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A COMMENTARY

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ABBREVIATIONS

RV	Revised	Version
RSV	Revised	Standard Version 1952
AV	English	Authorised Version (King James)
Lightfoot	<i>Philippians.</i> (McMillan & Co.) By J.B.Lightfoot.	
Lenski	<i>Philippians.</i> (Augsburg Pub. House) By R.C.H.Lenski.	
Muller	<i>New London Commentary: Philippians.</i> (Marshall, Morgan and Scott) By J.J.Muller	
Beare	<i>Philippians.</i> (A. & C. Black) By F.W.Beare.	
Martin	<i>Philippians : Tyndale Commentaries,</i> (Tyndale Press) By R.P.Martin.	
Bengel	<i>Gnomen of the New Testament – Philippians</i> (T. & T. Clark) By J.A.Bengel	
Michael	<i>Philippians: Moffat Commentaries.</i> (Hodder and Stoughton) By J.H.Michael	

INTRODUCTION

Philippi was a city ten miles inland from the harbour city of Neapolis. Once an older city “Place of Fountains” it was transformed by Philip of Macedon (father of Alexander the Great) into a real city. In 42 BC a battle was fought here between the Second Triumvirate (Octavius, Antonius Lepidus) and the republicans of Rome under Brutus and Cassius, the latter being defeated and killed. Because of this victory Octavius made Philippi a colony, that is it had the status of Roman colonies in Italy. Its citizens therefore had all Roman rights – freedom from scourging etc. The city was governed by two officials.

Acts 16:8–40 tells the story of the founding of the church at Philippi. Lydia – the first convert was most liberal (v. 15) and assisted Paul and Silas. The same church sent gifts when Paul had to go on to Thessalonica (Phil. 4:15,16) and were in the churches mentioned in II Cor. 8:1–5. When Paul left Philippi (AD 52?) Luke seems to have stayed behind (the “we” section Acts 16:11–40 seems to stop here – and resumes again in Acts 20:5 when Paul again comes and leaves Philippi). Luke perhaps strengthened the church. Timothy too, may have stayed here for a short time (cf. 17:14). At Easter (58?) – (see Acts 20:4) Paul is returning from Philippi to Jerusalem with the collection. It seems from II Cor. 2:13 that Paul was in Philippi the previous summer when on his way to Corinth. It may even have been that Paul wrote his

second Epistle to the Corinthians at this place. It may have been that Timothy was four times in Philippi. Certainly Phil. 2:19–23 shows his deep connections with this church. The church then seems to have had helpful ministry, and so to have flourished.

I. AUTHORSHIP

The letter asserts that it is Paul (1:1). Generally speaking most scholars are happy to accept the Pauline authorship. Beare (A. & C. Black Commentary ad.loc.) suggests the letter is a composite of three

- (i) Interpolated fragment. 3:2–4:1
- (ii) Letter of thanks 4:10–20.
- (iii) Final Letter. 1:1–3:1, 4:2–9, 21–23.

Lenski says “The external evidence for the authenticity of Philippians begins as early as Polycarp and extends onward to Eusebius. The internal evidence is so overwhelming that only the most radical criticism has attempted to set it aside. This letter is so fresh, distinct, inimitable in every way that forgery is impossible. Any effort to divide this letter into two parts with a redactor welding the parts together, or to make this letter a forgery for an ulterior purpose, is obsolete the moment it is published. This judgment accords with that of many other writers, all of whom make short shift of the few radical critics. (Commentary. Wartburg Press p. 698). Mullet says “there is nothing in this letter linguistic or historical, which can cause any doubts as to its authenticity.” (p.14). Clemens Romans, Ignatius, Polycarp (in his letter to Philippi) Irenaeus allude to and quote this Epistle. Later Clemens Alexandrinus and Tertullian quote it liberally. It is also found in Marcion’s Apostolicon and in the Muratorian Canon.

Thiessen (*Intro. to NT* 3rd Ed. p.248) suggests four elements make the Epistle spurious (i) Traces of imitation. (ii) Ecclesiastical anachronisms (mention of bishops and deacons). (iii) “Echoes of agnostic ideas”–eg. the kenosis teaching. (iv) Doctrinal

differences from the recognised Epistles of Paul. It is doubtful whether any of these can be sustained on close examination.

2. PLACE AND OCCASION OF WRITING

This question is quite complex, Martin (Tyndale Commentary) gives 18 pages to the controversy as to whether it was written at (i) Rome, (ii) Caesarea or (iii) Ephesus. The question cannot be solved satisfactorily. Muller (New London Commentary) seems to give a clearer picture and suggests Rome fits the facts best. The whole tradition of the early church demands Rome, and the debatable expressions “praetorian guard” (Phil. 1:13) and “Caesar’s household” (4:22) are in favour of Rome. The guard was about 900 strong and it would take some time for him to be known, whereas at Ephesus or Caesarea he would be immediately known – with so small a guard. Muller adds that there were a number of preachers in the area, and such would not be in Ephesus or Caesarea at that time. His imprisonment, Paul claims, is in “defence and confirmation of the Gospel” and this seems to accord with a situation other than Ephesus or Caesarea for it has gone beyond even the last mention in Acts to a place of his possible execution (1:19,20, 2:17) or even acquittal – which possibilities we do not see in Acts. Such a judgment has him well under guard, and such a decision must take place (for a Roman citizen) in no less a place than Rome. The other suggestions, however are attractive, and have much to support them.

The **occasion of writing** is not quite so easily determined. A number of ideas have been put forward. (i) An appreciation of the love gift brought by Epaphroditus to the Apostle in captivity (Phil. 4:14, 18, 2:25). (ii) There was the problem of Judaisers (3:1f). (iii) There was the problem of the contentious women cf. 2:1f and 4:2f. (iv) The Philippians were anxious to have news of Paul, and he wanted to

give it to them. Whilst he returns news with the now recovered (formerly sick) Epaphroditus, he also promises to send Timothy at a future date. Probably we can assume that Paul was not writing for any one particular reason, but just because he wanted to write a letter to his church at Philippi and for the reasons which are seen in the above matters. The Epistle is in fact to inspire joy, and be a blessing to the recipients. Paul never looked for gifts, but in his prison situation was probably grateful, as needy.

3. SOME DOCTRINES OF THE EPISTLE

(a) Christ

Paul’s pronouncement of 1:21 – “for me to live is Christ” has been taken by some to be the theme of the Epistle. Firstly the fact of Christ is in experience. He says (4:13) “I can do all things in him who strengthens me.” 3:7 he counts all things but loss for the sake of Christ. cf. 1:29 “suffer for his sake.” 3:3 They “glory (only) in Christ Jesus.” The saints at Philippi are “in Christ Jesus” (1:1). There is the day of Christ (1:6); righteousness comes “through Christ Jesus” (1:11); there is the “Spirit of Christ Jesus” (1:19): the Gospel is the gospel of Christ Jesus (1:27); the call of God is in Christ Jesus (3:14): they look to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ (3:20) and the peace of God keeps their minds “in Christ Jesus.” He finally prays for the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ to be with their spirit (4:23). Thus there is no theology apart from experience. Secondly there is an explicit Christology. This is clear from Phil. 2:5–11. Yet even this is not so much dogmatic as devotional; not given to clarify a Christology as to encourage a right “mind.” We might conclude that the power of this Epistle lies in its spontaneous glorifying of Christ.

(b) Joy

“Its keynote is joy,” someone has said of this Epistle. In its verbal and noun forms it is found

sixteen times. Paul being in prison makes this more remarkable. Phrases such as “making requests with joy, I will rejoice (in tribulation)” 1:18 and context: “joy of faith”; “rejoice with you all”; “rejoice with me rejoice in Christ Jesus my joy and crown Rejoice always in the Lord; and again I say rejoice”: indicate his overflowing joy in his bonds even with impending death.

(c) The Life of the Believer

Paul is nowhere interested in the simply dogmatic as against the practical and devotional life. He is concerned that his spiritual children make *progression*. This is seen in 1:6 – an encouragement (God will complete what He has begun); 2:13 insists that God is working in us; 3:14f urges us on to new completion, and 3:1f shows that it is in Christ we move towards full fellowship. 4:4–6 speaks of a life lived in freedom from anxiety, 4:8–9 show a pattern for the mental life while 3:20–21 speak of the ultimate transformation of the body. Indeed death and life are (naturally enough) two themes clearly in Paul’s thinking. He faces both with equanimity – not Stoical but joyful.

