



Philippians - Chapter Two

Summary of Chapter Two

Paul's opening call for church unity is described from the perspective of practical application, with the focus being on Christ and offered as a service to others. It almost describes the unity of a well maintained and highly tuned piece of machinery; that is, the church working as a healthy body. How can this work? Paul sets that out in poetic form describing the person and character of Jesus whose love conquers all and is the perfect pattern.

Paul returns to his present concern – obedience expressed through a common mindset, for the sake of Christ and the Gospel – by applying what he has just written to the Philippians' situation. Paul reminds them they are called to serve as guiding lights in a dark world. He also reminds them of his own ministry among them, which leads to the theme of his suffering, their faith, and his and their mutual joy.

Paul was hoping to send Timothy to them just as soon as his trial before Nero had been concluded and his own future known. He extols the virtues and faithfulness of Timothy as a man to be emulated. In the meantime, Epaphroditus, himself a Philippian, will bring the letter to them and will remain with them. When Timothy does come, he will subsequently return to Paul with news of them, bringing joy to Paul who, when released, will come himself.

III. Philippians 2:1-3:1a - Exhortation to Humble Service

Paul calls the Philippians to unite in love and humility (vv.1-4), as exemplified by Christ's humble service (vv.5-11). They are to live as lights in the world (vv.12-18), just like Christ's faithful servants Timothy (vv.19-24) and Epaphroditus (vv.25-30).

III.a Philippians 2:1-11 - Imitating Christ's Humility

Paul opens the section with a beautifully scripted call to church unity by calling on the church to reflect on what the Christian life means and how it should naturally manifest itself with regard to their relationships with others.

He then writes what has been called ‘the hymn of Christ’, a poem that describes what God gave up by coming in human form in order to suffer in the way that he did, with the final ignominy of the Cross, before being raised from death and exalted to his rightful place with the Father.

III.a.i Philippians 2:1-4 - Encouragement to unity in the faith and service to one another

The Philippians are encouraged to live out their lives in Christ and in the Spirit by living in Gospel-driven unity.

¹ If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, ² make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

Philippians 2:1-2

Paul does not doubt that encouragement, consolation in love, sharing in the Spirit, compassion, and sympathy are realities in Christ and are present in the congregation at Philippi. He uses a conditional sentence if to provoke the Philippians so that they will reflect on whether these qualities are evident in their lives. The Philippian believers must make sure they continue to progress in the absolutely critical area of love for one another.

Sharing in the Spirit again uses the Greek *koinonia*, often translated as fellowship, but clearly not intended here to refer to fellowship with the Spirit but the common bond that believers have with one another because of the indwelling of the Spirit.

The basis of Paul’s appeal is first of all the Philippians’ own relationship to the triune God, which he and they share together, and second, his and their relationship to each other, brought about by their common relationship and allegiance to the Trinity.

Make my joy complete. Leaders like Paul felt genuine joy through seeing and hearing of the positive response other people make to their calling to faith. John expressed this in a similar fashion: <<*We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life – this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us – we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete*>> (1 John 1:1-4), and: <<*I have no greater joy than this, to hear that my children are walking in the truth*>> (3 John 4); as did John the Baptist: <<*He who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice. For this reason my joy has been fulfilled*>> (John 3:29).

Having the same love suggests that Paul is first of all urging them to have the same love for one another that they already have experienced in God's love for them; and in theirs and his for each other.

As Paul emphasises, they must be in full accord and of one mind. This does not imply a drab intellectual uniformity; rather, the Philippians are to use their diverse spiritual gifts, some of which are recorded in 1 Corinthians 12, in an agreeable, cooperative spirit, with a focus on the glory of God. The key word in the appeal, and indeed a key word in the letter, is the verb *phroneo*, which has to do with the set of one's mind, how one is overall disposed toward something, as Paul writes elsewhere more descriptively: <<*For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law – indeed it cannot*>> (Romans 8:5-7), followed by: <<*I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect*>> (Romans 12:1-2).

One must be careful when speaking of church unity for people can be unified in many ways and for many causes, including those that most people would find abhorrent. What Paul always refers to is unity in the person of Jesus Christ as he reflects the nature and love of the Creator God.

³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.

Philippians 2:3-4

There is always a temptation to be like Paul's opponents in 1:17 and operate in a spirit of selfish ambition, looking to advance one's own agenda, as Paul had warned against before: <<*Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another*>> (Galatians 5:26). Such conceit, literally 'vainglory', is countered by regarding others as better than yourselves.

