

Philippians

A Recipe for the Spiritual “Blahs”!

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Contents

Preface	3
Bibliography	4
Lesson 1: The Pauline Prison Epistles	5
Lesson 2: Phil 1:1-11. Paul's Epistolary Style.....	9
Lesson 3: Phil 1:1-11. Salutation and Laudatio Prayer	13
Lesson 4: Phil 1:12-26. Paul's Present Circumstances	18
Lesson 5: Phil 2:1-11. Jesus - A Model for Christian Service	21
Lesson 6: Paul's Encouragement to the Philippians	28
Lesson 7: Phil 3:1-21 Paul's Exhortations.....	33
Lesson 8: Phil 3:8-16. Paul's Theology in a Nutshell!.....	38
Lesson 9: Phil 4:1-23. Paul's Final Exhortations for the Philippians.....	45

Preface

This study is not intended to be an extensive scholarly commentary on Paul's Epistle to the Philippians. It is written to provide resources for the serious Bible student or person leading a group Bible study in the Epistle. However, it is also intended to go beyond the normal level of Bible study guide in that it will include references to the original language of the Epistle, Greek, with both the Greek alphabet and an English transliteration provided for those not familiar with the Greek.

Where necessary, or where I have felt the need for some scholarly comment I have provided quotes from some of the leading scholars in the Epistle to the Philippians, or on Paul's theology. Some of the quotes are fairly long and I beg the indulgence of the reader with the request that the reader work thorough these quotes as I believe the time spent will in the long run prove helpful.

I have resisted the temptation to reference too many Greek-English Lexicons and have limited my references mostly to Spiros Zodhiates' excellent *Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*. On occasion I have referenced Gerhard Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*.

It will not take the reader long to discover that I appreciate the balanced and scholarly research and writing of Dr. Peter T. O'Brien of Australia; of Dr. Gordon D. Fee; Drs. Gerald Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin; Dr. Moisés Silva; and Dr. Norman Tom Wright. This does not say that there are not useful comments from other fine scholars, but then, I have already explained that this study is not intended to be an exhaustive scholarly commentary. I do recommend the works listed in the bibliography as a good foundation to the study of the Epistle to the Philippians.

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Lesson 1: The Pauline Prison Epistles

Four Pauline Prison Epistles

Traditionally the four prison epistles, Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon have been considered to have been written by Paul from prison in Rome, ca CE 60-62 or 61-63. There is some debate as to where Paul was imprisoned with Ephesus, Caesarea Philippi, and Rome being the proposed site of Paul's imprisonment. Most scholars, however, consider Rome to be the most likely location for Paul's imprisonment.

The circumstances leading to Paul's imprisonment in Rome were as follows; at Miletus (Acts 20:17) Paul called the Elders of the church in Ephesus to meet with him. The text indicates that he might not see the elders of Ephesus again. Paul then left the Ephesian elders at Miletus and travelled toward Caesarea and Jerusalem (Acts 21:1-15). While in Jerusalem to deliver a benevolent gift from the Gentile churches to the church in Jerusalem (cf. 1 Cor 16:1; 2 Cor 8, 9; Rom 15:30) Paul was arrested (Acts 21:27) and was tried by the Sanhedrin (Acts 23:1). When the Jews made a plot to kill Paul a Roman Centurion transferred him to Caesarea to be tried by Felix, the Roman Governor of the region. Exercising his rights as a Roman citizen, Paul appealed his case to Caesar and was then shipped off to Rome. Carefully read Acts 24:1-25:12.

After arriving in Rome he was placed in prison, or under house arrest, until his accusers arrived from Jerusalem. He was released after two years (according to Roman law) when his accusers did not arrive to bring charges against him.

While in prison in Rome, Paul had plenty of time to contemplate his missionary experiences and his ministry. It is most likely that it was during this time that Paul wrote the four Prison Epistles. In due course Paul was released from the Roman prison which apparently including some time spent in house arrest. He was able to receive visitors to his house and to conduct a limited ministry of outreach.

For some reason, possibly the receipt of news and of a gift from the church in Philippi, Paul wrote the letter to the Philippian church toward the end of his two year imprisonment, ca CE 60-62.

As mentioned in my commentary on Ephesians some scholars are not comfortable with the Pauline authorship of two of the Prison Epistles, namely Ephesians and Colossians, but most agree with the Pauline authorship of Philippians.

The Authorship of the Prison Epistles

The traditional view of the authorship of the four prison epistles is that they were written by the Apostle Paul. However there are some scholars who question the Pauline authorship of Ephesians and Colossians, but this is not a universal opinion. These scholars consider either one or both Ephesians and Colossians to have been written by someone close to Paul, possibly by a fellow missionary.

The epistle regarding which most questions are raised is Ephesians. Reasons for questioning Ephesians are as follows; the impersonal nature of the epistle – it contains no personal greetings; the discussion relating to the church seems to manifest a later understanding and development of the church than present during Paul's Roman imprisonment; a greater emphasis is given to the universal church; some of the language and terminology seems different from the accepted Pauline Epistles like Romans, Corinthians, and Galatians.

However, the fact that Ephesians was possibly not written to only one congregation with specific problems and is seemingly a general or universal letter, raises questions and proposes answers for most of these negative assumptions. Note the comment by Peter T. O'Brien:

“There are, however, considerable difficulties with the approach of Milton and Lincoln (who question the Pauline authorship, IAF) to the literary relationship of Ephesians and Colossians. In our judgment, their conclusions raise more problems than they solve ... It is inappropriate, therefore, to conclude that

Ephesians is non-Pauline because of the author's use of Colossians ... The view that Paul wrote both letters, as we shall endeavor to show, does greater justice to the evidence."¹

We will, however, work with the view that all four of these epistles are Pauline Epistles, written by the Apostle Paul while in a Roman prison. Cf. Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Writing of the New Testament*, 1999; Gordon D. Fee & Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*, 2002; Norman Tom Wright, *Paul or Everyone, The Prison Letters*, 2004, Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999, Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary, Dallas: Word Books, 1982, Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter to Colossians and Philemon*, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2008, and Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995.²

The City of Philippi:

For the geographic location of Philippi in the Roman province of Macedonia note the map below. Philippi is at the top center of the map.



Philippi had been established by Philip II, King of Macedon in 356 BCE. It eventually became a favored city of Caesar Augustus and was granted many Roman colonial and monetary favors. It stood on the major thoroughfare and road, the *Via Egnatia* that ran from Rome in the west to Byzantium (Istanbul) in the east.

Philippi lay 9 miles inland from the seaport of Neapolis.

By the time Paul arrived in Philippi it was a major city of significant importance to the region and Rome.

The Church at Philippi

Acts 16:6: Paul's Second Mission Journey (ca. 49-52): On his second mission journey Paul and his companions travelled up the western region of the Roman province of Asia in the region of Mysia. He was "forbidden" to "speak the word in Asia" hoping eventually then to move over from Mysia into the region of Bithynia. We do not know how the message of the Holy Spirit forbidding him to speak in Asia (which included the regions of Mysia and Bithynia) was conveyed to Paul but Luke informs us that God through the Holy Spirit did not intend Paul to go in that direction, so they went to the coastal city of Troas in Mysia. While in Troas Paul had a remarkable vision from God.

Acts 16:9: The Vision of the Man from Macedonia: In this vision a man from the Roman province of Macedonia appeared to Paul inviting him to travel to Macedonia and preach the gospel in Macedonia. Three interesting facts surface here! *One*, this would be Paul's first entrance into what we now call Europe. *Second*, Macedonia was the home of Alexander the Great (ca 356-323 BCE) who had conquered most of

¹ Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999, pp. 12ff.

² Cf. also Ian A. Fair, *Ephesians*, HCU Media, 2014, pp. 4, 5.

the region east of the Mediterranean Sea as far south as Egypt and East as India. Alexander had Hellenized that part of the world to where Greek had become the common language of the region, thus facilitating the spread of the Gospel in the 1st century CE. *Third*, this narrative of Acts 16 is important since it introduces Luke into the story of Acts in what has become known as the “we” passages in which Luke inserts himself into the narrative! Note Acts 16:11, “Setting sail therefore from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace...” The “we” passages surround the experience of Paul’s group in Philippi. We assume from this that Philippi may have been the home of Luke, or where he was when he wrote Luke/Acts. Paul and his group which included Timothy, Silas, and now Luke then sailed from Troas to Samothrace and on the next day traveled by land to Neapolis and then Philippi. Philippi was the leading city in the Roman Province of Macedonia, and typical of Paul’s mission strategy of preaching first in major cities he located initially in Philippi. Paul and his companions remained in Philippi for some time.

Acts 16:11-40: Paul’s preaching in Philippi: Since the events of this preaching and visit are extremely important to our study of Philippians I am including the full text from Acts of this stay in Philippi.

“11 Setting sail therefore from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, 12 and from there to Philippi, which is the leading city of the district of Macedonia, and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days; 13 and on the sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. 14 One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to give heed to what was said by Paul. 15 And when she was baptized, with her household, she besought us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.” And she prevailed upon us.

16 As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by soothsaying. 17 She followed Paul and us, crying, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.” 18 And this she did for many days. But Paul was annoyed, and turned and said to the spirit, “I charge you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And it came out that very hour.

19 But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place before the rulers; 20 and when they had brought them to the magistrates they said, “These men are Jews and they are disturbing our city. 21 They advocate customs which it is not lawful for us Romans to accept or practice.” 22 The crowd joined in attacking them; and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. 23 And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, charging the jailer to keep them safely. 24 Having received this charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

25 But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, 26 and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and every one’s fetters were unfastened. 27 When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. 28 But Paul cried with a loud voice, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.” 29 And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas, 30 and brought them out and said, “Men, what must I do to be saved?” 31 And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” 32 And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all that were in his house. 33 And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their wounds, and he was baptized at once, with all his family. 34 Then he brought them up into his house, and set food before them; and he rejoiced with all his household that he had believed in God. 35 But when it was day, the magistrates sent the police, saying, “Let those men go.” 36 And the jailer reported the words to Paul, saying, “The magistrates have sent to let you go; now therefore come out and go in peace.” 37 But Paul said to them, “They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and do they now cast us out secretly? No! let them come themselves and take us out.” 38 The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens; 39 so they came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them

to leave the city. 40 So they went out of the prison, and visited Lydia; and when they had seen the brethren, they exhorted them and departed.”

At this stage of our study as we prepare for our textual study of Philippians note the important points in this text: *First*, Paul found a group of ladies, presumably mostly Jewish, meeting for prayer at a river. Apparently there was no Synagogue in Philippi at this time.³ This practice was in keeping with Paul’s mission strategy of first finding a Synagogue or gathering of Jews where he would have some common ground to his preaching (cf. Acts 13:14; 14:1; 17:1; 18:4; 18:7; 19:8; et al.). *Second*, he converted Lydia, a seller of purple dye or cloth, and her household, all of them being baptized. Lydia was obviously a person of some financial means. Lydia is called “a worshipper of God” (σέβομαι, *sébomai*, a worshipper of the divine). This was a technical term used for Gentiles who were attracted to Judaism with its the Law, high ethical code, and monotheism.⁴ Lydia invited Paul and his group to stay with her in her house. *Third*, Paul had a clash with the pagans of Philippi over a slave girl who had a “spirit of divination” whose owners charged Paul with disturbing the city and creating a turmoil. Paul and Silas were arrested, beaten with rods, and thrown into prison. *Fourth*, while singing and praying in prison there was an earthquake which destroyed the gates of the prison. The jailor was afraid and about to kill himself when Paul introduced him to Jesus and taught him about Jesus. *Fifth*, the jailor and his household were baptized at once, that “*same hour of the night*” (Acts 16:33). *Sixth*, Paul a Roman citizen had been beaten and thrown in prison without trial, contrary to the rights of a Roman citizen. He brought this to the attention of the magistrates and was set free with many apologies from the magistrates.

Major points to learn from this lesson

Philippi was one of the epistles written by Paul from prison in Rome, ca CE 60-63. It was the leading city in the Roman Province of Macedonia.

On his second mission journey Paul was summoned to Macedonia by a vision of a man from Macedonia calling Paul to “come over and preach the gospel.”

Paul found Lydia, a “seller of purple” from Thyatira meeting in a prayer group of women by a river. Paul converted and baptized Lydia and her household.

Paul and Silas ran into trouble with the city leaders for his opposition to idolatry. He was beaten and thrown into prison.

Paul and Silas converted the Philippian jailor and his household, baptizing them immediately “the same hour of the night.”

Discussion points from this lesson

What do you conclude from Paul’s vision of the man from Macedonia? Have you ever had a call to serve Jesus in some fashion? Can you name this and describe its result?

Why did Paul go to the river to find people praying? What about going first to a Synagogue which was his practice even if he was not welcome?

Why is Lydia, being a “seller of purple” from Thyatira, an interesting discussion point regarding the Book of Revelation and Paul’s first visit to “Europe”? Compare Acts 16:14 and Revelation 2:18. Luke describes Lydia as “*a worshipper of God*.” This was a term used specifically of Gentiles who were influenced by Judaism, its theology, and its high moral standards.

Comment on why Paul first instructed the Philippian jailor to believe in Jesus in order to be saved, and then baptized him immediately the same hour of the night. Does this mean that the jailor was simply saved by believing in Jesus? What is going on in this text? Read Acts 2:38 and Peter’s sermon on the Day of Pentecost in Jerusalem. Read Acts 22:1-16 and Paul’s conversion. What was the purpose of baptism? Read Rom 6:1-11. What does Paul say about baptism?

³ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, New York: Doubleday, The Anchor Bible, 1998, p. 585.

⁴ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 520.

Lesson 2: Phil 1:1-11. Paul's Epistolary Style

Pauline Epistolary Style

Understanding the structure of a Pauline epistle, or any epistle, is vital to the interpretation of the epistle. For example, we can partially determine the origin of a letter today merely by examining the date! Compare the dates 12.31.2014 and 31.12.2014. Which one is American and which is British or European? What does this tell us regarding the author of a letter dated 31.12.2014?

Early in his ministry Paul adapted the typical Graeco/Roman form of letter writing into an early Christian Epistolary instructional and exhortative form.¹ This standard Pauline form of letter writing was structured around four major components, *Salutation/Prescript*, *Laudatio*, *Body*, and *Conclusio*.² These are described as follows:

Salutation/Prescript.

This includes a *greeting* and *salutation* in which Paul would address to whom he was writing and include some form of greeting.

Laudatio, a praise and prayer section.

This section is very important to determining the theology and purpose of the epistle because in this material Paul introduces his purpose and major theme of the epistle. The *Laudatio* would generally be in the form of, or include *a major prayer for the recipients*. The *Laudatio* often includes a *Prologue*³ to the Epistle.

Body of the letter which often came in two sections.

Doctrine/Theology – which outlines and develops Paul's major premise and argument.

*Paranesis*⁴ – which introduces the practical or ethical implications of the doctrinal material.

Conclusio.

The *conclusio* summarized his main purpose in writing and mentions friends with whom the recipients of the letter would be acquainted. The *conclusio* often includes an *Epilogue* to the Epistle.

Paul's Use of a Prologue and Epilogue

Paul's use of the epistolary *Laudatio* and *Conclusio* follow the traditional Hellenistic style of an epistle in which he combines the *Laudatio/Conclusio* as a *Prologue/Epilogue* which serves as an *inclusio*⁵ which defines or emphasizes the heart or theology of the message. As we move into this study we will note the emphasis placed on *joy* and *rejoicing*, the role of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the strength of true Christian fellowship which are matured through the joy of Christian service. The *Prologue* of Phil 1:3 ff and the *Epilogue* of Phil 4:10 ff begin by emphasizing the joy of Christian fellowship evident between Paul and the Philippian congregation which is intended to serve as a model to be encouraged within the congregation itself. Although the following comment by Peter O'Brien comes from the *Epilogue* and concluding exhortation of the Epistle it draws attention to the role played by the *Prologue/Epilogue* and *Laudatio/Conclusio* in this Epistle.

The apostle now turns to one of the main reasons for his writing the letter, namely to express his gratitude to the Philippians for their generosity, as evidenced in the gift sent through their messenger,

¹ Cf. Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1965, Leander Keck, *Paul and His Letters*, Fortress Press, 1978, and by Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin and Daniel G. Reid, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship*, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009

² Some scholars use different yet similar terms to describe these elements of an ancient epistle.

³ The *Prologue* and *Epilogue* form an *inclusio* which defines the theme or purpose of the body of the Epistle.

⁴ *Paranesis* or *paranetic* are technical terms that describe the practical, ethical, moral implications of the theological or doctrinal material.

⁵ The term *inclusio* refers to a literary device based on a concentric principle, also known as *bracketing*. The *inclusio* creates boundaries or frame to a literary piece such as an epistle by placing similar material at the beginning and end of the material thus emphasizing or highlighting the meaning or importance of the material between the *inclusios*. The *inclusio* may consist of a word, a phrase, or a paragraph. In the case of a Pauline epistle the *inclusios* would be the prologue and the epilogue, or the *Laudatio* and *Conclusio*.

