

**BIBLE STUDY GUIDES: SEEKING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S MESSAGE**

**A SERIES OF NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES**

**By Bob Young**

**PHILIPPIANS**

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## PREFACE TO THE SERIES

A number of factors have converged in my life as influences on my method of Bible study and Bible teaching. My undergraduate training in Bible and biblical languages served as the basic foundation for 25 years of full-time preaching ministry. During those years in ministry, I took some graduate coursework in an effort to stay fresh.

When I decided to pursue graduate education, I already loved teaching from an exegetical viewpoint while paying special attention to the historical-cultural context and the grammatical-syntactical features of the text. I had seen the healthy way in which people respond to thoughtful efforts to explain and apply the message of the text. I had developed the habit of using the same kind of Bible study in my sermon preparation. For those reasons, I focused my graduate training in ministry dynamics and the integration of academic studies with practical applications. Because I did graduate work while continuing my full-time work in ministry, I was blessed by have a laboratory to apply and test what I was learning.

My years of teaching and administration in Christian higher education coupled with involvement in the world of missions have made me even more aware of the need to view the text, insofar as possible, outside one's own social, cultural, experiential, and religious backgrounds. My interpretative efforts today are influenced by my training and experience as I try to understand the biblical context, the historical-cultural context, and the literary context—vocabulary, genres, grammar, and syntax. I try to understand the original message of the author and the purpose of the text as first steps toward understanding the message of the text in today's world. I want to know what the text said and what it meant, so that I can know what it says and what it means today.

As I have prepared these study guides, I have constantly asked myself, "What would I want in a study guide to the biblical text?" I have been guided by this question, at times excluding technical details and academic questions, other times including such items because of their value in understanding and communicating the text. Above all, I have tried to provide a practical guide to put in clear relief what the text says as a first step toward valid interpretation of what the text means and how it should be applied in the world today.

I wrote these guides with multiple readers in mind. Preachers and Bible class teachers will find the detailed study of the text helpful, and Christians in the pews with an interest in the message of the Bible will also be helped by the textual jewels and the textual summaries that are included. May God bless you in your desire and your efforts to understand and apply the Bible!

## INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

### **The Purpose of These Guides**

To describe the publications included in this series as “Bible study guides” says something about their intended purpose. As guides, these books do not attempt to answer every biblical question that may arise in your study of the biblical text. They are not commentaries in the strictest sense of the word. The focus of these guides is distinct.

I have as a primary goal to encourage you to do your own study of the biblical text. This series of study guides is designed to assist the Bible student with preliminary and basic exegetical work, and to suggest some study methods that will enrich your study and help you identify the message of the text—whether in a specific verse or paragraph, a larger context, or an entire book of the New Testament. A primary goal of these guides is to help you maintain a focus on the purpose and message of the original author. The message of the original writer should inform our understanding of the text and its application today. One should not think that the message and meaning of the text today would be significantly different than the message and meaning of the original document.

The title also says that these guides are “helps.” I have tried to provide resources to guide and enrich your study, keeping the purpose of the original author in view. This desire has informed the content of these study guides. Many study guides exist and there is no need to write more books that basically have the same content. Generally, the information included in these guides is designed to help identify the purpose of the original document. In some passages, the information included in these guides is not readily available in other resources.

### **What Kinds of “Helps” Are Included in These Guides?**

These study guides reflect how I organize and understand the biblical text, taking into account various exegetical factors such as syntax, grammar, and vocabulary. Along the way, I share some observations that may help clarify passages that are difficult to understand. I have not tried to write about every passage where potential problems or differences in understanding exist. I have not noted every textual variant in the original text. At times my notes may seem to be unnecessary comments on passages where the meaning is clear; that probably means I am trying to share insights to deepen understanding and appreciation of the text. In other passages, some may ask why I have not included more comments or explanation. Such is the individualized nature of Bible study. While I try to explain some difficulties, the overall goal of my comments is to help maintain a focus on the original author’s message and purpose for writing—the “what it said and what it meant” of the original author in the original context.

For each chapter, there is a “Content” section that usually includes a brief outline, followed by notes (“Study Helps”) about the biblical text. The content sections of the guides (including how the text is divided and how subsections are described) are drawn from my own reading and analysis of the text, and from a comparison of several translations. In only a very few cases does the outline provided in this guide vary from the majority opinion, and those cases are noted and the reasons given. In some chapters, there are a few introductory comments to help orient the student to the overall content of the chapter. The textual notes at times provide a periphrastic summary, but as noted above they are not intended to answer

every question. In several cases, I have tried to address topics that are not treated in detail in other resources. Texts that are easily understood and matters that are usually included in other resources are, for the most part, not treated in detail here.

### **A Useful Tool for Understanding the Message of the Bible**

While the primary purpose of these guides is to assist in personal study of the biblical text, these guides will also serve the casual reader who wants to understand the basic message of Scripture. The guides are written in such a way that the reader can understand the general message of the text, along with some helpful details, simply by reading the guide. One might describe these guides as a kind of “CliffsNotes” to the Bible, but they are intended as helps and should not be thought of as taking the place of Bible reading and Bible study.

### **How to Use This Bible Study Guide in Personal Bible Study**

This guide is not intended to take the place of your own Bible reading and study but is intended to provide insights and suggestions as you read the Bible, and to be a resource that will help you check your understanding. **No specific translation of the biblical text is included in this guide.** Two goals influenced the decision not to include a translation of the biblical text. First, it is hoped that the student will be encouraged to use his or her own study Bible. Second, these notes are designed to be helpful in biblical study, regardless of the version the reader may prefer for personal Bible study.

My primary purpose is to make it easier for you the reader or student to analyze and understand the text. Ultimately, you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible and you cannot simply follow what a favorite preacher or commentator says. Often the study of a chapter (or subsection of a chapter) contains a brief summary of the content, focusing on the message.

The suggested process for effectively using these Bible study guides involves five steps. First, you should first read the introduction to the book you wish to study. The introductions provided in these guides are for the most part briefer than normal and do not cover every detail. In some cases, one introduction is provided to cover several books, as in the case of the Thessalonian correspondence or the Pastoral Letters.

The second step in your study is to read the book through to understand the overall content. It will be helpful if this can be done at a single sitting. The student facing time constraints may have time for only one reading, but multiple readings will reveal additional details of the text being studied along with the opportunity to observe repeated words and phrases, the message of the book, how the book develops its message, and how various parts of the book are connected. You will find reading helps in the outlines of the books and the lists of themes that are provided in the introductions.

Now you are ready to begin your study of individual chapters or sections. The process is this: read a section of the text (probably a chapter) until you have a good understanding of it. This is not an in-depth reading to resolve every question but is a general reading to understand the content of the passage.

The fourth step is for you to write your own outline of the section or chapter, with paragraphing that reflects major thought patterns, divisions, and topics. The study guide for each chapter has a section with suggested paragraphing based on a comparison of various

translations. While it is possible to skip this step in which you do your own analysis and paragraphing, thereby moving directly to the paragraphing provided in the study guide, this is not the recommended approach. You will benefit from taking the time and investing the energy to do this work in initial reading and understanding.

Finally, the study guides have a section of study helps that will help you understand the text and keep the intent of the original author in mind as you do more focused study. In many chapters, a final section that summarizes the message of the chapter is included.

### **Initial Reading and Paragraphing**

In other articles and publications, I have explained the importance of preparatory reading and personal study of the text. In the five-step process described above, initial reading and paragraphing occur in the second, third, and fourth steps. When the Bible student carefully works through these steps, it becomes clear that this is a “Bible” study and not just reading more background and commentary from a human author who is trying to explain the Bible. Although many students jump immediately from reading an introduction to the commentary, it is important that the student learn to do this part of the Bible study for herself or himself. Once the text is familiar, I suggest the student think about the themes that can be identified and how one would mark the paragraph divisions, based on the content of the passage and the subjects treated. Once this work is complete, it is good to compare the resulting paragraphing with that of several versions (or with the outlines in the content sections of these guides).

### **A Note About Paragraphing**

Paragraph divisions are the key to understanding and following the original author's message. Most modern translations are divided into paragraphs and provide a summary. Ideally, every paragraph has one central topic, truth, or thought. Often, there will be several ways to describe the subject of the paragraph. Only when we understand the original author's message by following his logic and presentation can we truly understand the Bible. Only the original author is inspired—readers must take care not to change or modify the message. A first step toward integrity with the text is to develop the ability to analyze it and establish paragraphs.

*Note: This introductory information is not repeated for each chapter. Students will find it helpful to return to this introductory section again and again to guide their study, especially before beginning the study of a new chapter of the text.*

## READING AND UNDERSTANDING THE ORIGINAL MESSAGE

### A Word About Formatting

The format of the Study Helps in each chapter follows the outline that is provided for the chapter. The major points of the outline are used to begin new sections of the Study Helps. Biblical references that introduce sections or subsections of the Study Helps are placed in bold type to assist the student. These biblical references are placed in progressive order on the basis of the first verse cited (in the case of citations that cover multiple verses).

