

An icon of St. Paul, the Apostle, depicted with a long, dark beard and hair, wearing a white and gold robe with a black and white checkered pattern. He is holding a book in his left hand. The background is a light beige color with a halo around his head. In the top left corner, there is a small circular emblem with the Greek letters 'ΠΙ' and 'Ω'. In the top right corner, there is Greek text: 'ΠΟΛΥ', 'ΚΑΡ', and 'ΠΩ'.

Philippians

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I. INTRODUCTION

The church of Philippi had been established by Paul (Act. 16),¹ but had soon to rely upon itself in the midst of a distasteful environment. The apostle had set out for new cities, and the newly founded church of Philippi was put to the test of existing on its own. Not only had the Philippians themselves come through this test, but they had clearly also understood that once the believers had achieved faith in the gospel themselves, they had the duty to do their best to promote this gospel.

Paul was well aware that the young church was still in need of supervision as he wrote the Epistle to the Philippians while in prison, probably between 57-63 A.D. from Ephesus or Rome (Phil. 1:12-14).² He frequently mentions his chains, and considers the possibility of his death. Thus Philippians is known as the "Captivity Epistle."³ Here Paul's soul, his striving, his desires, and above all his faith are especially evident, and this is what makes this epistle so valuable. It has been called "the most personal of all Paul's epistles."⁴ When we read Philippians, we should always remember the miserable position in which Paul found himself as a prisoner. The prisons of the ancient world, even modern day prisons under Chinese or Vietnamese Communist, were nothing but inhumane. One would expect in view of this to find Paul complaining about the guards, about the uncertainty of the future, and about the restrictions; in contrast, there is nothing of that sort. Paul understands his situation wholly on the basis of Christian faith, and does not merely surmount it by his faith, but makes it a glorious testimony of faith.⁵ We see the greatness of the slave of Christ, yet it is not a greatness remote from us, and unattainable, but within human compass, real, tangible, and capable of being imitated. Anyone who must suffer and bear trials for the sake of the faith can find a standard of faith in the suffering apostle.

Philippians is an epistle of great breadth; nevertheless, this paper shall attempt to analyze the purpose of the epistle based on the letter itself and secondary materials. This paper describes evidence from the letter that reveals the intention of the letter. It also examines Paul's strategies to persuade the Philippians of his thesis. Finally, this essay identifies the theological significance of the letter as well as the pastoral issues under the lens of Christian ethics.

II. PAUL'S PURPOSE IN THE EPISTLE TO THE PHILIPPIANS

Paul was not writing a literary essay or a work of systematic Christology, but was addressing a pastoral crisis. According to Professor McCrudden of Gonzaga University, Paul's main purpose in writing this letter was to address issues at Philippi: perhaps internal dissension among Christians (Phil. 1:27-2:4) in particular, Euodia and Syntyche (Phil. 4:2-3), opposition from outsiders (Phil. 1:28-29), and threats from Jewish-Christian missionaries (Phil. 3:1-4:1). Paul refers specifically to individuals with whom Paul himself was having to deal while he was in prison: they were "brethren" who preached the gospel with the impure motive of harming the apostle (Phil. 1:15-17). In opposition to those who preach from rivalry and personal ambition are those who preach Christ out of good will and love. They realize that Paul's imprisonment is "out of defense of the gospel," (Phil. 1:7, 16) and they

share with Paul not only his gospel ministry but the trials of his imprisonment. Implicit in the separation between "pretense" and "truth" in Phil. 1:18 is a warning against divisions in proclaiming the one gospel.⁶ Animosity against the Jews at Philippi may also account for the continuing hatred of the community directed at the infant Christian church. In response to the serious rift in the harmony of the community, Paul called Christians in Philippi to stand firm (Phil. 1:27; 2:16; 4:1). He assured the church of his ongoing interest and confidence as it shares with him in the grace of God given to his people undergoing trial (Phil.1:7). The consistent emphasis of Philippians is that the community there should strive for unity. Paul returns again and again to stress the dangers of disharmony and the necessity to strengthen the bonds of community. Nevertheless, Paul had grown particularly fond of the church of Philippi. The Philippians had been warmly responsive to Paul, more than once sending him gifts of money, and they had done so by the hands of Epaphroditus (Phil. 4:15-18).

