EXEGESIS—PHILIPPIANS 3:7-16

Laura Beall

Biblical Exegesis – BIBL 627

Dr. James Thompson

May 3, 2011

In his letter to the church at Philippi, Paul writes on the theme of Christ-like self-emptying for the sake of appropriately aligned relationships with both God and fellow believers. Paul maintains this theme in Philippians 3:7-16, where he describes his own experience of—and continued desire for—maturation into relationship with Christ.

**Historical Context**

 The city of Philippi began as the Thracian village of Krenides, in what is now northern Greece. In 356 BCE, Philip II of Macedonia formally established the city so he could capitalize on the gold and silver mines of nearby Mount Pangaion.[[1]](#footnote-1) In addition to bringing Philip financial prosperity, the city was strategically important as a point of influence on the land route to the Dardanelles and Bosphorus straits. The Roman Empire wrested control of the city from the Macedonians in 168 BCE, however, and later in 42 BCE, Octavian and Mark Antony fought and defeated Brutus and Cassius, the assassins of Julius Caesar, there. After this victory, Octavian settled veterans and other displaced Roman citizens there, designating Philippi a colony city.[[2]](#footnote-2)

By the 1st century CE, Philippi was suffering economically. Mining had exhausted the nearby mineral resources. The *Via Egnatia*, a thoroughfare that brought business and travelers from many cultures and religions into Philippi, had fallen into disrepair.[[3]](#footnote-3) However, despite the decline in economic fortunes for the people of Philippi, the city endured as an agricultural center of grain and wine.[[4]](#footnote-4)

The 10,000 or so inhabitants of Philippi were considerably diverse, largely due to the city’s multifaceted history and its geographical placement as a gateway to Asia. Thracians, Greeks, and Romans mingled their heritages, languages, and religions. While the majority of citizens were Greek,[[5]](#footnote-5) due to the city’s colony status, Latin prevailed as the official and most widely used language.[[6]](#footnote-6) Religiously, Philippi was syncretistic, with its denizens worshipping Greek and Oriental gods and goddesses (often known by their Latin counterparts’ names) alongside the emperor and other heroes.[[7]](#footnote-7) Any Jewish presence in Philippi was miniscule enough that it did not meet the *minyan* quorum of ten men necessary for official services.[[8]](#footnote-8)

When the apostle Paul arrived with his companions in Philippi on his second missionary journey (c. 49-52 CE), they converted a small group—likely most of them Gentiles—to the Christian faith.[[9]](#footnote-9) Soon, though, after an incident leading to their flogging and imprisonment, city magistrates asked Paul and Silas to leave.[[10]](#footnote-10) They complied and continued on their journey, leaving behind a fledgling group of believers, perhaps shepherded by Luke and some others of their initial entourage.[[11]](#footnote-11) Years later, in the early 60s CE,[[12]](#footnote-12) Paul wrote to the Philippians, addressing the church he had established there.[[13]](#footnote-13) References throughout Philippians indicate that Paul wrote the letter while in prison, most likely in Rome.[[14]](#footnote-14)

**Literary Context and Movement**

 Paul wrote the letter to the Philippians in a form that mirrors Hellenistic “family letters.”[[15]](#footnote-15) He uses this family letter format as the basic framework for his message, taking advantage of Epaphroditus’ journey back to Philippi and writing to the church “family” there to both reassure them of his welfare and ask for news about their circumstances. However, while the letter generally carries the *form* of a family letter, its *purposes* are more complex than the typical family letter, and so Paul adjusts the form as necessary to meet his needs.

More specifically, Paul maintains the theme of kenosis from beginning to end, illustrating it in various ways and indicating its necessity for his audience. After the superscription and introduction of 1:1-11, an autobiographical section in 1:12-26 narrates Paul’s current experience of self-emptying for the sake of God. The verses that follow (1:27-30) inaugurate his advocacy for the Philippians to also embrace their “privilege” of suffering and their call to self-emptying.