Epaphroditus (2:25–30). Although Paul has already alluded to their kindness (1:3, 5) and written with great affection about Epaphroditus, who in bringing their gift had almost died (2:25–30), he does not discuss the gift in detail until now. The position of a ‘thank you’ note at the end of the letter looks like an afterthought, and this, together with the considerable amount of time that has elapsed between the arrival of Epaphroditus with the gift (2:25–30) and the writing of this note, has suggested to many scholars that 4:10–20 are a separate letter written by Paul soon after he received the gift from the Philippians. But this ‘drastic, hypothetical solution’ is to be rejected ...

As shown above, the introductory thanksgiving paragraph (1:3–11) functions as a prologue setting the tone and anticipating some of the major themes and motifs that bind the whole letter together. This is particularly true in relation to the epilogue (4:10–20), where interconnecting and thematic links with the prologue are made. The two paragraphs form an inclusion,⁶ with the affirmation of v. 19 (‘My God shall supply all your need ...’) and its doxology (v. 20) providing the answer to Paul’s intercessory prayer (1:9–11) and the Philippians’ other needs as expressed throughout the letter.⁷

The Literary Structure of Philippians

Salutation/Prescript: Phil 1:1-2

Prayer/Laudatio/Prescript: Phil 1:3-11

Body: Phil 1:12 – Phil 4:9

A difficult point in outlining Philippians is that Paul mixes both theology and paranesis as he works through the letter. However, the following is a broad outline of the body of Philippians.

Theology: Phil 1:12-30

Paranesis: Phil 2:1-Phil 4:9

Conclusion/Epilogue: Phil 4:10-23

The Recipients of the Letter

The recipients of the Philippian Epistle were the church that Paul, Silas, and Timothy had founded on their second missionary journey ca. CE 49-52, Acts 16:11-40. It is obvious from the contents of the letter that a close bond of Christian fellowship and friendship existed between the church and Paul.

The Christians in Philippi were predominantly Gentiles, newly converted to Christianity. However, there were some members who were Jewish and who were experiencing difficulty in a new Christian situation where past Jewish marks of identity such as circumcision were no longer held in high regard. This apparently led to some tension within the congregation.

The Occasion/Purpose of the letter

According to Paul, Epaphroditus had come from Philippi with news for Paul from the congregation in Philippi and a gift to help with his support. Note Phil 2:25 ff and 4:18 ff.

2:25. *“I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need, ²⁶for he has been longing for you all, and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. ²⁷Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. ²⁸I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. ²⁹So receive him in the Lord with all joy; and honor such men, ³⁰for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete your service to me.”*

4:18. *“I have received full payment, and more; I am filled, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. ¹⁹And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. ²⁰To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”*

⁶ As mentioned above in footnote 9 *inclusion/inclusio* is a technical term that functions similar to *parentheses*. The two ends of the *inclusio* primarily define the core of the message between the two *inclusios*.

⁷ O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, pp. 513–514.

Paul was responding with thanksgiving, but Epaphroditus had also brought disturbing news to Paul of developments in the church at Philippi that were creating some tension within the congregation.

There was some false teaching beginning to circulate that was disturbing Epaphroditus and the leadership of the church in Philippi, **Phil 1:15 ff.**

This false teaching had Jewish overtones in which some were claiming that the Christians needed to have the traditional marks of identity such as circumcision on order to be in a right relationship with God, **Phil 3:1 ff.**

There was some inner tension developing between members that was setting up some division within the congregation. This tension arose concerning two ladies in the congregation, Euodia and Syntyche, who for some unidentified reason were not getting along very well, Phil 4:2. Paul encouraged someone, either another fellow-worker whose name might be *Súzugos*,⁸ or simply some fellow-worker in general to help the two ladies.

It seems also that tensions with pagan neighbors was creating some opposition and suffering, possibly even persecution.

The Theology of the Letter

We will note in the next lesson on the *Salutation/Prescript* and the *Prayer/Laudatio/Prologue*, **Phil 1:1-11**, that Paul stressed the point that real joy in the Christian life comes through true Christian fellowship and loving service. To develop this theme Paul used four Christian examples which we will develop in the flow of thought in the epistle; *first* his own life, *then* that of Jesus Christ, then that of Timothy, and *finally* that of Epaphroditus.

In understanding the interweaving of *theology*⁹ and *paranesis*¹⁰ in Philippians, which flow together somewhat in the body of the epistle, two salient points must be recognized; *first* Paul seldom if ever makes *theological* statements that stand alone without some practical *paranetic* application; *second*, likewise, he seldom if ever makes *paranetic* arguments without bedding them in major *theological* points that lie at the root of the *paranesis*.

Since Philippi was a major city in the Roman Empire in which a Graeco-Roman culture defined society three important cultural Graeco-Roman mindsets lie behind much of what Paul was stressing in his Philippian letter.

First, the role that true friendship (*κοινωνία, koinōnía, fellowship*) played a significant role in the Graeco-Roman culture of the day. True friendship manifest in mutual partnership were considered admirable characteristics in the Graeco-Roman culture.

Second, most Graeco-Roman philosophers paid considerable attention to moral and ethical encouragement. In the course of his *theological/paranetic* discussion Paul uses himself, Jesus Christ, Timothy, and Epaphroditus as examples of appropriate ethical behaviour, especially in their concern for others.

Third, since Philippi was in many ways a Roman colony with high regard for the Imperial cult Christians would run into some disfavor with the Roman authorities and their pagan neighbors with their claim that Jesus Christ was Lord. Although opposition to this Christian claim had not yet run into Roman opposition as reflected in the Book of Revelation some local pagan and Roman opposition would be present. Paul drew attention to this by demonstrating that in his own case such opposition should not necessary impact Christian claims to the Lordship of Christ and the preaching of Christ. Even in Rome, the

⁸ Although the word *súzugos* is a general word for yoke-fellow or fellow-worker some have suggested that this may be the name of someone who Paul knew in Philippi who also knew the two women in question.

⁹ We might briefly define *theology* here as a synonym for a major doctrinal statement about God and Jesus Christ who are the foundation and core of all biblical faith and behavior. We might consider theology then as the doctrinal foundation to Christian behavior. The concept of theology emphasizes that in the doctrinal/theological material Paul establishes how God enters the discussion and frames the behaviour anticipated by the readers.

¹⁰ *Paranesis* or *paranetic* statements involve ethical, moral, or practical behavior stimulated by a theological statement.

seat of the Imperial cult, Paul had been successful in preaching the Lordship of Jesus and had even penetrated the Imperial Guard in the Praetorium in Rome.

As one reads the *Laudatio/Prayer* of Philippians, and then through the epistle, one can hardly miss the *centrality of Christ* in the theological weave of the epistle. Furthermore, two major themes surface in Paul's emphasis on *genuine partnership* in the gospel and *genuine joy* in Christians serving one another.

Since the theme of *joy* is mentioned at least five (5) times and *rejoicing* at least nine (9) times, perhaps we should ask why Paul makes such a strong emphasis on these themes! A possible reason was that the Christians in Philippi for several reasons were not enjoying their Christian life as they should which had caused Epaphroditus to mention some of the issues the church was facing. The joy of Christian service had grown weak due to tensions building within the congregation!

For this reason I like to use the term "*blahs*" to describe the life of the church in Philippi! One dictionary defines the *blahs* as "a feeling of physical uneasiness, general discomfort, or mild depression and malaise." I like to think of *blahs* as one's spiritual batteries running low! Churches and Christians often *plateau* in their Christian life and witness and experience *spiritual lows* or the *blahs*. This seems to be the case in Philippi, hence Paul notices this and speaks of the joy of Christian fellowship and serving one another.

The central theme, or theology that Paul develops in Philippians is that joy in the Christian life comes through loving service to one another in the example of Jesus Christ.

Four important themes to follow in Philippians

First, the Philippians should not let suffering and hardships discourage them from the power and glory of Christ and the gospel. **Phil 1:12, 18; 1:20-23; 1:29; 4:12, 13.**

Second, they are repeatedly encouraged to rejoice over the blessings they enjoy in Christ rather than concentrate on the negatives and sufferings they are experiencing. Paul, Christ, Timothy, and Epaphroditus are prime role models of this. Phil 1:4; 2:2; 4:4.

Third, they need to grow, energize, and mature in the salvation that God had begun in them in Christ. **Phil 1:6, 9; 1:25; 2:12.**

Fourth, God, who began it all for them in Christ, still desires to work in them and bring them to maturity in Christ. **Phil 1:1:6; 2:12, 13; 4:13, 19.**

Major points to learn from this lesson

- Philippi was a major Roman colony with a strong Imperial cult background.
- Philippi was a gentile region with some small Jewish influence – there was no full synagogue present and the Jews met at a river to pray.
- News had been brought to Paul by Epaphroditus that the church in Philippi was experiencing some difficulties.
- It seems like church life had bogged down or plateaued with a decline in spiritual joy.
- Paul stressed that Christian joy comes through loving Christian service after the model of Jesus Christ, and concern for one another.

Discussion points from this lesson

- What experiences do we encounter in our lives that cause us to experience the *blahs*?
- What can cause a congregation to go into a plateau and experience the spiritual *blahs*?
- On a personal level what can we do when we feel spiritually down? Where would a good place be for us to begin?
- Where should our spiritual focus be in our Christian life?

Lesson 3: Phil 1:1-11. Salutation and Laudatio Prayer

The Salutation: Phil 1:1, 2

¹Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,

To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:

²Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Although Silas and Luke had been part of the 2nd missionary journey that brought Paul to Philippi, at this point in his Roman imprisonment only Timothy is mentioned in the salutation. Apparently Silas and Luke had previously left Paul for other mission activities.

In other epistles where Paul's apostleship had been questioned or it had become necessary to remind the churches of the source of his apostleship (1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, et al.) Paul had stressed that he was an apostle of Jesus Christ, called and commissioned by Jesus Christ. Here with the Philippians this is not mentioned – it simple was not necessary! However, in keeping with the theme of the epistle Paul stresses that he and Timothy were simply *servants of Christ*. Notice the emphasis on *servants*!

First, Paul addresses the Christians in Philippi as *saints*. The term saint derives from the Greek *hágios*. This is a broad term with several facets. Spiros Zodhiates writes regarding the *hágios* word-group:

“Ἅγιος *hágios* ... from *hágos* (referring to) any matter of religious awe, expiation, sacrifice. Holy, set apart, sanctified, consecrated, saint ... Its fundamental idea is separation, consecration, devotion to the service of Deity, sharing in God's purity and abstaining from earth's defilement ... Consecrated, devoted, sacred, holy, meaning set apart from a common to a sacred use; spoken of places, temples, cities, the priesthood, men ¹¹

Hawthorne and Martin offer an extensive discussion of this significant term providing a full definition of the word *hágios* from which I have extracted the following:

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

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

Ἅγιος, “holy,” has a long history of meaning. Originally it was applied only to the gods as beings who commanded religious awe (ἅγιος) or were worthy of veneration (ἄζεσθαι, “to stand in awe of”). Later it was also applied to persons and things, because of their special relation to the gods. By virtue of this special relationship, therefore, they were separated from the profane world about them so as to be ceremonially pure enough to perform special service for, or be used in special rites pertaining to, the worship of these gods.

In the LXX ἅγιος is used chiefly to translate *שׁוֹרֵט* *qōdeš*, a Hebrew word with essentially the same meanings as the Greek word ... (ἅγιος) Yahweh makes a covenant with Israel, and as a result Israel is called holy, God's elect people, a nation separated from all the other nations of the world (Exod 19:5–6; Lev 11:44–45). Israel was holy because of God's gracious choice (cf. Asting, Heiligkeit, who writes: the holy ones are such “not only as living for a while in the evil world and not belonging to that world, but as

¹¹ Zodhiates, S. (2000). *The complete word study dictionary: New Testament*. Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers.

elect children of God and members of the coming kingdom” ... Therefore, to translate ἅγιοι as “God’s people,” rather than the traditional and often misunderstood “saints,” is fully justified, capturing better the root meaning of the word and showing more clearly that Paul viewed the members of the Christian church as the New Israel, the new community separated and dedicated to God, the eschatological people, the people of the end time, to whom God would make good his promises ...¹²

In summary then, a saint is God’s person, cleansed from the world and sin, dedicated and consecrated to God and his service.

The verb form of this word, ἁγιάζω, *hagiázō* is found in an interesting but meaningful manner in 2 Tim 2:21 which expresses many of the same concerns for Christian service. I have set in bold the word **consecrated**. This is translated from the Greek ἡγιασμένον, which is a perfect participle, *hēgiasmenon*, from the Greek ἁγιάζω, *hagiázō*¹³ since this is the verb form of the noun *hágios*, *saint*:

²⁰ *In a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and earthenware, and some for noble use, some for ignoble.* ²¹ *If any one purifies himself from what is ignoble, then he will be a vessel for noble use, **consecrated** and useful to the master of the house, ready for any good work.* ²² *So shun youthful passions and aim at righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call upon the Lord from a pure heart.* ²³ *Have nothing to do with stupid, senseless controversies; you know that they breed quarrels.* ²⁴ *And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to every one, an apt teacher, forbearing,* ²⁵ *correcting his opponents with gentleness.*

The saint is thus God’s person in Christ who has been cleansed by the blood of Christ and is now dedicated to Christian service. Paul intends the Christians in Philippi, all of them, to understand that they are all God’s people who are dedicated to Christian service. This includes all the members, especially the bishops and the deacons!

It is interesting and informative that here and only here in any of his epistles that Paul addresses the letter not only to the church but to the *bishops and deacons*! The bishops, who are also designated in the New Testament as elders or shepherds are the congregational leaders with a specific ministry of leading the congregation by example and service. Cf Acts 20:28; 1 Pet 5:1-3 where the three leadership terms, elders, bishops, shepherds are used to describe the same persons. Thus the *elders* who are *shepherds* are also *overseers* who have several ministries or “hats” involved in leading, teaching, shepherding, and caring for the “flock” or congregation.

It is not surprising that Paul addresses the *bishops* (The Greek term for bishop is ἐπισκόποι, *epískopoi*, *an overseer who looks over and after a congregation*) and *deacons* (The Greek term is διακόνου, *diákonoi*, who are *special servants whose ministry is to serve*) whose responsibility it was to be examples of *dedicated* and *consecrated leaders and servants* of God and Christ in the life of the congregation.

Thus the message of being a *consecrated servant* had triple meaning! It was addressed to the *overseers* of the congregation who had the ministry of *looking out over and for* the congregation, and to the deacons as *special servants* whose ministry was to be *dedicated* servants, and to the *saints* who had been sanctified for service for the God. The message was for everyone in the congregation! *It is evident from his greeting that Paul had dedicated Christian service on his mind!*

The expression “Grace to you and peace” was the traditional epistolary greetings in Paul’s letters. This expression is in the form of a prayer that the Philippians would enjoy the blessings of God’s gracious favor.

Hawkins and Martin observe regarding Paul’s epistolary greeting:

“Χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη, “grace to you and peace.” The salutation of the letter form current in the Greco-Roman world of Paul’s day invariably concluded with the word χαίρειν, “greetings,” or the phrases πλεῖστα χαίρειν or πολλὰ χαίρειν, “abundant greetings” ... Paul follows this form. But in a clever play on

¹² Hawthorne, G. F., *Philippians*, pp. 6–7.

