

# INTRODUCTION TO THE LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS

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*Abstract* — This article presents a socio-cultural overview of the ancient city of Philippi and the letter that Paul wrote to the Philippian church. It covers the background and setting of the area and the city, the emergence of the first Christian church there, the occasion for Paul's writing, the content and argument of his letter, and a brief introduction to specific interpretive issues the reader will likely encounter in the letter.

*General Research Topic(s)* — The Letter to the Philippians, Pauline Studies, Historiography, Socio-Cultural Studies.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The letter to the Philippians is a rather light-hearted correspondence of the Apostle Paul to the church in Philippi that contains warm affections, joyful expressions, and thankfulness. While he commends the believers in Philippi in many regards he also responds and addresses problems among them. Skepticism and false teaching from outsiders (and/or potential defectors of the faith) contended to overthrow the true message of the gospel and subvert the faith of the disciples (3:2-3). Also, rivalries and impropriety had sprung up in the church and they threatened to unravel the unity that is in Christ (4:2-3).

Paul speaks openly in response to these issues and redirects the Philippian's attention to recognize the importance of the Lord Jesus, urging them to consider him as their exemplar (2:1-18), to see how they should press on toward the goal of maturity and steadfastness in him (3:12-21), and to know that they should concern

themselves with such things as are good and profitable (4:8-9).

A brief summary of major themes in the letter: Paul relates to the Philippian church his personal experiences in prison and the unimpeded advancement of the gospel (1:12-26), the character and pattern of faith set by the Lord Jesus Christ for them to follow (2:5-11), words of encouragement to strengthen them in their boldness against their opponents (3:2-11), an exhortation to leave the past and strive for the heavenly prize they have been called to inherit (3:12-16), and Paul's thankfulness for their generosity in giving support for his ministry to God's people (4:15-18).

Humility and loving-service is an over-arching theme throughout the entire letter, and as Paul will reveal, this is not always the case among believers. Some serve Christ according to a spirit of envy, rivalry, and selfish ambition (1:15-17). Instead, it is service from love, selfless giving, and humility with the same mind and unity of purpose that demonstrates true discipleship and obedience like Christ's (2:1-5). It is this attitude and devotion that Paul will call for the Philippians to exhibit and cultivate. When they demonstrate a heart of servitude with these virtues, they are imitating the Lord Jesus Christ and proving themselves to be his servants and followers indeed. Throughout the letter, Paul's encouragement to the Philippians will be for them to adopt this Christ-like service and Christ-centered life.

## II. PAUL'S FIRST VISIT TO PHILIPPI

After having heard in a vision a plea for help from a man in Macedonia, Paul (as well as Luke and Silas) traveled to northern Greece, being led by the Spirit of the Lord (Acts 16:9-10). The first major place mentioned that Paul and his companions are recorded preaching at was Philippi, where they stayed for several days (Acts 16:12). In verse 12, Philippi is called “the chief city of Macedonia” (KJV) or “the leading city of Macedonia” (ESV/NIV). However, another way to translate the Greek text is, “a city of the first district of Macedonia.” It is known that Macedonia was divided into four districts for administrative purposes in 168 BC and Philippi was located in the 1<sup>st</sup> district. But, Philippi was not 1<sup>st</sup> district’s leading city. According to the writings of Pliny the Elder (c. 23-79 A.D.) that privilege was bestowed upon Amphipolis.<sup>1</sup> Thus, in consideration of grammar and external sources, the more accurate translation of verse 12 is more likely, “From there we reached Philippi, a city of the first district of Macedonia and a Roman colony” (NRSV).

Apparently, there was not a large Jewish presence in Philippi (at least not a large enough one to have a synagogue since ten male Jews was required to constitute a *minyan*)<sup>2</sup> and so on the Sabbath Paul, Luke, and Silas went to a place down by the riverside where they supposed there was “a place of prayer” (v. 13 NIV). The phrase that Luke uses for “we supposed there was a place of prayer” (*enomizomen proseuchēn einai*) does not imply that they took a wild guess at where people might be gathering. The word *enomizomen* means “to regard or acknowledge as customary.” Thus, Paul and

his crew went to where it was highly probable that people were gathering together to pray.

It was well-known that places of prayer were often located near water sources, and Paul would have known from his Jewish upbringing and education. Josephus (37 – c. 100 AD) mentions a decree in Halicarnassus by a Roman official named Marcus Alexander that permitted Jews to build “places of prayer near the sea, in accordance with their native custom.”<sup>3</sup> And, Philo (c. 25 BC – c. 50 AD) describes the Jews of Alexandria rising early and departing the city to the seaside and there praying together.<sup>4</sup> Even Tertullian (c. 160 – c. 225 AD) notes that, among their other rites, Jews have an established custom to perform prayer by the sea.<sup>5</sup> Thus, Paul is likely referring to this cultural custom of the Jewish people that they would likely be meeting together near the riverside outside Philippi.

At a certain spot by the river, Luke records that Paul and his companions meet some women; however, he does not say they were praying but only that they had simply gathered there. After joining the group, Paul and the others encounter one woman in particular, a devout believer in God named Lydia. She was a wealthy woman who was a seller of expensive purple cloth, but she was receptive to their words. Luke records that “as she listened to us, the Lord opened her heart, and she accepted what Paul was saying” (v. 14 NLT). There are two important things to note about this encounter. 1) Lydia's example proves that the message of the gospel is for everyone, and 2) Luke mentions how the Lord was at work in Lydia's heart to bring her to faith in the gospel.

The first observation is significant because, of all people, the rich are the least likely to see a need in their life for salvation. They can suppress the void in their soul and appease themselves with the luxuries of life

<sup>1</sup> Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 4.33-38.

<sup>2</sup> According to the Babylonian (*b. Meg. 23b*) and Jerusalem Talmud (*y. Meg. 4:4*), Jewish regulations require a quorum (minimum attendance) of ten adult males to be present in order to conduct public worship and other religious acts.

<sup>3</sup> Josephus, *Ant.* 14.258.

<sup>4</sup> Philo, *Flaccus* 1.122.

<sup>5</sup> Tertullian, *Ad Nat.* 1.13.

that can so easily divert one's attention from the message of hope found in the gospel. It takes true humility for a rich person to not trust in themselves but to trust in the Lord (cf. Mt 19:22; Mk 10:11).

