**Philippians Commentary**

**Philippians Chapter 1**

Php 1:1

**“holy ones.”** As born-again children of a holy God, Christians are inherently holy. That is why Philippians 1:1 and many verses in the Church Epistles say Christians are holy, even when they do not behave that way.

People who have confessed Christ as Lord and become born again are referred to as “holy ones.” This makes perfect sense because God is holy, and when a person gets born again and becomes a child of God by birth, he or she gets the nature of his parent (all children have the nature of their parents). God is holy, so every child of God is a partaker of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4) and thus is holy too. The gift of holy spirit born in the believer gives the believer a holy nature, which is why Romans 15:16 says that people are “made holy by the holy spirit.”

Sadly, the connection between the holy Father and the holy child has been obscured because for hundreds of years, the word *hagios* (holy) has been translated as “saint.” So, for example, in the King James Version, Philippians 1:1 reads: “Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the **saints** in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi.” The average Christian does not know that the word “holy” when used of God (Rev. 4:8), the word “holy” in the phrase “holy spirit” (Acts 1:5), and the Greek word translated “saints,” are all the same Greek word, *hagios*. The connection is actually simple: God is holy and spirit, and like any parent, when He gives birth, His children get his nature, so they are holy too. In 2 Peter 1:4, the Epistle says that believers have a “divine nature,” which is the nature we get from God in the New Birth. So, when a person gets “born again,” they receive the gift of God’s nature, which the Bible calls “holy spirit” (1 Thess. 4:8), and because God’s children have God’s holy nature, they are inherently holy and are called “holy ones.”

Also, something that makes things complicated for the beginning Bible reader is that over the ages, the meaning of the English word “saint” has changed. Since the Day of Pentecost and thus in the Church Epistles, a “saint” is a Christian; someone who is born again and has holy spirit. However, the English word “saint” has acquired two meanings that are not the meaning in the Church Epistles. Today, a “saint” is usually thought of as someone who is canonized by a denomination as an especially holy person, like “Saint Thomas,” or else the word “saint” is used to describe an especially good and religious person. Those two meanings are not the meaning of the word “saint” in the Church Epistles, and so the word “saint” in the Bible can be confusing, especially to new Christians.

Biblically, every Christian is a “holy one,” a “saint,” because every Christian has been sealed with God’s gift of holy spirit, which happened when they were born again. Many Christians do not do good deeds, but they are still “saints” (holy ones) because they have God’s holy nature. In contrast, many people who do good deeds have never given their heart to Jesus Christ and are not born again and thus are not “holy ones.”

Also, the fact that Christians are “holy ones” by nature can be confusing because we are also commanded to be holy. How can we be commanded to be holy if we are already holy? The confusion is caused because each Christian has two natures: “flesh” and “spirit.” Worse, those two natures are at war in us (Gal. 5:17). So, while we are “holy ones” by nature, we have to work hard to act that way and be “holy” in the flesh. In order to understand the Bible, the reader must know that each Christian is inherently holy because of the holy nature of God born within them, and thus called a “holy one” (or “saint”), while at the same time, we are “unholy” in the flesh and so we have to work at living a holy life. The two conflicting meanings of “holy” in the New Testament explain why many verses call us “holy ones” (“saints”), while at the same time, God commands us to “be holy” (Rom. 12:1; Eph. 1:4; 1 Pet. 1:15-16). Christians are always inherently holy because we were born again of God’s gift of holy spirit and now have God’s holy nature, but we have to work at being holy outwardly in our flesh.

To make the situation even more confusing, what it meant to be a “holy one,” a “saint,” changes in the Bible as the Administrations change (for more on Administrations in the Bible, see commentary on Eph. 3:2). In the Old Testament, before the giving of the holy spirit and New Birth occurred, and also after the Rapture during the Tribulation period, a person was a “holy one” based on their trust in God and behavior. That meant a person could go from “holy” to “unholy” as their beliefs and actions changed (cf. Ezek. 33:12-19). It helps to know that in order to understand what it means to be a “holy one” in the sight of God.

As for the word “holy” itself, although the meaning of “holy” in Hebrew and Greek has many nuances, the basic meaning of “holy” in both languages involves separation and often devotion. In the Old Testament, Gospels, and book of Revelation, a “holy” person is separated from the world and separated to God by their godly thoughts and actions and by their devotion to God, and thus the Old Testament has “saints” or “holy ones” (cf. Ps. 16:3; 34:9; Dan. 7:18, 21, 22, 25; Matt. 27:52; Rev. 5:8; 13:7, 10; 14:12). In the Christian Church in the Administration of Grace, a person is a holy one because they are a child of God with God’s holy nature born in them.

So we must make a clear distinction between the Christian Church and that which came before it and after it (the Old Testament and the book of Revelation). In the Christian Church, our holiness in the sight of God, and why we are called “holy ones,” is due to the fact that we are born again of God’s holy spirit and thus have God’s holy nature (2 Pet. 1:4). That is why every Church Epistle is written to the “holy ones” (“saints”) because every Christian is holy. In contrast, in the Old Testament and the book of Revelation, a person is a holy one by virtue of their trust and actions, as we see throughout the Old Testament and clearly set forth in Ezekiel 33.

The Church Epistles consistently refer to Christians as “holy ones” (cf. Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:2).

As for the phrase, “holy ones,” the Greek text only has the adjective *hagios* (#40 ἅγιος), “holy,” but it is a substantive, an adjective that is used as a noun, and therefore is best translated “holy ones.” A good example of substantives in English are the adjectives in the well-known Clint Eastwood movie, “*The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly*.” The adjectives “good,” “bad,” and “ugly” refer to people (“good people,” “bad people,” “ugly people”), and thus they function as nouns even though technically, “good,” “bad,” and “ugly” are adjectives. Another example in English would be, “We need to feed the hungry.” The word “hungry” is technically an adjective, but in that sentence, it is a substantive, an adjective being used as a noun, and thus it means “hungry people.”

The Bible is full of substantives, but we often cannot see them because the word “one” or another appropriate noun is supplied by the translators. For example, “the wicked” in Matthew 5:37 means “the Wicked One,” which is the way the English reads in most modern versions, and similarly in 1 John 5:19, “the wicked” means “the Wicked One.” In Revelation 1:18, “the Living” means “the Living One”; in Matthew 10:41, “a righteous” means “a righteous *person*”; in Matthew 12:41, “a greater” means “*someone* greater*,*” or “a greater *one.*”

[For more on substantives, see commentary on Matt. 5:37. For more on the difference between God, who is the Holy Spirit, and the gift and nature of God, which is “holy spirit,” see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?”]

**“in *union with* Christ Jesus.”** On the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), being “born again” of God’s spirit first became available, and Christians became part of the Body of Christ and identified with him (crucified with him, died with him, buried with him, and raised with him). Today, Christians are “in Christ” (“in union with Christ”) by virtue of being part of the Body of Christ, and it is important that we also are “in Christ,” that is, “in union with Christ” because we obey him and lead godly lives. When we read a phrase such as “in Christ” or “in him,” we must pay careful attention to the context to see if it refers to our spiritual union due to being part of the Body of Christ, or whether it refers to our being in union with Christ because of our obedience and godliness, or if both meanings apply in that given context. A lot of the blessings that Christians enjoy today are due to the fact that we are in union with Jesus Christ.

[For more on being in union with Christ, see commentary on Eph. 1:3. For more information on the Christian’s identification with Christ, see commentary on Rom. 6:5.]

**“together with the overseers and deacons.”** Cf. Meyer’s translation, “along with overseers and deacons.”[[1]](#footnote-30008) The Greek of this clause is very revealing. The words “along with” come from the preposition *sun* (#4862 σύν), here used in its associative sense. It could be translated as “in association with” or “together with.” This little word paints a picture of all the saints in Philippi standing in association with the overseers and deacons among them. What is the association that connects them? It is precisely *not* that of one class to another. The scripture here has no sense of a separation between clergy and laity—it was already affirmed that the letter was to “all the saints.” Interestingly, the two nouns for “overseers” and “deacons” lack the definite article, which highlights the fact that they are not a separate group. They are not *the* overseers and deacons, but simply particular saints who are described as fulfilling such a role. As Lenski explains, “The absence of the articles makes the two nouns qualitative, lends them the force of ‘such as are overseers and deacons,’ and thereby avoids the idea of a particular class.”[[2]](#footnote-20339)

Php 1:4

**“I always pray with joy.”** The Epistle to the Philippians has often been called the epistle of joy, and with good reason. Although the English versions differ somewhat in their translations of the Greek, in the REV, “joy” and “rejoice” occur 16 times in four short chapters—more than any other book except Luke, but Luke has 21 chapters. In the REV translation of Philippians, “joy” occurs seven times, and “rejoice” occurs nine times.

Php 1:5

**“from the first day until now.”** This phrase does not refer to a specific day that the Philippians came to the Lord, because obviously, the church grew over time. Rather, it refers to the fact that the church did not waffle in and out of the Faith, sometimes believing and sometimes not. The phrase means that from the time they got saved, they stayed faithful to the Lord.

Php 1:6

**“will continue to complete it.”** The Greek word is *epiteleō* (#2005 ἐπιτελέω) in the future tense. This is the linear or progressive future, which indicates that “the action will continue throughout a future time.”[[3]](#footnote-27027) There is an important message buried in the Greek of this verse that is difficult to bring into English. As well as “complete,” the Greek word *epiteleō* can mean “pay in full.”[[4]](#footnote-29219) Jesus Christ will indeed complete his work in believers. He will, and is, also paying them back for their efforts.

**“until.”** The Greek is *achri* (#891 ἄχρι), and it is a marker of a continuous extent of time up to a point. Thus, “until, as far as, right up to,” etc. A. Nyland notes that “right up to” is a well-attested meaning of *achri*.[[5]](#footnote-24426)

Php 1:7

**“defending and confirming.”** The Greek text has these words as nouns, “the defense and confirmation,” but they are verbal in nature and express action, and thus it seems clearer to express them as verbs, and some modern versions are doing exactly that (cf. NIV, NJB, NLT, *God’s New Covenant*; Charles B. Williams, *The New Testament*).

**“*and* because.”** The “because” comes from the participle form of the “to be” verb at the end of the sentence, which seems clearly to be causal. Paul is giving reasons why he thinks so fondly of the Philippians, and he says it is because they are in his heart and because they are joint partakers in grace.

Php 1:8

**“Indeed.”** A “confirmatory *gar,*” frequently translated here as “For.” This verse is not giving a reason, it is confirming the last sentence. Some versions simply leave out the “For” altogether (cf. NEB, NIV, NLT, The Source). In *The Kingdom New Testament*, N.T. Wright translates it “Yes.”

**“the deep affection.”** The Greek word translated by the phrase “deep affection” is *splagchnon* (#4698 σπλάγχνον) and *splagchnon* means “bowels.” There is an important truth that is being revealed by the word “bowels,” just as He uses “heart” in many verses and even “kidneys” in some verses (Ps. 7:9; 16:7; 26:2; 73:21; Prov. 23:16; Jer. 11:20; 12:2; 17:10; 20:12; Rev. 2:23). The “bowels” were used in the ancient world as a center and source of emotion and feelings, somewhat similar to “heart” being used for the center and source of thoughts and attitudes.

[See commentary on Rev. 2:23 for more on “kidneys.”]

For centuries, scientists and theologians thought that the ancients only equated “bowels” with a person’s emotional life because they were ignorant and superstitious. Recently, however, scientists are discovering that the bowels have a very large number of nerve cells, and actually can “think” on their own. In fact, there are as many nerve cells between the neck and navel as there are in the head. Of course, the nerves in the head are configured differently and function differently than the nerves in our gut, but scientists are now learning that the Bible is correct in mentioning our bowels, kidneys, and belly in connection with a person’s emotional life.

Almost everyone is aware of times he or she has been afraid or upset but felt it in their bowels or stomach. If we are anxious, our stomach often becomes “tied up in knots.” If we hear really bad news or are very afraid, we often become physically sick, lose our appetite, or even have diarrhea. In fact, involuntarily defecating is a common reaction to a sudden scare.

The fact that the bowels play a huge part in our emotional life is well represented in the Greek text. Unfortunately, the emphasis that God, by using the word “bowels,” places on the emotion in the verse is lost in most English versions of the Bible because “bowels” have been replaced by “heart,” “affection,” or similar words. While the translators mean well by trying to translate the Greek in a way that communicates to the modern reader, the great truth that the bowels are a huge part of a person’s emotional life is lost. Christians need to be aware that God wrote the Bible in such a way that it would educate us about ourselves, His creation, and we lose that education when we take a clear word like “bowel” and translate it as “heart.” In most cases, the REV has tried to maintain “bowels” when it occurs in the text and add italics to it to bring out the meaning.

One of the challenges with “bowels” is that it refers to emotions, but the exact emotion is different in different contexts.

Also, when translators use “heart” instead of the proper translation “bowels,” we lose another great truth in Scripture: that biblically, the heart is less associated with a person’s emotional life and is more associated with our mental life. Biblically, the heart refers more to a mental function, while our bowels, kidneys, and belly refer more to our emotional life. Verses that involve our bowels include:

* **Luke 1:78 (KJV)** “Through the tender mercy [bowels] of our God;”
* **2 Corinthians 6:12 (NASB)** “you are restrained in your own affections [bowels].”
* **2 Corinthians 7:15 (NASB)** “his affection [bowels] abounds all the more toward you….”
* **Philippians 1:8(NASB)** “I long for you all with the affection [bowels] of Christ Jesus.”
* **Philippians 2:1 (NASB)** “If therefore there is any…affection [bowels] and compassion,”
* **Colossians 3:12 (NASB)** “put on a heart of compassion [literally: “put on bowels”]”
* **Philemon 1:7 (NASB)** “the hearts[bowels] of the saints have been refreshed”
* **Philemon 1:12 (NASB)** “And I have sent him…my very heart [bowels]”
* **Philemon 1:20 (NASB)** “refresh my heart [bowels] in Christ.”
* **1 John 3:17 (NASB)** “But whoever has the world’s goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart [bowels] against him, how does the love of God abide in him?”

Php 1:9

**“will continue to increase.”** The verb translated “will continue to increase” is *perisseuō* (#4052 περισσεύω), and it is in the subjunctive mood, which is why almost all English versions have the helping word “may” (cf. “may abound”; ESV). However, in this case, the subjunctive mood of the verb comes from the word *hina* (“that”), which is conditional. Thus, the subjunctive comes from the Greek grammar, not the context or the intent of Paul’s prayer. Paul is not praying that their love “may” continue to increase, as if there might be some circumstance in which it would be better if it did not increase; rather, Paul is praying that their love “will” continue to increase. For more on the subjunctive mood being the result of grammar and not context, and how that can be confusing, see commentary on John 3:16, “will not perish.”

Php 1:10

**“determine.”** The Greek is *dokimazō* (#1381 δοκιμάζω), and it was used in testing metals, where a metal would be tested, then either approved or rejected based on the test results. The meaning here is similar to 1 Thessalonians 5:21, which says, “test everything *and* hold on firmly to what is good.” We are not to just “approve” excellent things, as if to give them a stamp of approval. We are to test things and then approve them based on the test. Thus, “determine” is a good translation here, as would be “test and approve”; it shows that you examine and arrive at a judgment. Robertson says, “… the first step is to distinguish between good and evil and that is not always easy in our complex civilization.”[[6]](#footnote-30171) (See also commentary on Romans 2:18).

**“the things that are best.”** See commentary on Romans 2:18.

**“without offense.”** Christians will not be able to stop some people, especially unbelievers, from being offended at what they believe, but Christians are to strive not to be offensive (see commentary on 1 Cor. 10:32).

Php 1:11

**“the fruit of righteousness.”** That is, the fruit which consists of righteous acts. The scholars are divided as to whether the genitive means “the fruit that comes from righteousness” or “the fruit that is righteousness” (that is, righteous acts). Although there are competent scholars on both sides of the issue, and although it is certainly true that a righteous person does righteous things, there is good evidence that that is not the emphasis here. The emphasis seems to be that the “fruit” is the righteous acts that people do. Gordon Fee writes: “Paul’s use of ‘religious language’ like this has been altogether conditioned by his lifelong reading of the OT. The phrase itself comes from the LXX (Amos 6:12; Prov. 3:9; 11:30), where it refers to the righteous behavior of the righteous person (cf. James 3:18 (‘the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace…) where again the emphasis is on righteous behavior).”

Fee goes on to point out, “…Paul’s use of the Greek definite article which here functions like a relative pronoun. This article is without ambiguity: it modifies ‘fruit’ not ‘righteousness.’ Paul’s emphasis, therefore, is on ‘the fruit, consisting of righteousness,’ which comes to them through their relationship to Christ.”[[7]](#footnote-14099)

In fact, all over the Old Testament and Gospels, “righteousness” referred to the righteous acts that a person did, so “the fruit that was acts of righteousness” would be well understood in the biblical culture (see commentary on Matt. 5:6). We see this in Hebrews 12:11, which mentions the peaceable fruit of righteousness, that is, the peaceable fruit which are the acts of righteousness that godly discipline brings.

Php 1:12

**“that the things that happened to me.”** Why do people stay in bad situations? Psychologists tell us that the fear we know is less fearful than the fear we do not know, so people stay in bad marriages, dead-end jobs, etc. In the first century, the Church was afraid of the evil government, and this slowed down the move of the Word. When Paul was put in prison, people were actually emboldened by it and spoke the Word with more boldness (Phil. 1:14).

Php 1:13

**“As a result *of those things*.”** The Greek word that starts verse 13 is *hōste* (#5620 ὥστε), which usually gives a reason (thus, “so that, therefore, so then”) but can also be used as a result clause, as it is here (cf. NIV). As a result clause, it can be confusing if not coupled with the “things” of Phil. 1:12, and because of that, many modern versions, especially those that are less literal to the Greek text, leave it off completely, and just say that the whole guard knows about Paul (cf. CJB, CEV, NCV, TLB, The Message).

There is a great lesson in what Paul is writing. God can make lemonade out of a lemon. God did not want Paul in prison, but that is where he was, so God worked in the situation to embolden the other Christians Paul was working with, and also to use Paul as a witness to those around him. We should always be looking for how we can redeem any situation for God, no matter how bad it seems.

**“everyone else.”** “Everyone else” refers to the common Roman citizen. To understand this phrase, we need to have some cultural background. For one thing, Rome, like most major cities, was a hotbed of gossip. Paul’s case would have been especially juicy because the Romans did not generally like the Jews, and had had nothing but trouble with them ever since Pompey conquered Jerusalem in 63 BC, around 120 years before Philippians was written. We see the animosity the Romans held for the Jews periodically in Acts. A good example is when Paul came to Philippi, which was a Roman colony, and taught about Jesus. The Romans became upset at some of the events that occurred, and brought Paul and Silas to the magistrates and said, “These men, being Jews, are seriously disturbing our city, and are promoting customs that are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or to observe.” Then, without even a pretense of a trial, the magistrates had them stripped, beaten with rods, and then thrown into the stocks in the prison (Acts 16:20-24).

Also, around AD 60, very close to when Paul was in jail and Philippians was written, there was still a lot of confusion about any difference between Jews and Christians. The majority of Christians were still of Jewish background (although the number of Gentile converts was growing dramatically). The Jews were well-known for arguing among themselves about almost every aspect of their religion, so when “another group of Jews” started propounding that the Messiah had come, the Romans did not generally see this as a new religion, as the Jews and Christians did, but just another Jewish sect. Some Romans saw the difference and understood what was happening, but at this time most did not. In fact, it is quite possible that it was this very trial of “Paul versus the Jews” that really clarified the difference between a Jew and a Christian for the emperor, the Roman officials, and even the common Roman. We can assume it had a big impact, after all, a trial in front of the emperor himself, in which Paul was being tried for breaking various Jewish laws, would have been the object of a lot of attention. We do know that by the great fire of Rome in July of 64, only a few years later, the difference between a Jew and a Christian was much better understood by the Romans—and by the Christians too, because it was around 60-62 that Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians were written, and those three Epistles greatly clarified the difference between a Jew and a Christian.

In conclusion, Paul’s imprisonment, the imprisonment of a Rabbi with some new ideas, due to supposedly breaking Jewish laws, got a lot of attention among the Praetorian guard, and “everyone else” in Rome.

Php 1:14

**“brothers and sisters.”** See Word Study: “Adelphos.”

**“in the Lord.”** See Word Study: “In the Lord.”

**“word of God.”** There is also good manuscript evidence for simply translating the phrase, “to speak the word.” The earliest witness, P46, excludes the phrase “of God” and quite a few others as well. However, there is also extremely strong support for the reading, “word of God” (Sinaiticus, Vaticanus, Alexandrinus). Since the meaning is clear that he is referring to speaking the word of God, not just any “word,” the REV goes with the latter reading, which brings more specificity to what the “word” is.