The themes that dominate the epistle to the Philippians: First there is the theme of community which Paul consistently challenges his audience to make stronger. This insistence is reinforced by Paul's emphasis on universality: he loves the Philippians (Phil. 1:7-8; 4:21) and urges them to singleness of mind and heart (Phil. 1:27; 2:5; 4:2). The second pervasive theme of Philippians is that of joy emphasized with the frequent imperative "Rejoice" (Phil. 1:4, 18, 19,25; 2:2, 17,18,28,29; 4:1,4,10).⁷ Third and perhaps most important is the theological theme: the need for those who are in Christ to live a cruciform life in the face of internal and external challenges to the Gospel. The letter is a unified word of exhortation and example grounded in the Hymn of the Crucified Lord found in Phil. 2:6-11. "Faced with his own imprisonment, opposition from outside the church and tension within it, Paul composes a letter that relates the story of Christ narrated in Phil. 2:6-11 to the ongoing story of the Philippians community."⁸ The political language of the hymn in Phil. 2:6-11, (especially the word "Lord,") combined with additional political language at key points throughout the letter, suggests that Paul wants the story of Christ to shape an alternative state of people governed by a different law, the narrative pattern of Christ. The purpose of the letter according to Gorman is to aid the Philippians in living out their "citizenship" in the divine "colony" of heaven (Phil. 3:12) in a "manner worthy of the gospel story of Christ," found in Phil. 2:6-11.⁹ Paul seeks to encourage them faithfully to live the gospel, to sing the hymn, until the day of Christ (Phil. 1:6, 3:20). Thus, Philippians 2:6-11, according to scholars, is "the centerpiece of this letter. It provides the formal structure, material content, and even many of the key vocabulary items for the entire letter"¹⁰ as we shall examine in the study to follow.

a. ENCOURAGEMENT TO UNITY THROUGH JOY AND HUMILITY

The nature of the crisis at Philippi that moved Paul to his most eloquent appeal (Phil. 1:27; 2:14, 21; 3:2; 4:2) was the danger of division in the church due to dissension. Paul's purpose here is practical: to maintain the unity of the church in Philippi. He achieves this by pointing to the example of Jesus, who is the paradigm of the Christian life. Christ is the first and foremost

example of behavior that makes for unity. He appeals to the affective faculties of his audience, who are to pattern their lives on Christ. He appeals not only to the compassion and sympathy of his audience, but to their participation in those qualities of God and Christ (Phil. 2:2).¹¹

Joy, a major underlying theme of the letter, is used as an appeal. You want me to be happy? Well, this is how you can do it: "being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose" (Phil. 2:2). This means more than "to think"; it is, rather, to have an attitude or orientation. They are to have the same attitude, to be oriented toward one purpose. They can do this by "loving the same thing and being of the same psyche, personality or temperament, to be of one soul, and to be unanimous."¹² Paul indicated that he could be joyous even when imprisoned, even when persecuted. But as firm as his joy is already, and as full of affection for the Philippians as he is, he will only be satisfied when they have achieved greater solidarity.

Paul warns the Philippians about unworthy motives that they could have in the situation that is causing the problem of disharmony among them. First, he asks them to do nothing from "selfishness," previously seen in Phil. 1:17, which is terminology drawn from "conventional exhortations to civic harmony and usually implies malice of intention."¹³ The second negative term is "empty conceit," a much more colorful word than can be rendered in the single translation "conceit".¹⁴ The root of their problem is in their "petty deceits" and self-seeking (Phil. 2:3). The antidote is meekness; that is, recognition of one's dependence on God. This induces humility within one. In a competitive social world, where maintaining one's honor consists largely of keeping up appearances so as to be praised and esteemed by others, having an inflated but empty opinion of oneself, and presenting a false appearance speak to the compulsion to be thought well of regardless of whether there is substantive quality of character to match the appearance. Such a false shell with empty content is contrasted to "humility" that encourages the countercultural attitude of seeing oneself as insignificant. In an honor-based culture, the notion of humiliation goes completely against the grain of a culture in which status is everything.

