

General Comments on Philippians

Paul writes to the ecclesia he founded and had spent some time with, cf. Acts 16:11-40. At that time, Caesarea Philippi was a Roman town where retired Centurions would relocate to, so we would assume the population was predominantly Roman. From the account in Acts, there was not a synagogue in the town, and the few Gentiles who had converted to Judaism weren't locals and were meeting at a local streambank on the Sabbath (cf. Acts 16:13).

Oddly enough, Paul does not address Lydia in this letter. Perhaps she is one of the generous benefactors of 4:10-19 and she remains anonymous, or perhaps she has sided with the Judaizers, or perhaps she has moved back to Thyatira? We are left nonplussed.

The ecclesia at Philippi appears to be doing reasonably well, compared to some of the other churches Paul was writing to at the time (e.g., Corinth, Galatia). They were also apparently quite generous in supporting Paul's during his missionary efforts and imprisonment (cf. 4:10-20).

There are some ongoing problems with contention between themselves and some of the former members who are Judaizers, but it appears to have resulted in the ecclesia separating over the matter of observation of the Law of Moses.

The Judaizers were apparently formerly the leadership of the ecclesia, who've either been expelled or left voluntarily, and not yet replaced (cf. 2:21). Paul encourages the faithful majority of the ecclesia (cf. 1:1) to be united and considerate of one another, by following Christ's example (cf. 2:1-18), as Paul does.

Paul accuses the Judaizers, who are likely Gentile converts to Judaism, of the following:

Preach Christ even of envy and strife (1:15)

Preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds (1:16)

Adversaries (1:28)

Cause the ecclesia to be "having the same conflict" as Paul, i.e., they are being persecuted by Judaizers just as he is (1:30)

Seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's
(2:21)

Dogs...evil workers...circumcision (i.e., those of the
circumcision) (3:2)

As many as be perfect (i.e., these are those who think they
are perfect, Paul addresses them sarcastically) (3:15)

Enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction,
whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their
shame, who mind earthly things (3:18-19)

The clearest explanation of who these people are appears in 3:2-16 where Paul contrasts them (cf. 3:2) with his own Jewish bona fides (cf. 3:4-6), which he has rejected (cf. 3:7-9) in favor of the perfection which Christ offers (cf. 3:10-14).

Paul's goal is to convince the majority of the ecclesia that they've made the right decision to reject the Judaizers, and remain faithful to Christ, recognizing that following His example in humility will result in them being perfected and exalted by Him. Paul is reinforcing their Christology in the face of opposition, and likely persecution.

The traditional timing of writing this letter is during Paul's imprisonment at Rome in the mid to late 60s AD. However, modern scholars (e.g., N. T. Wright, Donald A. Campbell) have placed the writing at early to mid 50s, during an imprisonment at Ephesus that is not explicitly documented. Among modern scholars, this letter is considered to be written around the same time as Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon. That being the case, it is easy to see why Paul would be pleased the ecclesia at Philippi had not fallen backwards into the Law of Moses as had the ecclesia at Galatia and Corinth. Yes, they had some internal problems over it, but they've by and large survived the contention.

While the KJV does a pretty good job on the literal translation, the presentation makes it difficult to understand Paul's message. Reading the KJV in parallel with a modern translation is recommended. The Good News Translation (GNT), New Revised Standard Versions (NSRV) and International Standard Version (ISV) show the poetical form of 2:6-11, where most

translations don't, and all break up the text into topical blocks that are more manageable.

Comments on Philippians 1

Paul addresses the ecclesia at Philippi, telling them all of his tribulations are for his own benefit and for the benefit of the Gospel. This isn't Paul being overly optimistic, rather he recognizes the Lord's hand and power in human affairs makes things work out in His own favor.

For an ecclesia that has undergone schism and is presently being persecuted, Paul's example of determination and strength of conviction in the face of adversity is meant to be an example.

¹ Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: ² Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

v1-2 The standard opening address, where Paul addresses the intended audience.

"bishops and deacons", suggesting the ecclesia there is well organized, despite the loss of the prideful leadership (cf. 2:21).

³ I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, ⁴ Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, ⁵ For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now; ⁶ Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ: ⁷ Even as it is meet for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart; inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace. ⁸ For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ. ⁹ And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; ¹⁰ That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ. ¹¹ Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.

v3-11 Paul gives thanks for the faithfulness of the ecclesia in Philippi and states he very much would like to see them in person (v. 3-8). He predicts their genuine love for the gospel will result in them obtaining greater knowledge, discernment, and righteousness (v. 9-11).

v7 "in my bonds", i.e., in his literal imprisonment. Paul is in captivity when writing this letter, hence his inability to visit them.

