

Philippians

1:1. “along with overseers and deacons.” Cp. Meyer’s translation, “along with overseers and deacons.” 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 “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.”

1:6. “will bring it to completion.” 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” (MacDonald, *Greek Enchiridion*, p. 32; cp. Burton, *Moods and Tenses*, §60).

1:10. “determine.” The Greek is *dokimazo* (#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; hold fast to that which 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 (Word Pictures) says, “... the first step is to distinguish between good and evil and that is not always easy in our complex civilization.” (See also note on Romans 2:18).

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

1:12. 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 (v. 14).

1:17. “selfish ambition.” The Greek is *eritheia* (#2052 ἐριθεία). See note on “selfish ambition,” Romans 2:8. 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.

1:19. 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.

1:21. “to die is gain.” Not for Paul, because death is an enemy (1 Cor. 15:26), but for the Church. His being put into prison had resulted in “gain,” (see v. 12), and he foresaw that even if he died, the Word would move.

1:22. If Paul stays alive, he will have fruitful labor.

1:23. “intense desire for the return” Paul was pressed between living and dying. Both would result in “gain” to the Church. It is strange to think of Paul’s imprisonment as gain, but that is exactly what had happened with his imprisonment, and would no doubt happen if he were executed (cp. v. 12 and 21). Now Paul was “hard pressed” between living and dying. However, he had an “intense desire (the Greek word *epithumia* is an intense desire, a lust, or a craving) “for the return.” The Greek word *analuo* refers to either a departure, or a return. Louw and Nida: “to move back to a point or area from which one has previously departed, but with more explicit emphasis upon the return.” Its only other occurrence in the New Testament refers to the Return of Christ, in Luke 12:36: “Be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet.”

After expressing that he is pressed between living and dying, Paul inserts a parenthetical wish that he intensely desires—for the Lord to return, which is “better by far” a phrase that is very emphatic in the Greek. If dying was “better by far” than living, as orthodox Christians teach, then why is Paul “hard pressed” between the two? He would not have been. He was hard pressed between living and dying, which both meant gain for the Church, but the return of Christ was better by far, and Paul intensely desired it. After expressing that wish, he returns to his thought and states that remaining alive will help the Philippians more. It would be incongruous with Paul’s life to say he had an intense desire to die and be with Christ. The Jews constantly sought to kill him, and he did everything he could to stay alive.

1:26. “by me.” This is the instrumental dative, or dative of means. It is *by means of* Paul’s deliverance from prison, coming to them again, that they may boast in Christ. For it was through their prayers for him that he was delivered (1:7; 19).

2:1. This verse can be taken in two totally different ways. The first, and most common, is similar to the NIV: “If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion...” The second, and the one that we prefer, with Robertson (Word Pictures) and Williams, is that *paraklesis* and *paramuthion* be understood in a persuasive sense. “encouragement” and “persuasive address” not “comfort.” (Cp. Thayer). Thus, Williams translation is, “So, if there is any appeal in our union with Christ, if there is any persuasive power in love...,” and we feel this has the proper sense here, as Paul is trying to persuade the Church.”

2:2. “fully fill my cup of joy.” The verb “fully fill” was used commonly of vessels, and so that is clearly implied in the Greek.

“thinking.” The Greek is *phroneo* (#5426 φρονέω), and means to have an opinion with regard to something, think, form/hold an opinion, judge; to give careful consideration to something, set one’s mind on, be intent on; to develop an attitude based on careful thought, be minded/disposed (BDAG). Because *phroneo* is an active verb in the present tense, it could be understood as “keep on thinking.”

“thinking the same thing.” Note that the verse does not tell us what we are to think, only that we should be likeminded 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.

“united in soul.” The Greek is *sumpsuchos* (#4861 σύμψυχος), from *sun*, with, and *pseuche*, soul; “with [one] soul.” Harmonious. “Souls that beat together, in tune with Christ and with each other” (Robertson). This word is united with the last phrase of the verse as one concept, not as many have, two distinct concepts (Lenski; Meyer).

“thinking this one thing.” Although many versions have “mind” the Greek is *phroneo*, 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 think the same thing but did not tell us what that thing is, so here, we have an amplification, and we are to think “this one thing,” but again, without direction in this verse as to what that thing is. Lenski has the idea here: “‘This one thing,’ however, still holds us in suspense, we wonder what it really is.” 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. 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 parts) in the next two verses.

2:3. “selfishness.” The Greek is *eritheia* (#2052 ἐριθεία). See note on “selfish ambition,” Romans 2:8.

“empty conceit.” The Greek is a compound word, *kenodoxia* (#2754 κενοδοξία), from *kenos* (empty), and *doxa* (glory, magnificence, spender). It is self glory, or conceit, that is not based in reality. We translated it “empty conceit” (cp. NASB) and not just “conceit” because often conceited people are good at what they are conceited about, and thus might be thought of as having a good reason for their conceit. This verse is specifically referring to “empty” conceit, conceit based on nothing.

“not out of selfishness or out of conceit.” This phrase is inserted because of the fact that some did preach Christ out of selfish ambition (1:17) and there was division that existed in Philippi (4:2, etc.).

2:4. This is the essence of “the one thing” (verse 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.

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 by virtue of being “saved,” and as such have an inherent “status.” Yet God would have us 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.