As Luke records, after Lydia believed the message of the gospel, her and her household were baptized and she then constrained Paul and his friends to stay with her. Lydia must have been the head of her house in order to be able to offer this hospitality and to compel Paul, Luke, and Silas to accept the invitation. An interesting parallelism later in their stay at Philippi is when Paul and Silas were freed from prison and the jailer believed in the Lord Jesus, he and his house were also baptized just like Lydia and her house (v. 33).

The second observation is significant as well because it indicates the presence and power of the Lord at work in Lydia to bring her to faith. Paul was preaching the gospel but Luke says, "the Lord opened her heart, and she accepted what Paul was saying" (v. 14 NLT). Paul was only a spokesman for the Lord, it was the Lord that changed Lydia's heart and transformed it to be receptive to the message of the gospel. Paul describes elsewhere about his preaching experiences,

"Who is Apollos? Who is Paul? We are only God's servants through whom you believed the Good News. Each of us did the work the Lord gave us. I planted the seed in your hearts, and Apollos watered it, but it was God who made it grow. It's not important who does the planting or who does the watering. What's important is that God makes the seed grow" (1 Cor 3:5-7 NLT).

Lydia believed in God before Paul arrived at Philippi. But when Paul brought the message of the gospel concerning the Christ and salvation through him, it was the Lord who sprouted the seed in her heart to see the truth of the good news they were proclaiming. She demonstrated several exceptional virtues as a believer in God. First, she did not let her personal qualifications

(such as wealth, prestige, honor, reputation, ego, etc.) go to her head and influence her attitude toward the gospel. Self-importance has long been a cancer in the heart of humans since the dawn of our existence in the Garden of Eden. It continued to surface as exemplified in Israel's long history of stubbornness and disbelief, which stemmed from their attitude that they thought they were better off without God at times and then went about to make gods of their own or follow their own evil desires.

Also, after her conversion Lydia is an important example in hospitality. She recognized that Paul, Luke, and Silas were travelers and were servants of God and she wanted to honor them by having them stay at her house and to provide food and accommodations. It is apparent when a believer has been genuinely touched by the Lord and the good news and their heart has been made new. An unexplainable sense of gratitude and appreciation fills one's soul and they realize that they have been given a great gift. The point, however, is not that Lydia was seeking to elevate Paul and his companions and place them on a pedestal for special attention. Lydia would have probably been just as insistent and desirous for Paul, Luke, and Silas to stay with her even if not a single person ever knew that they were residing at her place while in Philippi. She convinced Paul and the others to stay with her because she said if they saw that she was "a true believer in the Lord", then they should stay with her to fellowship together (Acts 16:15).

Things did not always go well for Paul and the others while in Philippi. One day as they were travelling to the place of prayer, Paul, Luke, and Silas encountered a slave girl who was possessed with a spirit of divination. Seeing her need for deliverance, Paul rebuked the spirit and healed the girl (Acts 16:16-18). But, the actions of Paul angered the owners and they were brought before the authorities and thrown in prison (vv. 19-24). But while in prison, the most astonishing miracle occurred. In the middle of the night while Paul and Silas were singing hymns a sudden earthquake

shook the prison, broke their chains, and opened the doors to the cells (vv. 25-26). After convincing the jailer not to take his own life, Paul and the others found themselves face-to-face with another person seeking to know the Lord and be saved (vv. 27-30). So, they went with the jailer and preached the word of the Lord to his entire house, baptized them, and dined with them as fellow believers in God (vv. 31-34).

Sometimes it takes a life-altering event for a person to wake up and desire to know the Lord deep within their soul. The actions of Paul and the others seemed to speak into the jailer's soul and awoke within him a yearning to find salvation. Paul, Luke, and Silas could have ran out of the prison seeing that the Lord had freed them through the earthquake, but apparently something compelled them to stay where they were in the prison cell. Oftentimes the Lord provides deliverance, and in the process of deliverance, he creates opportunity for others to enter his kingdom and come to know him.

### III. LETTER OVERVIEW

Following Paul's identification of himself and Timothy as "servants of Christ Jesus" and a formal greeting to the church at Philippi with the "bishops and deacons" (1:1-2), he gives thanks to God for the Philippian believers and conveys how he prays for them often, calling to remembrance their fellowship and sharing with him in the work of the gospel and his desire for all of them to grow and abound in love and insight into what is best (1:3-11). Since the Philippians were already acquainted with Paul's circumstances in prison, he specifically explains to them how his imprisonment has not hindered the advancement of the gospel (1:12-18). And, in response to their prayers for him, he eagerly anticipates being released from prison (1:19-26). Furthermore, he desires the Philippians be strong in the faith of gospel by the way they live their lives and to not yield to their enemies even in the face of persecution (1:27-30).

In this opening section, while it seems that the Philippian believers were concerned about Paul's well-being in prison and that it would be natural for Paul to respond to their concerns, instead he redirects the focus of his response to them toward the movement of the gospel and his success of that endeavor despite being detained by Roman authorities. Paul continues to point out how his stamina and determination to continue the work of the Lord even in his misfortune of being imprisoned has inspired believers to speak with greater boldness and without fear. Even in his circumstances, Paul is pleased to hear that the gospel is being preached regardless of the motive and he will rejoice in that. Paul appreciates the prayers of the Philippians for his deliverance and while he longs for Christ to be exalted either through his life or through his death, he will remain with them for their benefit and joy in the faith. But, whether he is with them or absent among them, he desires that the Philippians live worthy of the gospel, striving side-by-side with one mind, not being intimidated by their opponents, even though this means they will suffer like he has suffered.

Next, Paul begins one of the major exhortation sections of the letter where he encourages the believers in Philippi to be humble, selfless, and imitators of Christ Jesus, for Jesus has demonstrated the highest degree of humility and selflessness by his obedience and sacrifice of his life (2:1-11). An important and highly esteemed illustration of what Paul is talking about accompanies the exhortation where he delineates in specific terms the precedent of humility represented in the life and death of the Lord Jesus Christ (2:5-11). This exhortation is then immediately followed with another exhortation to live and serve God faithfully by holding fast to the word of life so that both he and the Philippians may rejoice together (2:12-18).

In the first exhortation, as members of the body of Christ, Paul asks the Philippians to make his joy complete by having the same mind and same love. He wants the believers to not act out of selfish desires or

conceited motives, but in humility, by giving more regard with honor and consideration to others more than to themselves. This altruistic pattern he describes is also most vividly portrayed in the life of the Savior, Jesus Christ. Paul uses the example of Jesus' humble attitude and lowly approach to serving as a paradigm for believers to follow. Paul's catch is that because Jesus was humble, he was exalted.