The overriding attribute here is humility, a uniquely Christian virtue which, like the message of a crucified Messiah, stands in utter contradiction to the values of the Greco-Roman world that generally considered humility not as a virtue but as a shortcoming or weakness. Such humility is to be genuine as one stands as the creature in the presence of one's creator. It is a virtue that God always rewards: <<*In the same way, you who are younger must accept the authority of the elders. And all of you must clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings with one another, for 'God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble'*>> (1 Peter 5:5).

Paul realises that everyone naturally looks out for his or her own interests. The key is to take that same level of concern and apply it also to the interests of

others, as Paul indicates elsewhere: <<*Do not seek your own advantage, but that of others*>> (1 Corinthians 10:24). It even rises above that to caring more for others than for self, demonstrating that, in Christ, individual responsibility should focus on the community. Such radical love is rare, so Paul now proceeds to show its supreme reality in the life, death and exaltation of Christ.

III.a.ii Philippians 2:5-11 - Christ's example of humble service

This passage is often referred to as the 'hymn of Christ'. Paul depicts Christ's example of service in a stirring poem that traces his pre-existence, incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension to the right hand of God. Paul wrote this magnificent theology to encourage the Philippians to consider other people's interests first (v.4).

Paul presents the essential matters of Christ's story, which he narrates in such exalted fashion, full of passion and poetry that serves as the centrepiece of this letter and is, in many ways, the centrepiece of the entire NT.

Jesus is the paradigm of genuine spiritual progress: not a self-aggrandising struggle for supremacy, but a deep love for God and neighbour shown in deeds of service. Verses 6-11 have some clear indications of poetic structure, leading some to believe that this is a pre-Pauline hymn adapted by Paul. It is just as likely, however, that Paul composed the hymn for this setting.

In view of the myriad theological questions that arise in these verses, it is critical to keep two things in mind:

1. These verses are written not to spur Christians to theological debate but to encourage greater humility and love.
2. The summary of Christ's life and ministry found here is not unique: the same themes are evident throughout the NT.

⁵ Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

Philippians 2:5

The believer's mind needs to reflect on the proper model if life is to be lived for God. There is some debate as to whether this mindset is something Christians receive by virtue of being united to Christ, which is in you that was in Christ Jesus, or whether it is to be based on the model of Christ, i.e. 'which is also in Christ Jesus'. The Greek has no verb; either 'is' or 'was' has to be supplied. In light of the consistent theme of behaviour modelling in this letter, Jesus, Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus are held out as examples; many interpreters have adopted the latter meaning. Both ideas are theologically true. In either case, the central theme of vv.1-5 is the same: that the Philippian church would be of one mind (v.2), united by love (v.2), and humility (v.3), while looking out for the interests of others (v.4).

⁶ who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,

7 but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
8 he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death –
even death on a cross.

Philippians 2:6-8

Prior to the incarnation, Christ was in the form of God, Greek *morphē theou*. Despite the assertions of some scholars to the contrary, this most naturally refers to the ‘pre-existence’ of Christ – he, the eternal Son, was there with the Father before he was born in Bethlehem: <<*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God*>> (John 1:1), and: <<*So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed*>> (John 17:5).

Form here means the true and exact nature of something, possessing all the characteristics and qualities of something. Therefore having the form of God is roughly equivalent to having equality with God, Greek *isa theō*, and it is directly contrasted with having the form of a slave. The Son of God is, always has been and always will be God.

Form could also be a reference to Christ being the ultimate image of God, <<*the exact imprint of God’s very being*>> (Hebrews 1:3b). It might also refer to the fact that he is the visible expression of God’s invisible glory: <<*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation*>> (Colossians 1:15).

Remarkably, Christ did not imagine that having equality with God, which he already possessed, should lead him to hold onto his privileges at all costs. It was not something to be grasped, to be kept and exploited for his own benefit or advantage. Instead, he had a mindset of service: <<*For Christ did not please himself*>> (Romans 15:3a). In humility, he counted the interests of others as far more significant than his own (vv.3-4).

Paul makes it clear that, as the eternal Son of God, Christ is the one who became human in and as Jesus of Nazareth, regarding his equality with God as committing him to the course he took: of becoming human, of becoming Israel’s anointed representative, and of dying under the weight of the world’s evil, bearing its guilt and shame, according to the will of God: <<*Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done*>> (Luke 22:42). Looking at Christ on the Cross provides the true understanding of who God is and defines his self-giving love.

