

# INTRODUCTION AND PHILIPPIANS

By Ashby L. Camp

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## Introduction

### *I. The City and the Church*

A. Philippians is a letter from Paul to the church in the city of Philippi.

1. Philippi was an important city in the Roman province of Macedonia (Acts 16:12). It was granted the status of a Roman colony around 30 B.C., which meant "the city was treated as if on Italian soil, was ruled by Roman law, and had greater freedom with Roman provincial governors; there was automatic citizenship for people born in the city; and people could sell and buy land and had exemption from certain land taxes, and were entitled to Roman protection."<sup>1</sup>

2. Population estimates for the city range from 10-15 thousand, with two or three times that in the surrounding areas.<sup>2</sup> About a quarter of the population was Roman, families of Roman army veterans who decades earlier had been given land there by the Roman government. There also were many Greeks and Thracians there, but apparently very few Jews.

3. Though the Romans were a minority of the population, the city was politically and culturally Roman. Indeed, it has been dubbed "Little Rome." The colonists generally were very loyal to Rome and the emperor, and as indicated in Acts 16:21, they were proud of their Roman allegiance.<sup>3</sup>

B. The church was founded there during Paul's second missionary journey, probably in late A.D. 49 or early A.D. 50.

1. You will recall that at the end of Acts 15, Paul tells Barnabas they should visit the churches they had planted during their missionary journey, but they went separate ways because they could not agree on whether John Mark should accompany them. Barnabas and Mark went to Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and headed out through Syria and into Cilicia strengthening the churches that had been planted in those regions, during Paul's years in Tarsus and/or as the gospel had spread out from the church in Antioch.

2. They went to Derbe and then to Lystra, Timothy's town. Timothy was a Christian and had a good reputation among the brothers in Lystra and Iconium (Acts 16:1-2). He presumably had been taught the gospel by his mother and the church elders in

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<sup>1</sup> Mark J. Keown, *Philippians 1:1-2:18*, EEC (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017), 36 (fn. 133).

<sup>2</sup> Keown, 38.

<sup>3</sup> Keown, 36-38.

Lystra. Paul had Timothy circumcised as a matter of evangelistic expediency, and then Timothy accompanied Paul and Silas on their journey.

3. The Holy Spirit forbid them from preaching in Asia and Bithynia – we are not told why – so they pushed on to Troas. This is when Paul received the vision of a Macedonian man urging them to come to Macedonia to help them. So they promptly sailed from Troas to Samothrace and then to Neapolis and then traveled over land to the leading city of Philippi. The founding of the church is reported in Acts 16:12-40.

a. In Philippi, Lydia, a Gentile convert to Judaism from Thyatira, is converted. Paul casts out the spirit in a fortune-telling slave girl, which caused her owners to bring Paul and Silas before the authorities on charges of disturbing the city and practicing unlawful things. They were beaten and thrown into prison with their feet fastened in stocks. In 1 Thess. 2:2 Paul refers to the suffering and insults they received in Philippi on this occasion.

b. That night, as Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, there was a great earthquake and the prison doors flung open and the prisoners' bonds came loose. The jailer was ready to kill himself, but Paul told him not to do it, as all the prisoners were present. This led to this man and his household being baptized into Christ.

c. The next day the authorities sent word that Paul and Silas could leave, but Paul insisted that they come and escort them out personally because, since they were Roman citizens, the beating they had been given was illegal. The officials were afraid and complied. Paul and Silas then visited Lydia and departed.

C. After leaving Philippi, Paul received material assistance from the Philippians both when he was in Thessalonica (Phil. 4:15-16) and in Corinth (2 Cor. 11:9 – "brothers who came from Macedonia"). Paul visited the Macedonian churches, those at Thessalonica and Philippi, on at least two occasions during the mid 50's (Acts 20:1-3) and maintained a warm relationship with the Philippians throughout his life.

## *II. The Date and Occasion*

A. At the time of this writing, Paul is in prison, probably in Rome. If Rome is indeed the site of his imprisonment, the year is around A.D. 61-62. This is near the end of his first imprisonment in that city.

B. During Paul's third missionary journey, when he was raising money from his Gentile churches for the poor Jewish churches in Judea, the Macedonian churches insisted on participating. And though they were in dire financial straits at the time, they gave with extreme generosity (2 Cor. 8:1-5). That generous gift, along with their uncertainty about Paul's status, probably is why the Philippians were unable to provide

Paul any material assistance during his two-year imprisonment in Caesarea (see 4:10). When they learned that Paul had been sent to Rome, they were determined to help him.

C. The Philippians sent Epaphroditus to Paul with a gift (4:18) and with instructions to care for Paul's needs (2:25). Either while he was on the way or after he arrived, Epaphroditus became so ill that he almost died. News of Epaphroditus's illness reached Philippi, which caused anxiety for both the Philippians and Epaphroditus. Epaphroditus recovered from his illness, and Paul decided to send him back to the Philippians. He takes that opportunity to send them this letter.

## Text

### *I. Opening (1:1-11)*

#### A. Salutation (1:1-2)

*Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with [the] overseers and deacons: <sup>2</sup>Grace and peace to you from God our Father and [the] Lord Jesus Christ.*

1. Paul refers to himself and Timothy as "slaves" of Christ Jesus. They were totally at the disposal of their Master. There was absolutely no question about who was in control of their lives. That is to be the attitude of every Christian because we have all been purchased by the blood of the Lamb (1 Cor. 6:19-20; Acts 20:28).

2. The recipients are described as "saints in Christ Jesus." "Saints" simply means holy or sanctified ones, those set apart for God and his service. All Christians are saints because in Christ they have entered into a new relationship with God; they are the special or elect community of mankind. The popular notion of saint as a status bestowed by the church on select deceased Christians is unbiblical.

3. The saints in Philippi include the "overseers and deacons."

a. Local congregations in the early church were each led by a plurality of men variously called elders/presbyters (*presbuteros*), overseers/bishops (*episkopos*), or shepherds/pastors (*poimēn*). The interchangeability of these terms is clear from Acts 20:17, 28; Tit. 1:5,7; and 1 Pet. 5:1, 2. The term "pastor" is today commonly thought to be a synonym for "preacher" or "minister," but technically that is incorrect.

(1) In brief, elders are responsible for the spiritual welfare of the congregation. This necessarily involves them in teaching and modeling the word of God. The qualifications for the office of elder are contained in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.

(2) The only leadership structure specified in the New Testament is a plurality of elders that govern each local congregation. Churches of Christ and many other groups follow that biblical pattern. In other words, we do not have some governing church structure above the elders in the congregation.

b. The role of deacons in the New Testament is less clear. The qualifications for this position are set forth in 1 Tim. 3:8-13. Given that the word translated "deacon" generally means servant or minister and given that it was a distinct position in the congregation, they probably aided the elders in carrying out their responsibilities to the church. Acts 6:1-7 is probably a good illustration of the concept. Though those men are not specifically called deacons (*diakonos*), Acts 6 was understood in the early church to involve the appointment of deacons,<sup>4</sup> a conclusion no doubt reached because of the presence of *diakonia* (service) in v. 1 and *diakoneō* (serve) in v. 2.

4. Paul desires for them that the Father and the Son will pour out on them unmerited favor in unspecified ways and the blessing of general well-being.

## B. Thanksgiving for them (1:3-8)

<sup>3</sup>*I give thanks to my God in every mention of you, <sup>4</sup>always, in every prayer of mine on behalf of all of you, making the prayer with joy <sup>5</sup>because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now, <sup>6</sup>being confident of this very thing, that the one who began a good work in you will carry it through until [the] day of Christ Jesus. <sup>7</sup>Indeed, it is right for me to think this way about all of you because I have you in the heart, in both my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel for all of you are sharers with me in [God's] grace. <sup>8</sup>For God [is] my witness that I long for all of you with [the] affections of Christ Jesus.*

1. Paul expresses his appreciation and affection for the Philippians, telling them that every time he mentions them in prayer he does so with thanksgiving and joy. Paul knew how to encourage people in the faith and was not hesitant to do so. The bases of his thanksgiving and joy are:

a. Their "sharing in the gospel from the first day until now." This means more than simply their coming to faith; it means their active participation in furthering the gospel, particularly their generous support of Paul's missionary effort. They

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<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book III, ch. 12:10 ("Stephen, who was chosen the first deacon by the apostles"), Book IV, ch. 15:1 ("Luke also has recorded that Stephen, who was the first elected into the diaconate by the apostles"); Pseudo-Tertullian, *Against All Heresies* ("He was one of the seven deacons who were appointed in the Acts of the Apostles") [The work is thought to be related to the lost treatise of the early third-century theologian Hippolytus of Rome titled the *Syntagma* – see Reinhard Plummer, *Early Christian Authors on Samaritans and Samaritanism* (Tubingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 32]; Cyprian, *Epistles of Cyprian*, Epistle LXIV:3 ("while apostles appointed for themselves deacons after the ascent of the Lord into heaven"). This understanding is reflected in Eusebius's early fourth-century work, *The History of the Church*, Bk. 2:1 ("By prayer and laying on of the apostles' hands they were appointed to the diaconate").

were a "missionary church" from the beginning (see, Phil. 4:15-16; 2 Cor. 11:9). The sincerity of their love for the Lord and his work was demonstrated by their sacrificial giving (see, 2 Cor. 8:1-8). Their faith was evident in its expression, which testified to its genuineness and brought Paul joy and thankfulness.

b. His confidence "that the one who began a good work in [them] will carry it through until the day of Christ Jesus."

(1) The God who began in them the good work of their sharing in the gospel, who through his revelation delivered by Paul and his companions brought them to genuine faith in Christ, will not abandon them to their own inadequate strength but will continue to empower them by his grace to remain faithful and thus to receive salvation on the day of Christ's return. This does not mean God makes it impossible to resist that empowering grace so that the Christian ceases to have any choice to remain faithful. It means that those who wish to withstand what otherwise would be overpowering forces will be enabled by God to do so.

(2) The unstated assumption, based on the Philippians' track record of not resisting God's grace in their lives, is that God's continuing to provide empowering grace, his following through on the good work he began in them, will in their case result in eternal life in the consummated kingdom at Christ's return. This assumption about the effect in their case of God following through on his good work adds to his thanksgiving and joy over God's commitment not to abandon his people.

2. He tells them it is right for him to have such a grateful and joyful attitude about them because he has them in his heart (i.e., holds them in affection).

a. The clause "in both my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel" probably goes with the following clause, it being put before it for emphasis. That is how the vast majority of scholars understand it. That understanding is best expressed in English by rearranging the clauses in the translation: *for all of you are sharers with me in [God's] grace in both my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel*. Such rearrangement is perfectly acceptable in translating Greek, and many standard translations do so. I left the clauses in their original order to help you appreciate why there is a question whether "in both my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel" goes with the preceding or the following clause.

b. If it goes with the following clause, the meaning is that Paul has them in his heart because they are *sharers* with him in God's grace in his current situation, a situation that involves both incarceration (chains) and a defense against the legal charges he was facing, a defense that involved a presentation of the gospel. In other words, he has them in his heart because they have stuck with him, have remained sharers with him in God's grace, through thick and thin, as evidenced by their gift sent to him by Epaphroditus.

c. If "in both my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel" goes with the preceding clause, which I think is a real possibility, the meaning is that Paul's affection for them is unchanged by his present difficult circumstances. He has them in his heart in his current situation, which involves both incarceration and his presentation of the gospel in his defense, because, as explained in the final clause, they are "sharers with [him] in God's grace." This is Christian fellowship. Paul loved those who shared in God's grace in Christ, and he loved the Philippians so deeply because the reality of their sharing in that grace was so evident in their lives. God's grace to them was not without effect, and as such, they were "soul mates" with the apostle. That love transcends his circumstances.

3. He loves them so much that he calls God as his witness that he "long[s] for all of them with the affection of Christ Jesus." Nothing can be said beyond this.

### C. Prayer for them (1:9-11)

*<sup>9</sup>And this I pray, that your love may grow even more and more in knowledge and all insight <sup>10</sup>so that you may ascertain the superior things, in order that you may be pure and blameless in [the] day of Christ, <sup>11</sup>having been filled [with the] fruit of righteousness through Jesus Christ, to [the] glory and praise of God.*

1. Paul's prayer is that their "love may grow even more and more in knowledge and all insight." He wants their love, the sacrificial commitment to the welfare of others that they have regularly shown – to Paul, the poor saints in Jerusalem, and no doubt many others – to be increasingly informed by knowledge and moral insight. As explained in v. 10, the growing of their love in knowledge and insight will allow them to "ascertain the superior things," to discern what is best in the sight of God. He wants them to recognize the kind of people God calls them to be, to grasp increasingly the ethical content of love.

2. As I often point out, love is not some vague emotion or feeling that means whatever anybody wants it to mean. It is a commitment to another's welfare that includes specific moral requirements.

a. As Paul said in Rom. 13:8-10: *<sup>8</sup>Owe nothing to anyone except the [well known] to love one another; for the one who loves the other has fulfilled the law. <sup>9</sup>For the [well known] "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this word, in the [command]: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." <sup>10</sup>Love does not work evil against a neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.*

b. If you love your neighbor, you will do him no harm. That means you will not commit adultery, you will not murder, you will not steal, you will not covet, or do anything like that. You see, all these commands are summed up in the command,

"You shall love your neighbor as yourself." The commands are simply specific ways in which love does no harm, so love fulfills the law in that love does what the law demands.

3. Paul wants the Philippians increasingly, through God's work (which is why he is praying for it), to discern the ethical contours of the love God demands, which discernment is part of God's transformation of them, his producing in their lives the fruit of righteousness. Gerald Hawthorne and Ralph Martin comment, "The 'fruit of righteousness,' therefore, must be understood in an ethical sense as referring collectively to those 'truly good qualities' (GNB) in the Philippians that result in all kinds of noble acts and worthwhile deeds done toward each other and their neighbors."<sup>5</sup> As people whom God has transformed in righteousness because of his relationship with them through Jesus Christ, they will be acceptable to God, "pure and blameless," on the day of Christ's return.

4. One cannot pull apart one's relationship with God through faith in Christ from the transformation of life that God works through that relationship; they are inextricably bound together. Becoming a Christian, being baptized into Christ, is not the end of one's spiritual journey; it is in many ways just the beginning. God desires, calls for, and works toward our transformation in righteousness, our becoming like Christ. He does so because righteous living, emulating the Lord Jesus in one's life, is "to the glory and praise of God." To reject that work, to insist on one's own moral course, is to rebel against God and thus to belie one's profession of faith.