Php 1:15

**“rivalry.”** The Greek word is *eris* (#2054 ἔρις), and it means strife, fighting, rivalry. We need to remember that there were churches in Rome before Paul arrived. After Paul arrived in Rome, his fame among the believers, no doubt bolstered by his understanding of the things of God in general and possibly by healings or miracles, caused some of the already established ministers, who were used to being the big wheels in town, to be very uncomfortable. Thus, they preached with renewed vigor, no doubt maximizing any difference between their understanding of the Scripture and what Paul was teaching, to elevate their prestige in the Church. They started preaching out of envy and rivalry.

Php 1:17

**“selfish ambition.”** The Greek is *eritheia* (#2052 ἐριθεία). See commentary on Romans 2:8, “selfishly ambitious.” Some versions have “rivalry” here. Although rivalry definitely existed, we do not feel it is the true core of the issue. Selfish ambition is the root of the rivalry, and in this case, the selfish ambition, which manifested itself in rivalry, also would manifest itself in dishonest and underhanded actions that were designed to achieve honor, position, and perhaps even money.

Php 1:18

**“What really matters?”** The Greek phrase, *ti gar*, is an idiom. “What about it?” “What really matters?” Even “How do I feel?” The phrase is translated by the context. Here, Paul has been talking about two groups of people: one who preaches Christ out of envy, the other out of love. What really matters? Although it would be wonderful if everyone were loving, we have to recognize free will and realize God will handle sin at the Judgment, and in the meantime, we can be thankful, especially in the pagan culture of Rome, that Christ is being preached.

Php 1:19

**“spirit of Jesus Christ.”** The “spirit of Jesus Christ” is Jesus Christ in action, as the “Spirit of God” is God in action (Gen. 1:2; Job 33:4). The gift of holy spirit does not really supply “help” the way Paul needs it to get out of prison. However, the greater truth is that there is (or certainly should be) in the mature believer a seamless connection between Jesus, who gives revelation and supplies power, and holy spirit via which it comes.

**“end.”** The Greek word is *apobainō* (#576 ἀποβαίνω), and in this context, it means “to result in a state or condition, turn out, lead to.”[[8]](#footnote-25015)

**“this will end in my salvation.”** This phrase is notoriously difficult to interpret. There are three major interpretations that have been set forth by scholars.

The first interpretation we will consider is that in Philippians 1:19, the “salvation” that Paul speaks of is referring to the salvation of others, and in that case, the verse would be translated as something like, “as far as I am concerned, this will end in salvation.” The second interpretation we will consider is that the phrase is referring to the salvation of Paul—Paul’s personal salvation—and then the verse would be translated “this will end in my salvation.” The third and last interpretation we will consider is that Philippians 1:19 is referring to Paul’s deliverance from prison, in which case the word “salvation” means “deliverance” from prison, and the verse could be translated as “this will end in my deliverance.”

In considering the first interpretation, in which “salvation” is referring to the salvation of others, the verse would be translated as something like, “as far as I am concerned, this will end in salvation” (i.e., the salvation of others.)” One reason in support of this view is that the word “my” in the REV translation is in the dative case in the Greek text, not in the genitive case. The most natural translation of the dative case would be “for me,” not “my.” Paul typically uses the genitive case when referring to his own salvation or the salvation of someone else, e.g. Ephesians 1:13, Philippians 1:28, and Philippians 2:12, where he speaks of “your” salvation. However, here in Philippians 1:19, Paul uses the dative case, which is the same grammatical form of the pronoun he uses in Philippians 1:21. That use of the dative case would be what scholars refer to as “a dative of feeling.” Thus, Paul would be using the dative to mean “as far as I am concerned.”[[9]](#footnote-32297) The dative of feeling is also how Daniel Wallace classifies the same dative just two verses later, in Philippians 1:21, which could well be translated as “As far as I am concerned, to live is Christ and to die is gain.”[[10]](#footnote-32711)

Also in support of the view that “salvation” could refer to the salvation of others is that the “this” could refer to the preaching of the good news discussed in the preceding verse, Philippians 1:18. The preaching of the gospel, whether through genuine preaching or selfish motives (Phil. 1:17) will lead to people’s salvation. Regardless of who is preaching or why they are proclaiming the name of Christ, Paul rejoices in it because it will result in salvation for those who hear the message of Christ.

Nevertheless, there are downsides to this second interpretation, that “salvation” refers to the salvation of others. For one thing, the text never says that Paul is considering the salvation of others; that has to be assumed. Also, the view that Philippians 1:19 refers to the salvation of others does not flow naturally into his thought in the very next verse (Phil. 1:20), which is about Paul being put to shame. Lastly, this interpretation does not fit with what is likely a quotation of the book of Job in the verse (this will be discussed below). Given the evidence, that Paul could have been talking about the salvation of other people here seems unlikely.

The second interpretation of Philippians 1:19 we will examine is that “my salvation” refers to Paul’s own salvation. Although a number of scholars think this may well be what Paul is saying, that interpretation has problems. For one thing, the prayers of the Philippians will not end in Paul’s salvation. Although we are to pray for people to be saved, nowhere else in all of his writings does Paul indicate that if we pray for people, it “will end” in their salvation. Furthermore, this statement of Paul’s would be very unusual, as if Paul somehow doubted his salvation and needed the Philippians to pray for it and for Jesus Christ to help with it. Paul had consistently set forth his confidence in salvation and had led many others to be saved as well. There is no indication in Philippians or in any of Paul’s other writings that he is concerned he might not be saved. In fact, in a number of places, Paul confidently speaks of his salvation (e.g., Rom. 6:5-8; 8:24; 13:11; 2 Cor. 2:15-16; Eph. 2:5; 1 Thess. 4:15-17). Given that, it does not seem that Paul could be speaking of his everlasting salvation here in Philippians 1:19. Many scholars, however, use “salvation” here to refer not to what would get Paul saved, but rather that he would be “vindicated” in the heavenly court of God, and not put to shame (Phil. 1:20). In that sense, “salvation” could refer to Paul’s stand and subsequent vindication in God’s court. Nevertheless, it is unclear how that vindication fits with the first part of the verse.

The interpretation that “salvation” refers to Paul’s deliverance from prison makes the best sense of the preceding phrase, “through your prayer and the help of the spirit of Jesus,” since through the Philippians’ prayers, God could help Paul to be released from prison. It is clear from other scriptures that the prayer of believers has great power (James 5:16). Gerald Hawthorne and Ralph Martin write: “Paul believed that some important things would contribute to his being set free from prison. One of these was prayer.”[[11]](#footnote-25275)

That interpretation also fits with the fact that Paul clearly seems to quote Job 13:16 in the Septuagint. Hawthorne and Martin write that what Paul said “are the exact words Job…surely the verbal identity between the two passages strongly indicates that Paul understood and interpreted his situation in terms of Job’s experience. As Job was ultimately “saved” from his plight and vindicated, so he, Paul, would ultimately be saved from his plight and vindicated.”[[12]](#footnote-27912) Hawthorne and Martin then go on to say, “Several things, however, argue for the fact that when Paul spoke of *sōtēria* [salvation] here he had in mind his release from prison.”[[13]](#footnote-21853) Then they list three reasons the text is referring to Paul’s release from prison: that the primary meaning of *sōtēria* is deliverance from death; that although *sōtēria* can be used of eternal salvation it is not used that way all the time, even by Paul; and Paul used the quotation from Job because he had a conviction that he too, like Job, would be saved, “released from prison.”[[14]](#footnote-31014)

So, in the end, the “salvation for others” view finds slightly better support in the preceding context (Phil. 1:18), and the “salvation for Paul” view finds support in the subsequent context in Philippians 1:20. However, the “deliverance from prison” view fits best with Paul’s reference to the Philippians’ prayers and help of the spirit of Jesus being connected with the outcome of his “deliverance.” Given all the evidence, the best interpretation of the verse seems to be that Paul was speaking of his deliverance from prison.

Php 1:21

**“to die is gain.”** Philippians 1:21 is taught as if Paul is saying that “to die is gain” because Paul would immediately be in heaven when he died. That is not the case. The Bible is clear that death is an enemy (1 Cor. 15:26), and it cannot both be an enemy and “gain” at the same time.

The first thing we need to recognize is that Paul never said death was a “gain” to him; he never said, “to die is MY gain.” The statement he made was simply, “to die is gain.” But whose gain? As we will see, it is the Church that would gain, not Paul himself. We had seen the Church unexpectedly gain before. We must remember that Paul was writing Philippians from a Roman jail. But Paul’s being imprisoned did not hinder the Gospel, instead, it advanced the Gospel and caused it to gain ground in the Roman world. Paul wrote: “Now I want you to know, brothers *and sisters*, that the things that happened to me [my being imprisoned and having to defend my Faith] have actually served to advance the good news.” (Phil. 1:12).

Paul specifically stated that his imprisonment helped the Gospel in two ways: many people heard about Christ who would likely have never heard about him (Phil. 1:13), and also, “most” of the Christians had become emboldened to speak the Word of God openly and fearlessly (Phil. 1:14). Fear of imprisonment and death had stilled the voices of many Christians, but when Paul was imprisoned it actually emboldened the Church and the Gospel gained as a result.

It might have been expected that Paul’s imprisonment would have emboldened the Church because earlier, when Paul had been the one persecuting the Church (Acts 8:1-3; 9:1-2), the persecution had only emboldened the Church and Christians scattered everywhere and kept preaching the Word (Acts 8:4). However, something that no one would have expected happened when Paul was imprisoned in Rome for the cause of Christ: even people who did not like Paul began preaching Christ and spreading the Word! Those people preached Christ out of envy and rivalry, just so Paul and his followers would not make more converts than they did, but they were preaching Christ and converts were being won (Phil. 1:15-18).

Paul’s imprisonment had been “gain” for the Church, and Paul was confident that if he died at the hands of the Romans, that would be “gain” too. Of course, there is the sense in which Paul’s death would have been a loss to the Church, just like every believer’s death is, especially if that believer is a leader and active in the Faith. But history has shown us that no one’s death stops the Church, and in many cases, it emboldens the Church and causes the Gospel to gain ground. The early Church saw that with Stephen, and the modern Church saw that with the German Lutheran pastor, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who died for his faith in 1945 and has inspired countless Christians in their stand for the Lord.

The Devil tries to use people’s natural fear of death to control people, but Jesus came to make the Devil ineffective so he could not use that weapon against people (Heb. 2:14-15). Paul was certain that if he died, his death would cause some believers to lose their fear of death and be more effective for the Gospel. He wrote to them that whether or not he came to them in person, they were not to be “frightened in any way [including prison or death] by those who oppose you” (Phil. 1:28).

Another way we know that when Paul said, “to die is gain,” he was not speaking of his own gain but rather the gain of the Church, is Philippians 1:20. He wrote: “Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death.” Putting Philippians 1:20-21 together we read, “Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” So it was Christ who was magnified and would gain by Paul’s living or dying, not Paul. For Paul, “to live is Christ” because Paul would continue to boldly preach Christ, and to die was “gain” because Christ would still be magnified and the Church would gain as more and more believers shed their fear of death and became courageous Christians.

Still another way we know that Paul’s death was not a “gain” to him is that not only does the Bible say death is an “enemy,” we know why it is an enemy: the dead are not alive in any form, but are dead in the ground awaiting the resurrection. That is not commonly known or taught in traditional Christianity, but it is what the Bible says. Paul would not gain by his death because he would be dead awaiting his resurrection, he would not be alive with Christ.

[For more on dead people being dead and awaiting the resurrection of their body from the dead, see Appendix 3: “The Dead Are Dead.”]

Php 1:22

**“But if I continue to live in the flesh, this *will mean* fruitful work for me.”** If Paul stays alive, he will have fruitful labor. Different English translations handle the abbreviated Greek in different ways. For example, Darby has, “if to live in the flesh *is my lot*.” The phrase “continue to live” comes from the continuous action inherent in the present infinitive verb.

Php 1:23

**“Now I am hard-pressed between the two.”** There is good reason to believe that there are three possibilities being set forward in Philippians 1:21-23. Two of the three of them, the two that Paul was torn between, are living or dying (Phil. 1:21). However, there is evidence that Philippians 1:23 sets forward a third possibility that is “far better” than either living or dying, and that is the return of Christ and being with Christ.

The reason Paul was torn between living and dying was that either one would benefit the church. He knew the church would benefit if he continued to live because he would be able to teach and support the believers. However, he also knew the Christian church had benefited from his imprisonment (Phil. 1:12), and so the church would also benefit from his death because believers would be emboldened to take a firm stand on the Good News about Christ. While that may sound unusual, history, including current history, shows that the persecution and killing of Christians does not stop Christian activism and often actually increases it. As it turned out, Paul’s execution was likely only five years after his writing Philippians because he was executed by Nero, most likely between AD 65 and AD 67. Paul was genuinely wondering which would be better for the church: his life or his death. He wrote, “I feel torn between the two” (NET). However, the return of Christ and being with Christ, which can be the meaning of the last phrase of Philippians 1:23, was far better than living or dying, and was what Paul—like most dedicated Christians—really wanted.

The traditional orthodox Church does not understand this meaning of Philippians 1:21-23 because of the erroneous belief that when a Christian dies, they go immediately to heaven and are with Christ. Thus, the orthodox explanation of the last sentence in Philippians 1:23 ignores what Paul has just said and claims that Paul has an intense desire for his death so he could be with Christ. But that traditional explanation does not seem to make sense. If Paul had an intense desire to die so he could be with Christ, then it seems that he would not have been “torn” between living and dying. After all, he had just written that both living and dying would benefit the Church—and that was the very reason he was torn between them. If Paul knew that his death would benefit both the Church and himself too, then there was nothing for him to be “torn” about, so a valid way to properly understand Philippians 1:23 is to see that the last phrase in the verse is introducing a third option that is much better than either living or dying: the return of Christ.

The Bible does not teach that people go to heaven (or Gehenna) when they die; it teaches that people are genuinely dead, without life, and are awaiting the resurrection. This explains why the choice between living and dying was so difficult for Paul. If death brings us immediately into the presence of God and Christ, and either living or dying would benefit the Church, then Paul had an easy decision: die. Then the Church would benefit and he would be with Christ. The reason Paul was torn between life and death was that there was no benefit to him in dying, even if the Church would benefit; if Paul died, he would not be with Christ, he would be dead, lifeless. However, it is worth noting that some Christians who understand that if Paul died he would be totally lifeless also understand that there is no sense of time in death, so for the person who dies, to them, the moment of death is the moment of being with Christ, and that is what they understand the last phrase of Philippians 1:23 to be saying.

If Philippians 1:21-23 is speaking of three possibilities, then it is saying the same thing as 2 Corinthians 5:1-9 is saying, but in a different way. Here in Philippians, Paul is torn between living and dying, both of which could benefit the Church, but he had an intense desire for the return of Christ and being with Christ. The return of Christ was much better to Paul than either living or dying, and if Christ returned, not only Paul, but the entire Christian Church would be with Christ, so Christ’s return would be the best for Paul and the Church.

2 Corinthians 5:1-9, like Philippians, sets forth three future possibilities: being alive in our earthly body (which Corinthians calls our “tent”); being dead, which Paul calls “unclothed;” and being clothed with his “habitation that is from heaven,” that is, getting his new body when Christ returns. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:4, “For indeed, we who are in this tent continually groan, being burdened, not that we want to be unclothed, but to be clothed; so that what is mortal is swallowed up by life.” What did Paul mean by that? Looking at the sentence phrase by phrase, we can understand it.

“For indeed, we who are in this tent” [that is, alive in our frail human tent-body] “continually groan, being burdened” [living Christians groan to be with Christ and have their new body], “not that we want to be unclothed” [“unclothed” means “dead,” with neither a human “tent” body or a new glorious body from heaven], “but to be clothed” [that is, clothed in his new immortal body]; “so that what is mortal” [the earthly body] “is swallowed up by life” [that is, the immortal body].

So there is evidence that both Philippians and Corinthians are presenting three possibilities: being alive in our earthly bodies, being dead and “unclothed,” or being clothed with our new body from heaven at the return of Christ. Paul says being with Christ in our new bodies is “far better.”

[For more on 2 Cor. 5:1-9, see commentary on those verses. For more information on the dead being actually dead, lifeless, until the resurrection, see Appendix 3: “The Dead Are Dead.”]

**“intense desire.”** The Greek word is *epithumia* (#1939 ἐπιθυμία), and it refers to an intense desire, a lust, or a craving. Paul was torn between living and dying, but he was not torn about a third option; he had an “intense desire,” a longing, for the return and to be with Christ.

**“to depart.”** The Greek verb translated “depart” is *analuō* (#360 ἀναλύω). In Greek literature, it generally referred to either a departure or a return, and it was used metaphorically for death. The verb *analuō* appears only one other place in the New Testament (Luke 12:36), and there it refers to the Return of Christ in the metaphorical example of a Lord returning from a wedding. The noun appears in 2 Timothy 4:6, where it refers to Paul’s death. Greek lexicons usually list both “depart” and “return” as meanings of *analuō.*[[15]](#footnote-27800)

There is evidence that in Philippians 1:23, Paul is offering a third possibility to living or dying, which is for Paul to depart the earth in the Rapture at the return of Christ. In that case, after expressing that he is pressed to make a choice between which is better, living and dying, Paul inserts a wish for something that he intensely desires, which is for the Lord to return and for him “to depart,” which is “better by far” than living or dying. Paul used the phrase “to depart and to be with Christ, which uses two infinitive verbs in conjunction, “to depart” and “to be with Christ.” These are two things that would happen to Paul: he would depart this world, and he would be with Christ. The only event in history that actually joins those two events—people leaving this earth and being with Christ—is the Rapture or return of Christ described in 1 Thess. 4:15-17. At that one event in history, both the living and the dead Christians will “depart” and be with Christ, which is “better by far” than living or dying. E. W. Bullinger notes the meaning of the phrase is “for the return.”[[16]](#footnote-14290)

Nevertheless, most Christians only see two possibilities in this verse and think that “dying” is what is “better by far” than living, because the dead person gets to be with Christ. But there are reasons to believe that is not what the verse is saying. If dying is far better than living, why does Paul say he is “hard-pressed” between living and dying? It seems he would not have been. Furthermore, why would Paul write in 1 Corinthians 15:26 that death is an “enemy”? In examining the argument, it seems that Paul was hard-pressed between living and dying because the Church would gain from either event, just as he had said: “for to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” But what Paul really wanted was the return of Christ, which was “better by far” than either his living or dying. After expressing that wish, he returns to his thought and in Phil. 1:24 states that remaining alive will help the Philippians more.

Why would Paul say that being with Christ at Christ’s return was “better by far” than living or dying? Because Paul would be together with Christ and all the other Christians who, like him, had been raised from the dead (1 Thess. 4:13-17), and he would have a brand-new body like Christ’s glorious body (1 Cor. 15:42-44, 51-54; Phil. 3:21; 1 John 3:2).

Furthermore, it does not seem to fit with what Paul wrote in other places for him to say here in Philippians that he had an intense desire to die even if it meant that—for him in his own personal experience—he would immediately experience being with Christ because there is no sense of time in death. The Jews constantly sought to kill him, and he did everything he could to stay alive. In fact, he either died or was close to death when he was stoned at Lystra (Acts 14:19), but he was prayed for and healed, and went right back to spreading the Gospel. At no point in any of Paul’s writings is there a sign that he was somehow disappointed at not being dead or that he somehow actually longed for death and not life.

Another reason for seeing Philippians 1:20-25 as referring to three options, Paul’s living, dying, or the return of Christ is the phrase, “Yet what I would prefer, I do not know” (Phil. 1:22). To understand this phrase, we must understand Paul’s use of “prefer.” It does not seem to be logical that Paul would say he did not know whether he would “prefer” living or dying in verse 22 but then say he had an intense desire to die and be with Christ in the very next verse (Phil. 1:23), and then go on to say that he “knew” he would remain alive and not die (Phil. 1:25).

The reason Paul did not know which he would “prefer” is that both his living and dying would benefit the church. But it seems that the reason Paul said he did not know whether he would “prefer” living or dying was to encourage the church and get them over any fear of death, because only two verses later Paul said, “I know that I will remain and continue with you” (Phil. 1:25, cf. Phil. 2:24) The only way he could have really known he would remain alive and continue with the Philippians was if the Lord revealed it to him by revelation, which would have given him complete confidence he would not die. Some commentators get around Paul’s saying he knew he would remain alive by saying that Paul really did not mean that, he just meant he thought he would remain alive, but the text says Paul “knew” it and that is confirmed by what he wrote in Philippians 2:24.

Reconstructed as set forth above, if Paul lived or died, the church would benefit, and Paul was not sure which of those he would choose, but in fact, Paul did not have to choose because he knew he would continue to live. For Paul to say that he was not sure whether he would choose life or death was a wonderful way to present what he really wanted, which was “to depart” and to be with Christ, which would happen at the Rapture/Return of Christ.