Standard abbreviations of biblical books are used. Verse citations that do not include a book (e.g. 2:14) refer to the book being studied. Other abbreviations that may not be familiar to some readers include the following: cf. = compare; e.g. = for example; v. = verse; vv. = verses.

The first time a translation is mentioned, the standard abbreviation is included. Subsequent references use only the abbreviation.

Greek words are placed in italics. Often, the corresponding Greek word, a literal meaning, and other translation possibilities are placed in parentheses immediately after an English word. Greek words are written as transliterations in English letters, using the basic lexical form of the word, to make it easier for the reader without a knowledge of Greek. Many readers will find these references interesting, especially in the repeated usage of the same Greek word. Readers can quickly pass over this inserted parenthetical information if desired. In a few cases, parentheses are used to indicate Greek verbal forms or noun forms, where this information would be significant to the student with some understanding of grammar. Again, the reader can pass over this information rapidly if desired. The Greek text used is the 27<sup>th</sup> edition of *Novum Testamentus Graece* which is identical with the 4<sup>th</sup> revised edition of *The Greek New Testament*.

Quotation marks are often used to call attention to special words or topics, and also to indicate citations or translations of the biblical text, many of which are my own. This is done to help the reader identify references to the biblical text, since no specific translation of the biblical text is not included in this Study Guide.

Parentheses are used liberally to enclose information and comments that would often be included in footnotes. It is hoped that readers will find this more convenient, both those who want to read the expanded explanation and those who wish to skip over the parenthetical material.

Comments concerning contemporary applications of the text are limited, but are included from time to time.

A summary of each chapter is provided at the end of the chapter. Some of these are written in first person, from the standpoint of the author, but the majority are written in third

person and are explanations of the content. These are not translations and are not paraphrases. They are an attempt to communicate the basic points and purpose of the original message.

## **READING AND UNDERSTANDING THE ORIGINAL MESSAGE**

### **Introduction to Philippians**

#### **Overview**

Philippians is difficult to outline, perhaps because it is such an informal and personal letter. Paul does not identify himself as an apostle in the salutation. Paul established a close relationship with this church despite his brief visit and rapid departure as narrated in Acts 16. Paul had a special place in his heart for this church, perhaps because it was the first church established on the second missionary journey as he and his companions worked to expand the gospel to new fields. This close relationship is reflected in the fact that he was helped in his missionary work with financial support this new church provided (Phil. 1:5, 7; 4:15). This does not seem to be Paul's usual practice, as he on other occasions mentions that he was providing his own living to preach the gospel freely without charge. Compare Phil. 4:16 where Paul mentions financial support received from Philippi with 1 Thess. 2:9 where he mentions working in Thessalonica so as not to burden the new believers. It appears that Paul worked at his occupation (tentmaking) during his stay in Thessalonica and that the money received from his secular work was supplemented by gifts from Philippi.

Philippians is counted among the Prison Epistles (so named because these letters were written while Paul was in prison). Paul's focus on the theme of "joy" is often mentioned in studies of the book. In the reading, analysis, and paragraphing, the student will want to seek out other themes. For example, the word "gospel" appears seven times in the first chapter. A reference to Jesus occurs 51 times (somewhat incredible in a book of only 104 verses).

#### **The City**

Paul and his companions came to the city of Philippi of Macedonia on the second missionary journey, as recorded in Acts 16. The city was located on the Ignatian Way, a major east-west Roman road. Philippi was named for Philip II of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great. (The original Thracian town was named Krenides.) The region became a Roman Province in 168 B.C. and became a Roman Colony in 31 B.C. (see Acts 16:12). This meant that the inhabitants of Philippi were citizens of Rome with numerous advantages. Paul refers to citizenship in Phil. 1:26 and to heavenly citizenship in Phil. 3:20, knowing that his readers would understand well the point concerning the responsibilities and the advantages of such citizenship status.

#### **The Bible Context from Acts**

On the second missionary journey, Paul concluded (Acts 16:6-10) that the so-called Macedonian call, received in a vision, was God's instruction to go westward from Troas to Macedonia. As a result, the gospel came to Philippi. We know from the text of Acts that Paul had with him Silas, Timothy, and Luke. Luke, as author of Acts, remains anonymous throughout the book of Acts, but his presence with Paul is indicated by the "we" passages in Acts. Luke came to Philippi with the traveling missionary group ("we") but apparently did not leave with them ("they"). The "we" sections of Acts end and begin again at Philippi. Later in Acts, Paul returned to Philippi on the third journey (Acts 20:1-3,6).

## Author, Date, and Recipients

Author. That Paul is the author is stated in 1:1. This was generally accepted very early. There are many first-person pronouns, by which the author describes his own life, experience, and connection to Philippi. There are several quotes and allusions to Philippians in early extrabiblical Christian literature.

Date. The date of this letter must be determined against the background of one of Paul's imprisonments—in Ephesus, Philippi, Caesarea, or Rome. A Roman imprisonment best fits the facts of Acts (also mentioned in the Marcionite prologue to Philippians). The best educated guess for the date of the writing of Philippians is Paul's first imprisonment in Rome in the early 60s. Philippians makes clear that Paul anticipated being released from prison so that he would be able to visit them (1:17-27; 2:24). References to the Roman soldiers and servants in Caesar's household also suggest Rome as a location, but are not conclusive (as there could have been soldiers and servants in other Roman cities).

This chart shows a possible chronology of Paul's writings including possible locations when the books were written and the relationship to the history of Acts.

Book	Date	Place of Writing	Relationship to Acts
Galatians	48	Syrian Antioch	Acts 14:28; 15:2
1 Thessalonians	51	Corinth	Acts 18:5
2 Thessalonians	51	Corinth	
1 Corinthians	55	Ephesus	Acts 19:20
2 Corinthians	56	Macedonia	Acts 20:2
Romans	57	Corinth	Acts 20:3
Colossians	early 60s	Rome	Acts 28
Philemon	early 60s	Rome	Acts 28
Ephesians	early 60s	Rome	Acts 28
Philippians	early 60s	Rome	Acts 28
1 Timothy	63 (or later)	Macedonia	after Acts
Titus	63 ??		after Acts
2 Timothy	64-68	Rome	after Acts

Recipients. The salutation of the letter mentions the saints in Philippi, along with bishops and deacons. Apparently, the Philippian church was biblically organized within a few years of its establishment. There are approximately 10 years between the establishment of the Philippian church in Acts 16 and the date of the book.

Based on various biblical references, it appears that women may have had significant freedom in Macedonia. A group of women were worshipping by the river, we read of Lydia who is described as a businesswoman, women are mentioned as co-workers in the gospel (4:2-3), and women were also mentioned in Thessalonica (Acts 17:4, Thessalonica was also in Macedonia).

## Purpose of the Letter

The letter is highly personal, and expectedly contains several personal references. Paul wants to update and assure the Philippians of his status. A short list of the personal references would include gratitude for the financial help extended, explanation of the situation with

Epaphroditus, encouragement concerning the future of the gospel, encouragement against false teachings, encouragement in the midst of external pressures, and instructions about internal conflicts.

Paul also wants the Philippians to know of the past, present, and future advance of the gospel. With Paul in prison and his future uncertain, it may be that the Philippians were wondering about the future of the cause of Christ, a cause to which they had committed themselves and a cause in which they had participated financially in fellowship with Paul. What will happen to the gospel in Paul cannot continue traveling and preaching freely?

Paul wants to encourage the Philippians to continue faithfully in the gospel. This admonition begins in Chapter 1, and continues throughout the book. In Chapter Two, Paul sets for a highly theological description of Jesus as an example to be followed in service and sacrifice. On the basis of these teachings, Paul calls the Philippians to Christian living, using a variety of illustrations and instructions—live as responsible citizens, fight for the gospel, unite, sacrifice, shine forth, cast off worthless things, seek to know Christ, hit the bulls-eye, forget the past and focus on the future, celebrate heavenly citizenship, depend on God, think positive thoughts. The careful student will be able to add to this list of illustrations and instructions.

### **General Outline of the Letter**

It is difficult to outline Philippians due to the content and personal nature of the letter. It may be that the book naturally divides into two parts, as do many of Paul's letters. These two parts are typically described as the doctrinal teaching and the practical application. In Philippians, the teaching part would be identified as Chapters 1-2 and the practical part as Chapters 3-4. However, at times it seems that Paul's mind is overflowing with numerous things he wants to say to this church, so that the progression of thought is difficult to outline. The challenge of outlining the letter will become clearer in the study of the four brief chapters.

The major literary units that can be identified include the following, although some studies identify smaller textual units.

1:1-2	salutation
1:3-11	prayer
1:12-26	explanation of personal situation as it relates to the gospel
1:27-2:4	live out the gospel, instructions based on what has been presented
2:5-11	early Christian hymn, Christological section
2:12-18	live out the example of Christ, instructions based on what has been presented
2:19-30	personal section, Paul's plans regarding Philippi, Timothy, and Epaphroditus
3:1-21	stand firm in Christ, against false ideas
4:1-9	admonitions to unity, joy, certain attitudes
4:10-20	personal section, gratitude for their help
4:21-23	closing

## READING AND UNDERSTANDING THE ORIGINAL MESSAGE

### Philippians 1

[Note: it is suggested that the student read the introductory materials on page 3-5 of this guide before beginning any individual preparatory reading and analysis.]