There could hardly be a more difficult challenge to a successful Greek or Roman male who considers himself to be someone important whom others will regard this way.¹⁵ Paul's references to suffering in Phil. 1:29 could involve the experience of being put down.¹⁶ Here he asks them to take upon themselves voluntarily the kind of attitude that will give honor to others rather than to self. The same thought is continued in Phil. 2:4: They are to look toward what will serve the best interests of others rather than themselves. Paul's exhortation of humility is reinforced by the example of Jesus in the section that follows.

i. THE BEST EXAMPLE, THE HYMN: PHILIPPIANS 2:6-11

Scholars agree that more has been written about this passage than any other New Testament passage with the possible exception of the Johannine Prologue, and the discussion of it continues.¹⁷ Both stand out as unusual examples of early

Christology. It is important to establish the place of the passage within the letter as a whole and its internal structure. There are two points to be made about the place of the passage in context. First, most analyses of the structure of the letter see this passage as the first example given to the Philippians of how they are to conduct themselves in order to bring about unity. Second, it has a certain parallelism with Paul's example of himself in chapter 3.¹⁸ While the passage is frequently mined for its Christological treasure, which is probably not why Paul chose to put it in the letter according to scholars, its entire context is "parenetic, not doctrinal."¹⁹ Paul's intention here is to exhort the Philippians to unity through humility and submission, and Christ has exemplified that model.²⁰ Christ's humility provides the corrective to the Philippian church's internal problem of divisiveness caused at least in part by self-assertion. Paul's purpose is to persuade the Philippians that they must give up their own preferences and self-status for the sake of the other.

ii. PREEXISTENT CHRIST

"Preexistent" in this context means that a being had some kind of "extramortal existence before entering the realm of time and space and mortality."²¹ Phil 2:5-11 is often cited as a precursor of an early Christian preexistent Christ. In the context of Christology, the term "preexistence" means that Christ (Paul's reference), or the Word-Logos (John) existed before becoming human as Jesus of Nazareth. The topic of "Christology" is so enormous that such a discussion cannot be fully realized within the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, a brief summary is as follows: within the first four centuries of the church, theologians and worshipers tried out various understandings of how preexistence could be. At one extreme was the belief in the simple human birth of Jesus who was later taken over or adopted by the Logos at some point, perhaps at his baptism or resurrection. At the other end of the spectrum was the belief that Christ was so divine that he could not possibly be human, but presented only the appearance of humanity. Somewhere in the middle is what came to be orthodox belief as formulated in the Councils of Nicea (325 CE) and Chalcedon (451 CE) that: the eternal Word of God was fully divine, always existed, yet entered completely into humanity in the person of Jesus, thus "uniting full divinity and full humanity in the Incarnation."²² The traditional and still predominant view is that the hymn speaks of a heavenly being whom existed in the presence of God before the "emptying" in Phil. 2:7, which is usually interpreted as incarnation, or becoming human. Phil. 2:5 proposes the Philippians to have a certain attitude, orientation, or mind-set as in the appeal to unity in Phil. 2:2, and that is to imitate the attitude that Christ himself had.

The hymn begins with Phil. 2:6. Christ is described as being "in the form of God." The traditional interpretation of a preexistent Christ takes this to mean either an exalted heavenly figure very close to God or as full divinity. This interpretation is enhanced by the rest of Phil. 2:6: "did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped." Adam is contrast to Christ in the hymn: Adam rushed at equality with God; Christ did not. Christ is the pattern of what human beings (Adam) were intended to be: obedient to God, in whose image they are made.²³ Christ could have exploited his position, like Adam, by misusing it to seek his

own power, his own preference, and his own status or by remaining impassive in the face of his potential mission that would require grave inconvenience on his part. He could have just enjoyed his comfortable position and given no attention the duty to which he was called. Phil. 2:6 does not say that Christ was God in the same way as John 1:1 asserts of the Logos, but instead uses status language, "on the same level with God."²⁴ The emptying and taking the form of a slave is becoming human, which necessarily involves death. Even within the traditional interpretation, divinity in the absolute sense is probably not being ascribed to Christ, but rather, exaltation to the divine realm to share the status and qualities of God. This is a reminder for the Philippians of their own status.