A seemingly strong argument against Philippians 1:23 referring to the return of Christ is if Paul had the return of Christ in mind as a third option in Philippians 1:23, he would not have used the verb *analuō* to refer to it, especially since he used the noun form of the word *analusis* (#359 ἀνάλυσις) to refer to his death (2 Tim. 4:6). But Paul used a large number of Greek words to refer to the return of Christ. These include *parousia* (#3952 παρουσία), which refers to the personal presence of the Lord and thus to his return (1 Cor. 15:23; 1 Thess. 2:19); *erchomai* (#2064 ἔρχομαι; cf. 1 Cor. 4:5, 11:26; 2 Thess. 1:10); *apokalupsis* (#602 ἀποκάλυψις); cf. 1 Cor. 1:7; 2 Thess. 1:7); *phaneroō* (#5319 φανερόω; cf. Col. 3:4; also used in 1 Pet. 5:4 and 1 John 2:28), and *epiphaneia* (#2015 ἐπιφάνεια; cf. 1 Tim. 6:14; 2 Tim. 1:10; 4:1, 8). Other Greek words used, but not by Paul, for the coming of Christ are *hēkō* (#2240 ἥκω; cf. Heb. 10:37; 2 Pet. 3:10), and *optanomai* (#3700 ὀπτάνομαι; cf. Heb. 9:28).

Given the many words Paul could have chosen to refer to the return of Christ, why choose *analuō*? We cannot be sure, but one possible reason is that *analuō* refers to a departure as well as a return, so it is a word that could “kill two birds with one stone,” by referring to the return of Christ and the church—and Paul—departing from the earth (1 Thess. 4:14-17) as well as having the background meaning of “return,” and thus Jesus returning for the believers. Also, if Paul meant to clearly refer to his death, why not use one of the words that clearly did that and that he used so many other times in his writing? Paul spoke of dying many times. He used the word *apothnēskō* (#599 ἀποθνῄσκω) for “die” in Philippians 1:21 and about 40 other times in the New Testament. He also used the metaphor of “sleep” for death quite often.

All that being said, the other way that Philippians 1:23 could be understood is that the verb *analuō* could be used to refer to Paul’s death if the reader kept in mind that, as Paul experienced it, the moment of his death was the moment he was united with Christ, even though many actual years may have passed (there is no recognition of the passage of time in death). Explained that way, Paul was indecisive about living or dying because both had advantages (Phil. 1:20-21). His indecision was caused because if he lived it was “fruitful work for me” (Phil. 1:22) and “more necessary for you” (Phil. 1:24). But if he died then his personal experience would be for him to immediately be with Christ.

It is possible that is an undertone of the meaning here in Philippians, but it does not seem likely that Paul meant it to be a primary meaning of *analuō*, however, because of the first part of the verse which says that Paul was torn between the two possibilities of living and dying. Paul was certainly aware that the moment he died would be, to him, the moment he was united with Christ, but that did not mean he had an intense desire to die so he could experience being with Christ. He did, however, have an intense desire for the Rapture or return of Christ, which meant that every Christian would simultaneously get to be with the Lord.

**“far better.”** The Greek uses a comparative with *mallon*, which can then be translated as “very much better,” “far better,” etc., as most English versions do. O’Brien suggests the superlative, “by far the best.”[[17]](#footnote-18120)

Php 1:26

**“reason for boasting.”** The Greek text reads *kauchēma* (#2745 καύχημα), the thing in which one boasts or, in the older English, “glories.” This refers to the object of our boasting, not the boasting or confidence itself, which would be *kauchēsis* (#2746 καύχησις).

**“because of me.”** This is the instrumental dative, or dative of means. It is *by means of* Paul’s deliverance from prison and coming to them again that their boasting in Christ will increase. Paul’s release from prison would be a blessing, and the fact that Jesus Christ was working behind the scenes to get Paul released would have been clearly seen. For it was through their prayers for him that he was delivered (Phil. 1:7, 19). Paul was eventually released from house arrest after 2 years (Acts 28:30), but there is no record that he did, or did not, visit Philippi after his release.

**“will continue to increase.”** See commentary on Philippians 1:9, “will continue to increase.”

Php 1:27

**“soul.”** In this verse, “spirit” and “soul” are used in a very similar fashion; with spirit perhaps putting more emphasis on attitude, while “soul” refers more to everything within you, mentally and emotionally.

Php 1:28

**“clear sign to them.”** The Greek word translated “clear sign” is *endeixis* (#1732 ἔνδειξις), which often means “proof,” but “clear sign” seems better here, in part because this sign is prophetic—it points to the future destruction of the wicked but salvation of the believers. The difficult part about the verse is that we might be tempted to read it as if the adversaries “saw,” i.e., understood, the sign. It is “to” them, but most of them never see it. We, however, see it clearly. Believers know (or should know) they will not be held by death, but will live forever, and in that confidence be able to stand firm against all adversaries. This is prophetic and speaks of our salvation, and the future destruction of the enemy. Thankfully, history shows that some unbelievers do see the strength and courage in the way believers fight evil, and suffer, and die, and some are thereby led to Christ.

**“and this is from God.”** The demonstrative pronoun “this,” *touto* (#5124 τοῦτο), is neuter and most naturally points to the collective clause that precedes it, rather than identifying a particular antecedent in the clause, such as “destruction,” or “salvation” (although there are scholars who argue for both those positions). O’Brien notes that the final words, ‘and this [is] from God’ apply not to just salvation, nor to destruction, but “to the whole of the preceding.”[[18]](#footnote-17271)

Php 1:29

**“graciously given.”** The Greek word is *charizomai* (#5483 χαρίζομαι), which means to give or grant something freely as a favor. The word is related to *charis*, “grace.” Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon says the word means: “to do something pleasant or agreeable (to one), to do a favor to, gratify; a. universally, to show oneself gracious, kind, benevolent.” BDAG translates this phrase in Philippians as: “you have (graciously) been granted the privilege of suffering for Christ.”[[19]](#footnote-30995) Although the word is sometimes used in the New Testament with more overtones of “give” than necessarily “graciously give,” the dominant use is to “graciously give” or “give as an act of grace.” Thus, Jesus “graciously gave” sight to the blind (Luke 7:21). The lender “graciously gave” (graciously forgave) the debts he was owed (Luke 7:42). God graciously gave life to the people on the boat in the storm (Acts 27:24). The spirit helps us know what God has graciously given to us (1 Cor. 2:12). God graciously gave the inheritance to Abraham (Gal. 3:18).

Here in Philippians 1:29, it has been “graciously given” to us to suffer for Christ. This may not seem like a gift, but we have to see things from God’s perspective. The world needs help. It needs people who will give of themselves to help bring it to Christ. The act of living like Christ and being an ambassador for Christ takes a lot of energy and often involves suffering. That God would choose us, rather than pass us over and ignore us, to suffer for Christ’s sake and point people to Christ, is a great privilege. To the extent that we respond to the call of God and give ourselves to His service, He will reward us. Jesus said that anyone who wanted to follow him must take up their cross (i.e., suffer for him) and follow (Matt. 16:24).

**Philippians Chapter 2**

Php 2:1

**“if…if…if…if.”** The Greek word *ei* (#1487 εἰ, pronounced just like a long ā) is usually translated “if,” but it does not always have the conditional meaning of the English word “if.” In certain circumstances, the Greeks used the word *ei* even though the condition was understood to be fulfilled, and in those circumstances, translating the Greek *ei* as “if” can confuse the English reader.[[20]](#footnote-23007) In those cases, the Greek word *ei* should be understood (and sometimes translated) as “since,” “surely,” or something similar, and there are also times when it is translated “indeed.” In his note in his commentary of 1 Thessalonians 4:14, R. C. H. Lenski calls this use of “if” “the condition of reality.”[[21]](#footnote-13096)

A good example of a use of *ei* that is not conditional is in John 7:4. The context of John 7:4 is the Feast of Tabernacles, and Jesus’ brothers were pressing Jesus to go public with his ministry when he was down in Jerusalem for the feast. They said to him, “If thou do these things, shew thyself to the world” (KJV). But Jesus’ brothers knew he was doing the miracles, so why would they say “if”? That is confusing. In that context, the verse should read as it does in the NIV: “Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world.” The New Testament has many places where the Greek word *ei* should be translated as “since” or “indeed” instead of “if.” Another good example is 1 Thessalonians 4:14. The translation in the KJV, “If we believe that Jesus died and rose again,” is not as clear in the context as the translation in the ESV, “Since we believe that Jesus died and rose again.” Other good examples where the *ei* is better translated as “since” than “if” are 1 Corinthians 15:44 and Colossians 2:20.

However, there are times when the translators recognize that the context of the verse makes it clear to the reader that the “if” can be naturally understood as “since,” and that is the case here in Philippians 2:1. Thus, the major versions such as the CSB, ESV, NASB, NIV, NRSV, and the REV, leave the “if” in place because it does not seem to be confusing. Here in Philippians 2:1, Paul is not doubting that there is encouragement in Christ, or comfort in love, or fellowship of the spirit. He is not meaning, “If there is any encouragement in Christ (but there may not be), and if there is any comfort from love (but there may not be).” No! Paul is not doubting that encouragement, comfort, love, and fellowship exist in Philippi. In fact, the opposite. Paul is using the fact that those wonderful things already exist in the church at Philippi, and he uses that fact to encourage the Philippians to greater heights of fellowship, love, and unity. It is because things like encouragement, love, and fellowship exist among the Philippians that the Greek text could be translated as “since there is encouragement in Christ, since there is comfort from love, since there is fellowship based on the spirit...then make my joy complete by having the same mindset.” Nevertheless, most translators considered that here in Philippians 2:1, leaving the Greek word *ei* translated as “if” would not confuse the reader into thinking that the Philippians had no mutual encouragement or love or fellowship. Of course they had those things, but now they needed to push forward to even greater unity among themselves. On the other hand, besides the fact that readers should realize there is comfort and love and fellowship at Philippi, leaving the word “if” emphasizes the fact that, reading the Epistle to the Philippians, we can see that there could be more of those things. The Philippians still needed to grow in the Faith (cf. Phil. 1:9, 24, 25; 2:5, 14; 3:17; 4:2, 3). Leaving the word “if” in the text lets the reader know that the Philippians still had room for growth in their personal lives and in their relationships.

Here in Philippians 2:1, the repetition of *ei*, “if” at the beginning of each phrase is the figure of speech anaphora (“alike sentence beginnings”), and the repetition is meant to call the attention of the reader to each point and thus magnify the significance of each point.

[See Word Study: “Anaphora.”]

**“comfort from love.”** Grammatically, this phrase can be taken in two different ways. The first and most common is similar to the NIV84, “If you have any...comfort from his love....” The other way it can be understood is that the word *paramuthia* (“comfort” ) can be meant in a more persuasive sense.[[22]](#footnote-21603) Indeed, some theologians prefer the persuasive sense here because it is possible that Paul is trying to persuade the believers of Philippi to be of the same mind, which means letting go of pride, being willing to listen, etc. Williams’ translation is, “So, if there is any appeal in our union with Christ, if there is any persuasive power in love….”

Even though the phrase can have two meanings, if this use of *paramuthia* was persuasion, then that meaning would only occur here in the New Testament, which is unlikely. Also, the common use of *paramuthia* as “comfort” does fit the context. What is most likely is that the common meaning of *paramuthia* is the dominant meaning, and the persuasive meaning is an undertone—in the text but downplayed. Also, it is worth noting that Paul does not specifically define “love” in this context as being God’s love, or Christ’s love, or his love toward them. It is likely that Paul is saying that love brings comfort no matter what the source of the love.

**“fellowship based on the spirit.”** The Greek literally reads *koinōnia pneumatos* (“fellowship of the spirit”) and this genitive phrase can grammatically be understood in several different ways. For example, it can be understood as a genitive of source (“fellowship that comes from the spirit”), or a genitive of production (“fellowship produced by the spirit”), or a genitive of participation (“fellowship with the spirit”), or an objective genitive (“fellowship in the spirit”), or a genitive of relation (“fellowship in relation to the spirit”). Scholars discuss which genitive the text is using, and the English translations differ as a result. Most versions opt to just translate the genitive in a neutral way, “fellowship of the spirit,” and let the reader make a choice, but many, like the REV, make what the translators consider the best choice in the context. It seems that the idea is best conveyed by a genitive of production and thus is well translated as “fellowship based on the spirit” because the “fellowship” that Paul has in mind is among fellow believers in Philippi, and that fellowship is a product from or is based on the holy spirit that connects believers together into one body in Christ.

**“compassion or mercy.”** The nouns are plural in the text. There are many different times when believers experience “compassions” and “mercies,” but that translation would be awkward in English. We know “mercy” occurs in many different ways and circumstances, but we still refer to it as “mercy.” Nevertheless, it is worth knowing that the Greek nouns are plural, and so there is an emphasis on the many different times and ways that people experience compassion and mercy.

Php 2:2

**“make my joy complete.”** The verb is literally “fulfill,” which was commonly used of vessels. It is as if Paul had a “cup of joy.”

**“like-minded.”** The Greek means to have the same opinion with regard to something, think, form/hold the same opinion or judgment. Because the verb *phroneō* is an active verb in the present tense, it could be understood as “keep on being like-minded.” Note that the verse does not tell us what we are to think, only that we should be like-minded about it. This is important because we must look for what to think from the context. After all, a group of robbers can all think the same about something, but they are not thereby credited with good.

**“*being* united together with *one* soul.”** The Greek is *sumpsuchos* (#4861 σύμψυχος), from *sun*, “with,” and *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή), “soul”; “with [one] soul.” A way to communicate this would be “in harmony.” “Souls that beat together, in tune with Christ and with each other.”[[23]](#footnote-10704) This word is united with the last phrase of the verse as one concept, not as many have, two distinct concepts.[[24]](#footnote-18437)

**“of one mind.”** The Greek is *phroneō*, the same verb that occurred earlier in the verse, but this time the verb is a present active participle. Just as the first phrase of the verse told us to be like-minded but did not tell us the specifics of what we were to be like-minded on, so here, we have an amplification, and we are to be of one mind, but again, without direction in this verse as to any specifics. R. C. H. Lenski has the idea here: “‘This one thing,’ however, still holds us in suspense, we wonder what it really is.”[[25]](#footnote-21957) What the one thing is that we are all supposed to think is in the next two verses. It is important to realize that this verse, and the thought being conveyed in this verse, is not finished, but is concluded in the next two verses (Phil. 2:3-4). This is important to understand, and usually missed, because almost every version puts a period at the end of the verse as if the thought was concluded and the next verse was a new thought. That is not the case. We Christians are to be thinking the same thing, even be thinking this one thing, which is the one thing (actually in a couple of parts) in the next two verses.

Php 2:3

**“selfish ambition.”** The Greek is *eritheia* (#2052 ἐριθεία). See commentary on Romans 2:8, “selfishly ambitious.”

**“conceit.”** The Greek is a compound word, *kenodoxia* (#2754 κενοδοξία), from *kenos* (empty), and *doxa* (glory, magnificence, splendor). It is self-glory, or conceit that is not based in reality. This verse is specifically referring to “empty” conceit, conceit based on nothing.

**“nothing out of selfish ambition or out of conceit.”** This phrase is inserted because of the fact that some did preach Christ out of selfish ambition (Phil. 1:17) and there was division that existed in Philippi (Phil. 4:2, etc.).

**“others.”** This word is used of others in the Christian community (see commentary on Gal. 5:13).

**“value others as more important than yourselves.”** We need to understand what this verse is saying. Two common ways that English Bibles translate the verse are to think of others as “more important” than yourselves (CSB, NASB, NET), or “better” than yourselves (ASV, CEB, CJB, NIV84, NRSV, RSV). Philippians 2:3 is not asking Christians to lie about themselves or the facts. A seasoned, godly, practicing Christian is more sound in the Faith, and often in life, than others who are not committed or who do not exercise wisdom and self-control. What the verse is asking is that Christians prefer others above themselves. The world is “me” oriented: “I” come first; “all others get in line behind me.” The ethics of the Bible teach that “others come first.” This comes up elsewhere in the New Testament, for example (e.g., Eph. 5:21; 1 Pet. 5:5). Christians should be other-person-focused, as Paul wrote, “so that those who are living should no longer live for themselves, but for him who died in their place” (2 Cor. 5:15).

Php 2:4

**“interests.”** This is the essence of “the one thing” (Phil. 2:2) that we should all be thinking, and it is, in essence, a restatement of the second great commandment, to love your neighbor as yourself. “Interests” are not hobbies or what someone wants to do, but what is good for the person in their relationship with God and Christ. To look out for the interests of others is to consider what would bring them closer to Christ.

Php 2:6

**[THIS VERSE AND COMMENTARY ARE CURRENTLY BEING WORKED ON...UPDATES COMING SOON]**

**“though being.”** Although many translations translate this present participle *huparchō* (#5225 ὑπάρχω) as “though he was,” it is preferable to keep the present, continuous aspect of the participle. The simple past tense, “though he was in the form of God” could be taken to mean that he ceased to be in the form of God at some later point which the present participle does not communicate.

**“appearance of God.”** This entry really concerns the entire passage of Phil. 2:6-8. One of the great purposes of Philippians is to encourage the Church to unity and humility, and in fact, unity can only be achieved through humility. (We see Paul’s plea for unity in Phil. 1:27 and 2:2, and see his plea for humility in Phil. 2:3). After telling people to be humble and to look out for other people’s interests, he gives the example of Jesus, saying, “Have this mindset in you that was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5). Jesus was in the form of God, that is, as God’s Son he had divine position and authority, but he humbled himself and became a servant to others. Similarly, no matter what your position is in the Church, whether you are an apostle or have a leadership ministry, you are called to humble yourself and serve, not be served.

These verses have been used to support the Trinity, but they do not. Actually, they have caused division among Trinitarians. There are several arguments wrapped into these two verses, and we will deal with them point by point.

First, many Trinitarians assert that the word “form,” which is the Greek word *morphē*, refers to Christ’s inner nature as God. This is so strongly asserted that in Phil. 2:6, the NIV has “being in very nature God.” The evidence does not support that *morphē* refers to an “inner essential nature,” and we will give evidence that it refers to an outer form. Different lexicons have opposing viewpoints about the definition of *morphē* to such a degree that we can think of no other word defined by the lexicons in such contradictory ways. We will give definitions from lexicons that take both positions to show the differences between them.

Vine’s dictionary has under “form”: “properly the nature or essence, not in the abstract, but as actually subsisting in the individual…it does not include in itself anything ‘accidental’ or separable, such as particular modes of manifestation.”[[26]](#footnote-10683) Using lexicons and dictionaries like *Vine’s*, Trinitarians boldly make the case that the “nature” underlying Jesus’ human body was God. Trinitarian scholars like Vine contrast *morphē*, which they assert refers to an “inner, essential nature,” with *schema*, (in Phil. 2:7, and translated “fashion”) which they assert refers to the outward appearance. We admit that there are many Trinitarian scholars who have written lexical entries or articles on the Greek word *morphē* and concluded that Christ must be God. A Trinitarian wanting to prove his point can quote from a number of them. However, we assert that these definitions are biased and erroneous. In addition, we could not find any non-Trinitarian scholars who agreed with the conclusion of the Trinitarian scholars, while *many* Trinitarian sources agree that *morphē* refers to the outward appearance and not an inner nature.

A study of other lexicons (many of them Trinitarian) gives a totally different picture than does *Vine’s.* E. W. Bullinger gives *morphē* a one-word definition, “form.”[[27]](#footnote-22466) The scholarly lexicon by Walter Bauer, translated and revised by Arndt and Gingrich, has under *morphē*, “form, outward appearance, shape.”[[28]](#footnote-10314) Gerard Kittel, *TDNT*, has “form, external appearance.” Kittel also notes that *morphē* and *schema* are often interchangeable.[[29]](#footnote-29454) Robert Thayer, in his well-respected lexicon, has under *morphē*, “the form by which a person or thing strikes the vision; the external appearance.”[[30]](#footnote-28578) Thayer says that the Greeks said that children reflect the appearance (*morphē*) of their parents, something easily noticed in every culture. Thayer also notes that some scholars try to make *morphē* refer to that which is intrinsic and essential, in contrast to that which is outward and accidental, but says, “the distinction is rejected by many.”

The above evidence shows that scholars disagree about the use of the word *morphē* in Philippians. When scholars disagree, and especially when it is believed that the reason for the disagreement is due to bias over a doctrinal issue, it is absolutely essential to do as much original research as possible. The real definition of *morphē* should become apparent as we check the sources available at the time of the New Testament. After all, the word was a common one in the Greek world. We assert that a study of the actual evidence clearly reveals that *morphē* does not refer to Christ’s inner essential being, but rather to an outward appearance.

From secular writings, we learn that the Greeks used *morphē* to describe when the gods changed their appearance. Kittel points out that in pagan mythology, the gods change their forms (*morphē*), and especially notes Aphrodite, Demeter, and Dionysus as three who did. This is clearly a change of appearance, not nature. Josephus, a contemporary of the apostles, used *morphē* to describe the shape of statues.[[31]](#footnote-27334)

Other uses of *morphē* in the Bible support the position that *morphē* refers to outward appearance. The Gospel of Mark has a short reference to the well-known story in Luke 24:13-33 about Jesus appearing to the two men on the road to Emmaus. Mark tells us that Jesus appeared “in a different form (*morphē*)” to these two men so that they did not recognize him (Mark 16:12). Although that section of Mark was likely not original, it shows that the people of the time used the word *morphē* to refer to a person’s outward appearance. It is clear that Jesus did not have a different “essential nature” when he appeared to the two disciples; he simply had a different outward appearance.