¹² But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel; ¹³ So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places; ¹⁴ And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. ¹⁵ Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: ¹⁶ The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds: ¹⁷ But the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel. ¹⁸ what then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice,

v12-18 Paul appears to be saying that out of bad things come good. Out of his imprisonment comes his preaching to his Roman guards (v. 12-13), and the increased faith of others in Paul's example (v. 14). Even the Judaizers within the ecclesia who are against Paul and taking advantage of his captivity to promote themselves are still proclaiming the gospel to the advantage of Christ (v. 15-18).

Paul's underlying thesis is the Lord works to undermine or overcome the evil acts of mortals to accomplish good in the long run, cp. Isa. 55:8-11. His will, insight, and power are sufficient to overcome any adversity and accomplish His goals, which in this case is the preaching of the gospel. This is not simply Paul being an optimist, He genuinely believes the Lord is aware of his situation and involved such that His work will be forwarded no matter what.

v15-17 Paul has had problems with Judaizers for quite some time, so while he might be generally referring to Judaizers (cf. Acts 21:20-26, Galatians, 2 Corinthians), it is more likely Paul is referring specifically to the problems they have been having there locally in Philippi. Obviously, Paul wouldn't be favorably disposed towards them, and they would take advantage of his absence due to his captivity to promote themselves and their causes.

yea, and will rejoice. ¹⁹ For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the spirit of Jesus Christ, ²⁰ According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness,

as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death.

v19-20 Paul knows that his present woes will only turn for his salvation (v. 19) and because of his faith he knows he will not be put to shame because regardless of what happens to him, either being spared or executed, Christ will be magnified (v. 20).

v20 If Paul is executed, he will be heralded as a martyr and the cause will go forward, while Paul himself gets to rest from his labors in the Lord's presence. If he is spared, all will see it as an act of God's mercy against his persecutors. So, either way, Paul and the Lord win. This is the kind of predicament evil people put themselves in when they persecute the prophets. The Lord wins no matter what.

²¹ For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. ²² But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. ²³ For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: ²⁴ Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you. ²⁵ And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith; ²⁶ That your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again.

v21-30 Living for Christ is life eternal (v. 21). Paul confesses he is tired of the struggles in mortality (v. 22-23), but concedes it is better than he persist in this life so as to be a benefit to the Church (v. 23-26).

v21-22 The IV/JST alters the order of the verses and emends the KJV v. 21, as follows:

KJV

For to me to live
is Christ,
and to die is gain.
But if I live in the flesh,
this is the fruit
of my labour:
yet what I shall choose
I wot not.

IV

But if I live in the flesh,
ye are the fruit
of my labor.
Yet what I shall choose
I know not.
For me to live,
is to do the will of Christ;

and to die, is my gain.

The IV/JST has Paul stating that if he were to die physically that he would be benefitting himself, but if he persists on in his labors in mortality he is benefitting the Church. Paul appears to be saying that to give in and die would be a selfish act.

v23 Paul is sounding somewhat depressed and perhaps a bit morbid here. While he couches it in terms of being off to a better place in a religious sense, when reading such a thing, one has to wonder what Paul's emotional state was at this point.

²⁷ only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; ²⁸ And in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God. ²⁹ For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake; ³⁰ Having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me.

v27-30 Paul then encourages the ecclesia to be faithful and zealous (v. 27), and not to fear their persecutors (v. 28-30).

v27 "Only let your conversation be", the IV/JST emends this to "Therefore let your conversation be".

v28 The IV/JST differs from the KJV, as follows:

KJV

And in nothing terrified
by your adversaries:

which is to them
an evident token
of perdition,
but to you
of salvation,
and that of God.

IV

And in nothing terrified
by your adversaries,
who reject the gospel,
which bringeth on them

destruction;
but you who receive the gospel,
salvation;
and that of God.

The IV is a better literal translation than the KJV, and follows modern translations of the verse.

v28-30 The "adversaries" here are the Judaizers whom Paul addresses throughout the entire letter.

v30 The separation of the Judaizers from the ecclesia has resulted in them being persecuted to some degree. There is nothing in the text to suggest members of the ecclesia at Philippi have been imprisoned. It is likely more along the lines of being harassed.

It would have been very easy for the Judaizers to tell the Roman authorities that this group should not be afforded the [legal protections](#) Jews were granted under Roman law (e.g., exemptions from participating in Roman religious festivals, allowance to practice their own religious rites, exemption from military service, exemption from provisioning military troops).

"and now hear to be in me", the IV emends this to "and now know to be in me".

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