Emptied himself has occasioned much controversy. Greek *kenōō* can mean ‘empty’, ‘pour out’, or metaphorically ‘give up status and privilege’. Does this mean that Christ temporarily relinquished his divine attributes during his earthly

ministry? This theory of Christ's *kenosis* or 'self-emptying' is not in accord with the context of Philippians or with early Christian theology. Therefore, Paul is not saying that Christ became less than God or gave up some divine attributes; he is not even commenting directly on the question of whether Jesus was fully omnipotent or omniscient during his time on earth. Nor is he saying that Christ ever gave up being in the form of God. Rather, Paul is stressing that Christ, who had all the privileges that were rightly his as king of the universe, gave them up to become an ordinary Jewish baby bound for the Cross. In that sense he poured himself out and became nothing for the sole benefit of others. This is not giving up divinity, this is what it means to be truly divine!

Christ emptied himself by taking the form of a slave, and being born in human likeness, which are roughly equivalent phrases. While he had every right to stay comfortably where he was, in a position of power, his love drove him to a position of weakness for the sake of sinful mankind: <<*For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich*>> (2 Corinthians 8:9); thus his 'emptying' consisted of his becoming human, not of his giving up any part of his true deity.

It is remarkable enough that God the Son would take on human form, Greek *schēma*, 'outward appearance, form, or shape', a different term from *morphē*, used in vv.6-7 for form of God and form of a slave, and thus enter into all the vicissitudes of a broken world. However, Jesus went much further, becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a Cross: <<*For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous*>> (Romans 5:19). Crucifixion was not simply a convenient way of executing prisoners. It was the ultimate indignity, a public statement by Rome that the crucified one was beyond contempt. The excruciating physical pain was magnified by the degradation and humiliation. No other form of death, no matter how prolonged or physically agonising, could match crucifixion as an absolute destruction of the person; refer to the comments made on Matthew 27:35 and Luke 23:33. It was the ultimate counterpoint to the divine majesty of the pre-existent Christ, and thus was the ultimate expression of Christ's obedience to the Father.

It was Paul's belief, in common with the rest of the early church, that in becoming human Christ did not cease to be divine. The word *homoïoma*, i.e. likeness, allows for the ambiguity, emphasising that Jesus is similar to humanity in some respects and dissimilar in others. The similarity lies in his full humanity; in his incarnation he was 'like' in the sense of 'the same as'. The dissimilarity lies with his never ceasing to be 'equal with God'; while 'like' humanity in being fully identified with them, he was not 'human' only. He was God living out a truly human life, all of which is safeguarded by this expression.

⁹ Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus

every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
11 and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:9-11

Therefore. It was precisely Jesus' humiliation that became the grounds for his exaltation. By humbling himself on the Cross out of love, he demonstrated that he truly shared the divine nature of God, who is love (1 John 4:8). For this reason, i.e. therefore, God raised him to life and highly exalted him, entrusting him with the rule of the cosmos and giving him the name that is above every name. This name is not specified here, but many think it refers to the Hebrew name *Yahweh*, God's personal name, which in the Septuagint is regularly translated as Greek *Kyrios* or Lord, the name specified in v.11. In any case, Paul means that the eternal Son of God received a status and authority: <<*And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me'*>> (Matthew 28:18), and the comments made on Acts 2:33, that had not been his before he became incarnate as both God and man. Jesus being given this name is a sign that he exercises his messianic authority in the name of *Yahweh*.

While Christ now bears the divine name *Yahweh* or Lord, he is still worshiped with his human name Jesus, since it was in the flesh that he most clearly displayed his divine glory to the world. This astounding union of Jesus' divine and human natures is reinforced by the allusion to Isaiah 45:23 in the words every knee should bend, and every tongue should confess, which in Isaiah refer exclusively to *Yahweh*: <<*Only in the Lord, it shall be said of me, are righteousness and strength; all who were incensed against him shall come to him and be ashamed*>> (Isaiah 45:24). Jesus' progression through incarnation to death must be seen, not as something that required him to cease being equal to God for a while, but as the perfect self-expression of the true God. The fact that these words can now be applied to God's messianic agent, Jesus Christ is Lord, shows that Jesus is and always was fully divine.

