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## **I. Introduction**

### **A. Notable**

- One feature that stuck out to me was the personal nature of the letter. Paul talks of his personal struggles and the possibility of facing death:

(21) For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. (22) But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. (23) For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: (24) Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you. (25) And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith; (26) That your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again. -- Phil 1:21–26

### **B. Paul**

- The traditional view is that Paul wrote this letter from Rome as a prisoner or maybe under house–arrest (Acts 28:30). Traditionally, the mention of the imperial guard in Phil 1:13 is seen as evidence of imprisonment in Rome. Many scholars don't see the imperial guard reference as definitive because there is some evidence it could also refer to provincial government and not just Rome.[1] Thus, Many scholars today favor an earlier writing date while imprisoned in the mid 50s (this would imply that it was written around the same time as 1 and 2 Corinthians and Romans). Ephesus has been proposed as a possible location.[2] Ephesus has the advantage of being much closer geographically to Philippi and hence communication would be much easier.

### **C. Audience**

- Philippi was a city in northeastern Macedonia; it was named after the father of Alexander the Great.[3] Paul's visit to Philippi is recounted in Acts 16:12–40 (including the conversion of Lydia). Paul seems to have a strong relationship with the congregation:

(1) Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: (2) Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. (3) I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, (4) Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, (5) For your

fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now; Philippians 1:1–5

- *Why did Paul write a letter to the Philippians? What problem is he trying to address? Does Philippians 1:27–30 give any hints about the situation?*

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

#### **D. Unity**

- Some scholars have questioned the unity of the letter. Could Philippians be a composite of more than one Pauline letter? There is no manuscript evidence to support this hypothesis, but the letter does seem to abruptly change at 3:1.[4] Additionally, Polycarp (an early second century Bishop) makes reference to the existence of multiple letters to the Philippians.[5]

#### **II. Unity (A different Kind)**

- Read Phillipians 2:1–5:

(1) If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, (2) Fulfill ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. (3) Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. (4) Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. (5) Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:

- *How should we read the series of if clauses and the connecting verses? Should we read the argument as the following: "if x means anything to you, then prove it now?"[6] Is that the point or is it something else?*
- *Are you surprised that Paul immediately follows the if clauses with the statement, "Fulfill ye my joy." Another way to translate the phrase would be, "make my joy complete" (NRSV). Why does Paul refer to himself in this situation and why would it be important that his joy be made complete?*
- *What do the desired responses have in common? Do these desired responses give us insight into what it means to be a Christian?*

- *Is there a pattern to the desired responses and attitudes in verses 3–4?*
- *Do you think these verses give us insight into some of the problems in the Philippian congregation? Or do you think that this theme is very important because of his recent suffering?*

### III. A Hymn

- Read Philippians 2:5–11:

(5) Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:  
 (6) Who, being in the form of God,  
     thought it not robbery  
     to be equal with God:  
 (7) But made himself of no reputation,  
     and took upon him the form of a servant,  
     and was made in the likeness of men:  
 (8) And being found in fashion as a man,  
     he humbled himself,  
 and became obedient unto death,  
     even the death of the cross.  
 9 Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him,  
     and given him a name  
     which is above every name:  
 (10) That at the name of Jesus  
     every knee should bow,  
 of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth;  
 (11) And that every tongue should confess  
 that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
 to the glory of God the Father.

- Many scholarly commentators accept these verse as a hymn and consequently in modern translations they are displayed as poetic verses. At the very least there is a rhythmic quality to the verses. Additionally, the use of parallelism is also prominent. One possibility is that Paul is quoting from one of the earliest Christian hymns.[7]
- *What are the main parts of the hymn? do you see main sections or themes?*
- At the very least it seems like the hymn splits into two parts: Christ's abasement (vv. 6–8) and his triumph (vv. 9–11).

#### A. Form of God

- What is verse 6 saying? Is it saying that Christ dared to claim he was like God or something else?

- An alternate translation would be the following:

"who, though he was in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God  
as something to be exploited." (NRSV)

and

Whom though his condition was divine,  
did not consider being like God  
something to exploit for selfish gain.[8]

*Does this change how you understand the verse? Does this translation make more sense given the context?*

- *What does it mean that Christ was in the form of God? What does the hymn emphasize about Christ's relationship with God?*
- *Some scholars suggest that verse 6 is implicitly contrasting Christ with Adam? What do you think of that possibility?*

### ***B. He Emptied Himself***

- An alternate translation of verse 7 is the following:

But rather he emptied himself  
adopting the condition of a slave,  
taking on the likeness of human beings.[9]

- *What do you think of the phrase, "he emptied himself?" Do you think it is equivalent to the the KJV phrase, "made himself of no reputation?" Does the parallel line, "adopting the condition of a slave," help us understand what is meant?*
- *The KJV translated the underlying Greek as "servant" but many translations use "slave?" Which word do you think makes the most sense in this context? Does verse 8 help us understand the intended contrast better?*

He lowered himself further still  
becoming obedient unto death  
[even to death upon the cross].[10]

- *Is it important that crucifixion was a form of execution usually reserved for slaves?*

### ***C. Wherefore God***

- *Are you surprised that the resurrection is not mentioned in verses 9–11?*

- *What is the connection between Christ's humiliation and his exaltation?*
- *Do these verses give us insight into how Paul and the first Christians understood Christ's role in the plan of God?*
- *What is the connection between Paul's advice and exhortation at the beginning of the chapter and the hymn? How are they connected? How does the hymn reinforce Paul's point?*

### **III. A Hymn**

- Read Phillipians 2:12–18:

(12) Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. (13) For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. (14) Do all things without murmurings and disputings: (15) That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; (16) Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain. (17) Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all. (18) For the same cause also do ye joy, and rejoice with me.

- *How are these verses connected to the hymn?*
- *Are you surprised to see a phrase like, "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" given Paul's emphasis on grace in other letters? Should we understand this phrase in a collective sense?*
- *Is it important to read verses 12 and 13 together? Do they balance each other?*

### **Endnotes**

1. Barton, John, and John Muddiman (Editors), 2001, *Oxford Bible Commentary*, Oxford University Press, 1179.
2. Barton, John, and John Muddiman (Editors), 2001, *Oxford Bible Commentary*, Oxford University Press, 1179.
3. Mays, James L. (editor), 2000, *The HarperCollins Bible Commentary*, HarperCollins, 1121.
4. Barton, John, and John Muddiman (Editors), 2001, *Oxford Bible Commentary*, Oxford University Press, 1180.

5. Mays, James L. (editor), 2000, *The HarperCollins Bible Commentary*, HarperCollins, 1122.
6. Barton, John, and John Muddiman (Editors), 2001, *Oxford Bible Commentary*, Oxford University Press, 1183.
7. Brown, Raymond E. (editor), Joseph A. Fitzmyer (editor), and Roland E. Murphy (editor), 1990, *The New Jerome Bible Commentary*, Prentice Hall, 794.
8. Brown, Raymond E. (editor), Joseph A. Fitzmyer (editor), and Roland E. Murphy (editor), 1990, *The New Jerome Bible Commentary*, Prentice Hall, 794.
9. Brown, Raymond E. (editor), Joseph A. Fitzmyer (editor), and Roland E. Murphy (editor), 1990, *The New Jerome Bible Commentary*, Prentice Hall, 794.
10. Brown, Raymond E. (editor), Joseph A. Fitzmyer (editor), and Roland E. Murphy (editor), 1990, *The New Jerome Bible Commentary*, Prentice Hall, 795.