More evidence for the word *morphē* referring to the outward appearance can be gleaned from the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Old Testament from about 250 BC. It was written because of the large number of Greek-speaking Jews in Israel and the surrounding countries (a result of Alexander the Great’s conquest of Egypt in 332 BC and his gaining control over the territory of Israel). By around 250 BC, so many Jews spoke Greek that a Greek translation of the Old Testament was made, which today is called the Septuagint. The Septuagint greatly influenced the Jews during the New Testament times. Some of the quotations from the Old Testament that appear in the New Testament are actually from the Septuagint, not the Hebrew text. Furthermore, there were many Greek-speaking Jews in the first-century Church. In fact, the first recorded congregational conflict occurred when Hebrew-speaking Jews showed prejudice against the Greek-speaking Jews (Acts 6:1).

The Jews translating the Septuagint used *morphē* several times, and it always referred to the outward appearance. Job says, “A spirit passed before my face. The hair of my flesh stood up. It stood still but I could not discern its appearance. A form (*morphē*) was before my eyes. *There was* silence, then I heard a voice” (Job 4:15-16). There is no question here that *morphē* refers to the outward appearance. Isaiah has the word *morphē* in reference to man-made idols: “The carpenter measures with a line and makes an outline with a marker; he roughs it out with chisels and marks it with compasses. He shapes it in the form (*morphē*) of man, of man in all his glory, that it may dwell in a shrine” (Isa. 44:13). It would be absurd to assert that *morphē* referred to “the essential nature” in this verse, as if a wooden carving could have the “essential nature” of man. The verse is clear: the idol has the “outward appearance” of a man. According to Daniel 3:19, after Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to bow down to Nebuchadnezzar’s image, he became enraged and “the form (*morphē*) of his appearance” changed. The NASB says, “his facial expression” changed. Nothing in his nature changed, but the people watching could see that his outward appearance changed.

For still more documentation that the Jews used *morphē* to refer to the outward appearance, we turn to what is known as the “*Apocrypha*,” books written between the time of Malachi and Matthew. “Apocrypha” literally means “obscure” or “hidden away,” and these books are rightly not accepted by most Protestants as being part of the true canon, but are accepted by Roman Catholics and printed in Catholic Bibles. Our interest in them is due to the fact that they were written near the time of the writing of the New Testament, were known to the Jews at that time, and contain the word *morphē.* In the *Apocrypha*, *morphē* is used in the same way that the Septuagint translators use it, i.e., as outward appearance. For example, in “The Wisdom of Solomon” is the following: “Their enemies heard their voices, but did not see their forms” (18:1). A study of *morphē* in the *Apocrypha* will show that it always referred to the outer form.

There is still more evidence. *Morphē* is the root word of some other New Testament words and is also used in compound words. These add further support to the idea that *morphē* refers to an appearance or outward manifestation. The Bible speaks of evil men who have a “form” (*morphosis*) of godliness (2 Tim. 3:5). Their inner nature was evil, but they had an outward appearance of being godly. On the Mount of Transfiguration, Christ was “transformed” (*metamorphoomai*) before the apostles (Matt. 17:2; Mark 9:2). They did not see Christ get a new nature; rather, they saw his outward form profoundly change. Similarly, we Christians are to be “transformed” (*metamorphoomai*) by renewing our minds to Scripture. We do not get a new nature as we renew our minds, because we are already “partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4), but there will be a change in us that we, and others, can tangibly experience. Christians who transform from carnal Christians, with all the visible activities of the flesh that lifestyle entails, to being Christ-like Christians, change in such a way that other people can “see” the difference. 2 Corinthians 3:18 says the same thing when it says that Christians will be “changed” (*metamorphoomai*) into the image of Christ. That we will be changed into an “image” shows us that the change is something visible on the outside.

Another reason that *morphē* does not refer to the essential nature of Christ in this context is that if the point of the verse is to say that Jesus is God, then why not just say that? If Jesus is God, say that, don’t say he has the “essential nature of God.” Of course *God* has the “essential nature” of God, so why would anyone make *that* point? This verse does not say, “Jesus, being God,” but rather, “being in the form of God.” Paul is reminding the Philippians that Jesus represented the Father in every possible way.

So what can we conclude about *morphē*? The Philippian church consisted of Jews and converted Greeks. From the Septuagint and their other writings, the Jews were familiar with *morphē* referring to the outward appearance, including the form of men and idols. To the Greeks, it also referred to the outward appearance, including the changing outward appearance of their gods and the form of statues. The only other New Testament use of *morphē* outside Philippians is in Mark, and there it refers to the outward appearance. Also, the words related to *morphē* clearly refer to an outward manifestation or appearance. We assert the actual evidence is clear: the word *morphē* refers to an outward appearance or manifestation. Jesus Christ was in the outward appearance of God, so much so that he said, “He who has seen me has seen the Father.” Christ always did the Father’s will, and perfectly represented his Father in every way.

*Schema*, as Kittel points out, can be synonymous with *morphē*, but it has more of an emphasis on outward trappings rather than outward appearance, and often points to that which is more transitory in nature, like the clothing we wear or an appearance we have for just a short time. As human beings, we always have the outward form (*morphē*) of human beings. Yet there is a sense in which our *schema*, our appearance, is always changing. We start as babies, and grow and develop, then we mature and age. This is so much the case that a person’s outward appearance is one of the most common topics of conversation between people when they meet. We say, “Wow, you’ve lost weight,” or “You have changed your hairstyle,” and point out even minor changes in appearance.

Like the rest of us, Christ was fully human and had the outward form (*morphē*) of a human. However, because he always did the Father’s will and demonstrated godly behavior and obedience, he therefore had the outward “appearance” (*morphē*) of God also. Also, like the rest of us, his appearance (*schema*) regularly changed. Thus, in Philippians 2:6-8, *schema* can be synonymous with *morphē*, or it can place an emphasis on the fact that the appearance Christ had as a human being was transitory in nature. The wording of Philippians 2:6-8 does not present us with a God-man, with whom none of us can identify. Rather, it presents us with a man just like we are, who grew and aged, yet who was so focused on God in every thought and deed that he perfectly represented the Father.

Another point we should make is that it has been suggested that since the phrase *morphē theou* (μορφῇ θεοῦ), traditionally “form of God,” is parallel with the phrase in Phil. 2:7, *morphēdoulou* (μορφὴν δούλου), “form of a servant,” that the translation “form of a god” is better than “form of God.” However, it seems more likely that “form of God” is correct since that phrase is governed by the preposition *en* (“in”) which means the noun *Theos* does not need to have a definite article before it to be “God,” and that is especially true in light of the fact that the second *Theos* in Phil. 2:6 clearly refers to God and not “a god.” We would say “a servant” because the noun is singular, but “God” is singular by nature, whereas saying “a God” or “a god” actually confuses the translation. Also, saying “the form of a god” would miss the point of the verse, because it is not saying that Jesus was “a god” so he did not grasp at equality with God, rather it is saying that he was in outward form God (his actions, his authority, as explained above), yet he did not grasp at equality with God, his Father.

**“did not consider equality with God something to be grasped at.”** After saying that Christ was in the form of God, Philippians 2:6 goes on to say that Christ “considered being equal with God not something to be grasped at.” Translated that way, the phrase is a powerful argument *against* the Trinity. If Jesus were God, then it would make no sense at all to say that he did not “grasp” at equality with God because no one grasps at equality with himself. It only makes sense to compliment someone for not seeking equality when he is not equal. Some Trinitarians say, “Well, he was not grasping for equality with the Father.” That is not what the verse says. It says Christ did not grasp at equality with *God*, which makes the verse nonsense if he were God.

Because *harpagmos* does not have a clear meaning from the Greek sources, people define it according to their theology. So, for example, Hawthorne and Martin give some examples of how theologians have thought about *harpagmos*. Some theologians believe it means something that is “not yet possessed but desirable, a thing to be snatched at, grasped after, as Adam or Satan, each in his own way, grasped after being equal with God.”[[32]](#footnote-10087) We agree with that position, but it presupposes that Jesus was not God. Trinitarian theologians are more apt to think *harpagmos* means something that is already attained and to be held on to. Thus, if Jesus was God, he would naturally want to hold on to that position, but instead, he gave it up and mysteriously became a God-man. Other Trinitarian theologians think it refers to a “windfall,” “piece of good fortune,” or “lucky find.”[[33]](#footnote-18887) In that case, Jesus did not think that being equal with God was something to be exploited or taken advantage of. Other theologians take the meaning from the verb which is found in 1 Thess. 4:17 and means “suddenly caught up,” referring to the “Rapture” of the Church. That makes for a very obscure point in Philippians 2:6, the essence of which is that Jesus was in the form of God but did not think being with God was a “rapture,” something that could be done for him because it was his nature to begin with. No spirit could bring him to that state.

The point of showing the above interpretations is to show that the meaning of the noun *harpagmos* is not clear. Instead, theologians bring their theology to the text and explain *harpagmos* in terms of what makes sense to them in view of what they believe fits with the scope of Scripture.

However, the most frequent way to translate this phrase by Trinitarians is something close to, “did not consider equality with God something to be grasped” (ESV, NASB, NAB, NET). Although this is not a bad translation, the term “grasped” is ambiguous enough that one of the clear aspects of the word in question, *harpagmos* (#725 ἁρπαγμός), might be missed. Although a precise meaning of *harpagmos* is not evident because it is a hapax legomenon, that is, it only occurs here in the New Testament, and it is fairly rare in Greek secular literature, there is an aspect of the word that is clear in every use. It denotes something that one does not currently have. When observing its uses in extra-biblical Greek, a pattern emerges. It refers to “a seizure of property” in Plutarch, and a “prize to be grasped” referring to how Peter viewed his impending death on the cross (quoted in Eusebius), and it is extremely close semantically to the meaning of *harpagma* which is used 18 times in the Septuagint and means “booty” or “spoil.”[[34]](#footnote-14396) Additionally, the verb with essentially the same root, *harpagē* (#724 ἁρπαγή), means “robbery” or “plunder.”[[35]](#footnote-22091) In all of these uses *harpagmos* and its close semantic neighbors refer to something that one does not already own or possess; it refers to something that is taken, stolen, or acquired. Thus, when Trinitarian translators just simply use the phrase, “something to be grasped” one could understand this to mean that Jesus already possessed it, but simply let go of his equality with God when he “emptied himself.” However, this misses the meaning of the word. It refers to something one does not currently possess, thus, it is best to translate the idea as “considered equality with God not something to be grasped at,” which clarifies that Jesus did not possess equality with God.

There is another aspect of this verse that solidifies the Biblical Unitarian understanding even more. Recently, Skip Moen, a Trinitarian, has pointed out that the “not” in Philippians 2:6 does not go with the verb *hēgeomai* (#2233 ἡγέομαι; “think, consider, deem, reckon”), even though almost all English versions have it that way, but rather it goes with the noun *harpagmos*. That means the verse does not read, “did not consider equality with God something to be grasped at” (NIV84), but rather should read, “considered equality with God not something to be grasped at.” Translated that way, it clarifies that it is not as if Jesus simply did not consider equality with God, but that he considered it and thought that it was not something to be grasped at. In that light, as Moen writes, “the implication is that Yeshua saw equality with God as something *unattainable*.” Moen goes on: “It means that this verse does not say that Yeshua gave up equality with God voluntarily because it did not serve the purposes of the Messiah. It says that Yeshua never aspired to be equal with God because equality with God is not possible.”[[36]](#footnote-15690) In that light, we can clearly see the contrast between Satan and Christ (or Adam and Christ) because while Satan and Adam were blinded by pride and desire and wanted to be like God, Christ remained humble and retained the clear knowledge that being equal with God was completely unattainable, and was content to fulfill the purpose that God had for him, and joyfully did the will of God.

Php 2:7

**[THIS VERSE AND COMMENTARY ARE CURRENTLY BEING WORKED ON...UPDATES COMING SOON]**

**“but *instead* he emptied himself by taking the appearance of a servant, becoming like *the rest of* humankind.”** The opening of verse 7 contains a phrase that has caused serious division among Trinitarians. It says, “But made himself of no reputation” (KJV), “but made himself nothing” (NIV), “but emptied himself” (REV, NASB, RSV, NRSV, NAB). The Greek word that is in question is the verb *kenoō* (#2758 κενόω, pronounced kay-'nah-ō), and it literally means, “to empty.” For more than a thousand years, from the church councils in the fourth century until the nineteenth century, the orthodox position of the Church was that Christ was fully God and fully man at the same time in one body. This doctrine is known as the “dual nature of Christ,” and has to be supported with non-biblical words like *communicatio idiomatum*, literally, “the communication of the idiom.” This refers to the way that the “God” nature of Christ is united to the “man” nature of Christ in such a way that the actions and conditions of the man can be God and the actions and conditions of God can be man. Actually, although *communicatio idiomatum* sounds scholarly, it does not explain anything. It is simply the Latin way of saying that the two natures in Christ “communicate” somehow. Dr. Justo Gonzalez, an authority on the history of the Christian Church, notes, “The divine and human natures exist in a single being, although how that can be is the greatest mystery of the faith.”[[37]](#footnote-15019) We differ with Dr. Gonzalez, and assert that biblical truth is not an “incomprehensible mystery.” The truth is simple: Jesus Christ was the last Adam, a man created by God just like God had created Adam, and the reason there are no fancy words in the Bible to explain the dual nature of Christ is that there is no dual nature of Christ. Jesus was, as Peter says, “A man approved of God” (Acts 2:22 KJV). The fact is that God longs for us to know Him and His truth.

The doctrine of the dual nature of Christ has been the standard explanation for the miracles of Christ, such as multiplying food, knowing the thoughts of others, raising the dead, *etc*. This explanation is maintained in spite of the fact that the prophets in the Old Testament were also able to do these things. The doctrine of Christ’s dual nature has caused a serious problem that is stated well by John Wren-Lewis: “Certainly up to the Second World War, the commonest vision of Jesus was not as a man *at all*. He was a God in human form, full of supernatural knowledge and miraculous power, very much like the Olympian gods were supposed to be when they visited the earth in disguise.”[[38]](#footnote-20484)

Our experience in speaking to Christians all over the world confirms what Wren-Lewis said about common Christians not considering Jesus human. In our experience, the average Christian does not feel that Christ “was made like his brothers [i.e., “us”] in every way” (Heb. 2:17), but instead feels that Christ was able to do what he did because he was fundamentally different than we are. We believe that the teaching of the dual nature is non-biblical and robs power from people who might otherwise seek to think and act like Christ. It artificially separates us from the Lord Jesus.

Because the dual-nature theory of Christ was so problematic over the centuries, in Germany in the mid-1800s, a Lutheran theologian and Trinitarian named Gottfried Thomasius began what has now developed into “Kenotic Theology.” This theology arose out of some very real concerns that some Trinitarians had about dual nature theology. First, dual nature theology did not allow Christ’s full humanity to be expressed. Second, it seemed to turn Christ into an unexplainable aberration: fully God and fully man at the same time. Third, if Jesus were both omniscient God and limited man, then he had two centers, and thus was fundamentally not one of us. Kenotic Theology (which has since splintered into a number of variants) provided a “solution” to these problems. According to Kenotic theologians, since Philippians 2:7 says Christ “emptied himself,” what he “emptied” was his God-nature. This meant that sometime before his incarnation, Christ agreed to “self-limitation” and came down to earth as a man only. However, Trinitarian theologians have vehemently disagreed among themselves about Kenotic Theology, and some orthodox theologians have even called its adherents “heretics.”

The central criticisms of Kenotic Theology are: First, it is only a little more than a hundred years old, it is simply not the historical position of the Church. Second, orthodox theologians say that it is not biblical, and that Philippians 2:7 does not mean what kenotic theologians say it means. And third, Kenotic Theology forces God to change—God becomes a man—which causes two problems for orthodox Trinitarians: God cannot change, and God is not a man.

We agree with the Kenotic theologians who say that dual nature theology does not allow Christ’s humanity to be expressed, and that it creates a “being” who is really an aberration and “fundamentally not one of us.”[[39]](#footnote-12914)

However, we also agree with the orthodox Trinitarians who take the biblical stance that God is not a man, and that God cannot change his nature to become fully human. But we assert that it is not the simple meaning of the Bible that has caused these “nature of Christ” problems, it is Trinitarian doctrine that has caused these problems, and there is *no solution* to them as long as one holds a Trinitarian position. We assert that the real solution is to realize that there is only one True God, the Father, and that Jesus Christ is “a man attested to you by God” and that “God has made him both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:22, 36 ESV). Then Christ is fully man and is “one of us,” and God is God and has never changed or been a man.

While Trinitarians have argued among themselves about the meaning of Philippians 2:6-8, an unfortunate thing has occurred—the loss of the actual meaning of the verse. The verse is not speaking either of Christ’s giving up his God-hood at his incarnation or of his God-nature being willing to “hide” so that his man-nature can show itself clearly. Rather, it is saying something else. Scripture says Christ was the “image of God” (2 Cor. 4:4), and Jesus himself testified that if one had seen him, he had seen the Father. Saying that Christ was in the “form” (outward appearance) of God is simply stating that truth in another way. Unlike Adam, who grasped at being like God (Gen. 3:5), Christ, the Last Adam, “emptied himself” of all his reputation and the things due him as the true child of the King. He lived in the same fashion as other men. He humbled himself to the will of God. He lived by “It is written” and the commands of his Father. He did not “toot his own horn,” but instead called himself “the son of man,” which, in the Aramaic language he spoke, meant “a man.” He trusted God and became obedient, even to a horrible and shameful death on a cross.

The Philippian Church was doing well and was supportive of Paul, but they had problems as well. There was “selfish ambition” (Phil. 1:15; 2:3) and “empty conceit” (Phil. 2:3), arguing and lack of consideration for others (Phil. 2:4, 14), and a need for humility, purity, and blamelessness (Phil. 2:3, 15). So, Paul wrote an exhortation to the believers that “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5). He then went on to show how Christ did not grasp at equality with God, but was completely humble, and as a result, God “highly exalted him.” The example of Jesus Christ is a powerful one. We do not need to make sure people notice us or know who we are. We should simply serve in obedience and humility, assured that God will one day reward us for our deeds.

[For more information on there not being a Trinity and on who Jesus Christ is, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.” For more information on the Holy Spirit, see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?” For more discussion on these verses in Philippians, see Frederick Farley, *The Scripture Doctrine of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*, 1873, reprinted by Spirit & Truth Fellowship International, pp. 76-78; Andrews Norton, *A Statement of Reasons for Not Believing the Doctrines of Trinitarians*, pp. 135, 136; *The Racovian Catechism*, written in Polish in 1605; translated into Latin in 1609; into English in 1818; reprinted by Spirit & Truth Fellowship International, pp. 119-121.]

[For more information and the contrast between *schēma* and *morphē*, see commentary on Phil. 2:6, “*morphē.*”]

Php 2:8

**“even death on a cross!”** Jesus Christ never sinned, so he was totally obedient to God. But to emphasize that fact, Philippians 2:8 makes the point that Jesus was obedient all the way to death, but not an easy death, in fact, one of the most horrific and painful deaths humans have invented: death by crucifixion. It takes total commitment to be that obedient.

Php 2:9

**[THIS VERSE AND COMMENTARY ARE CURRENTLY BEING WORKED ON...UPDATES COMING SOON]**

**“and therefore.”** The opening of Philippians 2:9 connects it to Philippians 2:8. It was because Jesus humbled himself and was obedient even to the point of dying on the cross that God highly exalted him and gave him a name that is above every name. Philippians 2:8-9 is one of the scripture texts that is evidence that there is no Trinity. If Jesus were “God in the flesh,” he would not have needed “God” to exalt him because being God, he would have already been exalted. Furthermore, he would not have been exalted because he was humble and obedient, but because he was God. On the other hand, if Jesus was a man, the fully human Son of God, then his being exalted to the highest place because of his humility and obedience makes perfect sense.

**“raised him to the highest place.”** The phrase “raised him to the highest place” is from the Greek word *huperupsoō* (#5251 ὑπερυψόω), which only occurs here in the New Testament, and which means, “exalt highly or supremely, put someone in the most important position of honor and power,[[40]](#footnote-11368) “to give exceptional honor,”[[41]](#footnote-10209) “raise someone to the loftiest height.”[[42]](#footnote-31281)

The English translations capture the meaning of *huperupsoō* in different ways: “put him in the highest place” (BBE); “highly exalted him” (HCSB, KJV); “exalted him to the highest place” (NIV); “elevated him to the place of highest honor” (NLT); “raised him to the loftiest heights”;[[43]](#footnote-19121) “raised him to the highest place”;[[44]](#footnote-21567) “exalted him to the highest place.”[[45]](#footnote-25919)

The justification for using the word “highest” comes from the context, which says the name of Jesus is above every other name and is, therefore, the “highest.” This is one of the verses that is evidence that Jesus Christ is not God, because if he was God, then God did not need to raise him to the highest place; indeed, God could not have raised him to the highest place, because as God, Jesus would have already had the highest place.