¹³ Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, “to make holy, sanctify, to consecrate, devote, set apart from a common to a sacred use since in the Jewish ritual, this was one great object of the purifications.”

the sound of the standardized and expected χαίρειν [chairein], “greetings,” he deliberately substitutes χάρις [charis], “grace” ... This latter word is a definitely Christian word, used 155 times in the NT, and a key term in Paul’s letters, used by him approximately 100 times. Through it he conveys to his readers more than his own personal greetings. He stresses each time the idea of the free, spontaneous, unmerited favor of God. God is now “for them,” having acted in grace toward them on the basis of the death of Christ ... But Paul changes the standardized Greco-Roman formula of salutation still further. Correspondence of that period generally limited the greeting to a single word (χαίρειν) with its appropriate modifiers. Paul, however, not only replaces χαίρειν, “greetings,” with χάρις, “grace,” but regularly adds to it the word εἰρήνη, “peace.” Χάρις καὶ εἰρήνη, “grace and peace,” then, is his most frequently used formula of greeting (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2; Phil 1:2; Col 1:2; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:2; Phlm 3; but cf. 1 Tim 1:2; Titus 1:2; many MSS of Titus 1:4 and 2 John 3, where the greeting χάρις, ἔλεος, εἰρήνη, “grace, mercy, and peace,” appears). He thus combines Western and Eastern salutations in his new formula, “peace” being the standard Jewish or oriental form of greeting ... But once again the commonplace is used in an uncommon way—an ordinary salutation is elevated into a benediction ..., for εἰρήνη, “peace,” like the word grace, is linked with the activity of God. As a result, “peace” comes to mean in Paul “harmony,” “tranquility,” “wholeness,” “well-being,” “salvation” of the total person, reconciliation of persons and societies to God as well as to one another—peace at the deepest level. The whole greeting, χάρις καὶ εἰρήνη, “grace and peace,” therefore, states that the OT dream for the future is being fulfilled ... and, therefore, it “becomes an epitome of all that is central and essential in the Christian religion...”¹⁴

Regarding *grace*, Zodhiates observes:

“Χάρις *cháris*... to rejoice. Grace, particularly that which causes joy, pleasure, gratification, favor, acceptance, for a kindness granted or desired, a benefit, thanks, gratitude. A favor done without expectation of return; the absolutely free expression of the loving kindness of God to men finding its only motive in the bounty and benevolence of the Giver; unearned and unmerited favor. *Cháris* stands in direct antithesis to *érga* ... works, the two being mutually exclusive. God’s grace affects man’s sinfulness and not only forgives the repentant sinner, but brings joy and thankfulness to him. It changes the individual to a new creature without destroying his individuality”¹⁵

Paul adds to this prayer for grace one for *peace* that only God can provide through Jesus Christ. The Greek word εἰρήνη, *eirénē* is parallel or similar to the Hebrew word *shalom* which implies a spiritual blessing of spiritual peace from God and with God. Again Zodhiates has some interesting thoughts to add to this:

“In the OT the equivalent word *shalom* ... meant wholeness, soundness, hence health, well-being, prosperity; more particularly, peace as opposed to war ... or concord as opposed to strife ... God is said to be a God of peace, not as one who needs peace, but one who dispenses peace. He expects peace of His people, meaning the absence of confusion ... He rewards those who practice this peace ... Peace is a blessing of which God alone is the author...”¹⁶

To clarify the matter Paul adds that this grace and peace, that is spiritual favor and tranquility comes, “from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” *We enjoy grace and peace by being in a right relationship with God through Jesus Christ.*

The Laudatio/Prayer/Prologue: Phil 1:3-11

“I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, ⁵thankful for your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶And I am sure that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. ⁷It is right for me to feel thus about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. ⁸For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. ⁹And it is

¹⁴ Hawthorne, G. F. and Ralph P Martin, *Philippians*, pp. 12–13.

¹⁵ Zodhiates, S. *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*.

¹⁶ Zodhiates, S. *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*.

my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰so that you may approve what is excellent, and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹filled with the fruits of righteousness which come through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.”

Certain themes surface from this *Laudatio/Prayer*. *First*, Paul’s pastoral concern for the congregations he either established or with whom he worked is clearly manifest in the repeated mention of prayer in his greetings and leading statements in his epistles to several congregations. Cf 1 Cor 1:4; Col 1:3; II Tim 1:3; 1 Thess 1:2; II Thess 1:3; Philemon 1. *Second*, Paul’s emphasizes his concern for a continuing and maturing partnership in the gospel. *Third*, Paul draws attention to God who continues to work in the lives of the Philippians through Jesus Christ. *Fourth*, Paul’s deep, heart-felt, awareness of God’s working of grace in their lives is evident in his prayer for the Philippians. *Fifth*, one cannot miss Paul’s great affection for the Philippians. *Sixth*, Paul’s prayer that their love may continue to grow, but with discernment is directly related to his concern for some broken relationships in the congregation as in the case of Euodia and Syntyche. *Seventh*, He prays that they may approve what is excellent (in keeping for a Graeco-Roman concern for *ethical* excellence). *Eighth*, he prays that they may be filled with the fruits of a *right relationship with God and Jesus*. *Ninth*, he is concerned that the Philippians’ lives would be lived to the glory of God.

The *Laudatio/Prayer* resonates with emphasis on partnership, concern for one another, with God’s gracious working in their lives, and a concern for mature Christ-like living to the glory of God. All of this leads us to assume that Paul was concerned with restoring sincere relationships within the Philippian congregation and a realization that how they related to one another reflected on God’s glory in that it was God who was working in their lives through Jesus Christ. Note how Paul picks up the theme of God working in their lives at Phil 2:12-16:

¹²Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

¹⁴Do all things without grumbling or questioning, ¹⁵that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, ¹⁶holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.

Major points to learn from this lesson

- Note well the epistolary ingredients and make-up of Paul’s epistles which include the salutation/prescript and the *laudatio/prayer* which form a prologue to the epistle. Note also that the body of the epistle is a mixture of theological/paranetic material. The *conclusio* also functions as an epilogue to the epistle.
- Note Paul’s obvious concern for mutual Christian fellowship and service both within the congregation and with himself.
- Pay attention to the fact that Paul stresses that God who began their salvation in Christ wishes to work with them to mature this and bring their salvation and faith to fullness.

Discussion points from this lesson

- Discuss the meaning of being a saint and its implications for Christian service. Remember 2 Tim 2:21!
- Why did Paul include the bishops and deacons in his salutation?
- What is the character of the Christian greeting grace and peace?
- What practical thoughts can you glean and learn from Paul’s Salutation and *Laudatio*? Discuss how these can and should play out in your own life. Think in terms of your relationship with other Christians and the congregation as a whole.

Lesson 4: Phil 1:12-26. Paul's Present Circumstances

The Theological Model: Paul's Present Circumstances: Phil 1:12-26

¹²I want you to know, brethren, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, ¹³so that it has become known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ; ¹⁴and most of the brethren have been made confident in the Lord because of my imprisonment, and are much more bold to speak the word of God without fear.

¹⁵Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. ¹⁶The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel; ¹⁷the former proclaim Christ out of partisanship, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. ¹⁸What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in that I rejoice.

¹⁹Yes, and I shall rejoice. For I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, ²⁰as it is my eager expectation and hope that I shall not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. ²²If it is to be life in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. ²³I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. ²⁴But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. ²⁵Convinced of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.

Paul clearly wants the Philippians to know that life's difficulties including opposition from either Roman or Pagan opposition, or from false teachers, does not or should not detract from the always present and urgent need to witness and preach. Note his opening comment, "¹²I want you to know, brethren, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel ...". Even while in house arrest in Rome Paul as been able to reach into the highly select Roman Praetorian guard. The Praetorian Guard were a select group of soldiers highly trained to protect the Emperor or Imperial Governors of the Roman world. How Paul managed to penetrate this guard is not the point! What was the point was that Paul had occasion to use whatever his circumstances arose to share the gospel and serve others, even the Pagan Roman guard. Phil 1:14 explains *how Paul had been able to use his trying circumstances which had encouraged others not to lose confidence in their faith but to continue serving*. Paul wanted the Philippians not to be discouraged by his difficult circumstances and certainly not to permit their own difficulties to negate their witness and serve one another in love.

Paul was aware that many would preach the gospel for negative means, possibly trying to discredit Paul. It seems apparent from the context of his comment and other matters relating to circumcision that Paul was aware that certain Jewish Christians did not like his message of a righteous relationship with God through grace and faith in Jesus and not through keeping the law of Moses. Nevertheless, that Christ was preached, even if in poor spirit, was a plus for the gospel of Christ and Paul rejoiced even in this opposition. Note his comment:

¹⁵Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. ¹⁶The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel; ¹⁷the former proclaim Christ out of partisanship, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. ¹⁸What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in that I rejoice.

Phil 1:19 *For I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance* indicates that Paul expected his imminent release from Roman incarceration. Roman jurisprudence required that one's accusers needed to appear before the courts within two years of accusation to bring official charges against the person accused. This was certainly the case of one appealing to the high court of the Caesar. As an educated Roman citizen Paul would have been keenly aware of this. His Jewish accusers in Jerusalem, thinking they had finally got rid of Paul, thought that leaving him in Rome would discourage him. They had not made the journey to Rome to officially accuse

Paul. Paul consequently expected to shortly be released. He wanted the Philippians to know, however, that even the difficulty of being a prisoner in Rome had not discouraged him to where he had quit his gospel message of serving. *Serving for and in Christ was a profoundly important part of Paul's life.* Note how Paul's awareness of God's grace motivated Paul in his ministry of Christian witness (1 Cor 15:9 ff and Rom 1:14):

¹ Cor 15:9 For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God which is with me. ¹¹ Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

^{Rom 1:13} I want you to know, brethren, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles. ¹⁴ I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish: ¹⁵ So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

Phil 1:20 ff is one of the truly amazing and striking passages in Paul's many great messages!

But that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹ For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. ²² If it is to be life in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. ²³ I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. ²⁴ But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. ²⁵ Convinced of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶ so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.

Paul's statement here is so important to understanding Paul's life and to the message of the Philippian epistle that I am highlighting it in bold font! Paul states in amazing clarity the central and driving purpose of his life was **first and foremost to live for Christ!** Paul knew that he owed everything in his life to God's grace in revealing Christ to him. From the road to Damascus experience on throughout his life his purpose was to simply live for Christ. He desired this also to be the foremost purpose for the Philippians. (Acts 9:1 ff and 1 Cor 15:8 ff).

^{Acts 9:11} But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. ³ Now as he journeyed he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed about him. ⁴ And he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" ⁵ And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting; ⁶ but rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." ⁷ The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. ⁸ Saul arose from the ground; and when his eyes were opened, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. ⁹ And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

1 Cor 15:8 ff is so important to the point Paul made that I am including it here in this context!

Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. ⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God which is with me. ¹¹ Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

The Paraneis. A Suitable Philippian Response: Phil 1:27-30

²⁷ Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you stand firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, ²⁸ and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear omen to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. ²⁹ For it has been

granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, ³⁰ engaged in the same conflict which you saw and now hear to be mine.

Notice Paul's final comment, "*engaged in the same conflict which you saw and now hear to be mine.*"

Paul encourages the Philippians to draw on his experience and response to difficult times. They could surely recall his own misfortune, beating, and imprisonment in Philippi! However, his exhortation goes deeper than that; right to honoring the gospel of Christ! They needed to stand fast *in one spirit with one mind, side by side* with Paul since they and Paul were engaged in the same battle. The exhortation was to maintain the harmony and unity of the congregation as the one body of Christ, standing side by side in the battle for Christ. Notice the similarity to Eph 4:1-3! The Philippians like the Ephesians were to lead a life worth of their calling and worthy of the gospel of Christ.

Eph 4:1 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, ³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace ...

In summary to their personal tensions the Philippians were encouraged to draw on Paul's personal example of using difficult situations positively while maintaining the unity of their Christian fellowship in Philippi in a spirit of concern for the gospel of Christ and out of love for one another.

Major points to learn from this lesson

- xxxxx
- vvvvv.

Discussion points from this lesson

- xxxx
- mmm

Lesson 5: Phil 2:1-11. Jesus - A Model for Christian Service

Paul's Exhortation to the Philippians for Humility and Concern for Others: Phil 2:1-4

¹ *So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, 2 complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. 3 Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

Paul gets to the heart of his concern for the Philippian Christians – a lack of sincere concern for one another! He begins by pointing first to Christ observing that in Christ and from Christ we gain confidence and encouragement, incentives to love, and the ground for harmony which Christians enjoy in Christ. **MMMMMMMM So, assuming there is The interesting conditional clause if Cf. O'Brien.** Christ's example of selfish service and humility and concern for others, upon which he will shortly elaborate in profound detail should be the ground of Christian fellowship. The ideal example of Christian love (*agápē*, the desire for the very best for others) arises out of looking not to one's own interests but to the interests of others. Paul exhorts the Philippians to not be selfish and full of their own interests but to be humble in their relationship with their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

The first sentence of this pericope Paul gets to the heart of the epistle! Encouragement in Christ. Participation in the Spirit, affection and sympathy, joy in being of the same mind, having the same love, and being in full accord and of one mind! This text lies at the roots of Paul's chief concern for the church at Philippi; their permitting outside influences to impact their Christian witness to the gospel of Christ, their loss of mutual concern for one another, and the loss of the joy of Christian fellowship.

Phil 2:3, 4 resonate with tones of Rom 12:9-18:

⁹ *Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; 10 love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honor. 11 Never flag in zeal, be aglow with the Spirit, serve the Lord. 12 Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. 13 Contribute to the needs of the saints, practice hospitality.*

14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. 16 Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; never be conceited. 17 Repay no one evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. 18 If possible, so far as it depends upon you, live peaceably with all.

Christ: The Theological Example of Humble Christian Service

⁵ *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. 9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

Phil 2:5-11 is possibly the most Christocentric theological pericope in the epistle to the Philippians, and arguably also of the whole New Testament! Most scholars recognize this pericope to be in the form of either an early Christian hymn or confessional statement. This is not the place to engage the interesting debate on the origins of this hymn or confession. My point is to draw attention to the beauty and rhythmic form of the pericope.¹⁷

Peter O'Brien observes regarding this pericope:

This magnificent passage (vv. 6–11) is an early Christian hymn in honour of Christ. It is the most important section of the letter to the Philippians and provides a marvellous description of Christ's self-

¹⁷ For detailed discussion on this hymn refer to the commentaries listed in the bibliography.

humbling in his incarnation and death, together with his subsequent exaltation by God to the place of highest honour.

The paragraph is the most difficult in Philippians to interpret. This is not, however, through lack of secondary literature on vv. 5–11, for there has been a continual flow of studies and articles in the twenty years since R. P. Martin’s history of interpretation was first published. Little scholarly consensus has emerged in relation to the origin and authorship of the passage (pre-Pauline, Pauline, or post-Pauline?), its form and structure (hymnic? the number of stanzas?), the conceptual background of the passage (OT, Gnostic myth, general Hellenism, wisdom speculation?), or key exegetical and theological issues. As a result, at several points in the following exposition it has been necessary to treat the more detailed cruxes in appendices, with the major conclusions being summarized in the main text.

a. Literary Form

In describing the passage as a ‘hymn’ it should be noted that the term is not being employed in the modern sense of what we understand by congregational hymns with metrical verses. Nor are we to think in terms of Greek or Semitic poetical metre. The category is used broadly, similar to that of ‘creed,’ and includes dogmatic, confessional, liturgical, polemical, or doxological material.¹⁸

O’Brien adds however that in spite of its beauty and significance that this pericope/hymn has challenged scholars through the centuries!

2:5 Paul’s personal admonition to the Philippians concludes the stirring appeal of vv. 1–4 and at the same time introduces the hymn of vv. 6–11. This verse, a crux interpretum over which there has been and continues to be considerable difference of opinion, ‘has essentially a transitional nature,’ forming a link between the two sections.

In the words of Norman Tom Wright, some texts are densely packed and need careful unloading, and this is one of them!

Around this pericope a whole theological library has developed through the centuries of Christian theology. In theological jargon this train of thought has been called Kenotic Theology which I will shortly define. Primarily Kenotic Theology relates to exploring what divine miraculous powers Jesus must have given up at his incarnation, and when they might have been restored to him. While this is an interesting thought it is not what this pericope develops and misses the heart of what Paul is discussing in this text. As one of my esteemed professors once said when confronted by a wide variety of opinions and options, *read the text and stay with the text!* The answer to this so-called mystery will become apparent as we work our way through this text and unpack its mysteries that will turn out not to be as mysterious as the topic Kenotic Theology implies! Bear with me!

Phil 2:5: Now we return to the text to pick up the heart of Paul’s argument. In the previous pericope, Phil 1:12–30, Paul had used his own example as an encouragement to the Philippians to take heart, now at Phil 2:5 he gets to the main theological point he is making in this exhortation, adopting the mind and attitude of Christ: “*Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus ...*” In the words that follow in clear concise thoughts Paul defines what he means by the mind of Christ which he is encouraging the Philippians to replicate in their own lives.

To drive home the extent of his exhortation Paul begins by stressing the force of his argument; Jesus’ great example of humble service and concern for others; “*though he was in the form of God he counted not equality with God a thing to be grasped.*” That the human Jesus was equal in every sense with God and had been so eternally, was perhaps one of the most striking and difficult thoughts to get one’s arms around!

We have become so familiar with the fact that Jesus walked around in human form that we tend to bypass the enormity of Jesus’ incarnation. Karl Barth, noted Swiss/German theologian of the 1st half of the

¹⁸ O’Brien, P. T., *The Epistle to the Philippians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, pp. 186–188. Cf also Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians*; I-Jin Lo, *A Translator’s Handbook to Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*; Moisés Silva, *Philippians*; Frank S. Thielman, *Philippians*; Richard R. Melick, Jr., *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*; Gordon D. Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*.

20th century noted that the incarnation was the greatest of all of God's acts of enormous love and grace. In fact, Barth makes the incarnation of Jesus the beginning point and foundation of his extensive theology.

John expressed the heart of incarnational theology well when he wrote "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.¹⁷ For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him." (John 3:16). That Jesus was willing to give up equality with God, living in a special eternal relationship with God, and a position of sovereignty and power in which with God he had with sovereign power created everything that exists is in itself amazing (cf. John 1:1, 2; Heb 1:1-3; 1 Cor 8:6).