## II. Paul's Current Circumstance (1:12-26)

### A. Setting the record straight (1:12-14)

*<sup>12</sup>Now I want you to know, brothers, that the things concerning me have actually come about for the advancement of the gospel, <sup>13</sup>so that my chains in [the cause of] Christ have become obvious throughout the whole palace guard and to all the rest, <sup>14</sup>and most of the brothers, having become confident in [the] Lord by my chains, are daring even more to speak the word fearlessly.*

1. In v. 12, Paul is addressing some misunderstanding about his situation that was circulating in Philippi. Contrary to what some had been led to believe, his situation was actually a benefit to the cause of Christ, not a detriment.

a. Precisely what "things" he is referring to when he says "the things concerning me" is unclear. It may simply be the fact of his imprisonment, but some think he is referring to a more recent change in his circumstances. It is possible his

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<sup>5</sup> Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians*, WBC, rev. ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 33-34. David Garland likewise notes, "Fruit' is related to ethical behavior, and Silva, 60, translates it 'the fruit of right conduct.'" David E. Garland, "Philippians" in Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, eds., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 12:196.

prison situation had changed because in A.D. 62 the infamous Tigellinus became the head of the Praetorian Guard in place of the honest Burrus. Until A.D. 63, Nero delegated the handling of appeals to the head of the Praetorian Guard.

b. Paul wants them to know that God is in control, that his circumstances in no way represent a defeat for God. He also wants them to know that the gospel is advancing because they share his desire in that regard. They care about the spread of the gospel message and its conquering of enemy territory.

c. God is amazing in how he accomplishes his purposes in ways we would not expect, the ultimate example of which is human redemption by divine crucifixion. When in Acts 23:11 the Lord told Paul, "As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome," I doubt Paul envisioned that he'd be doing so as a prisoner. This ought to encourage us when we find ourselves in difficult situations. We need to look for how we can serve and glorify God wherever we are and not go into a spiritual funk about our situation. God is looking for us to be faithful where we are.

2. In vv. 13-14 he elaborates on the manner in which his circumstances advanced the gospel.

a. He says the whole palace guard and everyone else involved with his incarceration and legal proceedings came to understand that he was in chains because of Christ. It became clear, undoubtedly through his preaching, that he was in the circumstance he was in not because he violated some Roman law but because of his belief in the risen Lord Jesus. The fact he was willing to suffer, solely for his allegiance to Christ, was a powerful witness. Faith that deep, that genuine, gets people's attention. Justin Martyr, a second century Christian, wrote that as a pagan he was greatly impressed with the courage of Christians in the face of death.

b. He says that most of the brothers were emboldened by his chains to preach the word even more fearlessly. The fortitude of a leader in the face of hardship and suffering often spurs those within the movement to greater zeal and courage.

(1) Consider the great witnesses in Heb. 11:32 - 12:1.

(2) I think we saw that with Nelson Mandela's imprisonment in South Africa. Paul inspired the brothers by putting Christ above all else, even liberty and life.

c. This should tell us something about the potential influence of a sacrificially committed life. If we want to influence the world toward Christ and to encourage those around us to pursue him more zealously, we cannot surrender our allegiance, cease to be faithful and obedient, when it costs us something. If as soon as Christianity becomes painful we "sell," the world will conclude that our God is not worth much.

## B. The reality of competitive preachers (1:15-18a)

<sup>15</sup>Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. <sup>16</sup>The ones [do so] out of love knowing that I am put here for a defense of the gospel, <sup>17</sup>but the [other] ones proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not with a pure motive, expecting to stir up trouble by my chains. <sup>18</sup>What does it matter? Only that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is being proclaimed, and in this I rejoice.

1. Some who were stimulated by Paul's imprisonment to preach more fervently were doing so from mixed motives.

a. He says they preached Christ out of envy, rivalry, and selfish ambition. They were competing with Paul in the presentation of the gospel, seeking to gain status at his expense. The phrase often translated "not sincerely" in v. 17 means "not with a pure motive," as rendered in the NAS and NAB. They sincerely believed the gospel message they were preaching, but part of their motive for preaching it was to elevate themselves above Paul.

b. By implication from v. 16, these competitive preachers did not appreciate that Paul's imprisonment was a divine appointment in which he was faithfully discharging his ministry to the Gentiles. Instead, they perceived it as a failure, as some kind of hindrance to the spread of the gospel. Judging from 1:12, this negative "spin" on Paul's imprisonment had apparently reached Philippi.

c. They supposed that they could stir up trouble for Paul "by [his] chains." Most translations interpret this phrase in v. 17 as "*while* I am in chains," but it makes more sense to see Paul's imprisonment as the basis on which they were causing trouble. As Hawthorne and Martin translate it: "They think they will stir up trouble *because* I am in prison."<sup>6</sup>

d. They probably played on the social stigma of being in prison to taint Paul's ministry. Prison was a place of dishonor, and chains signified shame and humiliation.<sup>7</sup> Note how Paul commends Onesiphorus in 2 Tim. 1:16 for not being ashamed of his chains. They spun this, however subtly, as a black eye for the faith, a failure on Paul's part, rather than a providential placement for the sake of the gospel.

e. D. A. Carson writes:

One can easily imagine the reasoning of Paul's critics. Depending on how this case turns out, Paul's appeal to the Emperor could bring Christianity into ill repute. Paul is constantly rushing headlong into things where a wiser, cooler head would have been cautious. Why did he have to go up to

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<sup>6</sup> Hawthorne and Martin, 38.

<sup>7</sup> Garland, 200.

Jerusalem and get himself arrested anyway? He knew how much he was held in contempt there? Surely there was a better way.<sup>8</sup>

f. Whoever these competitive preachers were, it is worth noting that they were not Judaizers. Paul says that despite their impure motives, they "preach Christ." Judging by Galatians 1, Paul does not consider the Judaizers to be preaching the gospel at all.

g. We must be very careful that our good works are not motivated by a desire to outshine someone else, a sort of spiritual one-upmanship. This problem, of course, is most acute among those who lead. One can fall into a competitive thing with other preachers or teachers and become focused on overshadowing them instead of on faithfulness to Christ.

2. Others who were encouraged by Paul's imprisonment to preach more boldly were doing so out of good will and love, realizing that Paul was where he was for the cause of the gospel.

3. Paul rejoiced in the preaching of the gospel, even if it was done at his expense. He could swallow the small mindedness of preachers who were intent on overshadowing him, as long as they were driven by that competition to preach Christ to a dying world. Carson comments:

Paul's example is impressive and clear: Put the advance of the gospel at the center of your aspirations. Our own comfort, our bruised feelings, our reputations, our misunderstood motives – all of these are insignificant in comparison with the advance and splendor of the gospel. As Christians, we are called upon to put the advance of the gospel at the very center of our aspirations.

What are your aspirations? To make money? To get married? To travel? To see your grandchildren grow up? To find a new job? To retire early? None of these are inadmissible; none is to be despised. The question is whether these aspirations become so devouring that the Christian's *central* aspiration is squeezed to the periphery or choked out of existence entirely.<sup>9</sup>

a. Note that these preachers were still preaching the truth of Christ. Paul is not suggesting that one should rejoice when heretics mention the name Christ as a lure to their damning doctrine. On the contrary, he rebuked the Judaizers in Galatians despite the fact their heresy included a belief in Jesus.

b. Of course, in rejoicing over the result, Paul is in no way condoning the motives of such men. In Phil. 2:3 he makes clear that they are to "do

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<sup>8</sup> D. A. Carson, *Basics for Believers: An Exposition of Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 23.

<sup>9</sup> Carson, 25-26.

nothing out of selfish ambition or empty conceit." The "how" of the preaching is not the object of Paul's joy; the "fact" of the preaching is.

### C. Rejoicing in confidence of salvation through his upcoming trial (1:18b-21)

*Yes, and I will rejoice*<sup>19</sup>*because I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this [situation] will turn out for salvation for me*<sup>20</sup>*in keeping with my intense expectation and hope, that I will in no way be ashamed but with all boldness, now as always, Christ will be exalted in my body, whether through life or through death.*<sup>21</sup>*For to me, to live [is] Christ and to die [is] gain.*

1. Paul will continue rejoicing in the future, regardless of the outcome of his impending trial, because he knows that the situation will turn out for his "salvation." He is confident that nothing in his upcoming circumstances will jeopardize his salvation, that the road he is about to travel will not divert him from that goal.

a. Most modern English versions here translate *sotēria* as "deliverance" instead of "salvation," presumably to suggest that Paul is referring to release from prison, but this word is elsewhere routinely translated "salvation." The KJV, ERV, and ASV render it "salvation" in Phil. 1:19, and several of the translations that opt for "deliverance" note that "salvation" is an alternative translation (NAS, NASU, NET, NIV).

b. With many commentators, I think Paul is here speaking of his eternal salvation. Though *Luke* uses *sotēria* for escape from physical danger when reporting Paul's statement in Acts 27:34, Paul in his own writings uses *sotēria* eighteen times, and in the seventeen uses outside of Phil. 1:19 there is very broad agreement that he does so with reference to eternal salvation. Indeed, that use is clear in the two other occurrences of the word in Philippians (1:28 and 2:12). This is in keeping with the dominant meaning of the word elsewhere in the New Testament.

c. That Paul is referring to his eternal salvation is reinforced by the fact he says his *sotēria* is in keeping with his *intense expectation and hope*, language that seems too strong for his getting out of prison and/or avoiding execution, especially in light of his statement in v. 21 that to die is *gain* and in v. 23 that he *desires* to depart and be with Christ. He does not have an intense expectation and hope to avoid death, which v. 20 suggests is a possible outcome of his situation.

d. It is his eternal salvation that is in keeping with his "intense expectation and hope." He fully expected and confidently looked forward to the consummation of the kingdom at Christ's return (see 2 Tim. 4:8; Rom. 8:22-25). We need to do the same; it is a source of joy that cannot be taken from us.

e. It is interesting that the phrase translated "this will turn out for salvation for me" is verbatim from Job 13:16 (LXX). Paul probably is applying the words

of Job to his situation ("turn out" is found nowhere else in Paul) because, like Job, he is confident of his vindication before God despite being held in contempt by others because of his hardships. As Job's friends mistakenly cast his suffering as the negative judgment of God, so some people were characterizing Paul's suffering as a sign of divine disfavor.

2. Paul's confidence of remaining saved through his upcoming trial is explained in terms of his confidence that he will in no way repudiate Christ.

a. He knows that the situation will turn out for his salvation because he knows that he "will in no way be ashamed but with all boldness, now as always, Christ will be exalted in [his] body, whether through life or through death."

b. Jesus taught that those who abandon him in persecution will be abandoned by him on that day. See Mat. 10:21-22, 32-33, 24:9-13; Mk. 8:34-38; Lk. 14:26-27, 21:16-19. See also, Rev. 12:10-11, 14:9-13.

c. Paul, of course, had suffered greatly for his faith. By the time of 2 Cor. 11:21b-27, he had been repeatedly flogged, beaten with rods, and imprisoned and was once subjected to stoning. He thereafter was imprisoned in Jerusalem, Caesarea, and now in Rome. Through all those times, despite being in constant danger, he maintained his confession that Jesus is Lord.

### Excursus on Persecution

1. As indicated in Heb. 11:32-38, God's people have always been subject to persecution, but the scope and intensity of that persecution varies with time and location. The Lord made clear in Jn. 15:18-21 that Christians will be persecuted because the world hates him, Paul told Timothy in 2 Tim. 3:12 that all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, and Peter said in 1 Pet. 4:12 that Christians are not to be surprised at fiery trials that come upon them as though it were some strange occurrence.

2. The reality of persecution in the lives of the first-century Christians is recorded in the New Testament, church history, and even in ancient secular literature.

a. Apostles – Acts 5:17-18, 40-42

b. Stephen – Acts 7:51–8:1

c. James (brother of John) and Peter – Acts 12:1-4

d. Paul – 2 Cor. 11:21b-25 (summary)

e. Unidentified Christians – Heb. 10:34

f. Timothy – Heb. 13:23

g. James the Lord's brother – According to Josephus's *Jewish Antiquities* written around A.D. 95, in A.D. 62 Jesus' brother James was put to death at the instigation of the Jewish high priest (Ananus) for supposedly having transgressed the law. According to Eusebius (early fourth century), Hegesippus, a second-century Christian writer, makes clear that the charges against James were related to his faith in Christ.

h. Nero's persecution

(1) Clement of Rome wrote in 1 Clement around A.D. 96:

6. Besides these men of saintly life [Peter and Paul], there are many more of the elect who have undergone hardships and torments instigated by jealousy, and provide admirable object lessons for ourselves. There were women hounded by jealousy to appear as Danaids and Dirces, who endured fearful and diabolical tortures; yet in spite of their bodily frailty they finished the race of faith unshaken, and received their noble reward.<sup>10</sup>

(2) The Roman historian Cornelius Tacitus (A.D. 55-120) wrote the following around A.D. 115 in his *Annals of Imperial Rome* 15.44:

44.2. Yet no human effort, no princely largess nor offerings to the gods could make that *infamous* rumor disappear that Nero had somehow ordered the fire. Therefore, in order to abolish that rumor, Nero falsely accused and executed with the most exquisite punishments those people called Christians, who were infamous for their *abominations*. . . .

44.4. Therefore, first those were seized who admitted their faith, and then, using the information they provided, a vast multitude were convicted, not so much for the crime of burning the city, but for *hatred of the human race*. And perishing they were additionally made into sports: they were killed by dogs by having the hides of beasts attached to them, or they were nailed to crosses or set aflame, and, when the daylight passed away, they were used as nighttime lamps.<sup>11</sup>

(3) Eusebius wrote in *History of the Church* 2:25 in the early fourth century:

It is recorded that in [Nero's] reign Paul was beheaded in Rome itself, and that Peter likewise was crucified, and the record is confirmed by the fact the cemeteries there are still called by the names of Peter and Paul, and equally so by a churchman named Gaius, who was living while Zephyrinus was Bishop of Rome.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Andrew Louth, *Early Christian Writings*, trans. by Maxwell Staniforth (New York: Viking Penguin, 1987), 25.

<sup>11</sup> Retrieved on 7/18/19 from <https://www.westmont.edu/~fisk/articles/TacitusAndPlinyOnTheEarlyChristians.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, trans. by G. A. Williamson (London: Penguin Books, 1965), 104.

i. John – Rev. 1:9

j. Antipas – Rev. 2:13

3. Christians continued experiencing persecution into the early fourth century, with periodic spikes in both scope and intensity.

a. Christians in Bithynia – Pliny, governor of the Roman province of Bithynia, wrote the following, in pertinent part, to Emperor Trajan around A.D. 112:

It is my practice, my lord, to refer to you all matters concerning which I am in doubt. For who can better give guidance to my hesitation or inform my ignorance? I have never before participated in trials of Christians, so I do not know what offenses are to be punished or investigated, or to what extent. And I have been not a little hesitant as to whether there should be any distinction on account of age, or no difference recognized between the very young and the more mature. Is pardon to be granted for repentance, or if a man has once been a Christian is it irrelevant whether he has ceased to be one? Is the name itself to be punished, even without offenses, or only the offenses perpetrated in connection with the name?