Using the model of Jesus, Paul then advocates in the second exhortation for the Philippians to continue in Christ-like obedience and to desist from attitudes and actions that contradict what makes for the unity of the church. He says they are like stars shining in the world, and if they hold fast to the word of life, Paul will rejoice in the day of Christ that his efforts and labor among them were not wasted. Paul's desire for the spiritual health of the Philippian church was so great that he was willing to offer his own life as a means to nourish and build up their faith.

After these two vital exhortations, Paul then expresses his intention to send Timothy to the Philippians soon (depending on how things go with Paul's imprisonment) in order to hear about how they are doing; but he also hopes that he too may come to visit them soon (2:19-24). Paul commends Timothy to the Philippians on the ground of Timothy's selfless character and personal humility to seek the things of Christ, unlike many others (2:20-21). Additionally, one of the Philippians' own fellow-believers, Epaphroditus, was with Paul ministering to him, and Paul wanted to send word regarding Epaphroditus' health and his plan to send him on his way back to Philippi soon as well. Apparently, the cause for Paul urgently returning Epaphroditus to Philippi was because Epaphroditus had fallen ill and Epaphroditus became distressed since he learned that the Philippian church was deeply worried about him (2:25-30).

The tone of the letter now changes with Paul offering several warnings against dangerous persons and

ideas that the Philippians were encountering and dealing with. What Paul predominantly warns against is the influence and arguments of Jewish zealots<sup>6</sup> who were advocating the necessity of circumcision in order to be a true worshipper of God (3:2-3). Using his own personal credentials and heritage as a defense against their argument, Paul declares that he has every reason to have confidence in his flesh just like what these Jewish antagonizers were pressing but even more so than they. If Paul were to be evaluated according to the criteria of his personal merits in the flesh for acceptance with God, his record would be found to be impeccable (3:4-6). But, Paul staunchly hammers back and proclaims that everything he had outwardly to gain based on his own achievements, religious pedigree, or self-acclamation he counts as worthless because of Christ Jesus and the value of knowing him as his Lord (3:7-11). Whatever great claim Paul had to boast in for his superb Jewish lineage and Torah observance, he appraised it to be as valuable as excrement ("dung") with respect to the surpassing value that he has attained in knowing Christ.

Furthermore, Paul then digresses to inform the Philippians that he does not esteem himself to have reached perfection in knowing Christ and the power of his resurrection, but he is constantly pressing toward achieving that goal (3:12). In addition, Paul entreats the Philippians to realize how he does not define himself by who he was and what he had done (whether it was good or bad...and it was mostly bad for Paul), rather what matters is holding fast to and pursuing the call of God that he and the Philippians have in Christ (3:13-14). Paul exhorts the Philippians to be like him and join him in pursuing the reality of this heavenly citizenship that they both share even though they see others who are consumed by their own interests and passions and have

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<sup>6</sup> These "dogs," "evil workers," and "those who mutilate the flesh" (3:2) might have been Judaizers, or possibly Jewish-Christians, in Philippi who were attempting to subvert the gospel and have the rest of the Christians revert to Torah observance as a means for attaining righteousness (cp. 3:9).

made themselves out to be enemies of Christ (3:15-21). Paul then sternly affirms that true believers are mindful of their heavenly residence and the meaning of their calling in Christ by standing firm in him and living as a citizen of his kingdom (4:1; cp. 3:14, 20-21).

After his extended argument for unity among believers both in faith and purpose (2:1-4:1), Paul specifically addresses a violation of that unity in the church at Philippi. He identifies by name two prominent ladies who he had come to learn were disrupting the peace and unity of the church. For one reason or another, they were in conflict and were not resolving their differences and being of the same mind (4:2). Paul makes a request for the help of his “loyal companion”<sup>7</sup> to aid in finding concord and harmony in this unsettled matter for these ladies were important and personal acquaintances of Paul, having labored and struggled with him in the gospel along with many others (4:3).

Then, with a double exclamation Paul exhorts the Philippians to rejoice in all things and additionally to let their gentleness be known among all (4:4-5). Moreover, Paul wants the Philippians to realize the nearness of the Lord’s return, and in light of their confidence in his return, they are to pray without anxiety and with thanksgiving knowing that the surpassing peace of God will guard their hearts and minds in Christ (4:6-7). Furthermore, the Philippians are to continue practicing and being mindful of Christian virtues and the good things they saw displayed in Paul’s life, and in doing these things, the God of peace will be with them (4:8-9).

In his closing comments, Paul offers his sincerest thanks to the Philippians for their remembrance and concern for him in his troubles and for supporting him and giving to him during his time in prison (4:10). Paul conveys how he has learned to live a life of modesty, being content with what he has (whether it is much or

little), and that he is strengthened and able to endure all things through Christ (4:11-14).

Paul gives full recognition to the Philippians for their commitment and dedication to support him in ministry and their premiere place as the only ones to do so in the early days of the movement of the gospel (4:15-16). Additionally, Paul rejoices for the Philippians’ generosity and support, not because it benefits him only, but because he knows that God has noticed their hearts to give and will credit it to them and repay them by supplying all that they need as well (4:17-19). Lastly, Paul concludes the letter with some final greetings (especially from Caesar’s household) and a benediction for the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ to be with them always (4:21-23).

#### IV. LETTER OUTLINE

1. **INTRODUCTION** (1:1-11)
  - a. Salutation (1:1-2)
  - b. Prayer of gratitude and thanks for the Philippians (1:3-8)
  - c. Prayer for the Philippians to continue to abound in love (1:9-11)
2. **PAUL’S CIRCUMSTANCES IN PRISON** (1:12-26)
  - a. Paul’s imprisonment and the continued advancement of the gospel (1:12-14)
  - b. Paul rejoices for the advancement of the gospel by any means (1:15-18a)
  - c. Paul’s readiness to preach the gospel and continue in ministry (1:18b-26)
3. **PAUL’S APPEAL TO THE PHILIPPIANS** (1:27-2:18)
  - a. Exhortation to live worthy of the gospel (1:27-30)
  - b. Live with unity and humility (2:1-11)
    - i. Mode of Humility: Be of the same mind, same love, and same accord (2:1-4)
    - ii. Model of Humility: Imitate Christ (2:5-11)
  - c. Live as obedient children of God (2:12-18)

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<sup>7</sup> This may be a reference to a believer at Philippi that was a close associate of Paul, but the referent is unknown.