In Phil. 2:7, the verb of emptying does not imply that Christ was emptied or humiliated by an outside agent, but that by his own choice he performed this action: he took on himself the form (in contrast to the form of God) of a slave, "being born in human likeness."²⁵ In contrast to the status and quality of God, he freely took on the far inferior status of humanity by becoming incarnate. To take the form of a slave means to become subject to the domination of forces both exterior and interior that deprive one of freedom. Paul elsewhere speaks of human existence without faith in Christ as slavery to the elemental powers (Gal 4:8-9; cf. Rom 8:15; also Col 2:18).²⁶ The one who was far superior to all these superhuman spirits became just as subject to them as everyone else, by an act of will, a choice of obedience.

The contrast between self-humbling and consequent exaltation by God (Phil. 2:9) is the key to the movement of the hymn. The impact of this self-humbling is that the one who was of equal status with God became obedient. Obedience is a relational concept: to whom was he obedient? The usual answer is God, which then carries the implication that God willed the death of Jesus. We are reminded of the Synoptic presentation of his agony in the garden before his arrest, in which he struggled with submission to God's will in spite of his own human resistance. But God is not named in this verse, and it is also possible that the necessary death of God's son is not part of the theology in this passage, but rather a general sense of obedience to human limitations, mortality being the greatest of these limitations. Romans 5:19 suggests that the obedience of Jesus serves as antidote to the disobedience of Adam and was thus redemptive. Hebrews 5:7-8 evokes the scene in Gethsemane and suggests that "Jesus learned obedience as a result of suffering, like a son tested by his father to develop strength of character in him."²⁷ The obedience of Jesus goes all the way to the point of death, the supreme paradox for a heavenly, immortal, preexistent being, and total nonsense for God. But the obedience and the death should not be separated: death is the content of the obedience. Phil. 2:8c makes this obedience even more explicit: it is death on a cross. For an immortal, preexistent being, death is bad enough. But for anyone, one of the worst kinds of death that could have been imagined in Greco-Roman antiquity was crucifixion. Used as a method of executing criminals, slaves, and enemy captives, the practice of crucifixion spread from Persians to Greeks to Romans. The keynote of this manner of execution is shame. The victim was publicly paraded through the streets,

inviting ridicule from bystanders, completely stripped, and fastened by ropes or nails in a very uncomfortable and completely defenseless posture in full view until death by asphyxiation and exposure, sometimes occurring several days later. Normally the bodies of the crucified were left exposed to be eaten by birds or animals, the remnants to be buried in a common pit, unless someone had the influence to obtain release of the body for private burial. The lack of dignified burial added to the humiliation and shame for the victim and his or her family. Death by crucifixion was considered to deprive the victim of all honors and submerge him or her in shame.²⁸ The reversal of self-status, self-preferences is pivotal to Paul's exhortation to the Philippians: the one of equal status with God dies, and dies a most shameful death.

Phil. 2:9 is the turning point of the narrative. A clear cause-effect relationship between the first and second parts is suggested. It is because Jesus voluntarily lowered himself that God raised him up. The downward movement is now sharply reversed into a steep climb. God not only exalted him, but also bestowed on him a new name that reigns supreme above all other names. All must confess that Jesus the Messiah is now Lord, that is, the one at God's right hand. From the perspective of preexistence and incarnation, what more could be added that this heavenly being did not have before? Perhaps the answer is "the triumph of the resurrected humanity of Christ, a new reality in divine existence."²⁹ The effect of this exaltation and gifting by God is expressed in Phil. 2:10-11. Christ's exaltation has also been drawn to parallels with Isa 52:13-53:12.³⁰ The poetic figure of all knees bending and all tongues acclaiming echoes Isa 45:23. So those alive, those deceased, and all superhuman spirits must acclaim the superiority of this great one who has been raised far above them by God. Even though the shamed crucified Jesus is now exalted Lord, thus being honored way beyond expectation, the ultimate honor belongs to God who pulled it off (Phil. 2:11c).³¹ God's honor above all is vindicated in the triumph of the exalted Christ.

