

Philippians

Introduction

Introduction Outline

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Philippians, more than any other Pauline epistle, reveals insights into Paul's situation, commitments, and background. Paul spoke candidly to his strongest supporters. He explained the situation at Rome and how his imprisonment caused mixed reactions in the church. He thanked his dear friends for their financial and prayer support and urged them to continue in the faith in spite of opposition. By sharing his thoughts and actions, Paul hoped to provide a model of the truth. This incarnational principle permeates his writing in this epistle. He found that he could even counter the false teachers by appealing to his past experiences. As a rabbi, he had lived what they taught and found it lacking.

In addition to revealing the life of Paul, the epistle contains a fresh presentation of Jesus Christ. In a lofty hymn about Jesus Christ, Paul called his readers to an examination and interpretation of the mind of Christ. Paul clearly believed his life had been transformed radically because of following Christ, and thus every portion of the epistle reveals the Lord through his servant.

The epistle reads easily. Paul's thoughts flow logically and personally, and there are few places where interpreters question the nature of the language or what it discloses. Apart from Philemon, Philippians is the most personal of all the Pauline corpus. Contemporary readers naturally and properly honor the apostle Paul. Paul, however, sought to honor his Lord, Jesus Christ. The focus on Paul can only be acceptable if it brings a clearer picture of the grace of God in Christ. This commentary, then, intends to honor that aspect of Paul's life. A goal of the commentary is to help readers see the apostle Paul in

a new light, with real and vital, life-changing commitments. Another goal is that readers will feel the depth of his understanding and practical insights. The overriding goal, however, is that readers will see the Lord through the pages of the text.

1. The City and Its People

Philippi is one of the better known New Testament cities. Scholars have done extensive historical and archaeological investigation at the site of Philippi, and information is readily available. The French Archaeological School of Athens excavated the site from 1914 until 1937. The Greek Archaeological Service continued the excavations after that time. Philippi's main street was the Via Ignatia, the main east-west Roman road of Macedonia. The present ruins include the forum, agora, streets, gymnasium, baths, library, and acropolis. In addition to what may be a 400 b.c. temple of Apollo and Artemis, the site has produced numerous inscriptions and coins.

(1) Location

Philippi was located in the northeast section of the Roman province of Macedonia, between the Strymon and Nestos Rivers. Being about eight hundred miles from Rome and approximately ten miles from the seaport of Neapolis made the city strategic in ancient times. Originally the city lay on a steep hillside on the edge of an inland plain. Abundant natural resources, such as water supplies, timber, and metals, made the city important. Most importantly, the area contained extensive gold mines on the Hill of Dionysus not far from town.⁴ These attracted the early settlers and prepared the city as a capital of the Greek armies.

The most imposing geographical feature was a 750-foot-high rock cliff which overlooked Philippi. Many reliefs, depicting the religious cults popular at Philippi, were sculpted on it. Everyone who entered the city was immediately confronted with the religious symbolism of the area.

(2) History

Philippi had a long, varied history. The occurrence of several name changes may be indicative of its importance. Many scholars suggest the earliest name was Tasibasta, "the place of the Thasians," and some believe the city was also called Datus.⁶ All agree that the ancient name was Crenides, "fountains" or "springs," a name given because of the abundant water supply there.

The city rose to prominence when it became the capital of the Greek empire. In 359/358 b.c. Philip II of Macedon gained control of the city after the residents appealed to him for help against the neighboring Thracians. He renamed the city Philippi, the first time a city had been named for its benefactor. With the resources there, especially gold and timber, Philip dreamed of uniting Greece and conquering the world. His untimely death ended his plans, but his son, Alexander, inherited his vision. At the age of nineteen, Alexander ventured from Philippi and in twelve years established a world dominion for the Greeks. Philippi became the showpiece of Greek culture, and Alexander devoted significant energies to its development.

About two hundred years later, Roman soldiers conquered Macedonia (168 b.c.). They divided the territory into four districts, each having its own legislature, and discontinued the mining operations. The city's significance diminished until about 40 b.c., following the battle of Philippi.

Civil war broke out following Julius Caesar's death in 44 b.c. Antony and Octavian fought Brutus and Cassius on the plains near the city. Two battles ensued. Antony's

army defeated Cassius first, and two weeks later Octavian defeated Brutus. Antony and Octavian disbanded their armies and established a colony at Philippi in 42 b.c. and in 30 b.c., respectively. The city was revived by army veterans, giving the city a predominant Italian flavor. Additionally, Octavian conferred upon it the *ius Italicum*, giving the colonists the same privileges and rights as those who lived in Italy.

Although Roman colonies emulated Rome, each enjoyed considerable self-government. Colonies elected their officials in pairs: two *duumviri* (judicial and political figures), two *aediles* (public works officials), and two *quaestores* (financial officers). Each Roman colony also had a *territorium* composed of land surrounding the city. Philippi's *territorium* consisted of 730 square miles which encompassed many small villages. This made the city significant to the area, but Macedonia had five other colonies. Philippi never attained the status of Thessalonica, the principal city of the province, located 100 miles away.

(3) People and Language

In the first century, Philippi contained a diverse population. Three primary ethnic groups lived there, but many others came for various reasons, including commerce. The native Thracians remained from the days when Philippi was outside of Macedonia. Many Latin inscriptions have been found that contain Thracian elements. This witnesses to the strength of the Thracian community even after Greek and Roman dominance.

The second major population group was Greek. Originally the Greeks were fourth-century b.c. colonists who shared Philip's dream of a world empire. Later, others moved to Philippi because of the commercial opportunities. Greek culture and language quickly conquered the Thracian culture, and by Paul's time any traveler with a knowledge of Greek could easily move about Philippi.

Finally, the Romans occupied the territory. From appearances, the Roman element was the strongest. Although it is impossible to know the identity of the various groups, clearly the Romans ruled every aspect of life in the city. Perhaps the double colonization of veterans after the Roman civil war gave them this prominence.

The strong Roman element suggests that Latin was the primary language of the city. The inscriptions bear this out, as do the tombstones. It continued to be the primary language into the second century and survived until after the time of Constantine.¹³ Greek was always spoken as well. Although anyone could make his way through the city with a knowledge of Greek, to be fully conversant with the affairs of the city, Latin was necessary. Apart from Rome, Philippi was no doubt the most Roman of all the cities Paul visited.

Other cultures mixed at Philippi, but there is little evidence of a Jewish population. Paul did not go to the synagogue, as was his custom, presumably because there was none in the city. Instead, he went to the river where he knew the Jews would be worshipping (Acts 16:13). Even there, those who responded were Gentile women. Since Jewish law commanded that a synagogue be established where ten male heads of household lived (a *minyan*), apparently few Jewish males lived in Philippi. Possibly the military nature of the city did not attract the Jews. More likely, the pro-Roman flavor of the colony caused the Jews to be expelled, as they were in Rome in a.d. 49 under Claudius. Paul entered the city in approximately a.d. 50–51. Certainly such a devoted Roman colony shared the same political sentiments as the mother city. This would include anti-Semitism.

(4) Religion

Most large cities of the Roman Empire had complex religious environments. Philippi was no exception. Native Thracian religions were “somewhat crude and barbaric, oftentimes involving animal-worship, human sacrifice and orgiastic rites.” Three outstanding Thracian gods were Liber Pater, Thracian Rider, and Bendis. Liber Pater was identified with the grape harvests and, therefore, with wine. He frequently was equated to Bacchus or Dionysus and was the great local god of Philippi. Thracian Rider was associated with hunting and represented the native hunter cult. He was always depicted on a horse. Bendis was a Thracian goddess identified with Diana and Artemis. She always was dressed in boots and short skirt and carried a spear or knife and appeared extremely athletic. Worship directed to her involved orgiastic practices.¹⁵ In addition to the Thracian religions, many Greek and Roman cults entered the city. The inscriptions, rock reliefs, and scriptural testimony reveal the worship of a number of these deities. Paul encountered a follower of Apollo in Acts 16:16. Apollo was particularly known for divination, but he was also associated with music, archery, medicine, and shepherding. A favorite Italian god was Silvanus, god of the woodland. A temple dedicated to him was completed in about a.d. 20–30. One of Paul’s companions had the name of this god. Paul consistently called him Silvanus; Luke always called him Silas (cf. Acts 16:19).

The archaeological finds reveal the strength of the Eastern cults as well. The Egyptian cult of Isis was most popular, but many others appeared. The religious climate produced more than two dozen cults at the time of Paul. Some, however, estimate that there were more than forty varieties of these cults actively carrying on their religious practices.²⁰ Finally, the emperor cult was a favorite religion. In fact, the specific charge brought against Paul and his company was that he advocated customs “unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice” (Acts 16:21). The acknowledgment and worship of the emperor served Rome’s political interests and distinguished Roman loyalists. Inscriptions mention Julius, Augustus, and Claudia. Rome had a relatively tolerant attitude toward religion at that time, and one could easily practice both a national religion and the imperial cult.

In that light, the Roman attitude toward religion emerges. Rome determined two classifications of religion: legal and illegal. Legal religions were affirmed by the senate, which generally accepted the ethnic, national religions of its conquered people. Some religions were unsanctioned (illegal). In general, however, if the people of the religion did not promote public discord, anti-Roman sentiments, or excessive debauchery, Rome gave significant freedom to them. At the time of Paul, Christianity had not been accepted or rejected by the Roman officials. In fact the first encounter with the Roman government occurred at Philippi. Since the first missionary leaders were Jews, it seems likely that Rome considered Christianity a sect of Judaism, and its practice was protected as a national religion. After the destruction of the temple in a.d. 70, it became increasingly clear that Christianity did not have a necessary tie to Judaism to qualify as a national religion, and the potential for persecution from the Roman government increased.

2. The Founding of the Church

The church at Philippi was founded by the apostle Paul on his second missionary journey from Antioch, Syria. The precise time of Paul’s arrival is unknown, but most likely it was around a.d. 51. When Paul determined to return to the churches founded on

the first missionary journey, he and Barnabas differed on taking John Mark. They parted company, and Silas accompanied Paul to the churches of Lystra and Derbe. At that time Timothy joined them, and they traveled west. Forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak in Asia (Acts 16:6–7), they journeyed northwest to Troas, a major seaport on the west coast of Asia. There Paul had a vision of a Macedonian calling for help. Subsequently, he and his team sailed to Neapolis and walked to Philippi. As was his habit, Paul looked for a synagogue where he could initiate conversations about Christ. Apparently there was none in the city, so on the Sabbath Day Paul went to the riverside outside the city gates to meet with those who practiced the Jewish faith.

In Acts 16:11–40, Luke recorded three significant events associated with the beginning of the church. An important convert to Christianity in Europe was Lydia from the Asian city of Thyatira. She probably moved to Philippi to further her import business, which consisted of selling the purple cloth so famous in Thyatira. No doubt she had considerable resources since the purple dye was quite expensive. After her conversion, she invited Paul and Silas into her home. Lydia was already a proselyte to Jewish religion, and her conversion to Christ was a natural outworking of her desire to know God. Her household followed in her decision to accept Paul's message.

A feature of the period, as Beare notes, was the proliferation of "private brotherhoods. There were cult-associations devoted to the worship of a chosen god; and there were many such groups at Philippi." The groups needed some influential person to provide the resources and location for the meetings, and the church was no exception. Lydia may have become the local patroness of the church. She also may have provided a link to the Gentile population of the city and, perhaps, to the more influential business community.

The second significant event at Philippi was the exorcism of demons from a slave-girl. Though the Scriptures do not state that she became a convert to Christianity, there is every reason to assume that she did. The masters of the demon-possessed girl made considerable money from her ability to predict future events. Paul encountered her, and through the gospel the demon was exorcised. The masters, realizing that they would lose their living, dragged the missionaries to court to have them silenced. This was Paul's first Roman trial. The charges included causing a disturbance and introducing a foreign religion. Paul and Silas were stripped of their clothing, beaten with rods, and thrown into a dungeon with common criminals.

The third event Luke recorded occurred while Paul and Silas were in jail. In spite of the adverse circumstances, the missionaries sang praises to God at midnight. At that late hour, an earthquake shook the prison; the cells opened so that all could escape. The jailer, assuming the prisoners had fled, feared for his own life at the hands of the Roman officials. He drew his sword to kill himself, but Paul assured him that all the prisoners were in their cells. The frightened jailer fell at the feet of the missionaries, and that night he and his family were converted to Christianity. They welcomed Paul and Silas into their home, bathed and cared for them, and gladly received the gospel message.

The next morning the city officials asked Paul and Silas to leave the city. Paul sent word that it was unlawful for Roman citizens to be subject to such treatment. The officials fearfully apologized to them and sent them on their way.

Paul maintained contact with the Philippian church. The missionaries visited the city again on the third journey. The church also took advantage of several occasions to send

financial support to Paul (cf. Phil 4:15; 2 Cor 11:9) and to the believers at Jerusalem (2 Cor 8:1–5). When Paul was in prison at Rome, the church sent Epaphroditus, a leader among the brethren, to minister to Paul. He responded by sending Timothy to them and planned to visit in person after his impending trial. Perhaps Luke joined Paul at Philippi since the Acts account changes from “they” to “we” during this time.

The Philippian church became a model. From its beginning, it was healthy, even though at the time of Paul’s writing, it was experiencing a minor problem of disunity in the congregation (4:2–7). The New Testament evidence suggests several characteristics of this congregation.

(1) Gentiles

The first converts were Gentiles, and Gentiles predominated in the fellowship. The Gentile character of the church may be questioned from Phil 3:1–4:1, which has a Jewish flavor to it; nevertheless, the historical data supports a primarily Gentile congregation.

(2) Women

Women played an important role in the life of the church at Philippi. The New Testament mentions four women: Lydia and the slave girl, the first converts, and Euodia and Syntyche, who were identified as collaborators with Paul. They were noted for their involvement in the spiritual battles of the area (4:2–7). Although they occupied a prominent place, when the disturbance between these last two occurred, Paul urged the “yokefellow” to care for it (4:3). They did not have the chief place of leadership in the congregation.

(3) Generosity

The church became an example of generosity to the other churches of Macedonia and Achaia (2 Cor 8:1ff.). It gave to Paul and to the Jerusalem saints who were in need. The church apparently was not wealthy, even though some persons of means were members. Paul said the members gave beyond themselves and out of their rock-bottom poverty (2 Cor 8:2–4). The Philippian congregation was the only one specifically mentioned as sending a financial gift to Paul. The church remains an example of genuine Christian concern.

(4) Loyalty

This church stood by Paul throughout his life, as evidenced in the gifts it gave for his support and in its desire to know Paul’s state in Rome. It thoughtfully and lovingly maintained contact with its founder. Caird suggests that this church “was the one which gave him [Paul] the most satisfaction and the least trouble.”

The church remained strong into the second century. Its location on the Via Ignatia made it ideally suited for hospitality to travelers. Fifty years after Paul’s letter to the church, Ignatius was escorted to Rome by Roman soldiers to be tried for his faith in Christ and he was comforted by the church at Philippi on the way.

3. The Occasion

Why did Paul write the epistle when he did? Several suggestions come from the epistle. Perhaps Paul wanted to inform the believers of Timothy’s approaching visit and prepare them for it (2:19). Likewise, Paul intended to visit the church in the near future, and the letter could have prepared it for his visit (2:24). Others suggest that Paul felt the need to address the problem of disunity which had surfaced in the congregation (4:2–4). None

of these, however, have significant enough material devoted to them to offer a plausible answer to the question of the timing of the letter.