- i. Obedience to the gospel and the energizing of God (2:12-13)
- ii. Living innocent and blameless and holding fast to the word of life (2:14-16)
- iii. Rejoice together (2:17-18)
4. **TIMOTHY AND EPAPHRODITUS** (2:19-30)
  - a. Paul will send Timothy (2:19-24)
  - b. Paul will send Epaphroditus (2:25-30)
5. **GENERAL ADMONITION** (3:1)
6. **WARNING AGAINST FALSE TEACHERS, ARROGANCE, AND IMMORALITY** (3:2-4:1)
  - a. Warning against Judaizers (3:2-11)
    - i. Reject legalism and confidence in the flesh (3:2-6)
    - ii. Retain Christ and the power of his resurrection (3:7-11)
  - b. The call of God: strive for heavenly things (3:12-16)
  - c. Live as citizens of heaven and be watchful of the enemies of Christ (3:17-4:1)
7. **A CASE OF DISUNITY: THE CONFLICT BETWEEN EUODIA AND SYNTYCHE** (4:2-3)
8. **GENERAL EXHORTATIONS** (4:4-9)
  - a. Rejoice and continue in prayer (4:4-7)
  - b. Continue thinking and doing things that are worthy of praise (4:8-9)
9. **PAUL'S GRATITUDE FOR THE GIFT** (4:10-20)
  - a. Paul's attitude of contentment (4:10-14)
  - b. The Philippians' gift (4:15-20)
10. **CONCLUSION** (4:21-23)

## V. AUTHORSHIP AND AUDIENCE

Apart from a few marginal, dissenting scholars,<sup>8</sup> the letter to the Philippians has enjoyed widespread

<sup>8</sup> The most significant opponent of Pauline authorship is probably F. C. Baur of the Tübingen School in the 1840s, who posited that there exists certain un-Pauline Gnostic ideas in the *Carmen Christi* (2:6-11). Others have followed his trail since then, such as A. Q. Morton and J. McLeman, *Paul, the Man and the Myth* (London: Hodder & Stroughton, 1966).

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acceptance as completely Pauline in authorship. In the opening salutation (1:1-2), Paul composes the letter with the common form of Greek letter writing in his day by first identifying himself and Timothy as the authors, the “saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi” along with the “bishops”<sup>9</sup> and “deacons”<sup>10</sup> as the recipients, and a blessing of grace and peace from “God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” These three components (author, audience, and prayer of blessing) were customary elements for epistolary writing in the first-century.<sup>11</sup> It is important to note that Paul writes the letter to the Philippians entirely in the first person but yet includes Timothy as a co-author in the salutation.<sup>12</sup> Timothy might have been serving as Paul’s secretary and amanuensis and therefore Paul saw it fit to include him in many of his writings.<sup>13</sup> Also, Timothy might be mentioned with Paul because he was with Paul when he first visited Philippi (Acts 16:1-12). Therefore, Timothy could corroborate Paul’s message and assure the Philippians of the things that Paul was writing to them.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, Timothy’s example as a believer is described by Paul later in the letter “how like a son with a father he has served with me in the work of the gospel” (Phil 2:22). This description of Timothy’s

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But, in recent scholarship opponents of non-Pauline authorship have all but vanquished. Peter T. O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 10. See also, F. F. Bruce, *Philippians* (UBC; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 9.

<sup>9</sup> Gk. *episkopois*, “overseers”.

<sup>10</sup> Gk. *diakonois*, “servants” or “ministers”.

<sup>11</sup> Stanley K. Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity* (Philadelphia: John Knox Press, 1986), 20. E. Randolph Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004), 128-30. See also Stanley E. Porter and Sean A. Adams, eds., *Paul and the Ancient Letter Form* (vol. 6 of *Pauline Studies*; Leiden: Brill, 2010),.

<sup>12</sup> Timothy is often mentioned as a co-author by Paul in his letters. 2 Cor 1:1; Phil 1:1; Col 1:1; Phm 1; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1.

<sup>13</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 25. Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 61.

<sup>14</sup> O'Brien, *Philippians*, 44.

dedication and sacrificial service with mutual love serves to echo the exceptional example of Christ's self-giving love and humility that Paul described just previously (2:6-8).

After providing their names as the senders of the letter, Paul refers to himself and Timothy as "servants of Christ Jesus",<sup>15</sup> which is unlike his usual introductory title of "apostle" that he uses in several of his other letters.<sup>16</sup> With the dominant theme of humility and unity, it is quite reasonable for Paul to designate the character of himself and Timothy in this way. It is unique that Paul includes Timothy under the appellation of "servant" with along with himself, though. In other letter introductions, when Timothy is mentioned with Paul, Paul's designation of himself appears separate from Timothy's.<sup>17</sup> It is likely that Paul uses the conjunction of their names as "servants of Christ Jesus" to show their unification and equality in the work of the gospel, a theme which he will subsequently address and argue that the Philippians should follow after as well. Moreover, Paul might also be using the term specifically to foreshadow his pivotal illustration of Christ as the greatest example of a humble "servant" (2:5-8).

The title "servants of Christ Jesus" points to the fact that Paul and Timothy were men who saw their lives in total subjection to the will of Christ Jesus and did not consider their lives their own.<sup>18</sup> If Christ is their Lord,

then they are his "servants." Being a "servant" in this context meant that one was both a servant to the heavenly master and also to fellow believers. Paul and Timothy's service was under Christ but directed to the church. You could say that Paul and Timothy were "devoted to one another as a direct result of being devoted to Christ"<sup>19</sup> and that devotion manifested in their continued work of the gospel and labor among the believers, such as those in Philippi.