(d) Fellowship

Paul longs that false doctrine (3:1f) shall not break the fellowship. 1:5 shows that the fellowship is in the Gospel. This is a phrase with broad meaning. 1:7 speaks of a sharing both in Paul’s suffering as well as his ministry. In 2:1 the fellowship is that of the Spirit and so may be in or with Him. The fellowship of His sufferings – 3:10 – is a fellowship which perhaps Paul longs to know for himself, but it can exclude others. Fellowship, then, in this Epistle has many facets. Although the word is not used continually Paul is longing for utter oneness at Philippi for this brings him joy (2:2 cf. 4:2–4). It is the fellowship that they have which makes him write so freshly.

(e) Eschatological Elements

As we mentioned above, Paul has some close concern with life and death. See 1:20–23, 3:10–11, 3:20–21 which speak of death and resurrection. See 1:10, 2:10,11, 2:16, 3:20–21f, 4:5 for the “day of Christ” or the judgment or the “transformation” into glory. These can be felt as a background to Paul’s joyful thought. It is clear that Paul’s (possibly) impending death is making him think seriously and joyfully upon the life to come. In none of this thinking does he show fear.

(f) Gospel

The word is found seven times (1:5,7,12,27, 2:22, 4:3,15). Paul is vitally concerned with the preaching of the Gospel. He is a prisoner for the Gospel’s sake – yet this very fact is inspiring many (with some doubtful motives) to preach. Timothy and others, including womenfolk have helped him directly, and others of the Philippians have helped in material ways.

ANALYSIS

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	4:1–3	Encouragements to steadfastness and unity: appreciation of service
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	4:10–20	Appreciation of the Philippians’ gifts
	4:21,22	Greetings
	4:23	Benediction

COMMENTARY

Address and Salutation

1:1–2 The opening is conventional – yet we ought not be deceived by its naturalness. First he designates Timothy and himself as slaves – this is a fact. He has no need to use the authoritative “apostle” as there is no doctrinal or discipline situation to be corrected. He addresses the “saints in Christ Jesus” – they are saints because are *in* Christ Jesus – not simply ethically, or morally but as separated to Him. The officials at Philippi are “bishops and deacons” – note the plural. Fifty years later Polycarp does not even refer to bishops but to presbyters and deacons, and we may assume that bishops and presbyters are probably the same. The word bishop is translated “overseer.” *Grace* and *peace* are lifted from the merely conventional. They are those qualities which come from (a) God our Father. (b) The Lord Jesus Christ. The source is the very fountain of God Himself. The concept of “our Father” coupled with the three meaningful words “Lord” “Jesus” “Christ” makes the salutation powerful.

Paul's Thanksgiving And Confidence

1:3 He is in spiritual health who is given to thanksgiving. Paul cannot remember them without thanking God for them. Some texts seem to indicate that his thanks is for their remembrance of him (Paul) in the Gospel, which may mean the gifts they had given him – in the Gospel. It is suggested that he had not thanked them – and they were not sure of his reception of the gifts and now he is reassuring. The first translation seems most like Paul.

1:4 “*supplication*” is a strong word in prayer – as he prays for *all*, i.e. the whole church – not just special ones. “*with joy*” – this is the authentic hall-mark of this Epistle. Paul’s being is filled with joy for these pleasing converts.

1:5 “*in the Gospel*” means “in the preaching or extension of the Gospel.” This is the work closest to Paul’s heart, and they have been sharing in this. “*until now*” means they have continued persistently in this ministry. II Cor. 8:7 and 8 show their generosity in Christ and their sincerity of love. A test of spiritual life is *gluing*. This is one of the last bastions to go – love of money for oneself. Lydia – first of converts set the pattern for giving and labouring when she invited the “team” to her house. We have to understand at the deeper level that in the early church evangelism was the natural action of the church.

1:6 “*hath begun a good work*” indicates that their fellowship and action is not simply giving assistance of gifts, but that the work of ministry is part of that which God will complete “till the day of Jesus Christ.” What is the *work*? surely the completion of their spiritual growth, resurrection and glorification which will all come at the day of Jesus Christ. Phil. 2:11f shows how Paul is thinking of things to come – *including* perfection and resurrection, and this he desires for them. His *confidence* is in God. God has initiated the work – He will complete it. “The day of Jesus Christ” is the day of Christ’s return – or the day of judgment. Paul sees the difficulties that face the Philippians (or believers generally) including persecution which demands the grace of continuance from God Himself.

1:7 This is a strong communication of his love and concern for them. “to think” is a strong phrase for “to feel.” He has them in his “heart” – a

strong, not effusive claim. (II Cor. 7:3, I Thess. 2:17)– “*Ye are all partakers of my grace*” means that they are one with Paul (as well as sharing practically) in his bonds, defence and confirmation of the Gospel. It may even mean that they side with him whether he is in prison or before the court for his part in the Gospel. In any case they are of the same spirit and demonstrate it to be so. This is what makes them dear to Paul’s heart. Had they rejected him in his shame (in prison) or in his *action* of standing by the Gospel, they could not have been in his heart – they would not have belonged to him. “*defence*” and “*confirmation*” (vindication) then, are strong terms.

An Apostolic Prayer

1:8 It is because of this that Paul longs for them. So far away they are, and he yearns for them. This in the “bowels” of Jesus Christ. The viscera were understood to be the seat of the emotions RV says “tender mercies” RSV “affection” is somewhat weak. “his pulse beats with the pulse of Christ; his heart throbs with the heart of Christ” – Lightfoot. Christ’s love is fully expressed in Paul himself. None of this is effusiveness, but the sincere experience of the Apostle.

1:9 “And this I pray” – “keep praying..” His love for them is concerned with their love. “more and more abound” – signifies that it is abounding – to some degree. He wants an increase, however, an indication that the measure of love is never enough – nor its abounding. However it is to abound in two things (i) Knowledge (ii) Judgment. Knowledge here is “full knowledge” Judgment is discernment or perception. *Love* (agape) is not easily gained – it needs the climactic experience as nominated in Romans 5:5, I John 4:19. Having been obtained it must be put to work – must increase, mature, develop – and in action. The purpose of this

1:10 that you may test (approve, prove in action, cf– Romans 12:2) “things that are excellent”. The testing is used of coins – you are to see what is spurious and what is *true*. If you see and prove the true then its result will be that you too will be sincere and “without offence.” Sincere here means “unadulterated, pure, true. A pure inner disposition will result in an outward manner of life (Rom. 14:13). “*without offence (stumbling)*” may mean (a) You may not stumble – or be hurt by the final testing or (b) You may not give another cause to stumble. When love expands in practice, this way, then it produces increasing discernment and inner sincerity.

1:11 “filled with the fruits of righteousness” or “bringing forth a *full harvest*.” Now, firstly, and so at that day. cf. Ephes. 5:9 and Gal. 5:22–23. This phrase really means so full as to fruit, that there is no room left for anything. Notice that this all springs from (developing) love. cf. I John 2:5. The *means* however is *Jesus Christ*. Paul brings them back to the *source* and *power*. It is on “*the day of Jesus Christ*” that they are to thus stand – “pure and blameless.”

Notice that none of this is to man’s praise, but to “the praise and glory of God.” This is the chief end of all man’s progress in Christ. So ends another of Paul’s great prayers.

Paul’s Great Ambition And Joy

1:12 This passage is really a report on the Apostle’s present situation and future prospects. The Philippians have been disturbed by what they have heard, or by lack of late news, and Paul is reassuring them.

(i) Unexpected results of his imprisonment

“*I want to inform you brethren.—*” By calling them brethren he shares intimately. He lets them know about “the things concerning me.” These concern the

working out of matters for the advancement of the Gospel. That is, obstructions are removed, and the Gospel is pressing forward, whereas human thinking would have seen only impediments to preaching.