More likely, Paul wanted to thank the Philippians for a gift received for his support. In 4:10–20, he expressed his thanks for their gift and took advantage of the opportunity to instruct them in a theology of material resources. Clearly the church's support had significant impact on Paul for two reasons. First, no other church gave to him like it did (4:15). Second, Paul's situation in Rome probably caused him to reflect on his ministry to other cities. To receive a tangible expression of confidence no doubt lifted his spirits. Even so, there could have been other occasions for expressing his appreciation. This suggestion may have contributed to the timing, but another possibility fits the data better.

Paul's companion Epaphroditus wanted to return to his friends at Philippi. The church had sent Epaphroditus to Paul as a personal embodiment of its concern. In the meantime, Epaphroditus almost died from a prolonged sickness. The church heard of his situation, and he, in turn, heard of its concern for him. He recovered, and Paul was eager to send him back to the church (2:28). Since he almost gave his life in service to Paul for fellow believers, Paul anxiously desired that they honor him appropriately. He would be better off at home. Paul took advantage of Epaphroditus's desire to return to the church. He wrote the letter expressing two concerns: thanks for the gift and a plea for unity.

If this analysis is correct, it clarifies the nature of the letter. Paul wrote a warm, friendly letter to his loyal children in the faith. A problem of Jewish false apostles who attempted to bring the church under the law, loomed on the horizon. The problem did not require an urgent reply like the situation which prompted Galatians. This letter barely mentioned the problems. It accentuated the relationships between the members and Paul.

4. The Authorship

No one seriously questioned Pauline authorship until the eighteenth century, when F. C. Baur expressed his extreme view that the letter is spurious. Few followed him in that since his arguments rested "on grounds which even his disciples of the Tübingen School found unconvincing."³⁰ At least one author selected the epistle as the standard by which to measure Pauline thought. Contemporary questions relate to the integrity of the epistle, but even most of those who see two or three letters collated into one accept the Pauline authorship of the fragments. It is agreed, therefore, that the epistle is Pauline. Polycarp (ca. a.d. 135) commented on the letter of Paul to the Philippians, and the letter appears in all the lists of canonical writings. The letter claims to have been written by Paul and the external evidence for Pauline authorship is overwhelming. No serious objection to Pauline authorship exists today.

5. The Integrity

The question of authorship quickly passes to integrity. The two are distinguished in Philippians in ways that other epistles are not. Generally, the question of integrity involves multiple authorship of a given epistle. Regarding Philippians, most scholars agree that Paul wrote the entire letter. They disagree, however, on how many fragments of letters Paul composed and whether Philippians reflects one letter or more. Today, there are advocates of one letter, two letters, and three letters now contained in the one canonical letter.

Some support for the view that there are multiple letters in this epistle comes from Polycarp, who mentioned that Paul “wrote letters, by which, if you study them carefully, you will be able to edify yourselves in the faith imparted to you” (Polycarp to Philipians, 3:2). Some have taken the plural words (“letters ... them ...”) to mean there were actually letters from Paul to the Philipians. A. Harnack thinks the Thessalonian letters were included in Polycarp’s plural since the two cities were in Macedonia. E. Schweizer regards 2 Thessalonians as a letter sent by Paul to the church at Philippi. A. Wikenhauser suggests that Polycarp was making a guess because of the abruptness of the canonical epistle at 3:2. Perhaps J. B. Lightfoot correctly assessed the situation when he interprets the plural “letters” as referring to a letter of importance which had a plural designation because of its significance.³⁴

Those who challenge the integrity of Philipians identify various fragments in the letter. The first assumed fragment is 4:10–20, where Paul thanked the church for its financial support. Advocates say that Paul hardly would have waited for months to write a note of thanks for their support, especially at this time of his life. They assume that it would have taken months for news to travel back and forth from Rome to Philippi and that Paul would have sent thanks immediately after his receiving the gift. In addition, why would he put the word of appreciation at the end of the letter rather than the beginning? Normally Paul thanked his readers at the beginning of his letters, and that would have been appropriate here as well.

The second assumed fragment begins at 3:2. At this point, the tone of the letter changes radically. No one doubts that Paul employed different writing styles, but they question whether he did so in one letter. Scholars who hold this view differ on where the fragment ends, at 4:1, 4:3, 4:9, or 4:20. Some assume that the change of tone is unusual because Paul addressed the same opponents in 3:2ff. as he did in 1:17ff. If that is true, the change is remarkable.

The third assumed fragment is 2:5–11. This section may well be pre-Pauline, but most scholars think Paul included the words himself, not that they were inserted by a later editor. This section, therefore, deserves its own treatment.

Today, scholars accept various ideas about Philipians. Those who reject one letter divide into those who accept two (3:2ff. as inserted into the original letter), and those who accept three (3:2ff. and 4:10–20 inserted into the original one). However, there is little agreement on the numbers of letter fragments, and there is even less on the precise verses which comprise each.

Fragment theories have difficulties. There must have been some reason for preserving and joining the fragments into the form in which they are preserved, and there must be clear evidence that they do not fit into the “original” document. It is impossible to prove either of these in the case of Philipians. The most that can be said is that “it is possible,” but the evidence suggests otherwise.

From the methodological perspective, several points argue for the integrity of the epistle. No external evidence exists for any other form of the epistle than the canonical one.

There is no apparent motive for joining the letter fragments into one and concealing the parts. Paul’s letters vary in length from the short letter of Philemon to the longer letters. There was no reason to put several together because of their length. Some suggest that the three letters were Paul’s way of addressing separate problems, but in epistles like 1,

2 Corinthians multiple problems were addressed in the same letter. The theories of interpolation raise the question of the thinking of the interpolator. Why would anyone insert a document in such an awkward place as 3:2, and why would someone place the note of thanks at the end if everyone knew it should come first? Finally, why would the church be so sloppy as to lose the introductions and conclusions of the letters from one so dear to them as Paul?

The two main “fragments” reveal more in common with the epistle than is often thought. The thank-you note of 4:10–20 is placed well if two matters are considered. If Epaphroditus’s sickness occurred on his way to Paul, so that the journey was completed only after Epaphroditus’s recovery, the note from Paul may have been written immediately after receiving the money. Perhaps word returned to Philippi before Paul knew of the sickness, and it is conceivable that when Epaphroditus arrived at Rome with the gift a messenger from Philippi also arrived to inquire about Epaphroditus. Thus a delay of some months before sending the thanks is not the only possibility. C. J. Bahr suggested that Paul put the thanks at the end purposely so as to sign it with his own hand. In that case, the thanks would have more personal significance since it came from Paul’s own hand, which was customarily at the end.³⁷ Furthermore, there are “preparatory allusions to [the gift] in 1:5 and 2:30.” These considerations reveal that the “fragment” is not necessarily as disconnected as some have thought.

The second so-called fragment (3:2ff.) has also been explained reasonably. Paul often wrote with abrupt shifts in style, and it would not be surprising that he would do so in a warm, personal letter such as Philippians (see Rom 16:16–19; 1 Thess 2:13–16). The change in tone from warmth to harshness is difficult only if the opponents were the same ones as in 1:15–17. If he had addressed them earlier, the new invective would be startling. If he had not, a change in tone might be expected. Paul clearly was more soft-spoken with the opponents of 1:15–17, treating them as misguided Christians. In 3:2ff. the opponents were represented as being motivated by the things of the world and hardly could have been Christians. The hard tones do not continue throughout the entire section (3:2–21). At 3:7, the language of faith and commitment predominates. The section is not radically different from the previous portions of the epistle. Similar words and themes were used in this section. The ethical admonitions of 2:12 resume in 3:2. Similarly, the issues raised in 1:28, 29 and 2:14–16 also continue in 3:2; and the types of dangers were hardly compatible with each other. The evidence for this segment as a fragment is not convincing.

Recently several scholars have approached the epistle from a literary perspective. The most enlightening of these approaches is by D. Garland. He argues that the epistle has a solid literary unity intended to build to the point of addressing Euodia and Syntyche. The so-called harsh elements must be reevaluated in light of linguistic and semantic evidence. When this is done, the hard language is considerably softened. The biggest obstacle to disunity, the change of tone, is removed. The text has greater affinity with other passages in Philippians, and the need for a fragment hypothesis no longer exists. The details of this exegesis surface in the specific sections of the commentary as they are appropriate. The work of these scholars offers a new way of analysis which complements traditional exegesis and may provide a way beyond the seeming impasse of present analysis.⁴²

After analyzing all the arguments, a conclusion may be reached. Significant evidence suggests the unity of the epistle, although some notable scholars disagree. The following reasons argue for the unity of Philippians: Definitive evidence of any kind supporting the fragment theories is absent. Those who accept a fragment theory have been unable to agree on the exact length of the fragments. Knowledge of a specific situation which called for the loss of portions of the two or three letters is lacking, as is the lack of knowledge of any time when the fragments were put together. A clear motivation for joining the fragments is also lacking. The redactor, if there were one, did sloppy work when he chose to leave the epistle with such changes of tone and abrupt breaks after attempting to collate them. Good explanations exist as to how the “fragments” actually fit into the plan and purpose of Philippians. More recent literary analysis demonstrates a valid way of explaining the unity of the epistle. In short, the fragment theories do not contain compelling evidence, and there are at least two different methods of approaching the epistle which support the unity and integrity of the letter.

6. The Origin and Date

One’s opinion about the date of the epistle depends in large measure on one’s conclusions about the provenance of the epistle. The questions regarding these issues basically fall into two divisions: the circumstances of Paul and the theology of the epistle. These must be considered both separately and together since the theology has compelled some to look to a date that differs from the traditional.

(1) The Origin

Rome. The traditional view (i.e., the view that stems from the earliest centuries of Christianity) is that Paul wrote the epistle from Rome during his first Roman imprisonment. No other tradition survived from the second century until the eighteenth. The only external evidence available comes from the Marcionite prologue to the letter. The writer, speaking about the Philippians, stated, “The Apostle praises them, writing to them from Rome, from prison, by Epaphroditus.” Although it is the only history available, no one knows the origins of this prologue or what basis lay behind it.

The traditional view fits most of the details required by the text. Many factors enter into discussions regarding the origin of the epistle. Some of the more important are: Paul was in prison at the time of writing; Paul had the freedom to entertain friends, write letters, and lead a movement which was suspect in the eyes of the government; Paul faced a trial, the outcome of which was uncertain; the church engaged in extensive evangelistic work apart from Paul; Paul planned to visit Philippi, assuming he received a favorable verdict; most importantly, the interpreter must account for the number of times Paul’s companions traveled to and from Philippi.

Each of these easily fits into the Roman hypothesis except the travel records. The strongest objection to a Roman hypothesis is the distance between Philippi and Rome. Objectors to the Roman hypothesis point out that the evidence calls for a minimum of four trips between Philippi and Rome, and perhaps as many as six would be necessary. The trips would have been: (1) news of Paul’s imprisonment was sent to Philippi; (2) Epaphroditus was sent from Philippi to Rome with a gift and an offer of help (2:25); (3) news of Epaphroditus’s sickness (after some time?) reached Philippi (2:26); (4) word reached Paul and Epaphroditus that the Philippians were concerned about Epaphroditus (2:26); (5) Paul hoped to send Timothy before he came himself (2:23–24);

and (6) Paul possibly expected that Timothy would return and journey with him to Philippi.

The trip to Rome from Philippi was approximately 800 miles. From Rome, the traveler would follow the Appian Way to Brundisium (360 miles), take a ship across the Adriatic to Dyrrachium (2 days with favorable weather), and follow the Ignatian Way to Philippi (370 miles). Sir William Ramsay estimated that a foot-traveler covered 15–20 miles per day on the Roman roads.⁴⁶ That equals 52 days by the slower rate and 39 by the faster. Imperial couriers traveled at a rate of 50 miles per day, perhaps with the help of carriages or horses. That makes the travel time only 15 land travel days, 2 sea travel days, and whatever intervals were needed for rest or inclement weather. Some estimate that the travel requirements of 5 months traveling round trip, and thus 10 months total for 4 one-way trips, easily fit into 1 year of time⁴⁸ It is difficult to see how earlier commentators, such as A. Deissmann, claimed that the travel was impossible in less than 2 years.

Many scholars also question the necessity of 4 to 6 trips from Rome to Philippi. Some have suggested that fewer trips were necessary. The travel could be reduced to a minimum with the following reconstruction: The Philippians heard that Paul was going to be sent (or possibly had been sent) to Rome to await trial; immediately they sent Epaphroditus with a gift for Paul's support, perhaps having heard he would have to rent housing; on the way, Epaphroditus took sick, and news of his sickness reached Philippi; the church dispatched the news of their concern for him, knowing that the courier would reach him on the way to or in Rome; and Epaphroditus continued his journey upon his recovery and presented the money to Paul. This would have required two trips to Rome, which may have been undertaken simultaneously in part, although there would obviously be delays for the sickness and recovery.

While this reconstruction is possible, it is hardly likely. The travel scenario is overdone. Too much may be built on unnecessary assumptions. The normal way to read the text allows for some time for Epaphroditus's sickness, and surely enough time elapsed for more than two trips from Rome to Philippi. Even if four seem likely, they could easily have been done in ten months, and Paul was imprisoned for two years. This removes the greatest obstacle to the Roman origin of the letter.

Other problems with the Roman origin have surfaced. Primarily, they are Paul's expected visit to Philippi upon his release and the nature of the content of the epistle. Paul could have changed his earlier plans to visit Rome after the relief offering was deposited in Jerusalem. Although in Rom 15:23–29 Paul spoke as though he had finished his ministry in the eastern Mediterranean, things changed. Time passed, and five years in prison could easily redirect thoughts and intentions. F. W. Beare's sentiments regarding this should be heard:

This argument is singularly weak. When Paul wrote Romans, he was a free man, and at the height of his powers. It would not be strange if after five years in custody he would no longer have the impulse to start new work in strange territory, but would long to return to the Aegean cities to see his old friends once again.

The content of the epistle is another matter. The argument is that the content of the epistle resembles Romans, Corinthians, and Thessalonians. Both the content and the apparent opponents do resemble these other books. After scrutiny, however, no

compelling theological parallels demand an earlier date. The epistle may have been written earlier, but nothing demands such a conclusion.

On one hand, the arguments against the traditional date do not compel the reader to forsake it. On the other hand, nothing in the epistle requires a late date, and the traditional date rests on slim evidence. The question that must be answered is, Does the evidence seem to fit better in another setting and time? If it does not fit better elsewhere, the traditional dating of Rome in a.d. 60–62 should be accepted. Nevertheless, three other suggestions demand consideration.

Ephesus. The Ephesian hypothesis goes back to 1900 when H. Lisco suggested that Paul may have written from there about a.d. 54–57. He has been followed by several scholars, including G. S. Duncan, who popularized the theory.⁵⁵ The theory basically assumes that the distance between Ephesus and Philippi makes the logistics more likely than from Philippi to Rome.