Meanwhile, in the case of those who were denounced to me as Christians, I have followed the following procedure: I interrogated them as to whether they were Christians; those who confessed I interrogated a second and a third time, threatening them with punishment; those who persisted I ordered executed. For I had no doubt that, whatever the nature of their creed, stubbornness and inflexible obstinacy surely deserve to be punished. There were others possessed of the same folly; but because they were Roman citizens, I signed an order for them to be transferred to Rome.

Soon accusations spread because of these proceedings, as usually happens, and several incidents occurred. An anonymous document was published containing the names of many persons. Those who denied that they were or had been Christians, when they invoked the gods in words dictated by me, offered prayer with incense and wine to your image, which I had ordered to be brought for this purpose together with statues of the gods, and also cursed Christ – none of which those who are really Christians can, it is said, be forced to do — these I thought should be discharged.<sup>13</sup>

b. Ignatius – During the reign of Trajan (early second century), this leader of the church in Antioch was condemned as a Christian and sent to Rome to face martyrdom. Eusebius reports:

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<sup>13</sup> Retrieved on 7/18/19 from <https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/study/module/pliny>.

There is evidence that Ignatius was sent from Syria to Rome and became food for the wild animals because of his testimony to Christ. . . . His martyrdom was well known to Irenaeus, who draws on [Ignatius's] epistles: "As one of our people said, when because of his witness he was condemned to the beasts, 'I am God's wheat, ground by the teeth of beasts, that I may be found pure bread.'"<sup>14</sup>

c. Polycarp – During a flare up of mob violence (mid-second century), this leader of the church in Smyrna was martyred. A second-century account from the church includes:

The Governor then said, 'I have wild beasts here. Unless you change your mind, I shall have you thrown to them. 'Why then, call them up,' said Polycarp, 'for it is out of the question for us to exchange a good way of thinking for a bad one. . . . The other said again, 'If you do not recant, I will have you burnt to death, since you think so lightly of wild beasts.' Polycarp rejoined, 'The fire you threaten me with cannot go on burning for very long; after a while it goes out. But what you are unaware of are the flames of future judgment and everlasting torment which are in store for the ungodly. Why do you go on wasting time? Bring out whatever you have in mind to do.'<sup>15</sup>

d. Justin Martyr – He was beheaded for his faith in Rome in the 160s. As stated in the *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*:

Like other itinerant pagan and Christian teachers, Justin found his way to Rome, where he carried on a long teaching ministry during the reign of Antonius Pius (138-161), to whom he addressed his *First Apology*. . . . The fateful part of his work, and that for which Christian tradition honors him, however, was his bold engagement of the Roman judicial system for its totally unjustified mortal persecution of Christians because of the "name" only. As the foreboding *Second Apology* addressed to the Roman senate anticipates, this courageous witness brought him into collision with the Roman state in the person of the prefect Junius Rusticus (162-168) early in Marcus Aurelius's reign. Upon confession of faith and refusal to sacrifice to the gods, Justin and six other Christians were, according to a later but reliable account of Justin's martyrdom (*Acts of Justin*), condemned by Rusticus, scourged, and beheaded.<sup>16</sup>

e. Origen – Eusebius reports in *The History of the Church* how Origen was tortured in Caesarea in the mid-third century during the reign of Decius.

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<sup>14</sup> Eusebius, 145, 147.

<sup>15</sup> Louth, 128.

<sup>16</sup> Everett Ferguson, ed., *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Garland Publishing, 1999), 648.

As for Origen, the terrible sufferings that befell him in the persecution, and how they ended, . . . the dreadful cruelties he endured for the word of Christ, chains and bodily torments, agony in iron and the darkness of his prison; how for days on end his legs were pulled four paces apart on the torturers stocks – the courage with which he bore threats of fire and every torture devised by his enemies – . . . of all these things a truthful and detailed account will be found in his own lengthy correspondence.<sup>17</sup>

f. Cyprian – He was beheaded in 258 in Carthage during the reign of Valerian, Decius's successor, for refusing to offer a pagan sacrifice. Historian Ryan Reeves states:

[Cyprian] is brought before the Roman council on orders by the Emperor that all Christians should be examined, and those found to be truly Christians should be executed. And Cyprian is brought by the proconsul Galerius, and he is asked his name, and Cyprian gives it; and then he is ordered to sacrifice to the Roman gods. Cyprian simply refused. The proconsul conferred with his colleagues, and then he turned and said, "Cyprian, you have lived an irreligious life. You have drawn together a number of men bound by an unlawful association and you have professed yourself an open enemy to the gods and the religion of Rome, and at the end you shall be made an example of." And it was decided then and there that Cyprian would be put to death by the sword. And Cyprian's response was simply, "Thanks be to God."<sup>18</sup>

g. The "Great Persecution" – This refers to the persecution under Diocletian in A.D. 303-304. Here are Eusebius's reports of that persecution first in Nicomedia and then in Thebais. Nicomedia was in northern Asia Minor, the location of the modern city of Izbit, Turkey. Thebais was a region in southern Egypt.

(1) "In [Nicomedia], the rulers in question brought a certain man into a public place and commanded him to sacrifice. When he refused, he was ordered to be stripped, hoisted up naked, and his whole body torn with loaded whips till he gave in and carried out the command, however unwillingly. When in spite of these torments he remained as obstinate as ever, they next mixed vinegar with salt and poured it over the lacerated parts of his body, where the bones were already exposed. When he treated these agonies too with scorn a lighted brazier was then brought forward, and as if it were edible meat for the table, what was left of his body was consumed by the fire, not all at once, for fear his release would come too soon, but a little at a time; and those who placed him on the pyre were not permitted to stop till after such treatment he should signify his

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<sup>17</sup> Eusebius, 273-274.

<sup>18</sup> Retrieved on 7/18/19 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AQhTqHOKBs4&index=10&list=PLRgREWf4NFWZEd86aVEpQ7B3YxXPhUEf->.

readiness to obey. But he stuck immovably to his determination, and victorious in the midst of his tortures, breathed his last."<sup>19</sup>

(2) "But words cannot describe the outrageous agonies endured by the martyrs in the Thebais. They were torn to bits from head to foot with potsherds like claws till death released them. . . . Others again were tied to trees and stumps and died horribly; for with the aid of machinery they drew together the very stoutest boughs, fastened one of the martyr's legs to each, and then let the boughs fly back to their normal position; thus they managed to tear apart the limbs of their victims in a moment. . . .

I was in these places, and saw many of the executions for myself. Some of the victims suffered death by beheading, others punishment by fire. . . . All the time I observed a most wonderful eagerness and a truly divine power and enthusiasm in those who had put their trust in the Christ of God. No sooner had the first batch been sentenced, than others from every side would jump on to the platform in front of the judge and proclaim themselves Christians. They paid no heed to torture in all its terrifying forms, but undaunted spoke boldly of their devotion to the God of the universe and with joy, laughter, and gaiety received the final sentence of death: they sang and sent up hymns to the God of the universe till their very last breath."<sup>20</sup>

4. Throughout the Middle Ages, Christians in vulnerable areas were persecuted by Muslims, and that remains true today. Christian persecution today is rampant throughout the world. Open Doors, an organization that tracks such things, says that every month, on average:

- 345 Christians are killed for faith-related reasons
- 105 Churches and Christian buildings are burned or attacked
- 219 Christians are detained without trial, arrested, sentenced and imprisoned.

They report:

In seven out of the top 10 World Watch List countries, the primary cause of persecution is Islamic oppression. This means, for millions of Christians—particularly those who grew up Muslim or were born into Muslim families—openly following Jesus can have painful consequences. They can be treated as second-class citizens, discriminated against for jobs or even violently attacked.<sup>21</sup>

5. There is in this country a growing hostility toward and demonization of Christians. We are increasingly being labeled an enemy of the public welfare, haters who refuse to "get

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<sup>19</sup> Eusebius, 333-334.

<sup>20</sup> Eusebius, 337-338.

<sup>21</sup> Retrieved on 7/18/19 from <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/>.

with the program." I do not know what will come of it, but I predict very difficult times ahead. A shallow faith will not be able to hide or to stand. The New Testament scholar Michael Kruger wrote just this week (7/15/19):

In many ways, little has changed for two-thousands years. In our modern cultural climate, Christians are still seen as a threat to the stability of society because they won't publicly and corporately bow down to the cultural gods.

And make no mistake, the culture always demands that Christians do this *publicly*. Everyone has to conform. Or else.

It is ironic, really. In a culture that so claims to value "tolerance," Christians who refuse to publicly affirm the cultural gods are given none.

But, the lesson from the early church is clear. We will not be accepted as citizens of this earthly Kingdom. But, that is a reason to be even more thankful that Jesus said, "My Kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36).<sup>22</sup>

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d. The conviction or perspective that helps create the will to suffer for Christ's sake is summarized in the statement, "For to me, to live [is] Christ and to die [is] gain" (v. 21). Paul could not be bullied by the threat of death because he knew to the core of his being that to die in Christ would be a blessing. He said in Acts 21:13, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

e. You might think this is arrogance; after all, Peter thought he would remain firm but denied the Lord. But Peter repented and proved his repentance by his deeds (see Acts 4:3, 5:17-40, 12:1-5). According to church history, he was crucified by Nero. Paul was rightly confident, not arrogant.

3. Paul's confidence that he would not repudiate Christ, that regardless of what happened to him he would maintain the conviction and perspective that to live is Christ and to die is gain, was in turn based on his confidence in the power of their prayers on his behalf and the help given by the Holy Spirit. Paul did not boast that he would stand firm in his own power; he trusted that God would grant him the strength as he had done in the past. We cannot underestimate the power of prayer, and we cannot become prideful about spiritual strength.

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<sup>22</sup> Retrieved on 7/20/19 from <https://www.michaeljkruger.com/us-womens-soccer-and-our-culture-of-tolerance/>.

#### D. Confidence that he will go on living to benefit the Philippians (1:22-26)

*<sup>22</sup>But if [I am] to live in [the] flesh, this [will mean] fruitful labor for me, yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. <sup>23</sup>Indeed, I am hard pressed between the two: I have the desire to depart and be with Christ, for [this is] far better, <sup>24</sup>but to remain in the flesh [is] more necessary for your sake. <sup>25</sup>Being convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your advancement and joy in the faith <sup>26</sup>so that your reason for glorying in Christ Jesus may overflow because of me through my coming again to you.*

1. Though dying would be a gain for Paul (v. 21) in that his spirit would be with Christ in heaven awaiting the resurrection, he understands that if he is to go on living it will mean fruitful labor, living for Christ, so he cannot say which he would choose (if it were up to him). He is torn between the two. He desires to be with Christ, "for this is far better," but he realizes that his remaining alive is more necessary for the progress of the Philippians in the faith.

2. Being convinced of the Philippians' spiritual need and knowing God as he does, Paul is confident that he will in fact live on for their advancement and joy in the faith. If it were up to him, he cannot say which he would choose, but it is not up to him. He is convinced that God will preserve him for the sake of the brethren and that he will again visit with them.

### III. Exhortation to Right Living (1:27–2:18)

#### A. Live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ (1:27-30)

*<sup>27</sup>Only conduct yourselves worthily of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether having come and seen you or being absent, I may hear the [things] about you, that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one soul contending for the faith of the gospel <sup>28</sup>and not being intimidated in any way by the ones opposing [you], which is an omen to them of [their] destruction but of your salvation, and this is from God. <sup>29</sup>For it has been graciously granted to you on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in him but also to suffer on behalf of him, <sup>30</sup>as [you are] having the same struggle which you saw in me and now hear [to be] in me.*

1. Regardless of Paul's situation, they are to conduct themselves worthily of the gospel of Christ.

a. We balk at this and say, "No one can live worthily of the gospel of Christ." But clearly there is a sense in which one can do so because the Spirit of God is commanding it through the apostle Paul. This is not unique to Philippians. In 1 Thess. 2:12 he reminds them that he had charged them to walk worthily of God; in Eph. 4:1 he urges them to walk worthily of the calling to which they had been called; and in Col. 1:10 he calls them to walk worthily of the Lord.

b. In general, to live worthily, to live in a manner *worthy* of something, means to act in accordance with the value and importance of that thing, to act with a recognition and proper appreciation of its worth. If someone gives you something that cost him dearly to obtain, say a photograph of your parents that he rescued from a fire at the price of his own physical disfigurement, and you then give it away to Goodwill, you have not acted worthily of the gift. You have trivialized and demeaned it.

2. Living worthily of the gospel can encompass many things, but the specific aspect with which Paul is concerned here is that they make a united stand against those opposing them. G. Walter Hansen remarks, "Like soldiers on a battlefield, they must not yield an inch of ground no matter how hard their adversaries press against them."<sup>23</sup>

a. They were being persecuted by their pagan neighbors. Verse 28 refers to "the ones opposing you," and verse 30 says "you are having the same struggle which you saw in me and now hear to be in me." Recall that Paul was flogged and jailed when he founded the church in Philippi. He writes in 1 Thess. 2:2 that they had suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi. And currently he is in jail in Rome.

b. The truth of Christ as revealed in the gospel is worth dying for, so suppressing or denying that truth to avoid being hated or looked down on by the culture or being deprived of property, liberty, or even life is to live unworthily of that truth. It is to live inconsistently with its value.

3. The united stand they are to make against those opposing them is explained in terms of both a positive and a negative aspect:

a. Positively, they are to contend or strive as one person for the faith based on the gospel. With unity of heart and purpose they are to struggle together for the cause of the faith, for its defense, spread, and growth.

(1) Our contending for the gospel includes our fighting against whatever is opposed to it, whatever false ideas pervert the gospel or work against its acceptance. That includes the lie that saving faith can be divorced from how one lives, that one can be saved while living in rebellion to God, and the larger background assumptions of the culture that set people against the gospel, beliefs like relativism (there is no objective truth), materialism (reality consists solely of matter acting by law over time), and scientism (science is the only source of true knowledge). As J. Gresham Machen wrote over a century ago:

False ideas are the greatest obstacles to the reception of the gospel. We may preach with all the fervor of a reformer and yet succeed only in winning a straggler here and there, if we permit the whole collective thought of the nation or of the world to be controlled by ideas which, by

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<sup>23</sup> G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 96.

the resistless force of logic, prevent Christianity from being regarded as anything more than a harmless delusion. Under such circumstances, what God desires us to do is to destroy the obstacle at its root.<sup>24</sup>

(2) We are to be united in our contending for the faith.