1:13 Paul's bonds are "manifest" or "published" in all the palace. Not infamous, but famous! "In Christ" means – in connection with Christ. All know it is because of Christ that he is in bonds, but this is valuable as his suffering is seen to be because of Christ, and perhaps in fellowship with Christ. "palace" is (Gk) *praetorium*, and means not the palace of Caesar but the barracks of the guard.

1:14 The fame of his bonds – this is the first Christian to be so tried before Caesar – and brings the Gospel right to the doors of the palace encourages others. They are stimulated by Paul's joyful bearing of bonds, and go out, bravely to proclaim Christ. So – the value of bonds!

(ii) Motives – sincere and mixed

1:15 *Lenski*:– "All this gold of speaking the Word fearlessly Rome was not without alloy." Calvin:– "Paul says nothing here which I myself have not experienced." The question is – how could some preach Christ out of "envy and rivalry?" The answer is that pure preaching of the Gospel is impossible on such grounds as it is opposed to the inner nature of the Gospel. However this has been seen down through history, that *gifts* are used, but without love. Some have been jealous of St. Paul because of his fame – everywhere, and they wish to become more famous.

1:16–17 The RSV and others (rightly) transpose verses seventeen and sixteen, and so these two read this way – "also of good will – these latter out of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the Gospel, and the former, not sincerely, thinking they can raise up (more) affliction for my bonds.' It is

simply that church–history has borne out the terrible fact that preachers of the Gospel can act in rivalry. Jealousy here has made them want to hurt St. Paul. The contrast between the two groups of preachers – one who preaches from good–will – encouraged by Paul's example, the other by jealousy, covetous of Paul's fame, speaks of different motivation. Paul does not discuss the validity or otherwise of the factious ministry. Whilst there is "alloy" this does not cancel out the Gospel. Christ is preached – God works even through faulty instruments. This is the burden of

1:18 Paul does not resent their wrong desire to be something, nor condemn them. He is glad the *substance* of the message is preached. The point here is that Paul is not a small man in spirit, who will be hurt by their motives. They have misjudged him if they think he is such. Paul simply rejoices at the Gospel being preached. Purists might demand that the Gospel be preached from pure motives only. This may be rarer than we would think, and a sovereign God can use any preaching. This however does not excuse or encourage wrong motives.

(iii) Paul's dilemma, and confidence, in life and death

1:19 Paul's continuing joy breaks through here. He is certainly under *pressure* both from his imprisonment, and also from his enemies in the church. However this pressure is not to be regarded as a calamity. His *salvation* will come. This may be (a) From judgment in the Roman court, or (b) Eternal salvation. From verse 6 we find a similar thought. "Your prayers" is not a conventional statement. Paul's own prayers (eg– Ephes. 1:15f, 3:15f) are always tremendous. On the other hand Paul always asks for his converts prayers (eg. Rom. 15:30, Col. 4:3, Ephes. 6:18f). "The supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ." This word supply is used in Ephes. 4:16 and II Pet.

- 1:5** (AV “add”). Paul is conscious of the supply of the Spirit Who communicates Christ to him in his time of dire need. In this way he is AS Christ (v.21 “for me to live is Christ”). Cf. Rom. 12:11, Ephes. 5:18 for the “supply” continually drawn upon. The phrase “for my salvation” some see to link with Job. 13:16 and the whole situation of Job.
- 1:20** “earnest expectation” is “eager expectation.” It has the sense (Muller ad.loc.) “looking forward to something with head erect, yearningly.” “hope” of course is a “fixed assurance,” not witty or wishful thinking. Paul is *sure*. “Hope maketh not ashamed” (Rom. 5:5). The thought is in the passive – that Paul will not be *shamed* rather than *ashamed*. He is sure that everything will work out so that Christ will be glorified. If that were not so, then he, Paul would be shamed. He wishes Christ to be honoured. For his part he will be bold (parrhesia), the word being a strong one. He may be delivered (bodily) or he may die, but his firm confidence is that Christ will be magnified. Shaftesbury – “Perish all things so that Christ be glorified!”
- 1:21** This beautiful sentence has riches in meaning. Briefly Paul means “Living for me is Christ; to live, therefore will be to Christ’s glory, that is, if I am spared death (by the Roman court) my living will be to His glory, for this is the way that ever it is. To die will mean His glory also (by my kind of death), and this will be a gain (for His glory). It will be a gain for me. Whilst I am living it is Christ. When I die it is *Christ*. Death will not exclude from Christ, but include me in a deeper way.” Paul is not seeking an escape, selfishly, but recognises whilst one lives in Christ that death or life make no difference, except that death brings (cf.3:11) full resurrection.
- 1:22–23** The actual order in the Greek shows some agitation of Paul’s mind:– “But if to live in the

flesh (is) to me fruit of work, and what I shall choose I do not make known.” He is saying “my living in the flesh will produce fruit from my labours – for me.”

He is pressed, not knowing what to choose. In verse twenty three he admits his desire to depart and *be with Christ*. “be with Christ” does away with the idea of a time of waiting before one is united with Christ. It is *now*. This thought – “to be with Christ” is “much rather better.” “in a strait” employs the same word “constraint” as in II Cor. 5:14. It speaks of two strong forces pressing him (a. to live in Christ. b. to die and be with Christ.)

- 1:24** The objective fact before him makes it clear. His own subjective desires press him fearfully. Yet it is better for their sakes to remain. We have to remember (as seen in Acts and the Pauline Epistles) that Paul has battled for the Gentiles and the true idea of the church. He has loved the church at Philippi.
- 1:25** He shows why he will remain – “for the advancement of you and joy about the faith..” It is clear that Paul suddenly sees the matter as resolved. There is a lightness and a strength in his speech. Perhaps at this very point he has received a revelation of the future. He seems assured he is right. It is fairly certain that he did live on, and that after freedom was again imprisoned, after which he writes differently – see II Tim. 4:6–8. However there is nothing of this note here. Is it that the “supply of the Spirit of Christ” has given him new assurance at this point? If so then he wishes to give a similar “progress and joy in the faith” to them.
- 1:26** The word “rejoicing” here is really “boasting” or “glorying” (nn. “boast”) of the same root as Gal. 6:14. It speaks of a sheer glorying which of course they would have if Paul were to come to them again.

Exhortation and Example

(i) Exhortation to unity and courage in the face of hostility, the enemy outside

1:27 Verses 27–30 are a clear admonition, and indeed this admonition continues to 2:18. The word only carries the meaning “moreover” (cf. Gal. 3:2). He persists in prison – let them persist in freedom. The Gospel is a high calling, a worthy standard. Let them not fall below it. “Gospel of Christ” uses the genitive of *origin*. It is the Gospel which calls us to live highly – not legalistic demand. Paul assumes this. Thus whether he comes or not, hears or not they will be so living. This will be in *oneness* (cf. 2:1f). The words “spirit” and “mind” are “pneuma” and “psyche” but they are not used technically, simply as a figure of close unity as in Acts 4:32. However this “oneness” is not light, nor to be despised. The RSV translates “striving side by side” from the Gk. “striving together.” “For the faith of the Gospel” implies that the Gospel or the faith is being attacked.

1:28 Here the opponents are shown to be in action. The Philippians are not to be terrified by opposition. That is they are to maintain their principles of the Gospel calmly. The opponents then will be disturbed, because their standing fast will be a proof to them of their destruction. They cannot defeat God. This destruction Thayer says “consists in the loss of eternal life, in eternal misery, perdition.” On the other hand the saints are seen to have salvation, for God has given them this, and they are calm in it.

1:29 Belief is not enough. Belief will entail suffering because of the very nature of the Gospel. The suffering is for *Christ’s sake*. Gk. “huper” means “on behalf of.” This is a glorious privilege granted to believers. “it is given” might be translated “it is graced.” Suffering is a precious gift, not a thing to be accepted fearfully but gratefully.

1:30 Paul is suffering. They know his various enemies. He knows their’s– Perhaps they were Judaisers. It is not known. But there is a common suffering in the Gospel because of a common conflict–They had seen Paul suffer (Acts 16:19ff) and now they hear of his suffering– Let them take courage from the fact that they are both in the same struggle.