**“gave.”** The word give is to “graciously give,” (to give because of grace), see Philippians 1:29. The fact that “God” raised Jesus to the highest place and “gave” him the name shows that Jesus Christ is not “co-equal” with God as the doctrine of the Trinity states. If Jesus was God, then He already had both the highest place and the name above every other name.

[For more on who Jesus Christ is, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.”]

Php 2:10

**“under the earth.”** The Greek word is *katachthonios* (#2709 καταχθόνιος), from *kata* (down, “under”) and *chthōn* (“earth”), and it refers to those who are under the surface of the earth, which explains why some English versions use the word “subterranean.” The phrase “under the earth” is not referring to dead humans, because they are dead, and anything dead—not alive—cannot worship God (Ps. 6:5; 30:9; 88:11; 115:17; Isa. 38:18; Eccl. 9:5, 6, 10). The only living beings that are under the surface of the earth at this time are the demon spirits in Tartarus, who are awaiting the Day of Judgment (1 Pet. 3:18-20; 2 Pet. 2:4).

[For more on the dead being truly dead and not alive in any form, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.”]

**“so that.”** The Greek preposition *hina* can be purpose or result, or both, and here both purpose and result are meant. God highly exalted Jesus so that Jesus would be honored, and He exalted Jesus with the result that Jesus is and will be honored.

Php 2:12

**“So then.”** This is a key to understanding this verse. The preceding verses have been about Jesus. As the Son of God, he was in the form of God, and as such could have demanded to be served, but he emptied himself and took on the form of a servant. He humbled himself and served, and for that reason, God exalted him. Christians, too, are children of God by birth, and as such have an inherent “status.” Yet God wants us to follow the example of Christ and empty ourselves and serve. Rather than exalt ourselves due to our future exalted position, we should be like Christ and let our salvation show in the world, then God will exalt us in time.

**“continue to work out your own salvation.”** The whole sentence is, “So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence, continue to work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who is working in you both to want *to do*, and to do, his good pleasure.” Paul is encouraging the Philippians and reminding them that God is working in His children, those who are born again, both to want to do and to do the will of God, so they should live in accord with the will of God and work out their own salvation.

The meaning of the verse has been discussed at great length by dozens of scholars. To many theologians (especially those with Calvinist leanings), Paul’s telling the Philippians that they had to work out their own salvation gave the people too much power and control over their own life. But to those who believe in free will, it makes perfect sense that people contribute to their own salvation. For one thing, each person has to confess and believe to be saved (Rom. 10:9). Earle Wilson, Alex Deasley and Barry Callen write: “Some Christians are reluctant to use any language that seems to imply that sinners can contribute anything to their salvation other than the sin from which they are saved. The chief device they prefer to use to avoid any such suggestion is to interpret the word *salvation* in a sociological sense as referring to the harmonious relations within the Philippian church rather than in a theological sense. But Paul’s typical use of the term will not support such a view. There is clearly a sense in which the Philippians’ salvation rests in their own hands, calling for their diligent and continuous effort. This is so real and serious that Paul says they must work at it with **fear and trembling**.”[[46]](#footnote-30486) It is worth noting that Peter T. O’Brien has a good refutation to the scholars who try to make Philippians 2:12 and the word “salvation” apply to healing the social situation in Philippi.[[47]](#footnote-21351)

Paul is clear that salvation is a free gift (e.g. Rom. 3:24) and a “gift” is not worked for, which is why he writes in Romans that “the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who *does not work* but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness” (Rom. 4:4-5; ESV). It is clear that, in Paul’s own words, a person does not need to “work” to be counted righteous and justified before God. Nor must a person “continue to work” to keep it or finish the job of salvation, as Paul says in Galatians: “I only want to learn this from you: did you receive the spirit by the works of the law, or by trusting what you heard? Are you so senseless? Having begun in the spirit, are you now trying to be completed in the flesh?” (Gal. 3:2-3). The key in understanding what Paul has said lies in his assertions that “trust” is not “works.” This is expressed in the phrase, “did you receive the spirit by the works of the law, or by trusting what you heard?” In reading the Pauline and general epistles, we learn that “trusting” is not works, but it is necessary for salvation. Our salvation is guarded by trust (1 Pet. 1:5). Like Abraham, we “rely on trust” (Gal. 3:7, 9). Even the Old Testament scriptures give us wisdom that leads us to salvation that comes by trust (2 Tim. 3:15). Without trust in Christ, we would not have been able to be saved in the first place (Rom. 10:9).

The Greek word translated as “work out” is *katergazomai* (#2716 κατεργάζομαι). The prefix *kata* in *katergazomai* makes the word “work” emphatic, which is also emphasized by the fact that *katergazomai* is in the imperative mood (indicating a command). This word has a range of meanings, including “accomplish” and “bring about.” Paul points out that the Philippian believers have always obeyed, and although who or what the believers obeyed is not expressly stated, it most likely refers to God and Christ. Now they must “continue to work out your own salvation,” which involves doing what it takes to continue in their trust, which is what got them born again in the first place.

Many commentators write that working out one’s salvation involves letting our salvation, which is internal and unseen, show outwardly in our lives. It is true that many verses in the Epistles say as much, that the Christian needs to take his internal salvation and live it outwardly in the flesh (cf. Rom. 13:14; Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10). However, as important as living a holy and godly life is, it is our trust that got us saved and trust that guards our salvation. The Christian must be on guard to protect that trust and be wary of anything that erodes it. False teaching is one of the major things that destroys trust in God (cf. 2 Tim. 2:18), and the desires of the flesh are another (2 Pet. 2:17-21).

**“with fear and trembling.”** At first, this statement may seem a little out of place because salvation is supposed to be a joyous gift given to us (Eph. 2:8), not something that can be fearful. But trusting God in life’s situations can be daunting, and God’s presence should spark a sense of awe, reverence, and complete humility in us. In fact, in the Old Testament, an extremely common expression for people who trusted God was that they “feared” God (Gen. 20:11; Exo. 1:21; Lev. 25:17; etc.). This is not a fear that God is evil or a tyrant, but a healthy fear realizing God’s supreme greatness and power, and the fact that he will execute justice upon the earth. Thus, it can be rightly said that we should work out our salvation with fear and trembling.

Php 2:13

**“both to want *to do*, and to do, his good pleasure.”** God, via the gift of holy spirit, works in us not just to do his good pleasure, but even to want to do it. God saves us, but that is not all He wants from us. He created us to do good works (Eph. 2:10). God wants us to take our internal holiness and “out-work” it into our daily lives. God can be seen to be the ultimate giver. First, when we are born again, He gives us his gift of holy spirit, which infuses our entire body and gives us a new, divine, and holy nature. Then He works inside us via that nature to produce in us the desire to do His good pleasure and to do those things that are pleasing to Him. He does not want us to simply work for Him whether we want to or not, He wants us to enjoy doing His work, so He works in us to produce both the desire to do His will, and then goes even further and empowers us to do His work.

That God and Jesus Christ are at work within us to do their will is a concept that is woven through the Church Epistles. Philippians 1:6 says that the one who began a good work in us will complete it, meaning that God will continue to work in us throughout our lives. Galatians 5:17 speaks of the battle between the flesh and the spirit, a battle that would not exist if God were not working through His gift of holy spirit to conform us into the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29). Hebrews 13:21 says that God is working in us that which is pleasing in His sight.

Yet people constantly resist the inner working of the spirit, and persist in hard-heartedness and sin. We need to be sensitive to the workings of God in us, and then we will both want to do, and be empowered to do, His will. As to the grammar of the phrase, Lenski writes: “the last phrase introduced with *huper* is not “*of* his good pleasure,” …but… “*in behalf of*, or, *for* his good pleasure.”[[48]](#footnote-21024) Furthermore, as Lenski points out, even though the Greek text has the definite article before “good pleasure,” and not the preposition “his,” the context makes it clear that “his,” God’s, good pleasure is meant. Lenski is correct when he says, “in hundreds of instances the article has the force of “his.”[[49]](#footnote-19244)

Php 2:14

**“complaining.”** The Greek word translated as “complaining” is *gongusmos* (#1112 γογγυσμός), and it refers to an “utterance made in a low tone of voice (the context indicates whether the utterance is one of discontent or satisfaction), behind-the-scenes talk. Negative aspect: complaint, displeasure, expressed in murmuring. …without complaining” (Phil. 2:14).[[50]](#footnote-13079) “As an expression of dissatisfaction: grumbling, complaining.”[[51]](#footnote-22390) The NLT has, “Do everything without complaining and arguing” (cf. NKJV).

**“arguing.”** The Greek word is *dialogismos* (#1261 διαλογισμός), and it has a wide semantic range. It includes a thought or internal reasoning; a purpose; deliberating or questioning; doubting; disputing, either like arguing or a legal dispute; or arguing. Here in Philippians, it refers more to arguing between the believers.

Php 2:15

**“pure.”** The Greek word is *akeraios* (#185 ἀκέραιος), and it literally means “unmixed,” “pure.” The believer is to be “pure” inside and out, and thus unmixed with evil or evil thoughts or actions. Thus, *akeraios* can mean “innocent” (cf. ESV, NASB), but we see that as more of the result of being pure inside and out. The pure person will be innocent before God and man, but the innocence is due to the fact that he kept himself pure. We are to do all things without grumbling and disputing, but if we do grumble and fight, it is due to problems inside us, and we are not “pure.” The believer must strive to keep himself pure, and complaining and fighting are signs we are not pure on the inside.

**“without blemish.”** See commentary on Ephesians 1:4.

**“Shine.”** The Greek verb *phainō* (#5316 φαίνω), “to shine,” is usually treated like it is in the indicative mood, and thus means, “you are shining.” However, the same form can be an imperative mood, and that seems to be the best meaning here, encouraging the Philippians to “shine,” thus the rendering, “Shine among them.” It is not like the Philippians were not shining, they were, but as all Christians know, encouragement is a good thing. Actually since the verb can mean “shine,” as an encouragement, and also “you are shining,” as a statement of fact and recognition, the verb could have the sense of an amphibologia (double entendre), with Paul both recognizing that they were shining and also encouraging them to shine out even more.

[See Word Study: “Amphibologia.”]

Php 2:16

**“hold fast.”** The Greek verb is *epechō* (#1907 ἐπέχω), and as Hawthorne and Martin point out, it “means either ‘to hold forth” or “to hold fast.”[[52]](#footnote-16825) The commentators and versions are divided as to which meaning is here in Philippians, and that is likely because this verse is using the figure of speech amphibologia, a kind of double entendre where one thing is said that can mean two different things, both of which are true. The two meanings of the verse are apparent in the different English versions. For example, the HCSB, ESV, NAB, NASB, NET, NIV2011, NLT, NRSV, and REV, and commentators such as Bengel and Kennedy think “hold fast” or an equivalent is the correct meaning.[[53]](#footnote-14784) On the other hand, the KJV, NEB, NIV84, Rotherham, Weymouth, Wuest, and YLT, and commentators such as Alford, Vincent,[[54]](#footnote-28196) Scott,[[55]](#footnote-28170) and Hendriksen[[56]](#footnote-18717) think that “hold forth” is best.

The context does offer some help, because we “shine” to others when we firmly hold on to the truth, although we also shine to others when we hold forth the truth. God likely gave the word *epechō* to Paul on purpose, knowing that it had both meanings and also knowing that both meanings were true and vital to the Christian walk, and thus the word is an amphibologia, a double entendre. If we are to shine in the world, we must “hold fast” to the Word of Life. We need to live Christlike lives. If we vacillate back and forth in our lives about God and the things of God, we do not shine to anyone. Also, however, as ambassadors for Christ, we should hold the Word forth to other people so they too have a chance to understand it and believe.

In cases when a Greek word has two meanings that both apply in the verse, the one in the REV text is believed to be the most prominent. The context that seems to give “hold fast” the edge over “hold forth” is that Paul is speaking of having a reason for boasting on the Day of Christ, i.e., Judgment Day, and that he did not labor in vain. Many people do not have the confidence or opportunity to hold forth the Word to others, but everyone has the opportunity to hold fast to the Word of Life and live Christlike lives, being kind, loving, forgiving, etc. Also, there are many people who tell others about Christ but are so ungodly in other parts of their lives that the light they could shine is veiled. For those sorts of reasons, the REV has “hold fast” and not “hold forth.”

[See Word Study: “Amphibologia.”]

Php 2:17

**“Indeed.”** This is an example of when the Greek *alla* is not adversative.[[57]](#footnote-25630) It adds another thing. The KJV is correct in this. Reading Phil. 2:16-17 shows that there is no “but” here; instead, verse 17 is a continuation of the thought of Paul’s working for and with the Philippians.

**“if I am being poured out.”** The scholars disagree about whether this refers to Paul being offered as a martyr, or whether it refers to the current suffering that Paul is experiencing as a prisoner in Rome. The evidence points to the fact that it refers to Paul’s present suffering. For one thing, although this is not conclusive, the verbs are in the present tense (“being poured out” and “I rejoice”). For another thing, it is difficult to see how the Philippians could rejoice if Paul was about to be martyred. Also in Philippians 2:24, Paul expresses great confidence that he will be released and be able to go see the Philippians “soon.” Paul equates suffering for Christ being a drink offering that was poured on the sacrifice the Philippians were making.[[58]](#footnote-23176)

**“*drink offering*.”** Drink offerings were done by both pagans and Jews (cf. Exod. 29:40; Num. 15:5ff; 28:7ff).

**“upon.”** The Greek preposition *epi* can be “upon” (“on”) or “at the same time as,” or have more the sense of “with, in addition to.” The argument about whether to choose “upon” or “in addition to” centers around the question, “Who was Paul’s intended audience?” When it came to sacrifices, the Jews, Greeks, and Romans had drink offerings that were made when their sacrifices were made. However, the Jews did not pour their drink offerings on top of the sacrifices (Num. 28:7). In contrast, the Greeks and Romans poured their drink offerings on top of the sacrifices. So in writing Philippians, was Paul primarily addressing Jews and saying “in addition to,” or was he primarily addressing Romans and saying “upon”? The evidence favors that Paul was primarily addressing Romans.

Philippi was a Roman colony, and when Paul got there on his second missionary journey, there was not even a synagogue in the town. When Paul arrived in Phillipi he had to find Jewish women who worshiped outside the city by a river (Acts 16:13). According to Jewish custom, it took ten men who were the heads of families to start a synagogue, and evidently, there were not ten Jewish men in Philippi, or at least not ten Jewish men interested enough to start a synagogue. In fact, judging by the fact that when Paul got to the river, he began to talk to the women indicates there were no men there worshiping. Once the Roman jailor and his household believed, the Word of God began to spread among the Romans. Then, from the text of Philippians itself, with its allusions to athletics, chariot racing, and citizenship, there is strong evidence that the church there was firmly Roman, and in that social context, it makes sense that Paul would allude to the kind of sacrificial practices that the Romans were used to.

**“sacrifice and service.”** The Greek reads, “sacrifice and service,” and when the two points are made like that, each part is stressed equally. Some scholars believe the phrase is the figure of speech hendiadys, “two for one,” where two words are used, often connected by “and” to describe one thing. That would make the translation be “sacrificial service,” but the verse makes very good sense without the hendiadys.

Php 2:18

**“should rejoice.”** The same verbs for “rejoice” are used in Philippians 2:17 and 2:18, but in verse 17 they are in the indicative mood, while in verse 18 they are in the imperative mood. Paul has great joy for the Philippians, and he is exhorting them to have the same joy for him.

Php 2:19

**“in the Lord Jesus.”** G. Walter Hansen writes: “Paul’s statement that his hope is in the Lord Jesus indicates that he makes his travel plans under the direction of the Lord Jesus, submits his plans to the Lord Jesus for approval, and depends upon the Lord Jesus for the realization of his plans.”[[59]](#footnote-27887)

[For more on this phrase, see Word Study: “In the Lord.”]

**“so that I too will be cheered up.”** There is a lot that is unsaid in this verse. The “too” refers to the Philippians. Paul is going to send Timothy to Philippi so the Philippian believers will be cheered up about Paul, and then Paul expects Timothy to return to him and give him news about the Philippians so he can be cheered up.

**“cheered up.”** The Greek word is the verb *eupsucheō* (#2174 εὐψυχέω), and it is a compound of the prefix “*eu*,” “good,” and *psuchē*, “soul.” It relates to being released from anxiety,[[60]](#footnote-23529) and thus to be encouraged, heartened, cheered up. This is its only usage in the Bible, but it is found in secular Greek literature. Paul was concerned about the Philippian believers but would be cheered up and encouraged if, when Timothy came back to him after being with them, he reported that they were doing well.

**“when I learn how you are doing.”** See commentary on Ephesians 6:22, which has a similar construction.

Php 2:20

**“like-minded.”** The Greek word is *isopsuchos* (#2473 ἰσόψυχος), and it is a compound of *isos* (“equal,” “the same”) and *psuchē* (“soul”). There is no English equivalent, because the idea behind *isopsuchos* (“the same ‘soul’”) uses *psuchē* (“soul”) in its wider sense of thoughts, attitudes, emotions, and passions. It is not just that Paul and Timothy agreed on things or thought about them the same way. They also had the same attitude and passion about the Lord and ministry. The apostle Paul was a unique and driven man, and it is not unusual that he could write to the Philippians that he did not have anyone else like Timothy who was of equal soul with him.

Php 2:21

**“all seeking their own interests.”** It is natural for people to be concerned about themselves, and that shows up here and in many other places in Scripture. A mark of the mature Christian is being able to view life in its fullness, including the next life, and realizing that what we have in this life is not overly important and can be postponed or even ignored so that we can take care of the interests of Jesus Christ. Christ said that same thing in many different ways, one of them being Matthew 6:33, “Instead, seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you.”

**“the interests of Jesus Christ.”** The word “interests” is not in the Greek text, but the plural article before it “the (something)” indicates that something was being implied, and the thing that is being implied is in the first phrase in the verse, “interests,” so “interests” is being properly supplied.

Php 2:22

**“But you know his proven character.”** The people of Philippi did know the tested character of Timothy. Timothy joined Paul on Paul’s second missionary journey (Acts 16:1), which Paul took shortly after the Jerusalem council (Acts 15). So Timothy was with Paul when he met Lydia at the place of prayer just outside the city of Philippi and founded the Christian Church at Philippi. From then on, Timothy was a close companion of Paul, and when Philippians was written, Timothy was apparently in Rome with Paul.

Php 2:23

**“as soon as I see how things will go with me.”** Paul was under house arrest and was waiting for news on when his trial would be and what the results would be. Generally, at that time, the verdict was given at the time of the trial. In contrast to the long delays we experience in courts today—where months can pass between a trial and its verdict or sentencing—in the ancient world, the verdict and sentence were delivered immediately at the conclusion of the trial. We see an example of that at the trial of Jesus Christ. He was tried and immediately sentenced to be crucified. In his own case, Paul apparently expected the trial to be soon, but as with judges everywhere, there could always be unexpected delays.

Php 2:24

**“in the Lord.”** The phrase “in the Lord” is addressed in the Word Study: “In the Lord.”

Php 2:25

**“consider.”** The Greek word is in the aorist tense, but this is the well-known epistolary aorist, which is where the aorist tense (past tense) is used but the present tense is meant. It is viewed from the present at the time of writing, but in the past from the perspective of the recipients. Paul considers it necessary to send Epaphroditus, but he has not yet sent him (cf. Phil. 2:28).

**“Epaphroditus.”** Epaphroditus apparently lived in Philippi, as we can see from his close connection to the church there, and from the fact that he was the one who came to Rome and brought the gift that the Philippians gave to Paul (Phil. 4:18). Paul apparently loved him very much, and called him “my brother,” “fellow worker,” “fellow soldier,” “your messenger” and “your servant.”

**“brother and fellow worker.”** Timothy is also called a brother and fellow worker in 1 Thessalonians 3:2.

**“messenger.”** The Greek word is “apostle,” but it is being used in its general sense of “messenger.”

**“servant to me in my need.”** The Greek is literally a “servant of my need,” but the “need” was not being served, Paul was, so we would say in English, a “servant to me in my need” (cf. NET).

Php 2:28

**“all the more eager to send him.”** The Greek word translated “eager” can also have the sense of “quickly” or “promptly,” and so Peter O’Brien translates the phrase, “I am sending him back as quickly as possible.”[[61]](#footnote-13404) But although the Greek word can have the sense of “quickly,” in this context, “eagerly” seems to be the correct emphasis, and most of the English versions agree. Paul was concerned about the Philippians and concerned about Epaphroditus, and he wanted to express his feelings to the church, so he said he was “eager” to send Epaphroditus back to Philippi. It is very likely that Epaphroditus carried the letter to the Philippians back to Philippi.

**“to send him.”** The verb “send” is an epistolary aorist. Epaphroditus had not been sent yet, but Paul was about to send him, likely with the Epistle to the Philippians (see commentary on Phil. 2:25).

Php 2:29

**“in the Lord.”** See Word Study: “In the Lord.”

Php 2:30

**“risking his life.”** Exactly what Epaphroditus did to risk his life is unknown and lost in history. People have speculated, but there are no facts about it.