There is strength and focus in unity. If the church fragments, needlessly turns on itself, it will be diverted from and less effective in its struggle against the things opposed to the gospel.

b. Negatively, they are not to be intimidated in any way by those who oppose them. In other words, they are not to be frightened into compromise, into doing less than Christ would have them do. We cannot allow a teacher, a boss, a judge, or a bureaucrat – any person with power over us – to intimidate us so that we shrink from faithfulness, from our Christian responsibilities. With Paul (1:20), we must glorify Christ whether through life or through death. As Martin Luther wrote in his hymn *A Mighty Fortress*, "the body they may kill, God's truth abideth still, his kingdom is forever." Hansen comments:

Christians are not to be intimidated in any way. No matter how powerful the opposition is, nothing should shake the resolve of those who stand firm in the one Spirit. Lined up side by side as one person, they should not be scared by any threats or any torture. They should not run from any battle, back down back down from any attack, compromise anything, or concede in any way.<sup>25</sup>

4. Paul encourages them by telling them that their standing firm in the face of persecution is an omen or clear indicator regarding the future.

a. The steadfastness of the Philippians in the face of that hostility, the boldness and courage they show as a result of sharing Paul's outlook that to live is Christ and to die is gain, is an omen that those persecuting them are doomed. That reaction to the persecution is revealed by God to be a sign that the persecutors chose the wrong side, whether they recognize that fact or not.

b. By the same token, the Philippians' resolve and unity in the face of that hostility reveals them to be God's faithful and is thus a clear sign of their coming salvation. Garland comments:

The "sign" or "proof" given to the foe is not a dramatic announcement of their impending doom writ large in the clouds or a thundering voice from heaven that shakes fear in their hearts. The sign is simply Christians not being frightened but standing firm together and battling shoulder to shoulder for the faith. The unity of the church and their refusal to cower in

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<sup>24</sup> Retrieved on 7/25/19 from <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/machen-false-ideas-as-obstacles-to/>.

<sup>25</sup> Hansen, 98.

the face of persecution become the proof of their own salvation and the perdition in store for their enemies.<sup>26</sup>

c. We need to appreciate that in the pressures we face today. Courageous faithfulness, enduring in the name of Jesus, is a sign of blessing.

5. All of this (τοῦτο – "this" – is neuter) is from God, is within his superintendence, for it is he who has graciously granted them not only the blessing of faith but also the privilege of suffering for Christ's sake (see Acts 5:40-41; 1 Pet. 4:12-14; Mat. 5:11-12). It is an honor to suffer as he did, to suffer because of evil's opposition to God, and this Christ-like pattern of life reflects a union with him that will culminate in eternal glory.

## B. Live in unity, being humble and considering others (2:1-4)

*Therefore, if [there is] any comfort in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship of [the] Spirit, if any affections and compassions, <sup>2</sup>make my joy complete [by these means]: that you think the same thing, having the same love, [being] ones joined in soul, thinking the one thing, <sup>3</sup>[doing] nothing according to selfish ambition or according to empty conceit but in humility considering one another more important than yourselves, <sup>4</sup>each one looking not to their own things but each of you [looking] also to the things of others.*

1. Having made clear that living worthily of the gospel calls for a *united* steadfastness in the face of opposition, Paul now focuses on the unity aspect. Given the importance of unity in living worthily, he now exhorts them to be united.

2. Paul bases his appeal to unity on their own experiences in Christ. "If" here means "since" or "if, as is indeed the case." It is the same as if I said to friends I've driven to many places, "If you've ridden in my car, don't make fun of it." Paul is saying, "If, as of course is true, you have experienced these certain things in Christ, then act in this way."

3. The experiences in Christ that he takes for granted and on which he bases his appeal for unity are:

a. comfort – Being in Christ is a tremendous source of comfort (or encouragement, as the word is often here rendered). Whatever this world may bring, one knows that the biggest issue in life has been dealt with.

b. consolation of love – Christ's (the Father's?) love certainly consoles one in dangers and hardships. Knowing that he loves you and hurts with you makes the pain more bearable.

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<sup>26</sup> Garland, 210.

c. fellowship (or sharing) in the Holy Spirit – All Christians share in the one Spirit, who lives in them and works in and through their lives.

d. affections and compassions – All Christians have been beneficiaries of Christ's boundless affection and compassion (see 1:8). We enjoy the fruit of that affection and compassion in our salvation and the many blessings of life in Christ.

4. Given the reality of these experiences, Paul asks them to "make his joy complete," to fill in what was lacking (thus providing a further motive for their response) by doing certain things. Probably some cracks, some disunity, had formed in the church under the stress of the persecution, and Paul is appealing for them to be unified. He calls them to make his joy complete by means of:

a. thinking the same thing in the sense of having the same mindset – Not meaning uniformity of thought but unity in intent and disposition. We might say that they are all to be "on the same page."

b. having the same love – Certainly for the church, for one another, and probably more generally for Christ and the things of God.

c. [being] ones joined in soul, that is, being united in spirit – What we mean when we speak of "team spirit." It is a bond with the group that transcends the individual.

d. thinking the one thing, being single-minded – Meaning intent on one purpose, having a life directed toward a single, overriding goal. Paul undoubtedly is referring to "the gospel."

5. They are to do nothing out of selfish ambition or empty conceit. Putting oneself first causes factions. Note that "selfish ambition" is the same word used in 1:17 in reference to the competitive preachers.

6. Instead, they should, in humility, consider others as more important than themselves. Each should look out not only for their own interests but also for the interests of others. Hansen comments:

When Paul uses this word [*huperechō*] in his encouragement to value others above yourselves, he is not counseling his readers to beat themselves up or put themselves down. Instead, he is urging them to build up and lift up others. The focus is not negative, but positive. Let the needs and interests of others surpass yours: put them in first place; give them the place of honor; respect them; listen to them; speak about them; serve them; strengthen them; encourage them. Putting others instead of

ourselves in the center of our concern will cause a radical Copernican revolution in the community.<sup>27</sup>

### C. Christ, the ultimate example of the right attitude (2:5-11)

*<sup>5</sup>Think this [way] among you, which also [was] in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup>who, being in the form of God, did not consider being equal with God as something to be used for his own advantage, <sup>7</sup>but emptied himself by taking [the] form of a slave, by being born in [the] likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, <sup>8</sup>he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross! <sup>9</sup>Therefore also God highly exalted him and graciously gave to him the name that is above every name <sup>10</sup>so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, [that] of [the] heavenly ones and [the] earthly ones and [the] ones under the earth, <sup>11</sup>and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ [is] Lord to [the] glory of God the Father.*

1. The attitude or mindset he has just mentioned, an attitude of humility that exalts the welfare of others, is to exist among them.

2. This, after all, was the attitude of Christ Jesus, as vv. 6-11 make clear. Most scholars believe these verses were already circulating among the churches as what they call a "hymn," by which they mean something broader than what we typically understand by "hymn." It includes any kind of set expression of faith. Peter O'Brien says it is a category of material "similar to that of a 'creed', and includes dogmatic, confessional, liturgical, polemical, or doxological material."<sup>28</sup> If that is correct, Paul incorporated preexisting language into his letter, but that does not change the fact the Spirit moved Paul to do so or change the point Paul is making in using these words.

3. He describes Christ Jesus as being or existing "in the form (*morphē*) of God."

a. This does not mean he was *like* God but really not God, that he had some similarity to God but not the essence or nature of God. That it does not mean that is clear from the fact being "in the form of God" is explained in the next clause as "being equal with God." Though he was "in the form of God" he did not consider "being equal with God," which is inherent in his being "in the form of God," as something to be used to his own advantage.

b. Hawthorne and Martin state:

As Kennedy (436) maintained, μορφή "always signifies a form which truly and fully expresses the being which underlies it" (cited with approval in MM, 417). Thus, when this word is applied to God, his μορφή, "form," must refer to his deepest being, to what he is in himself, to that "which

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<sup>27</sup> Hansen, 116.

<sup>28</sup> Peter T. O'Brien, *Commentary on Philippians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 188.

cannot be reached by our understanding or sight, precisely because God is ἀόρατος [invisible]: in fact the word has meaning here only as referring to the reality of God's being" (Cerfaux, *Christ*, 305). μορφή θεοῦ, "form of God," then, may be correctly understood as the "essential nature and character of God" . . .<sup>29</sup>

c. That is why the NIV translates "being in the form of God" as "being in very nature God." Gordon Fee states:

What the earliest followers of Christ had come to believe, of course, on the basis of his resurrection and ascension, was that the one whom they had known as truly human had himself known prior existence in the "form" of God – not meaning that he was "like God but really not," but that he was characterized by what was essential to being God. It is this understanding which (correctly) lies behind the NIV's "in very nature God."<sup>30</sup>

4. Despite being divine, he did not consider his divinity from a selfish standpoint. He did not see it as something to be used for his own gain, but as a position from which to serve.

a. Verse 6b states that Christ did not consider equality with God as *harpagmon*, which is a form of the word *harpagmos*. This is a rare word, and its precise meaning has been much debated. Current scholarship favors the meaning "something to be exploited" (NRSV and CSB) or "used to one's advantage" (NIV and HCSB).

b. But even if one opts for the translation "a thing to be grasped," it must mean "grasped" in the sense of "clung to" rather than in the sense of grabbing something not previously possessed. When *harpagmos* and similar nouns are combined with verbs like "consider" it always is an idiomatic expression referring to something already present and at one's disposal rather than something to be gained. Besides, the notion of Christ aspiring to equality with God, as though he was not God, is completely foreign to the New Testament.

c. The point is that in the incarnation one who is in nature God emptied himself, meaning simply that he poured himself out not that he in any way ceased being God, becoming in nature a slave through being born as a human, as Jesus, for the sake of serving others. Fee notes, "[W]e are still dealing with the character of God, as that has been revealed in the 'mindset' and resulting activity of the Son of God. The concern is with divine selflessness: God is not an acquisitive being, grasping and seizing, but self-giving for the sake of others."<sup>31</sup>

d. As Jesus said to the disciples in Mat. 20:25-28:

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<sup>29</sup> Hawthorne and Martin, 114.

<sup>30</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 205.

<sup>31</sup> Fee, 211.

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

5. The depth to which he humbled himself for the welfare of others is seen in the fact that, having become a man, he submitted, in obedience to the Father, to crucifixion. The death of the cross was the cruelest and most humiliating form of execution in the ancient world.

a. Roman orator Cicero called it "the most cruel and disgusting penalty." The Jewish historian Josephus, who witnessed crucifixions during Titus's siege of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, called it "the most wretched of deaths."

b. It was reserved for the lower classes, slaves, and the worst of criminals. In 63 B.C. Rabirius, a Roman nobleman and senator, was threatened with the penalty of crucifixion. In defending him, Cicero said:

How grievous a thing it is to be disgraced by a public court; how grievous to suffer a fine, how grievous to suffer banishment; and yet in the midst of any such disaster we retain some degree of liberty. Even if we are threatened with death, we may die free men. But . . . *the very word "cross"* should be far removed not only from the person of a Roman citizen but his thoughts, his eyes and his ears. For it is not the actual occurrence of these things but *the very mention of them*, that is unworthy of a Roman citizen and a free man.<sup>32</sup>

c. Not only was the subject publicly abused prior to the actual crucifixion, he was usually stripped naked and then hung on a cross at a visible place. (We know the guards cast lots to see who would get the Lord's seamless undergarment, but it is possible they waited until after his death to claim it in deference to Jewish sensitivity.)

d. For the Jew, the shame was magnified by the common understanding that Deut. 21:23 meant that anyone crucified was cursed by God.

e. It is this shame and humiliation of crucifixion that is in mind in Heb. 12:2, where the writer says Jesus "endured the cross, scorning its shame," and in 13:13 where he speaks of "the disgrace [Jesus] bore."

f. But the real price paid in the crucifixion of Jesus was not the physical torture or the shame, as great as they were. After all, many others had gone

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<sup>32</sup> Gerald G. O'Collins, "Crucifixion" in David Noel Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1:1208.

through that experience. No, the real price paid was that Jesus bore God's wrath against sin. He who had eternally known perfect communion with God the Father received from the Father the punishment for mankind's sins. As Paul wrote earlier in 1 Cor. 15:3, "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures" and in 2 Cor. 5:21 "The one who knew no sin [God] made [to be] sin on our behalf"; and as Peter wrote in 1 Pet. 2:24, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, in order that, having died to the sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wound you were healed."

6. That God is pleased with such selfless service is indicated by his extreme exaltation of Christ.

a. He has raised the God-man Jesus to a position of unparalleled honor and universal authority (see Acts 2:33, 36; Heb. 1:3), bestowing on him his own name of "Lord" (used in the LXX to represent the personal name of the God of Israel – e.g., Isa. 42:8).

b. The purpose and/or result of this exaltation is that at the Second Coming every being shall kneel in honor of Jesus' name (of Lord) and every tongue shall openly declare that he is Lord. On the part of some, this will be forced reverence, a submission to one whose power they cannot resist. As F. F. Bruce comments, "Not only human beings . . . but [also] angels and demons, in joyful spontaneity or in reluctant fear, acknowledge the sovereignty of the crucified one – in heaven and on earth and under the earth."<sup>33</sup>

c. Those "under the earth" may refer to the dead, those in Hades, or to an imprisoned group of demons. But as Bruce notes, "Perhaps we should not inquire too closely whether the reference is to dead human beings, or to demons, or to both groups. The language may simply be intended to convey the universality of the homage paid to Jesus."<sup>34</sup>

d. This lordship bestowed on Christ is to the glory of God the Father. It reveals his glory because he planned and brought about this ultimate reversal; it was he who took the faithful Son from disgraceful death to the greatest height.

#### D. Command to continue working out their salvation (2:12-18)

*<sup>12</sup>So then, my beloved, just as you always have obeyed, not as in my presence only but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, <sup>13</sup>for it is God who works in you both to will and to work for [his] good pleasure. <sup>14</sup>Do everything without complaints and arguments <sup>15</sup>in order that you may be faultless and pure, unblemished children of God in [the] midst of a crooked and perverted generation, in which you shine as lights in [the] world, <sup>16</sup>holding fast [the] word of life, so as to provide ground for glorying for me on the day of Christ, so that I did not run in vain nor*

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<sup>33</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Philippians*, NIBC (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1989), 74

<sup>34</sup> Bruce, 74.