CHAPTER TWO

(ii) Exhortation to harmony and humility in the face of factiousness, the enemy within

- 2:1** The four “ifs” contain four motives, or powers for true action. They are (i) Admonition, exhortation encouragement. Notice the “in Christ.” That is, “derived in Christ, or being from Christ.” The word *exhortation* means *an urge to right action*. You cannot live in Christ and not have such an urge. “In Christ” is not merely emotional and mystical, but alive and dynamic. (ii) Any consolation (solace) of love. Well, there is this “comfort” of love. This will bind the body together. This is the love of which Paul has been speaking. (iii) “Any fellowship of the Spirit.” This too is a dynamic situation. Exegetes differ in the meaning of the phrase. Is it “the Spirit’s fellowship” i.e. He initiates and controls it? Is it “fellowship *in* the Spirit” or even “participation in the Spirit?” It might even be “fellowship of spirit,” i.e. that fellowship which is not just human but spiritual. All these amount to the one thing such fellowship obtains, and is a mighty dynamic for a people divided, to bring them together. Where the Spirit is free, there is fellowship, and in depth and in power. (iv) “Any compassions and pities.” This is the tenderness, affection, sympathy – a warm human sympathy that is not just a logically ethical rightness. These four things – what they can accomplish!
- 2:2** “Fulfil ye my joy.” Paul has no joy, but in seeing a church utterly one-minded, and shar-

ing the sheer joys of full fellowship. Indeed joy is always hindered by division, and dulled by a refusal to go on to fulness of unity. “like-minded” – having one mind (for one thing); “having the same love” (mutual love) – as above (v.1); “being of one accord,” i.e. “being one in spirit (mind).”

This is a rich oneness. All are one, having one thing in mind.

- 2:3** Here Paul uses two words (i) *Rivalry* (epitheian) See Gal. 5:20, Phil. 1:17. Rivalry (partisanship) can be in Philippi. (ii) *Vainglory*, literally “empty glory.” This is “hollow.” These are the wrong motives – not those of V.1! “On the contrary” (*alla* – but) we are to, *with* “due lowly-mindedness” (with = dative of means) to deem others surpassing ourselves. Greek thought despised self-abnegation. “Lowliness” was looked upon as unmanly. To esteem others beyond yourself was folly. But this is the folly of love! When *all* do this, then none is inferior.
- 2:4** This impossible matter of esteeming others above one is shown in the practical outworking, that is in lack of self-assertion, in lack of self-consideration, but having a positive outlook to and for others. All of this of course is foreign outside of the soil of *agape*, and anything that is not as this is foreign to the soil of *agape*. It is not a high ethic to be reached, but the innate ethic of *agape* to be outlived. It is only real and realistic in the realm of the four elements of V.1.

(iii) The supreme example

- 2:5** It is from here, beginning with verse five and going on to verse eleven that Paul gives this beautiful hymn of Christ, humiliated, then glorified, to become (fully) the Lord of all Creation. One may here comment on the calmness and the cadence of this beautiful hymn. We must nevertheless remember that it was not written deliberately to give some Christology

as such, but to illustrate (even demonstrate) the kind of mind or disposition that the Philippians needed. If they were to have the fellowship and unity that Paul desired (and which it seemed, they needed) then they must “think” as, or have the “mind” of, Christ. Beare translates V. 5 “Let this be the disposition that governs in your common life, as is fitting in Christ Jesus.” The translation is literally “This think ye among you which (was)also in Christ Jesus.” “Think” is translated as “keep minding.” Lenski translates it “This keep minding in your case (the thing) which (appears) also in Jesus Christ’s case.” The sum total is that Paul calls for the same mind, disposition, thought, attitude which was Christ’s – for this they need amongst themselves.

2:6 “Who in the form of God subsisting.” The verb “subsisting” (huparchón) is an imperfect participle and denotes continued action. The RV (margin) translates “being originally.” “He was subsisting, and he deemed etc.” gives the sense of his pre-temporal existence (cf. Rom. 8:3, I Cor. 10:4, II Cor. 8:9, Gal. 4:4). “form of God”.. Here Paul is scarcely likely to be talking of philosophical (Greek) ideas. He is not, then, talking about an abstract essence, nor an external appearance of God, but *His divine nature*. (Muller, ad. loc.) One idea (see Martin, Tyndale Comm.) is that *glory* and *form* are related, and here is a contrast between the original Adam (who had God’s glory) and this second Adam (who is God’s glory), Adam seeking God’s glory for himself (when tested), Christ doing the opposite. (See II Cor. 4:4, Col. 1:15). “*Thought it not robbery*” i.e. “deemed it not a thing to be grasped at.” What does he not wish to “grasp at?” The answer is “to be equal with God” or “existence in a manner equal to God.” The question is “*Was* he equal with God?” The answer is “Yes”. Being in the “form” of God means he does not reach to *attain* equality. He has it. What is clear here is that there is a contrast of “*form of God*” with “*form of a servant*” (V. 7). Equality with

God is not rejected, in fact it remains. Since Paul is pointing to the Philippians to learn humility he takes this humbling by Christ of himself as the great example. The subsisting *form* of Christ’s glory is not negated by his becoming a slave – on the higher level we say “to the contrary,” but his glory was not “a booty ever to be exhibited” (Lenski). “If such had been the consideration on which Christ Jesus acted when he assumed his human nature, he could never have carried out the work of redemption for which he assumed his human nature. His great mission and office and the consideration of his equality with God as a prize for display could never be combined.” (Lenski – ad. loc.).

2:7 “But” (alla – “to the contrary”) emptied himself. There is the emphatic “himself” (heauton). Cf. II Cor. 8:9 and II Cor. 5:21. The change is not static but positive, and purposive. We need to look at the word “*emptied*.” It is from this word that the *Kenosis* theory of Christ’s “self-emptying” has arisen. This says that Christ has diminished his deity or his attributes, or his glory. Calvin says he emptied himself of “his majesty and glory” and Lightfoot says “...of the glories, the prerogatives of deity.” God’s nature, on any score is immutable,. He cannot – in the sense of his attributes empty himself. The diminishing of one attribute destroys his deity, which is absurd. (See Fairweather’s Appended note in Beare’s Commentary on Philippians – A. & C. Black). The answer must be sought in Paul’s explanation. “He took the form of a slave” – this is the how of kenosis. His “form” of God is not lost, but not expressed in the ineffable sense, by his becoming a slave. This being a slave is linked with “becoming in likeness to men” (“He got to be in men’s likeness”). He subjected himself (became a slave) to all that to which man was subject. His glory was not cancelled, but hidden under his humanity. The Transfiguration makes that apparent.

Perhaps, here too, the thought of his subjection to law (cf. Gal. 4:3-4, Col. 2:8,20) and those elements to which man is subject are included.

It is best not to think of his humble estate as Mary's child, or any such thing. The contrast is between his exercised Lordship, and his voluntary "exile" state. "In the likeness of men" may have reference to the thought of Romans 8:3 "Likeness of sinful flesh" although probably here there is no reference to moral quality. We must understand "servant" as a powerful concept. eg. Mark 10:45, and probably the concept of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah. To be in the "shape" of a man is no little thing. It is breathtaking when we think of the Logos becoming part of his creation, and subject to its laws.

2:8 "being found in human form" The word "form" here is better translated "fashion" – the outward scheme of a man. His humanity is real, not docetic. He was not just like a man. "He humbled himself." How? By becoming man? No – by dying. Some commentators, then, find the humiliation of Christ not in the *incarnation* but the *crucifixion*. It may not be possible to resolve this, except to say that the *incarnation* is with a view to the *crucifixion*. It is after he is found in fashion as a man that he is said to humble himself. If this points to the Suffering Servant, then he is not servant just for the sake of humility, but for the sake of humanity. He is "*obedient unto death.*" The word *obedient* must refer to some *command* – cf. John 10:17-18, 14:30-31 where Christ is commanded. It is a command with a view to a death. The *death* however is a humiliation for all men, let alone the Incarnate One. This degree of humiliation cannot be imagined. Added to this, then, is the "*death of the Cross.*" This is humiliation of the lowest kind. Cf. Gal. 3:13, I Cor. 1:23, Gal. 5:11. This is a scandal. Yet he voluntarily goes to this extent. Gal. 2:20 – "gave up himself for me (to death)" It accords with Isaiah 53:12 – "He poured out his soul

unto death." Death has to be seen as redemptive Heb. 2:14-15 cf. Heb. 2:9. Paul does not give a rationale of the death here because he is concerned with the humbling as a lesson to the readers. As to death he could have evaded this – with twelve legions of angels. His obedience is better seen in that he goes down into it positively. Isa. 53 gives a full picture of such submissive humility.