The phrase in heaven and on earth and under the earth refers to three distinct groups of beings. Those in heaven are the angelic beings who serve God; those on earth refer to all, or at least all those who believe in him, and who will be alive at Christ's Second Coming; those under the earth refer to the dead, probably those who have died in Christ but possibly others who have served God, especially those whose lives preceded Christ on earth.

There are many who believe that the whole of creation, whether those alive at his Second Coming, or those raised up from death, will finally acknowledge Christ as Lord. However, there are indications from Scripture, especially those for whom the Second Death awaits as recorded in Revelation 2:11, 20:6, 20:14 and 21:8. It is impossible for anyone to know the true reality of the final time of judgement. That is why it is so important to accept Jesus as Lord now.

However, the worship of Jesus as Lord is not the final word of the hymn. Jesus' exaltation also results in the glory of God the Father. This identical pattern is found in 1 Corinthians 15:23-28: God gives Jesus messianic dominion over all creation, and everyone will one day rightly give praise to him as their Lord. But when his Kingdom reaches its fullness, Jesus does not keep the glory for himself. Instead: <<*When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all*>> (1 Corinthians 15:28). Even in his exaltation, Jesus remains the model of loving service to God who never shares his glory with anyone else, yet here shares it with Jesus Christ, his Son: <<*Then from the cloud came a voice that said, 'This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!'*>> (Luke 9:35).

When reading this section, one must not get caught up in the grandeur of the poem. Paul's reason is singular: to focus on Christ himself, and thus to point to him as the ultimate model of the self-sacrificing love to which he is calling the Philippians and, by association, the global church.

One commentator concludes: 'In the final analysis, this passage stands at the heart of Paul's understanding of God. Christ serves as pattern, to be sure; but he does so as the One who most truly expresses God's nature. That this is what God is like is the underlying Pauline point; and since God is in the process of re-creating us in his image, this becomes the heart of the present appeal. Thus we are not called upon simply to 'imitate God' by what we do but to have his very mind, the mind of Christ, developed in us, so that we too bear God's image in our attitudes and relationships within the Christian community – and beyond'.

III.b Philippians 2:12-18 - Shining as Lights in the World

With the breathtaking portrayal of Christ before them (vv.5-11), Paul exhorts the Philippians to demonstrate the same faith and obedience in their everyday lives.

¹² Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³ for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Philippians 2:12-13

The Philippians have obeyed in the past and should continue to do so as they work out their salvation with fear and trembling. They cannot be content with past glories but need to demonstrate their faith day by day as they nurture their relationship with God. But while God's justice is a cause for sober living, i.e. fear and trembling, it is not as though Paul wants the Philippians to be anxious that they can never be good enough to merit God's favour. Rather, it is God's love and enabling grace that will see them through: it is God who is at work in you. They can rejoice in God's empowering presence even as they work hard at living responsible Christian lives.

While v.12 may seem to suggest salvation by works, it is clear that Paul rejects any such teaching (3:2-11). In v.12 Paul means salvation in terms of progressively coming to experience all of the aspects and blessings of salvation. The Philippians'

continued obedience is an inherent part of working out their salvation in this sense; they are to contrast their own responsibility for their spiritual welfare with the responsibility that Paul would take if he were with them. He is not, and may never be again. Therefore, they are to be obedient to him and much more so to God in Paul's absence than if he were present. As v.13 demonstrates, these works are the result of God's work within his people, just as he was within his apostles: <<*for he who worked through Peter making him an apostle to the circumcised also worked through me in sending me to the Gentiles*>> (Galatians 2:8).

Both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Even the desire to will, i.e. to do what is good, comes from God; but he also works in the believer to generate actual choices to do good, so that the desires result in actions, as it did for the Israelites released from captivity: <<*The heads of the families of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites – everyone whose spirit God had stirred – got ready to go up and rebuild the house of the Lord in Jerusalem*>> (Ezra 1:5). What is also clear from this passage is that God offers salvation to his people because it pleases him to do so.

¹⁴ Do all things without murmuring and arguing, ¹⁵ so that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world.

Philippians 2:14-15

Do all things without murmuring and arguing. The coming of Jesus as the Christ initiated the new exodus taking those who believe in him out of their bondage to sin and into a new world of love and service to God. However, the Israelites in the original exodus soon started complaining about almost everything despite God's grace and mercy upon them; refer to Exodus Chapter 16, Numbers Chapter 14 and 16-17. Paul makes it clear that the Christians in Philippi, and indeed everywhere else, are not to emulate the failing of their spiritual predecessors.