*labor in vain.* <sup>17</sup>Yes, even though I am being poured out [as a drink offering] on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you; <sup>18</sup>and [in] the same way, you also be glad and rejoice with me.

1. In light of Christ's radical example of obedience in subjecting himself to extreme humiliation for the welfare of others, Paul calls them to continue working out their salvation by obeying his command to be united and humbly to seek the good of their brothers and sisters.

a. To continue working out their salvation means to continue working out the implications of their salvation, to make that salvation fruitful. They are not obtaining salvation by their works; they are working out what it means to be saved in a fallen world, expressing their salvation in life.

b. This outworking of their salvation is to be done with "fear and trembling." This is not a reference to their opponents because they are not to be intimidated by them (1:28). As they live out their faith, they are to do so with an attitude of reverence and awe toward God, with respect for and appreciation of who God is. Because of who God is, his will is always a matter of utmost seriousness and gravity; it can never be treated casually simply because he in his grace has granted us intimate communion with him. Intimacy is not to be pitted against reverence.

c. The reason he can demand that they continue bearing fruit of their salvation, continue being transformed, is that it is God who is at work in them. The fruit is produced by God (through his indwelling Spirit); he is the one who enables them both to will and to work for what he wants. Though we must cooperate – must work to keep the faucet open – God is the one who supplies the change, who works the transformation. As he says in Rom. 8:13b, if *by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.*

d. Jim McGuiggan has described the Christian life as "dull trench warfare," meaning it is the day in and day out living of one's commitment to Christ. Hansen says:

"It is this 'long obedience in the same direction' which the mood of the world does so much to discourage" [quoting Eugene Peterson]. When the path to obedience to Christ becomes steep and dangerous, pleasure seekers look for an easier way. Religious tourists hunting for sensational entertainment, instantaneous enlightenment, and emotional excitement will jump on the newest rides and take quick shortcuts, but they will not be found with pilgrims on the long, hard road following in the footsteps of Christ, who was *obedient to death – even death on a cross*. Paul's call to unflagging, Christ-like obedience will not be popular in a world that so highly values going fast and having fun and so quickly rejects enduring pain and submitting to authority. But the essential characteristic of the

wise who build their community on Christ is their consistent obedience to him.<sup>35</sup>

2. More specifically, they are to do everything without complaints (grumbling) and arguments (disputes).

a. Paul is referring to griping or bad-mouthing that produces ill will instead of harmony within the church. This does not, of course, eliminate constructive criticism.

b. He demands this of them because he wants them to be faultless and pure, unblemished children of God who shine like lights or stars against the blackness of a crooked and perverted world.

(1) Hansen comments:

To be a *blameless* Christian community means that no one can find the faults of griping and bickering in the words or tone of conversation in the community. To be a *pure* Christian community means that Christians do not mix their good words with negative complaints or specious arguments. Their speech is like good, undiluted wine. When *children of God* are *without fault*, their conversations will not be marked by the blemishes of bitter criticisms and angry quarrels.<sup>36</sup>

(2) The church is to live in stark contrast to the world. As Jesus said in Mat. 5:14-16, we are the "light of the world" and must let our light shine before others that they may see your good works and give glory to our Father who is in heaven. But the notion has seeped into some corners of the church that we can best appeal to the world by denying or marginalizing our distinctiveness thus making conversion seem less intimidating. But in doing that, we unwittingly diminish the church's appeal. In the vernacular, distinctiveness is not a bug; it's a feature! It is part of God's drawing of people to himself.

3. Shifting the focus back to the steadfastness with which they are to stand, Paul urges them to hold firmly to the word of life, not be pulled from the faith by persecution or the more general buffeting of life, so that he may have grounds for rejoicing (glorying) on the day of Christ.<sup>37</sup> They are the fruit of his labor in the Lord, and he urges them to steadfastness so that his efforts on their behalf, his labor to present them to God, will not have been in vain.

4. Speaking of his efforts on their behalf, he adds that even though he, through his apostolic suffering, is being poured out as a kind of drink offering added to complete the sacrifice that is their life of faith, which life includes its own suffering for

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<sup>35</sup> Hansen, 171-172.

<sup>36</sup> Hansen, 181.

<sup>37</sup> O'Brien (p. 298) renders the clause, "In order that I may have ground for rejoicing on the day of Christ."

Christ, he is glad for their offering (not resentful) and rejoices with them in their joy of salvation. Though their (and others') needs translate into his suffering on their behalf, his gladness and joy over their faith and salvation trumps whatever he may suffer in helping them in that regard. He urges them likewise to be glad for his having contributed to their faith and to rejoice with him in his joy of his salvation.

#### *IV. Plans to Send Brothers (2:19-30)*

##### **A. Plans to send Timothy in the near future (2:19-24)**

*<sup>19</sup>Now I hope in [the] Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon in order that I also may be cheered by knowing the things about you. <sup>20</sup>For I have no one like-minded [with me], who genuinely will be concerned for the things regarding you. <sup>21</sup>For the entirety seeks the things of themselves, not the things of Jesus Christ. <sup>22</sup>But you know his proven character, that as a child with a father he served with me in the [cause of] the gospel. <sup>23</sup>This one, then, I hope to send as soon as I see [how] the things concerning me [will go]. <sup>24</sup>And I have confidence in the Lord that I myself will also come soon.*

1. Paul's hope to send Timothy in the near future is "in the Lord," meaning that Jesus is the one on whom human expectations depend and by whom they are realized. As Hansen remarks, "Paul's statement that this hope *is in the Lord Jesus* indicates that he makes his travel plans under the direction of the Lord Jesus, submits his plans to the Lord Jesus for approval, and depends upon the Lord Jesus for the realization of his plans."<sup>38</sup>

2. The reason for sending Timothy is that, just as they now will be cheered by hearing news about Paul from Epaphroditus, he also will be cheered by hearing news about them when Timothy returns. As spiritual family, they are keenly interested in each other's welfare. But beyond that, Paul is thereby exhorting them subtly not to disappoint him by failing to exhibit the united steadfastness in the face of opposition that he has urged, by not being united and humbly seeking the good of their brothers and sisters.

3. Timothy is the best choice for that assignment because he is a kindred spirit with Paul, a "like soul," a brother who shares Paul's genuine concern for the Philippians. He is the type of "other-centered" Christian Paul is urging them to be.

4. Among the other Christians in Rome at that time who Paul judged could serve as his emissary and messenger to the Philippians, he says they all are pursuing their own things rather than the things of Christ.

a. I take that to mean that the other possible candidates, whom Paul would have sent with Epaphroditus, were reluctant or unwilling to make the journey

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<sup>38</sup> Hansen, 193.

because they thought it would interfere too greatly with their lives. Remember this was not like traveling today. In thinking that way, they, unlike Paul and Timothy, underestimated Christ's concern for the spiritual welfare of the Philippian church, the depth of his interest in seeing Christians strengthened and matured. Thus, Paul says they put their own interests, their own affairs, over those of Christ, and in doing so brought into relief the distinctiveness of Timothy within that group.

b. I do not think Paul is thereby declaring them hypocrites or apostates. I think he sees it as a matter of immaturity. Their minds have not yet been sufficiently renewed to view the matter as the Lord does, to weigh the factors rightly. Though they at present would disagree, the reality is that they were putting their own things ahead of the things of Christ. Timothy, on the other hand, gets it.

c. It is not necessary to think Paul is here including Luke or Aristarchus in this description. Though they were with him in Rome when he sent Colossians and Philemon (Col. 4:10, 14; Phmn. 24), they are not mentioned in this letter. Paul simply says in 4:21b-22, "The brothers with me greet you. All the saints greet you, especially the ones from Caesar's household." And even if they were in Rome at the time, Paul may have had other plans for them that eliminated them as potential emissaries to Philippi.

5. Paul notes that they have personal knowledge of Timothy's proven character, defined in terms of his having served with Paul in a son-father relationship in the cause of the gospel. His commitment to the things of Christ was beyond question, as was his loyalty to Paul and faithfulness to his teaching, so there was no better representative of Paul's heart and mind.

6. Paul does not want to send Timothy until he finds out about his circumstances, probably meaning until his pending appeal is formally resolved. Apparently, he had particular need of Timothy while he was confined.

7. Paul is confident that he also will personally visit the Philippians before too long. This is consistent with what he said in 1:25-26.

## B. Plans to send Epaphroditus immediately (2:25-30)

*<sup>25</sup>But I consider it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow-worker, and fellow-soldier, your messenger and minister to my need, <sup>26</sup>since he was longing for all of you and was in anguish because you heard that he was ill. <sup>27</sup>Indeed, he was ill, near to death, but God had mercy [on] him, and not only [on] him but also [on] me, so that I might not have grief upon grief. <sup>28</sup>Therefore, I sent him with urgency so that when seeing him you may again rejoice and I may be less sorrowful. <sup>29</sup>So welcome him in the Lord with all joy and hold such men in high esteem, <sup>30</sup>for he came near to death on account of the work of Christ, having risked [his] life that he might supply what was lacking in your ministry to me.*

1. The Philippians had sent Epaphroditus to Paul to deliver their financial gift (4:16-18) and to act on their behalf in ministering to Paul's needs. It seems that Paul is sending him back prematurely and wants to make sure that Epaphroditus is not criticized for failing to complete his assignment.

2. Paul makes clear that the decision to send Epaphroditus to them was his; in other words, Epaphroditus did not insist on returning. He speaks of Epaphroditus with warm feelings and with much praise, calling him "my brother, fellow-worker, and fellow-soldier, your messenger and minister to my need." He was a credit to the church in Philippi.

3. Paul chose to send him back before expected because:

a. He was longing for all of them. He was homesick for his brothers and sisters in the faith.

b. He was in anguish because they had heard that he was ill. He so loved his brothers and sisters that it tore him up to imagine the pain that knowledge of his illness had caused them.

4. What the Philippians had heard about Epaphroditus becoming ill was true. In fact, he had become so ill that he almost died. But God had mercy on him by sparing his life, and in so doing also had mercy on Paul, sparing him the great grief he would have experienced over Epaphroditus's death. You see, death remains an enemy, a source of grief even for Christians, but we do not grieve like the rest of men who have no hope (1 Thess. 4:13) because we know death has been defeated and will one day end in resurrection life.

5. Because of the anxiety produced by Epaphroditus's illness, for both the Philippians and Epaphroditus, Paul decided to send him back sooner than he otherwise would have. He did so in order that, by Epaphroditus's safe return, this hindrance to their joy might be removed and his sorrow at being the involuntary cause of their anxiety would disappear. (Paul would, of course, still have the sorrow of captivity and of being surrounded by adversaries.)

6. Since Paul is sending Epaphroditus back so that they might rejoice again upon seeing him, he urges them to do so, to welcome him "in the Lord" (i.e., as a brother in Christ) with *all* joy. There was to be no particle of disappointment or resentment.

7. Even more, they are to hold Epaphroditus and all those like him in high esteem. He is to be honored because of his service in the cause of Christ. He nearly lost his life in his effort to minister to Paul in prison, in his effort to fulfill the service that they wanted to give Paul. So Epaphroditus is also the type of "other centered" Christian Paul is urging them to be.

## V. Warning About Judaizers (3:1-21)

### A. Watch out for the evil workers (3:1-4a)

*And so, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is not troublesome for me but a safeguard for you. <sup>2</sup>Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workmen, beware of the mutilation [group]. <sup>3</sup>For we are the circumcision, the ones who serve in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and do not have confidence in the flesh – <sup>4</sup>though I myself might have confidence in the flesh also.*

1. Verse 1 is a transition in which Paul urges them to rejoice in the Lord. The opening phrase (*to loipon*), which is commonly rendered "Finally," is here better translated "And so," suggesting a connection to the preceding paragraphs.<sup>39</sup> Those paragraphs provide joyful news, namely that Epaphroditus has returned after praiseworthy service, that he hopes to send Timothy soon, and that he is confident that he will visit them soon. The exhortation to rejoice is linked to what follows in that the Judaizers threatened to rob them of their joy by denying that they were saved.

2. To write the same things he previously taught them, to remind them of his former teaching (see 3:18), is not a bother for him, is not something he is reluctant or hesitant to do; rather, it is a safeguard for them, a protection against the theological danger posed by the false teaching of the Judaizers.

3. Paul warns the Philippians about the Judaizers in very strong terms. He says, "Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workmen, beware of the mutilation [group]."

### Note on Judaizers

The Judaizers were Jewish believers in Christ who rejected the fact the Mosaic covenant had been rendered obsolete. They clung to it as an ongoing, operative covenant, which led them to insist that all Christians must live according to the Mosaic law in order to be saved (Acts 15:1-5). This was a damning doctrine because, as I will explain momentarily, it implicitly made works rather than faith in Christ *the basis* of one's relationship with God.

The truth is that Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension brought to completion the institution of the new covenant. By insisting that Christians submit to the law of the old covenant in order to be saved, the Judaizers were forcing them to choose to relate to God on the terms of that obsolete covenant instead of on the terms of the new covenant. As Paul

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<sup>39</sup> See, e.g., O'Brien, 348.

makes clear in Gal. 5:2-4, it is an either/or choice, one or the other: <sup>2</sup>*Listen! I, Paul, say to you that if you get circumcised, Christ will not benefit you at all.* <sup>3</sup>*And I testify again to every man who gets circumcised, that he is a debtor to obey the whole law.* <sup>4</sup>*You who seek to be pronounced righteous by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.*

The old covenant cannot be forced onto the new, or put differently, the new cannot be forced into the form of the old. This was Jesus' point in Mk. 2:21-22 (Mat. 9:16-17; Lk. 5:36-37), where he said that no one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment or pours new wine into old wineskins. Scot McKnight states, "If we use the categories of [Gal.] 3:19-25, [the Galatians'] departure was a decision to live in B.C. days when the A.D. days had arrived. It was a decision to recede back into the days of Moses and to reject the epoch-altering revelation of Christ."<sup>40</sup> Thomas Schreiner similarly remarks, "The Galatians were turning the clock back in salvation history by submitting to circumcision and the Mosaic law. Since Jesus has been raised from the dead, believers are no longer under the Mosaic covenant."<sup>41</sup>

In choosing to relate to God under the obsolete Mosaic covenant, one chose to relate to God under a covenant in which the animal sacrifices prescribed for forgiveness were no longer recognized. The forgiveness God had provided in association with those animal sacrifices was based on, underwritten by, the fact Christ was coming. They were not atoning in themselves, for as the Hebrew writer declares in Heb. 10:4, it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. With Christ's appearance in history, his offering of himself as the perfect and true sacrifice, those shadow sacrifices are no longer valid, no longer linked to forgiveness. The reality has now appeared.