2:9 "*Wherefore*" It is clearly on the basis of his humility that he is exalted. His humility is in incarnation and crucifixion. God exalts him – even here he does not exalt himself. Rom. 14:9 shows that the purpose of his death and resurrection was Lordship – of the dead and the living. Humiliation results in exaltation, and being a servant (slave, *doulos*) he becomes the Lord. "Highly exalted" of course points to supremacy (cf. Ephes. 1:19-end.) This is confirmed by the phrase "granted to him the Name, the one above every name." This name is *Kurios* – the name above all. Note, however, that Paul has established the principle that humiliation leads to exaltation. Cf. Matt. 18:4, 23:12, Luke 14:11, 18:14, II Cor. 11:7, Phil. 4:12.

2:10 "in order that" (*hina*) The Name is given with a purpose. Christ now has authority over the entire universe. This is not an experiment in humiliation, but a plan fulfilled – he's Lord over the dead and the living – every sphere is under his sway – the MAN Christ Jesus – not just the Eternal Logos as such. Beings heavenly, earthly and subterranean are under his sway. It is victory! The first Adam covets the glory of God – thinks it to be a thing to be snatched at. The Second Adam covets none of this glory – and in abasement, wins, as *man* the moral victory over all powers. "All authority is given unto me, both in heaven and earth" (Matt. 28:18).

2:11 "*Every tongue*" – it does not mean that the confession is a glad one – simply that all will

be forced to acknowledge – and fully, that he is Lord. Yet this confession does not end here. It is all to the glory of the *Father*. It is not just the ministry of the Servant, but of the Son. The Father is the initiator, both of the humiliation and the exaltation. Ultimately this glory of the Son ministers to the Father for it reveals Him as the Divine Initiator. Ultimately all history climaxes in the glory of the Father.

Conclusion. These eleven verses commenced with Paul's insistence upon the power contained with the four motives (V.1). Paul wants his converts to esteem others better than themselves – to think not on their own things, but the things of others. To this end he gives the glorious hymn of Christ's humiliation. Martin (Tyndale comm.) says "The Old Testament, we believe provides the most intelligible background to these verses. The two concepts which are most likely to underlie the Apostle's thought are the teaching concerning Adam, and the Son of Man doctrine as modified in our Lord's own teaching, by the acceptance of the role of the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah's prophecy. His existence in the divine form, and his refusal to grasp at equality with His Father find their parallel in the story of the first man and his temptation. The obedience, humiliation and exaltation of the Lord are foreshadowed in the picture of the suffering Servant of Isaiah 52–53. It is this fusion of ideas . . . which gave to the early Christian community . . . this noble presentation. It is the record of the pre-existent, humiliated and glorified Lord who is ever the Object of the Church's worship and the destined Ruler of all created life." (p.109). Whatever may be the inner meaning of this great passage – the *purpose* of its writings was to point to the deep and powerful truth of true humility – true thinking on the things of others. The result – the Lordship of all life, is a Powerful reminder that humility is not abject living, but the source of true power. The Greek stoical ideas,

or the elevation of humanity as godlike in power are rejected for the intimate truth of true humility.

(iv) Exhortation applied, and the example of Paul

2:12 From 1:27 to this point Paul has been exhorting them to unity. Having closed that section of exhortation, he nevertheless uses the example of Christ's *obedience* (ie. unto death) for their situation. "You also," he says "obey." This church has always obeyed Paul – present and (now – he trusts) in his absence. Calling them "beloved" gives, of course a warmth and an encouragement. "*work out your salvation*" – in the light of all that Paul has said cannot mean "You are capable of earning your salvation through working." Ephesians 2:8–10, Gal. 2:16 etc. give the lie to this. The plural "You" makes it clear that it is a corporate situation. The division is what concerns Paul, and he is urging them to work out the situation to a good end. In any case they can only work out what God has wrought in them – "if there be any consolation in Christ...etc." Some commentators quote Deut. 32 especially vs. 1–5 and suppose it refers to a parallel – that the Philippians must beware lest they enter in with pride and not with humility – "fear and trembling." In any case fear and trembling are the two things which should characterise a man – not an easy presumption that the desired goal is inevitable. This fear keeps awe alive, and gives no entrance to spiritual pride, complacency or arrogance.

2:13 Monergism (one working) which *brings* salvation requires a humble participation by the believer. Salvation is in three tenses – always having an eschatological flavour. A practical synergism is required. They will always be dependent upon God, however – He works in them. On this basis they can "work out" their salvation. "This powerful inward working of God affects both the will and the work, the *decision of the will* and the practical deed. To will

and to do is the fruit of God's work in the believer for the sake of and towards the execution of God's good pleasure." (Muller ad. loc.). If God does not work within the will is impotent. If He works the deed will be fulfilled, i.e. salvation, the full relationships of love which Paul calls for.

2:14 "Without murmurings and disputings." As we go on in the Epistle we begin to see the variance at Philippi is not superficial. It concerns Paul, and he is determined to destroy it. Murmurings and disputings are probably not against God because of the process of "working out" salvation with its accompanying fear and trembling, but simply the personal relationships which are deficient. "Strife and vainglory" can easily give cause for such murmurings. The word "disputings" can even mean "litigation," and this we know (law-cases) was taking place at Corinth when Paul wrote. In any case self-assertiveness (as against voluntary self-humiliation) is in order. The murmurings and disputings are clearly a reference to Israel – again a corporate situation see I Cor. 10:10 (Num. 14 cf. Exod. 16:7, Num. 11:1).

2:15 The refusal to have murmurings etc. brings a lovely result. They will be *blameless* – "irreproachable, living a life at which no finger of criticism may be pointed." – and *harmless* (as "doves" – Matt. 10:16) (simple and concerning evil – Rom. 16:19). It means *innocent* – *guileless*. A Greek version of Song of Songs (5:2, 6:9) "my dove, my undefiled. "without blemish" i.e. without rebuke – "free from blemish" i.e. grumblings – disputings etc. The contrast is with "a crooked and perverse generation (nation)" cf. Acts 2:40, Matt. 17:17. (A.S. Way) "a society morally warped, spiritually perverted." If the church murmurs etc. – how then will it differ to the society without? The contrast to the world's darkness is *light*. Paul says they are shining as *lights*. The word is "luminaries" or *stars*. This shows the blackness of the world. Dan. 12:3 (LXX) "they that are wise shall shine as stars" – same word as here. This whole matter of

bearing light is important in Scripture cf. Matt. 5:14–16 I Thess. 5:5, Ephes. 5:8. Christ must not simply be the Light – all light must not be left to Him! The perverse generation is, of course active against light.

2:16 "Holding forth the word of life." It may even mean "holding fast" and if so, then as light it will mean "holding forth" i.e. communicating the Word. The Word is not the New Testament as such – as there was none. The Word was precious because there was communication of it through God's people. That is why action of life is so important. That is to "hold fast" to the word of life. Paul then goes on to say he does not want to be ashamed of them on the day of Christ. He wants it to be clear that they have so lived that his labour will not have been in vain. Since they love him, this is a high motive to which he can appeal – for their utter oneness together. The metaphors of the athletic stadium and the weaver's workroom are clear enough. A tragedy to run or work in vain.

2:17 This may be paraphrased "Yes, and if it should happen that my life-blood, so to speak is poured out upon the sacrifice and offering which your faith means to God..then..." (Phillips). He means "The libation (drink offering) which is poured out to the Deity in honour ritual, if that should be myself poured out (be soon executed) on the sacrifice and offering of your faith (your faith has already been expressed in many sacrifices as you have offered yourself up) then I will that I shall be full of joy in doing so." Paul means that he is one with them, and that in fact he will not have laboured in vain if his sacrifice can accompany theirs.