#### CONTENT

The paragraphing included in the Content section of each chapter are merely suggestions or guides. The student is encouraged to identify the paragraphs, and subsections within each paragraph, to assist in his or her own study. The division of the biblical text into paragraphs is usually fairly standard in modern translations. I have treated 1:12-26 as a paragraph based on the repetition of the idea of progress.

#### Outline of Chapter

- 1:1-2**, salutation and greetings
- 1:3-11**, prayer for the Philippians
- 1:12-26**, progress of the gospel
- 1:27-31**, living according to the gospel

#### STUDY HELPS

**1:1-2.** The salutation is typically Pauline. Timothy is included in the greeting although we have little biblical information concerning his presence with Paul during the Roman imprisonment. It may be that Timothy was able to travel between Ephesus (cf. 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy) and Rome periodically. Paul sent Timothy to help the church at Philippi (2:19-24). A study tracing Timothy's travels in support of the gospel is an interesting study, but beyond the scope of these comments.

Bondservants (*doulos*, literally. slaves) of Christ Jesus probably does not refer to physical imprisonment, but to their commitment as slaves of Christ (compare a similar reference in Eph. 4:1). Paul does not identify himself as an apostle, perhaps due to the personal nature of the book and the closeness of the relationship he had with the Philippian church. Paul's apostleship was not primarily in view and he does not need to mention his apostleship to have authority in the Philippian church. He writes from the context of a personal relationship with the recipients. For further study, look at Acts 16:1-17:14; 18:5-19:22; 20:4; Gal. 1:1; Rom. 16:21; 1 Cor. 4:17, 16:10; 2 Cor. 1:1,19; Phil. 1:1, 2:19-24; Philm. 4; and the salutations in 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy.

The reference to the saints (*hagioi*) in Philippi is a usual way of describing Christians. God's people are holy "in Christ Jesus." Paul includes the overseers (*episkopos*, bishops) and deacons (*diakonos*) in the greeting. In the New Testament, the words pastor, elder, and bishop all refer to the same group of leaders in the local church (Acts 20:17,28; 1 Pet. 5:1-4; cf. Tit. 1:5,7). Bishop (*episkopos*, overseer) had a Greek background; elder (*presbuteros*) had a Jewish background. The Philippian church had apparently developed a leadership according to the model described in other parts of the New Testament, despite Paul's general absence from Philippi. Perhaps Luke had been a part of the leadership development in this church. (The

likelihood that Luke stayed in Philippi when the rest of the missionary team went on to Thessalonica is described in the Introduction to the book). Deacon is a general word for servant or minister, but was used in a more official sense in Ephesus (cf. 1 Tim. 3:8ff) and in Philippi. The biblical text supports these two leadership functions in the local church, although women servants are mentioned in 1 Tim. 3:11, possibly a reference to the widows' role (see comments over 1 Timothy in the *Bible Study Guide: Later Letters*). While the roles of bishops and deacons were originally tasks or works that focused on service, in the early history of the church these quickly became titles and offices in an ecclesiastical hierarchy with a focus on power.

Grace and peace are usual in the salutations of Paul's letters.

**1:3-11.** The Greek letter form typically opened with a prayer, and Paul follows the same pattern. I identify 1:3-8 as Paul's prayer of thanksgiving for the Philippian church, and 1:9-11 as his prayer for their maturity. In this view, v. 8 is transitional between the two prayers, but it is also possible to speak of one prayer of Paul with two different subjects.

**1:3-8.** Paul often mentions in his letters that he is praying for the churches to which he writes. The reference to joy introduces a theme that echoes through the book (*chara*, 1:4, 25; 2:2, 29; 4:1; *chairō*, 1:18; 2:17, 18, 28; 3:1; 4:4, 10; *sunchairō*, 2:17, 18; *chairō* and *sunchairō* used together, 2:17, 18).

**1:5.** Paul is grateful for their fellowship (*koinonia*, sharing, participation, help) in the gospel. This probably refers to their financial help (see Phil. 4:15; cf. Rom. 12:13; 15:26; 2 Cor. 9:13; Gal. 6:6; 1 Tim. 6:18, where *koinonia* is an idiom that refers to financial help). This financial help is described in 4:10, 14-18.

**1:6.** "I am confident." Paul writes with confidence about God's desire for the continued work of the Philippian church. Confidence is translated from a work that means to be persuaded, thus to be certain.

"He who began a good work in you...." The subject of this phrase is not stated but in the context it refers to God. God initiates his work in human beings and he is the one who will complete (perfect) it. The future tense ("he will complete it") again indicates certainty. This is not primarily an eschatological passage, but it does show the tension between the "already" and the "not yet" of the Christian life. "Until the day of Christ Jesus" is most likely a reference to the Second Coming (see parallels in 1:10 and 2:16).

**1:7-8.** These verses reflect the close relationship between Paul and the Philippians. They shared (were partakers together) of the grace of God. In this verse, we encounter the first of several references to the gospel in the first chapter. "The defense and confirmation of the gospel" includes terms that were used with reference to a legal defense. Defense (*apologia*) and confirmation (*bebaiosis*, a legal guarantee) suggest that Paul was presenting the gospel boldly, whether defending it or actively advancing its proclamation.

The phrase, "You share together with me," uses the word *koinonia* (fellowship with, 2:1; 3:10; 4:14, 16 are related passages). Paul in this book uses a number of compound words that begin with "*sun*." These words show how Christians share together in the work of the gospel. Examples include fellowship with, partakers with (1:7, 4:14), striving together (*sun-athlountes*) with the meaning of working together or cooperating (1:27), of the same mind (literally, souls together) (2:2), rejoicing together (2:17-18), working together, fellow workers (2:25, 4:3),

soldiers together, fellow soldiers (2:25), formed together, becoming like him (3:10), and imitating together, join in imitating me (3:17).

Paul closes the first part of the prayer by mentioning the special relationship he had with the Philippians (v. 8).

**1:9-11.** Having described various aspects of his past relationship with the Philippians in vv. 3-8, Paul now turns to his prayer for their future. These three verses are one sentence in Greek: a prayer for abounding love in knowledge and discernment, giving the ability to understand what is best, being filled with the fruit of righteousness to be ready for the day of Christ.

“That your love may abound” is present active subjunctive expressing hope for continued growth. Abound (*perisseuo*) means to be filled to overflowing. Knowledge (*epignosis*) is an intensified form from *gnosis*: full knowledge, real knowledge, insight. Discernment (*aesthesis*) is understanding and good judgment.

To approve (*dokimazao*) means to test, often referring to metals or coins. It often meant to approve on the basis of the testing. In this context, it means to know by testing, and thus to approve, what is best (*diaphero*, literally, the things that carry through). *Diaphero* can be translated “things that differ,” carrying the idea of making a distinction. In the context, the idea refers to things that last or remain, thus excellent things. A possible translation would be: “the things that are really important or of real value” (cf. Rom. 2:18 where the same word is used). The text suggests the ability to understand priorities and to choose what is best. The result is a Christian who is sincere. This is an interesting Greek word that combines sunshine and judgment, literally to test in the light. This often leads to the idea (and translation) of free from impurity. The Christian is also blameless (*aproskopos*), not causing offense or stumbling in others. Day of Christ refers to Jesus’ return.

Having been filled (present passive participle) connects to and depends on the preceding thought but describes what had happened previously to make the Christian sincere and blameless until the day of Christ. The fruit borne in the Christian life is righteousness, a righteousness that is possible only through Jesus Christ. All of this is to the glory and praise of God (cf. Eph. 1:6, 12, 14).

**1:12-26.** I treat this extended section as a single literary unit on the basis of the parenthetical references to progress. The progress of the gospel (v. 12) leads to progress and joy in the faith for the Philippians (vv. 25-26).

“I want you to know....” Perhaps the Philippians had asked Paul some questions through Epaphroditus. The Philippian church had participated with the gospel from the beginning. With Paul in prison, the future perhaps appeared uncertain. What would happen to the gospel if Paul died in prison? What would happen without the efforts of Paul in the churches? Such questions come from the first century context in which the letter was written. Paul wanted to assure the Philippians with regard to the gospel and the future. This is the context of this section.

**1:12-14.** Paul shares good news. His situation in prison is helping the gospel go forward. The guards and everyone else have become aware that he is imprisoned for Christ. It may seem that such circumstances would work against the gospel, but God is always at work regardless of our good or bad circumstances. God works in mysterious ways, in Paul’s ministry and in our

lives today. The progress (*prokope*, advancement) of the gospel carries the idea of trailblazing or following a difficult path. The gospel is progressing among the guards and throughout the palace, among those who are in places that were formerly considered enemy territory. The gospel is progressing because other preachers were being encouraged to preach the word of God more boldly because of Paul's experiences.