That means that one who chooses to relate to God under the old covenant is left with the "bare" law. One is under the commands of the covenant but without any applicable sacrifice for one's inevitable violations of that law. This leaves one dependent on one's works, one's obedience, for salvation, which contradicts and nullifies Christ's saving work. The key is the Christ-effected change of covenants. As Douglas Moo explains in his commentary on Galatians:

Paul assumes in his argument [in the letter] that the sacrifice of Christ has rendered the OT provisions for atonement null and void (see 1:4; 3:1, 13). . . . In the time after Christ, then, one is faced with two, and only two, options: find justification in Christ by faith or find justification through the law, a justification that can now, apart from the provision of sacrifice, be secured only by doing "all" the law (see esp. Das 2001: 215-22; Laato 2004: 343-46).<sup>42</sup>

So not only did some Jews distort the Mosaic law into a works salvation during the time of the *old* covenant, many Jews in the time of the new covenant in effect did the same

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<sup>40</sup> Scot McKnight, *Galatians*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 51.

<sup>41</sup> Thomas Schreiner, *Galatians*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 75.

<sup>42</sup> Douglas Moo, *Galatians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 29-30.

thing by insisting that Christians relate to God under the old covenant without the benefit of the now-superseded animal sacrifices. That left them with only their works, their obedience, on which to stand before God.

As I have explained *ad nauseum*, the obsolescence of the Mosaic covenant does not mean Christians are without specific moral obligations, without divine commands. Commands, do's and don'ts, are all over the New Testament. Rather, the obsolescence of the Mosaic covenant means that the *set of commands* (the unit or group or package of commands) that were part of that covenant, the Mosaic law, ceased to be binding. But many of the *individual commands included in that set*, those commands reflecting universal moral desires of God, have an ongoing or renewed applicability in the new covenant and indeed find their full expression there. So not being under the Mosaic law does not mean "command free."

I encourage you to read what I have written about the Mosaic law and its relationship to the Christian. I think it will save us from a lot of needless confusion and nonsense. The two most pertinent papers, available under "Bible Studies" at [www.theoutlet.us](http://www.theoutlet.us), are [A Note on the Mosaic Law](#) and [The Mosaic Law and the Christian – Further Reflections](#). You also may consider reading under "Bible Books" the notes accompanying certain sections of Galatians ([Introduction and Galatians](#)).

a. "Dogs" was applied by Jews to Gentiles and to lapsed Jews who were ritually unclean and thus outside the covenant. Paul turns the tables and applies it to the Judaizers – they are "the dogs" who stand outside the covenant blessings.

b. "Workmen" was used not only to designate workers generally but also to designate Christian workers in the context of missionary activity. Thus, Paul refers to Judaizing missionaries as "evil workmen."

c. "Mutilation" is a derogatory play on the word "circumcision," the rite which the Judaizers insisted was essential for salvation. By this reference, Paul identifies the Judaizers with the practice of pagan mutilation that was forbidden by the Law. Circumcision, the Judaizers' source of pride, is interpreted by Paul as a sure sign that they have no part in God's people.

4. Paul explains why he uses "mutilation" to refer to the Judaizers: It is Paul, the Philippians, and all like them who are the circumcision, meaning the covenant people of God. The Judaizers' claim to that title is false; they are "the mutilation."

5. Paul elaborates on qualities of the circumcision, implicitly contrasting that group to the Judaizers. It is Christians who:

a. serve by the Spirit of God – "Serve" in the LXX denoted the service rendered to God by Israel as his special people. Just as "the circumcision" now applies to the church, so "service of God" is now performed by the church. This service, in the new age, is rendered by the power of the Spirit.

b. glory in Christ Jesus – The new covenant people glory or boast in Christ rather than in their Jewish status or own performance.

c. do not have confidence in the flesh – This is a negative restatement of the preceding, rather than a separate and third assertion. They place no confidence for salvation in national identity or human achievement.

6. When it comes to "the flesh," however, Paul takes a back seat to no one.

## B. Paul greater than the Judaizers in terms of the flesh (3:4b-6)

*If any other person thinks [he has reasons] to have confidence in the flesh, I [have] more: <sup>5</sup>with respect to circumcision, [an] eighth-day person, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew [born] of Hebrews; with regard to the law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup>with regard to zeal, persecuting the church; with regard to righteousness [rooted] in [the] law, being faultless.*

1. Paul draws attention to the fact that he possessed, before his conversion to Christ, even more reason than the Judaizers for placing confidence in the flesh. In other words, he had greater status and achievements within Judaism than the Judaizers had. He does this to show that boasting in Christ, not in Jewish identity and zeal for the Mosaic law, is all that mattered.

### 2. Status within Judaism (his orthodox pedigree and upbringing)

a. With respect to circumcision, an eighth day-er. Not only was Paul circumcised, a sign that he belonged to the covenant people of Israel, but he was circumcised according to God's covenant with Abraham and in strict conformity with the law (Gen. 17:12; Lev. 12:3). He was not from a lax Jewish family or a proselyte from paganism who would have been circumcised when he converted.

b. Of the stock or race of Israel. Paul was not a child of proselytes; he was an ethnic Jew. Having been born of Israelite parents and subsequently circumcised, Paul inherited all the privileges of the covenant community (see, e.g., Rom. 9:4-5).

c. Of the tribe of Benjamin. The tribe of Benjamin was highly regarded in Israel because it gave Israel its first king (1 Sam. 9:1-2), remained loyal to the house of David after the disruption of the monarchy (1 Ki. 12:21), and contained just inside its southern border the city of Jerusalem (Josh. 18:28; Judges 1:21).

d. A Hebrew of Hebrews (i.e., a Hebrew son of Hebrew parents). "Hebrew" probably refers to Jews who normally spoke Aramaic with one another (while knowing some Greek) and who probably attended synagogues where the service was said

in Hebrew. Paul is saying that he spoke Hebrew (including Aramaic), as did his parents before him, suggesting that his family was strictly observant of the Jewish way of life and maintained its links with the home country.

### 3. Personal achievements in relation to the law

a. With regard to the law, a Pharisee. His approach to the law was that of a Pharisee, the strictest sect of Judaism (Acts 26:5). He was devoted to obeying not only the Mosaic law but also the hundreds of commandments contained in the oral law. The Pharisees tried, by obedience to the law, to represent the pure community, the true people of God preparing itself for the coming of the Messiah.

b. With regard to zeal, persecuting the church. Zeal for the law was an important ideal among many Jews, and his extreme zeal for the traditions he had inherited from his ancestors was evident in his persecution of the church (see, Gal. 1:13-14; Acts 22:3-4). He saw a crucified Messiah as contrary to the law and thus ferociously sought to stamp out Christianity.

c. With regard to righteousness that is rooted in the law, being faultless. When it came to righteous living, to living in conformity with the Old Testament as interpreted along Pharisaic lines, he was exemplary. He thus was "faultless" in the eyes of men, "faultless" from the viewpoint of the flesh. So no one could dismiss him as not having been devout, argue that his conversion to Christianity was attributable to prior failure in his Jewish lifestyle. He was as serious and devout as any of them.

(1) This is the same sense in which Zacharias and Elizabeth, the parents of John the Baptist, were "faultless" (Lk. 1:6). It clearly does not mean "sinless" because that would be totally foreign to Jewish theology (e.g., 2 Chron. 6:36; Prov. 20:9), contrary to Paul's statements in Romans about the universality of sin, and contrary to Paul's admission that he coveted prior to his conversion (Rom. 7:7-9). Rather, part of his being "blameless" was his offering of the prescribed sacrifices when he sinned. As Keown remarks, "[Paul's blamelessness] does not imply perfection, but complete fulfillment of the requirements of Jewish Torah, including its provision to deal with sin (sacrifice, Day of Atonement, etc.)."<sup>43</sup>

(2) It is noteworthy that in some important respects the Pharisaic understanding of the law, to which Paul was committed, relaxed the divine standard. You see this in Jesus' critique of Pharisaic understanding in Matthew 23. So any notion that the Spirit, through Paul, was declaring Paul to be sinless is all the more untenable.

(3) As I indicated, with the coming of Christ and the obsolescence of the Mosaic covenant, and consequent inapplicability of the Mosaic law, being a devout adherent of the Mosaic law ceased to be salvifically relevant. What matters in terms of being considered righteous by God is no longer faith expressed in

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<sup>43</sup> Keown, 150-151.

conformity with the Mosaic law but faith in Christ that is expressed according to the new covenant. To choose to relate to God under the now obsolete Mosaic covenant, to treat it as binding and not obsolete, leaves one relying on one's obedience rather than God's grace because the sacrifices for sin that were available under the Mosaic covenant when it was in effect are not recognized in light of the perfect and efficacious sacrifice of Christ. That is why Paul said in Gal. 5:4 to Christians being lured by Judaizers, "You who seek to be pronounced righteous by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace."

### C. Paul's radical reversal of values (3:7-11)

*<sup>7</sup>But what things were gains to me, these things I have considered loss on account of Christ. <sup>8</sup>But even more so, I consider all things to be loss on account of the surpassing value of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, on account of whom I have lost all things; indeed, I consider [them] dung that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup>and be found in him – not having my own righteousness that comes from the law but the righteousness that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God [based] on faith – <sup>10</sup>in order to know him, that is, the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death, <sup>11</sup>if somehow I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.*

1. But these marks of Jewish status and personal devotion to the Mosaic law, which were in fact blessings and spiritual advantages (e.g., Rom. 9:1-5, 11:1-2), he came to regard collectively as "loss on account of Christ," as a liability instead of an asset, presumably because of how he allowed them initially to blind him to the truth and glory of the Lord Jesus. The Judaizers were still doing that because, though they accepted Jesus as the Messiah, they allowed their misplaced zeal for the Mosaic covenant to deny the covenant-altering nature of Christ's work, which resulted in them forcing believers into a damning choice of relating to God under a now graceless old covenant. In doing so, they presented people with a false gospel, a works salvation, rather than the true gospel of salvation through faith in Christ.

2. And beyond the specifics of his Jewish status and personal devotion to the Mosaic law, Paul now considers *all things* to be loss on account of the surpassing value of the knowledge of Christ Jesus. In other words, he views as a liability, a negative, *anything* (e.g., status, possessions, comforts, pleasures) that obscures, distracts from, competes with, or throws shade on the surpassing greatness and significance of Christ Jesus, whom he came to know as the Lord.

3. Paul adds that he not only *considers* such things loss but has in fact *lost all things*. He was, as he informs us in Gal. 1:14, advancing in Judaism beyond many of his peers. Indeed, he was educated at the feet of the great rabbi Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). He was a rising star within Judaism, but after the Lord called him, the Jewish religious elites, the very people whose respect he had desired, wanted to murder him. And whatever ambitions he may have had for life as a respected scholar and teacher of the law, he walked a very different road with the Lord.

a. As he says in 1 Cor. 4:11-13: <sup>11</sup>To the present hour we both hunger and thirst and are poorly clothed and are beaten and are homeless, <sup>12</sup>and we labor, working with our own hands. When being reviled, we bless; when being persecuted, we endure; <sup>13</sup>when being slandered, we speak kindly. We have become like the filth of the world, the scum of all things, to the present time.

b. He says in 2 Cor. 11:23-27 – <sup>23</sup>Are they servants of Christ? (I am speaking as being out of my mind.) I [am] more [of one], with more labors, more imprisonments, beatings beyond measure, [and] frequent deaths. <sup>24</sup>Five times I received from the Jews forty [lashes] minus one; <sup>25</sup>three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked. <sup>26</sup>I have spent a night and a day in the deep. On many journeys, [I was] in dangers from rivers, in dangers from bandits, in dangers from [my] people, in dangers from Gentiles, in dangers in [the] city, in dangers in [the] country, in dangers at sea, in dangers among false brothers. <sup>27</sup>[I have lived] with labor and toil, many sleepless nights, hunger and thirst, many fastings, cold and nakedness.

3. Beyond viewing as a liability anything that obscures, distracts from, competes with, or throws shade on the surpassing greatness and significance of Christ Jesus, he considers any such thing as *dung*, however much the world may exalt it. He thus intensifies his rejection of them. He views them that way that he may gain Christ and be found by God to be in Christ. That is all that really matters, and anything that may be an obstacle to or diversion from that objective is revolting to him.

4. The righteousness that comes from God through faith in Christ is contrasted with a righteousness of one's own that comes from the law. To say yet again, one who after the cross seeks salvation under the Mosaic covenant is left to depend on one's own performance, one's own righteousness, because the prescribed sacrifices through which grace was mediated when the Mosaic covenant was in effect are no longer recognized in light of Christ having offered himself as the perfect and efficacious sacrifice. To live under the Mosaic covenant as a requirement of salvation in the age of the new covenant is necessarily to depend on one's own obedience for salvation, which is death. Paul is declaring his rejection of that illusory path.

5. Paul rejects all the worldly things that are promoted as being worthy of one's focus, effort, and reliance that he may gain Christ and be found by God to be in Christ. He adds in v. 10 that he rejects all the worldly things, considers them *dung*, in order to know Christ, by which he means to know the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death. He wants to know Christ *experientially* to the fullest extent possible.

a. It is in the single-minded devotion to and pursuit of Christ that one suffers for his name, as Christ suffered ultimately to the point of death, and in that suffering experiences the triumphant power of God. This is the power that raised Jesus from the dead and which will do the same for the faithful at the consummation of the kingdom when the Lord returns.

b. Keown comments:

"The power of the resurrection," then, is the language of the Spirit, God and Christ's empowering presence in believers in the present, constituting another example of the work of the Spirit in Philippians without direct mention of πνεῦμα . . . This is the power of God "as a present, continuously active force," giving spiritual life in Christ (Rom 6:5; Col 3:1; Vincent, 104; Gee 1995, 330-31).

Paul wants to know and experience this power that raised Christ from the dead as he continues to live out his life in ministry and struggle, as he shares in the sufferings of Christ and is conformed to his death. That is, while his life experience is a struggle and might end in martyrdom, within his veins flows the Spirit of God empowering him – this he wants to know more. . . . Paul yearns to know this power daily, in the context of suffering and even death, as the following clauses will illustrate. Ultimately, he wants to know full bodily transformation (vv. 11-14, 20).<sup>44</sup>

6. Paul's ultimate hope is that through his faith-based union with the Lord Jesus, a faith that results in the centered and crucified life he is describing, he will share in the end-time resurrection of the dead. In saying "*if somehow* (εἴ πως) I may attain," I do not think Paul is doubting his participation in the resurrection of the righteous but rather is acknowledging that that participation will always be a matter of God's grace and not something achieved by his consecrated life.