Paul makes the specific address of his letter to "all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi" (1:1). The description "to all the saints in Christ Jesus"<sup>20</sup> in Philippi is no special sub-group of ultra-righteous Christians whom he is singling out. "Saints" is a common designation for Paul to refer to those who believe in Jesus Christ and have been set apart in him from the rest of the world.<sup>21</sup> This description of the Philippians can also be translated as "to all God's holy people who are in Christ Jesus." Paul's reference here is to an all-inclusive designation for believers (God's people) who live in the city of Philippi. He is basically writing to all the Christians who are part of God's church there. However, "in Christ Jesus" serves as more than a simple accent that the Philippian church believes in Christ. For Paul, this phrase is packed with nuances that range from signifying the believer's personal relationship with Christ by faith, their justification through Christ, the spiritual union with the risen Christ, their participation

<sup>15</sup> Gk. *douloi Christou Iēsou*. This self-designation appears also in Rom 1:1; cf. Tit 1:1 "servant of God" (*doulos theou*); Phm 1 "prisoner of Christ Jesus" (*desmios Christou Iēsou*); Gal 1:10 "servant of Christ" (*Christou doulos*).

<sup>16</sup> See Rom 1:1; 1 Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 1:1; Gal 1:1; Eph 1:1; Col 1:1; 1 Tim 1:1; 2 Tim 1:1; Tit 1:1. Paul omits the title "apostle" only in Phil 1:1; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1; and Phm 1.

<sup>17</sup> See Col 1:1; Phm 1:1; no title used in 1 Thess 1:1 or 2 Thess 1:1. This distinction is likely because Paul designates himself as an "apostle" whereas Timothy does not share that same qualification.

<sup>18</sup> Moses, Joshua, and David were great leaders of God's people who also were called servants of the Lord (Neh 10:29; Jos 24:29; Ps 89:20 (88:21 LXX)).

<sup>19</sup> Murray J. Harris, *Slave of Christ: A New Testament Metaphor for Total Devotion to Christ* (NSBT 8; ed. D. A. Carson; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1999), 104.

<sup>20</sup> Gk. *pasin tois hagios en Christō Iēsou*, "to all the holy ones in Christ Jesus".

<sup>21</sup> The Greek word *hagios* indicates a separation and distinction from association with something common. Paul's use of the term denotes the believer's separation from the evil and wickedness of the world and their association with the calling and consecration of God's people. BDAG, 11.



with Christ's redemptive work, and their placement and function within Christ's body.<sup>22</sup>

## VI. BACKGROUND AND SETTING

Evidence found in the area of Philippi shows early settlement during the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. Led by the exiled politician Kalistratos, a colony was established in the southeast plains of Drama at the foothills of Mt. Orbelos after an invasion of settlers from the island of Thasos (just off the northern Aegean coast) in ~360 BC.

The colony that would later be named Philippi was first called Krenides (or Crenides, which in Greek means "springs" or "fountains", since there were a number of natural springs and streams in the area). With the potential threat of the neighboring Thracian tribes, the Thasian settlers petitioned Philip II, king of Macedonia, for military aid in 356 BC. However, because of the rich resources and abundant gold and silver mines that were known in the area, Philip II decided to conquer the colony and take over the area. With the colony under his control, Philip II renamed the colony "Philippi" in his honor and fortified the city with new walls and defensive structures. He also increased the population of the city by re-settling Macedonian mercenaries there and having them work the mines and extract precious metals for his empire. Throughout the Hellenistic period, not much is known of the city, but it appears to have continued to grow and prosper throughout the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries BC.

The city was annexed to Phillip's kingdom and became highly Hellenized with Greek lifestyle and customs, including the Greek language, entertainment, government, and business practices. Then, in the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century (~168-67 BC), the Romans conquered the area and made the city an important outpost along the *Via*

*Egnatia*, an important Roman road extending toward northwest Asia to ports along the Adriatic Sea.

But, it was not until 42 BC when Mark Antony and Octavian (the later Roman Emperor Augustus) defeated Brutus and Cassius (the murderers of Julius Caesar) in the valley near Philippi that the city of Philippi became a Roman colony and home for numerous Roman army veterans.<sup>23</sup> When Octavian and Antony were victorious, the city of Philippi came under Roman jurisdiction and it was thus re-named, *Colonia Victrix Philippensium*. Then, a few years later, Octavian defeated Marc Antony and Cleopatra at the battle of Actium in 31 BC., thus becoming caesar of the Roman Empire (30 BC).

As emperor, Octavian instituted the *Pax Romana* and brought a time of peace to the Roman Empire. As a result, many more veteran Roman militia were retired from battle after the war and given allotments in the city of Philippi, and Octavian renamed the city *Colonia Augusta Julia Philippensis* in honor of his daughter, Julia. And so in the years following, Roman aristocracy and architecture flourished in Philippi and it became the dominant culture and character of the city. Roman arches, baths, forums, temples, and other constructs were built to resemble its mother city—Rome. Roman coinage and municipal patterns were instigated as well as Roman civil and administrative practices.

Furthermore, as a Roman colony, the citizens of Philippi were endowed with all the privileges and rights of Roman citizens.<sup>24</sup> This afforded those living in Philippi many exclusive property and legal rights not appropriated to other cities lacking official colony status. Roman law (also known as the so-called "Italian Law," Lat. *lex Italicum*) was in effect throughout the city. Along with the privilege of self-government

<sup>23</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles* (AB 31; New York: Doubleday, 1998), 584.

<sup>24</sup> For a detailed analysis and reconstruction of Philippi as a Roman *colonia*, see Peter Oaks, *Philippians: From People to Letter* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>22</sup> G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 40.

reserved for the most honored Roman provincial cities, the residents of Philippi were exempt from all taxes.

## VII. PHILIPPI IN PAUL'S TIME

At the time of Paul in the mid 1<sup>st</sup>-century AD, Latin was the official language of Philippi, but as a Greek cultured colony, the Greek language was the dominant language in everyday life of business, family, and religion.<sup>25</sup> Luke accurately identified the city as a Roman “colony” (*kolōnia*) and acknowledged its position in the empire by describing it as “a leading city of the district of Macedonia” (*prōtēs meridos tēs Makedonias polis*) (Acts 16:12). However, this distinction was not a matter of prestige but of geography. Philippi was not a “leading” (“chief”) city by any means. At the time that Paul first visited Philippi, it is estimated to have had only ~10,000 inhabitants.<sup>26</sup> Rather, Macedonia was divided into four districts and Philippi was located in the first district.<sup>27</sup> Acts 16:12 literally reads, “...a city of the first district of Macedonia.” Luke was probably stating the fact that Philippi was part of the “first” district, not the most prominent city of the district.