**1:15-18.** Paul mentions that some preachers of Christ operate from envy, but others from good will and love. Who the envious preachers are has been widely debated. It seems the message was right but the motives were wrong, because of their attitude toward Paul. Perhaps they were leaders who had been displaced or had lost some of their former power and prestige with Paul's presence. The result is the same and can be seen in churches today—poor attitudes, jealousy, the party-spirit, divisiveness.

**1:16-18.** I have been put in this place (*keimai*, set, appointed) for the defense of the gospel. The verb was used of putting a soldier on watch. Defense (*apologia*) is repeated from v. 7. The situation is described again: some proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition (perhaps arrogance) and not from pure motives. This was designed to cause Paul concern. But for Paul, the cause for rejoicing is that Christ is proclaimed, whether by pretenders or in truth. Preaching the gospel supersedes personal matters.

**1:19-21.** Paul rejoices because he believes the events he is describing will be the source of his deliverance (*soteria*, literally salvation). Here the word does not refer to spiritual salvation in Christ, but as the context shows, to Paul's deliverance from his situation. Paul believed he would be released (v. 22). This would be possible through the prayers of the Philippians and the provision (*epichoregia*, something supplied or provided) of the Spirit.

This is Paul's expectation and hope, believing that his confidence in God will be rewarded and that he will not feel shame for having been proved wrong in this expectation. He is therefore bold to speak, because his goal is that Christ will now and always be exalted in his body, whether in life or death. The Christian honors God by how he or she uses the physical body.

**1:21.** A well-known verse, frequently quoted, caps this sub-section. To live is Christ, to die is gain. To live (present infinitive) is a continuous action. Death (aorist infinitive) is a one-time event. The reference here is to physical death, which for Paul meant being with Christ.

**1:22-26.** If I live (the first class condition is considered true), that will result in fruitful labor. Paul sees advantages in both options. If he had to make a choice, he does not know which choice he would make. Paul's words here and other biblical and historical evidence suggests Paul was released from prison sometime after he wrote the prison epistles.

**1:23-24.** Paul feels pressure (*sunecho*, pressed or held together tightly). He has the desire to depart to be with Christ, a much better option. But he also sees that it would be more helpful to the Philippians that he remains on in the flesh (alive).

**1:25-26.** Paul expected to be released from prison, "I know I will remain and continue with you...." The result would be progress and joy in the faith for the Philippians. These two verses are one sentence in Greek. These two results introduce two major themes of the book. Their confidence and pride in Paul would be even more abundant when it was possible for him to come to them again.

**1:27-30.** The Christian is to live (present imperative, from *politeuomai*, to live as a citizen) in a manner worthy of the gospel. These verses are one long sentence in Greek. Note again the reference to the gospel. To live worthy of the gospel so that regardless of what happened to Paul, whether he was able personally to come to visit them or not, he would hear of their way of life. This lifestyle is described in a series of descriptive phrases:

- standing firm (present, active, indicative) in one spirit (in this context, likely referring to one commitment),
- of one mind (thinking alike),
- striving together (*sunathleo*, where you can see the root for our word athlete; in the verb *sunathleo*, one can also note the idea of teamwork) for the faith of the gospel (the faith, with the article, a reference to the body of Christian truth),
- not concerned because of the opponents.

The attitude of the Philippians would bear evidence that those who oppose Christ and Christianity are destined for destruction, while Christians will be saved by God. Saved, as in v. 19, is likely a reference to physical salvation, in which case the destruction of the opponents may also be physical.

**1:29-30.** Christians have been called both to believe and to suffer for Christ. The fact that Paul was experience the conflict of faith and suffering was evidence that such was a reasonable expectation for them. In fact, in the New Testament the suffering of Christians is virtually a given fact. Paul had been persecuted during his first visit to Philippi (Acts 16:22-24).

## **SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER**

Greetings to the saints in Philippi, and also to the bishops and deacons: grace and peace.

I want you to know how thankful I am for your past life—especially how you have shared in the work of the gospel. God made that possible, and he will keep on doing the work he has begun until Jesus comes again. We have shared life, and I long for you and have you in my heart, regardless of my circumstances. I also pray about your future, so you will grow in love and knowledge and insight, choosing the things of greatest value, always prepared for the day of Christ, bearing fruit in Christ.

Now concerning my imprisonment and the gospel, I want you to know that my time in prison has worked to advance the gospel. The whole palace is hearing the gospel, and more and more brothers are speaking fearlessly. Not all have pure motives, but the gospel is being preached. I think all of this will turn out so that I am released, but regardless of what happens, my goal is to exalt Christ. Living is Christ, dying is gain. Living means fruitful work, but dying would mean being with Christ. I will remain and you will continue to progress in the faith.

It is imperative that you live in a manner consistent with the gospel. Be firm, stand together, contend for the gospel, don't pay attention to the opponents. You have been blessed, not only to believe in him but also to suffer for him, the very same thing that has happened to me.

## READING AND UNDERSTANDING THE ORIGINAL MESSAGE

### Philippians 2

*[Note: it is suggested that the student read the introductory materials on page 3-5 of this guide before beginning any individual preparatory reading and analysis.]*

#### CONTENT

The paragraphing included in the Content section of each chapter are merely suggestions or guides. The student is encouraged to identify the paragraphs, and subsections within each paragraph, to assist in his or her own study. The division of the biblical text into paragraphs is usually fairly standard in modern translations.

#### Outline of Chapter

**2:1-11**, preserve unity by developing the mind of Christ and imitating the humility of Christ

**2:12-18**, lights in the world

**2:19-30**, information about Timothy and Epaphroditus

#### Description of the Contents of the Chapter

The theme of unity is sometimes overlook in the Philippian letter.

The text of 2:6-11 is likely an early Christian hymn.

The personal nature of the letter is shown in the extended explanation about Timothy and Epaphroditus.

#### STUDY HELPS

**2:1-4.** This is one sentence in the Greek text, with four first class conditional statements (assumed to be true). The first class condition functions here rhetorically: since there is.... “If there is....,” and there is!

If there is encouragement in Christ (*paraklesis*, encouragement, often translated as comfort or exhortation, possibly meaning stimulation or motivation).

If there is any comfort (*paramuthion*) of love. The relationship between comfort and love is that love is comforting (New English Translation, NET, the comfort provided by love).

If there is fellowship (*koinonia*, sharing) of the Spirit (compare 2 Cor. 13:14), and there is! Spirit does not have the definite article. While this may refer to the Holy Spirit, it may refer to the connection of human spirits, that is, spiritual fellowship. Is Paul ever purposefully ambiguous?

If there is affection (literally, bowels, referring to the idea that the abdomen was thought to be the seat of emotions) and mercy (*oiktirmos*). There is overlap in several of the words in 2:1.

**2:2.** “Fulfill my joy, thinking the same things, with the same love, like-minded, thinking with one purpose.” The Philippians are urged to complete Paul’s joy by their actions toward one another. The focus is on unity, demonstrated by “one another” Christianity. Thinking (*phroneo*) is used twice in this verse, which I have reflected in my translation above (for other uses of this word in the book, see 1:7; 2:5; 3:15, 19; 4:2, 10). The primary translation question

is how to translate the first phrase which is a subjunctive (in order to think the same things). A common approach is to consider the phrase as exegetical (added words to explain what precedes it). Complete my joy by being of the same mind (English Standard Version, ESV), or complete my joy and be of the same mind (NET). This gives an imperatival force to both verbs—complete my joy and think the same things, which in turn gives an imperatival force to the participles that follow.

How to accomplish this is then set forth with a series of four present participles in 2:2-4—having the same love, like-minded ones thinking with one purpose, regarding others as better than self, looking out for the things of others. Clustered around these verbal forms are several explanatory phrases. A somewhat awkward but fairly literal translation is this: “Having (*echo*) the same love, like-minded ones thinking (*phroneo*) with one purpose, no one according to strife or vanity but in humility considering (*hegeomai*) others better than self, each one not his own things looking after (*skopeo*) but the things of others.”

Paul is likely anticipating the problems that have arisen in the Philippian church due to strife and pride (see 4:2-3). Humility was not a virtue in the Roman world. As Paul concludes the letter, he includes similar concepts in 4:8-9.

**2:5-11.** Have the same attitude (present active imperative) repeats the word think (*phroneo*). Think like Christ. Have in yourselves what was also in Christ. Christ-like actions begin with Christ-like thinking.

**2:6.** This introduces a poetic section (2:6-11) that was likely a hymn quoted by Paul. Several words in this section are not found elsewhere in Paul’s writings. Christians are to imitate Christ in thought, in humility, in sacrifice, and in service. Christ was self-abasing and self-giving.

**2:6-11.** A good way to explain the structure of this section is to note the focus on Jesus’ nature and actions, followed by a focus on God the Father’s actions. Jesus, preexisting in divine nature, become incarnate in human form, and humbly sacrificially died on a cross. God the Father exalted him, with universal confession of his name, and Lordship over all. Several great theological truths are presented in this section.