Four considerations argue against the Ephesian hypothesis. First, it is based on conjecture. No evidence confirms Paul's imprisonment there, though such an imprisonment was possible. Second, the letter does not mention the "collection for the saints" which so occupied Paul's thoughts during this period. Further, it is unlikely that Paul would have received a gift for himself when he was so involved in fund-raising for this project. Third, Paul spoke in Philippians as though he had no friends with him at the time except Timothy (2:19–21), yet Aquila and Priscilla were in Ephesus when he was (Acts 18:18–26). Fourth, it does not appear that he faced death at Ephesus, especially since he had not yet appealed to Caesar. To these may be added the fact that Paul probably would not have had the freedoms described in Philippians at Ephesus since he would have been imprisoned because of a riot.⁵⁹

The idea of the Ephesian hypothesis is attractive, but it does not fit the details as well as the Roman. If sure evidence existed that Paul was in prison there and that he had the freedoms and friendships demanded by the letter, the hypothesis could be accepted. The theory gained prominence in reaction to the Roman view and because of the problem of the distance. It offers a solution which contains more problems than what it intends to solve.

Caesarea. As early as a.d. 1779 H. E. G. Paulus proposed Caesarea as the place of origin for Philippians. Unlike the Ephesus hypothesis, the distance between the two cities did not prompt the development of the Caesarean hypothesis. Caesarea is further from Philippi than Rome, approximately 1200 miles over land, so other issues need to be considered besides accessibility to Philippi when deciding between Caesarea and Rome.⁶² The primary reason for suggesting Caesarea is that it reconciles with Paul's travel plans after his release. Paul easily could have expected to visit the church at Philippi because the overland route to Rome would take him through the Philippi. It also reconciles with his earlier intention to go to Spain.

Apart from the resolution of the supposed conflict in mission plans, little commends the Caesarean hypothesis. The primary reason for the Ephesian theory was to avoid the distance in travel. That problem is more difficult with a Caesarean origin. Unlike the Ephesian hypothesis, it can claim the support of the Book of Acts, which records a lengthy imprisonment in Caesarea. In reality, however, nothing commends the

hypothesis positively to such a degree that it should replace the traditional view, and certain problems persist.

Corinth. The final suggestion is that Paul wrote Philippians from Corinth. It too claims early support since the first suggestion occurred in 1731 by G. L. Oeder. S. Dockx revived the theory in 1973. The suggestion suffers some of the same problems as the Ephesus hypothesis, but it also solves some of the same problems.⁶⁵ The hypothesis dates Philippians early, about a.d. 50–51.

Against the proposal, some major obstacles remain. First, Acts does not record an imprisonment in Corinth. The account reveals that Paul had less trouble at Corinth than other places, such as Caesarea or Ephesus. Second, at Corinth Paul had good friends surrounding him, but in Phil 2:20–21 it seems that only Timothy remained with him. Few today hold to this option. It creates more problems than the Ephesus hypothesis and has even less to commend it.

(2) The Date

The date of the epistle depends on the origin. Those scholars who locate the writing at Corinth pick an early date, about a.d. 50–51, shortly after the founding of the church. Those who locate the writing at Ephesus date Philippians in the mid-50s, when Paul ministered at Ephesus on the third missionary journey. Those who locate the writing at Caesarea date the epistle later, about a.d. 58–60. Finally, those who affirm the traditional view, from Rome, generally date the epistle at about a.d. 60–62, during Paul's first Roman imprisonment. This is the preferred view in this commentary.

Some interpreters attempt to date the epistle even more precisely. Was it at the beginning, middle, or end of the imprisonment? There is no way of knowing this. The epistle seems to imply that when the letter was written Epaphroditus had been in Rome for a short time. Additionally, the letter reveals that repercussions of Paul's imprisonment were widespread, suggesting some time of development after his arrival. Also, it may be that Paul expected a quick trial. These factors suggest that Paul had been in Rome for some time. On the other hand, he hoped for a quick verdict and a visit to Philippi soon (2:24). The best suggestion, therefore, is that the letter was written from the middle to near the end of his stay in Rome, around a.d. 61–62.

The relationship of Philippians to the other Prison Epistles also causes some interest. Apparently Colossians, Ephesians, and Philemon belong together in time (see the notes on Colossians). It is likely that Paul would have delayed Onesimus and Epaphras if he had expected a quick release. The three of them could have traveled together. In light of that factor, Paul probably wrote Philippians after the others as he saw his trial date approaching.

7. Paul's Opponents at Philippi

Who were Paul's opponents at Philippi? The question is not easily answered, though the epistle provides ample information regarding them in four basic passages: 1:15–17; 1:27–28; 3:2; 3:18–19. Scholars question whether these passages refer to the same group, two groups, or three groups.

Several observations guide the investigation. In 1:15–17 Paul referred to the opponents as preachers of Christ. He exposed them by describing their motivations, but his ultimate evaluation was joy that they preached Christ. Clearly he considered them Christian brethren, and their differences were minor. The situation changed in chpt. 3. He addressed those opponents sharply and condemned their message and activities.

Could the opponents of chpt. 1 have been the same as the opponents of chpt. 3? It seems not.

In chpt. 3 Paul first addressed the opponents as “dogs, evil workers, and cutters” (v. 2). Later in the chapter the problem was libertinism, and Paul described the opponents as “enemies of the cross” (vv. 18–19). The difficulty appears to have been a mixture of legalism related to law and liberty related to foods. Were the opponents the same people with the same message? It seems not.

Another difference is worth noting. The opponents in 1:15–17 were within the Christian community at Rome; the opponents in 3:2ff. appear to have been outside the Christian community at Philippi. Did something tie together people from two different places and with different attitudes toward Christianity? Paul seems to have identified them differently. In 1:15–17 he knew well those who opposed him. Perhaps he could have called them by name. In chpt. 3, however, another group with whom he was not personally acquainted opposed his message. They loomed on the horizon, ready to invade the church from outside. Paul’s attacks were general, relating to the group and its characteristics rather than specific individuals.

Finally, the interpreter must determine what Paul’s opponents opposed in Paul. Paul identified his opponents’ message in Phil 1:15ff. as Christ, and he handled it as though it were no problem to him. Presumably he could have preached the same message! The point of division was probably the same as Paul encountered everywhere he went. He proclaimed implications of the gospel that some could not accept. His distinctive insight was that Gentiles were included in the gospel and that they did not need to accept the Jewish social and religious obligations as a part of their salvation. The Roman church discussed the same matters (Rom 14:1–15:6), and divisions occurred as convictions formed.

The opponents in chpt. 3 opposed Paul’s teaching that Gentiles were saved as Gentiles and that the law was fulfilled in them by the Spirit. It is likely, therefore, that the issue was one of degree rather than kind. The law was the issue. The early part of the epistle reflects a long-term situation in Rome and the tension between Jewish and Gentile believers. The third chapter reflects a situation like the ones at Galatia and Corinth. The opponents attacked the heart of the message; they preached another gospel. So, it appears that two different groups were addressed in the epistle. The first were those who opposed Paul in Rome (chpt. 1); the other posed the threat to the church at Philippi (chpt. 3).

The history of identifying the opponents reveals several different options for chpt. 3. Some suggest they were entirely Jewish, either Judaizers (from within the church) or Hellenistic Jews (from outside). Their preoccupation with law formed the basis of Paul’s attacks. First, they displayed a legalism regarding circumcision (3:2). Paul defended his position by claiming that genuine circumcision is spiritual. Second, they had a fascination for food laws as a part of the ceremonial law. Thus in 3:19 Paul said their “god is their stomach,” referring to the scrupulous manner of choosing foods carefully. In both cases, then, the opponents were Jewish missionaries who opposed Paul’s mission to the Gentiles.

Others have seen a Gnostic influence in the chapter. Perhaps the opponents were teachers who claimed to have membership in the Jewish-Christian-Gnostic community by virtue of their circumcision. They boasted of their own circumcision but added to it a

perfectionist element. They already had been raised to a heavenly, spiritual life on earth, and moral and nutritional restraints made no difference to them. For that reason, Paul countered these opponents with a revelation of his personal attitudes regarding Christian perfectionism (3:12–16). He directly dealt with their claims of freedom from any restraints on diet or morality (3:18–19).

Finally, the data have led some commentators to see two or more kinds of opponents in the chapter. These opponents generally are considered to be Judaizers who attacked the church from outside (3:2) and libertine heretics who may have come from within (3:19).

In summary, the opponents of chpt. 3 appear to have preached the Jewish law. While Gnostic influence is possible, the data may be well understood and satisfied by the position that these false teachers were Jews. It appears that they came from outside the church since Paul's words hardly referred to Christian brothers. The opponents of chpt. 3, then, called the church to accept the laws of the Old Testament, boasting in their own self-effort. The opponents of chpt. 1 preached with a view to hindering Paul's universal application of Christianity. They taught that as Christians it was necessary to keep the law.

The Jewish flavor of the argument predominates. One question remains. Why would Paul have to engage in such a Jewish dialogue with a church in a city with few Jews? If there were too few to have a synagogue and the first converts were Gentile, by what avenue did the Jewish teachers come in? The answer must be that they had a concern to oppose Paul's preaching wherever they encountered it. That is likely the tie between the opponents of 1:15ff. and 3:2ff. They both had an interest in "the Christ" and his relationship to Gentiles.

8. The Theological Structure of the Epistle

Philippians divides into four primary sections. Paul had definite concerns which he wanted to express, and he also wrote to warn of false teachers who threatened the church. Unlike many of Paul's letters, Philippians cannot be divided into theological and practical sections. Every section is incarnational. Paul's theological interests are expressed in biographical sections. Within this motif, however, certain movements occur.

First, Paul explained his situation at Rome (1:12–26). Although he was concerned about the divided Christian community there, his outlook was strengthened by the knowledge that Christ was magnified. Paul's theology of life formed the basis of his optimism.

Whether he lived or died, whether he continued his service to others or went to his own rewards, or whether he was appreciated or not, he wanted Christ to be glorified.

Philippians describes this commitment better than any other of Paul's epistles.

Second, Paul exhorted the church to unity (1:27–2:18). Two factors influenced him. The church at Rome was divided, and he lived with a daily reminder of the effects of disunity. Further, similar disunity threatened the Philippian church as two prominent women differed with each other. Selfishness lay at the heart of the problems at Rome and Philippi. The answer came in an incarnational vehicle. Paul reminded the believers of the humility of Jesus. If they would allow the outlook of Christ to guide their lives, harmony would be restored. The hymn to Christ dominates the epistle.

Third, Paul warned the church to beware of Jewish legalists (3:2–21). Legalistic Jewish teachers threatened to destroy the vitality of the congregation by calling it to a

preoccupation with external religious matters. Paul countered the legalists with a forceful teaching about justification by faith. He chose to express his theology through his personal experience. He had lived their message and found it lacking. Finally, Paul thanked them for their financial support. The church had sent money and a trusted servant, Epaphroditus, to care for Paul. Its generosity encouraged Paul at a time of personal need. Even here Paul took advantage of the situation to express the rewards of its giving and to teach Christian living. Again, theological instruction was occasional.

The epistle abounds with Christian models for imitation. Most obviously, the church was to imitate Jesus, but other genuine Christians also merit appreciation. Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus embodied the selflessness God desires in his people.

Philippians also instructs in the meaning of salvation. Salvation was provided by Christ who became obedient to death (2:6–8). It was proclaimed by a host of preachers who were anxious to advance the gospel. It was promoted through varying circumstances of life—both good and bad—so that the lives of believers became powerful witnesses.

Finally, salvation would transform Christians and churches into models of spiritual life.

This little epistle provides insight into church relationships. Paul expressed his concern for unity. Christian unity came when individuals developed the mind of Christ. In more difficult situations, the church collectively solved problems through the involvement of its leadership (4:2–3). Harmony, joy, and peace characterize the church which functions as it should. Paul taught about Christian stewardship. The Philippian church had reached a maturity regarding material possessions. It knew how to give out of poverty. It knew the value of supporting the gospel and those who proclaim it, and it knew that God could provide for its needs as well. Paul also demonstrated his attitude toward material things. He could live with spiritual equilibrium in the midst of fluctuating financial circumstances. Christ was his life, and Christ's provisions were all he needed. In everything, Paul's joy was that Christ was glorified in his life.

Philippians contributes to a knowledge of genuine Christianity. Most of its themes occur elsewhere in Scripture, but the lessons impact life most powerfully in this letter. It is filled with theology, Christian commitment, and Christ-likeness. Every Christian should learn these lessons well.

Outline of Philippians

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- V. Conclusion (4:21–23)

I. Salutation (1:1–2)

The greeting Paul sent the church resembled the greetings of other first-century letters. Commonly they contained three elements: identification of the writers, identification of the readers, and the greeting. Some differences occur, however, which reinforce the Christian nature of the letters. Paul changed from the typical greeting *charein* to *charis* (“grace”); he added “peace” and explained that “grace and peace” come from both God the Father and Christ.

The greeting reveals that Paul chose to write this in a letter (epistolary) format. Epistles may be formal or informal. Formal epistles tend to reflect forethought in subject matter, stylized writing, and an organized presentation. Informal letters generally contain a tone of warmth and spontaneity and, at times, reflect an intimacy regarding specific contexts

that leave the modern interpreter puzzled.³ Philippians is informal. This conversation between friends suggests two important truths. First, the letter is not systematic. This means that much of the writing simply flowed from Paul's mind. At no place in the epistle did Paul sustain a fully developed, systematic presentation. The closest to it is in Phil 2:5–11, which has the marks of more formal writing, but it illustrates another point. Second, the letter is occasional. Some specific situation(s) prompted Paul to write. The letter is "theology in street clothes." Paul answered the Philippians' specific concerns in ways that they could understand. That is the beauty of such portions of Scripture: they are applied theology. At the same time, that approach brings some frustration to modern readers, and the interpreter must always ask what lay behind the writing.

1. The Writers (1:1a)

1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus

1:1a The epistle identifies two writers: Paul and Timothy. Other New Testament books reveal significant information about both men, and no doubt the church at Philippi knew them very well. Timothy occupied a prominent place in Paul's ministry. No doubt Paul met him on the first missionary journey in the area of Lystra/Derbe. When he embarked on his second journey, Paul asked Timothy to accompany him, and Timothy became a prominent member of the ministering team. Paul mentioned him in the salutations of six epistles (2 Cor; Col; Phil; 1, 2 Thess; Phlm) and wrote two epistles to him (1, 2 Tim). Why was Timothy mentioned? Various suggestions have been made. The most obvious answer lies in the close relationship Timothy had with the Philippians. He was part of the team that founded the church (Acts 16–18), Paul intended to send Timothy to the church not long after writing the letter (Phil 2:19), and Paul had no one who better shared his outlook and burden for his ministry (2:20). M. Silva suggests that, given the prominence of Timothy in Macedonian evangelism, the surprise would have been if he were not included in Paul's letter. Perhaps Silva is correct, but if that criterion is applied consistently, Timothy should also have been mentioned in 1 Corinthians. Paul referred to himself and Timothy as "servants of Jesus Christ." He generally reserved the title *doulos* ("servant" or "slave") as a description of himself, and even then it occurs sparingly. This is the only place he referred to Timothy as a "servant" of Christ, and he only called two persons other than himself by the title. In Col 4:12, Paul called Epaphras a "servant of Christ" (*doulos Christou*), and others are called "fellow-servants" (Epaphras, Col 1:7; Tychicus, Col 4:7). Thus Paul identified Timothy by a title which revealed high esteem for Timothy's commitment to Christ and his effective and humble service (see 2:20–24).