**“life.”** See commentary on Romans 11:3.

**“provide what you were not able to.”** The word husterēma (ὑστέρημα, #5303), which is translated in the REV as “what you were not able to,” is translated in many translations as “what is lacking.” Although this is certainly a possible meaning, in this context, it communicates the wrong idea. The phrase is meant to convey how Epaphroditus was able to make up for what the Philippians were unable to do themselves, because they were not physically present to provide for Paul’s needs in prison. It is not that the Philippians were simply lazy in their service to Paul, but that they were truly unable to help him because of distance. See 1 Corinthians 16:17 for a similar usage.

**Philippians Chapter 3**

Php 3:1

**“Furthermore,”** not “finally.”[[62]](#footnote-16609) The problem with “finally” is that *to loipon* (Τὸ λοιπόν) does not mean “finally” in this context, as we are just at the halfway point in the Epistle. “The formula is common with Paul in cases where he attaches, in a somewhat loose way, even in the midst of an epistle, a new subject to that which he has been discussing.”[[63]](#footnote-14198) Since this is the beginning of a new subject, “furthermore” is appropriate, and a more workable translation than something like Wuest, “as for the rest [of which I wish to say to you].”[[64]](#footnote-25294) Another problem with “finally” is that it makes the last chapter of Philippians an afterthought (see many commentators), which, since all Scripture is God-breathed, is simply not the case. In the New Testament, *to loipon* has many different shades of meaning and is translated in several different ways: “Are you *still* sleeping...” (Matt. 26:45); “*Moreover*, it is required in stewards” (1 Cor. 4:2); “*Finally*, brethren, rejoice.” (2 Cor. 13:11).

**“the same things to you.”** It seems that the “same things” that Paul is writing about are the same things that he had told them about previously. Paul had been telling the Philippians to rejoice, and he now says it is not troublesome to write to them again.

What is a “safeguard” for the Philippians is for Paul to write to them now about what he had communicated to them earlier. The Bible does not say whether what Paul had communicated earlier to the Philippians was in person or by a letter. In any case, in the following verses Paul “safeguards” the Philippians by writing to them about people and things to watch out for, and how to have the proper attitude about things of the flesh and the righteousness from God.

**“troublesome.”** The Greek word *oknēros* typically means “lazy” or “idle,” however, it can also mean “troublesome” or “burdensome.” There are two primary ways this word could be interpreted. One is that Paul is reassuring the Philippians that he is not being lazy by writing the same things to them again. Although, the primary reason against this understanding is that it seems unlikely that this would even arise in the Philippians’ minds. We do not have any evidence that they in any way thought of him as a lazy person.

The other way to understand this word and its implications is that Paul is reassuring the Philippians that he is not burdened by having to repeat himself, but sees it as necessary, and a safeguard for them in their faith. Thus, in this context it is best understood as something that is “irksome” or “troublesome.”

Php 3:2

**“Beware...Beware...Beware.”** This is the figure of speech anaphora, which is used for emphasis.

[See Word Study: “Anaphora.”]

**“dogs.”** The Jews traditionally called the Gentiles “dogs,” claiming they made the Jews unclean, but now Paul turns that analogy back on the Jews who insist on circumcision, claiming they are the ones who defile the Church.

**“those who mutilate the flesh.”** Literally “the mutilators.” “Mutilation” is a metonymy for those who practice circumcision.[[65]](#footnote-22581)

[See Word Study: “Metonymy.”]

Php 3:3

**“we.”** The “we” is emphatic in Greek. The verse starts with the first-person plural pronoun, thus, “WE are the true circumcision.”

**“*truly* circumcised.”** Paul’s point was that the people who served God, boasted in Christ, and did not put confidence in the flesh were the real circumcision, not the Jews.

**“the spirit.”** This is the gift of holy spirit born inside each Christian. There is no definite article in the Greek, but one is supplied in English for ease of reading. The “the” is not needed in the Greek text before the word “spirit” because the preposition *en* can make the *pneuma* (spirit) definite without the article. In this case, the Greek text does not have a definite article before “spirit.” The preposition *en* is before the word, which means it can be understood as if the “the” were actually present. In Greek, if a preposition governs a noun, it is the context that determines whether the noun is definite or not, and therefore whether there should be a “the” or not in the English translation. Daniel Wallace writes: “There is no need for the article to be used to make the object of a preposition definite.”[[66]](#footnote-12968) A. T. Robertson writes: “...the article is not the only means of showing that a word is definite. ...The context and history of the phrase in question must decide. ...[As for prepositional phrases], these were also considered definite enough without the article.” Robertson then cites some examples that use *ek.*[[67]](#footnote-10938)

We can worship (pray and praise) “by *the* spirit” by speaking in tongues (1 Cor. 14:14-18).

**“boasting.”** We are the true circumcision, we who boast in Christ Jesus. The Greek word translated as “boast” is *kauchaomai* (#2744 καυχάομαι), and it means “to take pride in something,” and/or to “boast, brag.” Here in Philippians 3:3, it has both meanings. Christians are to take pride in Jesus Christ, in what he has done, is doing, and will do, and also to boast about him. Since “boasting” in Christ is the genuine outworking of taking pride in Jesus, the REV uses “boast” in its translation (cf. CEB, CJB, CSB, Darby, NAB, NJB, NIV2011, NRSV). In the minds of the people Paul was writing to who spoke Greek as a native or second language, the verse would have been understood as “For we are the *true* circumcision, the ones who are serving by the spirit of God and taking pride in and boasting about Christ Jesus and are not putting any confidence in the flesh.”

There are people who say their religion is “personal,” but the NT knows of no such religion. The Christian is saved! He has everlasting life! And all because of the work of Christ. We should boast about Christ all day long. If we do, Christ will boast about us at the Judgment, but if we do not, neither will he (Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26).

Php 3:4

**“such confidence.”** The literal is “I have confidence also in the flesh.” What Paul means is that he has no difference from those who place confidence in the flesh because he has good reasons for having that same type of confidence. He goes on in Philippians 3:5 to describe what that sort of confidence in the flesh looks like. A major point to get in this section is that Paul is not saying that the “true circumcision” are those who boast in Christ because they cannot “make it” by qualifying in the flesh—Paul himself can qualify in an exemplary fashion. Paul is saying that the flesh is not what matters, whether a person can qualify by fleshly standards or not.

The Jews could not say, “Paul only says not to have confidence in the flesh because he has no pedigree in the flesh,” because Paul shows he has a flawless pedigree in the flesh. Gordon Fee summarizes Paul’s argument well when he writes: “We who serve by the Spirit, Paul says, who ‘boast’ in Christ Jesus, have thus abandoned altogether ‘putting confidence in the flesh’ —which by implication is what the Judaizers are bringing Gentiles to by urging circumcision. But, he now concedes, if they want to play that game, then I went in there as well, since I exceed on their turf, ‘having [grounds for] confidence even in the flesh.’”[[68]](#footnote-31639)

Php 3:5

**“eighth day.”** Circumcision was to be done on the eighth day according to the Mosaic Law (Gen. 17:12).

**“of the people of Israel.”** The Judaizers wanted to bring the believing Gentiles into Israel, but Paul is saying he is already of Israel and is saying what the Judaizers want is not necessary. If Paul had not been a Jew, his argument might have been weakened because his accusers might have said, “Paul, you are just saying that so you won’t have to go through the steps to join the Jews.” So Paul is the perfect one to make the argument that the Gentiles are believers simply by their trust in Jesus.

**“of the tribe of Benjamin.”** This is a good example of the excellent historical memory among the peoples of the Bible Lands. Benjamin was a son of Jacob and the great-grandson of Abraham, and Benjamin was born about 1700 years before Christ, and thus more than 1750 years before Paul wrote Philippians, and yet Paul knew he was a descendant of Benjamin. This kind of historical memory is one reason that blood feuds last so long in the East.

That Paul could say he was of the tribe of Benjamin was powerful because it showed he was not making things up when he said he was of the people of Israel, and Benjamin was a proud tribe because when the ten northern tribes of Israel rebelled against the legitimate king, Rehoboam, the tribe of Benjamin stayed faithful to the Davidic covenant. In fact, given the proclivity to name people after someone in their ancestry, it is possible that Saul was named after the first king of Israel, Saul of Benjamin and the “Sauls” that came after him in that ancestral line.

**“Hebrew of Hebrews.”** Since Paul already wrote that he was an Israelite and from the tribe of Benjamin, this almost certainly means more than just that he was a Hebrew born from Hebrew parents. O’Brien says that “Hebrew” “probably refers to Jews who normally spoke Aramaic with one another (while knowing some Greek) and who probably attended synagogues where the service was said in Hebrew. The Hellenists, by contrast, spoke only Greek.”[[69]](#footnote-31296) There are early inscriptions that use the word “Hebrew” to refer to Jews who came from Palestine and spoke Aramaic or Hebrew.

Php 3:6

**“in regard to zeal, persecuting the church.”** Paul showed his zeal for the Law by persecuting the Christians, but we must be careful to note that when Paul was persecuting Christians, they were all still Jews; the Gentiles had not been reached yet (Paul was converted in Acts 9, the Gentiles were converted in Acts 10). So the “church” that Paul was persecuting was to him Jews who were perverting the Law. To Paul, for Jews to say that Jesus Christ was the Messiah was to lead people away from the true God, and the penalty for that kind of activity was death (Deut. 17:1-7). After all, Jesus did not deliver God’s people like the Old Testament said the Messiah would do. Furthermore, the fact that Jesus was crucified, hung on a tree and thus cursed by God was even more solid proof that Jesus could not have been the Messiah (Deut. 21:23; Gal. 3:13). But there must have been thousands of Jews who felt like Paul did, that Jesus was an imposter and dangerous heretic, but how many of them did anything about it? Paul says his zeal for Judaism speaks for itself—so if the Gentiles needed to be circumcised, he would certainly be promoting that heavily. The fact that he was saying they did not need to be circumcised showed that that was what he really believed.

**“I was.”** The phrase “I was” is an aorist participle literally translated as “having become.” The use of this participle indicates that Paul had attained a status of obeying the Law to the point that he could not be found at fault. This was one of the big reasons that Paul could have confidence in the flesh; in the works of the Law, Paul had become blameless, which was a crowning achievement for any Jew. This quality of being blameless gives Paul the upper hand in his argument over Jewish opponents who were trying to advocate for circumcision but who were likely not themselves blameless when it came to obeying the Law.

Php 3:7

**“because of Christ.”** The Greek preposition *dia* (#1223 διά), with the accusative case is causal and thus in this context means “on account of,” “because of.” Speaking of the huge change in the apostle Paul when he personally met Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus, Hawthorne and Martin write, “This radical transvaluation took place within the apostle διὰ τὸν Χριστὸν, ‘because of [the] Christ.’ But what precisely does Paul mean by this prepositional phrase? He does not mean that he made this reassessment ‘for Christ’ (KJV), or ‘for Christ’s sake” (RSV, GNB, NIV), as though somehow Christ would in any way benefit by his decision. Rather, he means that his own outlook on life was radically altered because of the *fact* or the work of Christ. …The impact of Christ upon Paul thus was life-altering.”[[70]](#footnote-22193)

Php 3:8

**“But.”** Philippians 3:8-11 are one sentence in the Greek text but are broken into two for clarity of English reading.

**“But even more than that.”** It is close to impossible to bring the Greek construction in this verse into English because we do not speak the way the Greek language communicates. As Robertson points out, there are five “particles” introducing Paul’s point and giving it a strong emphasis. These five are: *alla, men, oun, ge,* and *kai* (the word “particles” is often used as a grammatical “catchword” for words of connection or emphasis, including prepositions, conjunctions, interjections, adverbs, etc.). Robertson states: “[There are] Five particles before Paul proceeds [with his point] (yea, indeed, therefore, at least, even), showing the force and passion of his conviction.”[[71]](#footnote-11240)

The point of what Paul is saying is that when he considers “all things” to be loss for Christ, he wants to make sure the reader includes in the “all things” everything he has said before in Philippians 3:4-7, including his being of Israel, a Benjamite, circumcised the eighth day, etc. To Paul, it was really true that everything, literally everything in his life, was just dung in comparison to knowing Christ.

**“the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.”** This verse, combined with Phil. 3:10, “*My goal is* to know him,” is certainly one of the great goals that each Christian should aspire to. These verses are not speaking of “knowing about” Christ, but “knowing” him, that is, having a personal and powerful relationship with Jesus that involves personal interaction with him.

The word “know” in Phil. 3:8 is *gnōsis* (#1108 γνῶσις), while in Phil. 3:10 it is *ginōskō* (#1097 γινώσκω). Although the words differ somewhat in meaning, both relate to knowledge, and both have a range of meaning that includes both general knowledge (that is, “knowing about,” or what we might term “head knowledge”) as well as an intimate and personal knowledge that comes from experience and interaction. That “know” was used for intimate and personal knowledge gained from experience explains why for a man “to know” a woman was idiomatic for his having sexual intercourse with her (cf. Gen. 4:1, 17, 25; Judg. 11:39; 19:25; 1 Sam. 1:19; Matt. 1:25; Luke 1:34).

Philippians 3:8 is one of the many places where a more literal translation of the Greek text can give the wrong impression of what the Bible is actually saying because the Greek is idiomatic. It would be a more literal translation of the Greek to have “the knowledge of Christ Jesus” (ASV, KJV), than “knowing Christ Jesus,” as the REV and many other versions have, but in English, to “have a knowledge of” usually applies to “head knowledge,” and that is not what the verse is talking about; something that is much clearer in Greek than in English. That fact explains why so many modern versions translate the Greek as “knowing Christ Jesus (cf. CEB, CJB, ESV, HCSB, NASB, NET, NIV, NJB, NRSV, RSV, etc.). In their translation, Hawthorne and Martin[[72]](#footnote-14055) clarify the Greek by adding the word “personal” and saying “a personal knowledge of Christ Jesus,” and that is a good alternative translation to get the meaning of the verse across to English readers. BDAG gives good evidence that “the knowledge of Jesus Christ” referred to Paul’s personal acquaintance with Jesus. “The knowledge of Jesus Christ” was not “knowing about” Jesus; it was personally knowing him.[[73]](#footnote-25091)

The context of Philippians and the scope of Scripture show us that the use of “know” here in Philippians is not just “know about” but intimate and personal knowledge that comes from experience. Paul does not just want to “know about” Jesus; he wants a personal, interactive relationship with him.

The use of “know” that refers to personal and interactive experience is well-founded in the Bible. A good example is the Pharaoh of Egypt who did not “know” Joseph and who enslaved the Israelites (Exod. 1:8). The Pharaoh certainly “knew about” Joseph. He would have been told about all that Joseph had done and about how he personally profited from the wealth and strength of Egypt that Joseph was in large part responsible for. He likely even visited Joseph’s tomb. But he never had a personal, interactive relationship with Joseph that influenced his behavior, so he is said not to “know” Joseph.

A similar use of “know” is found in Judges 2:10. After Joshua and the elders of his generation died out, the next generation did not “know” their God, Yahweh. Certainly, they “knew about” Him. Even the pagans knew about Yahweh and all the great works He had done in Egypt and Canaan. Also, the Israelites knew about Yahweh insofar as His laws affected their lives: they kept the Sabbath and the Feasts, participated in the sacrifices and cleansing rituals, honored the priests, and to a significant degree governed their lives by the rules set forth in the Torah. But they did not personally and intimately know Yahweh to the end that their knowledge of Him changed their hearts. Thus, the Israelites were like a Christian who goes to church but only knows about Jesus superficially. He likely learned about Jesus from Mom and Dad while growing up, heard about him in church, and recognized that Christmas is about his birth and Easter is about his death, but all that “knowledge” never changed his heart. He never had a life-changing personal experience with Jesus. Thus, Jesus’ admonitions to seek heaven first, or store up treasure in heaven, or be loving and forgiving, or to not be angry, anxious or bitter, or to not lie or gossip, never changed him. He knew about those things, but never really “knew” them.

Paul does not want to “know about” Christ, he wants to “know” him, that is, to have a personal, interactive, intimate, life-changing relationship with him, and that should be the goal of every Christian. We should thank Jesus for what he has done for us, ask him for help, praise him, ask him what he wants us to do, and expect to hear from him. That was certainly what Paul wanted, and we should want that too!

Although it is sometimes taught that we cannot pray to Jesus, this verse and Phil. 3:10 are strong contributing evidence that we can indeed pray to him as well as to God. The only way to really “know” Jesus is to have a personal and powerful relationship with him, and that includes hearing from him and, in turn, asking him for help, which is the essence of prayer.

[For more explanation on us praying to Jesus Christ, see commentary on John 14:14. Also see Appendix 13: “Can We Pray to Jesus?”]

An interesting fact about the Greek construction of the phrase “the knowledge of Jesus Christ” is that the genitive (translated “of”) can grammatically be either an objective or subjective genitive. Although the context certainly favors an objective genitive, which we understand is our knowing Christ, the grammar also can be understood as a subjective genitive. It is likely that the sentence was written the way it was on purpose so that while the most obvious point is that Paul wants to know Christ, it is also true that the verse is saying that there is surpassing worth in being known by Christ. Jesus promised: “Whoever has my commandments, and is keeping them, that is the one who loves me. And whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him, and will reveal myself to him.” As we dedicate our lives to Christ, we can be sure that he “knows” us and will show himself to us in many different ways.

**“dung.”** The word “dung” is translated from the Greek word *skubalon* (#4657 σκύβαλον). A. T. Robertson says it is a “Late word of uncertain etymology, either connected with *skôr* (dung) or from *es kunas ballô*, (to fling to the dogs and so refuse of any kind). It occurs in the papyri. Here only in the N.T.”[[74]](#footnote-12188) Like most words, *skubalon* was used in several ways, including both “dung” and “table scraps” that were thrown to dogs, as well as refuse in general. Thus, it is difficult to make a choice, and the commentators are split. *The Expositor’s Greek Testament* goes with “dung.”[[75]](#footnote-26248) However, J. B. Lightfoot has an interesting explanation: the Jews believed and taught that they sat at God’s banquet and tossed their scraps to the “dogs,” i.e., the Gentiles. Paul could be turning that around by saying that he counts his Jewish accomplishments and pedigree as the scraps to be thrown away in comparison to Christ.[[76]](#footnote-30061) However, Paul is not comparing his accomplishments to *skubalon*.

Paul is comparing all that he has “lost” to *skubalon*, and he is saying that he counts all he has lost as but *skubalon* compared to his “gain” in Christ. In that sense, “dung” makes good sense. However, since “dung” and “table scraps” that were thrown to the dogs were both horrible in Jewish culture, and since the Greek word may refer to either word, either “dung” or “table scraps” could be the meaning.

In the end, “dung” is the better translation. It has the advantage of being totally worthless, in fact, potentially harmful. Paul is comparing what he has lost to *skubalon*. But what has he really lost? Can being a Pharisee or from the tribe of Benjamin save a person? It cannot. Worse, those things that can mean so much in the world can tempt people to hang on to their human merits and not fully give themselves to the merits and righteousness we have from Christ. Our fleshly human righteousness is not just “table scraps,” which we throw away if we get around to it or have a dog around, it is “dung,” and is wretched and even dangerous, and we must get it away from ourselves as soon as possible. Based on that logic, “table scraps” or “rubbish” really does not communicate in our culture the same as the word *skubalon* communicated in the first century. Also, “dung” was likely the better choice anyway, given what Paul was trying to say.

**“in order to gain Christ.”** This phrase must be understood in the context of the profit-loss picture that Paul is drawing here in Philippians 3:7-8. Paul gave up the “gain” he had because of who he had been and what he had done, and considered that gain to be a “loss” because of Christ (Phil. 3:7). Then he turned the tables on his accomplishments and considered them to be a “loss,” and “suffered the loss of all things” in order to “gain Christ.” In other words, Paul gladly gave up his worldly accomplishments and goods in order to “gain Christ,” that is, acquire a knowledge of Christ, a relationship with him, and to have the righteousness that comes from trusting Christ.

Php 3:9

**“in *union with* him.”** On the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), being “born again” of God’s spirit first became available, and Christians became part of the Body of Christ and identified with him (crucified with him, died with him, buried with him, and raised with him). Today, Christians are “in Christ” (“in union with Christ”) by virtue of being part of the Body of Christ, and it is important that we also are “in Christ,” that is, “in union with Christ” because we obey him and lead godly lives. When we read a phrase such as “in Christ” or “in him,” we must pay careful attention to the context to see if it refers to our spiritual union due to being part of the Body of Christ, or whether it refers to our being in union with Christ because of our obedience and godliness, or if both meanings apply in that given context. A lot of the blessings that Christians enjoy today are due to the fact that we are in union with Jesus Christ.

[For more on being in union with Christ, see commentary on Eph. 1:3. For more information on the Christian’s identification with Christ, see commentary on Rom. 6:5.]

Php 3:10

**“*My goal is.*”** This phrase is derived from the articular infinitive “to know,” and the context, which is about making it a goal to know Christ.