Next, 2:1-11 contains Paul’s thematic climaxes: a pointed exhortation to enact kenosis, followed by the greatest of illustrations possible—the self-emptying and voluntary humility of Christ and God’s subsequent exaltation of him.[[16]](#footnote-16) This is followed by vss.12-18, which supply a brief transition, and then vss.19-30, which serve to exhibit the attitudes of Timothy and Epaphroditus, who act as exemplars of self-emptying to the Philippians.

Paul then uses the theme of kenosis to proclaim two different approaches to relationship with God.[[17]](#footnote-17) First, he demonstrates in 3:1-6 what kenosis *is not* (“anti-kenosis,” if you will). In this way of life, “dogs”[[18]](#footnote-18) act evilly, arrogantly putting confidence in their own works of the flesh. Paul indicates that he himself would be greatly benefitted if this way of life was appropriate for Christians. However, he then shows in 3:7-16 that the Christian norm is instead submission to the humble, kenotic way of Christ, all for the purpose of becoming like Christ and obtaining the resurrection. Paul indicates both why and how one takes on this posture of self-giving.

Bracketed with the inclusio of an “imitate me” motif, 3:17—4:9 serves as Paul’s final exhortation to the Philippians to live a life that exemplifies self-emptying, sometimes with generalized admonitions and sometimes with piercing specificity (as in 4:2-3). Throughout the letter as a whole but especially in this pericope (4:4-7), Paul emphasizes that the Philippians should rejoice even in their self-emptying and suffering, for God will sustain them as they strive in this way for the prize of the resurrection.

Finally, before closing in the typical form (4:21-23), Paul concludes his letter with the suggestion that the Philippians already *know* how to participate in self-emptying because they have already *done so*![[19]](#footnote-19) He affirms their kenotic actions toward him, noting in v.17 his particular thankfulness that they will reap the benefit of those deeds, since God will satisfy their needs much as God exalted the sacrificially self-emptying Christ (v.19, see 2:9-11).

**Detailed Analysis**

The pericope I have chosen (3:7-16) is Paul’s theological narrative of kenosis in his own life. Paul illustrates to the Philippians both why and how Christians should live kenotically, using himself as an example. However, this section is not autobiographical in the same sense that 1:12-26 is. Rather than recounting concrete *actions* of kenosis (i.e., his imprisonment for the sake of the gospel), here Paul displays his *attitude* of self-emptying, speaking of it in the context of resurrection and relationship with Christ. Having already briefly discussed what self-emptying trust in God does *not* look like (3:1-6), Paul explicitly states his own rejection of that arrogant, self-centered way of confidence in the flesh.

In vss.7-8 he uses the terminology of accounting—profit (κέρδος) and loss (ζημία)—and employs these terms in antithetic parallelism for a “reevaluation of values.”[[20]](#footnote-20) Things he once would have ignorantly considered advantageous (vss.4-6), he now sees as harmful[[21]](#footnote-21) because they prevented him from experiencing the “surpassing value” (ὑπερέχoν) of knowing Christ. According to Paul, nothing else equals personal acquaintance (γνῶσις) with Christ,[[22]](#footnote-22) though that relationship entails the “loss of all things” he once thought propitious (v.8).

Echoes of earlier passages from Philippians are already present in vss.7-8. Paul used κέρδος, so significant here, in 1:21, stating that “to live is Christ and to die is gain.” His audience would likely pick up on this reference, remembering his earlier insistence that true gain or profit in the Christian life was to be in the presence of God, even if that meant death (in Paul’s case, even death at the hands of persecutors). Paul also used ὑπερέχoν in its participial form in 2:3, when he instructed the Philippians to consider one another as “surpassing yourselves.” And his repeated use of ἡγέομαι (once in v.7, twice in v.8) hearkens back to 2:6, where Christ “did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself…”[[23]](#footnote-23) The use of these terms here (especially as echoes of Paul’s exhortative and illustrative climaxes in 2:1-11) shows Paul’s major emphases: imitating Christ and valuing relationship with both fellow believers and Christ, both to the point of denying oneself in kenosis.