The people of Philippi also showed themselves to be proud of their privileged Roman provincial status as they questioned Paul under the suspicion that he and his associates (Silas and Timothy) were advocating customs that were not lawful for Romans to “adopt or observe” (Acts 16:21). As a Roman colony, the Philippian citizens were aware of their debt and allegiance to Rome and they were very loyal to Caesar and the Imperial

Cult. Roman citizenship was not something they took lightly and when Paul exposed himself and his associates to be Roman citizens as well, the magistrates of the city became greatly concerned about the maltreatment they imposed upon them and personally came and apologized and released them immediately (Acts 16:35-39). Thus, under the ambience of such a highly regarded political position as a Roman citizen, Paul uses the notion of “citizenship” in another way to relate to the Philippian believers how they ought to live and behave (1:27; 3:20). Just as the Philippian people identified and conducted themselves with respect to their Roman status, Paul urged the believers in Philippi to see the even greater importance for them to live and conduct themselves in accordance with their heavenly status.

As with all establishments throughout the Greco-Roman Empire, pagan worship was rampant in Philippi with temples and cults to the gods permeating the city. With Philippi being a Roman colony, this was all the more prevalent in order to honor the gods of Rome. One of Paul's encounters in Philippi was with a slave girl who was possessed by a “spirit of divination” (“spirit of Python,” *pneuma pythōna*) that told fortunes to earn money for her masters. Prophecy was something extremely common among the ancient Greek and Roman cultures. A prophecy was a message from the ancient gods also known as an “oracle”, and the prophet or prophetess delivering the message was also commonly called an Oracle. Oracles were sought by nearly all ranks of people from farmers wanting to know the seasons and climates to government officials seeking guidance for civil decisions and political outcomes.

Nearly each religion had its own prophet or prophetess that the followers would come see to have an oracle spoken to them. As the Roman historian Livy (59 BC – 17 AD) describes the followers of Cybele were known to “prophesy in frenzied chants” and the followers of the pagan god, Bacchus, “as if insane, with fanatical tossing of their bodies, would utter

<sup>25</sup> From archaeological remains, Latin inscriptions are predominant the city but Greek inscriptions are also present (See H. L. Hendrix, “Philippi,” *ABD* 5.315). Also, evidence of the continued use of Greek as the common language in Philippi substantiates Paul use of it in his letter to them.

<sup>26</sup> Morna D. Hooker, *The Letter to the Philippians* (NIB; Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 469.

<sup>27</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 330.

prophecies.”<sup>28</sup> The most famous oracle in the ancient world was located in the city of Delphi in Greece and was called the Oracle at Delphi. According to Greek mythology “Python” was the serpent or dragon who was slain by the god Apollo at the base of Mt. Parnassus at Delphi. After it was killed, the spirit of the serpent remained and according to the legend it possesses the priestess or prophetess of the Oracle at Delphi. This “spirit of Python” is said to take “possession of their organs of speech moving and compelling them to give prophetic utterance.”<sup>29</sup> Thus, fortune-telling and prophesying became heavily associated with the “spirit of Python” from the famous cult practices at Delphi. This Oracle became known as “Pythia” after the mythological legend of the Python slain by Apollo.

At the time Paul first visited Philippi, there was not a large Jewish population and possibly no Jewish presence in the city at all.<sup>30</sup> In order to preach the gospel, Paul and his companions ventured out of the city to a place of prayer beside the river (Acts 16:13).<sup>31</sup> It seems that there were not many Jews in Philippi and certainly no synagogue since they proceeded to leave the city on the Sabbath to a remote place where only a few women gathered together. As Paul’s custom was, he would have entered the local synagogue on the Sabbath and preached the gospel as he had done in numerous other cities.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, it is not even known if these

women were Jewish. Lydia, Paul’s first convert in Philippi, is described as being “one who worships God” (*sebomenē ton theon*). This is a generic Lukan expression that commonly designates a “Gentile worshipper,” who has come from a polytheist religion into the monotheistic worship of the God of Israel.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, it is likely that Paul’s converts and early church in Philippi were predominantly, if not entirely, Gentile believers. But, it could also be that Lydia was a Jewish proselyte who had recently come to join the weekly Jewish gathering by the river. Luke does not give explicit details of the demographics of the group that Paul, Silas, and Timothy encountered by the river.

However, when Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians, the situation of Jewish presence was markedly different. Paul mentions opponents of the gospel who “mutilate the flesh” (3:2),<sup>34</sup> which is a reference to Judaizers who were advocating the need for external (physical) circumcision in order to be a true worshipper of God. In an almost satirical tone, Paul retorts by affirming that it is Christians who are the true circumcision, who worship God in the spirit (3:3). He then offers his superior qualifications (“works of the flesh”) that he views as complete loss compared to knowing Christ in order to combat the antagonizing arguments of his Jewish assailants (3:4-9).

Whoever Paul was fending off with this argument must have represented a Jewish faction in the city or in

<sup>28</sup> Livy, *Hist. Rom.* 38.18.9; 39.13.12.

<sup>29</sup> David Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 33, 354.

<sup>30</sup> No archaeological evidence supporting any Jewish presence in the city at the time of Paul has been discovered. This suggests that any Jewish population, if any, was very minimal. Hooker, *Philippians*, 471.

<sup>31</sup> The river that passes by Philippi is ~0.5 miles northeast of the city. Paul must have learned in the city that somewhere along the river people gathered to pray.

<sup>32</sup> Acts 13:42, “But they went on from Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia. And on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down... So Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said...” Acts 17:1-2, “Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came

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to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures”; 18:4, “And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks”; 19:8, “And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God.”

<sup>33</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Acts* (BECNT 5; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 534.

<sup>34</sup> This is a condescending reference to physical circumcision. Paul is degrading the idea that cutting off your foreskin actually affords a person any real benefit, advantage, or value.

the surrounding area. So, by the time that Paul wrote to the church in Philippi, the believers there had experienced pressure and hostility from Jewish rivals who were trying to mislead the community back into mandated Torah observance (i.e., works-based righteousness under the Mosaic Law).