**“to share.”** The Greek word is *koinōnia* (#2842 κοινωνία), and it means fellowship, association, community, participation, sharing. When two believers have “fellowship,” *koinōnia* refers to “intimate joint participation,” and in this case, when it comes to “the *koinōni*a of Christ’s sufferings,” the word *koinōni*a refers to participation or sharing. Jesus Christ suffered in the flesh, but it is not as clearly taught that he is still suffering. Scripture teaches that Jesus is still suffering now. Jesus suffers when his people suffer—when anyone suffers. When Paul was persecuting the Church, he was persecuting Christ himself (Acts 9:4), and he wrote to the Corinthians that the sufferings of Christ abundantly overflowed into his life (2 Cor. 1:5). Peter also wrote that we believers share in the suffering of Christ (1 Pet. 4:13). Christ “groans” because of all the suffering on earth (Rom. 8:26). R. C. H. Lenski correctly writes: “This participation in Christ’s sufferings is not a participation in their expiatory quality, as all the passages show. It is due to the world’s hate, due to its hate of our Lord, which is extended to us because of our connection with him.”[[77]](#footnote-28653)

We all participate in the sufferings of Christ because the world hates Christ and hates Christians, so we are all sinned against. However, when we are sinned against, we are challenged to handle that sin in a godly way and not just be angry and bitter about it. Jesus said to rejoice when people sin against us, because if we handle it rightly, we will be rewarded (Matt. 5:12; Luke 6:23).

Also, we should not be confused by the wording, “My goal is...to share in his sufferings,” as if suffering is what we want to do. Paul understands that suffering is a part of the dedicated Christian’s life, and that it is not that we want to suffer, but that we want to share in Christ’s sufferings, and by “sharing” in them, we don’t avoid them or give up the Faith because of them. Sadly, too many Christians hide their faith so they can avoid suffering. That is not what the Christian is called to do.

**“becoming like him in his *obedience unto* death.”** The verb translated as “becoming conformed” is *summorphoō* (#4833 συμμορφόω), and this is the only known use of this verb in Greek literature. In fact, many scholars believe Paul himself coined the word. The root and cognate words are known, however, so “becoming conformed” is accepted as a good translation. More difficult is what the word means in this context, and there has been much scholarly discussion. What it does not mean is that Paul somehow wanted to die like Christ did or in any way had a death that somehow paid for the sins of others.

Peter O’Brien argues, likely correctly so, that Paul’s idea of being conformed to Christ’s death is not just about Paul dying, but the whole process of Paul’s “dying-and-rising-with-Christ teaching. …The expression means that as Paul participates in Christ’s sufferings, strengthened to do so through the power of his resurrection, he is continually being conformed to Christ’s death. … Paul who was united with Christ in his death on the cross is continually being conformed to that death as he shares in Christ’s suffering.”[[78]](#footnote-29218)

Hawthorne and Martin write about the phrase “being conformed to his death” and they say, “As such it says that Paul, already dead to sin by virtue of Christ’s death, nevertheless strives to make the effects of that death an ever-present reality within himself by his own constant choice to consider himself in fact dead to sin and alive to God (cf. Rom. 6:11), to conform his practice in the world to his position in Christ, to renounce his own selfish desires and say yes to Christ, who calls him to take up his cross daily and follow him as a servant of God for the good of humankind…. This interpretation does not totally rule out the thought of physical sufferings or death playing out their transforming role in the Christian’s life. In fact, the mystical union with Christ in his sufferings and death, as outlined above, is but strengthened and deepened by any physical pain that may be experienced because of faith in Christ.”[[79]](#footnote-26779)

Gordon Fee writes, “…here, ‘being conformed to his death’ means for those who ‘know’ Christ to live in such a way that their lives bear that same likeness [obedience unto death]. Thus they are continually in process of ‘being conformed to his death.’”[[80]](#footnote-18688)

The point is that “being conformed to his death” does not mean dying like Christ died; it refers to living like Christ did, sacrificially suffering and living for others and living that way throughout one’s life until death, although dying for the cause of Christ may certainly be included.

Php 3:11

**“that through whatever happens.”** The Greek is *ei pōs* (εἴ πως), a Greek phrase that is usually understood as a conditional clause, such as “if somehow” and contains an inherent doubt. But most grammarians attest that in this case, Paul is not expressing any doubt about his salvation and resurrection. In fact, if he were, Philippians 3:11 would then openly contradict Philippians 1:23 and 3:20-21, and also be in conflict with many other verses such as Romans 6:5; Ephesians 2:6; and Colossians 2:12.

It seems that what is in doubt in Paul’s mind is not the resurrection, but how he would arrive at the resurrection. Peter O’Brien writes: “…the element of uncertainty lies with πως (= ‘somehow, in some way’): he might reach the resurrection through martyrdom (or by some other kind of death), or he might be alive at the coming of Christ (cf. Phil. 1:20-26). ‘The resurrection is certain; the intervening events are uncertain.’[[81]](#footnote-25119)

In the previous verse, Philippians 3:10, Paul spoke of sharing in the suffering of Christ and even possibly becoming conformed to his death, but we also know that Paul kept in his mind the possibility that he would be changed and taken to heaven in the Rapture before he died (note his use of “we” in 1 Cor. 15:51-52 and 1 Thess. 4:15). So Paul knew that if he died, he would be raised with Christ. But would he die, and if so, when and how? He was under house arrest in Rome when he wrote Philippians. Would his trial go well, or would he be executed? If he was released by the Romans, would he live to the Rapture or die of something or be killed? And so the meaning of *ei pōs* does not indicate that Paul doubted his salvation; it shows that he did not know exactly how it would happen.

Many English versions recognize that the *ei pōs* does not indicate doubt here in Philippians 3:11, and translate it different ways that do not express doubt (cf. “so that somehow” CJB, N.T. Wright; “and so somehow” NET, NIV; “with the confidence” GW; “in order that” NASB1995; “so that one way or another” NLT).

**“I will arrive.”** The Greek word *katantēsō* has an ambiguous form: first person subjunctive (“I may arrive”), or first person future (“I will arrive”). Based on the context of the section, it seems that Paul’s view of his participation in the resurrection is not uncertain. He knows he will experience resurrection. Therefore, the future tense seems to be the meaning that Paul is trying to convey.

Php 3:12

**“Not that I have already obtained *these things*, or have already reached the goal.”** Reading Philippians 3:11 and 12 together can be confusing to the English reader because it can make it seem like Paul is talking about reaching the goal of being resurrected from the dead. For example, the ESV reads, “that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. (Phil. 3:11-12 ESV).

The thing Paul says he has not obtained and the goal or perfection that Paul says he has not reached cannot refer to being resurrected from the dead. It is plainly obvious that Paul is alive, so of course he has not reached the resurrection from the dead—that does not need to be stated. The things that Paul has not obtained and the goal, the perfection, that he has not yet reached refer to the things in Philippians 3:10, which is the first half of the sentence that ends in Philippians 3:11 and which reads, “*My goal is* to know him: *to experience* the power of his resurrection and to share in his sufferings, becoming like him in his *obedience unto* death.”

According to Philippians 3:10, Paul’s desire was to know Christ, to experience the power of his resurrection, to share in his sufferings, and be conformed to his death. Paul was willing to suffer the loss of all things “for the surpassing value of knowing Christ” (Phil. 3:8). Yet in Philippians 3:12 Paul admits that he has not reached the goal—reached the perfection—of knowing Christ. In fact, it is doubtful that anyone—Paul or anybody else—can really “know Christ” in the fullest extent of the word. Nevertheless, we keep trying to know and understand Christ on a deeper and deeper level, just as Paul did, and to be more and more like him in our lives.

In the Greek text, Philippians 3:12 is difficult because what Paul has not yet reached is not spelled out. The Greek text, translated quite literally, reads, “Not that already I obtained, or already have been made perfect.” However, the Greek word that sometimes means “to be made perfect” can also mean “to have been fulfilled,” and it is also used of reaching a goal (cf. CJB, NIV, NJB, NRSV). So the questions that have to be answered by reading the context are “obtained what,” and also “been made perfect” in what way, or “reached what goal”?

Some versions like the ASV, are like the Greek text and have “obtained” with no object to the verb, so the idea is not known, and they also just have “made perfect” without saying in what way. Other versions try to be clearer, and the opinions vary. For example, “not that I have already obtained it or already reached the goal” (CJB); “Not that I have already reached the goal or am already fully mature” (HCSB); “Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect” (ESV); “Not that I have already attained this—that is, I have not already been perfected” (NET).

Although the verse can be unclear to the reader, the context fills in what Paul is speaking about. Paul makes it clear what he wants, as has been stated earlier: to know Christ, to experience the power of his resurrection, to share in his sufferings, and be conformed to his death. He does not want to die and then be resurrected. Paul had not yet obtained what he wanted to know, and he had not yet reached his goal of knowing Christ the way he wanted to know him.

Paul is humble and honest in saying that he has not reached his goal of knowing Christ, experiencing the full power of Christ’s resurrection, sharing in Christ’s sufferings, and being conformed to Christ’s death. Nevertheless, Paul says, “I press on toward the goal in order to *win* the prize” (Phil. 3:14). Paul had not reached his goal yet (and won’t in this life), but he is not discouraged; he presses ahead to grow in Christ as we all should. Also, Paul knew that even though he did not have the fullness of the knowledge of Christ that he wanted to have, he did know a lot, and so he wrote, “Brothers *and sisters*, join with others in being imitators of me” (Phil. 3:17). Paul knew that younger believers needed examples to follow, and Paul was mature in the faith and knew people.

Php 3:13

**“letting go.”** The Greek word *epilanthanomai* (#1950 ἐπιλανθάνομαι) means to forget or neglect. In this verse, neglect (thus “overlook,” or “let go of”) is better, because many things in the past cannot just be “forgotten,” but they can be let go of.

**“reaching forward.”** The Greek word is *epekteinomai* (#1901 ἐπεκτείνομαι) “to reach out or stretch out toward some goal…In Phil. 3:13 ἐπεκτείνομαι is used figuratively to suggest intense effort as well as firm purpose.”[[82]](#footnote-21472) It is “to exert oneself to the uttermost, *stretch out, strain.*”[[83]](#footnote-19547) In Philippians 3:13, Paul is using language sometimes used in the Greek games for runners running for the prize. The runner will not win the race if he is distracted by things that are now behind him; he must press on to what is ahead and strive to win the prize. The ancient games were different from the modern athletic competitions in that there was no second or third place in the ancient games. There was one winner, so there was no “second place.” Although every Christian can win a reward for their godliness in life, we should all strive to obey God as if there were no “second place” winner.

Php 3:14

**“to what is above.”** Paul’s wording reflects the common understanding of God and heaven as being “up,” and it thus refers to the “heavenward” calling of God, the calling of people to think and act like He does, and eventually be with Him. Christians live on earth, but we are citizens of heaven (Phil. 3:20) and will be seated in heaven (Eph. 2:6), and now here on earth we are to set our minds on heavenly aspirations, not on earthly and worldly things (Col. 3:1-2). Paul knew he would be raptured to heaven one day and rewarded for what he had done, so he set his mind to win the prize of God’s heavenly calling.

This phrase has been nuanced in some versions to make it easier for the English reader (cf. “God’s heavenly call” GW, NJB; “the heavenly call of God” NRSV).

Php 3:15

**“must think.”** The Greek text reads *phronōmen* (φρονῶμεν), a hortatory subjunctive of *phroneō* (#5426 φρονέω), to think, understand, have an opinion.[[84]](#footnote-10871) If the subjunctive is translated “let us think,” then we must understand it as a command, not just a suggestion. God’s people have an obligation to God to think in certain ways that glorify Him and further His purposes. When we agreed to make Jesus our Lord, we agreed to follow his ways and his directives.

Php 3:18

**“and now tell you again in tears.”** Paul is in tears over the unsaved because he knows they will die in the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:11-15). Paul had great compassion for the unsaved, and it was that love and compassion that drove his ministry and sustained him through things such as beatings and imprisonment (cf. 2 Cor. 11:23-28). The world would be a better place without evil people, but we must love them with the same love that God and Jesus have for them, and not give in to hating them because they are ungodly.

**“that many walk as enemies of the cross of Christ.”** In the context of Paul’s argument, these people who “walk” (i.e., “live their lives”) as enemies of the cross of Christ are mainly the Jews (cf. Phil. 1:28; 3:2), although by extension every unsaved person is included. These are the unsaved people whose end is destruction. Some scholars say that the many who “walk as enemies of the cross of Christ” are the Christians who have fallen away from the Faith. That seems unlikely. For one thing, even if they had fallen away from the Faith, they still would have holy spirit (Christians are sealed with it until the Day of Redemption; Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30), and they still would have been citizens of heaven (Phil. 3:20).

Php 3:19

**“god is their belly.”** In the context of this chapter, including the next phrase in the verse, this is primarily a reference to the Jews, who were stuck on food laws and who bragged about how they kept the laws of Moses regarding food, even though it often separated them from the rest of the Body of Christ. A secondary meaning is that it concerns people whose life is consumed in satisfying their own appetites.

**“whose glory is in their shame.”** In the context of this chapter, this is primarily a reference to the Jews, who focused so much attention on circumcision. They circumcise people and then “glory in their flesh” (Gal. 6:13), that is, they boast about how they have gotten everyone to keep the Law. That makes this verse a strong irony. What the Jews brag about, from God’s perspective, is really their shame, that they work so hard to keep the Law but reject the Christ who fulfilled the Law and could give them everlasting life. As a secondary meaning, the verse can be generalized to apply to everyone who feels so good about something that is, in fact, ungodly. They brag about what really is, to God, their shame.

Php 3:20

**“But.”** The Greek word translated “but” is *gar* (#1063 γάρ). “*Gar*” usually gives the reason for something, and so it is most often translated “for” or “because.” However, the use of the *gar* here in Philippians 3:20 is what some scholars refer to as the “confirmatory gar,” when *gar* confirms, clarifies, and/or explains what is being stated. In this case, the *gar* is explaining a reason for being an imitator of Paul and living like Paul (Phil. 3:17), and it is contrasting that way of life with the way of “people who walk as enemies of the cross of Christ” (Phil. 3:18). A number of English versions use “but” to begin Philippians 3:20 (cf. CJB, ESV, GNV, HCSB, NAB, NET, NIV, NJB, NLT, NRSV, RSV).

**“citizenship is in heaven.”** If Scripture does not teach heaven as our eternal home, but that Christians will inherit the earth and reign here with Christ, then why does Paul write here that our citizenship is in heaven? The Bible says our citizenship is in heaven now because that is where God’s kingdom is centered at this time. The Bible could not say “our citizenship is on earth,” because that would give the totally wrong idea, for it is Satan who now has control of the earth (Luke 4:6; 2 Cor. 4:4; 1 John 5:19). It is not until the future reality of Revelation 11:15-18 that Jesus takes his power and begins to reign, that the kingdoms of the world become his. If Paul had said, “our citizenship will be on earth” we would not know if we were citizens now, all we would know is that we would be citizens at some time in the future. Saying our citizenship is in heaven is the perfect way to say that we are citizens now, in God’s kingdom.

We must also remember the cultural context in which the book of Philippians was written; the cultural background behind this verse brings out its full meaning. The concept of citizenship for the Philippians did not mean that they were to go off to the mother-city, but exactly the opposite, that they were to stay in Philippi and expect the emperor to come to them. As N.T. Wright explains:

Philippi was a Roman colony. Augustus had settled his veterans there after the battles of Philippi (42 BC) and Actium (31 BC). Not all residents of Philippi were Roman citizens, but all knew what citizenship meant. The point of creating colonies was twofold. First, it was aimed at extending Roman influence around the Mediterranean world, creating cells and networks of people loyal to Caesar in the wider culture. Second, it was one way of avoiding the problems of overcrowding in the capital itself. The emperor certainly did not want retired soldiers, with time (and blood) on their hands, hanging around Rome ready to cause trouble. Much better for them to be establishing farms and businesses elsewhere.

So when Paul says, “We are citizens of heaven,” he doesn’t at all mean that when we’re done with this life we’ll be going off to live in heaven. What he means is that the savior, the Lord, Jesus the King—all of those were of course imperial titles—will come *from* heaven *to* earth, to change the present situation and state of his people.[[85]](#footnote-15899)

When we understand the cultural backdrop of the Philippians’ situation, we can see that Paul did not mean we are supposed to live in heaven; rather, he meant the opposite: that the emperor wants us to live on the earth. Furthermore, when we understand the custom of imperial visits to colonies, this becomes even clearer. When the emperor came to visit a colony, the subjects would all go out to meet him and escort him back to the town, to the place they had just come from. This was called an *apantēsis* (#529 ἀπάντησις); Paul used this word to describe the Lord’s coming in 1 Thessalonians 4. He said we will “meet [*apantasis*] the Lord in the air,” that is to say, we will go out from the earth to greet the Lord and then escort him back to the earth, and “so we will always be with the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:17).

So our citizenship is indeed in heaven, but this does not mean we will live there forever. There is one last thing we must realize about having our citizenship in heaven. In Scripture, God speaks of a “heavenly city” called the New Jerusalem, which we are looking forward to and longing for (Gal. 4:25-26; Heb. 11:16; 13:14; Rev. 3:12; 21:1-27). Since the Jerusalem that is above is our mother (Gal. 4:26), we have citizenship in this heavenly city. But as we can see from Revelation, this does not mean we will live in heaven forever, because the city of New Jerusalem will come “down out of heaven” to the earth and God’s dwelling will be with men (Rev. 3:12; 21:1-27). So even the city in heaven will come to the earth, along with the Lord, and eventually the Father himself. In light of this, we can be very thankful the Scriptures say we will be on earth too (Rev. 5:9-10).

**“from which we also wait for the Savior.”** Christians wait for Jesus Christ to come down from heaven. When he does, he will resurrect the dead Christians and change the living Christians, and take all of them to be with him (1 Cor. 15:52; 1 Thess. 4:13-17). Philippians 3:20 is very accurate. Christians are not joined to the Lord when they die. Christians do not “go to heaven” when they die. Christians are joined to the Lord when he comes from heaven and gets them, and that is the event we Christians wait for, just as this verse says.

[For more on dead people being dead and not alive in any form until they are raised from the dead, see Appendix 3: “The Dead Are Dead.”]

Php 3:21

**“who will transform our lowly body.”** Philippians 3:21 is teaching the resurrection here. This is the great hope of the believer, that when Jesus returns, he will resurrect believers who have died, and transform the bodies of living believers into new incorruptible bodies (1 Thess. 4:16-17; 1 Cor. 15:42). The new heavens and earth will be free from sin, sorrow, and death (Rev. 21:4; 1 Cor. 15:52) and all things will be restored to how they were meant to be (Acts 3:21).

**“the same form.”** This word, *summorphon* (#4832 σύμμορφον), which means to be in the “same” or “similar” (σύμ) “form” (μορφον), occurs only one other time in the New Testament, in Romans 8:29, and in a similar context. This verse, along with Romans 8:29 and 1 Corinthians 15:47-48, demonstrates that the bodies that we will have in the resurrection will be in the same form as Jesus’ current, exalted, glorious body. This poses a problem for Trinitarians, though. If Jesus is God, in what sense can we be said to be in the ‘same form’ as his body? Do we become Gods too? If, according to Trinitarians, Jesus is omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent, and it is clear biblically that we will not become any of these things, how could it be said that we are in “the same form” (Phil. 3:21), “conformed to his image” (Rom. 8:29), or that we will “be like the heavenly man Jesus” (1 Cor. 15:48)?

It is not surprising, then, that many Trinitarian translations say that our resurrection bodies will be “like” (ESV, NIV) or “in the likeness” (CSB, NET) of Jesus. Although those are not completely biased translations, as they are within the semantic range of the word, it does not capture the *morphe* (“form”) aspect of *summorphon*. It is not just that we will be like Jesus in some vague way, but that our form, our bodies, will be like his.

**Philippians Chapter 4**

Php 4:1

**“So then.”** To be contextually consistent, Philippians 4:1 should have been the closing verse of Philippians 3, and the verse that is Philippians 4:2 should have been the first verse of Philippians 4, since it starts a new section.

It can be helpful to the modern reader to realize that the Bible was originally written with no spaces, punctuation, verses, or chapters. An entire scroll was just one solid string of letters. So, for example, if the original Bible was in English, then what is now John 11:34-36 would read: ANDHESAIDWHEREHAVEYOU LAIDHIMTHEYSAIDTOHIM LORDCOMEANDSEEJESUSWEPT SOTHEJEWSSAIDSEEHOWHELOVEDHIM. Reading that form of the text is very difficult, so over time, chapter and verse divisions were added to the Bible. Our modern Old Testament chapter divisions came in 1205 from Stephen Langton, a professor in Paris engaged in editing a Latin version of the Bible. These chapter divisions were added to the Hebrew text in 1330. Chapter divisions in the New Testament began to be made much earlier, before the Council of Nicea in AD 325, but today’s chapter divisions were not finished until the Archbishop of Canterbury did so in about AD 1227.

For various reasons, some chapter divisions (and verse divisions also) were put in places that hinder people’s understanding of the Bible rather than help it. The careful Bible student must always check to see if and how the chapter they are reading is connected to the one before it.