Recent scholarship, however, argues that Christ is there, to all appearances, and being elevated to a new status that he did not have before does not fit smoothly with a paradigm of preexistence. Those who therefore look for a different explanation find it in discussions in the intertestamental period of the relationship between sin and death and new interpretations of the transgression of Adam as narrated in Gen 3, with Adam increasingly being seen as the typological human being. Wisdom 2:23-24 sums it up: "God created us for incorruption, and made us in the image of his own eternity, but through the devil's envy death entered the world, and those who belong to his company experience it." Paul picks up this interpretation in Rom 5:12-21: "sin came into the world through the sin of disobedience of one man, Adam, and death came as a result of sin, then spread throughout the human race because of the continued sin of all."³² The first human beings, in other words, were created immortal and were never intended to die. Death came only through their sin and continues to their descendants who reinforce the situation with their own sin. God's threat that the first man and woman would die if they ate of the forbidden tree (Gen 2:17; 3:3) was not a threat of retaliation but a prediction.³³ Joined to this background is Paul's statement in 2 Cor 5:21 that "for our

sake God made the one who knew no sin to be sin so that we might become righteousness - a puzzling passage.”³⁴ It speaks of the idea that Christ was sinless, a commonly accepted Christological affirmation. But what does it mean that he was made to be sin? These considerations and others like them lead to the alternate interpretation that the Philippian hymn is not about preexistence but about Christ's voluntary assumption of mortality from the moment of his birth.³⁵ A reading of the text through this lens produces some different conclusions. In Phil. 2:6, his being in the "form of God" and being of the same status as God do not refer to preexistence but to the immortality that was ours and his by right until the sin of Adam destroyed it (see Wis 2:23).³⁶ Then the emptying in Phil. 2:7a is not a transformation from divine to human status, and the form of a slave that he assumes is not humanity, an idea that goes against the grain of the doctrine of our creation in God's image. Rather, both refer to his free embrace of mortality, the effect of sin that he, the sinless one, did not inherit and did not have to accept. He took on the full apparatus of humanity including corruptibility (Phil. 2:7b-c), and his lowering of himself to death, even death on a cross (Phil. 2:8), spells out all the implications of that free acceptance of mortality that he took on for our sake. Then the exaltation (Phil. 2:9-11) is more easily explained: the humanly born Jesus Messiah, because of his obedience not in becoming human, but in embracing "the full catastrophe" of death, was raised up by God into the heavenly realm, seated at God's right hand (Ps. 110:1), where he was given all power and authority (Matt 28:18).³⁷

b. FINAL APPEAL TO UNITY (PHILIPPIANS 4:2-9)

Phil. 4:2-3 are the conclusion of the argument for unity that Paul has been making throughout the letter. Here he actually names the two people who are at the heart of the problem. In Phil. 4:2, Paul makes a deliberate and individual appeal in strong language to each of two women, Euodia and Syntyche. He repeats the verb "I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche" to agree in the Lord. Three questions must be pursued, the answers to all of which were so obvious to the Philippians that they did not need to be mentioned. First, what is the position of these two women in the community? Second, how important is their disagreement to Paul's concerns and the rest of the community? Third, what was the cause of their quarrel? First, scholars believe that Euodia and Syntyche occupied important positions in the community frequently allude to purported evidence for the high status of Macedonian women. According to scholars, these women could occupy the position of diakonos (Phil. 1:1).³⁸ We know that the first generations of Christians met largely in private houses under the patronage of the owner of the house (Rom 16:4-5; 1 Cor 16:19). Many would argue that these household patrons became the local pastoral leaders, eventually forming a council of leaders in a certain city or region. We also know that some of these house-church patrons were women, with no mention of their husbands (Acts 12:12; Col 4:15), probably widows with sufficient resources to keep their households running.³⁹ These two women are called "coworkers" by Paul, a title he sometimes gives to fellow itinerant missionaries (Phil. 2:25; 1 Cor 3:9; 1 Thess 3:2).⁴⁰ Considering the evidence for women leaders of house-churches, what best fits is that Euodia and Syntyche,