### VIII. PLACE OF COMPOSITION

When Paul wrote this letter, he was in prison (1:7, 13, 17) and he knew that death was a potential outcome of his predicament (1:20; 2:17), but he eagerly anticipated being released and rejoining with the Philippian believers (1:25-26; 2:23-24). However, the location of his imprisonment at the time of writing remains a mystery. All the details that Paul gives about his circumstances, and not to mention, the critical illness of Epaphroditus (2:25-28) do not lend any help in ascertaining the possible location of composition. Luke's account in Acts tells of Paul being held in prison in Caesarea for two years (Acts 23:33; 24:27) and then traveling to Rome and being detained there for two more years (Acts 28:16, 30). But, he was also frequently in prison more than other followers of Jesus (cp. 2 Cor 11:23).<sup>35</sup> So, Paul could have written to the Philippians while at Caesarea, Rome, or on any other number of imprisonments he experienced during his ministry.

The only clue that is provided is that Paul was able to speak the gospel to all the Praetorium (Gk. *praetōrio*; 1:13), which was the "headquarters," so to speak, for any Roman principal administrator, whether military or civil (e.g., general's tent, governor's palace, praetor's house, etc.). This might be referring to the Praetorium at Rome when Paul lived under guard with a soldier in a rented house (Acts 28:16, 30-31). This would also coalesce with the situation mentioned in Philippians when Paul passes along greetings that come from "those

who belong to Caesar's house" (Phil 4:22).<sup>36</sup> But Rome was very far from Philippi (~1,200 mi) and that would seem to make it unlikely with the apparent multiple correspondences that occurred between Paul and the church at Philippi.

On the other hand, Caesarea has been promoted as being more likely the place of writing since Paul was held in Herod's Praetorium in Caesarea for two years (Acts 23:35). This location provides another option where Paul could speak the gospel to the guards and palace residents and for the Philippian church to communicate with him and Epaphroditus.<sup>37</sup> However, Caesarea is still exceptionally far from Philippi and faces many of the same problems as Rome. Still others have suggested Ephesus as a possible place where Paul could have been imprisoned (although there is no official record of him being in prison there).<sup>38</sup>

Thus, the matter of the location for the letter's composition is simply speculative and is not likely to be solved with the information that is currently known. Ephesus has the silence of any imprisonment against it, and Caesarea has Paul's intention to appeal to Caesar as contradicting his imminent hope to soon visit Philippi, and Rome has the geographical remoteness in its disfavor. But, weighing the arguments, Rome still matches the best with the timeline, circumstances, and internal content of the letter even with the seemingly improbable ability for Paul to communicate easily with the believers in Philippi. However, with Philippi being along the *Via Egnatia*, merchants and traders would

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<sup>35</sup> Clement of Rome wrote that Paul was imprisoned "seven times" (1 *Clem* 5.6).

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<sup>36</sup> For a thorough argument in support of Rome as the location of composition, see Markus Bockmuehl, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (BNTC; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1998), 25-32.

<sup>37</sup> For a thorough argument in support of Caesarea as the location of composition, see Lewis Johnson, "Pauline Letters from Caesarea," *ExpTim* 68 (1956): 24-26.

<sup>38</sup> For a thorough argument in support of Ephesus as the location of composition, see G. S. Duncan, "Were Paul's Imprisonment Letters Written from Ephesus?," *ExpTim* 67 (1995-56): 163-66.

have been traveling regularly to and from Rome, and thus, the possibility of a hired courier or believer being able to transport communication back and forth cannot be under-credited. Therefore, there is no tenable reason to not give preference to Rome as the most likely place where Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians.

### IX. DATE OF COMPOSITION

The date of composition for the letter to the Philippians is, of course, dependent upon the place of Paul's imprisonment where he wrote it. If the letter was written from Rome, then the time frame would likely be AD 60-61. But, if Caesarea was the location, then the date would have to be earlier (AD 59-60). Or, if Ephesus or another location was selected, the date would be even earlier still. The best date that can be assigned due to all the uncertainties is simply the late 50's to the early 60's.<sup>39</sup> However, since Paul or others had previously corresponded with the church at Philippi by the time he wrote the letter (2:26), it must have been penned in the latter portion of his imprisonment. This premise also agrees with Paul's own testimony and confidence that he anticipated being released soon and thus able to come to visit the Philippians (2:24; cp. 1:25). Therefore, a later dating of AD 60-61 seems more plausible as the time frame for when the letter was likely written.

### X. OCCASION FOR WRITING

From the content of Paul's letter, it seems that he had two primary occasions for which to write to the church at Philippi. Both occasions extended from his current experience in prison. One occasion was to convey to the Philippians how being in prison has not stopped him from advancing the gospel. Even in chains he is speaking the name of Christ and proclaiming the good news. In fact, Paul says, being in prison has

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<sup>39</sup> D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 507.

“actually helped to spread the gospel” (1:12). Paul's proclamation of the gospel was known by “all the imperial guard and to everyone else” (1:13). By describing his efforts to preach the gospel despite being restricted and confined in prison, Paul says that other “brothers and sisters having been made confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, dare to speak the word with greater boldness and without fear” (1:14). This word of encouragement served to embolden the Philippians to continue to proclaim the gospel under any circumstance they might face.

Paul's second occasion for writing was to thank the Philippian church for their gift and continued support and to send them word about their fellow-brother, Epaphroditus (2:25-30; 4:10-19).<sup>40</sup> During his time in prison, Paul received a gift and was ministered and tended to by Epaphroditus from Philippi (2:25; 4:18). Unfortunately, during his visit Epaphroditus fell ill and to such an extent that he almost died (2:27). Moreover, during his time with Paul while he was recovering from his illness, Epaphroditus became distressed upon learning that his church in Philippi was worried about his health (2:26). Epaphroditus longed to reassure his fellow-believers in Philippi that he was all right, and so Paul undertakes it to make mention of him in his letter, conveying his eagerness to send Epaphroditus so that they may rejoice with him when they see him again (2:28-29). Whatever the nature of the concern the Philippian church had about Epaphroditus, Paul was anxious about informing them and he reassures them that Epaphroditus had performed his duties exceptionally and that he will be returning to them soon.

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<sup>40</sup> Many similarities exist between the system of giving and receiving Paul mentions in 4:15 and common structures in Greco-Roman benefaction operating in that culture. See G. W. Peterman, *Paul's Gift from Philippi: Conventions of Gift-Exchange and Christian Giving* (SNTSMS 92; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

Another reason for Paul writing the letter could also be that he wanted to include an introduction of Timothy to the Philippians, who he was going to send to Philippi to minister to them and to have news of their well-being sent back to him (2:19-24). With the extended explanation and commendation of Timothy, it seems that the Philippian church was not acquainted with Paul's fellow-worker in the gospel, and probably, Paul wanted to increase the strength of their confidence in Timothy and for them to warmly receive him in Paul's stead until he is able to come himself. Paul's letter of cordial affection to the Philippians with his assurance of himself and his request for reassurance from them is surely a token for solidifying his bonds with the Philippian church that already been formed during his visits.<sup>41</sup> Even though Paul had visited Philippi at least twice on his missionary journeys (Acts 16:12-40; 20:6), he still was building rapport and trust with the church there. This letter and his delegate, Timothy, would serve as his surrogate presence with the Philippians until he was able to come and be among them personally again.

