted them to do in this letter. We need God's grace for this purpose too.

Paul's personal view of life lies at the center of this epistle structurally as well as conceptually (cf. 3:7-14). There he demonstrated what it means to adopt the mind of Christ. The great burden of this letter is that we need to make His attitude our own so we can join with other believers in partnership in the gospel. The partnership of the Philippians with Paul is still bearing fruit today through this encouraging epistle.

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