Paul continues to discuss his appropriately realigned beliefs, shifting the object of reference for κέρδος so that gain is now a good thing if it is obtained through self-emptying into relationship with Christ.[[24]](#footnote-24) He indicates in vss.8b-9a that to gain Christ and to be found in him is worth the loss of all things, things which Paul now rightly considers rubbish (σκύβαλον). To translate σκύβαλον as “rubbish,” however, is overly polite. This term, used only here in all of the New Testament, often refers specifically to human excrement, or—perhaps still being a bit too genteel—“crap.”[[25]](#footnote-25) The crassness of Paul’s language here illustrates the extreme nature of the contrast he is making. His desire for relationship with Christ has completely overturned his values, and he is eager to empty himself of everything he once considered valuable in order to gain it.

 In v.9, Paul negates an implied accusation that he is no different than “the dogs” of vss.2-6, who assume they can attain righteousness through their own actions; he clearly indicates that his kenotic actions do not in any way earn him a relationship with Christ. The issue of agency is central to his relationship with Christ. He wants us to know who is truly at work here. First, Paul says that he desires to “be found” in Christ. He uses the passive form of εὑρίσκω, signifying that *Christ* is the one doing the finding. After thus setting the tone for the remainder of the verse, he continues by drawing a contrast between two sources of righteousness (δικαιοσύνη)—the self through the law, and God through faith. He makes the definitive statement that his righteousness before Christ is not of his own merit.[[26]](#footnote-26) The first phrase he uses—“a righteousness of my own that comes from the law”—parallels his previous comments in 3:4-6, where in v.6 he specifically mentions his own impeccable “righteousness under the law” as an attribute he would have once considered to his profit. Paul is again rejecting his former system of evaluation based upon outward merit (or lack thereof). He adopts instead “righteousness from God based on faith.” It is this faith-based, nearly passive righteousness (whether it comes through faith *in Christ* or the faith *of Christ*)[[27]](#footnote-27) that allows Paul to be found in and gain Christ. Far from *earning* him a position in relationship to Christ, Paul’s self-emptying instead simply *opens up the opportunity* for that relationship to develop.

 Having settled this, in vss.10-11 Paul then returns to and expands upon the motif that being in relationship with Christ is the intent of the Christian faith. Using parallel objects of the infinitive “to know” (γνῶναι), Paul indicates his desire (though this word is only implied in the Greek text) to know three particular things: *Christ* himself, the *power* of Christ’s resurrection, and the *fellowship* of Christ’s sufferings. Within his discussion of this overarching desire, Paul employs a chiastic sequence of thought. He wants to: (A) know the power of Christ’s resurrection, (B) know the fellowship of Christ’s suffering, (B’) participate by being conformed to Christ’s death, and (A’) participate in the resurrection from the dead that Christ inaugurated. Within this framework, he shows his audience that truly being acquainted with Christ requires kenotic action on the part of both Christ (i.e., his death and resurrection) and Christ’s followers (i.e., their association with his suffering and death). This series of self-emptying actions that Paul describes is demanding but worthwhile, for it leads, in the end, to his joining with Christ in the resurrection from the dead. Just as was the case for Christ himself in 2:6-11, Paul’s kenosis is followed by his exaltation.