- Jesus is truly God (divine in essence, *morphe*).
- Jesus is truly human (in form, *schema*).
- He took the essence (*morphe*) of a servant and the likeness (*homoionoma*) of humanity.
- Jesus shared human nature and obediently went to the cross.
- The result is that God exalted him as truly worthy of worship, making him Lord of all, and this by the will of God and to the glory of God.

Let us consider these one at a time in more detail.

Jesus is truly God. The first description of Jesus is this phrase: “who in the form of God being.” This is a present tense verb form in a series of aorist (past tense) forms. The point is the pre-existence of Jesus with divine essence, that Jesus was already existing. Jesus did not come into existence in the Incarnation. Jesus’ pre-existence is an evidence of his deity. Jesus did not consider being equal with God something to be seized for himself. Here is a present infinitive (to be) which I have translated with the present participle (being). Jesus always exists (existed, exists, will exist) with the essence of God and in equality with God (Deity, but in the context usually understood as a reference to God the Father). Jesus is fully God. Grasped

(seized) has the verbal form *harpazo*. (*Harpazo* has three basic dimensions or uses—something unexpected or sudden, something done with much force, and something done for personal gain. See my comments on 1 Thess. 4:13-18 where it means unexpectedly. Here it means to seize for personal gain.)

Jesus became truly human. Literally, he emptied himself. He chose to come to earth and live as a human being. He voluntarily humbled himself in the limitations of human existence. A question that has been long-debated is the nature of Jesus in the Incarnation. Was he half divine and half human? Was he all human with no divine essence? Is it possible to be 100% divine and 100% human at the same time? It is hard to understand how one gives up one's essence. Heb. 1:3 says Jesus has the exact character of God's essence, an apparent reference to his earthly existence. It seems the best option is to say that Jesus did not cast off his divine nature in his Incarnation, but that he accepted human nature. With a human nature, he was tempted (Matthew 4; Luke 4), tested (John 4), fearful (Luke 22, in Gethsemane), and obedient (Heb. 5:8-9). Note these things from Phil. 2:6-11: he left eternity and existence with God the Father, he was humbled so that he could later be exalted, his name (nature) was like other human beings so that he could receive a name above all, he lived "not as Lord" so that he could be declared Lord of all. He fully experienced our humanity, and as divine in essence, he became the perfect mediator being a faithful and merciful high priest (Heb. 2:17-18)

He took the essence of a servant and the likeness of humanity. He took the form (*morphe*) of a servant (*doulos*, slave) is a phrase exactly parallel to the "form of God" in v. 6. To become a slave is to give up personal privilege and choose to serve. Here the emphasis is on the one-time event of Jesus' Incarnation (aorist tense forms), not on his continuing existence (present tense forms). Jesus became fully human. Likeness of humanity may remind of the creation of human beings in the likeness of God (Gen. 1:26-27). This phrase, the likeness of humanity, does not mean that Jesus participated in human sinfulness. In fact, that Jesus could take human likeness or human nature without experiencing fallenness and sin shows the fallacy of a commonly-accepted theology that sees human nature as sinful. Having human nature does not demand sin; babies are not born in sin simply because they are human beings. Sin enters the human experience when human beings share the decision of Adam to rebel against God. (See my comments on Romans 5 for more on this topic. Also see Rom. 8:3; 1 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15-16; 1 Pet. 2:22.)

Jesus shared human nature and obediently went to the cross (v. 7-8). The text says Jesus was in the essence of a servant, likeness of men, and appearance (*schema*) as a man. *Morphe* was usually understood to refer to the inner stable forms and essence; *schema* was usually understood to refer to the outward changing forms that were not dependent on essence. The point is that Jesus' essence was a divine servant, in human likeness, with the outward form of a man which had nothing to do with his essence. These three descriptors combine in the statement that he humbled himself becoming obedient to the point of death on the cross (more aorist verb forms).

God exalted him, giving him a name above all, making him Lord of all, and this by the will of God and to the glory of God (vv. 9-11). It is important to note that this hymn does not present two Christologies. On the basis of what has been said about Jesus' preexistence as Deity with the inner essence of God, and his Incarnation with the inner essence of a slave, with

human likeness and outward human form—therefore God has acted to exalt him. God also gave (*charizomai*) him a name above every name, the name of Lord.

Every knee will bow at the name of Jesus. Every tongue will confess; this means that one day everyone will acknowledge that Jesus is in fact Lord. In this way, God receives the glory he desires and deserves. All of this is according to the will of God.

**2:12-18.** When the Philippians live in imitation of Jesus, with the mind or attitude of Christ, they will be lights in the world.

**2:12-13.** This is one sentence in Greek. Thus (so then) points back to the previous section. “My beloved ones” reflects Paul’s concern for this church, although the phrase is not unusual in Paul’s writings (see Rom. 12:19; 16:8,9,12; 1 Cor. 4:14,17; 10:14; 15:58; 2 Cor. 7:1; 12:19; Eph. 6:21; Phil. 4:1; Col. 4:7,9,14; 1 Tim. 6:2; 2 Tim. 1:2; Philm. 1,2,16).

Paul describes them as obedient in the past whether he has been present or absent, and encourages them to continue in the same way, working out their salvation with fear (*phobos*, awe) and trembling (*tromos*, reverence). Work out can refer to solving a mathematical problem. The more complex form (*katergazomai*, finish, fashion, bring to an end) does not deny the sovereignty of God in salvation and does not demand meritorious actions that result in salvation. The mystery of God’s plan for salvation extended by grace and received by faith will never be understood by insisting on a strict dichotomy. (See my comments on Eph. 2:8-10). Paul clearly affirms both that God is at work (*energeo*, working in you), and that his work produces desire and effort in believers, according to his will. The use of the plural forms (you, your) in a letter written to a group of believers should not be interpreted to mean that these verses have no application to individuals.

**2:14-18.** This section begins with another long sentence (vv. 14-16). The admonition about grumbling and arguing possibly reflects the disunity and challenges in Philippi. There were problems with some preachers (1:14-17), possible problems within the church (1:27-2:4), a need for humility and sacrifice (2:5-11), false teachers (3:2), and women in conflict (4:2-3). Here is a summary of the message in 2:14-16: Living without grumbling shows that the Christian is pure, blameless, without blemish, unpolluted by the surrounding worldly context, capable to shining as a light in the world. This is done by holding tightly to the word of God, and in the case of the Philippians, will result in glory for Paul in the day of Christ, knowing that he did not run work in vain.

A believer must make choices. A believer chooses salvation; a believer must choose life and lifestyle afterward. Blameless (*amemptos*) is without defect, a word used frequently to describe God’s people. Pure (*akeraios*, innocent, spotless) refers to moral purity. Without blemish (*amometos*) may be translated without blame. The context in which believers live is crooked (*skolios*) and distorted (from *diastrepho*, turned away). The world has no interest in the word of God and does not measure up to its standard. It is in the midst of such a world that believers shine as lights (*phoster*, giving illumination) in the world. When Jesus said that Christians are the light of the world, he used different words but communicated the same basic idea. Being a light in the world is possible when one holds tightly or holds forth (*epecho*) the word of life. Note the two possible meanings of this verb: to hold on to firmly, or to hold forth or extend.

The Philippians' success in being lights and holding forth the word will be a cause of rejoicing for Paul in the day of Christ, referring to the Coming of Christ. Paul will rejoice because he will know that his labors had produced fruit (were not in vain). Verses 17 and 18 have four references to rejoicing. Paul is being offered as a sacrifice for the development of the faith of the Philippians, a faith that is evidenced by sacrifice and service. Paul's sacrifice does not refer to his impending death. Note that he has earlier expressed confidence in his release (1:25).

**2:19-30.** In this final section of the chapter, Paul explains his plans to send Timothy and Epaphroditus to the Philippians. These two helpers serve as models of ministry. Paul plans to send Timothy so that the Philippians will know Paul's status and so Paul can receive news of them. Paul anticipates that this will occur before he sends the letter, and that the letter will serve as explanation after-the-fact of what Paul has done. Then Paul plans to send Epaphroditus, probably using Epaphroditus as the carrier of the letter. The description Paul gives of the situation of Epaphroditus will serve as explanation when the Philippians receive the letter.

**2:19-24.** Concerning Timothy, Paul says he hopes to send him soon. One of Paul's purpose was to receive news of the Philippians. Paul's description of Timothy presents a challenge to every Christian and to every minister: "I have no one else who shares such a like-spirit that is genuinely concerning for your welfare." It is not clear to whom Paul refers in v. 21, but the point is that people who share Timothy's concern for others are few, and that the typical attitude of Christians, and even ministers, is to look out for their own interests more than those things that advance the cause of Jesus Christ. Paul may be referring to the jealous preachers or the false teachers described in other parts of the book. Self-interest is an ever-present threat, and the modern church has not escaped the tendency to put the things of others and things of God in second place.

Timothy had shown his value (*dokime*, testing) by his past service, serving with Paul, as child with a father, on behalf of the gospel. Paul was perhaps expecting some news about his legal case, and upon receiving the update, he planned to send Timothy to the Philippians with the news, and to receive news about them upon Timothy's return. Further, Paul himself hoped to be able to visit the Philippians soon. This is sometimes cited as evidence for dating Philippians as the last of the Prison Epistles.