D. Digression: Pressing on toward the goal (3:12-16)

<sup>12</sup>*Not that I already obtained [this] or already have been perfected, but I press on that I may take possession [of it] because I was indeed taken possession of by Christ [Jesus].*  
<sup>13</sup>*Brothers, I do not consider myself to have taken possession [of it], but one thing [I do]: forgetting the things that are behind and straining for the things ahead,* <sup>14</sup>*I press on in keeping with [the] goal, toward the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.* <sup>15</sup>*Let us, therefore, as many as [are] mature, think this [way]. And if in something you think differently, this too God will reveal to you.* <sup>16</sup>*Only let us live in line with what [truth] we have attained.*

1. Paul declares that he has not already come to know Christ completely, has not already shared fully in his sufferings and his experience of resurrection power, nor has he reached the perfection that will be his only at the resurrection at Christ's return (e.g., 1 Jn. 3:2; Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 15:49; 2 Cor. 3:17-18).

a. At Christ's second coming, not only will our bodies be changed to be like his glorious and immortal body, as Paul indicates in 3:21 (see also 1 Cor. 15:50-55;

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<sup>44</sup> Keown, 168-169.

Col. 3:4; 1 Thess. 4:13-17), but the sanctification that began at our conversion, our transformation into Christlikeness (2 Cor. 3:18), will be brought to completion. We then will be fully "conformed to the image of his Son" (Rom. 8:29). We will be physically and spiritually prepared for eternity in the immediate presence of God Almighty.

b. This transformation will in some sense be effected by our seeing Jesus "as he is," seeing him in his returning glory as the King of kings and Lord of lords. Thomas Johnson comments on 1 Jn. 3:2, "There will be a transforming vision at the return of Jesus in which believers will be purified of all that still separates them from complete likeness to Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 3:18)."<sup>45</sup>

2. Though Paul has not reached the blessed perfection of the resurrection, he presses on in faithful service so as to lay hold of it, and the full laying hold of Christ which that perfection entails ("when he is revealed, *we will be like him*" – 1 Jn. 3:2). He does so *because* he was taken possession of by Christ.<sup>46</sup> Christ captured his heart. Hansen comments:

Christ's apprehension of Paul means that Paul has been captured by Christ, taken hold of by Christ, and Christ will not let go of him. Because he has been apprehended by Christ, Paul has all the reason, the endurance, the assurance, and the joy he needs to pursue Christ even if he has not already comprehended Christ. He is running hard after Christ with his heart wide open to receive Christ because Christ has already received him and arrested him by his love. Divine grace is the source and goal of the human pursuit.<sup>47</sup>

3. In running the race of his Christian life, Paul forgets the part of the track he has already covered and focuses on the finish line. He does not dwell on past accomplishments or failures in his Christian service but strains to be faithful till death (see 1 Cor. 9:24-27). He labors to finish the race that he might receive the prize, the crown, that is part of God's upward call in Christ. I see 2 Tim. 4:6-8 as a commentary on this verse delivered right at the finish line.

4. All who are mature should have this mindset. Their lives should reflect the same goal Paul has of fully laying hold of Christ, ultimately in the consummation at his return. And if on some detail or finer point within that fundamental orientation, that basic way of thinking, one should disagree with Paul, he says God will lead them into the truth in that matter as well. God in his grace will grant them growth in spiritual understanding.

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<sup>45</sup> Thomas F. Johnson, *1, 2, and 3 John*, NIBC (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 68-69.

<sup>46</sup> Many English versions render v. 12b something like, "but I press on that I may take possession of that for which I was indeed taken possession of by Christ [Jesus]," but *eph'ō* is here probably better translated "because." See, e.g., O'Brien, 425; Hansen, 252; Matthew Harmon, *Philippians*, Mentor Commentary (Geanies House, Fearn, Tain, Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2015), 353 (n. 152).

<sup>47</sup> Hansen, 252.

5. In any case, we all are to live in conformity with the truth we have already attained, the truth that is the gospel we accepted. In other words, we are to live with the devotion and submission to Jesus that is called for by the fact he is God incarnate who was crucified for our sins, raised from the dead, and exalted by the Father to the greatest conceivable position and glory. Live a life centered on and surrendered to him, and growth and enlightenment will occur in that context.

#### E. Imitate servants of the cross, not its enemies (3:17-21)

*<sup>17</sup>Be fellow imitators of me, brothers, and take note of those who walk in this way just as you have us [as] an example. <sup>18</sup>For many, about whom I often spoke to you and now say even weeping, walk as the enemies of the cross of Christ, <sup>19</sup>whose end [is] destruction, whose god [is] the belly, and their glory [is] in their shame; the ones thinking the earthly things. <sup>20</sup>For our commonwealth exists in heaven, from where also we eagerly await a Savior, [the] Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>21</sup>who will transform the body of our humiliation [into] conformity with the body of his glory by the working of his power even to subject all things to himself.*

1. Paul urges them to imitate him and to carefully observe those among them who have patterned their lives after Paul and his associates. They are to follow the path Paul and his associates have modeled, the path of exclusive, intense, and wholehearted reliance on Christ, which will end in the perfection of the consummation.

2. He calls them to do this as a safeguard against the many who live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Though the identity of these enemies is disputed, I am with those who are convinced he is referring to Judaizers<sup>48</sup> who are enemies of the cross because their false gospel is in reality a works salvation that alienates them and their disciples from the grace Jesus provided through the cross (Gal. 5:2-4). As Paul said in Gal. 2:21, "I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness [is] through the law, then Christ died for nothing."

3. Paul weeps as he thinks of the Judaizers and the danger they pose and damage they have done. He speaks forcefully against them, saying:

a. their end is destruction – By trusting in their own performance under what is now an obsolete and therefore graceless covenant they have cut themselves off from the saving grace of Christ (Gal. 5:2-4). As a result, their destiny is eternal condemnation (Gal. 1:6-9).

b. their god is the belly – This is a sarcastic reference to their binding the old-covenant food laws beyond the time and sphere bound by God, making them something necessary for salvation in the age of the new covenant. Since God has rendered them obsolete, Paul characterizes the Judaizers' binding of them as demanding

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<sup>48</sup> See, e.g., O'Brien, 33.

an offering to their bellies, the receptacles of the food, which is to treat their bellies as a god.

c. their glory is in their shame – This probably means that they glory in their private parts through their exaltation of circumcision. In 1 Cor. 12:23, the sexual organs are referred to as shameful, unpresentable, or unseemly (ἀσχήμων). Philippians 3:19 uses a different word for shame, the noun αἰσχύνη, but 1 Cor. 12:23 shows it is not a stretch for the concept to be applied to their private parts. Alternatively, Paul may mean that the very things in which they glory will bring them the shame of condemnation.

d. their mind is on earthly things – Paul accuses them of having their mind on earthly things because it was their pride in their Jewish identity and heritage that made them resist the fact the Mosaic covenant had been rendered obsolete by Christ's work. A salvation bestowed apart from the Mosaic law, a salvation that was not tied to Jewishness in the same way it had been, diminished their significance, so they clung to the Mosaic law as an indispensable aspect of salvation. Though they may not have recognized it, this reduced them to seeking a righteousness based on works, a righteousness of men, rather than the righteousness of God that comes solely through faith in Christ.

4. Paul and his kind, not the Judaizers, are to be imitated because they are the ones whose commonwealth or "governing force" is in heaven and thus whose lives are ruled by that authority. The allegiance of the Judaizers is elsewhere.

a. O'Brien states:

The meaning [of πολίτευμα] that is best attested in Hellenistic times and that is most suitable for our context is 'state' or 'commonwealth' in an active and dynamic sense . . .

Most interpreters recognize that πολίτευμα has added significance in a letter sent to Philippi. This is not, however, because the rendering 'colony' fits. Rather, under the provisions of the Roman form of constitutional government conferred on the city by Octavian in 42 B.C., Philippi was 'governed as if it was on Italian soil and its administration reflected that of Rome in almost every respect.' So, writing to Christians in a city proud of its relation to Rome, Paul tells the Philippians that they belong to a heavenly commonwealth, that is, their state and constitutive government is in heaven, and as its citizens they are to reflect its life.<sup>49</sup>

b. Fee similarly writes:

Although Paul's language will not quite allow the translation, "we are a colony of heaven" (Moffatt), the point of the imagery comes very close to that. Just as Philippi was a colony of Rome in the province of Macedonia,

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<sup>49</sup> O'Brien, 460-461.

so the citizens of the "heavenly commonwealth" were to function as a colony of heaven in that outpost of Rome.<sup>50</sup>

5. And part of the blessing shared by Paul and his kind is the anticipation of Christ's return and the glorious resurrection which he will bring about by his incredible power. At that time, their (and our) earthly bodies will be transformed "to be conformed to the body of his glory."

a. Paul says in Rom. 8:11: If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you. As James Dunn notes in his commentary on Romans, it "is now agreed" that the future tense verb "will give life" (ζωοποιήσει) "clearly refers to the final resurrection (as in 1 Cor 15:22)."<sup>51</sup> To give just one example of many leading commentators from whom to choose, Douglas Moo writes:

The cause-and-effect relationship between Christ's resurrection and the believer's, made so plain in Rom. 6:5 (see 8:17), lies behind Paul's affirmation that God will give life to "our mortal bodies" just as he raised Christ from the dead. And keeping with Paul's focus throughout this part of Rom. 8, it is the Spirit who is the instrument by whom God raises the body of the Christian. . . . The Spirit's life-giving power is not circumscribed by the mortality of the body but overcomes and transforms that mortality into the immortality of eternal life in a resurrected body.<sup>52</sup>

b. Paul says in Rom. 8:23: And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. To quote Moo again:

Christians, at the moment of justification, are adopted into God's family, but this adoption is incomplete and partial until we are finally made like the Son of God himself (v. 29). This final element in our adoption is "the redemption of our bodies." . . . As Paul has hinted in v. 10, it is not until the body has been transformed that redemption can be said to be complete; in this life, our bodies share in that "frustration" which characterizes this world as a whole (see v. 20).<sup>53</sup>

c. In 1 Cor. 15:35 Paul says:<sup>35</sup> But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" The bodily nature of the resurrection is taken for granted. The question is the *kind* of body with which they will be raised not whether they will have a body. He goes on to explain that the resurrection body will be one that God has transformed to be imperishable, immortal, glorious, and powerful.

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<sup>50</sup> Fee, 379.

<sup>51</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, WBC (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 432.

<sup>52</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, NICNT, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 515-516.

<sup>53</sup> Moo, 543.

d. This is why Jesus said in Jn. 5:28-29 that "an hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear his voice and will come out, those who have done good to a resurrection of life, but those who have done evil to a resurrection of judgment." This is the raising up that will occur on the *last day* (Jn. 6:39-40, 44, 54).

## VI. Closing Exhortations (4:1-9)

### A. To stand firm (4:1)

*So then, my beloved and sorely missed brothers, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in [the] Lord, beloved.*

1. Paul very warmly refers to the Philippians as "my beloved and sorely missed brothers" and as "my joy and crown." He cared for them deeply, and they were a source of joy and honor for him in their faithfulness to Christ. And he anticipates they will be even more so on the day of Christ's return.

2. He urged them in 2:16 to hold fast to the word of life "so as to provide ground for glorying for me on the day of Christ, so that I did not run in vain nor labor in vain." And he earlier had written of the Thessalonians in 1 Thess. 2:19-20, "For what is our hope or joy or crown of glorying in the presence of our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? <sup>20</sup>Yes, you are our glory and joy."

3. They are to stand firm "in this way," meaning by imitating the pattern of exclusive, intense, and wholehearted reliance on Christ demonstrated by Paul, his associates, and a number in Philippi. They are to trust in nothing else for their relationship with God and are to strain to be faithful to Christ until death.

### B. Appeal for Euodia and Syntyche to be united (4:2-3)

*<sup>2</sup>I beg Euodia and I beg Syntyche to think the same thing in [the] Lord. <sup>3</sup>Yes, I ask you also, loyal companion, help them, for they struggled beside me in the [work of the] gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names [are] in [the] book of life.*

1. Paul publicly begs these two women to be like-minded in the Lord. They were apparently active and notable members in the church, and their discord was a threat to the unity of the church as a whole. Unresolved conflict, especially between two respected or high-profile Christians, can polarize a congregation. People begin to take sides. That explains why their names were mentioned in a letter to be read publicly in church.

2. This is so important that Paul asks another individual in the congregation, a man who is identified simply as "loyal companion" (possibly *Syzygos* is a proper name), to help these women come to peace with one another. We know it is a man because the words are masculine in form. There is a place for a third party helping to resolve conflicts in the church.

3. Paul mentions a personal reason for helping these women reconcile: they had struggled beside him in the work of the gospel. There is something especially tragic about a split between two Christians who once labored together in harmony for the glorious gospel. It is sad in its own right, but also the division hinders their effectiveness in blessing others.

4. Euodia, Syntyche, Clement, and others had served as Paul's fellow workers. We are not told what specific roles they played in assisting Paul in his apostolic labors, but he was grateful for it and recognized that it involved struggling on their part; it was done in the face of resistance and with personal cost. Perhaps he is referring to when the congregation at Philippi was founded.

5. Paul adds that all these coworkers are listed in God's book of life. This conflict between Euodia and Syntyche needed to be resolved, but these women were by no means apostates. They loved the Lord; they simply needed help working through this conflict.

### C. Rejoice, be gentle, do not be anxious (4:4-7)

*<sup>4</sup>Rejoice in [the] Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! <sup>5</sup>Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord [is] near. <sup>6</sup>Be anxious [in] nothing, but in everything, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be known to God. <sup>7</sup>And the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

1. As indicated in chapter 1, these brothers and sisters were being persecuted by their pagan neighbors. Yet, having just mentioned the "book of life," Paul commands them to rejoice in the Lord always. And in case they are hesitant, he doubles down, telling them again to rejoice. This is reminiscent of Jesus in Lk. 10:20 where he told the Seventy (or 72) not to rejoice that the spirits submit to them but to rejoice that their names are written in heaven.

a. A Christian's relationship with Christ, that priceless treasure, is always to be a source of joy, whatever the world may throw at us. No circumstance or situation can be allowed to strip us of this higher joy. Since no power can snatch us from his hand (Jn. 10:29), the joy of that relationship is immune to worldly pressures. That joy is a constant backdrop of the Christian's life.

b. This does not mean there is no sadness or discouragement in the Christian life. It means that Christ must never cease to be a joy for the believer. Sadness and discouragement are part of life in this fallen world.