 The exact words Paul chooses here (vss.10-11) are significant for his purposes. First, while “power” (δύναμις) is the actual object of the infitive γνῶναι, and is therefore what Paul is intent on knowing, by further defining it as the power of resurrection (ἀνάστασις) he indicates his particular interest in Christ’s exaltation (and, indirectly, his self-emptying).[[28]](#footnote-28) Next, his use of a highly positive term (κοινωνία, or “fellowship”) in the context of suffering shows that Paul somehow sees value in joining in the suffering of Christ. Suffering—particularly *Christ’s* kenotic suffering—is perhaps even what initiates Paul into faithful, trusting fellowship with Christ.[[29]](#footnote-29) What is more, Paul even sees value in being conformed (συμμορφιζόμενος)[[30]](#footnote-30) to the death (θάνατος) of Christ, something he has already noted his willingness to do.[[31]](#footnote-31) And finally, having gained relationship with Christ by being conformed to his death, Paul’s hope is to attain (καταντάω) the resurrection (ἐξανάστασις) from the dead (νεκρός). His shift in vocabulary here—rather than continuing with the terms κερδαίνω, ἀνάστασις, and θάνατος—is meaningful. While κερδαίνω has a literal financial meaning of “gain,” καταντάω has more the sense of reaching a destination through experience, which emphasizes the relational aspect of Paul’s hope of resurrection.[[32]](#footnote-32) And the addition of the prefix ἐξ to ἀνάστασις indicates more than just physical resurrection from death.[[33]](#footnote-33) This is resurrection from a *life of deadness*, as is confirmed with the subsequent use of νεκρός (instead of the nearby and easily accessible θάνατος), which carries the additional sense of figurative death because of sin.[[34]](#footnote-34) Again, Paul is making it quite clear to the Philippians that the only life worth living, the kind of life they will participate in as Christians (thereby receiving the resurrection), is the life of self-emptying for the sake of Christ and one another.

 Having described his desire and attempts to kenotically reorient his life around relationship with Christ in vss.7-11, Paul then proceeds in vss.12-16 to explain to the Philippians his method of and progress in doing so, all the while encouraging them in their similar efforts. He begins with reassurances to his likely overwhelmed audience and reminds them that though he has not yet succeeded in attaining his goal, because he is not depending on his own righteousness (implied from v.9), he still belongs to Christ (v.12). Referring to the Philippians with an endearing family term (ἀδελφόι), he tells them of his own struggle to achieve his goal (vss.13-14), speaks of them as being mature (τέλειος, v.15), and reminds them that they too have already attained something (φθάνω, v.16).

 This set of verses begins with Paul again suggesting (v.12-13a) that his own attempts at participating in the life of God and the resurrection were based upon Christ’s initial action (i.e., Christ’s kenosis, as in 2:6-8). Paul has not yet “obtained” (λαμβάνω) everything he just described as ideal in vss.7-11.[[35]](#footnote-35) He has not yet “been brought to the goal” or “been made perfect” (τελειόω, in its perfect passive form), but he “presses on” (διώκω). His use of διώκω here, with its typical connotation of persecution, may be an allusive play on words, reminding the Philippians that joining in Christ’s persecution and suffering, just spoken of in depth in v.10, is a large portion of why and how they “press on.” And his main reason to press on is the desire to “attain” (καταλαμβάνω)[[36]](#footnote-36) “that for which I have also been attained by Christ Jesus.” In this latter clause, Paul uses καταλαμβάνω again, this time in the aorist passive, indicating both that the action is already completed and that *Christ’s* action was what made the entire process possible. There is no doubt here that—even given his failings—Paul belongs to Christ, and there is no doubt that that relationship is only accessible because of Christ’s initiative.

 In fact, Paul’s one contribution to the development of the relationship (v.13b-14a), is to “press on” (again, διώκω) by “forgetting” (ἐπιλανθανόμενος) what is behind him and “straining” (ἐπεκτεινόμενος) toward what he knows is ahead. Though the terms do not come from the same category of financial language, in the contrast of things “behind” (ὀπίσω) and things “ahead” (ἔμπροσθεν), it is easy for readers to recall the earlier contrasting language of profit and loss in vss.7-8, thereby remembering that the things *behind* are those things Paul says he once would have considered gain but now knows to be loss. Therefore, Paul puts out of his mind the things behind him—empties himself of those things, if you will—and exerts himself to the utmost to reach the goal ahead.