Among the many striking biblical statements regarding Jesus' incarnation I find Heb 1:1-3 to be most expressive of this amazing act of God's love and grace, "¹In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; ²but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. ³He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power." In spite of his eternal glory and divinity in his incarnation we find Jesus a baby in his mother's arms, the son of a carpenter in Nazareth, in fact as one scholar expressed it, a marginalized Jew in a world dominated by the power of Rome. He had been fully equal to the almighty God and now without restraint was willing to become equal in every sense with humanity as a simple human being subject to all of the physical weaknesses of humanity. Surely we can call this Amazing Grace!

A dominant philosophical quasi-religious mood of the 1st and early second century CE, which some have termed Gnosticism, seriously questioned this incarnation of the divine in human form. Their argument was that the human Jesus remained human in every sense of humanity and that the divine Christ used Jesus' human body for a period. The denial of the miracle of the full deity of the human Jesus John called the antichrist. Cf. 1 John 2:18-25 and 1 John 4:1-3:

¹⁸ Children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come; therefore we know that it is the last hour. ¹⁹ They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out, that it might be plain that they all are not of us. ²⁰ But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all know. ²¹ I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and know that no lie is of the truth. ²² Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. ²³ No one who denies the Son has the Father. He who confesses the Son has the Father also. ²⁴ Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you will abide in the Son and in the Father. ²⁵ And this is what he has promised us, eternal life ... ¹ Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world. ² By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, ³ and every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God. This is the spirit of antichrist, of which you heard that it was coming, and now it is in the world already.

In similar vein in his Colossian epistle at Col 1:15-20 and 2:8-10 Paul stressed this mind stretching thought of the human person of Jesus being fully divine and filled with the divinity of God.

Col 1:15 ff: "He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; ¹⁶ for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that in everything he might be pre-eminent. ¹⁹ For in him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross ..." Col 2:8: "See to it that no one makes a prey of you by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ. ⁹ For in him the whole fulness of deity dwells bodily, ¹⁰ and you have come to fulness of life in him, who is the head of all rule and authority."

Phil 2: 6: Paul stresses that Jesus' willingness to leave the supreme existence of equality with God becoming fully human was not something that he did reluctantly. He did not cling to his divine nature and position with God, or as Paul aptly expresses it, "though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped ..." The word *grasped* derives from the Greek ἀρπαγμός *harpagmós* which can denote *to seize with force* or *hold onto with force*.¹⁹ Jesus willingly gave up his exalted position with God which he had held eternally since before creation, and humbly became human.

Paul's next statement at Phil 2:7 has created the extensive library of theological thought which theologians have come to speak of as Kenotic Theology. The scope of kenotic theology ranges over a wide range of religious thought, having impacted Roman Catholic thought, Eastern Orthodox thought, Gnostic thought, and Protestant thought. In short, kenotic theology addresses the miraculous nature of the incarnation and seeks to understand how the divine nature of the Christ can indwell the human form of Jesus. Questions such as "Did the boy Jesus know he was God?" "Did the boy Jesus demonstrate his divine miraculous powers?" "What divine and miraculous powers did Jesus give up in becoming human?" Demonstrating the early nature of this question one of the Gnostic Gospels, *The Gospel of Thomas*, found at Nag Hammadi included the story of the boy Jesus entertaining his friends by making clay pigeons and throwing them into the air, upon which they flew away!

Since the proposed "theology" is set in a text of profound importance, and since it has been of interest to this epistle for centuries, I am including several observations from recent scholarship in our discussion.

The text we have in mind speaks of the example we have in *Christ Jesus*:

"who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,⁷ but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men."

The expression emptied himself is derived from the Greek ἐαυτὸν ἐκένωσε, *heauton ekenōse*, the word of concern being ἐκένωσε, *ekenōse*, which is an aorist indicative of κενόω, *kenōō*. Regarding κενόω, *kenōō* Zodhiates observes:

The use in Phil. 2:7 is of great theological importance. It refers to Jesus Christ as emptying Himself at the time of His incarnation, denoting the beginning of His self-humiliation in verse eight. In order to understand what is meant by Jesus' emptying Himself, the whole passage (Phil. 2:6–8) must be examined.²⁰

O'Brien observes regarding this challenging expression:

ἀλλὰ ἐαυτὸν ἐκένωσε. In sharp contrast (note the strong adversative ἀλλά, 'on the contrary') to the way that might have been chosen Christ 'emptied himself.' This is a most striking phrase which has no convincing parallel in the whole of Greek literature. The emphatic position of ἐαυτόν ('himself') and the form of the verb (an aorist active) strongly suggest that this act of 'emptying' was voluntary on the part of the preexistent Christ.

κενόω in secular Greek meant 'to empty, make empty' in a literal sense, and then metaphorically 'to make of no effect'. In the LXX the simple form of the verb is found only twice (Je. 14:2; 15:9), in a metaphorical sense meaning 'to languish.' κενόω is used only five times in the NT. Three of these are in the passive voice and the sense required is clearly metaphorical: at Rom. 4:14 it has to do with faith being made void, in 1 Cor. 1:17 regarding the cross of Christ and at 2 Cor. 9:3 of Paul's boasting as an apostle. The remaining two instances of κενόω (1 Cor. 9:15; Phil. 2:7) are in the active voice, and a metaphorical sense holds good for 1 Cor. 9:15, where κενώσει means 'deprive'. Thus, in four of the five NT occurrences of the verb it bears a metaphorical sense; the balance of probability lies in favour of a figurative connotation at Phil. 2:7 as well.

Accordingly, it has been suggested that this enigmatic expression is a 'poetic, hymn-like way of saying that Christ poured out himself, putting himself totally at the disposal of people.' This meaning, it is argued,

¹⁹ Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*. Cf. also Gerhard Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*.

²⁰ Zodhiates, S., *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*.

suits the entire passage (2:3–11) with its exhortation to humility. Again, ἐαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν has been interpreted metaphorically to refer to Christ making himself powerless in the sense of accepting that vocation which led to the real humiliation of his incarnation and finally his death on the cross. Either suggestion makes good sense, though our preference is the latter (see below).

The meaning of ἐαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν is defined more precisely in the two participial phrases that follow, namely μορφήν δούλου λαβών ('taking the form of a slave') and ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος (being found in human form'). The first three lines of v. 7 (7a, 7b, and 7c) should be taken together (see above regarding the discussion of the hymn's structure, pp. 188–193). V. 7b and c are formed in a parallel fashion to explicate the main clause in v. 7a (ἐαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν), since the two aorist participles λαβών and γενόμενος are coincident with the finite verb ἐκένωσεν and both are modal, describing the manner in which Christ 'emptied himself':²¹

On kenotic theology Hawthorne and Martin include an extensive Excursus which I have included for reference.

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

It is impossible to explain such a mystery—that the one who was on par with God could also be a human person to the fullest, a truly genuine human being possessing all the potential for physical, mental, social, and spiritual growth that is proper to humanity (Luke 2:52), and be both at the same time—divine and human, God and a human being. Here, of course, speaks the voice of credal Christianity with Chalcedonian overtones. Nevertheless, the Philippian hymn seems clearly to set forth just such a paradox and affirm it, but does not try to explain it. Hence, anyone coming to the text in the hope of interpreting it must exercise the same kind of balance and reserve, neither tampering with anything relating to the divinity of Christ, nor calling into question any aspect of the reality of his humanity (cf. Dawe, *SJT* 15 [1962] 337–49, esp. 348; see also G. F. Hawthorne, *The Presence and the Power: The Significance of the Holy Spirit in the Life and Ministry of Jesus* [Dallas: Word, 1991; reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003]).²²

²¹ O'Brien, P. T., *The Epistle to the Philippians: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, pp. 216–217.

²² Hawthorne, and Martin, *Philippians*, p. 121.

Phil 2:7b: After making the challenging, if not enigmatic statement that Jesus counted not equality with God a thing to be fiercely defended and that he had emptied himself of all claims to superiority, Paul defines the nature of this emptying as Jesus taking on *the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men*.

As we focus on the hymnic and emotive nature of the pericope itself it becomes obvious that Paul's use of this hymn serves as the foundation of what he was encouraging the Philippians to emulate in their relationship with one another.

The extent of Jesus' emptying himself was not only in his becoming human but in the extent in which he became human, he took on *the form of a servant!* This in itself estranged him with the Jewish leaders who expected the Messiah to come in the form of a king! He came in the form of the lowest form of servant, as a δούλος, *doúlos*. Zodhiates defines this as "a slave, one who is in a permanent relation of servitude to another, his will being altogether consumed in the will of the other ... Generally one serving, bound to serve, in bondage."²³

Hawthorne and Martin observe regarding the meaning of δούλος, *doúlos*:

"If the incident from the life of Jesus where Jesus puts himself in the place of the slave and washes his disciples' feet (John 13) played any part in shaping this hymn, if the context in which the hymn is inserted presents a call to serve one another, then δούλος, "slave," emphasizes that in the incarnation Christ entered the stream of human life as a slave, that is, as a person without advantage, with no rights or privileges of his own, for the express purpose of placing himself completely at the service of all humankind ..."²⁴

O'Brien sums up the extensive discussion²⁵ that has evolved around the meaning of δούλος, *doúlos* as follows:

We conclude with a summary evaluation. Bearing in mind that the apostle is writing to Christian readers in Philippi with a pagan past, it seems best, on balance, to understand the expression μορφήν δούλου λαβών against the background of slavery in contemporary society. Slavery pointed to the extreme deprivation of one's rights, even those relating to one's own life and person. When Jesus emptied himself by embracing the divine vocation and becoming incarnate he became a slave, without any rights whatever. He did not exchange the nature or form of God for that of a slave; instead, he displayed the nature or form of God in the nature or form of a slave, thereby showing clearly not only what his character was like, but also what it meant to be God. A particularly telling example of this, as Hawthorne and Bruce note, was Jesus' washing the disciples' feet and drying them with a towel he had tied around his waist (Jn. 13:3–5). Jesus' extreme act of humble service became the pattern of true servanthood, and it is understandable how Christian vocabulary would then come to reflect this, as Hurtado points out. But the action of Jesus serves as the model and explains the servant language.²⁶

Bringing his example of Jesus' incarnation home to the level of the Philippians Paul adds, "*And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.*" No longer in divine glory but now in human form Jesus humbled himself, being obedient even to the point of being willing to die a human criminal's death on a cross. Crucifixion was the penalty for the worst form of criminals in the Roman system and Jesus was willing to humble himself beyond normal understanding. The extent of Jesus' humility in death would not have been lost on the Philippians who would have been very aware of the penalty and cruel nature of crucifixion. Paul's point in mentioning Jesus' death on the cross was not to make a soteriological theme here but to stress the extent of the humility demonstrated by Jesus which Paul was exhorting the Philippians to emulate in favor of their brothers and sisters in Christ.

Phil 2:9: The result of Jesus' self-emptying obedient humility was that God had *highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name*. The contrast between absolute humility and transcendent glory would be one the Philippians would understand. A secondary consequence of Jesus'

²³ Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*.

²⁴ Hawthorne, G. F., *Philippians*, p. 119.

²⁵ All of the scholarly works on Philippians have discussed in detail the wide ranging views relating to this servanthood. The conclusions of Hawthorne, Martin, Bruce, and Moule seem to be the most applicable to the context of this hymn.

²⁶ O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, pp. 223–224.

exaltation would be that “*at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,* ¹¹ *and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*”

Paul’s point was that Philippian pride and failure to honor one another in service and love would only bring disgrace on the church in Philippi and on the true nature of Jesus and the glory of God.

Major points to learn from this lesson

- xxxxx
- vvvvv.

Discussion points from this lesson

- xxxx
- mmm

Lesson 6: Paul's Encouragement to the Philippians

Mature in your Christian Witness

Phil 2:12-30

“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³ for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

¹⁴ Do all things without grumbling or questioning, ¹⁵ that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, ¹⁶ holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. ¹⁷ Even if I am to be poured as a libation upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. ¹⁸ Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.”

Paul's attachment to the Philippian church rises to the surface in the opening words of this exhortation, *“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now....”* The rhetorical key *therefore* ties what he was not going to ask of the Philippians, and draws on the central thought of the previous pericope, Jesus' remarkable example of humble service. The theme of his relationship with the Philippians resonates throughout the epistle; *my beloved brethren!* He is well aware of their previous obedience to the gospel call and reminds them of this *as you have always obeyed*, so do so *now!* Obedience in the presence of one's mentor is easier than in the absence of the mentor but Paul encourages them to act just as though he were now present with them.

Although this may not be the place to develop this thought, but Paul was aware of the fact of the apostolic “presence” in his epistles as one should be aware of the divine presence in the Word of God.

Paul's next statement and exhortation is intriguing! He urges them to *work out your own salvation with fear and trembling!* The expression *work out your own salvation* does not imply that they should cognitively and personally determine for themselves what their salvation should be, nor is he encouraging a works ethic of salvation. The expression is a present middle/passive imperative that derives from the Greek *κατεργάζομαι*, *katergázomai*, which means *to bring about, accomplish, to bring to its end, to carry out a task until it is finished, to energize, to accomplish completely.*¹

Hawthorne and Martin observe:

*“The verb Paul uses, *κατεργάζεσθαι*, has the sense of working at something until it is brought to completion, hence “to accomplish,” “to achieve,” “to bring about” (BDAG). Its tense is present, which heightens this idea, denoting not so much present time as continuous action. Paul in effect commands the Philippians to keep working and never to let up until their salvation (*σωτηρία*) is achieved.”*²

O'Brien notes that this expression, although using words found often in the New Testament in combination is somewhat unique!

τὴν ἑαυτῶν σωτηρίαν κατεργάζεσθε. ‘Work out your own salvation.’ Each of the individual words in this expression is well known in the NT; yet their combination here is unique.³

Although there are some commentators who see this admonition as a corporate one to the congregation as a whole fulfilling its obligations this is not the case! O'Brien is correct in pointing to the personal obligation of the Christians in Philippi to work out their salvation which he knows was in fact the working of God and he will remind them of this in the next verse. O'Brien adds:

ἑαυτῶν σωτηρίαν κατεργάζεσθε is a demand to make that salvation fruitful in the here and now as the graces of Christ or the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23) are produced in their lives. It involves continually living in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ (Phil. 1:27) or ‘the continual translating into action of the principles of the gospel that they had believed.’ Paul has in mind a ‘continuous, sustained, strenuous

¹ Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*.

² Hawthorne and Martin, *Philippians*, p. 140.

³ O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, p. 276.

effort,' which is elsewhere described under the imagery of a pursuit, a following after, a pressing on, a contest, a fight, or a race (Phil. 3:12; cf. Rom. 14:19; 1 Cor. 9:24–27; 1 Tim. 6:12). Further, to speak of believers being responsible for the outworking of their personal salvation in their day-to-day living in no way denies that this σωτηρία is an act of God (contra argument [4] above). In precisely the same way 'make your calling and election sure' (2 Pet. 1:10) does not suggest that election is not God's act.⁴

Paul is encouraging the Philippians to energize and bring to maturity or completion the salvation which God had begun in their lives and which they now must continue to develop toward maturity in Christ through Christian love for one another and service. O'Brien summarizes this well:

Such an outworking of the gospel in their day-to-day living has in view the approaching day of Christ when their salvation will be complete (cf. Rom. 13:11). Furthermore, this appropriate behaviour clearly involves them in responsibilities to one another (e.g., pursuing unity through humility), as the preceding and subsequent admonitions show (2:1–4, 14, etc.). But their responsibilities to one another or to the outside world (e.g., 2:15–16) are not to be confused with the content of the eschatological salvation itself.⁵

Paul's next exhortation adds a note of seriousness and importance; work out your own salvation **with fear and trembling for God is at work in you**, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. First, the coupling of fear and trembling in Greek, φόβου καὶ τρόμου, is a form of hendiadys in which the second noun, trembling, becomes a form of adjective which defines or enlarges on the first noun, fear.

The juxtaposition of these two nouns in a formulaic sense has gendered considerable discussion among some scholars with some adopting a non-theistic humanistic approach but O'Brien is correct in rejecting this view:

μετὰ φόβου καὶ τρόμου is the second phrase modifying the principal verb καταργήσεσθε and indicates the manner in which the readers are to complete their salvation, namely 'with fear and trembling'. But with what kind of 'fear'? The φόβος word-group in Greek carries as wide a range of meanings as the English 'fear' and could denote 'alarm,' 'fright,' or 'dismay' in the face of danger, as well as 'reverence' or 'respect' in the presence of fellow humans or God. τρόμος meant 'trembling' or 'quivering' from fear, and was often coupled with φόβος to 'picture a person standing with quivering fear or trembling awe before someone or something'. The two nouns φόβος and τρόμος appear together in the LXX on a number of occasions, almost as a stereotyped expression, and usually refer to the fear of human beings in the presence of God and his mighty acts ... At Is. 19:16 'fear and trembling' describes the future reaction of the Egyptians to the hand of the Lord raised against them in judgment, while in Ps. 2:11 the appropriate response of the rebellious nations and rulers of the earth to the Lord's decisive action of installing his Son and of warning them of imminent destruction is to serve him 'with fear' and to 'rejoice with trembling' ... However, even there, the dread is prompted by God's decree and results from his mighty interventions.