2:18 Paul is saying "I rejoice with you all; so you too, rejoice in the same way with me!"

Future Plans

(i) The commendation of Timothy

- 2:19** Seems clearly to link with verse 12. Whilst Paul is not with them nevertheless he will send Timothy. Timothy, of course was well known to the Philippian church. I Thess. 3:2, I Cor. 4:17, 16:10, show that Timothy had been Paul's emissary before. Paul, it seems, would let them know the trial's outcome, but his love is such as he wants, mainly to know their condition. This letter Paul is writing, comes to the Philippians, of course, with Epaphroditus. Is this one, then, not enough? Verse 20 shows that Timothy's mission is different. Epaphroditus goes to them (v.25), Timothy *for* them (v. 21–22).
- 2:20** Paul does not say he has no one else, but no one with the qualities like those of Timothy. The word “naturally” means *sincerely*, or *genuinely*.
- 2:21** shows the deficiencies of those at Rome – near him, were not so much that they cared *nothing* for Christ as they did not care enough – they let their own interests interfere with the things of Christ. Paul feels strongly the spirit that wants its own. cf. v.4.
- 2:22** Acts 16:1f, 19:22, 20:4 etc. show from the three times Timothy had been with the Philippians of what calibre he is. They know he has “stood the test.” Anyone who could go along with Paul had stood tests! Also he proved himself a son of his (spiritual) father Paul, and a son to his father. He was a slave, serving Paul, father, a slave of Christ; Timothy a slave.
- 2:23–24** When the trial is clear in its verdict Paul hopes to send Timothy. His “how it will go with me” means “the outcome of the present situation” i.e. “life or death.” *In the Lord* he is confident that he also will soon be able to come. We must remember that the Philippians would be awaiting the outcome, eagerly.

(ii) The commendation of Epaphroditus

- 2:25** 4:18 shows us that Epaphroditus was sent as the bearer of a gift by the church at Philippi. The phrases used of him – “brother,” “fellow-worker,” “fellow soldier” are descriptive of his relationship to Paul. He had been sent as the messenger or “apostle” of the church, to Paul that he could be the minister to Paul's needs.
- 2:26** The terms used of Epaphroditus rank him highly. His love for the church at Philippi tells of his sterling quality. He was worried because they were worried over him. The journey from Rome was some 800 miles, and it would be difficult to get news.
- 2:27** It was true that Epaphroditus had been ill –and close to death. God had delivered him, and this had been a relief to Paul. He no doubt was sympathetic at his brother's worry over being unable to discharge fully the mission given to him – to minister to Paul.
- 2:28** Paul therefore sends him as soon as possible after his recovery. They are not to think that Epaphroditus has come prematurely – before Paul's release from prison, but to see this as Paul's contribution to their relief and joy. It could be possible that since he is with Paul “a brother, fellow-worker and soldier” and cares so deeply for them that he assist in bringing to fulness that fellowship which alone will bring joy.
- 2:29–30** They are to welcome Epaphroditus with all joy (gladness), because he is worthy of it. He is to be honoured because he risked his life for them to supply Paul with what they had sent him. We do not know what the “risk” was. It may have been the sickness (v.27) or even the dangers of travel – we do not know. The picture of Epaphroditus is a strong character study and his return to Philippi was to be a tremendous occasion.

CHAPTER THREE

The Great Digression

The “finally” of v.1 should not deceive us into thinking Paul is about to close the letter. 4:8 also uses this phrase, and 4:10 was obviously a verse (thought) he intended to include. The substance, then, of this chapter is quite significant.

(i) Paul’s warning and claim

- 3:1** After what Paul has told them he calls on them to rejoice. (cf. 2:18, 4:4, 1:4,8,25). They have their struggles, there are problems – his and theirs, but there is no need to despair – faith rejoices. This is not all; he has to write other things – as below. He does not find it “boring” and he knows it will warn them – keep them safe.
- 3:2** Note the hammer–strokes “Beware..dogs! Beware ...evil workers! Beware..the mutilation! The menace of the Judaisers appears on the scene. One is tempted to think their pernicious influence had caused the division in fellowship at Philippi. Probably it was not so. “Dogs” i.e. scavenging (Judaising) dogs seeking to gather Christians in their prowling. “Evil workers mutilators” refer to their defiling of the Pure doctrine of justification, and then of demanding circumcision – all this is seen in the Epistle to the Galatians.

- 3:3** *The True Circumcision.* cf. Rom. 2:25–29, Col. 2:11 – who have “circumcision of the heart.” All who believe in Christ have undergone the true circumcision. They worship in the Spirit of God. “We” of course includes the Philippians. “Worship God in the spirit” means “worship by the Spirit of God.” Paul does not amplify this – but it is meant to oppose “worship by the flesh” i.e. by circumcision that is material. That is, not just by forms, but by the impulse of the Spirit – linked with the new freedom through the Spirit. “Glory in Christ Jesus” is clearly salvation, and not Judaistic demands. “Have no confidence in the flesh” – that is trust is in the Spirit and in Christ Jesus – flesh – whether the act of circumcision or “human confidence” is rejected,

(ii) Paul’s autobiography

(a) His Jewish inheritance

- 3:4–6** “The flesh” is now described. It is all that human pride is based on, and on which it boasts. Look at the procession! (Judaisers do this kind of boasting and Paul – in irony – outboasts them). Correct circumcision. Fine genealogy. “Hebrew of the Hebrews” i.e. Hebrew–speaking, and racially pure. “A Pharisee” – not a word of vilification in Paul’s day, but a high religious honour! His understanding of the law was such as a Pharisee understood. It was his zeal as a Pharisee which made him persecute the church. Romans 10:1–3 describes the former Saul of Tarsus – ablaze with the doctrine of works–justification, he was aroused to “holy” zeal to destroy the purveyors of justification! “touching the righteousness of the law...blameless–” That is he had outwardly kept all its commandments. He had not understood the inner meaning – but he had done perfectly according to the standards of the Judaisers – they could not have done better! Paul lacks nothing in this list of the “flesh.” From a Jewish point of view it was no mean

attainment. It is only when we remember that he is attacking the Judaisers, either by showing himself to have had more zeal than they, or by so warning his converts against them, if they had not already come, that we realise the intensity of Paul's former *religious* zeal and fervour. If he had lacked this or been one who indulged in *novelties* religiously or theologically, then they would have weapons to destroy him. Acts 26:9–12 shows the intensity and dreadful nature of his former opposition – his fierce inner drive for “righteousness.” Against this the Judaisers can say nothing, as they are not even non-Christians.

(b) His past renunciation; present aim and future hope

3:7 The balance in the following verses is delicate. Paul is not saying he has weighed up the merits of the things “of the flesh” – i.e. race, genealogy, law-righteousness etc. and has found them to be outweighed by what he receives in Christ so that he surrenders the things of the past – no! He insists on the fact that the past was a deterrent to finding the “excellency of the knowledge..etc.” Far from advancing him in any way they had retarded him. Far from being valuable cargo to be retained they are dangerous and destructive. Rom. 10:1–3 shows the terrible *drive* of self-righteousness. Note the word “counted” – a perfect, indicating present experience of a past act.

3:8 Note the present “I count.” He emphasises everything as “loss.” It is to be noted that these things in themselves – genealogy, race etc. were not evil. When we remember Paul is in prison then the words have power. The motivation is “the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.”

No better translation can be made. The knowledge is saving and personal. He KNOWS Christ. He is however “*my* Lord.” His knowledge is not a casual one or a knowledge about – he is submitted to his Lord, knows Him in *salvation* and *submission*. The *proof* (Judaisers please note!) is that he *has* suffered the loss of *all* things. He has no regrets; these things are *dung* i.e. offal, or the refuse (skubala) thrown out of eastern cities and fit only (ironically enough) for dogs. They had been hindrances to his coming to Christ.