important enough to be called "coworkers" by Paul, were in fact episkopoi, that is, heads of local house-churches and thus strategic members of the church. Second, is their quarrel central to Paul's concern for unity, or does it come up here as an afterthought to his earlier appeals? Scholars are divided on this point,⁴¹ but the majority are in consensus that it seems the disagreement between Euodia and Syntyche is central to the problem in Philippi, not "just a case of two bickering women,"⁴² or even just another important topic, but the topic to which all appeals to unity are oriented. The third question is by far the most difficult according to scholars,⁴³ and one to which we will never know the answer: Why did they quarrel? What was the cause of their division? One line of interpretation, however, suggests that there was a contest for honor, credibility, and reputation, that the difficulty was simply a personality clash, a competition for power and authority. They had yet to learn the lesson that Paul was trying to teach in his examples of the emptying of Christ and of his own value system. This makes it into a personal, one-to-one conflict. If their dissension did divide the community, there must be some issues involved, and it must involve more than two people. Their influence has produced groups of followers in dissent with one another, and perhaps more than two groups. Most scholars agree that the two women are pointed out as belonging in the special category of Paul's coworkers.⁴⁴ This too suggests that theirs is not a petty quarrel with no impact on the community, but the central focus of disunity.

In Phil. 4:3 Paul asks a third party to mediate in the dispute between the two women. The way in which he does it suggests a rather polite but firm approach, unlikely therefore to refer to one of his trusted helpers whom he would assign with less polish. The identity of this third person has been much disputed, and is likely to remain so according to scholars.⁴⁵ Though, many are in consensus that Epaphroditus, the bearer of the letter (Phil. 2:25), is a likely candidate, since Paul speaks so highly of him (Phil. 2:25-30),⁴⁶ and that Paul is entrusting him not only with the letter but also with the task of making peace at Philippi.

It is significant to note that when there was disunity at Philippi, Paul mobilized the whole resources of the church to mend it. He thought no effort too great to maintain the peace of the church. "A quarrelling church is no church at all," for it is one from which Christ has been shut out. "No one can be at peace with God and at variance with others."⁴⁷

III. THEOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL SIGNIFICANCE

For a "hortatory letter of friendship," Philippians reveals an extraordinary amount of Pauline theology, and not just in the Hymn (Phil. 2:6-11) that has long held interest by many. The theological and ethical importance of the letter can be seen under four points:

First, Philippians raises the question of the relationship of behavior to identity. To whom do the audiences belong, and what is the appropriate response to acknowledgment of that identity? Imagery of citizenship is introduced at Phil. 1:27, so that Christians are depicted as residents in an alien land: "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a

Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:20). Their own heavenly citizenship requires of them certain distinctive behaviors,⁴⁸ just as would be expected for members of a minority cultural group who want to preserve their own heritage.

Second, Paul uses the imitation theme for formation to Christian life: "Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us" (Phil. 3:17). He proposes himself and others like him as examples of how to conduct oneself. In doing what seems to modern readers to be a horrendous approach to humility, Paul is simply following the way of the philosophical schools and their pattern of apprenticeship.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, it is a vivid reminder that discipleship is learned through observation, imitation, and interaction, and therefore that community has everything to do with gospel living.

Third, the role of joy in this letter is remarkable. It appears twelve times and sets its general tone.⁵⁰ Joy is found in the fact that nothing can render ineffective the preaching of Christ. Joy is always bound up with Paul's work as an apostle. One could call Philippians the gospel of joy at the heart of suffering. While Paul is imprisoned with an uncertain outcome, while he is burdened with his concern not only for problems in Philippi but in many other churches as well, he can reflect on the sufferings of Christ and on his own, but the sense of joy shines through. His prayer for them is with joy (Phil. 1:4). He rejoices that Christ is preached in every circumstance, joy has an ecclesiastical basis, even from bad motives: "What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in this I rejoice" (Phil. 1:18). His survival in this ordeal will give them joy (Phil. 1:25), while their harmony would give him joy (Phil. 2:2). Even if he is to be "poured out as a drink offering," both he and they should rejoice (Phil. 2:17). They will rejoice to see Epaphroditus back with them once again (Phil. 2:28-29). The concrete form of joy is fellowship "in the Lord;" they are his "joy and crown" (Phil. 4:1), whose continued care for him brings him joy (Phil. 4:10). The presence of joy is persistent, more noticeably than in any other Pauline letter.⁵¹ Paul's joy is not merely anticipatory nor is it dependent on pleasant circumstances as Philippians so clearly demonstrates. Joy is usually experienced in the present and nothing can make it void. Linked to hope (Phil 1:19-20), joy enables the believer to bear suffering and even to face the possibility of martyrdom. Joy becomes conviction for the believer, providing the basis for the absolute optimism.