**2:25-30.** Concerning Epaphroditus, the key to understanding this section is to recognize the epistolary aorist tenses so that Paul places himself in the position of the recipients of the letter and anticipates their reception of the letter in these verses. Another way to describe this technique is to say that Paul writes about these things as if they have already occurred.

With this understanding, we can summarize Paul's message. "I considered it necessary to send Epaphroditus, brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier to me, your representative (*apostolos*, used in non-technical sense) to me and your minister to my needs. I wanted to send him because he was longing for you and was distressed when you learned that he was sick. He was sick to the point of death, but God was merciful to him, and to me so that I did not have sorrow piled on top of sorrow. Therefore, I am still eager to send him, and even more eager, so you can rejoice when you see him and I will no longer be anxious. Receive him, honor him and

those like him, because he almost died because of his commitment to Christ's work. He risked his life to complete what was lacking in your ministry to me."

We know little about Epaphroditus. Epaphras is perhaps an abbreviated form of the name, but the Epaphras we know in the Bible is not the same person (cf. Col. 1:7; 4:12; Philm. 23). It appears that Epaphroditus was charged with delivering a financial gift to Paul in prison, a task that had brought him risk of life and life-threatening sickness. The risk of life is probably the same as the life-threatening illness. Against the backdrop of modern-day faith healers, it is important and interesting to note how often in Scripture healing was not possible or the gift of healing was not used. Is the lack of healing always the result of lack of faith? The determining factor is not faith, but God's will. Life here is *psuche*. The context determines meaning; this refers to the possible loss of life, not soul. The New Testament usage of the words for body, soul, and spirit sometimes seems inconsistent and is difficult to discern. Epaphroditus went to Paul in prison to help the Philippians accomplish what they had not had the opportunity to do. The idea of deficiency may sound negative, but it was simply an effort to do on behalf of the Philippians what they themselves could not do.

## **SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER**

The blessings that are available in Christ are more than sufficient reason for living in accord with the gospel, and casting off every tendency toward self-centeredness and self-concern, and be concerned with the well-being of others. In fact, the gospel through Jesus and the Spirit calls us to mercy, love, humility, like-mindedness, and changed thinking. This will bring unity, including unity in purpose.

There is no better example of this changed thinking than Jesus himself. He gave up everything that might have been seen as of personal value or gain in order to become like us, he humbled himself so that he could look out for our best interests. As a result, God exalted him so that it is evident to all that He is Lord.

You must diligently try to understand how to resolve personal conflicts and similar problems, just as God is energizing you and giving you the power and the desire to do everything possible to seek his will. When you do this with a Christ-like spirit and with pure lives in a corrupted world, you will be genuine lights to the world. You will never be able to do this successfully unless you hang on tightly to the word of God and help others see that word. A part of my desire for you is selfish, because your faithfulness in imitating Jesus will make my service worthwhile, knowing that I have not labored in vain. In this we can rejoice together, I for you and you for me.

I want to update you about Timothy and Epaphroditus. First, I plan to send Timothy soon in order to find out firsthand how you are doing, and he will also deliver news about me to you. Timothy is exactly the right person for this task, he is concerned about you and he has faithfully served in the gospel. (When we see how my case is going to be resolved, I believe I will be able to come to you soon as well.)

Second, I consider it a necessity to send Epaphroditus to you. He has been helpful to me as your representative. He misses you and has been concerned about how you would receive the news of his illness. You know that he was so sick he almost died, so I am even more eager to send him. When he arrives, welcome him and honor him.

## READING AND UNDERSTANDING THE ORIGINAL MESSAGE

### Philippians 3

[Note: it is suggested that the student read the introductory materials on page 3-5 of this guide before beginning any individual preparatory reading and analysis.]

#### CONTENT

The paragraphing included in the Content section of each chapter are merely suggestions or guides. The student is encouraged to identify the paragraphs, and subsections within each paragraph, to assist in his or her own study. The division of the biblical text into paragraphs is usually fairly standard in modern translations.

I have maintained the chapter division. Some would place 3:1 with the last paragraph of Chapter 2.

#### Outline of Chapter

**3:1-11**, The true righteousness that is in Christ

**3:12-16**, Pressing toward the mark

**3:17-21**, Heavenly Citizenship

#### STUDY HELPS

**3:1-11.** Paul addresses several matters in this extended paragraph. An introductory verse is followed by a warning against the Judaizing teachers. The warning is based on Paul's own experience in Judaism (vv. 2-6). Paul then sets forth that which he has come to recognize as genuine gain and of true value in Christ Jesus (vv. 7-11).

**3:1.** "Finally," (*loipon*) is literally, "for the rest." This is a common way to transition to a new subject, but it often occurs near the end of a letter (cf. 2 Cor. 13:11; Eph. 6:10; 1 Thess. 4:8; 2 Thess. 3:1). "Rejoice in the Lord" repeats a theme that appears frequently in the letter. Paul recognizes that he is repeating certain matters. This may refer to a previous letter that is unknown to us, or it could anticipate the mention of the opponents, a topic he has previously addressed in the letter.

**3:2-6.** "Look out for" (present active imperative) is repeated three times. The Gentiles were sometimes called dogs by the Jews. Here Paul reverses that usage, referring to the false teachers, apparently Jewish teachers, as dogs. These false teachers held forth a false circumcision. In the insistence of the Judaizers that Gentiles also be circumcised (Acts 15; Gal. 5:2-3, 12), they were teaching that one could not be a Christian without becoming Jewish. Circumcision was a necessity for becoming a proselyte Jew. The insistence of some Jews on circumcision for every Christian is an evidence of how closely connected were the two faith systems during the early decades of Christianity, especially up to the destruction of the temple and the Jewish system in A.D. 70.

**3:3.** Paul writes that Christians are the circumcision, that is, spiritual Israel (cf. Gal. 6:16; Romans 9-11). "True" does not appear in the Greek text but is added in translation to make clearer Paul's meaning. That Christians are God's people is supported by three present active participles: worshipping in the Spirit of God, glorying (*kauchaomai*) in Christ, not putting

confidence (*peitho*) in the flesh. Glory is sometimes translated as rejoice, boast, exalt, be confident, be proud. *Peitho* can be translated as rely, trust, yield, be persuaded by, obey. In contrast to Jews who put much confidence in their physical circumcision, even when it was not accompanied by heart commitment, Paul describes the Christians who are spiritual Israel as not measuring life by such external standards, even though he himself would measure up pretty well in consideration of his past life in Judaism.

**3:4-6.** If someone wants to put confidence in the flesh (first class condition is assumed to be true), Paul says that no one would have more reason to do that than he. Paul's Jewish credentials were virtually unequalled: circumcised; Israelite through and through; Benjaminite and thus of the same tribe as King Saul and from one of the faithful tribes that stayed with Judah in the south in the division into northern and southern kingdoms; a Hebrew of the Hebrews—perhaps of pure descent or perhaps a reference to his understanding of the language as a student of the Old Testament. Concerning the law, a Pharisee keeping every detail of the law, a persecutor of the church, a keeper of the law doing everything he could within his understanding of God's will.

**3:7-11.** Paul now values none of the things that he formerly considered so important (*kerdos*, gain), the things that the Judaizing teachers are still focused on. He is willing to let go of such things, to count (*hegeomai*) them as loss (*zemia*) because of Christ. Note the continued interaction of three concepts in this section: what Paul thinks about certain things, what is gained, what is lost.

**3:8-11.** These verses are one extended sentence in Greek. Paul repeats the verb (*hegeomai*): I count everything to be loss (*zemia*) because of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.... To know someone suggests personal relationship, not just the accumulation of facts about another person. In English, we make the distinction with "to know" and "to know about." Paul is describing the importance of knowing Jesus, not just knowing about Jesus. When we come to know Jesus, we can trust him and live obediently for him.

...for whom I lost (*zemioo*) all things, and I count (*hegeomai*) them to be rubbish (*skubalon*, literally what is thrown to the dogs, refuse, dung) in order than I might gain (*kerdaino*) Christ. Paul also used the word "gain" in 1:21.

3:9. ...and be found in him. This is the second of two subjunctives: that I might gain, that I might be found. Paul frequently mentions the importance of being "in him" or "in Christ." To be in Christ is to reject the personal righteousness that comes through keeping the law. (In Greek, righteousness and justification are not two words, but are translations of the same Greek word, with the translation depending on the context. Here, I am using righteousness as the translation since it fits the context.)

Righteousness before God is not possible through law-keeping, whether of the Old Law or of any legal system. To be righteous (justified) in God's sight is possible only through faith in Christ, a righteousness from God that is based on faith. The phrase, faith in Christ, raises again the question concerning the relationship of these two nouns that are connected with the genitive case. Is Christ the object of faith or the subject of faith? It is easy to read the phrase as an objective genitive, Christ is the object of our faith in him. But in Greek, it is equally easy to read the phrase as a subjective genitive so that Christ's faith (faithfulness) is the basis of our

justification. Both readings present biblical truth. Our righteousness is possible because of Christ's faithfulness in doing God's will. Our righteousness is on the basis of our faith response to Christ. In either case, this is a righteousness from God.