3:9 “that if I might gain Christ” seems strange. He *has* gained Christ. Yes, but his rejection of the past must remain *firm*. The Epistle to the Galatians shows how a man can slip back into law and so lose Christ (cf. Gal. 5:1f). *Law-righteousness* Paul rejects. Calvin: “Faith offers naked man to God.” i.e. man has nothing to offer God. It is interesting that Paul goes back to the beginning again, and stresses *faith-righteousness*. It can be summed up (Bonnard) “to be in Christ means nothing less than having the righteousness which comes from God.” This is the theme of Romans 3:19–5:1. “The righteousness derived from God on the basis of faith.” (Rom. 1:17). Notice then as we see verse 10 that *experience* of Christ is based upon justification by faith.

3:10 Paul has suffered the loss of all things to *gain* Christ, and also (v.10) to *know* him. He knows but would know. The knowledge (gnosis) comes in three elements – (i) *Power of his resurrection*. This has many elements: *justification* (with its dynamic) Rom. 3:24. *New Life* Col. 2:11f. “made alive with him” (Ephes. 2:5,6, Rom. 6:4). *Freedom from death*–

fear and flesh. (Rom. 8:11f). However mainly *salvation* – Rom. 10:9. Christ by *his* resurrection is alive from the dead. Man is redeemed. Man is saved. Yet also it is the power of a living risen Christ *within* (Col. 1:27) and giving his life (Rom. 5:10). Resurrection power is dynamic – Ephes. 1:19f. Paul knows him *in* and *by* this power. (ii) *Fellowship of his sufferings.* No one can be united to Christ by faith (baptism), and share with him in his life and not suffer. Cf. II Tim. 1:12, Rom. 8:17f, II Cor. 4:10 etc. It is suffering *for* Christ, *because* of Christ, *with* Christ. Principally you can only know in sharing, and to *know* Christ is just to do this. It is not the *price* of knowing him but the *way* of knowing him. Also see Matt. 5:11,12, 20:22, John 15:19–21, II Cor. 1:5, Col. 1:24, I Pet. 4:13, Phil. 1:29. (iii) *Being conformed to his death.* Stephen (Acts 7:54–60) evidenced this manner of death. Indeed Paul may have these three points in mind from that (indelible) incident upon his mind. If we have *gone down into death* (in co–crucifixion) then we ought now to go down in every situation. Cf. *I John 3:16f.* Whilst this may well mean “death to sin” and indeed all evil, it also means a willingness to reproduce the “mind of Christ” in every situation “even unto death.” However it is not the “shema” – i.e. *outward form* but *morphe* i.e. inward essence. If the present participle is a *middle* i.e. “conforming myself” then the striving for this “form” is on Paul’s part, and his intention. If it is a *passive* “being conformed” (the most probable) then it means that all things are patterning him into the pattern of Christ’s death.

3:11 The *motivation* behind the 3 elements above is “resurrection out of the dead.” That is he longs for a *full resurrection* – cf. *Gal. 6:7f.* How he is now in resurrection power, suffering, and death–

conformity will determine *what* his resurrection will be in *morphe* (form and essence). To be united with Christ must mean growing in conformity with him. Resurrection can only show or reveal this. This makes every action of life significant. Notice the phrase “Somehow” or “if by any means.” Paul does not take resurrection for granted. It is a moral and ethical spur to him.

3:12 This emphasises the perfection after which Paul longs and strives – full resurrection. He has been apprehended for this – this is the goal of Christ taking him (and anyone for that matter), and he has not yet attained to that. He has not yet been perfected. He *presses On* to *lay hold of* that for which Christ laid hold of him. The verse contains a lot (i) The process begins with Christ taking hold of him. Notice that human initiative and initial effort is absent. (ii) The goal is perfection or fulness or fulfilment (resurrection from the dead). (iii) Christ began the work – Paul must press on in it.

3:13 Paul is sure that he has not yet attained perfection – a good word to those who think they have – but he is stretched out to reach the things before. He has to forget the “things which are past” perhaps the “things that were gain,” as well as (in Christ) the things already gained. Nothing must ever let him rest – as one on his oars – or one running in a race, thinking he has arrived...”stretching out goalward to those (things) in front.”

3:14 tells us what it is for which he presses on – “the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” What is that? His calling or vocation. What is that – “called to be saints,” or his glorification with Christ in heaven (cf. II Tim. 4:8, Rev. 2:10). He, then is not concerned primarily with his own things, or even his present activity so much as the end of it. He is tensed towards the end. This hope draws him on powerfully – as a magnet the steel. See also II Thess. 1:11, Hebrews 12:1,2.

(iii) Paul’s call for unity in conviction and conduct

3:15 Now Paul remembers his beloved at Philippi. He has warned them against the Judaisers. Having spoken of his own standing through justification, and its end eternal life and this in the fulness of the pattern of Christ, he urges his brethren to remain along the same lines. “As many as are perfect” (complete) means those following the lines he follows. Perfection is in stages – whilst we continually look to the “end-stage.” *“If in anything you are otherwise minded”* – that is if they do not see it powerfully, clearly, and urgently as does Paul, then they will see it – for God will draw them on thus – presupposing of course their *attitude* is right.

3:16 Keep in line, nevertheless with what you have already attained! That is “You have the general outlines of the truth I have expounded – never depart from these – refuse the “lines” of the Judaisers. Unless you do so you can never go on – to perfection.”

Paul is intensely moved at this point. He appeals in love (as their Apostle).

3:17 They are to follow him or to be co-imitators of him. He knows that in every way he is following Christ and is so bold to make this demand.

(iv) A digression on false teachers

3:18–19 He *watches* how others walk – so must they, and Paul’s pattern must be the standard of comparison. Thinking on how others walk Paul is deeply moved – even to tears – (weeping) – as he remembers the *terrible manner of life* and *the terrible end* of the enemies of the Cross of Christ. Who are these enemies? The answer is: Those who oppose the Cross no less than the Judaisers. They seek to nullify the Cross by legalism. Can it then be said “whose god is their belly?” The answer is “Yes, they do not wish to suffer persecution but to preserve and extend their life by preaching circumcision and evading the persecution of the Cross.” cf. Rom. 16:18. If we take Galatians as a model the *law-way* always results in the *flesh-way*. Truly “their end is destruction” for they have denied the way of salvation. Their *glory* in their shame refers to the area of circumcision on which they place so much emphasis. So Gal. 6:13 “They desire to have you circumcised so that they may glory in your flesh.” *They mind earthly things* – that is they are not set on the heavenly – cf. Col. 3:1f.

(v) The true Christian's inheritance

3:20 Paul shows the contrast – from this terrible earthly, human way of approaching the divine and glorious Gospel. Our commonwealth or homeland is heaven – to which our calling leads us and in which it is fulfilled. As in Col. 3:1–2 we are always directed towards it – stretched out to reach it. It is also from this “commonwealth” that Christ will appear – at the parousia – the Second Coming. (cf. I Thess.4:15–17). He is Saviour because his coming will seal and finalise salvation. This is clear from Romans 8:23. The fulness of salvation is only when the liberty is complete by the redeemed body. The consummation of the defeat of evil will be evident.

3:21 Reveals Paul's longing for resurrection – that which is the opposite to the Judaisers' “minding earthly things.” Christ shall change the “body of humiliation” (not “vile” – AV) I Cor. 15:42–44,49 shows how the dead will be glorified. I Cor. 15:51–54 shows how the living will be glorified. The wonder of this high calling in Christ Jesus is shown when our body of humiliation shall be transformed as his body of glory (cf–transfiguration and I John 3:2). Only Christ can accomplish this. The power (energising, operation) derives from his authority as Saviour.

See Psalm 8:6, 110:1, I Cor. 15:24f. Until our bodies are changed his salvation is not complete. His energising will complete this. Cf. Rom. 8:11, Ephes. 1:19f. This is the goal towards which Paul strives, and for which he rejects the vain way of law against the glorious way of justification and (resultant) perfection.

CHAPTER FOUR**Encouragements, Appreciations, Greetings****(i) Encouragements to steadfastness and unity: appreciation of service**

4:1 This verse really belongs to the previous section. On the basis of our Lord's coming – and their “apprehending of the prize” let them stand fast. That he longs for such a stand is seen in his tender expression of his love for them – “dearly beloved” (twice) and “longed for” and “my joy and crown.” The church at Philippi gives him great cause for rejoicing and is his “crown or victory laurels” (stephanos – the wreath of victory). In them he has won. May they, then stand fast “in *the Lord*.” (i) May they not go back (through Judaisers as such). (ii) May they go forward by (v.2) being of one mind in the Lord.