Also, Paul touches on smaller issues and personal admonitions that are less pronounced themes in the letter but certainly show his pastoral concern for the church. For example, Paul includes an exhortation for unity (2:1-18), a warning against false teachers (3:1-11), encouragement to keep pursuing the heavenly goal in Christ (3:12-21), a plea for conflict resolution between two specific believers (4:2-3), and instruction to keep doing what is good and being mindful of Christian virtues which they had observed in him (4:4-9). But these elements only serve to promote the larger purpose and themes of the letter as discussed above.

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<sup>41</sup> Alexander Loveday, "Hellenistic Letter-Forms and the Structure of Philippians," *JSNT* 12 (1989): 87-110.

## XI. TEXTUAL RELIABILITY

Overall the text of the letter to the Philippians has relatively few variants and no major sections of disputed readings. Detailed investigations into the text in recent studies have classified 112 known variants in the texts reported in the Nestle-Aland 27<sup>th</sup> edition critical Greek New Testament.<sup>42</sup>

## XII. WRITING STYLE

Recent scholars have analyzed Paul's writings in accordance with ancient oratory practices known as "rhetoric." Such analyses are categorized under the heading of "rhetorical criticism" for they seek to understand the text as though it has a formal shape and behaves like the writings and speeches of ancient orators who sought to persuade and convince their audience through methodological propositions, arguments, and reasoning. Three types of rhetoric have been classified: judicial (accusing or defending), deliberative (persuading or dissuading), and epideictic (praising or blaming). Philippians has been labeled as containing elements of predominantly deliberative rhetoric and two distinct analyses have been set forth detailing this approach to the letter and the structure of its contents.<sup>43</sup> While many elements of rhetoric are apparent in Philippians, it is argued that the best way to structure the form of the letter is not by rhetorical methods but by according to a content/literary analysis (see outline above).<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Moisés Silva, *Philippians* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 23.

<sup>43</sup> D. F. Watson, "A Rhetorical Analysis of Philippians and its Implications for the Unity Question," *NovT* 30 (1988): 57-88. L. G. Bloomquist, *The Function of Suffering in Philippians* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993).

<sup>44</sup> I. Howard Marshall et al., *Exploring the New Testament* (2nd ed.; vol. 2; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2011), 145.

Also, by employing methods of form and redaction criticism, some scholars have advocated that the letter to the Philippians could possibly be a combination of three fragments from three different letters. Due to shifts in tone and language, it has been proposed that Philippians is not a single letter but a compilation of several letters that Paul wrote. Besides the assumed jump in Paul's argument at 3:1, "Finally, my brothers and sisters...", the most significant evidence scholars point to is Polycarp's reference to the "letters written by Paul to the Philippian church."<sup>45</sup>

While this debate has occupied the time and efforts of many scholars, it is not viewed as a credible topic of investigation by conservative scholarship. The claim that the letter demonstrates literary, thematic, and theological unity has been well defended and the text need not be subjected to arbitrary scrutiny as it has by liberal scholarship. No reasonable evidence exists to see the letter to the Philippians as anything but a single letter written for multiple purposes to the church in Philippi.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Polycarp, *Phil.* 3:2: "For neither I nor anyone like me is able to replicate the wisdom of the blessed and glorious Paul. When he was with you he accurately and reliably taught the word of truth to those who were there at the time. And when he was absent he wrote you letters. If you carefully peer into them, you will be able to be built up in the faith that was given you."

<sup>46</sup> David E. Garland, "The Composition and Unity of Philippians: Some Neglected Literary Factors," *NovT* 27 (1985): 141-73. See also, Veronica Koperski, "Textlinguistics and the Integrity of Philippians: A Critique of Wolfgang Schenk's Arguments for a Compilation Hypothesis," *ETL* 68 (1992): 331-67. William J. Dalton, "The Integrity of Philippians," *Bib* 60 (1979): 97-102. B. S. Mackay, "Further Thoughts on Philippians," *NTS* 7 (1961): 161-70. T. E. Pollard, "The Integrity of Philippians," *NTS* 13 (1966): 56-66. For an overview of the debate see, Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 339. Carson and Moo, *Introduction*, 509-10.

### XIII. INTERPRETIVE ISSUES

Within Paul's brief letter, three major sections are known to contain interpretive challenges. The obvious one that has been long debated with untold amounts of ink is the *Carmen Christi* or "Hymn to Christ" (2:5-11). Most scholars attribute this passage to be the quintessential description of Jesus' incarnation as setting forth the manner of his pre-existent deity and then his subsequent action of taking on humanity, thus becoming God in the flesh. However, there are several schools of thought that dissent from this majority view. Another way to view the passage is typologically with reference to Adam's transgression in the Garden of Eden in Genesis chapter 3. In this perspective, Christ is being contrasted as the antitype against Adam, his predecessor due to strong corresponding imagery and terminology that links these two characters.

Another challenging passage is Paul's description of his moral dilemma of whether it is better to live or to die. Paul desires for Christ to be exalted whether by his life or death because he says, "living is Christ and dying is gain" (1:21). Paul further says that his "desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better" (1:22). Most scholars contend that Paul was expressing his desire to die in order that he could go and be with Christ immediately in heaven and that being with Christ was the gain he was referring to. However, another way to see Paul's argument in 1:21 is that his dying would result in the gain of the furtherance of the gospel, not his personal gain.

Lastly, another difficult passage is Paul's exhortation for the Philippians to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (2:12). Most scholars recognize that Paul is not advocating a prescription for works-based salvation here, but there have been many different views on Paul's logic and the connection of this argument with the prior Christ hymn passage.

Unfortunately, the interpretive issues mentioned in these passages require much deliberation and certainly more explanation than can be afforded here in this brief introduction to the letter. Mention of them is simply made so that the reader can be aware of potential controversial sections in the letter.

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