Within the NT Paul is the only writer to use the expression 'fear and trembling,' namely at 1 Cor. 2:3; 2 Cor. 7:15; Eph. 6:5, and Phil. 2:12 ... However, an examination of the other contexts in the Pauline corpus where φόβος καὶ τρόμος appears suggests that the phrase has to do with an attitude of due reverence and awe in the presence of God, a godly fear of the believer in view of the final day. It is not the slavish terror of the unbeliever; nor is it an attitude oriented solely towards humans...⁶

The thought of a working relationship with God with ultimate respect, fear, and awe reminds me of two other Pauline text. Both of these texts speak of respect for the working of the Holy Spirit of God in the life of Christians. 1 Thess 5:16-22 and Eph4:29-32:

1 Thess 16-22: "Rejoice always,¹⁷ pray constantly,¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.¹⁹ Do not quench the Spirit,²⁰ do not despise prophesying,²¹ but test everything; hold fast what is good, 22 abstain from every form of evil".

Eph 4:29-32: "Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for edifying, as fits the occasion, that it may impart grace to those who hear.³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in

⁴ O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, p. 279.

⁵ O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, pp. 279, 280.

⁶ O'Brien, P. T., *The Epistle to the Philippians: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, p. 282.

whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, with all malice, ³² and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you”.

The sobering thought of this Philippian text reminds us of the powerful of God working on our lives. God is not only at work in our lives, but also wills to work in us for his good pleasure.

In summary, the Philippians need to be actively energizing and moving forward (maturing) the saving work of God in their lives, but also his continuing working in their lives *for his good pleasure*. To approach God’s willingness to work in their lives nonchalantly is the equivalent of denying the working of the Holy Spirit which carries serious consequences! We are reminded of Jesus’ rebuke of the Pharisees at Matt 12:28-32 that to deny the working of the Holy Spirit is an unforgivable sin! We approach the working of God in our lives therefore *with fear and trembling, with ultimate respect*.

Paul’s exhortation to the Philippian’s becomes specifically related to the situations which Epaphroditus had brought to him; the members were not getting along well. There was some internal bickering!

¹⁴ *Do all things without grumbling or questioning, ¹⁵ that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, ¹⁶ holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. ¹⁷ Even if I am to be poured as a libation upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. ¹⁸ Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.*

That Paul was concerned with the church’s image or witness in the pagan society in which it lived is evident in his expression that they be “*without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.*” By doing this they would testify to the word of life that related to Jesus’ eschatological ministry which included his final return in glory, or his *parousia*. Their living in and for Christ would endorse the validity of his ministry, “*I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.*”

Paul’s comment “¹⁷*Even if I am to be poured as a libation upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all.*” Raises some interesting thoughts! Paul draws a comparison between his imprisonment as a willing sacrifice to God for the Philippians and their willing sacrificial gift to him which he has already received and upon which he will speak at Phil 4:10 ff. O’Brien observes:

The language now changes to that of sacrifice (σπένδομαι, θυσία, and λειτουργία) as Paul depicts the life of the Philippian congregation as an offering acceptable to God. To this his own life may be added as a modest drink offering. Although he hopes for a favourable decision from the imperial court, he might instead be sentenced to death. Accordingly, if one thing remains to make the Philippians’ sacrificial service perfectly acceptable to God, he is willing that his own life be sacrificed as a libation and credited to their account. There is thus every reason for mutual joy: he rejoices because God has been willing to use him for the sake of the Philippians in the fulfilment of his apostolic struggle for the gospel, while their sacrificial service was something that they joyfully offered to the living God.⁷

The Christian Example of Timothy and Epaphroditus and Paul’s Concern for Epaphroditus: Phil 2:19-30

¹⁹ *I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I may be cheered by news of you. ²⁰ I have no one like him, who will be genuinely anxious for your welfare. ²¹ They all look after their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. ²² But Timothy’s worth you know, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel. ²³ I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me; ²⁴ and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself shall come also.*

²⁵ *I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need, ²⁶ for he has been longing for you all, and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. ²⁷ Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.*

⁷ O’Brien, P. T., *The Epistle to the Philippians: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, p. 301.

²⁸ *I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious.* ²⁹ *So receive him in the Lord with all joy; and honor such men,* ³⁰ *for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete your service to me.*

As Paul has developed his theme of the importance and joy that comes from Christian service, first using himself as an example, then Jesus Christ, he now turns to Timothy as an outstanding example of Christian service and notes the core of Christian service. Of all of the fine Christian fellow ministers that had accompanied Paul for some reason on this occasion he singles out Timothy. Considerable discussion has flowed from this statement! Several possibilities surface. Hawthorne and Martin comment:

Apparently Paul knew that the Philippians would question his sending Timothy. Timothy seems to have played no significant role in founding the church at Philippi, although he was with Paul at that time (Acts 16). And it is conceivable that in the eyes of the Philippians he even may have contributed negatively to that mission. The book of Acts is strikingly silent about Timothy at Philippi while loudly proclaiming the activity of Paul and Silas (Acts 16). And although Timothy may have visited (or will visit) Philippi on other occasions (Acts 19:21–22; 20:3–6), no descriptive account is made of any of these visits. In any case, Paul felt compelled elaborately to justify his decision: “I am sending Timothy (1) because (γάρ) I have no one like him, (2) because (γάρ) he, unlike the others, is not chiefly concerned with his own interests, and (3) because (δέ) you know what his real value is to the advancement of the gospel.”⁸

The word that Paul uses to speak of Timothy’s *like-mindedness* or *like-soulness* is interesting, “*I have no one like him ...*” The Greek reads οὐδένα γὰρ ἔχω ἰσόψυχον, *oudena gar echo isopsuchon* which literally reads “For I have no one equal in soul”⁹. The adjective ἰσόψυχον in this clause is “*a rare poetic word that is found nowhere else in the NT and only once in the LXX (Ps. 54:14 [E.T. 55:13]), meaning ‘of like soul or mind.’*”¹⁰ After all, Timothy was Paul’s son in the gospel (Acts 16:1-5; 1 Tim 1:2) explaining “*how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel!*” What Paul is assuring the Philippians regarding Timothy, his young fellow-minister, is that Timothy has the same genuine concern for others as the have seen in Paul.

That Timothy is young says little of his commitment to ministry of Christ. He has a genuine interest in Christ and the gospel. Others

“... *all look after their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.* ²² *But Timothy’s worth you know, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel.*”

Paul assures the Philippians that Timothy “*will be genuinely anxious for your welfare.*”

Turning now to Epaphroditus O’Brien comments on his relationship with Epaphroditus as carrying a profound message to the Philippians regarding filial relationships and Christian service:

In a warm and emphatic commendation the apostle employs five terms to express his loving and grateful regard for Epaphroditus, who has been a faithful coworker with him in the gospel and an emissary of the Philippians in helping him ...¹¹

However, a careful glance at the text reveals more than five expressive or emotive terms regarding Epaphroditus’ relationship with Paul and the Philippians. I have set these in bold in the following text:

*I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus **my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need,** ²⁶ **for he has been longing for you all, and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill.** ²⁷ *Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.* ²⁸ *I am the more eager to send him, therefore, **that you may rejoice at seeing him** again, and that I may be less anxious.* ²⁹ ***So receive him in the Lord with all joy; and honor such men,*** ³⁰ ***for he nearly died for the work of Christ, **risking his life to complete your service to me.******

⁸ Hawthorne, G. F., *Philippians*, pp. 153–154.

⁹ O’Brien, P. T., *The Epistle to the Philippians: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, p. 318.

¹⁰ O’Brien, P. T., *The Epistle to the Philippians: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, p. 318.

¹¹ O’Brien, P. T., *The Epistle to the Philippians: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, p. 330.

Major points to learn from this lesson

- xxxxx
- vvvvv.

Discussion points from this lesson

- xxxx
- mmm

Lesson 7: Phil 3:1-21 Paul's Exhortations

Although there is only a subtle difference in meaning between the terms *encouragement* and *exhortation* the latter term is a little stronger than the former in the sense that Phil 2:12-30 lay in the Philippians own spiritual experience, the latter, Phil 3:1-21 lay in the danger of false teaching and external influences. In addition the term *finally* in the opening clause adds a heightened sense of urgency as do the words “*look out for the dogs, look out for the evil-workers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh*” in 3:2.

¹*Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is not irksome to me, and is safe for you.*

²*Look out for the dogs, look out for the evil-workers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh.* ³*For we are the true circumcision, who worship God in spirit, and glory in Christ Jesus, and put no confidence in the flesh.* ⁴*Though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If any other man thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law a Pharisee, ⁶as to zeal a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness under the law blameless. ⁷But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith; ¹⁰that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.*

¹²*Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.* ¹³*Brethren, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵Let those of us who are mature be thus minded; and if in anything you are otherwise minded, God will reveal that also to you. ¹⁶Only let us hold true to what we have attained.*

¹⁷*Brethren, join in imitating me, and mark those who so live as you have an example in us. ¹⁸For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, live as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹Their end is destruction, their god is the belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. ²⁰But our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself.*

Paul's opening statement: Phil 3:1-3

¹*Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is not irksome to me, and is safe for you.*

Finally, τὸ λοιπόν, to loipón, derives from the Greek λοιπός, loipós which speaks of something remaining or lacking. Hawthorne and Martin observe:

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

¹ Hawthorne and Martin. *Philippians*, pp. 172–173.

O'Brien adds:

at 1 Thes. 4:1 this adverbial use of λοιπόν serves to mark the transition from the long thanksgiving period (1:2–3:13) to the παρακαλέω-sentence of 4:1–2, and two entire chapters follow the phrase. Similarly, (τὸ) λοιπόν ought to be rendered by 'well then,' 'and so,' 'for the rest,' 'therefore,' or 'moreover' in Acts 27:20; 1 Cor. 1:16; 4:2; 7:29; and 2 Thes. 3:1, rather than 'finally' or 'in conclusion.' How τὸ λοιπόν functions depends on the context. It is clear that new subject matter is being introduced in the following verses; thus we render τὸ λοιπόν as 'well then,' 'and so,' 'furthermore.'²

Moisés Silver adds an interesting thought to his translation of this text. He writes:

Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. [There is a matter, however, about which I must remind you.] Writing again to you about the same things is certainly not troublesome to me, while for you it is a safeguard.³

I like the thought that Paul is saying to the Philippians, I have encouraged you to mature in your Christian faith *but now, furthermore*, I need to add this following warning.

Paul knows that on occasion his imperatival warnings may be irksome to his loved ones, but such concerns for Paul are not irksome, they are necessary, so now "*my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is not irksome to me, and is safe for you.*"

Gordon Fee notes that whereas it might be irksome to some for Paul to refer repeatedly in his epistles to the danger of Jewish influences creeping into the Christian faith, such as circumcision, Paul finds it necessary to constantly warn the church against this creeping tendency to appeal to the flesh rather than to the spirit, a contrast he regularly draws on in his arguments against Judaist (cf Galatians, Romans, and Corinthians).⁴

Paul's concern over false teachers

²Look out for the dogs, look out for the evil-workers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. ³For we are the true circumcision, who worship God in spirit, and glory in Christ Jesus, and put no confidence in the flesh.

Paul's opening statement at 3:2 is interesting, dramatic, and stylistically poetical. It is carefully constructed for impact with each clause introduced by the same imperatival verb βλέπετε, *blepete*, adding a sense of urgency to the statement.

The verb βλέπω, *blépō* is used widely in the New Testament and can suggest several shades of meaning depending on context, each possibility having a sense of *look carefully at something*. Zodhiates observes that metaphorically βλέπω, *blépō* can mean:

"to look to, direct the mind upon, consider, take heed; followed by the accusative ... **Phil. 3:2** take heed, keep an eye upon, and thus by implication, meaning beware of."⁵

O'Brien suggests that Paul's sudden outburst with the threefold βλέπετε, "in the present context indicates some urgency. On balance, we regard the apostle's imperative as a warning that refers to opponents who as yet had not made serious inroads into the life of the congregation"⁶ but whose threat was apparently present.

The poetic aspect of the three clauses is noticed in the three imperatives, Βλέπετε, *blepete*, each followed by an accusative noun that begins with a "k" as can be seen in the following text, Βλέπετε τοὺς **κύνας**, βλέπετε τοὺς **κακοὺς** ἐργάτας, βλέπετε τὴν **κατατομήν**. The text translates as "be on the lookout for *dogs*, *evil-workers*, and *mutilators* (of the flesh). Whereas the first two nouns, *dogs* and *evil-workers* does not necessarily imply who Paul had in mind, the third, namely the *mutilators* focuses, attention on Jewish issues. O'Brien notes, "the third term, κατατομή ('mutilation, cutting'), moves in Jewish categories,

² O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, p. 348.

³ Moisés Silver, *Philippians*, Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2005, Kindle Location, 3837.

⁴ Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1995, Kindle location 8456 ff.

⁵ Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*.

⁶ O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, p. 354.

so that the apostle's biting irony might designate Jews, Judaizing Christians, or Gentile proselytes circumcised later in life."⁷

Phil 3:3 clarifies the Jewish matter for Paul writes ³*For we are the true circumcision, who worship God in spirit, and glory in Christ Jesus, and put no confidence in the flesh.*

The term *dogs* at Phil 3:2 is however interesting! O'Brien comments:

'The dogs.' This epithet, which the apostle employs nowhere else, has been given all kinds of pejorative connotations, including impurity, shamelessness, greed, cunning, insolence, intrusiveness, ferocity in attack, and wandering about.⁴⁹ It evoked for the Jew the image of uncleanness, p 355 for dogs were 'well known for feeding on carrion, filth and garbage'. According to the Mishnah these animals were mentioned with reference to matters of unclean food.⁵¹ The term was an apt description of those who did not submit to Jewish dietary laws and thus were regarded as unholy.⁵³ 'Dogs' and Gentiles in some contexts were almost synonymous; for example, the Mishnaic interpretation of Ex. 22:31 was that flesh torn in the field could be used to feed dogs or Gentiles (m. Ned. 4:3; m. Bek. 5:6). As a religious term it was applied by Jews to Gentiles or lapsed Jews who were ritually unclean and thus outside the covenant (cf. Mt. 7:6; 15:26–27). Here at Phil. 3:2 the dogs' association with impurity and their being outside the people of God are the points of the comparison. But in an amazing reversal Paul asserts that it is the Judaizers who are to be regarded as Gentiles; they are 'the dogs' who stand outside the covenant blessings.⁸

In keeping with O'Brien Hawkins and Martin observe:

The Jews were in the habit of referring contemptuously to Gentiles as *κύνας*, "dogs"—unclean creatures with whom they would not associate if such association could be avoided (cf. Matt 15:21–28; O. Michel, TDNT 3:1101–04; Str-B 1:724–25; 3:621–22). Paul now hurls this term of contempt back "on the heads of its authors" (Caird, 133; cf. Barth, Dibelius, Collange); for to Paul the Jews who promoted their ethnic identity were the real pariahs that defile the holy community, the Christian church, with their erroneous teaching (Jewett, NovT 12 [1970] 386).⁹

Paul is not discussing three different forms of corruption in Phil 3:2. The parallel symmetrical poetic construction ties all three together, the dogs, the evil-workers, and the mutilators. As indicated in Phil 3:3 ff he has in mind those who would bind circumcision on the Christians and in Paul's minds they are corruptors of the faith and are to be assiduously avoided.

Paul's personal journey into fulness in Christ: Phil 3:4-16

⁴*Though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If any other man thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law a Pharisee, ⁶as to zeal a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness under the law blameless. ⁷But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith; ¹⁰that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.*

¹²*Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³Brethren, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵Let those of us who are mature be thus minded; and if in anything you are otherwise minded, God will reveal that also to you. ¹⁶Only let us hold true to what we have attained.*

⁷ O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: a Commentary on the Greek Text* p. 354. Cf also Moisés Silver, *Philippians*, Kindle Location 3809.

⁸ O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, pp. 354–355.

⁹ Hawthorne, G. F., *Philippians*, 174. Cf. also Moisés Silver, *Philippians*, Kindle Location 3855.

Paul's Jewish heritage: Phil 3:4-6. Of all people who could have confidence in the flesh, which is his fleshly heritage as a Jew, Paul would be at the top of the list, but he eschews such a heritage as a mark of spirituality or relationship with God. Each of the following items alone would testify to his purity if purity could be through the flesh and through Judaism!

⁵circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law a Pharisee, ⁶as to zeal a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness under the law blameless.