(1) Paul just finished telling them that he wrote "with tears" in the matter of the Judaizers, and he earlier mentioned the great grief God had spared him by sparing Epaphroditus. Elsewhere Paul says that the Corinthians caused him "great distress and anguish of heart" (2 Cor. 2:4) and that he faced daily the pressure of his concern for all the churches (2 Cor. 11:28).

(2) Jesus himself wept over Lazarus (Jn. 11:35) and wept over Jerusalem (Lk. 19:41). In the Garden of Gethsemane he said that his soul "was overwhelmed with sorrow" (Mat. 26:38).

2. Paul commands them to let their graciousness or magnanimity or forbearing spirit be evident to all.

a. One scholar defined this slippery word in this way: "fairmindedness, the attitude of a man who is charitable toward men's faults and merciful in his judgment of their failings because he takes their whole situation into his reckoning."<sup>54</sup> It often is translated "gentleness."

b. Hansen comments: "Paul recognizes that suffering for faith in Christ tests the quality of gentleness. Harsh attacks quickly spark defensive responses. So Paul encourages the small, beleaguered group of Christians in Philippi to let their gentleness be evident to all even when they are stripped of their honor and treated unjustly."<sup>55</sup>

3. The Lord is near means that he is attentive to their circumstance and available to aid and strengthen them in trials. "[T]he Lord is near to hear prayer and bring his peace (4:6-7)."<sup>56</sup> See Ps. 145:18 (LXX 144:18).

4. Paul commands them not to be anxious about anything. That is different from being aware of and concerned circumstances and situations. It is concern that has passed into what we would call fretting.

a. They are not to be anxious in any circumstance but instead are in every circumstance to make requests of God through prayers and petitions offered with gratitude. They are to cast their cares on him (1 Pet. 5:7). In this Paul is echoing the teaching of Jesus in Mat. 6:25-34.

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<sup>54</sup> Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 168 (quoting L. H. Marshall).

<sup>55</sup> Hansen, 289.

<sup>56</sup> Keown, 338.

b. In conjunction with their making heartfelt and grateful requests to God, they will receive from God a peace that will protect their hearts and minds, both individually and corporately, from the assault of their circumstances. O'Brien comments:

[Verse 7] is a specific and certain promise about God's peace that is attached to the encouraging admonition of v. 6. Most significantly, this promise about God's peace guarding the Philippians is given irrespective of whether their concrete requests (αἰτήματα) are granted or not. This word of assurance is independent of their petitions being answered by God in the affirmative. God's peace will be powerfully at work in their lives as a result (καὶ) of their pouring out their hearts in petition with thanksgiving, not because they have made requests that are perfectly in line with the will of God.<sup>57</sup>

c. This peace that God provides surpasses or transcends all human understanding either because it is beyond comprehension, especially given the circumstances, or is something that human reasoning and planning could not bring about.

d. The sphere in which this divine protection occurs is given in the final phrase, "in Christ Jesus." O'Brien states:

God's peace will stand guard over the hearts and minds of those who are in union with Christ Jesus. Their new relationship with him has been effected through his death and resurrection, and they have now been united to him as their crucified and risen Lord. Within this relationship there is the production or guarding of God's peace.<sup>58</sup>

#### D. Focus on what is excellent and follow Paul's model (4:8-9)

*<sup>8</sup>Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable – if [there is] any moral excellence and if [there is] any praiseworthy thing – dwell on these things. <sup>9</sup>What things you learned and received and heard and saw in me, practice these things. And the God of peace will be with you.*

1. Paul lists six positive ethical qualities and then summarizes them, thus describing the characteristics they are to dwell on to shape their character. These things are similar to items in lists of virtues given by Greek philosophers, especially Stoics. Pagan recognition of what is good is traceable to the law of the heart (Rom. 2:15) that is part of mankind's creation in the image of God. That means we cannot reflexively repudiate what the world calls good. Rather, we must evaluate everything by the revelation of God.

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<sup>57</sup> O'Brien, 495-496.

<sup>58</sup> O'Brien, 498-499.

a. Regarding the need to dwell on what is true, Harmon says:

Focusing on the things that are true is essential in the struggle to follow Christ in this fallen world, as falsehood is the currency in which our enemy Satan deals. Jesus described him as 'a liar and the father of lies' (John 8:44). Satan works to convince people of his lies, so it is imperative that we set our minds on the things that are true instead.<sup>59</sup>

b. "Honorable" refers to something that evokes a special respect. It describes "things that lift the mind from the cheap and tawdry to that which is noble and good and of moral worth."<sup>60</sup>

c. "Just" or "right" refers to "giving to God and our fellow human beings their due."<sup>61</sup>

d. "Pure" refers to "those things that are morally blameless."<sup>62</sup> Keown states, "The term here speaks of a refusal to join the enemies and ponder sins of the flesh such as sexual immorality, material corruption, and more (cf. 3:19). The concern is not external matters of ritual purity, as might preoccupy some Jews, but matters of the heart."<sup>63</sup>

e. "Lovely" refers to what is pleasing. Bruce says such things "commend themselves by their intrinsic attractiveness and agreeableness. They give pleasure to all and cause distaste to none, like a welcome fragrance."<sup>64</sup> Harmon states:

The embrace of the lovely means the eschewing of the base and ugly. In Paul's day, it would have worked out in rejection of brutality and worship of force. In our day, much that passes for humor involves degradation and reversal of the virtuous. Entire movies are devoted to a series of shameful incidents in the pursuit of laughs at all costs; some comedians make careers of mocking what is tender and lovely.<sup>65</sup>

f. "Commendable" or "praiseworthy" refers to who or what "deservedly enjoys a good reputation."<sup>66</sup> Keown says, "Paul wants the Philippians to focus their minds on those things that are worthy of their conversation and well spoken of, such as the sacrifice of Epaphroditus."<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Harmon, 418.

<sup>60</sup> Hawthorne and Martin, 251.

<sup>61</sup> Hawthorne and Martin, 251.

<sup>62</sup> Hansen, 298.

<sup>63</sup> Keown, 362.

<sup>64</sup> Bruce, 146.

<sup>65</sup> Harmon, 421-422.

<sup>66</sup> Bruce, 146.

<sup>67</sup> Keown, 363.

g. Paul shifts from the "whatever" structure to an "if any" structure to give the final two elements: if [there is] any moral excellence and if [there is] any praiseworthy thing. With Keown and others, I think Paul probably is summing up the other items and expressing the general idea he is making.<sup>68</sup>

2. He is not urging them simply to contemplate these attributes but to dwell on them that they may be manifested in their lives. As Keown says, "they are not to be drawn aside into pondering evil, negative thinking, or ideas and notions that threaten the gospel and its lifestyle. They are to be renewed in their thinking through consciously focusing their attention on good things."<sup>69</sup>

3. Paul displayed these virtues in his own life and so could appeal to the Philippians to put into practice what he had taught them (learned and received) and what they had observed of him (heard and saw). Those who model their lives on the pattern of apostolic teaching and example are assured that God, who provides true peace, will be with them.

## VII. Thanksgiving, Praise, and Final Greetings (4:10-23)

### A. Paul's gratitude for the gift and his contentment in Christ (4:10-14)

*<sup>10</sup>I rejoiced in [the] Lord greatly because now at last you caused [your] concern for me to bloom again, with regard to which you indeed were concerned for me but were lacking opportunity [to show it]. <sup>11</sup>Not that I am speaking because of need, for I have learned to be satisfied in whatever [circumstances] I am. <sup>12</sup>I know [how] to be deprived, and I know [how] to abound. In any and all circumstances, I have learned [the] secret, both to being well fed and to being hungry, both to having plenty and to having need. <sup>13</sup>I can do all things through him who strengthens me. <sup>14</sup>Nevertheless, you did well by becoming sharers of my hardship.*

1. Paul rejoiced greatly when he received from Epaphroditus this most recent expression of the Philippians' concern for him. Their concern for him "bloomed again" in the form of this tangible gift.

2. Paul immediately makes clear that there was no suggestion of reproach in what he just said. There was no implied "It's about time!" They had been concerned for him all along but did not have an opportunity to express that concern until recently. The nature of the circumstances that prevented them from expressing their concern are not spelled out, but several possibilities have been suggested:

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<sup>68</sup> Keown, 363.

<sup>69</sup> Keown, 365.

a. They were poor. As a poor church, they may have been tapped out by giving beyond their resources for several years to contribute to the collection Paul had organized for the church in Jerusalem (2 Cor. 8:1-4).

b. They were unsure of Paul's situation during his imprisonment in Caesarea. Perhaps it was a while before they learned of it and then did not know whether he would still be there or could receive guests or gifts.

c. They had no one to send with their gift. A small, poor church often may not have had a member who could take the long time that would be required to visit Paul in a distant place.

3. Paul's joy over their gift was not because it met his material needs. Hansen comments, "Paul does not deny that he was in the condition of lacking basic essentials, but he does deny that his impoverished condition gave rise to great joy when gifts arrived to rescue him from his poverty. No, his great joy had nothing to do with the fact that the receipt of gifts met his dire needs."<sup>70</sup> Paul's joy was because of what the gifts said about their commitment to him and to the gospel. For Paul had learned to be satisfied in whatever circumstance he found himself.

a. Verse 12 elaborates on this. He writes, "I know how to be deprived, and I know how to abound. In any and all circumstances, I have learned the secret – both to being well fed and to being hungry, both to having plenty and to having need."

b. Paul's peace of mind, his satisfaction or contentment, was not tied to his material circumstances. His contentment came from his relationship with God through Jesus Christ; everything else was secondary. Because that relationship was constant, his contentment did not fluctuate with his financial condition.

c. Note that this went both ways. Not only did he know how to be deprived, he also knew how to abound. He not only learned the secret to being hungry but to being well fed; he not only learned the secret to having need but to having plenty.

(1) We understand how deprivation can disturb one's contentment and why one would need to learn the secret of coping with that circumstance, but our reaction is "who needs a secret to cope with abundance – what's to cope with?"

(2) Having plenty carries the danger that one will be lured into the spiritual trap of thinking that one's life consists in the abundance of one's possessions, and from that warped perspective flows all kinds of discontent. One then lives with the anxiety of protecting one's wealth and with the insatiable desire to accumulate more. If wealth is the measure of a man's life, one is doomed to the dissatisfaction of trying to keep up with a never-ending line of Joneses. If contentment is

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<sup>70</sup> Hansen, 309.

found in having X amount of stuff, then greater contentment lies in having X + 1 amount of stuff, which is more than you presently have.

d. Finding contentment in Christ regardless of his material circumstances is something Paul *learned* over the course of his Christian life. Think of all Paul endured in learning this lesson (e.g., 2 Cor. 11:23-28). Pain and hardship often are necessary to teach us the truly important lessons of life. That is the only way some lessons can be learned. That's the point of Heb. 12:7-11.

4. In this context, 4:13 needs to be understood as "I am strong enough for all these circumstances through him who empowers me." Paul learned to be content in these diverse circumstances, but he understood that it was only through Christ that such contentment was possible. He was Paul's power source. D. A. Carson comments:

This verse is often wrenched out of its context. Paul is not claiming to be a kind of superman because he is a Christian and God is on his side. . . .

Paul's "everything" is constrained by the context. His point is that whatever the circumstances in which he finds himself, whether with the rich and the powerful or with the poor and the powerless, whether preaching with unction to substantial crowds or incarcerated in a filthy prison, he has learned to cast himself on God *and to be content*. He can do all these things, *everything* that God assigns him to do, through the one who gives him strength. Let the gospel advance, let God's will be done in me and through me, Paul is saying, I am content, for I can trust the one who invariably strengthens me to do what he assigns me.<sup>71</sup>

5. Paul makes clear that, despite his contentment with his material situation, it was good for them to share with him in his hardship. It was a loving thing to do and a genuine blessing for Paul (though not in the same sense as for someone else who had material needs).

## B. Paul's gratitude for their past and present support (4:15-18)

<sup>15</sup>Now you indeed know, Philippians, that in [the] beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you alone. <sup>16</sup>For even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. <sup>17</sup>Not that I seek after the gift, but I seek after the fruit that accrues to your account. <sup>18</sup>I have received everything in full and have more than enough. I have been fully supplied since receiving from Epaphroditus the things from you, a fragrance of a sweet smell, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God.

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<sup>71</sup> Carson, 119-120.

1. Paul praises them for their past generosity in supporting his missionary effort. In 4:17 he makes clear that his focus is not on the gift *per se* but on the faithfulness they exhibit in giving it, which is a credit to them ("but I seek after the fruit that accrues to your account"). Paul is always sensitive about being perceived as someone angling for money, as there were plenty of teachers in the ancient world who were hustlers.

2. Paul lets them know that he received their recent gift in full and that he now is fully supplied. He thus acknowledges their generosity and expresses his appreciation for it.

3. In 4:18c he refers to the things they sent as "a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, something well-pleasing to God." The financial contributions we make to fellow believers in need, especially those who are spreading the gospel, are offerings that please God.

### C. Expression of praise to God (4:19-20)

*<sup>19</sup>And my God will fully supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. <sup>20</sup>Now to our God and Father [be] the glory forever and ever, amen.*

1. Being chained in Rome, Paul is in no position to reciprocate the giving of his Philippian brothers and sisters, but he declares that his God will richly supply every need of theirs. However one understands the "every need" that God will supply, it bears keeping in mind the perspective on need that Paul has just given. Frank Thielman states, "if Paul's own understanding of 'need' (vv. 11-13) is the key to understanding the term here, then surely Paul is promising that God will supply the Philippians with the greatest need of all – the ability to face all circumstances through the one who gives them strength (v. 13)."<sup>72</sup>

2. Verse 20 is an expression of praise to our God and Father. It emphasizes what is primary and what Paul is all about: the glory of God.

### D. Final greetings (4:21-23)

*<sup>21</sup>Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers with me greet you. <sup>22</sup>All the saints greet you, especially the ones from Caesar's household. <sup>23</sup>The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ [be] with your spirit.*

1. Paul asks for his personal greeting to be given to every brother and sister in Christ. He adds that those brothers with him, probably referring to his close coworkers, also greet them. He then says that all the saints in the area greet them, especially the ones from Caesar's household. Thielman remarks, "If the Philippians were

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<sup>72</sup> Frank Thielman, *Philippians*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 238.

caught in the tension between their own civic pride as members of a Roman colony and the offense they presented to their city's unbelieving citizenry (cf. 1:27; 3:20), then perhaps Paul hopes to encourage them with the news that even some of the Roman emperor's staff have turned to the gospel."<sup>73</sup>

2. He closes with a prayer that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the divine blessings and beneficence he provides, be with them. May that be the case for all of us.

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<sup>73</sup> Thielman, 239.