The word *doulos* occurs in only three salutations (Rom, Phil, and Titus). Elsewhere he used the term "apostle" to describe himself. Before considering the meaning of "servant," it is necessary to ask why Paul used it here and elsewhere. He had not met the Roman church personally, but neither had he met the Colossian congregation. In Romans Paul used both "servant" and "apostle" (1:1). There "servant" designates his humility, and he stated that even his apostleship came by divine call. Perhaps more to the point, he did not have to assert his authority at Rome or Philippi. In Romans, Paul hoped to solve the problem of division between the Jewish and Gentile elements, but ultimately he had no personal responsibility for the church. When writing to Titus, Paul did not need to assert his apostleship. Titus knew him well and accepted his authority.

Further, the problems addressed in Titus related to sub-Christian practice, not false teachers entering the Christian community.

The word “servant” or “slave” has been defined in various ways. Its basic meaning is clear, but it may have implied two different ideas. The first comes from Greco-Roman culture. Slaves were common because of war, and Christian slaves probably worshiped in the churches along with their masters. Everyone knew slaves. A slave had no rights or privileges, and all personal interests and ambitions had to be repressed. Everything related to the master.¹⁰ This title did not refer to a position of honor in the first-century world. The Philippians no doubt thought it strange, if not shocking. Paul chose his words carefully, and “servant” truly characterized his life.

The second possibility comes from the Old Testament. Frequently the Septuagint used the word “slave” for one who served Yahweh (e.g., Num 12:7). Moses was the “servant” of the Lord, and from his day onward, the title became one of honor. It stood for one who was commissioned by God for a special task. That background may have influenced Paul, but he employed the word because it spoke of humility. Paul used it of himself in epistles written largely to Gentile audiences (though the Roman church was mixed Jew and Gentile), where they would not necessarily perceive the Old Testament tradition.

The term represented the Christian era. Whether it was heard with Hellenistic or Hebraistic ears, it became a Christian ideal. Paul certainly knew of its centrality to the hymn found in 2:5–11; if the term characterized the Lord, it was equally appropriate as a model for his servants.

2. The Readers (1:1b)

To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons
1:1b Paul identified two groups of readers. They were the church at large and special persons within the congregation. The church was called “the saints.” The term has no other New Testament meaning than Christian people, and Paul used it in place of “the church,” which he had used earlier in his ministry. The saints were those who were set apart by God at conversion, and they were in process of becoming like Christ. The term thus reminded the church of its special status in God’s redemptive plan.

The other group consisted of bishops and deacons. This is the only time Paul used the word “bishop” outside of the Pastoral Epistles. The word means “overseer,” and the question here is whether it refers to an office. At that time in church history, the title “bishop” did not refer to one person who had the charge of a number of churches in a geographical area. That came in the second century.

Was there some type of office in the church this early? The text reveals several factors. They were singled out in a special way, not as simply “saints” and not as “deacons.”

They also were placed second in Paul’s opening remarks. Perhaps this revealed his concern that they had a secondary importance. Third, the term is plural. That definitely rules out the possibility of a “one man” rule over several churches, if Philippi had only one church, which seems to be the case. On the other hand, it suggests that several had this function or office. In the only Lukan use of the term, bishops were called to service by the Holy Spirit (Acts 20:28). The term sounds much like the separation of Barnabas and Saul for the missionary task in Acts 13:1–3. Another reason for not considering the term as a designation of a church office is that it does not appear in any list of spiritual gifts or church functions outside the references identified above.

There was precedent for offices in the church. The early church probably took over the worship patterns of the synagogue, which had two chief officers. Likewise, some scholars point to a parallel in Essene communities, which had an administrative supervisor who was responsible for community leadership. Finally, some suggest that the titles “bishops” and “deacons” simply reveal “the Roman penchant for organization” which “gave the Philippian church a regular system of office-bearers.” How much any church was influenced by these organizational precedents is impossible to know. Anyone could have provided the organizational pattern.

Clearly the early church was organized. The lists of leadership positions reveal at least an informal structure (Eph 4:11–13), which probably grew out of natural ability and spiritual giftedness. Similarly, in Acts 20:28, Luke recorded the presence of “overseers.” In just a few years after the Epistle to the Philippians was written, the church had defined offices with qualifications clearly identified (1 Tim 3:1ff.). Since 1 Timothy may have been written only two to five years after Philippians, it seems there was an emerging or developing structure.

On the other hand, the precise function of “bishops and deacons” is not clear. In writing to the Ephesians at about the same time as Philippians, Paul did not mention “bishops and deacons,” even though he listed several offices which helped the church develop (4:11–13). Ephesians has perhaps the most profound theological presentation of the church in the Pauline epistles, and the fact that bishops and deacons were not mentioned there is significant. In Phil 4:3, Paul alluded to another church leader, asking for his help in solving the misunderstanding between Euodia and Syntyche.

Two other factors deserve mention. First, many commentators identify the overseers with the gift sent to Paul; perhaps they generated the gift. Since the letter is, in part at least, a thank you, their role was acknowledged. The title “bishop” was common in Greek society and had a variety of uses in the LXX.¹⁷ Perhaps it was a natural term to identify leaders within the church community. Second, if this were a description of formalized church officers, it is surprising that “elder” (“presbyter”) is omitted. That title drew more on Jewish/Christian background than “bishop,” although there is sufficient evidence that “bishop” and “elder” referred to the same persons.¹⁹ The title probably related to a function rather than an office. Providing oversight in the areas of teaching and administration were the primary functions of a bishop or elder.

The word “deacon” described the other group. It may have been used in a technical sense (1 Tim 3:8) to refer to an office in the church. This use probably draws its origin from Acts 6:1–6, though the word “deacon” is not used of the seven who were elected. The word also occurs nontechnically in many passages. Many simply “ministered” in the name of Christ (Eph 3:7 of Paul; Col 1:7 of Epaphras). It may be difficult to suggest that the word “bishop” here could be functional in nature and the word “deacon” official. It is possible, however, that Paul identified the specific overseers of the gift collection first, out of courtesy, then mentioned the deacons. Since neither “bishops” nor “deacons” occurs elsewhere in the epistle, obviously the letter was written to the church at large, the saints.

3. The Greeting (1:2)

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

1:2 The specific greeting, “grace and peace,” adds to the normal epistolary introductions. Since grace always reminded Paul of God’s grace in Christ, no doubt this

word conveys full Christian meaning. It means “may God’s grace be with you.” The fact that Paul placed it before “peace” may indicate further his theological orientation that grace provided for and secured peace. “Peace” no doubt conveyed Paul’s Hebrew background and the typical greeting “shalom.” It had a full sense of “may all things be well with you.” Both words as used by Paul imply a petition as well as a greeting. Grace and peace come jointly from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. That God sends them to believers was no surprise to anyone. Many prayed to their gods for the same qualities. The addition of “Jesus Christ” here adds a profound Christological dimension to the blessing. The church knew well that grace was embodied in Jesus (Titus 2:11–14), and peace was his gift to the believer (John 14:27; 16:33). In so combining the work of God and Jesus, Paul reflected his deep conviction about the deity of Jesus. Jesus does what God the Father does.

II. Explanation of Paul’s Concerns (1:3–2:30)

1. Paul’s Thanksgiving and Prayer for the Philippians (1:3–11)

The epistle proper begins like many of Paul’s epistles—with praise to God for the church and a specific petition on its behalf. The pattern occurs regularly enough that it no doubt reflects Paul’s natural inclination in prayer. God’s call on the Philippians’ lives brought Paul joy, even though he had specific concerns about their Christian growth. Philippians 1:3–11 forms a unit of thought in two movements. Several factors reveal the unity: the synonyms “I thank my God” (1:3) and “this is my prayer” (1:9), the general content of praise and petition, and Paul’s epistolary pattern in introductions. The section divides naturally into two subsections, however. First, vv. 3–8 express praise for the Philippians. The verb translated “I thank my God” contains the idea of thanksgiving. Furthermore, all of vv. 3–8 modify that one main verb. Second, vv. 9–11 express Paul’s more specific petition. He introduced his prayer with a consecutive conjunction (“and,” kai) which both continues the previous idea and introduces another. These verses contain one long sentence in Greek, but Paul made two petitions in them.

(1) Paul’s Thanksgiving (1:3–8)

3I thank my God every time I remember you. 4In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy 5because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, 6being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

7It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God’s grace with me. 8God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

The format for this thanksgiving resembles others, but the content is unique. Paul remembered God’s working in the believers’ lives, as well as their participation in his ministry. Clearly, he did not simply recite a thanksgiving that could be true of any group of Christians. These verses are warm and personal. The best analysis is thematic. Three ideas support Paul’s main statement in the opening verb: “I always pray with joy” (1:4), “being confident of this” (1:6), and “It is right for me to feel this way” (1:7). Following these structural components, the text reveals that Paul’s thanksgiving was joyful (1:4–5); it was confident (1:6); and it was proper (1:7–8).

1:3 Paul expressed his pleasure for the church. He let the believers in on his thoughts. Two significant aspects of Paul’s thanksgiving emerge in v. 3. These aspects reveal

information about Paul's prayer life and his fondness for the Philippians. First, Paul was thankful for them, even though a problem of disunity threatened the fellowship of the congregation. He lived his life in response to the love of Christ (2 Cor 5:14–15), hoping to reach people everywhere. The validation of his ministry, which was his life, was that people actually did respond to the gospel he preached and that they remained true to their faith. He stated as much in 1 Thess 2:19; 3:8. Any positive response to the gospel brought Paul joy; when a church embraced the Lord and the gospel message as enthusiastically as the Philippians did, it was cause for great thanksgiving.

Second, Paul's thankfulness never wavered. It was "every time I remember you." The reasons for that are detailed in 1:4–5. Here he stressed the consistency of his memories. Paul turned each thought of them into praise for them. What kind of church produced those memories? They had shared hard times which served to deepen their friendship.

1:4 The first characteristic of Paul's thanksgiving for them was that it was joyful. The Greek text stresses this by placing the words "with joy" before the words "I always pray." This is the first reference to joy, a major theme in the epistle.

The grammatical and syntactical relationships in this section are quite complicated. Several questions must be answered that pertain to vv. 4–5 and their function in the sentence. Is the NIV text correct in starting a new thought at the beginning of v. 4? Does the phrase "because of your partnership in the gospel" connect with the main verb "I thank," or does it go with something else? Where does the phrase "from the first day until now" go?

Regarding the first question, how should the thoughts of v. 4 be arranged? The NIV correctly interprets the sense of the passage, though there should be no major break such as it makes. This observation is based on some literary patterns which prevail. Twice the same root word for "prayer" occurs, though in different parts of speech ("In all my prayers" and "I always pray"). These two occurrences, which go together logically, also somewhat repeat and specify the word "I give thanks." Paul informed his readers that his thanksgiving was actually done in prayers.⁵ Therefore, the sense of the thanksgiving was resumed in the two words for "prayer."

1:5 The resolution of the second question begins at this point. Does the phrase "because of your partnership" (*koinōnia*) go with v. 3 or v. 4? The parallelism of the text suggests that it goes with v. 4. The two terms for "prayer" belong together in sense, and the two clauses which provide a reason for the prayers conform to each other as well. The first clause, "every time I remember you," provided a reason for Paul's thankfulness. The second, "because of your partnership," provided a corollary reason for his specific joyful prayers. His remembrance was stirred by the gift they gave him. Their partnership was also the support they rendered to the apostle. Here it is emphatic, not careless.⁷ The new element in this verse is the statement of joy, which emphasizes the importance of the phrase "with joy."

The third question is the location of "from the first day until now." Some scholars want to place it with "I thank my God"; others, with "being confident of this"; still others, with "I always pray." Taking it with "I thank my God" makes the sentence extremely awkward and surely should be rejected. Understanding it with "being confident of this" causes an abrupt change of direction from the emphasis on the gifts of the church to the attitudes of Paul. That, too, should be rejected. The church participated with Paul in the gospel

from the first day until now. That considers the normal flow of the text and satisfies the need for consistency of subject matter.

Since the primary contribution of v. 4 is the identification of Paul's joy, the basis of Paul's joy is revealed in v. 5. The NIV correctly captures the relationships by stating "because of your partnership in the gospel." The relationship between Paul and the church went deeper than human friendships. They had a tie that came from joining in the work of God in the world. Such cooperation in the spread of the gospel was something Paul appreciated very much. That fellowship was with Paul only in an intermediate sense; the ultimate contribution they made was to the spread of the gospel itself.

"Fellowship" is a major theme of the letter. The word occurs primarily in the Pauline Epistles (thirteen of nineteen times in the New Testament) and three times in Philippians. In 2:1 Paul urged, "If any fellowship with the Spirit," and in 3:10 he expressed his desire to share in the "fellowship of sharing in his sufferings." Additionally, the verbal form of the word occurs in 4:15, which the NIV translates "shared with me." This last occurrence presents a context for understanding Paul's use of the word in Philippians. It referred to the believers' involvement with Paul by sending a gift to support his work. The grammar of 1:5 confirms this primary meaning. The noun "partnership" may be followed by various cases or parts of speech. For example, in the other two occurrences of "fellowship" in Philippians, the word "of" occurs. Here the word "unto" follows. In other places where the preposition "unto" follows, the people experience "fellowship" by contributing to a gift (Rom 15:26; 2 Cor 9:13). Thus when Paul thanked God for their fellowship "in [eis] the Gospel," he meant that they were contributing to the spread of the gospel in tangible ways, i.e., primarily through their support.

The gospel was not only the environment of their fellowship but also its goal. Had it not been for the gospel, they would not have met. Paul generally stated that the tie that bound Christians together was the gospel message. Here, however, the construction suggests that the advancement of the gospel united them. In their support of Paul, they contributed to the work of God in the world through the gospel. When the Philippians were converted, they were given a privilege of promoting the gospel. Through their relationship with Paul, they were true to that aspect of their faith.

Paul mentioned the gospel nine times in Philippians. His other epistles reveal that he conceived of the gospel as a message of salvation based on historical, theological, and experiential evidence.¹¹

In this epistle, the gospel was proclaimed (1:15–17), defended (1:16), and advanced by the lives of those who knew it (1:12; 2:22). In this text, Paul used the term to suggest that the gospel was the movement of God through history and that it was perpetuated by God's human spokespersons.

Paul's joy came as he remembered the history of the church, as well as the relationship it had with him. Immediately upon Paul's preaching, some people had responded to the gospel, and the church remained firmly committed to Paul, who had taken the gospel message to them. Paul, therefore, looked back to the beginning and appreciated its general support from the first day. Acts 16 records the early history of the Philippian church. The beginning was difficult for both believers and the apostolic band. In addition to the common difficulties faced in spreading the gospel, Paul faced imprisonment for his faith. His joy as he remembered the Philippians, therefore, was not because of his

good circumstances when they believed. Rather, it was because of the firm faith of the believers in spite of their difficulties. As they grew in their Christian maturity, they also grew in their appreciation of Paul. He, in turn, prayed for them with joy.

1:6 The second characteristic of Paul's thanksgiving for the Philippian believers was that he prayed with confidence. That confidence was based on the working of God in their midst, not in his own ability or persuasiveness. Two matters emerge as significant emphases: the nature of the work in the Philippians and the time orientation involved. God began the work in the church. Obviously if he starts something, it will reach completion. Paul easily moved between the tensions of human agency and divine initiative, accepting both in a natural way. The Philippians had a partnership with Paul, but God actually worked it in them. Both the contrasts between these two realities and Paul's comfort with each deserve attention.