This goal (σκοπός), this thing ahead, is v.14b’s “prize (βραβεῖον) of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.” Paul employs some athletic imagery here, with both σκοπός and βραβεῖον.[[37]](#footnote-37) The former, interpreted in this passage as “goal,” can also mean “mark,” as in an archer’s target.[[38]](#footnote-38) And the latter term, sometimes translated as “reward” in other literary works, is primarily used to refer to a literal prize given to an athlete who wins a race, though it can figuratively refer to moral or spiritual performance.[[39]](#footnote-39) Leaving aside the metaphor, Paul then describes the prize more fully as an “upward calling” (ἄνω κλῆσις). The play on words that this alternate translation offers more directly reflects the context of 3:7-16, in which the resurrection (“rising up”) from the dead, obtained by knowing Christ, is explicitly noted as Paul’s goal.[[40]](#footnote-40) This divine invitation to resurrected life with God through Christ is what motivates Paul to humble and empty himself before God.

In vss.15-16, Paul closes this theological narrative on kenosis with a few final exhortations—the only ones of the entire pericope. First, using the hortatory subjunctive (φρονῶμεν), he indicates his desire that both he and the Philippians might take on this mature (τέλειος) way of thinking that he has just described.[[41]](#footnote-41) If they have a different understanding about something, God will reveal (ἀποκαλύπτω) that to them too.[[42]](#footnote-42) His final words here, in v.16, are both reassuring and exhortative. Though the Philippians perhaps have not yet reached the desired level of maturity and completeness (τέλειος), Paul emphasizes with the word πλὴν (“nevertheless”) that their limitation is not what is important.[[43]](#footnote-43) Using the emphatic imperative (στοιχεῖν), Paul calls the Philippians to fully live into what they *do* have accessible: submission to the kenotic way of Christ for the sake of gaining relationship with Christ and attaining resurrection from the dead.

**Paraphrase**

 In Philippians 3:7-16, Paul says to his audience, “Because I’ve come to realize that the most important thing in life is being in relationship with Jesus, my old system of values has undergone a complete transformation. The things I once thought valuable, I now understand to be toxic. I want only to know Jesus and be in his presence—not through my own merit, but because of what he’s already done for me! It’s my desire to join him in the resurrection from death (both physical and spiritual), and that means I’ll also join in his suffering and death to self. Now, it’s not like I’ve already accomplished all this. No, but I strive for it with all my might, leaving behind my former life and living into the new one in which Jesus has already made me his own. Yes, and I would like all of you to join me in this. And don’t worry—God will help you! In the meantime, let’s just keep living the self-sacrificial, Christ-centered lives we know we’re supposed to be living, and God’s overwhelming grace will get us to the goal of what God’s got planned for us.”

**Bibliography**

Alexander, Loveday. “Hellenistic Letter-Forms and the Structure of Philippians.” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 37 (1989) 87-101.

Beare, F.W. *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Philippians*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959.

Bockmuehl, Markus. *The Epistle to the Philippians*. Black’s New Testament Commentary Series 11. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998.

Danker, Frederick W. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature.* 3d ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.

Deismann, Adolf. *Light from the Ancient East: The New Testament Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts of the Graeco-Roman World*. Translated by Lionel R. M. Strachan. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1965.

DeSilva, David A. “No Confidence in the Flesh: The Meaning and Function of Philippians 3:2-21.” *Trinity Journal* 15NS (1994), 27-54.

Hartog, Paul. *Polycarp and the New Testament: The Occasion, Rhetoric, Theme, and Unity of the Epistle to the Philippians and its Allusions to New Testament Literature*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002.

Hawthorne, Gerald F. *Word Biblical Commentary: Philippians*. Vol. 43. Edited by Ralph P. Martin. Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 1994.

Hooker, Morna D. “The Letter to the Philippians.” In *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. XI. Nashville: Abingdon, 2000.