“out-work.” The Greek word is *katergazomai* (# 2716 κατεργάζομαι), has several definitions. The prefix *kata* in *katergazomai* makes the word “work” emphatic, which is also emphasized by the fact that *katergazomai* is in the imperative mood (imperative present middle). Thus the verse is saying, “work! your salvation...”; perhaps, “be outworking your salvation!” would be a good alternative translation). The Christian is

saved, so there is no need to “accomplish” salvation. The need is to let the salvation, which is internal and unseen, show outwardly in our lives. There are many verses in the Epistles that say basically the same thing, that the Christian needs to take his internal salvation and live it outwardly in the flesh (cp. Rom. 13:14; Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10).

Notice that the reason we can effectively “out-work” our salvation is that God works in us. This is clearly stated: (“...out-work your own salvation...for it is God who works (*energo*; present participle active; “is working”) in you....” So we OUT-work as God works IN us. This is more evidence that the verse is not saying that we are to “accomplish” salvation. We are saved, which is why God can work in us. It is in large part due to the presence of the gift of holy spirit that we received when we were saved (Eph. 1:13, 14) that God is able to work in us.

Many commentators believe that good works are in some way an essential part of salvation, either earning it (Roman Catholic) or keeping our salvation by doing good works (then, if you get drunk, commit adultery or murder, etc., you lose your salvation). For that reason, many commentators use this verse to say that we “work out,” i.e., “accomplish” or “produce,” our own salvation. Although *katergazomai* can mean “produce,” that is not its meaning here. In this verse it means to work outwardly. **2:13.** “both to want *to do*, and to work for, his good pleasure.” God, via the gift of holy spirit, works in us not just to do (“work”) 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 work 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. Actually, 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).

Yet people constantly resist the inner working of the spirit, and persist in hardheartedness 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.” 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.”

2:15. “without blemish.” See note on Ephesians 1:4.

“shine.” A passive verb with an active sense (BDAG).

2:17. “yes.” An example of when the Greek *alla* is not adversative, but climactic. It adds another thing. The KJV is correct in this. Reading verses 16 and 17 shows that there is no “but” here, verse 17 is a continuation of the thought.

“if I pour myself out.” Lenski makes a convincing case that the verb is in the middle voice, not the passive voice, which would be, “if I am poured out.”

“in addition to the sacrifice and service of your faith.” The preposition *epi* here does not mean “upon,” as if Paul’s sacrifice of himself, his offering, could be somehow poured “upon” the sacrifice of the Philippians. Rather, Paul is saying that if he pours himself out, even as the Philippians have sacrificed themselves, he rejoices, and rejoices along with them. The joy is mutual when the sacrifice is mutual.

3:1. “Furthermore,” not “finally” (Cp. Lenski; Robertson, *Word Pictures*). The problem with “finally” is that *to loipon* (Τὸ λοιπόν) does not mean “finally” in this context, as we are just at the half way 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” (ICC--Philippians, Philemon, by Vincent, p. 90.). 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]” (Wuest-Expanded Translation). 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 it translated in several different ways: “Sleep on **now**” (Matt.26:45); “**Moreover**, it is required in stewards” (1 Cor. 4:2); “**Finally**, brethren, farewell” (2 Cor. 13:11).

“Tiresome” (as per YLT). When used of people, *okneros* is “lazy, slothful (Matt. 25:26).” When used of work it makes one slothful or tired, it is “tiresome.” Paul is a true servant, and the work of the Lord is not “tiresome” to him, contrasting the priests in Malachi 1:13.

3:2. For punctuation on “Beware...” see Lenski.

“Mutilation” see Thayer, BDAG, Friberg. “Mutilation” is metonymy for those who practice mutilation.

3:3. “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 italics in English for ease of reading. We can worship (pray and praise) “by spirit” by speaking in tongues (1 Cor. 14:14-18).

“boasting.” We are the true circumcision, we who boast in Christ Jesus. 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).

3:8. The Greek *alla* is climacteric (Lenski, A. T. Robertson; *Word Pictures*) and means, “yes; indeed, etc.). However, due to the strong implication of “yes” in English, it is best to avoid it if it is not clearly in the text. Actually, it is close to impossible to bring the Greek into English as we just do not speak the way the Greek communicates. There are “five particles” (*alla men oun ge kai*) “before Paul proceeds (yea, indeed, therefore, at least, even), showing the force and passion of his conviction” (Robertson, *Word Pictures*).

“Dung.” From *skubalon* (#4657 σκῦβαλον). “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.” (Robertson; *Word Pictures*). 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.” 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 (Lightfoot, *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians*). 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” would probably fit. However, “dung” is much more decisive. We felt that “table scraps” or “rubbish” really does not communicate in our culture the same as the word *skubala* communicated in the first century, and so “dung” is the translation we chose.

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.

“straining forward.” The Greek word is *epekteinomai* (#1901 ἐπεκτείνομαι) “to reach out or stretch out toward some goal... In Philip 3.13 ἐπεκτείνομαι is used figuratively to suggest intense effort as well as firm purpose.” (Louw Nida). It is “to exert oneself to the uttermost, *stretch out, strain*” (BDAG). It is to stretch forward, but with such intensity and purpose that “straining forward” (RSV, NRSV) is a better translation.

3:20. “citizenship 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 B.C.) and Actium (31 B.C.). 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 on 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. (*Surprised by Hope*, p.100).

When we understand the cultural backdrop of 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 *apantasis*; 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).

4:5. “reasonableness.” See note on 1 Tim. 3:3.

4:12. “Learned the secret.” *Mueo* (#3453 μύεω) is literally to be initiated into a “mystery religion” of the Greco-Roman world (Thayer, *Lexicon*).