What work had God begun? Referring to the immediate context only, some interpreters prefer to explain it as the support the church gave to Paul. They say Paul meant the "sharing in the gospel." The rule of context always guides the interpreter, but it is conceivable that Paul may have drawn on the wider context of Christian experience as well. The experience of God's grace always lay under the surface of Paul's words. Most likely that is true here since a reference to the support seems awkward.¹³ Further, how does the reference to the "day of Christ" relate to their completion of the gift? Did Paul expect them to continue supporting him until the second coming?

Paul had a general Christian characteristic in mind when he made this statement. Even those who interpret the passage as referring to the specific financial gift normally generalize it somewhat. They refer to the spirit which produced the gift or the opportunity and responsibility of supporting the gospel. It is more likely, however, that Paul saw the Philippians' generosity as evidence of the grace of God in their lives, and in this text he spoke to that grace. In 2 Cor 8:7, a passage that urged the Corinthians to be like the Philippians in giving, Paul urged the development of the grace of giving. Giving evidenced the maturity of their thought and action. The good work in 1:6 refers to what lay behind their generosity, the calling and Christian maturity of the church. Since Paul spoke of the work beginning and ending, that he had only their initial salvation experience in mind is unlikely. He also had in mind an ongoing process of growth in the Christian's life (Phil 2:12). The whole salvation process, particularly the progressive element, is what Paul meant here. Since God began a work of Christian growth, evidenced by their giving, he would complete that growth.

Paul expressed the confidence that the growth would take place "until the day of Christ Jesus." He glanced backward to their salvation and forward to the completion of their character when the Lord returns. No doubt the reference to the "day of Christ Jesus" is the "day of the Lord" so common in the Old Testament (Joel 2:1; Amos 5:20). The question is why the end times were included at this point. Although Paul could have thought in terms of the imminent coming of the Lord, he also was more aware of a delay than earlier in his ministry. Paul's use of the phrase "until the day" actually called to mind the consummation of the present age. It was Paul's way of making two emphases: sanctification was an ongoing process and the process would continue to the end of the age. At that time the believers would be complete in character. They needed not to fear the judgment which characterized that day.¹⁷

Some scholars take the confidence to be directed to the church at large, rather than to individuals within the church. The plural “you” makes the text uncertain, and it could have been addressed to the church collectively. On the other hand, the distributive plural commonly occurs in the epistles. It seems better here. Paul’s thankfulness came with the confidence that God would work in the individual Christians until the day of Christ. This confidence occurred for two reasons. First, Paul was confident that what God began God would complete, and his words came from a deep conviction that God worked in them. Second, Paul saw the manifestations of their right relationship with God. Their gift evidenced their Christian maturity. Since God worked in them and they responded, Paul’s confidence was justified.

1:7 The third characteristic of Paul’s thankful attitude was its properness. The Greek text has the word “right, just” (*dikaion*), a descriptive term expressing the sense of propriety. A structural question should be asked here: What does this clause modify? It could explain why Paul felt such confidence in God’s working in the Philippians. Alternatively, it could add a reason Paul was thankful for them, expressing a thought parallel to his great joy for them. The latter is better. The “even as” clause parallels the two verbal ideas found here (“I always pray” and “being confident”). Further, Paul’s confidence that God would complete his work hardly rested on emotional ties with them. His thankfulness for them could.

Paul provided three reasons for his attitude of thankfulness. First, he had them in his heart. Commentators differ over the precise meaning of this structure. On one hand, the Greek could read, “You have me in your heart,” and the context could be interpreted to support it. Paul was explaining his appreciation of their gift on his behalf. Perhaps he continued his appreciation for their financial support. On the other hand, the construction more naturally reads, “I have you in my heart.”²¹ Taken this way, Paul’s thanksgiving was more than a response to the gift they sent and to the knowledge of God’s working in their behalf. It came from a true blending of hearts. Emotional ties bound them together.

The second reason for this attitude was their fellow-service in the apostolic ministry. Paul’s circumstances did not hinder their relationship. Being a prisoner could have presented an obstacle to their wholehearted support, but they took the attitude that it was their imprisonment too. No doubt this meant more to Paul because the church at Rome divided into two groups concerning him—to some, his imprisonment was part of the problem. No church was in a more patriotic setting than the Philippian church, but the chains proved to be no obstacle. Paul also mentioned his “defending” and “confirming” the gospel. The words are legal terms. They are official language for a formal defense, and some interpret them as evidence that Paul had presented his case in court. In fact, he had presented himself and the gospel to various political officials in Palestine. His presence in Rome was also a defense of the gospel. Paul stated later that the topic of conversation was “Christ” (1:13). The ordeal of his incarceration may be correctly called a “defense and confirmation.” It was the ultimate opportunity for Christians to present their claims to the emperor. Thus, by life or death, Paul was committed to the gospel message. The church stood by him in it. Whether good or bad times came, Paul counted on the Philippian church. Their support evidenced the fact that they were true “fellow-workers.”²⁴ They joined with him in his apostolic calling to

reach Gentiles for Christ. The partnership between them formed the strong tie which Paul addressed in the next verse.

Paul referred to his apostleship with the word “grace.” The term may identify general Christian attitudes, a state of grace in which a Christian stands, or Paul’s specific calling of grace. The last correctly describes this reference. To understand it as depicting a general state of grace does not take the immediate context seriously. The defense and confirmation of the gospel directly relate to the grace. They are the arena in which the grace operates. Here is another reference to his apostolic function. The Philippians recognized Paul’s unique place in God’s economy as apostle of God’s grace, and they demonstrated their support for it by participating with him as they could.

1:8 The third reason for Paul’s attitude in prayer was the deep Christian tie between them. The force of this statement is demonstrated in two ways. First, the new sentence is in the form of an oath, as Paul called God to the witness stand. They could not see Paul’s heart for them, but God did. Second, this intense desire was distinctly Christian. Paul used two terms: “long” (epithō), which expresses a strong desire, and “affection” (splanchnois), which identifies the “entrails” as all being involved in the emotion. The “entrails” were actually those of Christ Jesus. Paul thereby expressed the fact that his feelings came from the Lord. This was a total Christian emotion that was the result of both of them being Christian and of both sharing in what God was doing in Christ.

(2) Paul’s Prayer for the Philippians (1:9–11)

9And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, 10so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, 11filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

Paul’s thoughts easily moved from thanksgiving to petitioning prayer. The two were part of the same spiritual activity, but more than that, Paul acknowledged that the good done in the Philippians’ lives came from God. As a part of his response in praise, he prayed that God would continue his work in them.

This prayer resembles the prayer in Colossians. The similarity goes beyond the fact that the prayer follows quickly upon thanksgiving. Similarities of words reveal a similarity of content. No doubt Paul wrote them both at a time when he pondered the same thoughts on Christian growth, perhaps because of his own situation in life. The lexical and conceptual parallels include the following:

Phil 1:9–11

Col 1:9–11

praying

These parallels reveal that Paul thought consistently on the matter of Christian growth, and the fact that they are parallel emphasizes the basic themes found in his requests. The prayer contains two basic petitions. These are known by two “that” (hina) clauses in the Greek text. The NIV fails to pick up this distinction and even makes the second petition part of a parallel statement (“and may be pure and blameless”). The two petitions are: “that your love may abound ... so that you may be able to discern what is best” (1:9–10a); and that you “may be pure and blameless ... having been filled with the fruit of righteousness” (1:10b–11). The first looks to the time interval between the present situation and the return of the Lord. The second takes the perspective of the second coming and looks back to the preparation of the church for that event. Paul prayed for a growing love (1:9–10b) and for a complete character (1:10b–11a).

Prayer for a Growing Love (1:9–10a)

Love entered Paul’s thoughts first. Perhaps that was because of the Philippians’ love demonstrated in supporting him at such a crucial time in his life. Perhaps it was because love summarized the Ten Commandments, as presented in Deut 6:5 and Luke 10:27. Love also epitomized Christian responsibility to other Christians (John 13:35; 1 John 2:7–11).

To these rather obvious commands regarding love, Paul added his own insights. If the Philippians’ love abounded, they would be well on the way to Christian maturity. Here Paul described the nature of a growing love, the environment for a growing love, and the result of a growing love.

The Nature of a Growing Love (1:9a)

Some confusion always exists in discussing love. It is at the same time the universal ideal to which all should aspire and the most personal and existential of all expressions.

1:9a The definition of love is addressed in this part of v. 9. Paul used the word *agapē*. The word predominates in Scripture as the expression of love. It is sometimes difficult to distinguish *agapē* from *philos* because the two occur frequently in Scripture with seemingly interchangeable meaning. Nevertheless, *philos* does contain an element of mutuality not found in *agapē*. It is a satisfying interaction with others. What is clear is that for Paul *agapē* emphasized the self-sacrificial love of Christ. It is a selfless action to benefit someone else. The model for this love is Christ, who gave himself for the sins of the world.

As Paul prayed for the readers' love to abound, he prayed for their Christlike attitude of self-sacrifice to continue as it had been demonstrated earlier in their giving. The sacrificial nature of the love is further stressed in that there is no object for the love; it is a characteristic of the "lover" regardless of the object.³³ Jesus taught that aspect in the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37).

The lawyer asked, "Who is my neighbor?" seeking to come to a clear understanding of his neighborhood and, thereby, of his responsibility (10:29). Jesus responded, "Which ... was a neighbor?" informing the man that he had framed the question incorrectly (10:36). There are no boundaries to a Christian's neighborhood. Love was to follow in the wake of their living.

The dynamic growth of love is presented in two ways in this first clause. First, the verb "abound" (*perisseuē*), which means to "be present in abundance," occurs in the most dynamic of expressions possible.³⁶ Their love was to "keep on abounding." Second, the adverbial expression "more and more" stresses the dynamic of love. The Greek text actually has the expression "still more and more," the first part of which is omitted in the NIV. The expression builds layer upon layer to make the point. "More" would have sufficed, "more and more" was better, but "still more and more" accentuated the point being made. Although exemplary in their love, the Philippians had not yet reached perfection. There was still room for growth.

The Environment of a Growing Love (1:9b)

1:9b The prayerful exhortation to love came with instructions about how to implement it. The words "knowledge and depth of insight" provide the twofold environment in which love may grow. They are, in fact, the most basic elements which foster love.³⁸ The first aspect of the environment for growing love is knowledge. The Greek word for "knowledge" (*epignōsis*) is difficult to translate into acceptable English. The root word is *gnosis*, and the preposition *epi* ("upon") is prefixed to it. Both parts of the compound need explanation.

The basic word used here (*gnōsis*) contains a slight contrast with its synonyms. Most often it is compared or contrasted with the common Greek term for "knowledge" (*oida*). This latter term generally signifies an intellectual knowledge (the product of the mind). It may convey the idea of a complete knowledge because the other terms are not well suited to the idea of completion. In contrast, *gnōsis* generally conveys the idea of an experiential knowledge (the product of experiencing by living). It easily lends itself to expressing relationships since they come from experiences. Further, since experiences provide the process of learning, *gnōsis* often stresses the process of knowing, rather than the outcome. Here Paul used the term in its full sense of real, personal knowing. It is not the product of deductive reasoning and, therefore, intellectual (*oida*).

Nevertheless, it is not fully relational, indicating only relationships with persons. Paul

wanted them to have a personal knowledge which, as he stated later in this prayer, would surface in practical ways as well.

The compound form heightens the definition. In Greek, prefixed prepositions may be either directive, pointing to a specific knowledge, or perfective, emphasizing an accurate knowledge. Since this context does not provide a direction, clearly Paul used the word in the perfective sense. This first aspect of love, therefore, is a complete knowledge. Part of the completeness is its ability to apply what is known to the practical aspects of life.⁴⁰

Paul added judgment, the moral environment, to knowledge. The term “depth of insight” occurs only here in the New Testament, although a form of the root word occurs in Heb 5:14. It conveys the sense of moral discretion. Thus morality affects the growth of love. Although the terms knowledge and judgment have no specific modifiers, two matters are clear. First, Paul wrote in Christian terms. The love and judgment he espoused were those seen in Christ and consistent with Scripture. While the words sometimes occur in secular contexts discussing general morality, Paul certainly rooted his prayers in Christ and the resources which come from the Holy Spirit. The Philippians would realize, therefore, that in disclosing his prayer for them, Paul called them to the highest and best of Christian qualities and growth. Second, these two terms provide a collective environment which fosters growth. If either is lacking, love will not grow. In this, Paul’s expression is consistent with his Jewish-Christian ethical background. Knowing and living go hand in hand. Failure to grow in the knowledge God expects of Christians hinders love. Similarly, failure to discipline the moral life hinders love. Attention to both of these realms promotes a healthy and positive Christian life.

Like “love,” the terms “knowledge” and “insight” have no expressed objects. They speak to broad, general concerns. The comprehensive knowledge includes an accurate understanding of God and the world, as well as the “lover” himself. Similarly, the moral insight comes from various sources and is comprehensive in nature. It exposes the rightness and wrongness of all thoughts and actions.

The Result of a Growing Love (1:10a)

1:10a Paul envisioned mature Christians who had the ability to distinguish right from wrong. He directed his prayer toward that end. The NIV correctly translates what may be taken in several ways. The word “discern” has the meaning of test by trial, and the term “best” emphasizes the result of that testing. The phrase need not stress the fact that some things are harmful and, therefore, should be avoided. It has equal application to affirming and embracing the best of good choices, and that reading fits this text better. Since this context calls for a wisdom related to life, the words suggest the ability to discern moral conduct and values so that life and energy are not misdirected. A growing love, fed by proper knowledge and moral insight, enables one to see the best way to live in light of the day of Christ.

Prayer for Complete Character (1:10b–11)

Discerning what is best develops character. A growing love provides for character development and completion. As Paul prayed, his thoughts moved to the day of accountability. He prayed that the Philippians would live in such a way that they would be without blame at that time. In this second petition, therefore, Paul saw the end of life on earth. As always, the return of the Lord and Christians’ preparation for it occupied his

thoughts. Paul identified through prayer the nature of complete character, the means to it, and the purpose of it.

The Nature of Complete Character (1:10b)

1:10b Two words describe Paul's concern for the Philippians: "pure and blameless." Strictly defined these words convey two slightly different ideas. "Pure" (eilikrinēs) occurs only one other time in the New Testament (2 Pet 3:1), although other words with the same root occur (i.e., 1 Cor 5:8). The most common etymology of the term suggests that it comes from the two words "sun" (helios) and "to judge" (krinō) and that the word meant to hold up to sunlight for inspection. "Blameless" (aproskopoi) also occurs rarely in the New Testament. The term may have an active meaning (to cause blame) or a passive one (to be free from blame). The decision is a difficult one since both have a precedent (cf. Acts 24:16; 1 Cor 10:32). The text, however, follows with a reference to the "fruit of righteousness," a term which implies character, and thus it favors the passive sense. Paul hoped they would have a blameless life.

The Means to Complete Character (1:11a)

1:11a Similar to the first petition, Paul provided a context out of which such character could come. In the first, the environment of knowledge and morality produced a discriminating love. In this petition the fruit of righteousness produces complete character. The phrase "fruit of righteousness" also demands interpretation. The primary concern is the use of the term "righteousness." Some interpret it to mean the fruit produced by their imputed righteousness.⁴⁸ Most, however, understand the phrase to mean the result of righteous activity as Christians. It refers to an ethical righteousness. The Old Testament supports this conclusion (Hos 10:12), and it fits Paul's attitude expressed in Philippians.