4:2 Having called them all beloved Paul selects two of them who need special attention. The verb “beseech” is used twice – one each for the two women] It can mean “implore admonish exhort” or “entreat.” It is not easy to know which nuance Paul uses. He wants them to “agree in the Lord” (Moffatt). All we can guess is that their disagreement is most unhelpful.

4:3 “true yokefellow” Lenski translates as a proper name “genuine Syzegus”. It is true that “true yokefellow” is difficult to place, and is a strange manner of writing. However we cannot say it is wrong when we are not in possession of all the facts. If it is a proper noun, then the “true” before is a slight play on words, and perhaps intended to encourage. Anyway these women and Clement and others (not now named) have laboured with Paul. All have their names in *the book of life*. Cf. Rev. 3:5, 20:12, Luke 10:20, Exod. 32:32, Psalm 69:28, Dan. 12:1. That is they are eternal – and perhaps by now, even, they have departed this life.

(ii) Encouragements to prayer and noble-mindedness

4:4 The command to rejoice appears again. Paul knows the constant secret of joy – it is “in the Lord.” (Bonnard) “The Pauline appeals to joy are never simply encouragements; they throw back the distressed churches on their Lord; they are, above all, appeals to faith.” The “always” implies “in all circumstances, conditions, situations.” Paul has made all his main points and is rounding off the Epistle – on a high note.

4:5 “moderation” has been translated variously “sweet reasonableness,” “gentleness,” “forbearance goodwill fairness” “magnanimity.” These convey the idea of something which will impress even those who hate them – “graciousness” is probably as

good a translation as any. This must be known to “all men:” – including even the “concision”! This is no light demand. The strong motive is “The Lord is at hand”! This refers to his parousia – the Second Coming. We should view our life ethically, and actively especially towards all in the light of his near coming cf. James 5:8 for the same motivation.

4:6 “No anxiety”! “Never be fretful”] “Worry about nothing”! These are the ideas (cf. Matt. 6:25–34). Lack of trust in God is sinful. It refuses to accept His nature as the One Who cares (cf. I Pet. 5:7). We make this understanding of God the basis of our praying. Thanksgiving accompanies prayer (Gk. *proseuche* – prayer in general) and supplication (Gk. *deësis* – that which emphasises need) because thanksgiving reminds the suppliant of his God and His gifts. Requests (Gk. *aitemata* – specific petitions) are a “coming to the point” before God – believing and receiving through asking.

4:7 When we take our cares to Him the peace of God is given to us. Peace with God, and peace from God bring quietness of Spirit. The *extent* of the peace is untellable. That is why it *guards* the heart. The heart may quake and fear, but peace is greater than the fear. The *mind* is also maintained – no small thing. The mind itself cannot guard the fort, but God’s peace cancels fear. “*in Christ Jesus*” is the great condition. Peace is derived *in* and *through* him, by our attachment to him, our fellowship with him.

4:8 Paul is not having “another ending” (cf. 3:1) but continuing his exhortation on peace of heart and mind. In Christ they will dwell on these things. Some see these as *pagan virtues* raised to a higher level. They are all of *moral* excellence. “honest” = dignified, elevated; *lovely* – pleasing, attractive; “*of good report*” – “speaking well of”. Pagan virtues are not wrong. “think” = “Let your mind dwell on”. cf. Rom. 12:2. The mind dare not dwell on other things. The psychological value of this verse cannot be over-estimated – thinking produces fruits.

4:9 Contemplation is not enough. All these things – in addition to that previously seen and heard (in connection with Paul) they must do, i.e. practice. cf. 3:17. It is not egotism on Paul’s part. He walked Christ’s way – as now must they. In any case they had *learned* these things of St. Paul and now they are increasing the area of virtues by deliberate contemplation. The result – the *God of peace* (not only the peace of God!) will be with them.

(iii) Appreciation of the Philippians ‘ gifts

4:10 Paul’s joy at their gifts is “in the Lord.” It is not joy for himself. “now at the last” seems to suggest indolence on their part, but this thought is cancelled by the fact that they “lacked opportunity.” Paul is deeply grateful. If his writing seems a trifle tense it is perhaps because he does not greatly like speaking about money. Perhaps it seems like hinting of further need! “hath flourished” = “has again revived” – now that opportunity is presented, i.e. by the sending to him of Epaphroditus.

4:11–12 Paul shows he is not rejoicing because of a need met, but because of their giving. He – in one sense – is never in need – having accepted situations as they arise. This is not a fatalistic acceptance in Stoical silence, but a glad acceptance of God’s plan for him. This accords with 3:10. He who has such a “philosophy” will not be other than “content” with whatever comes. “abounding” and “abasing” are not difficult for one who knows Christ’s humility (2:5f). See also I Cor. 4:10–13, II Cor. 6:10. “abound” (overflow) and “abase” (lowliness) may refer to the circumstances physical or otherwise. “I have learned” = “I am instructed.” It does not just “come” to anyone. It is a “secret,” not a thing naturally known by men. (“have learned” = “initiated” a word for secret rites).

4:13 What are *all things*? The answer is that these are the things of *Vs. 11 and 12*. eg. “abounding and abasing.” Strictly speaking “all things that Christ would have me know and experience.” Not “all things” that would make one a superman! An interesting study of redeemed man is to compare Romans 7:18, II Cor. 12:9, Phil. 2:13 and here – verse 13. Accomplishment, whilst not innately of man (even redeemed man) can be executed “through” or “in” Christ – see II Cor. 12:10. NB Chrysostom on St. Paul “Although he was an apostle, he was also a man.”

4:14 Having described his trust upon the Lord (for needs and enablement) Paul returns to thank them for the gift. Lenski: “You did nobly in jointly fellowshiping my affliction.” “affliction” here should not be taken only to mean “physical need” but a sharing in the tribulation in which Paul was *because* of the Gospel – and *for* the Gospel.

4:15–16 “beginning of the gospel” means when Paul first preached in Greece. When he left Macedonia (Philippi and Thessalonica) and went to Athens and Corinth, only the Philippian church assisted in expenses (cf. II Cor. 11:8,9). Paul himself always worked (cf. I Thess. 2:9, II Thess. 3:8, I Cor. 4:12). Paul is praising them for their special ministry.

4:17 Paul does not desire their gifts for his own sake – but for their’s – the blessing that they *have* in giving and are *proved* by giving. cf. Luke 19:15f, Matt. 25:19f Cf. Prov. 11:25 “The liberal soul shall be made fat, and he that watereth shall be watered also himself.”

4:18 “having received” is technically the term of a receipt. However Paul is not being official, but personal. He is speaking of the blessing to himself – he had needs, and these were fulfilled. The gifts they sent are a lovely fragrance, an offering pleasant and acceptable to God. cf. Gen. 8:21, Heb. 13:16.

4:19 II Cor. 8:2ff shows the Philippian church was not rich, but to the contrary. Paul assures them that they by what they have given will not impoverish. God will supply every need. Rom. 11:33 shows the *measure* of God’s riches. Paul does not simply show them the *source* from which God will supply, but the *manner*, that is befitting with such glorious riches, i.e. “according to” or “according with.” “On a scale worthy of His wealth.” The “in Christ Jesus” means “in connection with Christ Jesus.” Out of him there cannot be wealth nor its supply.

4:20 Bengel: “The doxology flows from the joy of the whole Epistle.” This pattern of doxology always demands great depths of affectional experience. The “Amen” is a fitting close to affirm – with assurance all that has been said. It delineates authority.

(iv) Greetings and Benediction

4:21–23 This is not simply a formal salutation, but warm in the spirit of the whole Epistle. “they that are of Caesar’s household” does not really give us any more information. Paul’s final benediction is powerful. The correct rendering is “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ (be) with your spirit.” Paul returns richly to the present experience of the believer—grace, and the very grace of (genitive of possession) the Lord Jesus Christ. Having given this full and meaningful title he closes.