**3:10-11.** The result Paul is seeking is "to know him, and the power of his resurrection, the fellowship of his sufferings, to be like him in his death, to attain (*katantao*, arrive at) the resurrection from the dead." "To know him" is repeated from v. 8. "The power of his resurrection" may mean that Paul wants to know or experience in his own life the power that resurrected Jesus (cf. Eph. 1:19-20), or it may refer to the resurrected, changed life that believers experience in Christ. "The fellowship (*koinonia*) of his sufferings" means that Paul was willing to undergo suffering. "Being conformed (*summorphoo*) to his death" reminds of the use of *morphe* in 2:6-9. This may refer to Paul's willingness to die for the cause of Christ, but it can also mean that all Christians are dead to sin and alive to God (Rom. 6:1-11; Gal. 2:20).

"To arrive at the resurrection of the dead" requires knowing Christ, experiencing the power of his resurrection, the sharing of his suffering, and the likeness of his death. In v. 11, the word for resurrection is compounded (*exanastasis*, in comparison to the more common *anastasis*). This is the only use of this compound form in the New Testament. The idea may be that in some way the ultimate resurrection from the dead is "out of" the power of Christ's resurrection in the Christian's daily life. The Christian experiences the resurrected life in Christ after baptism (Rom. 6:1-6) but also anticipates the final resurrection. This is a good example of the "already-not yet" tension of Christian salvation.

**3:12-16.** None of what Paul has written should be understood to suggest that he has already obtained (*lambano*, receive) these things, or that he has been perfected (*teleioo*, perfect passive indicative). *Teleioo* can mean complete, mature, fully able or equipped. The major point to be remembered is that in the New Testament, the word "perfect" and its various forms does not have the English connotation of sinless. Paul understood the tension between following Christ and anticipating future blessings. The present anticipates the future but does not always accurately represent the future. Suffering can lead to glory. Paul sought to arrive (*katantao*) but had not yet obtained it (*lambano*). The addition of "to have been righteous" in some manuscripts and translations is rejected in favor of the shorter text.

**3:12-14.** I pursue (*dioko*) in order to lay hold (*katalambano*, possess, find, obtain) that for which I was laid hold (*katalambano*) by Christ. But I have not yet laid hold of it (*katalambano*). All of this points to only one thing: the literal reading says only, "but one."

Two participles precede Paul's description of the one thing and show how he tries to accomplish that one thing that is of supreme importance. "Forgetting" (*epilanthanomai*) what is behind and "reaching forth" (*epekteinomai*) to what is ahead, with this goal in view (*skopos*), I pursue (*dioko*) the prize (*brabeion*) of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

**3:15-16.** Therefore, let those of us who are mature (*teleios*, mature is a better translation than perfect in the context) think this. In the context, "this" must refer to some part of what Paul has just presented. To think (*phroneo*) refers to mental processes or reasoning, and also to attitude (remember the use of the same verb in 2:1-5). When (if, first class condition is assumed to be true) any of you think differently or have a different attitude, this also God will reveal to you. The interpretation of v. 15 is difficult. Paul affirms that he has received his message from God. It is therefore an authoritative message that should be accepted by those

who are mature. Others who are less mature might have other thoughts or attitudes. Perhaps Paul is referring to the opposing preachers, Christians with interpersonal conflicts, or false teachers. The interpretation of the last phrase may go two ways: perhaps Paul is saying that God will reveal truth to those who have the other attitudes, or perhaps he is saying that God will reveal to the Christians who it is that is using other thinking.

**3:16.** The ultimate test of thinking is in the actions that result. “To what we have already attained (*phthano*, what is beforehand), let us conform (*stoicheo*).” A textual variant adds, “let us think according to the same standard or rule.”

**3:17-4:1.** While an effort is being made to maintain the common chapter divisions, in this case it seems that 4:1 better belongs with the preceding text.

**3:17-21.** Many of the older translations are difficult to understand. A fairly literal reading of the text is simple: “Be imitators of me and watch those walking in this way, just as you have us as an example.” There are two imperatives in v. 17—be imitators and watch.

**3:18.** Because many walk (live), about whom I told you many times, and now weeping I tell you, they are enemies of the cross of Christ. Who these enemies are is not clear. Perhaps they are the false teachers, but the list of sins that follows suggests the possibility that some Christians at Philippi were returning to Greek philosophies or pagan lifestyles.

**3:19.** The description of the “enemies” of v. 18 continues. “Whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite (*koilia*, literally stomach, but figuratively meaning appetite) and the glory of their shame, who think about (*phroneo*) earthly or worldly things.” Some who were formerly Christians have become enemies and will be lost. They glory in shameful things.

**3:20-21.** The citizenship of Christians is in heaven (cf. 1:27), “our citizenship.” Christians eagerly anticipate (*apekdechomai*) a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ. To focus on heavenly things is the opposite of vv. 18-19 where the focus is on worldly things. Jesus is described as one “who will change (*metaschematizo*, transform) our humble bodies to the likeness (*summorphos*) of his glorious body according to his energizing power, and to subject all things to himself.” The earthly body is exchanged for a glorious body (cf. 1 Cor. 15:35-51). Christ is Lord of all (Phil. 2:11; cf. 1 Cor. 15:24-28).

**4:1.** On the basis of these things, I urge you to stand firm in the Lord. (See additional comments in Chapter 4.)

## SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

Beware of false teacher who work evil and want to circumcise everybody! Christians are the new Israel, and this does not depend on human external markers. If you want to measure by the external things related to Judaism, I (Paul) come out very well: I am circumcised, genuine Israelite, tribe of Benjamin, Hebrew of the Hebrews, spotless concerning the law, Pharisee, I even persecuted the church. With regard to the righteousness of the Law, I had it made.

None of that matters to me anymore. The gain is now loss, the loss is now gain. What matters to me more than anything else is to know Christ, to be found in him, to be righteous with the righteousness of God by faith. The great goal of my life is to know Christ, the power of his resurrection, to share sufferings, to become like him in his death, and to ultimately arrive at the resurrection from the dead.

None of that is fully in place in my life, but I am trying to possess the things for which Christ possessed me. The ultimate goal is the prize for which he calls us upward. To reach the goal, I forget the past and reach forward. I hope you think the same things, or that God will make all of this clear to you so that we at least live up to God's standard considering the point to which we have progressed.

Imitate me, follow my example, because some have reverted to worldly things, appetites, shameful things, and they are enemies of Christ. With a heavenly citizenship, anticipating the Savior Jesus Christ, we think of the upward call and the ultimate resurrection and not the things of this world. One day Jesus will change this earthly body to a glorious body like his, using his power—the same power that makes him Lord and brings everything into subjection to him.

Stand in the Lord. How much I want to see you, you are indeed my joy and crown!

## READING AND UNDERSTANDING THE ORIGINAL MESSAGE

### Philippians 4

[Note: it is suggested that the student read the introductory materials on page 3-5 of this guide before beginning any individual preparatory reading and analysis.]

#### CONTENT

The paragraphing included in the Content section of each chapter are merely suggestions or guides. The student is encouraged to identify the paragraphs, and subsections within each paragraph, to assist in his or her own study. The division of the biblical text into paragraphs is usually fairly standard in modern translations.

#### Outline of Chapter

**4:1-9**, instructions about unity, joy, and attitudes

**4:10-20**, the gift received from the Philippians

**4:21-23**, final greetings

#### STUDY HELPS

**4:1.** Paul addresses the church affectionately. He longs (*epipotheo*) for them (cf. 1:8; 2:26) and describes them as his joy and crown (cf. 1 Thess. 2:19-20; 3:9). The word “crown” (*stephanos*) often meant a victor’s crown. He tells them to stand firm (*steko*, present active imperative, persevere, stand fast). Believers stand firm, God keeps believers standing (Jude 24). The seeming paradox is easily explained when one considers multiple causation. Both are essential, neither is sufficient by itself, even though causation studies may identify primary and secondary causes.

**4:2-9.** In v. 2, it appears that two church members at Philippi were experiencing interpersonal conflict. Paul admonishes them to think (*phroneo*) the same thing in the Lord (cf. 2:1-4; note the frequent use of this verb, in the context of having the same mind, same goals, same purpose, same attitude).

**4:3.** Some translations treat this term of address as a name (Syzygus), but it is probably a descriptive term meaning faithful co-worker (yoke-fellow). It is a masculine noun. This person, unidentified in the text although a number of speculations have been offered, was to help (*sullambano*, hold with) the two women who had shared with Paul in the work or struggle (*sunathleo*, cf. 1:27) of the gospel. It would appear that the help would be offered to overcome their differences or disagreements.

The construction of the verse suggests that the additional names are others who have also struggled along with Paul in the cause of the gospel: Clement and the rest of the fellow workers (*sunergos*), whose names are in the book of life. Clement was a common name, likely a reference to a person otherwise unknown in the New Testament. The suggestion that this Clement is the same as Clement of Rome who wrote some 35 years later does not have any evidence to back it.