Paul continues the theme of 'working out' one's salvation (vv.12-13). The Philippians should shine like stars amid a crooked and perverse generation. Paul's choice of words again recalls the wilderness generation of Israel, who in Deuteronomy 32:5 are described by these very words: <<*yet his degenerate children have dealt falsely with him, a perverse and crooked generation*>>, and whose spiritual progress was thwarted by grumbling and disputing; refer also to 1 Corinthians 10:1-12.

Shine like stars probably alludes to Daniel's eschatological vision: <<*Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever*>> (Daniel 12:2-3). Those who express their faith by living in this way will be raised to eternal life, to Paul's great joy.

¹⁶ It is by your holding fast to the word of life that I can boast on the day of Christ that I did not run in vain or labour in vain.

Philippians 2:16

The Philippians' obedience to the word of life is not merely a matter of private concern. As an apostle and fellow sharer in the Gospel, Paul's own labour would be in vain if they failed to hold fast until the day of Christ, refer to Philippians 1:6, 1 Thessalonians 5:2-11, 2 Peter 3:10-13, and Revelation 20:11-21:8, and thus proved not to be genuine believers.

Holding fast means both believing God's Word and following it. Since the Greek *epechō* can mean either hold fast, 'hold out to' or 'offer', some think that Paul may have in mind 'holding forth', i.e. proclaiming the word of life.

¹⁷ But even if I am being poured out as a libation over the sacrifice and the offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you — ¹⁸ and in the same way you also must be glad and rejoice with me.

Philippians 2:17-18

I am being poured out as a libation. Paul compares himself to a drink offering, just as he does in his final letter: <<*As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come*>> (2 Timothy 4:6), which was written in the knowledge that his execution was approaching. However, death is not necessarily what Paul has in view here; instead he is expressing the whole clause as a metaphor for the present suffering that both he and they are experiencing at the hands of the empire. This type of offering, familiar in both the OT and Greco-Roman culture, involved pouring out wine, either onto the ground or, as here, onto an altar along with an animal or grain sacrifice: <<*Its drink-offering shall be one-fourth of a hin for each lamb; in the sanctuary you shall pour out a drink-offering of strong drink to the Lord*>> (Numbers 28:7). It was a vivid illustration of a life poured out for God's service. The Philippians too are a sacrificial offering; they are to emulate Paul's joyful service to God.

Paul frequently expressed his expectation that Christ would return at any moment and that those who believed in him should be ready for that momentous occasion. He also realises that he might not be alive on that day, yet his joy is in its anticipation, whether he lives or dies.

I am glad and rejoice with all of you. Despite his trials and tribulations, and an uncertain future, Paul remains upbeat in his service to Christ for he has learned to place his hope, faith and trust in God. His words are reminiscent of the conclusion of a prophet's lament: <<*Though the fig tree does not blossom, and no fruit is on the vines; though the produce of the olive fails and the fields yield no food; though the flock is cut off from the fold and there is no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will exult in the God of my salvation*>> (Habakkuk 3:17-18). Paul is so confident in the promises of God that he goes on to invite the Philippians to be glad and rejoice with me.

III.c Philippians 2:19-3:1a - Timothy and Epaphroditus

Paul holds up these two men as role models to be emulated in their service to Christ and his church. Both the length and the language of these two commendations suggest that these men also serve as exemplary paradigms for the two central concerns that emerged in 1:27–2:4: Timothy models serving the Gospel by caring for the needs of others; Epaphroditus models the suffering that accompanies serving the Gospel.

Timothy had joined Paul during his second missionary journey and had been a faithful companion through some very tough times. Epaphroditus, a Philippian, is only ever recorded in this letter but it is clear that he was also held in high regard, making the perilous journey from Philippi to Rome in order to bring the Philippians' financial gift to Paul.

III.c.i Philippians 2:19-24 - Timothy as an example of a service-centred life

Paul's desire to send his protégé Timothy highlights the very personal nature of early church life. Timothy emulates Christ in that he is concerned for the Philippians' welfare; he does not look out for his own interests, but for those of Christ.

However, Paul does not want to send Timothy until the result of his impending trial is known, which he expects will result in his freedom. Thus, Timothy would come back to him with news of Philippi, and Paul planned to visit them as well.

¹⁹ I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I may be cheered by news of you.