[For more on when chapters and verses were added to the Bible, see commentary on Dan. 11:1.]

**“brothers and sisters.”** See Word Study: “Adelphos.”

**“my beloved whom I long for.”** The Greek consists of two substantival adjectives which would literally be translated: “my brothers, beloved ones and longed for ones.” However, the REV text reads, “My beloved whom I long for,” to make his statement clearer, that he is not referring to two different groups of people, but one.

**“in the Lord.”** See Word Study: “In the Lord.”

**“in this way.”** This phrase goes back to Philippians 3:17, where Paul says to be “imitators of me and pay attention to the ones who are walking according to the pattern you have *seen* in us.”

Php 4:2

**“in the Lord.”** See Word Study: “In the Lord.”

Php 4:3

**“loyal.”** The Greek word *gnēsios* (γνήσιος #1103) means “genuine, legitimate, true.” It can also mean “loyal,” and furthermore, someone who is “faithful.”

**“co-laborer.”** The Greek word *suzugos* (συζυγός #4805) literally means “yokefellow.” It refers to someone in the congregation who is pastoral and helpful and can help Euodia and Syntyche mend their differences. However, it is also possible that the Greek word can be translated as “Syzysus,” a man’s name. And if this is the case, the name Syzysus (“Yokefellow”) would be describing what the man often did in helping people in the congregation. Part of the reason for the uncertainty in this case is that there has never been found another person named Syzysus in all of Greek literature. That does not mean there was not such a person in Philippi, but it indicates that perhaps “loyal co-laborer” was a designation given to a leader in the congregation at Philippi.

**“help these women.”** The Greek is simply “help them,” but the context makes it clear that the “them” refers to Euodia and Syntyche, the women in Philippians 4:2.

**“contended together.”** The same Greek word is used in Philippians 1:27.

**“Clement.”** There is no way to connect this Clement with the Church Father known as “Saint Clement of Rome,” who was a leading figure in the church at Rome and the first Apostolic Father of the Church.

Php 4:5

**“reasonableness.”** The Greek word is *epieikēs* (#1933 ἐπιεικής), and the concepts of “moderation, forbearance, gentleness, and sweet reasonableness” all touch a side of the full meaning of this word. The meaning is yielding, not insisting on one’s legal rights to the end that the legal rights become moral wrongs. Too strictly enforcing rules and not understanding that there are often legitimate exceptions turns “right” into “wrong.” For a much more complete understanding of *epieikēs*, see commentary on 1 Timothy 3:3.

Php 4:6

**“but in every situation.”** The Greek text uses the word for “everything,” but the context shows that the “everything” is “every situation,” which is clearer in English. Some modern versions of the Bible say “every situation” or “every circumstance” (e.g., AMP, ISV, NET, NIV).

Php 4:7

**“and *as a result*.”** The “and” (Greek is *kai*) here in Philippians 4:7 has a consecutive force and means, “and as a result.”[[86]](#footnote-24501) If we do what Phil. 4:6 says, then the peace of God will guard our heart.

**“understanding.”** The Greek is the word for “mind,” *nous*, but here it relates to what the mind thinks and understands, hence “understanding” is an appropriate translation. The noun *nous* is connected to the noun “thoughts” *noēmata*, the use of the *nous*, which occurs later in the verse.

**“*since you are*.”** This could also be translated using “because you are” instead of “since you are.” It is “because” of our union with Christ and the wonderful hope that is laid out before us that we can have the “peace of God that surpasses all understanding.” In this life we have trouble upon trouble, but in the next, we will have everlasting joy, and that is why we should have peace that guards our heart.

**“in *union with* Christ Jesus.”** The Greek text says, “in Christ Jesus,” but this is the use of “in” that Greek grammarians refer to as the “static *en*,” (the Greek word *en* is translated as the English “in”), which defines a relationship or sphere of influence. We need to understand the static use of *en* because although we understand how a person can be “in” a room, English does not typically use “in” to describe a relationship, such as “in Christ” or “in the Lord,” but phrases like those are common in the New Testament.

This context in Philippians is referring to being “in Christ,” that is, being in union with Christ, both by virtue of our Christian New Birth and also because of our godly lifestyle and living like Christ. When we get born again, we can look forward to a wonderful everlasting life, and as we live like Christ, are thankful, and pray for God’s help, we can truly have the peace of God that will guard our hearts and thoughts. The Christian can be truly peaceful because we have God’s ever-present help and the hope of a wonderful future, no matter what happens to us in this present evil age. Like the Apostle Paul said, “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy *to be* compared with the glory that is going to be revealed to us” (Rom. 8:18).

The importance of the addition of the phrase “in *union with* Christ Jesus” cannot be overstated, because we will not be guarded by God’s peace apart from our union with Christ. Peter O’Brien writes: “The final phrase, ‘in Christ Jesus’ indicates the sphere in which the divine protection will occur: God’s peace will stand guard over the hearts and minds of those who are in union with Christ Jesus.”[[87]](#footnote-28077) I-Jin Loh and Eugene Nida write, “Paul introduces the important phrase in union with Christ Jesus (literally, “in Christ Jesus”) to close the sentence. It is a solemn reminder to his readers that outside of their closest possible union with Christ there is no protection, no safekeeping by God’s peace.”[[88]](#footnote-14702)

Charles Williams’ translation, *The New Testament in the Language of the People*, considered to be one of the best available English translations of the New Testament,[[89]](#footnote-16063) reads, “Then, through your union with Christ Jesus, the peace of God, that surpasses all human thought, will keep guard over your hearts and thoughts.” *Today’s English Version* of the New Testament reads, “And God's peace, which is far beyond human understanding, will keep your hearts and minds safe in union with Christ Jesus.”

An acceptable but more expansive translation of Philippians 4:7 would be: “and *then*, because of the fact you are united with Christ Jesus, the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will guard your hearts and your thoughts.” Or “and *then* the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will guard your hearts and your thoughts; this is true because you are united with Christ Jesus.”[[90]](#footnote-32673)

[For more on “in” and the relationship it refers to, see commentaries on Eph. 1:3 and John 10:38. For more information on the Greek preposition *eis* sometimes having the same meaning as *en* and referring to a relationship, see commentary on Rom. 6:3.]

Php 4:8

**“Finally.”** The Greek is *to loipon*. The phrase means somewhat different things in different contexts. At the end or conclusion of a subject, it can mean “finally” or “last of all.” About this occurrence in Philippians 4:8, Hawthorne and Martin write that it “signals not the end of the letter or even its near end, but rather the last of the imperatives in a parenetic section that has stated in detail how one is to ‘stand firm in the Lord.’”[[91]](#footnote-30143)

**“brothers and sisters.”** See Word Study: “Adelphos.”

**“honorable.”** “Honorable” here is from the adjective *semnos* (#4586 σεμνός). *Semnos* denotes that which is worthy of respect and honor. It can refer to people or things, ideas, characteristics. The word *semnos* occurs four times in Scripture, once of things (Phil. 4:8), and three times of people (1 Tim. 3:8, 11; Titus 2:2). When used of people we translated it to speak of a “dignified” person, but we referred to impersonal objects as “honorable” things.

**“think about.”** The Greek word is *logizomai* (#3049 λογίζομαι), and it means “give careful thought to the matter.”[[92]](#footnote-21598) Many English versions go with “dwell on,” in other words, give these things the deep consideration they deserve, but also think about these kinds of things instead of the evil and ungodliness that exists in the world. Colossians 3:2 also encourages believers to think about “things that are above,” i.e., godly things.

Php 4:10

**“has blossomed again.**” The REV more literally reflects the Greek text, which uses a horticultural analogy. Like a plant that went dormant for a while, the giving of the Philippian Church stopped, but now, like a flower in the spring, it has blossomed again; it has begun again.

Php 4:11

**“for I have learned.”** In this case, the “for” seems to have both an explanatory and a causal force. Paul is both giving the reason for why he is rejoicing in the Lord, which is not because he is in need, and also saying that he is rejoicing but not “because” he is in need. He is rejoicing because the love of the Philippians had been clearly shown.

Php 4:12

**“In any and every situation.”** The Greek is more literally, “In everything [singular] and all things [plural]. The point is that Paul is sufficient in Christ in all the situations in which he finds himself.

**“learned the secret.”** *Mueō* (#3453 μυέω) is literally to be initiated into a “mystery religion” of the Greco-Roman world.[[93]](#footnote-31783)

**“well fed.”** See NAB; Louw-Nida.

Php 4:13

**“I have strength for all situations in *union with* him who empowers me.”** Because of the way it is usually translated, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me,” this verse gets thrown around by Christians as if it were a war cry; as if it were making the claim that Christians could conquer everything on this earth no matter what the situation or the odds. That use of the verse results in arrogance and false bravado, and it is not at all what the verse is saying. For one thing, even with Christ’s help, Christians cannot do “all things.” In fact, there are millions of things we cannot do—our human bodies are very limited, which is why the Bible tells us that “Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding” (Prov. 4:7 NIV84). What would be the need for wisdom if no matter what we faced, we could just “tough it out” and win through Jesus?

Furthermore, and importantly, verses in the Bible get a lot of their meaning from the context and remote context, or “scope” of Scripture, and that is certainly the case with Philippians 4:13. The context of Philippians 4:13 was Paul’s situation—he was a prisoner in Rome (Phil. 1:13-14) and possibly was going to be executed (Phil. 1:19-21). The Epistle to the Philippians was written during Paul’s first imprisonment in Rome, which is recorded in Acts 28:16-31. During this time, Paul was chained to a guard at least part of the time—an ignominious situation at best—and was not free to travel (cf. Acts 28:20). Before Paul was even arrested, he had plenty of trouble (cf. 1 Cor. 4:11ff; 2 Cor. 4:7-12; 11:22ff; 12:10), and he had more “affliction” after his arrest and imprisonment in Rome (Phil. 4:14). He did not want to be in prison, he wanted to be free (Phil. 1:19, 26; 2:24).

Both the verse before Philippians 4:13 and the verse after it mention Paul’s troubles, so verse 13 is surely not a war cry. Rather, it is a declaration of how Christians are going to get through life in spite of our troubles, which is by being in union with Christ, the one who empowers us. Our final goal is the resurrection and new bodies (Phil. 1:28; 3:11, 21). There are plenty of verses in the New Testament that say or demonstrate that Christians will have troubles in life (e.g., John 16:33; Acts 14:22; 2 Tim. 3:12; Rev. 1:9).

Philippians 4:13 is not an arrogant war cry, it is a victory cry. But it is not a cry of victory and deliverance from earthly troubles—Paul certainly had his share—it is a cry of victory from hopelessness and despair. Sadness, discouragement, and hopelessness are our real enemies. If we understand our situation and security in Christ and look to the future like Paul did, and allow Christ to empower us via things like revelation, the manifestations of holy spirit, and the encouragement of others, then we can say, like Paul did, that even our death would be gain to the Church (Phil. 1:21). We can indeed be strong in every situation due to our union with Christ, because even if our lives are full of troubles, we have peace with Christ, joy in Christ, and hope in the future.

It is helpful to analyze Philippians 4:13 phrase by phrase to properly understand it. The word “strong” is translated from the Greek *ischuō* (#2480 ἰσχύω), which refers to strength, but can also be translated as ability or “can do.” In this context, “strength” refers more to our mental strength and that we are firm in our minds than to what we “can do” in the flesh.

The phrase “for all situations” is from the single Greek word *pas* (#3956 πᾶς), which means “all.” In this verse, *pas* is in the accusative case, which would make it more literally, “for all,” which could be expressed as, “I am strong for all,” or, as we would more commonly express it in English, “I am strong in all.” We add the word “situations” from the context, which is about all the different situations Paul encountered. Loh and Nida add “conditions” instead of “situations,” and translate the verse: “I have the strength to face all conditions…,”[[94]](#footnote-28504) and that also is a good translation from the context. Although most translations add the word “things,” and read “I can do all things…,” we do not believe that “all things” is as clear as “all situations.”

The phrase “in union with” is the translation of the Greek word *en* (#1722 ἐν). We agree with R. C. H. Lenski and Peter O’Brien that the *en* in this verse is used in its “static” sense, indicating a relationship: a union with, or a connection with, and that it is not primarily an “instrumental use of en,” meaning “through” or “by way of,” though the meanings do overlap.[[95]](#footnote-10929) We are “in Christ,” that is, “in union with Christ,” or “connected to” Christ, by virtue of being a member of his Body and identified with him.

The static sense of *en* (“in”) is important in the New Testament but not well understood by most English readers. We understand the normal sense of “in,” and know what it is to be “in” a boat, “in” a house, or even “in the night” (Matt. 4:21; 5:15; John 11:10). But what does it mean to be “in Christ,” “in the Lord,” or “in him?” It means to be in connection with, in relationship with, or in union with. We feel “in union with” is the best English translation in this context because of its other uses in the New Testament.

Another reason we believe that the *en* in this verse has the static sense and not primarily the instrumental sense of “through” is that it seems that if the verse was trying to tell us that we were strong “through” Christ, the Greek would have used the most standard way of expressing that, which would have been by using the preposition *dia*, “through.” *Dia* is used in Philippians with the sense of “through” in Phil. 1:11, 19, 20, 26, and 3:9 (although it is sometimes translated “by,” “comes through,” “from,” etc).

We are weak in our flesh, and in fact, even in our minds. Our flesh constantly fails us, and so does our will, as Paul so eloquently writes in Romans 7:14-24. To us, the verse is not about how strong Christ makes us (“I” am strong through Christ), but rather it is saying that I am strong due to being in union with Christ. The difference is subtle but important. The verse is not so much about “me” being strong as if Christ strengthened me and then let me do the heavy lifting, but rather it is about me being able to be strong in the situations I am in because of the relationship I have with Christ and the heavy lifting he does and the power that he gives, just as he said at the Last Supper, “apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

The phrase “who empowers me” is from the Greek verb *endunamoō* (#1743 ἐνδυναμόω), which is to “empower.” This verb is a participle in the active voice, present tense, which in Greek describes that Jesus is constantly empowering. It is not a one-time act, but something we can rely on constantly. Lenski writes: “Being connected with the Lord who keeps empowering him, Paul always has the strength for everything in his life and work.” Hawthorne and Martin translate the verse: “I have the power to face all such situations in union with the One who continually infuses me with strength.”

Philippians 4:13 is not a call to arrogance and our ability—what “we” can do through Christ—rather, it is a call to humility and the realization that because we are in union with Christ and being empowered by Christ, we can deal with life’s situations no matter how difficult they may be. Paul’s situation was not “good” or “nice,” but because of his attitude, he affected the lives of many. In fact, even the Emperor’s personal army, the Praetorian Guard, had all heard about Paul and his stand for Christ (Phil. 1:13). The fact that Paul was in prison and possibly about to be executed did not deter those guards from respecting Paul and the Christian Faith, after all, everyone has problems, but Paul was set apart from the other criminals they dealt with because he was strengthened by his union with Christ and had a positive outlook on life and the future.

[For more information on the static use of *en*, and being in union with Christ, see commentary on Eph. 1:3.]

Php 4:14

**“by sharing with me.”** The verb is simply “share with,” and the clearly implied object is “me.”

Php 4:16

**“more than once.”** The Greek uses an idiom, “both once and twice,” but that does not mean two times, but refers to an indefinite low number, so “more than once” is a good translation, and “several times” would be fine too. Paul is being very gracious because no doubt he could have said exactly how many times the Philippians helped him, but it shows more grace and largesse to just say “more than once.”

Php 4:18

**“have received everything *you sent.*”** The literal Greek is “I have received all things,” but this was a common expression when a business transaction was carried out and a person had received full payment. Also, it is not like the Philippian church owed Paul anything, but they wanted to support him because of the love they had for him. The Greek verb is *apechō* (#568 ἀπέχω), which can mean to be enough or to be sufficient. But the context here is the gift the Philippians sent to Paul, giving and receiving, and profits being added to their account with God, and in business transactions, *apechō* was used to designate when there had been payment in full. In that context, this line from Paul was a wonderful blessing and a great comfort written to the Philippians. When someone is in need and we give help, we often second-guess ourselves and wonder, “Have I given enough?” (Also, there can be occasions when we wonder if we have given too much, but this would not be one of those). Paul writes and removes that burden from the Philippians. He has received full payment; they did what they could, and it was “full payment” from God’s and Paul’s point of view.

There is a great lesson we can learn from this verse because sometimes we are so caught up in our own stuff that we do not take the time to think about others and comfort them. Paul was in prison in less than desirable circumstances with an uncertain future, and yet he penned these wonderful comforting words to the Philippians.

**“*My needs* have been supplied.”** The literal Greek is “I have been supplied,” but the context seems to imply that it is Paul’s needs that have been met; obviously not every single need, but the needs that the money from the Philippians could meet.

Php 4:19

**“will supply.”** The earliest and strongest support in the Greek manuscripts is for the reading, *plērōsei* (πληρώσει), which is the future tense, indicative mood, of the verb *plēroō* (#4137 πληρόω, pronounced play-'rah-ō), “to fill, or fulfill,” and thus it means “will supply,” as most English versions read. However, a number of manuscripts read *plērōsai*, which is the aorist optative and thus would read, “may meet,” i.e., that God may meet all your need. This would make the verse into a supplication so that Paul was praying that God may meet all the need of the Philippian church. It seems clear that this latter reading is a scribal change to the text, a very understandable change given life’s circumstances. Most Christians ask at one time or another, “If God promises to meet all my needs, why aren’t they being met?” We would like to give a couple answers to that important question.

First, we must understand that all of God’s promises are given in light of the entire Word of God; very few stand alone on their own. Just like God promised to bless Israel, but in the context of them keeping the covenant, so too we, in order to see all of God’s blessings in our life, must live and be living in a godly environment. For example, God cannot contradict Himself, and when He says that we reap what we sow (2 Cor. 9:6; Gal. 6:8), that is as much a promise of God as that He will meet our needs. So if a person sows unwisely by unwisely spending his money, he may need money one day that God will not be able to provide without breaking His law of sowing and reaping. Or if a person sows unwisely into their body by eating unhealthily year after year and not exercising, he may reap sicknesses that God may not be able to reverse. Sure, there is always God’s mercy, but the spiritual war raging around us and God’s righteousness may preclude God from acting when we think He should be able to. We understand this principle in many things, for example, death. Adam and Eve sowed death into the human race, and although God has sometimes extended a person’s life by mercy, such as Hezekiah (Isa. 38:1-5), His righteousness precludes Him from keeping people from dying. That same righteousness, and the spiritual war, keep Him from simply giving people what they feel they need.

Certainly, another thing that influences God’s ability to meet our need is our prayer life. God admonishes us to pray constantly, and prayer opens pathways for God and allows Him to work. Yet many people have weak prayer lives. Like the persistent widow in Luke 18:1-8, sometimes we do not get what we need from God unless we pray diligently about it. So, in summary of the above, there may be things we need that God simply cannot give us due to the circumstances involved.

There is a second thing we must understand about God meeting our needs, one that is certainly secondary to this context in Philippians but real nonetheless: God sees life from an eternal perspective, one that we do not have. Many times, we think we need things that we do not need, and that may apply to our physical lives as well. God sees us in the resurrection as well as today, and there may be things we think we need now that He will supply in the future in the Kingdom.

Given how life for Christians became difficult and deadly for almost 250 years after Nero made Christianity illegal in AD 64 (Constantine made it legal again in AD 312), it is easy to see how scribes would think that “will meet all your need,” should really be, “may meet all your need.” However, that is a dead-end road. We have to trust God and rely on His promises. He will meet our need, even if we do not think so or see it in our lifetime on earth.

Php 4:21

**“holy one in Christ Jesus.”** The holy ones are holy by being in union with Christ. This is not an unnecessary redundancy, but an emphasis on the source of our holiness being our union with Christ. Paul uses the same basic phrase at the opening of the Epistle (cf. Phil. 1:1).

**“brothers and sisters.”** See Word Study: “Adelphos.” Paul did not live in isolation as a Christian, but closely associated himself with other Christians.

Php 4:23

**“with your spirit.”** That is, with you. See commentary on Galatians 6:18.

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12. Hawthorne and Martin, Philippians [WBC], 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-27912)
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20. See Dana and Mantey, A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament, 289, for more information on ei being used in a sense that is not conditional. [↑](#footnote-ref-23007)
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22. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament, 4:443; Charles Williams, The New Testament. [↑](#footnote-ref-21603)
23. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament, 4:443. [↑](#footnote-ref-10704)
24. Lenski, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, 765; Meyer, Philippians and Colossians, and Philemon, 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-18437)
25. Lenski, Philippians, 765. [↑](#footnote-ref-21957)
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27. Bullinger, A Critical Lexicon and Concordance, s.v. “form.” [↑](#footnote-ref-22466)
28. BDAG, s.v. “μορφή.” [↑](#footnote-ref-10314)
29. Gerard Kittel, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, s.v. “μορφή.” [↑](#footnote-ref-29454)
30. Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon, s.v. “μορφή.” [↑](#footnote-ref-28578)
31. BDAG, s.v. “μορφή.” [↑](#footnote-ref-27334)
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