Paul's personal decision and goal: Phil 3:7-11. In Judaism his "Jewish purity" would guarantee him access into any Jewish society or important position which in the eye of some would be a great advantage/gain. However, Paul was willing to count them all as *refuse* (Phil 3:8), that he may be found in Christ. The Greek for refuse is σκύβαλον, *skúbalon*. Zodhiates *observes on σκύβαλον, skúbalon* that it is related to the word dog, *kúōn* which we have already encountered in 3:2. σκύβαλον, *skúbalon* is:

something thrown to the dogs, which is from *kusí*, dat. pl. of *kúōn* ... dog, and *bállō* ... to cast. That which is thrown to the dogs, dregs, refuse, what is thrown away as worthless. Spoken of the refuse of grain, chaff, or of a table, of slaughtered animals, of dung, and figuratively of the filth of the mind. In the NT, meaning refuse, things that are worthless (Phil. 3:8).¹⁰

In contrast to the spiritual realities of faith in Jesus and the gift of the Holy Spirit the fleshly sign of circumcision is worthless. This had been Paul's theology throughout his apostolic ministry from as early as his epistle to the Galatians. Note Gal 5:1-12, especially his comment at 5:12 regarding mutilating the flesh:

1 For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

2 Now I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. 3 I testify again to every man who receives circumcision that he is bound to keep the whole law. 4 You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. 5 For through the Spirit, by faith, we wait for the hope of righteousness. 6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but faith working through love. 7 You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth? 8 This persuasion is not from him who calls you. 9 A little leaven leavens the whole lump. 10 I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view than mine; and he who is troubling you will bear his judgment, whoever he is. 11 But if I, brethren, still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? In that case the stumbling block of the cross has been removed. 12 I wish those who unsettle you would mutilate themselves!

A highpoint in this pericope and certainly in Paul's theology and his message to the Philippians was to gain Christ, be found in Christ, and experience the power of Christ's resurrection. The following quote from Paul at Phil 3:8-11 is as N. T. Wright observes a densely packed pericope and one loaded with the high points of Paul's theology. To stress them I have set certain words in bold:

*⁸Indeed I count everything as loss **because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.** For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that **I may gain Christ** ⁹**and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith;** ¹⁰**that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,** ¹¹**that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.***

This pericope is so loaded and packed that I am devoting the next chapter to unpack this extraordinary text.

Major points to learn from this lesson

- XXXXX
- VVVVV.

¹⁰ Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*.

Discussion points from this lesson

- xxxx
- mmm

Lesson 8: Phil 3:8-16. Paul's Theology in a Nutshell!

⁸Indeed I count everything as loss **because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.** For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order **that I may gain Christ** ⁹and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith; ¹⁰that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

¹²Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³Brethren, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵Let those of us who are mature be thus minded; and if in anything you are otherwise minded, God will reveal that also to you. ¹⁶Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

In the previous chapter I had set certain expressions of Paul's in bold type which I have repeated in bold type above as an outline of what we will be examining as major points in Paul's theology.

As I have stated in the sub-title above, this represents Paul's theology on a nutshell! If ever there was a densely packed Pauline text, and there are many, this one rises to the surface. Without attempting to set these themes in any order of importance the following rise to the surface as we examine this pericope. Paul speaks of:

The surpassing worth if knowing Christ my Lord. Paul begins this clause with a comment on the *surpassing worth* of knowing or having a personal relationship with Christ. *Think of this for a moment! Rather than having a relationship with the Law one can have a personal relationship with the God of the Law through personal relationship with Jesus Christ, his fully divine son!*

Furthermore, it is important to Judaism and thus Christianity that knowing God or knowing Jesus Christ is not simply an intellectual or cognitive knowledge but something deeply relational and personal.

Hawthorne and Martin note that "knowledge, then, is not primarily intellectual but experiential."¹¹ O'Brien adds: "In the OT knowledge signifies 'living in a close relationship with something or somebody, such a relationship as to cause what may be called communion.' To know God was regarded as of paramount importance (Ho. 6:6; cf. 4:1, 6) and meant to be in a close personal relationship with him. Here at Phil. 3:8 Paul is speaking about 'his own personal relationship with Christ,' something that is absolutely basic and fundamental to his being a Christian. It 'includes the experience of being loved by him and loving him in return.'¹²

The remarkable nature of Paul's relationship with Jesus Christ and God is intensely personal, not purely intellectual! O'Brien cites noted scholar F. W. Beard on Paul's use of "τοῦ κυρίου μου, my Lord." "Beare aptly remarks: 'Here and here alone in his writings do we find the intensely personal Christ Jesus my Lord; and it would be a dull reader indeed who did not mark the warm and deep devotion which breathes through every phrase.' In the Philippian hymn Jesus has already been set forth as 'the Lordly Example' for the readers (2:6–11), and Paul has asserted that God has highly exalted him and graciously given him his own name, that is, κύριος in its most sublime sense, the personal name of Yahweh. On the last day, in honour of Jesus' name of 'Lord,' every tongue will openly confess, some gladly but others unwillingly, that Jesus alone has the right to rule and is worthy of all praise and acclaim (vv. 9–11). This same person Paul remarkably calls 'my Lord' (τοῦ κυρίου μου). In using the singular pronoun μου rather than the regular plural 'our' (ἡμῶν), the apostle is in no way suggesting that his relationship with Christ Jesus is an exclusive one. Rather, the wonder of this knowledge of Christ Jesus as his Lord is so great and the relationship is so intensely personal that he focusses upon it in his testimony."¹³

¹¹ Hawthorne and Martin, *Philippians*, p. 191.

¹² O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, p. 388.

¹³ O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, pp. 388–389.

That I may gain Christ. On this expression Hawthorne and Martin observe:

“Finally now, Paul states his motives for counting everything as loss (vv 8c–10). They are (1) that he might gain Christ, (2) that he might be found in Christ, and (3) that he might know Christ and the power of his resurrection.¹⁴

For many people today, Christians and non-Christians alike, *Christ* has become something of the surname or family name of Jesus. However, *Christ* in the expression *Jesus Christ* refers not to a name but to a title. To the Jew *Christ*, the Greek for the Hebrew *Messiah*, was a heavily loaded theological sovereign term! It implied that Jesus was the *Messiah*, the king that God had been preparing for centuries, since before his covenant with Abraham. Jesus is God’s sovereign ruler of everything. That is what *Jesus Christ* means! This would be disturbing to the leaders of the Jews in Paul’s day who had rejected and crucified Jesus, as well as to the Romans who were concerned about new kings that would challenge their hegemony. Unfortunately many Jews rejected the thought that Jesus of Nazareth could be God’s sovereign *Messiah* and *Christ*. And now in contrast to the Jew’s concern for keeping God at a distance, so much that they would not even say the word God but substituted other terms in favor of god, here was Paul *speaking of having a personal relationship with the sovereign ruler of all creation!*

Not only was the knowledge of Jesus Christ, which is having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ surprising, it surpassed every other knowledge or relationship one could imagine such as the knowledge of the Law which had guided Israel now for centuries.

This knowledge was surpassing simply because it offered a personal relationship with almighty divine sovereign ruler of all creation! *No wonder Paul was willing to give up whatever he had gained before coming to know Christ!* Now instead of a relationship with Judaism and the Law of Moses Paul had been granted a personal relationship with the almighty God through his Son, Jesus the *Messiah* of God.

That I may be found in him. Being “*in Christ*” is one of Paul’s dominant theological themes! Cf. Eph 1:3-11 where Paul emphasized that God has predestined us, called us, redeemed us, forgiven us, and made us his children *in and through Christ*. He makes this kind of statement at least 10 times in that many verses. In Romans and Galatians Paul argues that *in Christ* through the faithfulness of Jesus God has *reconciled* Christians to himself, he has *justified* them, declared them *not guilty*, and brought them into a righteous relationship with himself. They are therefore *righteous* not in themselves and their ability to keep laws, but in God’s forgiveness in Christ.¹⁵

Paul was not interested in being found in Judaism, in Jerusalem, in the Temple, or in the Law of Moses. He had high regard for the law (cf. Rom 7: 12, 14, the law is holy, just, good, and spiritual) but Paul knew that it was not in the Law that he was justified, but *in Jesus Christ*. He was concerned with being in Christ for it is in Christ that one becomes an heir of Abraham and God’s covenant with Abraham. To him that was simply of no value, it was refuse! Cf. Gal 3: 23-29:

23 Now before faith came, we were confined under the law, kept under restraint until faith should be revealed. 24 So that the law was our custodian until Christ came, that we might be justified by faith. 25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a custodian; 26 **for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.** 27 **For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.** 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 **And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.**

To be in Christ meant everything to Paul and he was hoping the Philippians would understand this.

Not having a righteousness of my own, based on law. *It has been held by some that the Jewish understanding of righteousness was one grounded in keeping the Law of Moses. However, Paul had argued that in his Jewish heritage, for example in Abraham and David, righteousness was through faith or trusting in God. Jews understood that they were born into a right relationship with God through their birth into the larger family of Abraham’s descendants. For the Jew circumcision was a sign of a right*

¹⁴ Hawthorne and Martin, *Philippians*, p. 193.

¹⁵ Cf. the extensive argument to this effect in N. T. Wright, *Justification*, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009, *passim*.

relationship with God. Thus the Jews made circumcision, circumcision being part of the Law of Moses, a barrier defining who was in God's family and who had a right relationship with God.

Recent studies from within both Christian and Jewish scholarship have demonstrated that the Jew did not consider law keeping as the means of "salvation" or entering a right relationship with God. Keeping the Law of Moses was a sign of a right relationship with God. The Jew understood that he entered that right relationship with God by birth and maintained that relationship by keeping the Law of Moses. Paul, however, argued against that view claiming that the right relationship with God, which is righteousness, was maintained not by works of the Law of Moses. Paul knew from personal experience (cf. Rom 7:13-24) that he and others would not or could not keep the Law perfectly and thus could never be righteous through keeping the Law. A right relationship with God had always been through faith in God which now involved faith in God's Messiah, Jesus.

So at Phil 3:9 Paul stated that his righteousness, or right relationship with God, was not one achieved by his keeping law, which he had done very well. In regard to keeping the Law he had been blameless (Phil 3:6). For Paul righteousness had always been through faith in God. Now that Christ had come righteousness was through faith in God's forgiveness found only through faith in Jesus Christ.

For Paul, as demonstrated in both Galatians and Romans, righteousness comes only through faith on God's grace, through the faithfulness of Jesus to God's purpose, and through faith in Jesus' death on the cross which was God's atoning work to be received only through faith in God's working in Jesus.

Righteousness was not through keeping the Law of Moses. Righteousness was found only through faith in Jesus Christ and through being in Christ.

That I may know him and the power of his resurrection. *Paul next turns to the ground of all hope, the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is only through an intimate relationship and faith in Jesus (knowing him) that resurrection means anything. Paul argues in 1 Cor 15: 12-19 that unless one believed in the resurrection of Jesus faith was empty and futile. It was in the death of Jesus that God made atonement for man's sins, but it was in the resurrection of Jesus that God ultimately defeated Satan and gave hope to all that would have faith in his working in Jesus and be in Christ.*

Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians begins with a strong statement of Paul's gospel message. Note 1 Cor 15:1-5:

¹Now I would remind you, brethren, in what terms I preached to you the gospel, which you received, in which you stand, ²by which you are saved, if you hold it fast—unless you believed in vain.

³For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, ⁴that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures ...

Paul also argued at Rom 1:4 that Jesus had been designated Son of God, powerfully through the operation of the Holy Spirit in his resurrection from the dead. Later at Rom 8:9-11 Paul wrote:

⁹But you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰But if Christ is in you, although your bodies are dead because of sin, your spirits are alive because of righteousness. ¹¹If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you.

Paul is stating in this another densely packed text how significant the resurrection of Jesus is to Christian resurrection. He ties both the Christian and Jesus' resurrection to the working and power of the Holy Spirit. My point in drawing attention to this text is to demonstrate how important the resurrection and the power of the Holy Spirit are in Paul's fundamental theology.

That I may share in his suffering, becoming like him in his death. *For Paul, being in Christ implied not only blessing but also solidarity, personal and missiologically. Being united with Christ in baptism (Roma 6:1-11; Col 2:12, 13) brought together atonement, resurrection, and ministry. But Paul was aware that it also involved sharing and participating in the suffering service of Jesus. Although the following text*

can be difficult to grasp and some of it is beyond the purpose of this study it expresses Paul's view on this point, Col 1:24-29:

²⁴Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, ²⁵of which I became a minister according to the divine office which was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, ²⁶the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now made manifest to his saints. ²⁷To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. ²⁸Him we proclaim, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man mature in Christ. ²⁹For this I toil, striving with all the energy which he mightily inspires within me.

The striking point of Paul's comment here in the above two texts is that becoming like Christ in every sense was the goal of his life and ministry.

That I may attain the resurrection from the dead. *In order to attain the resurrection (share in Jesus resurrection) from the dead Paul recognized that he needed to be like Christ and in Christ. He certainly needed the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the power of Jesus' resurrection but he also needed to be in Christ and to strive to be like Christ. His cautionary statement in the next three verses expresses Paul's attitude in becoming like Christ, Phil 3:12-14. Paul recognized that he was on a journey toward the goal to which God had called him:*

¹²Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³Brethren, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Paul indicates that the motivating force in his striving to be like Christ is because Christ Jesus has made me his own!

Paul's goal is the *upward call of God in Christ Jesus*. The expression upward call of God, τῆς ἄνω κλήσεως τοῦ θεοῦ, is interesting and has generated considerable discussion. I prefer the proposal made by O'Brien:

(3) Finally, κλήσις has been interpreted of God's act of calling to salvation, with the genitive τῆς ... κλήσεως being understood as subjective (or indicative of belonging). The prize (τὸ βραβεῖον) then refers to that which is announced or promised by the call, and could be a comprehensive expression for the blessings of everlasting life. In the immediate context, however, τὸ βραβεῖον is the full and complete gaining of Christ, for whose sake everything else has been counted loss. The noun κλήσις, like its cognate verb καλέω, frequently refers to God's initial and effective call to salvation through the gospel: it is a summons to enter the kingdom (cf. 1 Thes. 2:12), Christ's peace (Col. 3:15), or into fellowship with Christ (1 Cor. 1:9), so as to be conformed to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29–30), and to receive salvation (2 Thes. 2:13–14) and eternal life (1 Tim. 6:12; cf. Eph. 1:18; 4:1, 4; 2 Thes. 1:11; 2 Tim. 1:9). The addition of ἄνω points not so much to the heavenly origin of this call (cf. Heb. 3:1) as to the direction in which this calling leads, that is, 'upwards, heavenwards'. This invitation to enter God's kingdom, which was already issued to Paul at his conversion, is sometimes referred to in the present tense (cf. 1 Thes. 2:12). It is as if the divine call keeps ringing in the hearer's ears, as God summons Paul and other Christians in a heavenward direction and to holiness of life.

... But on balance we prefer (3), with τὸ βραβεῖον τῆς ἄνω κλήσεως τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ being rendered 'the prize promised by God's heavenly call in Christ Jesus'. On this view κλήσις can be understood in its customary Pauline sense of the divine calling to salvation, particularly the initial summons, while the prize is that which is announced by the call. On any view τοῦ θεοῦ indicates that it is God himself who issues the call, while ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ probably signifies that it is in the sphere of Christ Jesus himself that this summons is given. In the immediate context the prize (τὸ βραβεῖον) is the full and complete gaining of Christ for whose sake everything else has been counted loss. The greatest reward is to

know fully, and so to be in perfect fellowship with, the one who had apprehended Paul on the Damascus road. And this prize Paul wants his readers also to grasp.¹⁶

Paul's final statement in this profound theological pericope was to encourage the Philippians to be likeminded and to join him in this quest. Phil 3:15-21 rounds out this concentrated theological piece:

¹⁵Let those of us who are mature be thus minded; and if in anything you are otherwise minded, God will reveal that also to you. ¹⁶Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

¹⁷Brethren, join in imitating me, and mark those who so live as you have an example in us. ¹⁸For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, live as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹Their end is destruction, their god is the belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. ²⁰But our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself.

Paul is well aware that there would be some in the Philippian church that would already be following Christ's and Paul and Timothy's example and encouraged the church to follow their example. However, he is also aware of the fact that there were some who were enemies of the cross. But who does he have in mind with this comment?

Considerable debate has been engaged in defining whom these enemies of the cross. Suggestions ranging from "moral libertinists, behavioural materialists... orthodox Jews, lapsed or apostate Christians—because of persecution ... Jewish Christians for whom the cross had little significance, Judaizers, and so on."¹⁷

Moisés Silva's comments indicate that there is no consensus regarding who precisely Paul had in mind other than for some reason their behaviour was not in keeping with Christ-like living and whose example was contra to the model of loving Christian concern discussed by Paul in the preceding pericope.¹⁸ Whoever they were the Philippians knew who Paul had in mind since Paul had often spoken to the Philippians regarding such persons (cf. Phil 3:18). "¹⁸For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, live as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹Their end is destruction, their god is the belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things".