Philippians 2:19

In all circumstances Paul's hope is placed in the Lord as he plans to send his trusted friend and companion Timothy to them, as he had done before: <<*So he sent two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia, while he himself stayed for some time longer in Asia*>> (Acts 19:22), with the expectation that he will return with a positive report concerning the wellbeing and unity of the church. This will be news that would cheer Paul, even during his own imprisonment.

This is an interesting reversal of Paul's usual reasons for sending a representative to a church. Normally, this would be intended for the benefit of the church and for building them up. Here, it is so that Paul can receive news from the church that he hopes will bring cheer to him; especially, he would hope to hear that this letter had had the desired effect.

²⁰ I have no one like him who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare.

Philippians 2:20

I have no one like him. Paul had many trusted companions who had proved to be faithful servants of Christ and wholeheartedly supportive of Paul in his darkest

times. Yet Timothy had a special place in his heart: <<*To Timothy, my loyal child in the faith*>> (1 Timothy 1:2a).

Who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. This statement shows that Timothy loved the church with the same passion that Paul did. This is the central reason why Paul writes this glowing commendation of Timothy who, after all, was well known in Philippi. He wants to assure them that Timothy has the same heart for them that Paul himself held.

²¹ All of them are seeking their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.

Philippians 2:21

All of them. Paul had observed so many others that were only seeking their own interests. This probably includes those who <<*proclaim Christ from envy and rivalry*>> (1:15a), but show no consideration for the outcome. They make no sacrifice and have no patience to nurture or give of themselves to others.

Although Paul does not name the people he has in mind, they are clearly those in Rome and not Philippi, and are not those whom he would consider to be his faithful co-workers. The type of person he has in mind may well have been those like the hapless Demas: <<*Do your best to come to me soon, for Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica*>> (2 Timothy 4:9-10a).

²² But Timothy's worth you know, how like a son with a father he has served with me in the work of the gospel.

Philippians 2:22

But Timothy's worth you know. Timothy had served in Philippi on at least two occasions with Paul and at least once more as well. Therefore, he was well known to them and had clearly conducted himself in a worthy manner.

How like a son with a father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. Again, Paul's affection for Timothy and his trust in him is clear, as it was when he sent him to Corinth: <<*For this reason I sent you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ Jesus, as I teach them everywhere in every church*>> (1 Corinthians 4:17)

²³ I hope therefore to send him as soon as I see how things go with me;

²⁴ and I trust in the Lord that I will also come soon.

Philippians 2:23-24

As soon as I see how things go with me. Building on the assumption that the letter was written during Paul's first Roman imprisonment in AD60-62, then the trial before Nero was approaching and Paul wanted to wait to see the outcome before sending Timothy to Philippi, thus he could update them on Paul's situation.

I trust in the Lord that I will also come soon. Paul knew that he could easily be found guilty and be executed, or at least spend a long time in prison. Yet he trusted in Christ to deliver him to complete the service he had been called to: <<*For this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher, and for this reason I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know the one in whom I have put my trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that day what I have entrusted to him*>> (2 Timothy 1:11-12).

III.c.ii Philippians 2:25-3:1a - Epaphroditus as another example of service

Epaphroditus, who was himself from Philippi, is another example of genuine Christian love. He has been longing for the Philippians just as Paul longs for them (1:8 and 4:1), and has been eager to let them know that God has spared him from his severe illness. Paul wanted Epaphroditus to travel to Philippi ahead of Timothy so that they would be comforted by his return and they would also receive this letter that much sooner.

²⁵ Still, I think it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus – my brother and co-worker and fellow-soldier, your messenger and minister to my need; ²⁶ for he has been longing for all of you, and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill.

Philippians 2:25-26

I think it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus. In the meantime, Paul thought it appropriate to send Epaphroditus to them. Paul's description of him shows the high regard he held of this man of faith.

My brother and co-worker and fellow-soldier is very clever phrasing by Paul to describe this man. The first was a common term for a fellow believer and the second one indicated he worked alongside Paul in his work. However, the use of a military term not only alludes to the work as being like that of military service: <<*Share in suffering like a good soldier of Christ Jesus*>> (2 Timothy 2:3), but, given the close ties in Philippi with the military, Paul portrays Epaphroditus as if he were a wounded soldier returning from battle and deserving of the welcome that such a one would normally expect.

Your messenger and minister to my need. Epaphroditus was a Philippian and he had made the journey to bring their financial support and news to Paul during his time of imprisonment.