**4:4-7.** Rejoicing is a major theme in Philippians. Rejoicing is not the result of one's circumstances, but is an attitude. Gentleness (*epieikes*, kindness, the willingness to yield) is a hallmark of the Christian. This admonition is more powerful when it is read in the context of 4:2-3. In the context of the preceding verses, the return of Jesus is a motivation for Christian living. If the phrase is understood as introducing the verses that follow, it would refer to the Lord's continuing presence so that Christians know peace and are not anxious.

**4:6-7.** Do not be anxious (*merimnao*, give thought) for anything. Prayers (*proseuche*), supplications (*deesis*), and thanksgiving (*eucharistia*) are to be used to make your requests known to God. The peace of God surpassing all understanding (*nous*) will guard (*phroureo*, protect) your hearts and your minds (*noema*, perceptions, thoughts) in Christ Jesus. The enemy of peace is worry. Worry is lessened when concerns are presented to God. Peace is both the absence of concern and the absence of conflict. The peace that God gives is beyond understanding, it will bring calm to the believer in a way that analyzing circumstances and seeking solutions never can. Note again Paul's phrase, "in Christ Jesus."

**4:8-9.** These verses emphasize the importance of what we think about. "Finally," is the same construction as in 3:1. Especially in the book of Philippians, what and how we think is supreme. The list is not long: think about things that are true (*alethes*), honorable (*semnos*), right (*dikaios*), pure (*hagnos*), lovely (*prospiles*, acceptable), of good report (*euphemos*). If there is excellence (*arete*) and praise (*epainos*), consider (*logizomai*) these things. This means to reason about them and determine what has value and priority.

True may be contrasted with falsehood, but also refers to a way of life. Honorable may be translated as dignified, but is translated as "grave" (august) with reference to church leaders in 1 Tim. 3:8, 11 and Tit. 2:2. Right is similar to just, meaning morally upright. Pure refers to moral purity. Lovely means likeable, bringing forth love, pleasing. Good report is well-spoken. The first class condition controls the last two items, assuming something as true. Excellence was a common word in Greek philosophy. Worthy of praise means approved.

**4:9.** Whatever you learned and received and heard and saw in me, practice (*prasso*, present active imperative) these things. The sequence is helpful: one learns mentally, one incorporates understandings into one's life by listening and watching. Christianity is not defined only by what one believes, it is also evidenced by what one does.

The God of peace will be with you, repeating the focus on peace in v. 7.

**4:10-20.** The last part of the letter (only the conclusion remains) again shows the personal nature of Paul's communication with the Philippians church. He explains how he is doing and expresses his gratitude for the help and support he has received from the believers in Philippi—financial, in prayers, from Epaphroditus, and in their emotional concern.

**4:10.** Paul echoes the theme of joy or rejoicing: I rejoice because you have showed your care for me again. *Anathallo* means to flourish or to flourish again. Revive is a possible translation but may leave the impression that the Philippians had been unconcerned for a time. This is not a negative observation. Paul's continuing explanation provides the context. You were concerned, but the time was not right (*akaireomai*, to be unseasonable, to lack opportunity). Paul uses the verb *phroneo* twice in this verse. A smoothed literal reading is something like this: "I rejoiced in the Lord greatly because now again you have put forth your care (*phroneo*) for me, indeed you were concerned (*phroneo*) before but lacked opportunity."

Paul is simply saying that he is aware of the reason they have not been able to assist him more recently as they had in the past.

**4:11-14.** These verses contain no translation difficulties. Paul's purpose is to reassure the Philippians that all is going well with Paul despite his circumstances. This does not mean that he has not experienced problems, but that he is able to overcome even in the midst of circumstances because of his attitude. The peace of God transcends our situation. Paul is not writing about the Philippians' gifts and concern because he needs anything (I do not speak from want). I have learned to be content (*autarkes*) in whatever circumstances.

**4:12.** This is an interesting sentence grammatically. Paul says "I know...I know...I have learned." "I know" is idiomatically translated from the construction, "I have seen." The idea is that one knows what one has seen or experienced firsthand.

I know how to be humbled (cf. 2:8, here the meaning is to have less than needed).

I know how to have abundance (*perisseuo*, to overflow, to have more than needed).

I have learned (*mueo*) to be satisfied (*chortazo*), to be hungry (*peinao*), to be overflowing (*perisseuo*), to have need (*hustereo*). *Mueo* can mean "to be initiated" but I prefer not to use the word "secret" in the translation. Paul's ability to know God's peace and to think like Jesus with an attitude of sacrifice and service was no secret to the Christians. If it was a secret, it was to the uninitiated and the unbelievers who could not understand the joy and sacrifice of the followers of Jesus. In this verse, Paul is expressing his trust in and dependence on God.

**4:13.** This verse is one of the most well-known verses in the book. "I am able to do all things through him who strengthens me." In the context, this refers to Christ Jesus. The word Christ appears in the King James Version but is not in the oldest Greek manuscripts. Strengthens (present tense) suggests a continual source of strength.

**4:14.** Literally, you have done well to share with me (*sugkoinoneo*) in my affliction (*thlipsis*, pressure, burdens, trouble, tribulation). The Philippians participated with Paul in the gospel (1:5). They were concerned about Paul and they had sent him financial help.

**4:15-20.** Paul expands his description of the relationship he and the Philippians had shared, followed by a doxology. Paul wants the Philippians to understand that the lack of communication between them was not because of his ingratitude. It appears that some time had passed since Paul and the Philippians had been in contact (2:25-30). For this reason, Paul briefly recounts their history of sharing together.

**4:15-16.** The Philippian church was the only church that had shared with Paul in the initial preaching of the gospel (in giving and receiving). They were aware of this fact. They had sent multiple gifts to Paul when he was in Thessalonica (in Acts 17). This does not contradict 2 Cor. 11:8-9. First, and sufficient by itself, the plural grammatical usage would be expected even if there were only one church that had helped him. Second, Paul is not describing the same time period of his ministry.

Paul established the church at Philippi when he arrived there in Acts 16. He left under pressured circumstances, and almost immediately this new church sent him money to assist with the continuation of the mission. How different than the expectation in much mission work today! Churches are established, and instead of quickly developing the ability to assist in the spread of the gospel, they become dependent and in need to receiving funds, often for

extended periods of time. This factor may explain how the gospel spread so rapidly in the first century and why the contemporary church so often struggles in its efforts to spread the gospel.

**4:17-18.** Paul makes clear that he is not writing in the hope of receiving more help, but is rather seeking fruit that abounds (*pleonazo*) to their account (*logos*). “Account” or “credit” seems the best translation, although other options such as cause, intent, and work also make sense in the context. Paul’s point is that he seeks only that they be blessed by God for the generosity they have showed toward him.

Paul has (*apecho*, I have, or I have received) all that he needs and abounds (*perisseuo*). He is fully supplied (*pleroo*) and has received what they sent by Epaphroditus. He describes their gift as a fragrant offering, acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.

**4:19-20.** Just as the Philippians have helped Paul with his needs, Paul is confident that God will supply their needs as well. This is not a promise that God will give Christians everything we want. Wants must be distinguished from needs. Paul had what he needed for his ministry because the Philippians had shared their abundance. When a Christian has abundance, it is a gift from God to be shared. There is no greater example of God’s willingness to meet our needs than the glorious spiritual riches he has given in Christ Jesus. The doxology of v. 20 is similar to those used by Paul in other books.

**4:21-23.** The final greetings of Paul to the Philippians are brief. This is the only use of the word “saint” in the singular in the New Testament. “Every saint” is distributive and is to be applied collectively; note also the plural usage in v. 22. Those with Paul send greetings, especially those from the household of Caesar (cf. 1:13, likely referring to various servants, slaves, and officials).

**4:23.** “Spirit” is used to refer to the entire human person; it is singular. “Your” is plural. A good paraphrase says “grace be with you all.”

## **SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER**

I urge you to resolve conflicts and work together for the gospel.

Rejoicing is the proper Christian attitude, with gentleness and encourage of others, even in times of disagreement. Rejoicing is possible because God takes care of our needs and gives us peace that goes beyond all that we could hope.

Let your thinking be focused on positive things, just as we have tried to give you an example. This will guarantee the presence of the God of peace in your lives.

Before I close, I want to say “thank you” again for the gifts you have sent. I rejoice that you have been able to help me again, not that you were not willing all along, but you did not have the opportunity. I do not mention this because I have any needs right now. I have experienced all kinds of things, both good and bad, and I have learned to be content in every situation. Whether satisfied or hungry, lacking or abounding, I can do everything that needs to be done through the one who strengthens me. I am grateful that you are among those who have given me strength in the gospel, especially in my times of trouble.

In fact, you were the only ones who helped me in the early days. You sent help several times when I was in Thessalonica. I do not need anything, only that you be credited with the fruit of your generosity. I have what I need, and I received what you sent by Epaphroditus. God is so good to supply everything we need. Glory to Him!

We share greetings. Greetings to everyone there; greetings from everyone here, including those from Caesar's household. Grace be with you all.