Above everything else, joy is the distinctive mark of the believer in Christ Jesus; and in this letter it comes most often as an imperative. Believers are to "rejoice in the Lord always" (Phil. 4:4), because joy has not to do with one's circumstances but with one's relationship with the Lord; and they are to do so both on their own, as it were, and together with others (Phil. 2:18). Whatever else, life in Christ is a life of joy. To miss this reality is to miss Philippians altogether; and to miss Philippians at this point is to miss out on an essential quality of Christian life.

Fourth, the Christological poem, the so-called "Philippian hymn" of Phil. 2:6-11, is one of the most important pieces of very early reflection on the role and destiny of Christ.⁵² Its interpretation stands as proof that very sophisticated Christological

development was happening within the first Christian generation. Philippians is a jewel of the Pauline writing. It reveals Paul at his best and provides us with an exquisite glimpse of Christian life in the first generation of its existence in the Eastern Mediterranean world.⁵³ The hymn stands in the church's Scripture not only to define lordship and discipleship, but also as a judgment upon the kind of triumphalism that abandons the path of service and obedience.

IV. CONCLUSION

The problems of the first century church were not so very different from our days. Much as we would wish to think that with our developed twentieth first century mentality we have eluded them, problems of morality, divisions along the lines of social, political, liturgical, doctrinal values, crises of leadership and fellowship, of people enslaving other people, of persons' refusing responsibility for creating a more human world continue to plague us. Inspired words from a first century prophet, the apostle Paul, who called himself a "servant of Jesus Christ" (Phil 1:1) and a "prisoner for the Lord" (Philemon 1:1) can help us. Paul is a model for the pastoral care many today long for. He is a friend who experienced much of the same anguish we feel when we do not feel free. Paul's epistles are documents of contemporary value because they appeal to the kind of corporate witness that is so needed in today's highly compartmentalized world. They are challenging documents because they urge our communities as well as those to whom they were originally addressed to face the issues that divide us, to act with an upright moral conscience, to resist divisiveness and to listen more attentively to the Spirit that calls us to unity and to greater generosity. Paul's epistle can still be read with value by every age, in every church and every day.

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VI. END NOTES

¹ Joachim Gnilka, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, (NY: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1981), 3.

² Mary Ann Getty, R.S.M., *Philippians & Philemon, in the New Testament Message*, ed. Wilfrid Harrington, O.P. And Donald Senior, C.P., (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1980), xi.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Gnilka, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, 4.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Getty, *Philippians & Philemon, in the New Testament Message*, ed. Harrington, and Senior, 18.

⁷ Ibid., 5.

⁸ Michael J. Gorman, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord*, (Grand Rapids: William Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 419.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Osiek, *Abingdon New Testament Commentaries – Philippians and Philemon*, 52.

¹² Ibid., 53.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 54.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 55.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 58.

²² Ibid.

²³ Bonnie B. Thurston & Judith M. Ryan, *Philippians & Philemon*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2005), 87.

²⁴ Osiek, *Abingdon New Testament Commentaries – Philippians and Philemon*, 60.

²⁵ Ibid., 61.

²⁶ Ibid., 62.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 63.

²⁹ Ibid., 64.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 63.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., 65.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., 67.

³⁸ Ibid., 110.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., 114.

⁴² Ibid., 111.

⁴³ Ibid., 114.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ William Barclay, *The New Daily Study Bible- The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, (Westminster: John Knox Press, 2003), 87.

⁴⁸ Osiek, *Abingdon New Testament Commentaries – Philippians and Philemon*, 31.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., 62.

⁵³ Ibid., 32.