Here Paul used an agricultural metaphor which included the word "fruit." Some translate the word as "harvest," a translation which no doubt captures Paul's thought well. The fruit was that which Jesus Christ produced in them. It parallels Gal 5:22. For that reason, the participle is best understood as a passive idea, "having been filled" (e.g., by Christ). The prayer was for them to live in such a way that Christ could work in them the harvest of morality and righteousness which would be acceptable at the day of Christ. Righteous living would protect the church; it would be blameless. As Paul would clarify later (see 3:4–6), his concern was that blamelessness be because of Christ and his righteousness, not one's own. The passage teaches that if those who are righteous by God's grace through faith live as they should, the fruit of their lives will be true blamelessness. No one will condemn them, and they will stand the test of judgment day.

The Purpose of Complete Character (1:11b)

1:11b Paul concluded this prayer with a reference to God's glory. The day of Christ characterized Paul's thoughts; the glory of God motivated Paul's actions. He saw the entire scope of salvation as an outworking of God's grace and as a contribution to God's glory. The chief end of persons was the glory of God. He reminded the Philippians of their ultimate calling, to reflect God's character in their lives. He explained the reason for their careful living: the glory of God in their lives.

With this prayer for God's glory, Paul ended the first section of the epistle. The epistle began with appreciation for their relationship to Paul from the beginning. It called them to realize that God began a work in them and it must continue, and it reminded them of the need to prepare for the day of Christ's appearing. Paul masterfully revealed his

concerns for them, introducing each of the major themes of the epistle. In a manner appropriate to friends, Paul spoke first in appreciation for who they were, then urged them to continue in Christian growth. Even his prayer provided a positive approach to them. His was no disinterested concern. He prayed that they would achieve the character prized so highly for them and himself (3:8–11). The concern did not bypass the present life, however. Love was to characterize all Christians. It uniquely expressed their relationship to Christ and prepared them for meeting him at the end of life.

2. Paul's Joy in the Progress of the Gospel (1:12–26)

With v. 12, Paul began a discussion of his situation in Rome. He rarely wrote so early in an epistle about his own situation. Perhaps several reasons prompted this approach. First, no doubt the church anxiously awaited this news; it had sent Epaphroditus to Paul's side, anticipating his needs. Perhaps it had heard of the potential difficulties Paul might have with the Roman government. Although at this time Christianity was not a capital crime, no one knew how the emperor would rule regarding Christians. This was the test case.

The second reason Paul discussed his circumstances so soon was that the Philippians would hear a firsthand report from Epaphroditus, and Paul needed to address their concerns quickly. Their anxiety regarding Epaphroditus would quickly turn to continued anxiety about Paul. Although Epaphroditus's report would be accurate, it could easily be filled with his impressions. Little could be done constructively to address the needs of the church if readers were waiting to hear how Paul responded to his circumstances. Third, Paul saw firsthand how divisions affected the work of the gospel. The divided church at Rome surely grieved Paul. Although he did not complain in his letter, and he pointed out the positive aspects of the situation, obviously the disunity concerned him. An explanation of his circumstances provided a natural and easy way to encourage the Philippians in the qualities he saw lacking at Rome. Thus the description of his situation served to anticipate his point to the readers. Surely they would conduct themselves differently from the Roman church.

Finally, this section responded to the gift they had sent. They wanted to know Paul's circumstances because they were friends; because of their stewardship, they needed to know how the work progressed. At specific intervals Paul wrote autobiographically, informing the readers of his own thoughts. Three times this occurs in major sections: 1:12–26, regarding his circumstances; 3:1–14, regarding his experience of salvation; and 4:10–20, regarding the gift from the church. In each case, Paul's experiences became an effective vehicle for communicating his concerns.

A major structural question concerns the ending of the first section. It is difficult to know whether 1:27–30 concludes the first section by applying Paul's concerns regarding Rome to the church at Philippi, or whether it begins the first set of exhortations. There are thematic and conceptual ties to both sections.

The problem is to determine what criteria actually indicate a new section has begun. On one hand, Philippians has the marks of a personal letter, and informal allusions to the tie between writer and reader occur throughout. In 1:27–30 Paul made reference to his desire to hear of the Philippians' firm stand. Such a stand confirmed his apostolic ministry. In 2:1–11 Paul appealed to the common bond between himself and the church. The humility he advocated was a fulfillment of his joy. In 2:12–18 he urged them to obey and work out their salvation even if he were sacrificed. Their obedience vindicated his

sufferings for them. The criterion for structural divisions may be personal allusion, but such allusions are frequent in the section. In each portion Paul appealed to their friendship. On the other hand, the criterion may be that the form changes to exhortation rather than information. Three basic commands occur in 1:27–2:18. This change of tone appears more significant, and the three no doubt form a section to themselves. The first section, therefore, ends at 1:26. It divides naturally into two primary sections: Paul's circumstances (1:12–17) and Paul's attitudes (1:18–26).

(1) Paul's Circumstances (1:12–17)

12Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. 13As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. 14Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly. 15It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. 16The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. 17The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains.

The church primarily desired to know Paul's circumstances. While his description is in some ways quite explicit, in other ways many questions remain unanswered. For one thing, Paul assumed that the church knew the details. If it did not, Epaphroditus would surely report more than Paul could write. Writing all that he felt could have jeopardized his legal situation. For another, what he wrote was one-sided, and the readers had to piece things together as best they could.

Paul's Imprisonment (1:12)

1:12 Rather than detail the hardships he faced, Paul took a divine perspective. He recognized that all events could be redeemed for the Lord's sake, and he took what advantage he could to continue his mission. The primary concern was that the gospel go forward. This happened through adverse circumstances, but as long as it happened, Paul could be joyful.

Paul did not specifically mention his imprisonment. The Greek text says simply "the things to me" (ta kat' eme). Most likely he included all the events from his imprisonment at Jerusalem through his imprisonment at Rome. These were the riot, the two-year imprisonment at Caesarea, the appeal to Caesar, the threat on his life, the trip to Rome with its shipwreck, his house-arrest and restricted freedom, and the impending trial. However, the focus is on the Roman events. As Paul described them, he spoke in terms of the effect on the soldiers and the Roman church.

The church might have expected the worse, but Paul countered that quickly. The gospel advanced. The term "advanced" (prokopēn) was used in the Greek-speaking world to describe blazing a trail before an army, the philosophical progress toward wisdom, and the progress of a young minister. Paul, therefore, saw the events as forging new territory for the gospel. They took Paul into contact with a select group of people, soldiers and Roman officials, who otherwise would have had no relationship to him, and they also prompted a renewed evangelistic effort in the city. While others may have seen the end of missionary activity, Paul saw the new ways the gospel could advance. The events which seemed to inhibit the freedom of the gospel became its springboard. Paul did not say "in spite of" these events, but rather "through them." There is a note of sacrifice here. Paul's private concerns did not matter; the gospel did.

Reactions to Paul's Imprisonment (1:13–17)

In explaining the situation at Rome, Paul disclosed two important results of the events that had happened to him. Neither of these was expected, and thus Paul's word was news to them. At the same time, both reactions advanced the gospel; Paul made specific what he had claimed to be the case in 1:12. His statement there did not come without evidence. Even here, however, one of the reactions continued to be a mixed blessing, and it proved to be a continuing circumstance of the gospel's advance through difficulties.

The Gospel Spread Among Roman Soldiers (1:13)

1:13 In this undesirable situation, the gospel spread through the ranks of the soldiers. Basically, Paul said that they knew he was a prisoner of Christ, not just of Rome. The clarification of that fact was an encouragement since Paul would later state "to live is Christ" (1:21). Two matters deserve comment: the meaning of the phrase "manifest in Christ" (*phanerous en Christō*), which the NIV translates "become clear ... for Christ," and the meaning of "the praetorium" (*praitōrion*), which the NIV translates "palace guard."

Paul's basic reason for encouragement was that his real imprisonment became clear. Commentators differ on the meaning of the words "in Christ." Some think they go with "chains," with the resultant meaning being something like "it became evident that I was a Christian," or "that I was a prisoner of Christ." Since Paul lived for the gospel, perhaps he stated that he was not guilty of any charge brought against him and that the soldiers knew he could be released except for his commitment to Christ. In the truest sense, he was a prisoner of Christ. That prior relationship caused him to be a literal prisoner of Rome. Others, like the NIV translators, interpret the phrase to mean that the chains were manifest that they were "for Christ." Pointing out the awkwardness of the construction in Greek if any other interpretation holds, they state that Paul was really a prisoner for the sake of Christ.⁵⁶ His predicament was because of the Christian message he proclaimed.

Paul actually took advantage of the situation to call to mind a deeper slavery. In Eph 3:1, he referred to himself as the prisoner of Christ. Surely he intended a similar meaning here, though neither passage is determinative. Paul did use words in such a way that they conveyed deeper meanings (not in violation of simpler meanings, however). The first interpretation fits better than the second. Paul's joy came because what he lived for (the manifestation of Christ) was actually happening. Further, the principle he held so dear was clarified to those around. They understood his slavery to Christ.

Paul said this knowledge spread in the praetorium. Considerable debate focuses on whether the *praitōrion* (praetorium or palace guard) was a place (i.e., a barracks) or a people (i.e., an elite imperial guard). On one hand, the praetorium was a place. Those who interpret it as a place assume that the place was the barracks of the imperial guard. The evidence from Acts reveals that Paul had his own leased dwelling, so he could not have been incarcerated at the praetorium (Acts 28:30). Seen this way, Paul stated that the topic of conversation in the barracks was Paul and Christ. On the other hand, the praetorium was also a group of men. The term stood for the emperor's bodyguard of nine cohorts. They were the only troops stationed in Italy after the settlement of

Augustus. Although Paul did not claim that people of the guard were converted, he did claim that they heard his message.⁶⁰

Christians Encouraged to Speak (1:14–17)

1:14 The second result of Paul's circumstances involved the church at Rome. A new evangelistic effort sprang up that affected the entire Christian community. Paul saw that his situation was the catalyst for this renewed interest in outreach, and he knew it would be good news to the church at Philippi.

In actuality, the church at Rome had two different reactions. Some members were encouraged by Paul and preached out of sympathy; others hoped to get Paul into more trouble with the Roman officials. Paul focused first on the brethren who supported him. In addition, he was able to see beyond the differences in motivation and realized that Christ was proclaimed. He was comforted by this reality.

Most of the Christians took heart from Paul's situation. They preached more courageously and fearlessly. Some commentators have suggested that the believers' preaching came because they knew that Paul's only crime was Christianity, and that was no crime at all. Before they had feared their own imprisonment; now that fear no longer existed. There is no evidence for that interpretation, however. While Paul's general tone was optimistic, he never indicated that he knew the trial would exonerate him. Paul actually stated that "the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak." He emphasized their spiritual motivation, not the evidence they might have derived from Paul's circumstances. Further, the context assumes their preaching was encouraged by the imprisonment, not by the expected release. As the next verses indicate, their support for Paul had given them courage to preach God's word.⁶³

Paul acknowledged that they preached the word, but not all preached with proper motivations. In vv. 15–17 Paul described two groups of preachers who reacted to him. The verses fall into a literary pattern of a chiasm. The literary pattern reveals three important aspects of their preaching. First, the "outside" members of the chiasm receive the emphasis. When Paul turned his thoughts to these preachers, therefore, he thought first in terms of those who opposed him.⁶⁵ Second, each group has two sets of descriptive phrases accompanying it. All of these contribute to an understanding of the motivations involved. Third, the chiasm further describes the preachers of v. 14. "Most of the brothers" included those supportive and those opposed to Paul.

The ones preaching to harm Paul are discussed in 1:15, 17. The content reveals a close connection between vv. 14–15, but the translators show a separation. The only word against the preachers of 1:15 is that they had wrong motives. They were still brothers. The first portion of the chiastic unit, however, mildly changes to describing an activity unexpected of brothers. The translation "It is true that" captures the thought. Some opposed Paul, but that was a minor obstacle.

1:15 Paul exposed their method and motivations. The method was "envy and rivalry." The words always suggest relationships which have gone bad, and the terms normally occur in Paul's lists of sins to avoid. Paul used the same construction in stating that others preached "out of goodwill." Certainly their goodwill was not be directed toward the Roman authorities, and it was unlikely that it was goodwill toward the church. In fact, some would no doubt think that the best course of action for the church would have been to remain silent and allow unity and harmony to prevail.

The motivation of the opposing preachers was “selfish ambition” (cf. 1:17). While they may have eyed Rome, hoping that an unfavorable judgment would come, they actually sought to elevate themselves at Paul’s expense. Their insincere preaching intended to bring greater affliction to Paul. Perhaps they thought Rome provided the key to rid the church of Paul and his kind.

1:16–17 Paul also described his supporters’ motivations. They preached from “goodwill” and “love.” These relational terms contrast with the descriptions of the opponents. Those of goodwill directed their support toward Paul, just as the others directed their animosity toward him.

One further contrast between these groups indicates how Paul’s imprisonment became the occasion for such attitudes to surface. Paul stated that his supporters knew he was “put here for the defense of the gospel” (1:16), while his antagonists hoped to “stir up trouble for me while I am in chains” (1:17). The first statement, from his friends, reveals a theological understanding of Paul’s unique place in God’s missionary program. The words “I am put here” translate the Greek word *keimai* (“I have been set”). Paul used the word (*keimai*) to express the divine purpose of his imprisonment, which was “the defense of the gospel.”

Paul revealed a similar self-understanding in Gal 1:15–16. In a statement that parallels Jeremiah’s experience (cf. Jer 1:5), Paul explained that God separated him from the womb, called him by grace, and sent him to preach the gospel to the Gentiles (Gal 1:15). He could not foresee all of the situations he would encounter in responding daily to God’s call on his life. He knew his appointment involved suffering as a regular part of his ministry, and he knew God called him to defend and present the truth of the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles. His defense before Jews reached a theological climax at the Jerusalem Council when it was decided that Gentiles did not need to adopt Jewish patterns of life, worship, and service. Throughout his ministry, however, he had to live out that agreement, many times among those who did not accept it as well as the Jerusalem apostles did. Paul’s presence in Rome occasioned this segment of the ongoing debate. His defense before Rome also had a long developing history. In several cities where he founded churches, Paul defended himself against Gentile attacks (cf. Acts 17:6–9; 18:12–14; 19:24–41; 26:19–20).

Paul knew from these experiences that he not only encountered Jewish opposition but also had to answer to Rome. No doubt as he walked the many miles of Roman roads, he planned how to defend the gospel should such an occasion arise. Paul’s defense involved the gospel. Others may have thought about the repercussions of their preaching in relation to their own lives, but Paul lived for the gospel. For him, the opportunity to appear before Caesar provided a test case for the gospel. Would it be accepted? Perhaps there is a note of anticipation, as well as resolution. He was the apostle to the Gentiles. He struggled to bring the gospel to them, and now he would have opportunity to present the new ideology to the emperor. He knew that in a real way the task of Gentile evangelism was his, and he could finish it this way. The emperor of the world would actually hear the gospel. Opponents also saw this as the time to silence Paul. They hoped—or perhaps imagined—to bring affliction to him and, perhaps, to sway the sympathies of the emperor against him.

Such a disclosure of the situation at Rome prompts the question of who these two groups were. Some have suggested they were Judaizers like those who troubled Paul

at Galatia and, perhaps, in Phil 3. Paul had little sympathy for Judaizers, however. His harshest words spoke against their theology and methodology. They hardly fit the accepting attitude of Paul in this text. Others suggest that they were preachers who believed martyrdom was a high ideal. They preached with an intent of bringing Paul to martyrdom, while realizing that whatever consequences he received, they would likely bear as well.⁷³

These preachers, however, preached against Paul out of jealousy. They could hardly have hoped to bring Paul to a higher spiritual stature if they were envious of what he already had. This suggestion has little to commend it. A third possibility is that they preached against the Jews for what they did to Paul. The Jewish flavor of the situation is quite likely, but preaching against the people who opposed Paul does not fit the context. Paul stated that they preached against him.