Contrary to the earthly mind of these enemies of the cross whose mind is set on *earthly things* the Christian mindset or commonwealth is in heaven. Commonwealth derives from the Greek *πολίτευμα*, *políteuma*. A related word is *πολιτεία*, *politeía*; which means *to behave or act as a free citizen. The relation of a free citizen to the state ...* Citizenship, the right of citizenship ... The state itself, a community, commonwealth (Eph. 2:12).¹⁹ Zodhiates notes that the verb *politeúō* as we have it in Phil 3:20 means "to behave as a citizen of an administration of the state ... In the NT the word can mean the state itself, a community, or simply a commonwealth. It is used metaphorically of Christians in reference to their spiritual community and their status as citizens of heaven (Phil. 3:20)."²⁰

With the statement but our commonwealth is in heaven Paul is reminding the Philippian Christians that their values are set by their relationship with Jesus Christ and not by a this-worldly profligate mindset for from their heavenly commonwealth they await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. I am reminded of Col 3:1, 2:

¹ If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

¹⁶ O'Brien, P. T., *The Epistle to the Philippians: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, pp. 432–433; so also Moisés Silva, *Philippians*, Kindle Location 4542 - 4556; *contra* Hawthorne who sees Christ as the prize as in an athletic context. While Hawthorne has a point I prefer O'Brien's conclusion above.

¹⁷ O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, p. 453. Hawthorne and Martin, *Philippians*, p. 223 suggest that they could have been simply Jews or Jewish messianic preachers.

¹⁸ Moisés Silva, *Philippians*, Kindle locations 4609 ff.

¹⁹ Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*.

²⁰ Edited from Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*.

³ For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

The order of the expression Lord Jesus Christ, κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν, is significant for it stresses that Jesus, the Messiah, is the ultimate Lord. Κύριος, *kírios*, has a wide range of meanings. In the Jewish tradition of the Septuagint Old Testament it was the equivalent of Jehovah, YHWH, which obviously referred to supreme God Almighty. In the Roman context it was a word used to refer to the Caesar, the supreme lord. In the Christian context it means that *Jesus is the sovereign Messiah and Lord of God's kingdom*.

Paul's use of the expression *we await a Savior* is interesting. Savior from σωτήρα, an accusative noun from σωτήρ, *sōtēr* which simply in this context means savior. It is in an anarthrus (without the definite article *the* which identifies a thing or person) construction which reads *savior* rather than *the Savior*. Paul uses the term savior in a quasi-apocalyptic eschatological sense as not our personal savior but the eschatological savior of all things, the one who for God puts all things right again. O'Brien observes:

A real parallel is found at 1 Thes. 1:10, where the Saviour (ὁ ῥυόμενος) who is awaited from heaven will effect deliverance from the coming wrath. Paul often employs σωτηρία (see above on 1:19; cf. also σῶζω) in this final or eschatological sense (Rom. 5:9; 1 Cor. 3:15; 5:5; 1 Thes. 5:19), and here σωτήρ is consistent with this usage.²¹

Hawthorne and Martin, along with O'Brien have some interesting thoughts to add the eager awaiting of Christians for the eschatological coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Hawkins and Martin write:

The verb that expresses the church's eager anticipation, ἀπεκδεχόμεθα, "eagerly wait for," is used six times by Paul of the eight times it appears in the NT (Rom 8:19, 23, 25; 1 Cor 1:7; Gal 5:5; Phil 3:20). It is his special word, the one that for him best describes the Christian's persistent yearning for, happy expectation of, and earnest desire for the second coming of Christ, when this travailing creation will be freed from its "thralldom (sic) to decay"...²²

O'Brien adds regarding the expression *await*:

ἀπεκδέχομαι ('to await eagerly') expresses 'the expectation of the End'.¹¹⁸ This verb, which appeared rarely in the Greek world and not at all in the LXX or Josephus, is used by Paul six times out of a total eight NT occurrences (also Heb. 9:28; 1 Pet. 3:20). The contexts are similar, and while the objects of Christians' eager anticipation vary, ἀπεκδέχομαι always focusses on what is definite, future, and eschatological. So Christians eagerly await the revealing of the sons of God (Rom. 8:19), their sonship, here described as the redemption of the body (8:23), the future hope (8:25), the hope of righteousness (Gal. 5:5), the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:7), and the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour (Phil. 3:20).

The believers' earnest expectation is focused on the Lord Jesus Christ in his character as σωτήρ ('saviour, deliverer'), a designation that is not commonly applied to him in the NT. In fact, the NT makes relatively little use of the term, for it occurs only twenty-four times in all: sixteen of these refer to Christ, eight to God. σωτήρ is not used of ordinary humans. At Phil. 3:20 this saving function has to do with the end time, that is, the final salvation. A real parallel is found at 1 Thes. 1:10, where the Saviour (ὁ ῥυόμενος) who is awaited from heaven will effect deliverance from the coming wrath. Paul often employs σωτηρία (see above on 1:19; cf. also σῶζω) in this final or eschatological sense (Rom. 5:9; 1 Cor. 3:15; 5:5; 1 Thes. 5:19), and here σωτήρ is consistent with this usage.²³

With the expression "who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself" Paul again picks up the theme of the resurrection, this time reflecting on statements made at 1 Cor 15:51 ff:

Lo! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised

²¹ O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, pp. 462–463.

²² Hawthorne and Martin, *Philippians*, p. 232.

²³ O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, pp. 462–463.

imperishable, and we shall be changed. ⁵³ For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality. ⁵⁴ When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

“Death is swallowed up in victory.” ⁵⁵ *“O death, where is thy victory?”*

O death, where is thy sting?” ⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The remarkable transformation of the human corruptible body into a divine spiritual body like Christ’s calls on the working of the sovereign power over all the universe, that same power that it took to create everything in the beginning, which brought about Jesus’ resurrection from the dead, and in the end will bring everything under God’s control. One cannot exclude the power of the Holy Spirit (cf Rom 8:9-11) working with Jesus to bring about this transformation. At Eph 4:23, 24, Col 3:10, and 2 Cor 3:18 Paul declared that in Christ Christians are presently being recreated in the image of their creator from one degree to another and that this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit (2 Cor 3:18). Here in the Philippian text Paul declares that this glorious transformation will be brought to fulfillment at the final eschatological coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Major points to learn from this lesson

- XXXXX
- VVVVV.

Discussion points from this lesson

- XXXX
- mmm

Lesson 9: Phil 4:1-23. Paul's Final Exhortations for the Philippians

His Acknowledgement of the Philippian Gift, and his Conclusion

¹ Therefore, my brethren, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved. ² I entreat Eu-odia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. ³ And I ask you also, true yokefellow, help these women, for they have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵ Let all men know your forbearance. The Lord is at hand. ⁶ Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸ Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹ What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, do; and the God of peace will be with you.

¹⁰ I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me; you were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. ¹¹ Not that I complain of want; for I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content. ¹² I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound; in any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want. ¹³ I can do all things in him who strengthens me.

¹⁴ Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. ¹⁵ And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving except you only; ¹⁶ for even in Thessalonica you sent me help once and again. ¹⁷ Not that I seek the gift; but I seek the fruit which increases to your credit. ¹⁸ I have received full payment, and more; I am filled, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. ¹⁹ And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. ²⁰ To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

²¹ Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren who are with me greet you. ²² All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household.

²³ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Paul's Final Exhortation: Phil 4:1-9

¹ Therefore, my brethren, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved. ² I entreat Eu-odia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. ³ And I ask you also, true yokefellow, help these women, for they have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Paul wastes no time in reaffirming his close filial ties with the Philippians referring to them as “my brethren, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown.” However, with the form coordinating conjunction ὥστε, *hōste* he connects this warm statement of brotherly love tightly to the preceding comments regarding the Philippians being members of the commonwealth of heaven. Since the Philippians are co-members of the heavenly community with Paul this establishes a firm bond of fellowship. This is exactly what Paul is encouraging the Philippians to do in regard to some of their own members and joint members of the commonwealth, notable Euodia, Syntyche, and some of the fellowship who seem to be coming up short in this regard. The term yokefellow σύζυγε from σύζυγος *súzugos* is a masculine noun/adjective from σύζυγος *súzugos*, which has been suggested by some to be the name of a fellow male member of the Philippian congregation. This may be a long stretch and O'Brien comments:

Who is the person singled out by the expression γνήσιε σύζυγε ('true yokefellow')? Clearly it was unnecessary to name the person (unless Σύζυγε is itself a proper name), since everyone at Philippi, including the one so addressed, would know who was intended ... Apart from a number of fanciful guesses, a suggestion that enjoys considerable support among commentators is that Σύζυγος is a proper name. In favour of this it is argued that Paul nowhere else makes use of this term to describe his official colleagues and that if it were a common noun here it would imply that the person stood in a special relation to him.²⁴ If Σύζυγος is a proper name, then the adjective γνήσιε indicates that the colleague is rightly named; Paul is punning, as he does with Onesimus (Philemon. 11; cf. the later Chrestos), and in effect saying: 'You who are Σύζυγος (lit. 'yokefellow') are a comrade not in name only but also in deed' ... It is no longer possible to determine with certainty just whom Paul has in mind; 'faithful partner' suggests a coworker in the apostolic mission who was no doubt well known to the Philippians. He was probably some prominent and influential member of the congregation, perhaps a person of tact²⁸ as well as influence.²⁴

Whoever this *true yokefellow* may be Paul encourages him to help these two women resolve whatever tension may exist since they have been valuable fellow-workers of Paul ad his mission team.

Too often in churches tensions between two people can easily develop into serious divisions in a congregation which can hinder, even cripple the effectiveness of a congregation's witness, particularly in a hostile environment. When earthly, this worldly attitudes impinge on heavenly, spiritual attitudes a fractured fellowship is the natural result. The result set in the context of Philippians is that a church plateaus, the blahs set in, and the joy of Christianity suffers.

Paul's following comments reinforce his concern that the Philippians may be suffering the blahs and a loss of joy in Christ.

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵ Let all men know your forbearance. The Lord is at hand. ⁶ Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Paul's use of the double present imperative *Rejoice ... Rejoice*, Χαίρετε ... Χαίρετε strengthen the above comments regarding the danger of broken fellowship and the church or group plateauing. The present nature of the imperative verb Χαίρετε emphasizes that this act of rejoicing should be a constant in their Christian fellowship in the commonwealth of heaven, that is, the church. The verb χαίρω, *chairō* is related to the noun χαρά, *chará* which means *joy*. As mentioned in the opening pericope to this epistle the joy of the Christian life. *Rejoice* occurs 9 times in 8 verses in Philippians, and *joy* 5 times in 5 verses. It should be obvious that joy in the life of a group or congregation is a primary ingredient of effective fellowship. That joy and rejoice are mentioned 14 times in this short epistle does not indicate that this congregation was full of joy! To the contrary it suggests that the congregation was beset with some form of the spiritual blahs!

O'Brien adds:

Rather, the key to this rejoicing is its being ἐν κυρίῳ, 'the governing factor in the exhortation', which signifies that the Lord is either the object of their rejoicing or the ground and the one in whom their joy thrives (see on 3:1). It is just possible that the mention of 'the book of life' in v. 3 induced the apostle to renew his exhortation for his readers to rejoice. Cf. Jesus' words to the Seventy after they returned from their mission 'with joy (μετὰ χαρᾶς)': 'Do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice (χαίρετε) that your names are written in heaven' (Lk. 10:20).

Clearly, continuous rejoicing in the Lord is of great significance to Paul. It is a Christian's distinguishing mark (Rom. 12:12) and a characteristic of the kingdom of God (Rom. 14:17). Along with other graces it is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23; cf. Rom. 14:17; 1 Thes. 1:6) that will be evident in times of suffering and trial (Rom. 5:3–4; 2 Cor. 6:10; 8:2–3). Because rejoicing in the Lord at all times is so

²⁴ O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, pp. 480–481. Cf. the discussion of this in Hawthorne and Martin, *Philippians*, p. 242; Moisés Silva, *Philippians*, Kindle location 4932 ff; Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, Kindle location 11177 ff.

important, the apostle emphatically repeats the injunction: *πάλιν ἐρῶ, χαίρετε*. ‘I have said it once and I will say it again, rejoice!’ ‘He doubles it to take away the scruple of those who might say, what, shall we rejoice in afflictions?’²⁵

A key to joy in Christian fellowship is *forbearance*, a point that in various emphases is high on Paul’s parnetic esthetics. The Greek *ἐπιεικής*, *epieikēs* in various forms appears often in the New Testament Christian context. It primarily means *mildness* or *gentleness* and speaks directly to inter-personal relationships. O’Brien observes:

This word group had a long history (from Homer onwards) and described ‘a balanced, intelligent, decent outlook in contrast to licentiousness.’ *ἐπιεικής* and *ἐπιείκεια* were applied to authorities to denote equity and leniency. When strict adherence to the letter of the law would lead to injustice, *ἐπιείκεια* knew how to act with fairness. In the LXX the word group described the gracious gentleness of God’s rule (1 Sa. 12:22; Ps. 86:5; Wis. 12:18), as well as the actions of a king (2 Macc. 9:27), a prophet (2 Ki. 6:3), and a godly person (Wis. 2:19). This last reference is important for two reasons: first, *ἐπιεικής* is not applied to one with power and authority, and so it does not describe the indulgence of a ruler. Rather, at Wis. 2:19 *ὁ δίκαιος*, who seems to represent the poor, is delivered up to the whims of the rich and powerful ‘ungodly’. Secondly, the context of ill-treatment, torture, and even disgraceful death strongly suggests that *ἐπιείκεια* here signifies ‘a humble, patient steadfastness, which is able to submit to injustice, disgrace and maltreatment without hatred or malice, trusting God in spite of it all.’

Within the NT it is Christ who preeminently displayed this ‘gentleness’: at 2 Cor. 10:1, Paul speaks of his ‘meekness and gentleness’. The combination *πρα—της καὶ ἐπιείκεια* forms a hendiadys, with the former and better-known term clarifying the meaning of the latter.²⁵ Elsewhere the overseer is urged to be *ἐπιεικής* (‘gentle’) as well as *ἄμαχος* (‘peaceable’; 1 Tim. 3:3; Ti. 3:2), while ‘the wisdom from above,’ according to James, is not only ‘pure, peace-loving, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial, and sincere,’ but also ‘gentle’ (*ἐπιεικής*, 3:17). In urging his Philippian readers to ‘let their gentleness be evident’ the apostle wants them to display such a Christ-like character, and this may involve them in the patient bearing of abuse.²⁶

The brief expression *The Lord is at hand*. Is interesting! Not that it would surprise on coming from Paul for whom the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ was a major feature in his theology. Cf. 1 Thess 1:1-10 where many of the themes Paul has discussed in Philippians are found. Professor Abraham Malherbe has suggested that the Thessalonian correspondence has major ethical and sociological emphases, and it is in these contexts that Paul brings up the coming of the Lord (Cf 1 Thess 4:13 – 5:11). In this regard I like Paul’s comment at 1 Thess 1:19-10:

9 For they themselves report concerning us what a welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, 10 and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

What may seem surprising is why insert this short expression at Phil 4:5 in the context of repeated emphases on *rejoicing*!

Any explanation of the expression is somewhat clouded by what Paul means by *The Lord is at hand*, *ὁ κύριος ἐγγύς*. Does he mean *nearby* or *present*, or is he referring to the expected *coming* of the Lord at the eschatological end of time. Perhaps he means both for both the temporal (end of the world) and the special (nearby, present) meanings are inherent in *at hand*. Both O’Brien and Hawkins have insightful comment on this. Note Hawkins:

ὁ κύριος ἐγγύς, “The Lord is near!” Without warning and without any conjunctions to join it either with what precedes or with what follows, Paul suddenly interjects this phrase. Its meaning is rendered elusive by the ambiguity contained in *ἐγγύς*, “near,” which can refer both to space and time. Thus, “the Lord is near” may mean that the Lord is close, present, and hence aware of a person’s conduct, concerned

²⁵ O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, p. 486.