You heard that he was ill. Despite the distances involved, news travelled around the empire on a regular basis. The danger of journeys by land and sea in those days did not prevent people from being relatively mobile and communications were reasonably reliable, although delivery took quite a time. However, they had clearly not heard of the outcome of his illness and would have been distressed, probably because his unexplained illness would normally have resulted in his death as Paul goes on to explain.

²⁷ He was indeed so ill that he nearly died. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, so that I would not have one sorrow after another.

Philippians 2:27

Epaphroditus nearly died from the undisclosed illness. Even though to die and be with Christ is far better (1:21), God showed mercy on Epaphroditus in sparing his life. Christians can be assured that a fellow Christian truly is in Christ's presence upon his or her death, refer to the comments on 1:23; even so, it is proper on such occasions to feel one sorrow after another, as Paul would have done had he lost his faithful companion in that way.

God had mercy on him seems to indicate more than just an acknowledgement that Epaphroditus recovered from his illness. Paul and his team would naturally have been praying for their friend and they viewed this as God's direct intervention as a result.

These verses give a true insight of Paul's character and indeed the Christian life generally. Although Paul frequently writes of his joy and hope, he also lets his readers know that being a Christian does not place one in a protective bubble. The Christian life is about facing all the things that human existence can produce and being honest about its results. Humans are designed to be emotional. It is OK to fear, to grieve, and to be hurt, as well as laugh and be joyful, especially in the midst of sorrow. Paul indicates that he would have been grieved to have lost his friend to this illness. Jesus too had shown his emotions at his friends' grief when they thought they had lost Lazarus. As a result: <<*Jesus began to weep*>> (John 11:35).

Note too that Paul simply would not understand the denial of grief that some express today when they rejoice over the death of a loved one. No, death is still an enemy of humanity and of God: <<*For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death*>> (1 Corinthians 15:25-26); and grief is the normal response; but it is sorrow expressed in the context of hope: <<*But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope*>> (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

²⁸ I am the more eager to send him, therefore, in order that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious.

Philippians 2:28

I am the more eager to send him. In order to relieve them of their anxiety over his illness as quickly as possible, Paul wanted Epaphroditus to return to them as soon as possible in order to provide them with the opportunity to rejoice.

That I may be less anxious. The knowledge of the Philippians' joy at being reunited with Epaphroditus would help to lift some of the anxiety that Paul felt over his incarceration that was preventing him from continuing in the work he was called to. His main cause for concern, however, was the continued wellbeing of

the church groups he had apostolic oversight of: <<*And, besides other things, I am under daily pressure because of my anxiety for all the churches*>> (2 Corinthians 11:28).

²⁹ Welcome him then in the Lord with all joy, and honour such people,
³⁰ because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for those services that you could not give me.

Philippians 2:29-30

Welcome him then in the Lord with all joy indicates that they should understand the simple blessings of life, such as being reunited with a friend and knowing that he is well again.

Honour such people is both a commendation for Epaphroditus and also serves to indicate that he was not travelling alone. Indeed, it was unusual for people to travel alone for to travel in a small group offered both companionship and physical protection from the many dangers such journeys could pose.

The Christ-likeness of Epaphroditus is highlighted by Paul's careful use of words. Having said that Christ was <<*obedient to the point of death*>>, Greek *mechri thanatou* (v.8), Paul now says that Epaphroditus <<*nearly died*>> (v.27) and that he came close to death, also with Greek *mechri thanatou*. This seems to allude that either his illness came about as a result of his journey or perhaps he was taken ill en route but continued on anyway, making his condition worse almost to the point of death.

For the work of Christ. Because Paul was imprisoned for the sake of the Gospel and Epaphroditus had travelled to Rome with the Philippian offering, then he was engaged in such work.

Epaphroditus had faced this peril on behalf of the Philippians, who had desired to support Paul in ways other than their financial offering but had not been able to do so, i.e. to make up for those services that you could not give me, until Epaphroditus made it possible: <<*I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me, but had no opportunity to show it*>> (Philippians 4:10), and: <<*I have been paid in full and have more than enough; I am fully satisfied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God*>> (Philippians 4:18).

The first clause from Chapter 3 is included here to complete the section.

^{3:1a} Finally, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord.

Philippians 3:1a

Rejoice in the Lord. Paul will pick up the theme of rejoicing again in Chapter Four, but first he must deal with the Judaisers.