Finally, some scholars note that the opponents preached against Paul. Perhaps they did so because of his weaknesses. The fact that he was a prisoner demonstrated for them that he was not who he claimed to be. Surely he would triumph in Christ if God were with him. Instead, they said that God had manifested his presence through them. Paul responded by saying what was manifest about him.

More than likely, the problem came from the dynamics of the Roman church and Paul's relationship to it. Possibly the situation resembled Corinth, where the various factions rallied around one great leader or another. The situation at Rome was pluralistic. No great Christian leaders were there before Paul arrived, so there was no primary apostle. Perhaps many vied for the position or, at the least, they did not want someone from the outside claiming that status.

Rome welcomed various ethnic groups and cultural practices. Normally immigrants lived in common tenement houses by ethnic and language groups. Sometimes various groups subdivided by ideologies or places of origin. For example, the city had at least thirteen Jewish synagogues, which probably served Jews from different places in the empire. How the church fit into that social and ethnic structure is difficult to discern. The issues that separated the Gentile and Jewish Christians had become more pronounced with the expulsion of all Jews from Rome in a.d. 49 and their return in a.d. 52. No doubt Gentiles dominated at least during the period of expulsion, and they probably vied for power and leadership when the Jews returned. Earlier, Paul had written to the Roman church with a major concern about unity between Jews and Gentiles. Although the letter to Rome was written five years before Philippians, the complexities of the situation surely continued until Paul arrived in Rome.

The situation regarding Paul is, therefore, difficult to untangle. Tensions arose between and among the various groupings: Jews against themselves, Gentiles against Jews, Jews against Gentiles, and various Gentile factions against each other. Further, Paul entered this difficult situation with the authority of the apostle to the Gentiles but limited by the Roman government. All of the groups within the church knew him, but not all welcomed him.

Perhaps a theological tension underlay the social and economic situation. Paul championed Gentile freedom from the law. In his Roman letter, he had sided with the Gentiles in affirming that they did not need to keep the practices of Jewish culture. Although the Jewish Christians would have expected that from Paul, no doubt it forced an intense debate on the matter. The debate followed Paul wherever he went, and his

arrival at Rome perhaps triggered it again. Most likely it involved the law. Paul's writings and the historical data reveal that Paul had intense conflicts over the relevance of the Ten Commandments and the ceremonial aspects of Jewish law. Additionally, the argument in Phil 3 concerned these matters. There the debate intensified and broadened beyond the concerns of the preachers of Phil 1.

Significantly, Paul evaluated these preachers carefully and objectively. Three areas of concern emerge in his evaluation of others: their methods, their motives, and their message. They clearly had a correct message. Christ was proclaimed (1:14–18). Likewise, their methods caused no problem. The text reveals only one way of ministry: They preached. The point of difference was their motives. Motivations generally remain inside and quiet, but these preachers quite openly explained their motives. Paul had a great concern for motives in the ministry,⁸¹ yet he did not attack these preachers the way he did others. Apparently this was because they acted toward him, not toward the gospel or Christianity in general. He chose to look on the bright side since the message and the method furthered the truth. God alone can deal with motives!

(2) Paul's Attitude (1:18–26)

18But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.

Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, 19for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. 20I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. 21For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. 22If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! 23I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; 24but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. 25Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, 26so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.

Paul's situation caused deep reflection. His concerns were twofold: the outcome of his imprisonment and trial and the possibility of death. These verses reveal the tensions in Paul's life. The tribulation he endured reached their zenith as he awaited his trial. In many ways, that was his finest hour for the gospel. The commitments which drove him in his life now kept him as he contemplated his death. Even in the midst of such deep reflection, Paul was optimistic. He would be saved, Christ would be glorified one way or another, and the gospel would go forth.

Structurally, two questions arise in these verses. The first is, Where does the section begin? The second relates to the progress of thought through 1:18–26: Are there one, two, or three movements? Regardless of the number of movements, Paul's argument progresses with one discussion flowing from a previous idea. The thought of joy (1:18a) brought to mind the expectation of continued joy in the future (1:18b). In v. 20 Paul introduced the concept of death, and in 1:21–24 the themes of life and death are further developed. Finally, 1:24 ends with a desire to do what was best for the Philippians, and 1:25–26 continues the themes of remaining on earth and sacrificing for them. It is a carefully composed section that expressed Paul's emotions.

Paul's Joy in Salvation (1:18–24)

1:18a The section begins in v. 18— all interpreters affirm that. The problem is whether it begins at the beginning of v. 18, at the middle, or at the end. The NIV translators assumed correctly that the new section began in the middle of the verse. The theme of the preachers continues until that point, and Paul ended the previous section on a note of joy. The repetition of the word “rejoice” serves as a transition, providing another reason for Paul’s joy: his own anticipation of success in the trial that lay before him. The second structural question relates to the three movements within the section. The question is whether they should be seen as three different ideas or two. Those who see three separate units argue that the grammar suggests them. The first unit is 1:18–20, which is one sentence in the Greek text. The second unit is 1:21–24. This contains the section about life and death and is introduced by “for” (gar), as is the first section. The third unit is 1:25–26, which is one sentence in Greek introduced by the expression “and having this confidence.”

This arrangement is quite possible, but a two-unit arrangement makes better sense in light of the parallels and the thematic structure of the passage. Two basic parallels confirm the flow of thought. The main verb of 1:18b–19 is “I know,” and that same verb is repeated in 1:25. The other parallel is a conceptual tie between “I will ... rejoice,” which introduces the first “I know,” and “convinced of this,” which introduces the second. Paul’s joy and confidence were two expressions of the same attitude: He would be able to achieve his deepest desires of glorifying Christ. The same ideas and root words occur in 1:4–6, where Paul’s prayer for the Philippians was both joyful and confident. Here Paul’s desire was that Christ would be magnified in his life, and his confidence was that he would remain for their edification.

Paul’s optimism was obvious. Why was he optimistic? Was it because he expected to be released from prison soon? Was it that he knew whatever happened, he was surely to be delivered from this evil world? Was it a joy that came from a backward glance to his conversion experience that sustained him through the difficulties of the present? These three suggestions call for careful analysis, and they are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The first section contains two parts: a description of Paul’s salvation and hope (1:18b–20) and an expression of his commitment to them (1:21–24).

Paul’s Salvation and Hope (1:18b–20)

1:18b–19 Paul fully expected deliverance, and these verses express that hope clearly. He wrote with a joyful note as he contemplated what that meant for him and for the Philippians. The first question to answer in this text is about the nature and means of Paul’s salvation.

Paul spoke of his salvation with a note of certainty. The verb “know” (oida) used here contains an air of confidence. The term may be used of a complete knowledge identified with the mind rather than the process of knowledge which comes from the experience. How Paul knew this is unknown, and the many suggestions made depend on the meaning of the word “salvation.”

“Salvation” has been interpreted in two primary ways. First, a common interpretation today is that Paul knew he would be delivered (“saved”) from death and/or imprisonment. Since Rome had nothing against Christians at this early date, Paul had no reason to suspect anything but a positive decision at his trial. Two main lines of argumentation support this conclusion. The word “salvation” may have the sense of “deliverance from death.” Those who accept this interpretation, such as the NIV, invoke

that meaning in this passage. Additionally, 1:25 expresses Paul's certainty that he would remain on earth. This last argument is the most significant.

Against this interpretation, several factors in the context must be considered. First, Paul stated that his adversity would result in his deliverance. His words indicate that the difficulty would itself have the positive results he anticipated. That hardly fits a deliverance from prison. Second, Paul entertained the possibility of death, but that did not affect his optimism. His deliverance would come in spite of imprisonment or even death. Third, Paul anticipated gaining his hope of "not being ashamed." Finally, Paul's statement in this section is similar to Job 13:13–18. Thus, while many equate the passage with an expectation of release, that interpretation does not fit all the details well.

The second interpretation of salvation takes the word in its full, eschatological sense. The completion of the salvation begun with commitment to Christ would be the final vindication of the believer when he met Christ. Paul knew that he would arrive at that great day and see the complete salvation he so desired. This longing did not come from an unsettledness or unassured attitude toward salvation. Paul knew that perseverance through this life was one of the identifying characteristics of a Christian. Knowing he had been saved, he also anticipated the full joy of complete salvation. Several factors support this interpretation.

Paul's wording in this section clearly reflects Job 13:13–18 in the LXX text. Both the Greek wording and the circumstances parallel each other. If Paul quoted Job in context, as he normally did when he referred to the Old Testament, he must have consciously derived comfort from Job's course of life. Paul's life had, in fact, taken much the same course. When nothing made sense to Job and everyone opposed him, his "salvation" was that he knew he was just and that he would stand before God and be vindicated. A significant question to answer in 1:19 is the reference to "this" ("this shall result in my salvation"). The NIV translates "what has happened to me." The pronoun must look to the mixed preaching of the Christians at Rome. In that way, many brought their accusations against Paul and his righteousness. Like Job, he would stand vindicated at last.

A second reason for this interpretation is that it deals seriously with the question of life and death (1:21–24). Paul would be "saved" regardless of his physical condition. The element of uncertainty regarding the trial did not affect his confidence inside.

Third, Paul's real joy was that Christ was proclaimed. The factor of his life-call enters this context. Paul wanted to hear "well done" when he stood before God. His task was to reach the Gentiles for Christ, and how that was accomplished was of secondary consequence. The mixed preaching at Rome actually furthered his deepest Christian desire, which was to make Christ known.

Finally, the passage contains terms that relate to spiritual deliverance: salvation and hope. Thus, the better interpretation is to see Paul's salvation in an eschatological sense—he looked forward to his entrance into heaven and vindication by the Lord himself.

In spite of Paul's confidence in his destiny, he sought the Philippians' help. His deliverance would come "through [their] prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ" (1:19). Paul considered these two ideas to be closely related because they both provided the means through which his goal was achieved. He sought their

prayers on his behalf, realizing that God answers prayer and works through it to accomplish his purposes. There was no “resignation to the inevitable” here. Paul combined his foundational trust in Christ with the need for prayers on his behalf. The “help given by the Spirit” goes along with the prayers. This phrase has been handled in different ways. Some scholars take it to be “the supply that the Spirit gives,” or “the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ” (NIV). Others take it to mean “the help which consists of the Spirit.” A parallel idea occurs in Gal 3:5, where Paul asked how they had received God’s Spirit, obviously meaning the gift of the Spirit himself. Most likely the NIV translation is correct. Paul expected the Holy Spirit to provide whatever he needed to meet life’s demands. This would occur through their prayers as well.

1:20 The second portion of this section focuses on Paul’s hope. The NIV captures the force of the text well in making “I eagerly expect and hope” introduce the content of Paul’s hope. The anticipation of his deliverance accorded perfectly with his lifelong hope that Christ would be glorified in him.

Paul stated his hope in two ways. First, he hoped that he would not be ashamed; second, that Christ would be exalted in his body. What did he mean that he would not be ashamed? This certainly does not express the feeling of guilt which the English word often conveys. There is an objective aspect to it. Here Paul was using the objective aspect of “hope” or “trust” as it was used in Isa 28:16. He quoted this verse both in offering the gospel and as one of its foundations (Rom 9:33; 10:11). The verses from Romans help interpret Paul’s understanding of the passage. In Rom 9:33, he contrasted a stumbling over a stone (Christ) with those who do not stumble (i.e., are not put to shame). In Rom 10:10–11, Paul stated that the one who confesses Christ “with his mouth” after believing “in his heart” will not stumble (i.e., be put to shame). Confession seals the commitments, and those commitments do not lead to embarrassment. This suits the context of Isa 28:16, where the Lord spoke through the prophet that Israel should remain true to the Lord. If it did, it would not be “put to flight.” These texts have little to do with being ashamed to confess Christ. They do not speak to the point of timidity. Rather, they speak to the security of believers and the certainty that they are on solid foundation when they believe on the “cornerstone.”

Paul expected, therefore, not to be put to shame. He confidently had confessed Jesus as Lord. It was not a thoughtless or quick confession; it was the direction of his life. He had Old Testament Scripture to support his contention that the Lord aids those who confess him. Perhaps his thoughts turned to the day of judgment. That was the greatest test, and Paul hoped to be bold (not to “be ashamed”) on that day. The context, however, points to the present life, as the contrasting clause to this one makes clear. He expected God would give him the grace so that he would not be put to shame in his confession here and now. The Roman trial was another opportunity for him to triumph in Christ. In no way would he fail. Christ would give him the strength.

The positive side of Paul’s hope was that Christ would be exalted in his body. This clearly identifies the hope with an earthly situation rather than the final judgment. The first clause of the section presents the hope that Paul would stand strong through the various situations of life. This clause makes that hope concrete. They both refer to the same aspects of existence. The use of the term “body,” which Paul used for the physical body, and the discussion of life or death as the means of accomplishing this hope

demonstrate Paul's present expectation. Two matters help interpret Paul's statements here: "sufficient courage" and "in my body."

The phrase "have sufficient courage" translates a strong Greek expression (lit., "have all presence"). Usually, Paul employed it referring to the proclamation of the gospel (2 Cor 3:12; Eph 6:19) so that it described boldness in witness. However, it describes a courage of life. He hoped that he would have the courage to live or die as a true Christian should. Paul's ministry encompassed both living and speaking, and he needed courage for both. He had enjoyed success before, but now he faced greater tests. He expected to end as he began, courageous in his witness.

The location of this final witness was "in my body." Paul consistently used the term for the physical body, and there is no need to suggest some metaphorical use of the term here. In Rom 6:6 Paul spoke of the crucifixion with Christ to "paralyze the body [physical] of sin" (author's translation). Later, in 6:12–14, he made it clear that the body was the mortal body, and sin had to be overcome there. Further, in a positive command, in Rom 12:1–2 Paul employed the metaphor of sacrifice to exhort the believers to consecration. He still used the terms of the physical body. It is not surprising, therefore, that he thought here in terms of the body's responsibility in Christian commitment. Paul knew that Christian commitment cannot happen apart from the body. In fact, Christian growth requires a focus on the body as the vehicle of expression of the true person, and as the instrument for receiving the communications of others. The person is intimately connected to the body, and Paul easily localized Christian commitment in the physical parts of his body. Since, therefore, he had committed his body to God and served him through the body, he had to continue to glorify him there as well. The immediate context confirms this conclusion where, in 1:24, he again referred to life in the body.

No matter what it took or what it cost, Christ would be honored by everything about this apostle. Paul's commitment to Christ, his confession of him, and his understanding of the power of God to sustain the believer demanded no less.

Paul's Commitment to the Philippians (1:21–24)

In vv. 21–24, Paul revealed a deep inner struggle. The contrasts between life and death indicate that Paul seriously contemplated the possibilities of both. Of course, he did not have the power over his destiny; it was in the hands of God (perhaps as he might work through Rome). However, he faced the alternative situations with forethought. In his own mind, he resolved the tension by the same principle that guided his life to that point. He would serve to the end.