²⁶ O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, pp. 487–488.

about a person's attitude, available to come to a person's aid, and at hand to assist (cf. LXX Pss 33:19 [ET 34:18]; 118:151 [ET 119:151]; 144:18 [ET 145:18]; see Caird, Michaelis, and especially note *1 Clem.* 21.3). Or these words may mean that the return of the Lord Jesus Christ is imminent, as in the prayer call *Marana tha*, "Our Lord, come" (1 Cor 16:22; Rev 22:20; *Did.* 10:6). There would thus be good reason to rejoice, magnanimously to put up with the harassment of pagans, and to live worry free. It is that the Lord is coming soon to reward the faithful, to punish the evildoers, to heal all ills, and to right all wrongs (cf. 1 Cor 16:22; Heb 10:24–25; Jas 5:8; Rev 1:7; 3:11; 22:20; cf. 2 Thess 1:7–8; *Barn.* 21.3). Thus the shortness of time and the nearness of salvation heighten the earnestness of the exhortations (Haupt, Dibelius, Bonnard, Beare, Gnilka, Houlden, Martin [1976]; Ridderbos, *Paul*, 490). It may be wrong, however, to choose between these two interpretations and to remove all ambiguity by translation (cf. GOODSPEED, LB, GNB). Just possibly Paul deliberately chose this particular word, ἐγγύς, "near," with all its ambiguity precisely to include both ideas, of time and of space, together: the Lord who will soon return is the Lord who once came so close to humanity (Phil 2:6–8) as actually to share the human lot and who though absent now in body is still near at hand in his Spirit to guide, instruct, encourage, infuse with strength, assist, transform, and renew (cf. John 14:12, 16–18, 26; 16:12–13; Rom 8:9–11; 2 Cor 3:17–18; see Collange; Bruce, 117–18; O'Brien, 488–90).²⁷

That Paul is primarily concerned with the peace of the Philippian congregation is seen in his expression at Phil 4:7; *And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* However, before we get to the peace expression we need to examine the preceding verse Phil 4:6!

⁶ Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

We have ere a major emphasis of Paul's theology. Prayer! A brief examination of Paul's introductions to his Epistles will reveal a steadfast emphasis on prayer. Paul prays steadfastly, daily, consistently for the church and his fellow workers. Sometimes as in MMM he brings together several different emphases in prayer, thanksgiving, intercession, supplication, etc. Here he mentions *prayer* (basically talking to God), *supplication* (pleading for other or for some concern), and *thanksgiving* (always thanking God for his grace and help) all in the one context. Prayer words piled up on top of each other! Surrendering anxiety results from turning one's concerns over to God and leaving them with God! It is only when we can do this that the peace that comes from God is possible. Learning to turn things over to God and concentrating on what really is important opens the door for the peace that comes from a right relationship with God.

I am reminded of Jesus' great teaching on the Sermon on the Mount at Matt 6:16-34 where Jesus counselled his disciples to not lay up treasures on earth but to lay up their treasures in heaven where God is. A verse 25 he counselled them to not be anxious about physical needs, and at 6:33 to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all their anxieties would be taken care of by God.

One cannot read this in the context of Philippians and overlook Phil 4:19 where Paul writes *And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.*²⁰ *To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever.* But we will get to that shortly!

At Phil 4:6 Paul encourages the Philippians to *with thanksgiving let their requests be made to God.* When we can do this God brings a spirit of peace into our lives.

Paul's Six Virtues: Phil 4:8, 9

⁸ Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹ What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, do; and the God of peace will be with you.

²⁷ Hawthorne, G. F., *Philippians*, pp. 244–245. Cf also O'Brien, *Philippians*, pp. 488 ff.

Does he really mean *finally*! Remember Phil 3:1, *Finally*! And then he goes on for two more chapters! At Phil 3:1 we observed that *finally*, τὸ λοιπὸν, *tó loipón* could mean *and so ...*, or *however ...*, or *furthermore ...*, where it serves as a mark or point of transition.

At Phil 4:8 it seems that an appropriate translation for *finally* could be *In addition my brothers ...*

At the conclusion of this series of exhortations (vv. 1–9) Paul focuses on six widely accepted concepts in the Graeco-Roman ethical world. Paul urged his readers to let their minds dwell on those qualities which are good in themselves and beneficial to others. In a single sentence, using terms that were known in popular moral philosophy, Paul describes those characteristics upon which the Philippians were to reflect carefully in order to shape their conduct to be such that peace may mature in their personal inter-relationships. These are things that are *honorable, just, pure, lovely, gracious, and excellent*.

I am reminded of Paul's exhortation at Eph 4:29-5:2:

²⁹ *Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for edifying, as fits the occasion, that it may impart grace to those who hear.* ³⁰ *And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.* ³¹ *Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, with all malice,* ³² *and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*

¹ *Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.* ² *And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

Whatever is **true** derives from the Greek ἀληθής, *alēthēs*, literally means *without blemish* or *something that can be hidden*. It carries the sense of being *genuine* or *something that can be trusted*. **Honorable** derives from σεμνός, *semnós* which is related to *sebomai*, to *worship* or *hold venerable*. Zodhiates adds “venerable, reverend, reputable, and dignified. *Semnós* represents not only earthly dignity ... but that which is derived from a higher citizenship, a heavenly one, which is the possession of all believers. There lies something of a majestic and awe-inspiring quality in *semnós* which does not repel but rather invites and attracts (Phil. 4:8; 1 Tim. 3:8, 11; Titus 2:2).²⁸ Whatever is **just** derives from δίκαιος, *dikaios*, which basically means *right, righteous, and correct*. It carries a broad sense such as *not simply in relation to humans but in accordance with the divine standard, and thus fulfilling all obligations to God, others, and themselves*.²⁹ **Pure** from ἀγνά derives from a verb that meant to stand in awe of someone. It was used in religious language from early times as an attribute of deity and everything belonging to it; later it was employed in a transferred moral sense of holy or pure ... In the NT ἀγνός appears only in the epistles, meaning ‘chaste’ (2 Cor. 11:2; Tit. 2:5), ‘innocent’ (2 Cor. 7:11), and ‘morally pure, upright’.³⁰ **Lovely** from προσφιλή appears only here in the NT and is not found in the contemporary lists of virtues in the ancient world. The basic meaning of the word is ‘that which calls forth love, love-inspiring’, and here it has the passive sense of ‘lovely, pleasing, agreeable, amiable’.³¹ εὐφημα is also a NT hapax³² and has been variously rendered as ‘auspicious, well-sounding, praiseworthy, attractive, appealing’ **Gracious**, εὐφημα, is also a NT hapax and has been variously rendered as ‘auspicious, well-sounding, praiseworthy, attractive, and appealing.’

Having listed the above 6 virtues Paul summarizes and reinforces the six in his expression *if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things*. **Excellence**, ἀρετή (‘virtue, excellence, goodness’) appears nowhere else in Paul's letters and elsewhere in the NT only at 1 Pet. 2:9; 2 Pet. 1:3, 5 (twice) ... **Praise**, ἔπαινος signifies the ‘praise’ that is offered to God ... but here ἔπαινος (‘a thing worthy of praise’) because of the parallelism with ἀρετή, probably denotes the kind of conduct that

²⁸ Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, adapted.

²⁹ O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, p. 504.

³⁰ I have referenced O'Brien for most of the following definitions. O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, pp. 504–505.

³¹ O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, p. 505.

³² Hapax is a technical word that means only once. It stresses that a word appears only once in the NT or some piece of literature.

wins the praise of fellow humans.³³ Paul's encouragement to the Philippians to think on these things certainly addresses the concern he had for the inter-personal problems he had heard were troubling the brethren.

Think about these things in Phil 4:8 is an imperative verb λογίζεσθε which encourages the Philippians to *constantly be thinking* about these the things he has mentioned.

Returning to his own example, which the Philippians of which were well aware Paul writes,⁹ *What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, do; and the God of peace will be with you.*

The Conclusio/Epilogue: Paul's Acknowledgement of the Philippian Gift: Phil 4:10-21

¹⁰ I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me; you were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. ¹¹ Not that I complain of want; for I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content. ¹² I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound; in any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want. ¹³ I can do all things in him who strengthens me.

O'Brien's comment opening this section is so important to the overall message of the Epistle that I am including it again!³⁴

The apostle now turns to one of the main reasons for his writing the letter, namely to express his gratitude to the Philippians for their generosity, as evidenced in the gift sent through their messenger, Epaphroditus (2:25–30). Although Paul has already alluded to their kindness (1:3, 5) and written with great affection about Epaphroditus, who in bringing their gift had almost died (2:25–30), he does not discuss the gift in detail until now. The position of a 'thank you' note at the end of the letter looks like an afterthought, and this, together with the considerable amount of time that has elapsed between the arrival of Epaphroditus with the gift (2:25–30) and the writing of this note, has suggested to many scholars that 4:10–20 are a separate letter written by Paul soon after he received the gift from the Philippians. But this 'drastic, hypothetical solution' is to be rejected (see the Introduction for detailed reasons).

As shown above, the introductory thanksgiving paragraph (1:3–11) functions as a prologue setting the tone and anticipating some of the major themes and motifs that bind the whole letter together. This is particularly true in relation to the epilogue (4:10–20), where interconnecting and thematic links with the prologue are made. The two paragraphs form an inclusion³ with the affirmation of v. 19 ('My God shall supply all your need ...') and its doxology (v. 20) providing the answer to Paul's intercessory prayer (1:9–11) and the Philippians' other needs as expressed throughout the letter.³⁵

Paul's opening comments resonate with thanksgiving and a gracious spirit, emphasizing the point of mutual concern, his and that of the Philippians. He recognized that it had not been possible for the Philippians to continue with their original support, *you had no opportunity*, and that they had still been concerned enough to send Epaphroditus to help him in Rome. Paul acknowledges their continued support in the following statement at verses 15 and 16:

¹⁵ And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving except you only; ¹⁶ for even in Thessalonica you sent me help once and again.

Paul's next comment is one that has been echoed in the minds of many, unfortunately taking it out of context and beyond what Paul had intended!

I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content. ¹² I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound; in any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want. ¹³ I can do all things in him who strengthens me.

³³ O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, pp. 506–507.

³⁴ I had included it in the Prologue of the Epistle at Phil 1:3 ff. Here it is in the Epilogue and concluding part of the inclusio of Phil 1:3 ff and Phil 4:10 ff. I have set certain expressions in bold for emphasis.

³⁵ O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, pp. 513–514.

What Paul was saying was that in his many times during his ministry he has been abused and had to face all kinds of trials, his Philippian imprisonment would have been such a case. On that occasion after having been beaten and thrown into prison as a Roman citizen without a trial he and Silas had spent time praying and singing hymns. The Philippians would have first-hand knowledge about that saga! Nevertheless Paul had learned from such occasions that God had always been present with him to give him the strength to endure. Because of God's grace in his life Paul realized that he could face any problem or issue because God always was there to strengthen him.

The next pericope functions to highlight Paul's above point and the point that even in the lives of the Philippians God was always there to strengthen and uplift those who were facing difficulties such as the Euodia/Syntyché strain of fellowship, and even the congregations spiritual blahs!

¹⁴ Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. ¹⁵ And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving except you only; ¹⁶ for even in Thessalonica you sent me help once and again.

¹⁷ Not that I seek the gift; but I seek the fruit which increases to your credit. ¹⁸ I have received full payment, and more; I am filled, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. ¹⁹ And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. ²⁰ To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

The statement that stands out in this pericope is verse 19, *And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.*

Many years ago during my missionary and preaching experience in South Africa I was reading a book by Charles Haddon Spurgeon, note English Baptist preacher at the Metropolitan Tabernacle Fellowship hall, and found a sermon on Phil 4:19, 20, Paul's "thankyou" comment to the Philippian church for their revived concern and gift. I was so impressed that I adapted it into a sermon for our congregation in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. I have since preached it on several occasions! Below are the thoughts that stood out for me in Spurgeon sermon.

Paul referred to God as:

- **My God**
- Who can provided **all of our needs**
- **Not your wants**
- Through his **riches in glory**
- **In Christ Jesus**

As indicated below in the discussion of the text these thoughts tell an astonishingly profound story about Paul, God, Christ, and the Philippians.

Paul intensely personalizes his relationship with God, it is not simply God who provides Paul's needs, it is *my God!* Too often God is some impersonal power out there somewhere who we call into our lives when we are in need, or a God whom we visit occasionally on Sunday morning! Paul's relationship with this God, YHWH, contrary to Jewish prejudices and pagan idolatry was a personal relationship which he enjoyed in God's gracious constant presence.

God is not limited in his ability to provide for us as we might be able to provide, or the church might be able with a limited budget! God operates out of his riches in glory which riches are to be found in Christ Jesus, or in a relationship with Christ Jesus.

Fee draws attention to the role in Christ plays in Paul's theology and in his letter to the Philippians:

Paul sees clearly that Christ Jesus is the way God has made his love known and available to his human creatures. This is what the letter has ultimately been all about. It began "in Christ Jesus;" it now concludes "in Christ Jesus." Indeed, even the customary closing greetings focus on Christ Jesus. For Paul, "to live is Christ, to die is gain." Thus the final word in the body of the letter proper is this one, "every need of yours in keeping with the wealth that is in glory made available to you in Christ Jesus."³⁶

³⁶ Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, Kindle location 12935 ff.

O'Brien also expresses this well:

This concluding phrase, like the previous two, is to be taken with the verb πληρώσει (rather than with ἐν δόξῃ) and signifies either the sphere in which God's supplying takes place or, more likely, is instrumental and means 'through Christ Jesus.' Jesus Christ is the one through whom God's marvellous promise for the Philippians will be fulfilled.³⁷

Contrary to our desires and sometimes expectations, it is not our *wants* that God meets, but our *needs*, especially our spiritual and emotional needs. When I pray for God to bring healing to my physical body, which I believe he has the power to do, he sometimes does not necessarily respond in the manner that I want. However, when I pray for him to give me the strength to handle my illness, and for patience and faith to endure the trials of illness, even death, I believe that this is where God shines the brightest. *In Christ Jesus* I have all the assurance I need that God has always acted, since even before creation (Eph 2:3-11), with my best interest and needs foremost in mind.

Paul knew this from personal experience. He had some physical handicap that he had asked God many times to cure but God had a greater purpose in mind, Paul's spiritual and emotional needs. I am sure that you are already ahead of me and recall Paul's comment in this regard at 2 Cor 12:6 ff. In the context of discussing his many spiritual revelations and experiences Paul made the following truly remarkable comment I have set certain statements in bold for emphasis:

*Though if I wish to boast, I shall not be a fool, for I shall be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think more of me than he sees in me or hears from me.⁷ **And to keep me from being too elated by the abundance of revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to harass me, to keep me from being too elated.**⁸ **Three times I besought the Lord about this, that it should leave me;**⁹ **but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."** **I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.**¹⁰ **For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong.***

Paul's Closing Doxology: Phil 4:20

So profound is the last statement of Phil 4:19 that without anything more to say Paul bursts forth with praise for the glory of God. *To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

Note especially again Paul's personalization of the relationship with God. Not only his God, but also the Philippians; *our God*.

In Paul's letter to the Ephesians Paul argued that Christians have been called and destined since before the foundation of the world to be God's children in Christ and to so live their lives that they bring glory to God in Christ Jesus and the church (Eph 1:3-14). Now his final doxology to this he closes with a prayer that everything covered in the letter turns out to the glory of God.

To this he adds the traditional *amen*. Zodhiates observes:

The Greek ἀμήν, *amén*; is transliterated from the Hebr. *ʾāmēn* ... Amen, to be firm, steady, trustworthy. It is rendered also as "truth" (Is. 65:16, "God of amen;" Jer. 11:5, "So be it").³⁸

O'Brien sums up the discussion on the doxology and Amen well:

The spontaneous endorsement of this doxology is uttered in the ἀμήν ('amen, truly, so let it be') that follows. 'Amen' was said on solemn occasions in the OT to confirm a curse or adjuration, to accept a blessing, or to associate oneself with a doxology. Each of the doxologies that concludes the first four books of the OT psalter (Pss. 41:13; 72:19; 89:52; 106:48) ends with an ἀμήν, while prayers and doxologies in the NT are strengthened and endorsed by it. This 'Amen' makes it clear that Paul's ascription of praise is not simply a matter of the lips or of the 'pen,' but is the spontaneous response of his whole being. Elsewhere he

³⁷ O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, p. 549.

³⁸ Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*.

strikingly connects believers' response of ἀμὴν to the faithfulness of God, who has said 'Yes' to all his promises in Christ (2 Cor. 1:20).³⁹

Paul's Final Greetings: Phil 4:21-23

²¹ *Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren who are with me greet you. ²² All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household.*

²³ *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.*

Note again the mention of the *saints* (from ἅγιος, *hágios*) a specialized term for those who have been sanctified in Christ through His shed blood and their obedience in faith to the gospel of Christ. He opened the epistle with an emphasis on all who were saints, ¹ Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, *to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons*, and now he closes the epistle on the same note, *greet every saint*.

The fact that the term saint is a special term for those who have been cleansed by the blood of Christ and through this have been brought into a special relationship with God adds to the significant thought that the Philippians are saints and need to act like saints!

The remainder of this greeting includes those who are associated with Paul in his Roman experience even some in Caesar's household.

Paul closes with a prayer that the Philippians may experience the grace/favor of the lord Jesus Christ and that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ would be with them in the spirit, or innermost being, of their hearts.

Amen, and all praise to the glory of God in and through Jesus Christ!

Major points to learn from this lesson

- xxxxx
- vvvvv.

Discussion points from this lesson

- xxxx
- mmm

³⁹ O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, p. 550.