1:21 The themes of life and death explain how Paul would glorify God in his body—even death would not keep him from it. These themes also prompted him to evaluate the purpose of living. With this introduction to 1:21–24, it seems that the section explains the commitment of the previous verses (vv. 18b–20). As far as Paul was concerned, "to live is Christ and to die is gain." This differs from what others thought and what might have been expected. Normally, one would say to live is gain and to die is Christ, but Paul reversed these. At death a Christian gains a more intimate relationship with the Lord. The statement "to live is Christ" is magnified by the statement "to die is gain."⁹⁵ Often Paul spoke of Christ as his life. In Gal 2:20 he said, "I live by faith in the Son of God." In Col 3:4 he stated that Christ "is your life." These two passages differ in context and concern. The emphasis in Gal 2:20 is soteriological; in Col 3:4, Paul speaks to the

mysterious union between Christ and the believer. Paul did not mean precisely either here, however. In this context he spoke of glorifying Christ through whatever means he had, and that provides the interpretive environment. The statement is completed by envisioning death as a better state than life. Thus, “to live is Christ” must mean that Paul so totally wanted to glorify Christ that as long as he lived everything about him was to point people to Christ. This was accomplished in part by the chains which were “manifested in Christ” (1:13); but even if he were called to die, it would be an occasion for Christ to become prominent. Death was a gain because he would see the Lord, enjoy him, and no longer endure the difficulties he was called to bear on earth.

1:22–24 These verses describe both Paul’s dilemma and his resolution of it. The literary pattern emphasizes his conviction that he would remain, that the result of his trial would be life not death. In 1:22 he expressed the conviction that fruit would result from his continued physical life. The way the discussion takes place reveals the interpretation of “fruitful labor for me” (1:22). This statement is matched by the conviction that he would remain for the sake of the Philippians (1:24). While it may appear that the “fruit” was some spiritual development in Paul’s life, the context clearly relates “fruit” to the service Paul performed. In between these two statements, he posed the troublesome question of his choice. “What shall I choose?... I am torn between the two.” It was helpful to them for Paul to remain; the fruit was what resulted from his work for others. The longer Paul lived, the more people would be touched by his life.⁹⁷ Many understand Paul to say that he would reap the harvest of his past work. Therefore it would benefit him to remain in the flesh. These interpretations, however, seem to neglect the fact that Paul’s rewards, and therefore his “benefits,” awaited him at death. That is why dying was gain. Further, this passage reveals Paul’s concern for others, not himself (1:24, 26). He must have been thinking of the future and the harvests that would come from his life should God allow him to continue on this earth.

Beyond the discussion of rewards, however, Paul clearly expressed the desire to be with Christ (1:23). It was better. The discussion of rewards clouds the basic issue. Paul’s longing for death was, in reality, a longing for a more intimate, open, and total relationship with Christ himself. Such a relationship could only occur after death. The practical dilemma, therefore, consisted of whether Paul would choose his own preference or remain to benefit others. His conviction was that he would remain. While the statement obviously takes an optimistic perspective on the trial Paul faced, it spoke more to his conviction regarding his life service. His work remained unfinished. He thought, therefore, that God would have him remain and accomplish it.

One final concern emerges from these verses. Some commentators introduce the problem of the doctrine of soul sleep here. Generally those who do must address the fact that these verses do not teach the doctrine. They must harmonize the passage with what they have deduced from others. Paul directly stated that in death he would be “with Christ,” and the language speaks of being immediately in Christ’s presence. Further, Paul would hardly have been comforted by being away from Christ after death. He was already with him and looked forward to a more open relationship with him at death. Why would Paul want to sleep (away from the conscious presence of Christ which he enjoyed on earth) when his tension resulted from the desire to enjoy Christ more fully? Finally, making this passage conform to an already assumed position such as soul sleep is difficult.¹⁰⁰ The natural way to read the passage speaks against it, as

do the other Pauline discussions of life after death. The fact is, Paul did not discuss the doctrine in this text at all. He simply expressed his conviction that if he died he would gain because death was a departure whereby he would be in the presence of the Lord (syn Christō, 1:23).

Paul's Confidence of Future Ministry (1:25–26)

1:25–26 The second section of this passage begins here. It not only looks back to the discussion of 1:18–20 but also expresses Paul's hope in new ways. Specifically, Paul shared his confidence that he would remain with the Philippians to advance the gospel and to further their progress and joy in the faith as they saw him again.

Looking back, Paul based his statement on the confidence expressed in 1:18–20. The glory of Christ would be achieved best by Paul's remaining on earth to continue his ministry. Paul did not tell the readers why he felt this conviction. Perhaps he knew that Rome had no reason to punish him, and his optimism lay in the confidence that Rome would do justly. At a deeper level, his confidence grew out of his understanding of the ministry God had given him. Paul lived for others. He knew their needs well, and he knew that they would grow spiritually through his presence with them. This statement applied the hope that Christ would be glorified (1:20) to the realities of daily life. He might have chosen to go on to heaven and enjoy fully the Lord whom he loved, but the task was unfinished, and he must remain.

Paul would remain because of their needs, which he first stated in an overview and then in specific terms. The overview is “for your progress and joy in the faith.” The word “progress” (prokopēn) was used earlier of the advancement of the gospel message (1:12). There Paul's circumstances pushed the message forward into new territory. In a similar way, his return to the church would push its faith forward. As the events became opportunities for preaching the gospel, his presence with the church could only help it. This advancement of its faith was also called a joy. Both “progress” and “joy” are modified by “in the faith.” As the Philippians matured in their understanding of Christ, their joy in the faith would deepen and would be encouraged. This thought is repeated in v. 26.

1:26 The specific statement is that Paul's presence would bring great joy. It was a joy in Christ through Paul's release. A similar statement occurs in 4:10, where Paul said, “I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me.” Their financial support caused Paul to worship and praise the Lord, who sent it through them. Naturally, the gift brought joy, but the greater joy was what it meant in the work of the Lord. Applying that understanding here, Paul realized that his presence provided an occasion for worship and praise. In spite of the similarity of 1:26 and 4:10, two different words describe “joy.” In 4:10, Paul used chairō, “to rejoice” or “be glad.” Here, the word is kauchēma, “to boast or be proud.” Kauchēma often suggests an occasion or object of the joy and has the sense of “taking pride in” something specific.

Three complementary phrases explain the ground of their glorying. First, it would “overflow” in Christ Jesus. For Paul, Jesus was always the basis of joy. Second, it would be through Paul as representing Christ. Paul, as apostle, brought Christ to them, and they longed to see him again. He was their best example of Jesus. Third, they would boast because of Paul's presence with them again. Additionally, there may be an overtone of joy that the trial would be over and that the work of the Lord could go forth.

Paul's words express his optimism. Without a doubt, he expected to continue his ministry after the trial. Even so, he contemplated the realities of what could happen and how he would respond to the worst of situations. He would triumph. If he went to be with his Lord, that was triumph. If he stayed with them, they would be helped. But as he understood the work of the Lord, he would remain to further their faith.

This passage suggests that Paul anticipated a visit to Philippi upon his release. The same expectation occurred in Colossians and Philemon. Paul's plans to go to Spain had been postponed. Perhaps he sought the strength of fellowship that his converts provided. Perhaps he knew they needed him. At any rate, they would prosper if God allowed him to remain on earth.

3. Exhortation to Christlike Character (1:27–2:18)

This verse begins a new section of the epistle. A change of tone signals a change of direction. Paul moved from information to exhortation, and three primary exhortations occur: 1:27–30; 2:1–4; 2:12–18. Both before (1:12–26) and after (2:19–30) the exhortations, Paul shared information about himself. The word “only” (“whatever happens,” NIV) also marks a change, such as seen in Gal 2:7–9. Paul's concerns about Christian relationships surface during this discussion.

(1) A Unified Stand (1:27–30)

27Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel 28without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. 29For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him, 30since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

In this first section of commands, Paul urged the church to be true to the faith. Paul's actual words were, “to walk worthily of the gospel of Christ.” The command may be taken broadly, but Paul's specific concern was a unified stand for the gospel. Both of these elements were important. The church at Rome stood for the gospel, but there was no unity. That hurt its witness. The Philippians had the opportunity to witness to the world by their unified stand for the gospel. This would be particularly impressive if they stood strong through the sufferings they were called to endure. Two matters need to be discussed: the nature of their stand (1:27–28) and Christian suffering (1:29–30).

The Nature of the Philippians' Stand (1:27–28)

1:27–28 The main verb “conduct yourselves” (*politeuesthe*) called the church to appropriate conduct. It is an unusual term, and the verb form occurs only here and in Acts 23:1. Normally Paul used the verb “walk” (*peripateō*) to describe a Christian's conduct. Here he used the verb “conduct yourselves as citizens” (*politeuō*). Scholars differ as to the exact force of the word in this text. It was a word built upon the Greek *polis* (city) and had overtones of citizenship responsibilities. Paul made conscious use of the term. The noun form occurs in 3:20 in calling the Philippians to appropriate ethical conduct. There he stated that “our citizenship is in heaven.” No doubt the readers would have associated the word with the Roman citizenship which they prized so much. This was Paul's way of reminding them of the obligations of people who participate in a society. In this case, the society was of Christians whose strongest ties were in heaven.

Paul expressed his concern for the church earlier (1:24–26). He so longed for its maturity that he was convinced that God would leave him on earth to help it grow in faith. In reality it could grow with or without him, and now he spoke of the possibility that he would not come. If he were absent, perhaps because of the unfavorable verdict in his trial or unexpected delays, he still longed to hear of its good spiritual condition. Paul had no inflated ideas about his importance. The church was capable of standing for the gospel.

The Christian's stand is "in one spirit." This is the first of the several words for unity that bind together 1:27–2:4. The word "spirit" is used in parallel with the word "soul" (1:27b; "as one man," NIV), and thus refers to the attitude that should characterize the church. It naturally cannot refer to the Holy Spirit, nor does a combination of the Holy Spirit working to strengthen the human spirit satisfy the parallel constructions. Paul drew on the imagery of persons to describe the function of the body of Christ. It is unnecessary to distinguish between "spirit" and "soul" here. They both explain the immaterial part of persons, and the point Paul made was that the church was to unite inside and out. Both "one spirit" and "one soul" mean that there was no divisiveness. The differences between the words are minimal.

The stand is explained in two complementary ways. The positive statement is "contending" for the faith of the gospel. The imagery changes again. Before, Paul used the idea of a Greek polis to explain the Philippians' relationship to the Lord. Then he used the metaphor "stand," which was taken from the military. Paul's mind moved to the athletic games where he had seen team sports in action. The metaphor is rare, occurring only twice in the New Testament (cf. Phil 4:3). If the Roman military element appreciated the military associations with the word "stand," the Greek population would identify with the necessity of "contending as one man" as was demanded in athletic games. It does little good for individuals on a team to contend individually rather than as part of the team. Similarly, the church was to contend "as one man." Complete harmony of purpose and coordination of various elements was necessary to achieve God's purposes.

The struggle was described in positive terms. The Philippians were to contend "for the faith of the gospel." The expression "faith of the gospel" has many possible interpretations, and there is little clear precedent in the New Testament that favors any one of them. The context assumes that people opposed the church and its message. That means that this construction probably relates to its taking the gospel to the world. Paul must have meant "contending for the advance of the gospel." The NIV translators have captured that meaning by the statement "for the gospel."¹¹¹ The team effort supplied by the church would present the gospel to the world. Together the members also would explore the implications of the gospel in each other's lives.

1:28 The second explanation of standing firm is negatively stated: "without being frightened." The term occurs only here in the New Testament and suggests a reflex action resulting from being startled. The church was to have an unflinchable steadfastness, even in the midst of persecution. Whoever the opponents were at this point, they were not to intimidate the Philippians.¹¹³

The fact that the church stood fast became a sign. The question is, To whom was it a sign? Scholars have taken two positions regarding the rest of this verse. First, some see the steadfastness as a confrontation to unbelievers and a confirmation to believers.

Therefore, the same situation produced a twofold result. Unbelievers would see the stand of the church and know that destruction was coming. They would be warned to accept the truth. On the other hand, the church would be encouraged by its own stand, knowing that God strengthened it and that salvation was sure. This interpretation contrasts the words “to them” (autois) and “of you” (hymōn) in 1:28.

Others interpret the construction with reference to the non-Christian world entirely. They point out that the words “to them” precede the rest of the sentence and must mean that both aspects of the church’s steadfastness were a sign to unbelievers. Thus, they would know of their destruction and the believers’ salvation. This makes better sense of the passage. The fact, then, that the Philippians could stand firm in the face of adversity proved their relationship to the Lord. Others could see a hidden strength. Paul did not enumerate the ways he knew the church would be confronted by such a proof.

Apparently it was the inner strength to live and die for what the Philippians believed. Such strength had to come from God himself, not from mere human resources.

Christian Suffering (1:29–30)

The reason unbelievers would arrive at that conclusion is that God granted suffering to Christians. The text makes a direct connection between “the sign” and suffering, using a Greek word which must be taken as providing a reason. These verses speak to the nature of Christian suffering (1:29) and the Pauline model of suffering (1:30).

The Nature of Christian Suffering (1:29)

1:29 Paul spoke straightforwardly about Christian suffering. In this text he clearly said it was a privilege, that God had in fact graced them with suffering. That raises serious questions, and it is necessary to understand Paul’s thought carefully. The suffering was “on behalf of Christ,” as stated twice in 1:29. The words “on behalf of” appear to be vicarious, i.e., in his place. The words recall Col 1:24, where Paul stated that he suffered eschatologically, “for the sake of his body.” The phrase does point out that Paul had in mind the specific suffering that comes to Christians as they serve Christ.

The fact that suffering was connected with believing reinforces Paul’s claim that it is a grace gift. Paul lived with persecution, and he realized its redemptive value, but here he did not address that. The key to this phrase “on behalf of Christ” is Phil 3:10 where Paul revealed his deepest desire of knowing Christ. That knowledge involved knowing resurrection power and the fellowship of suffering. Suffering confirms Christians’ faith, brings them into closer contact with the Lord, and provides a vehicle for making commitment real and tangible. It is one thing to accept suffering and resign oneself to it. It is another to realize the privileges that come through it.

The Pauline Model of Suffering (1:30)

1:30 Paul’s life provided the model of the suffering he identified here. In 1:30 he used athletic imagery again (“struggle,” agōna) to remind the believers that they would go through what he did. In a parallel, 1 Thess 2:14–16, Paul explained that his suffering related to calling the Gentiles to Christ so that they could be saved. The universal nature of the gospel presented a problem to Gentiles, who had their own religions, and to Jews, who wanted the Gentiles to accept Judaism. The result was that Paul suffered at the hands of both groups, and the church at Philippi would do so as well. Paul had to develop a theology of suffering. He did so without becoming calloused to human need and without accepting suffering as good. The danger for Christians at Philippi and elsewhere was that as they endured suffering they would have one of those reactions.

Suffering is evil because it comes from sin in the world. Paul stopped far short of mixing good and evil, which would make evil (suffering) a good thing. He did, however, realize the benefits and privileges of being involved in a battle for the truth and that battle scars were inevitable. The supreme model of that was Christ. Similarly, Christians should remember that general suffering sometimes comes because they live in a world which suffers as a result of sin, that Christians are called to a unique Christian suffering because of their identification with righteousness in an evil world, that it is a divinely given privilege to be involved in this battle, and that the struggle becomes redemptive in attesting the grace gift in their own experience. The Philippians were, therefore, to take heart if they were called to suffer. Their steadfastness would demonstrate the reality of their relationship to God.