Johnson, Luke Timothy. *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999.

O’Brien, Peter T. *The Epistle to the Philippians: A Commentary on the Greek Text.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991.

Perriman, Andrew. “The Pattern of Christ’s Sufferings: Colossians 1:24 and Philippians 3:10-11.” *Tyndale Bulletin* 42, no. 1 (1991), 62-79.

Renn, Stephen D. (ed.). *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words: Word Studies for Key English Bible Words*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005.

Silva, Moisés. *Philippians*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992.

**Other Resources Consulted**

Peterson, Jeffrey. “Philippians.” Pages 965-971 in *The Transforming Word*. Edited by Mark W. Hamilton. Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 2009.

Reumann, John. *Philippians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. The Anchor Yale Bible Series. New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2008.

Sellew, Philip. “*Laodiceans* and the Philippians Fragments Hypothesis.” *Harvard Theological Review* 87, no. 1 (1994), 17-28.

1. These gold mines yielded Philip an income of around a thousand talents yearly. F.W. Beare, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Philippians* (New York: Harper & Brothers,1959), 6. Converted to current USD, that is over 1 billion yearly. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Philippi’s residents, therefore, were Romans citizens and received the numerous privileges that accompanied that status, including government by Roman law and the rights of purchase, ownership, property transfer, and lawsuits. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Paul Hartog, *Polycarp and the New Testament: The Occasion, Rhetoric, Theme, and Unity of the Epistle to the Philippians and its Allusions to New Testament Literature* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 54. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Morna D. Hooker, “The Letter to the Philippians,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. XI (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 469-470. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Hooker, “Letter,” 471. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Markus Bockmuehl, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, Black’s New Testament Commentary Series 11 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 5,notes that in the 3rd century Greek culture and language had regained their primary status in Philippi, leading him to think that the transition to Latin may not have been more than “an official, culturally fashionable veneer.” [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Peter T. O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 5, and Hartog, *Polycarp*, 55-56. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. According to Acts 16:13-14, only an informal place of prayer existed, populated by women (some of whom—like Lydia, Paul’s first convert in Philippi—were not Jews but merely “God-fearers”). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Acts 16:6-40 contains the story of the beginning of the church in Philippi, including the vision that originally led Paul and his companions there, the conversion of Lydia and her household, and Paul and Silas’s imprisonment. As Philippi was the first major European city in which Paul preached the gospel, we should not forget that the background of its inhabitants was drastically different from that of the Semitic peoples Paul had previously dealt with. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. O’Brien, *Philippians*, 7, points out that this episode with the slave girl played on the anti-Jewish [and, consequently, anti-Christian] prejudices of the citizens of Philippi. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. O’Brien, *Philippians*, 8, notes the change from first-person to third-person pronouns in the descriptions of the missionaries’ activities in Acts 17:1. Then, in 20:6, Luke says that “we sailed from Philippi…and in five days we joined [Paul and his companions],” thereupon resuming his use of first-person pronouns. O’Brien also speculates that Luke may be the “true yokefellow” or “loyal companion” of Phil 4:3. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. I have taken my dating here from Hooker, “Letter,” 475, and from the conclusion (see below) that Paul wrote from prison in Rome. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Given consistencies with other letters attributed to Paul and external testaments such as Polycarp’s writings and the oldest extant lists of the New Testament’s contents, scholars generally accept Pauline authorship of Philippians. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. See Phil 1:7, 13, and 14, among others. Most scholars argue for either Rome or Ephesus as the site of Paul’s imprisonment when he wrote Philippians. I have chosen Rome largely due to the implied seriousness of the situation (Phil 1:20-24) and the lack of an apparent “trump card” of appeal to Caesar (O’Brien, *Philippians*, 19). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. This statement is meant to indicate three things. First, in the terms of Deissmann, the communication is a *letter* rather than an *epistle*. See Adolf Deissmann*, Light from the Ancient East: The New Testament Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts of the Graeco-Roman World* (trans. Lionel R. M. Strachan, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1965), 228-230. Second, I have been convinced by Loveday Alexander’s proposition that the letter generally follows the style of Hellenistic family letters (rather than, as scholars often argue, friendship letters). See Loveday Alexander, “Hellenistic Letter-Forms and the Structure of Philippians,” *JSNT* 37 (1989).” And finally, I view Philippians as a single composition rather than a heavily redacted series of letters. This conclusion largely leaves aside external evidence (e.g., Polycarp’s *Letter to the Philippians*) that can easily be interpreted in numerous contrasting ways. It is instead based upon Alexander’s formal analysis and the internal textual evidence of cohesive thought and themes within the letter. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 375, puts Christ’s kenosis and exaltation in terms of “possession,” saying that Jesus “*dispossesses* all” to the point of “being *dispossessed* himself” therefore coming to “*possess*, in the end, all things as Lord.” This terminology appeals to me, not only because of its play on words but also because Paul uses “possessive” terms of financial gain and loss in ch.3. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Many have regarded chps. 3 and 4 as separate fragmentary letters, inexpertly placed in the context of the “real” Philippians, citing the transition of tone in 3:2 as one of the strongest evidences of this detachment. But if my analysis of Philippians is correct, these passages specifically serve to develop the theme of kenosis, as is detailed further above. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Found only here in all of Pauline literature, κύων can be used to describe those who are ceremonially unclean, but it also has the underlying sense of moral perversity, making it appropriate for a discussion of those who scorn the life of moral goodness indicated by kenotic action. Stephen D. Renn, (ed.), *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words: Word Studies for Key English Bible Words* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005), 295. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Again, far from being the awkwardly placed thank you note many believe it to be, 4:10-20 is skillfully and strategically situated to be a culminating commendation of (and exhortation to continue in) self-emptying behavior—like what the Philippians have just done in sending Epaphroditus to Paul with gifts. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. I have taken this insight regarding parallelism from David A. DeSilva, “No Confidence in the Flesh: The Meaning and Function of Philippians 3:2-21,” *Trinity Journal* 15NS (1994), 39. The phrase “reevaluation of values” also comes from the same page of this article, where it is borrowed from O’Brien, *Philippians*, 382. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. According to BDAG, ζημία indicates damage that results in hardship or suffering. See Frederick W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature,* 3d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 428. I will hereafter refer to this work only as BDAG. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. BDAG 203 indicates personal, relational knowledge for γνῶσις, citing similar sources that refer to acquaintance with Augustus and Tiberius. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Moisés Silva, *Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), makes this connection (p.178) but also notes (p.179) the shift of tense from perfect to present in the uses of ἡγέομαι from v.7 to v.8, interpreting this as a further indication that Paul does not in any way regret his changed view of what is valuable. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Andrew Perriman, “The Pattern of Christ’s Sufferings: Colossians 1:24 and Philippians 3:10-11,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 42, no. 1 (1991), 72. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. See BDAG 932. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Silva, *Philippians*, 185-187, points out a chiasm in v.9’s two descriptions of righteousness. The chiasm emphasizes both the source and method of righteousness. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. The debate rages about which translation of the difficult phrase διὰ πίστεως Χριστοῦ is more accurate. The commonality between the two translations is a basis of *faith* for righteousness, which leaves aside any procuring of favor from God based upon human works. For that reason, either translation will serve my point here. However, given this pericope’s overwhelming emphasis on human participation in activities of God’s initiative and agency (e.g., 10, 12b, 15b), my instinct is to prefer the translation “faith of Christ,” which indicates that it is Christ’s faithfulness in kenotic sacrifice (as in 2:6-11) that allows for our righteousness and our participation in the life of God. It is not so much about *having faith in Christ* as it is about *being in relationship with a* *faithful Christ*. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. 1 Corinthians 15:43. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Again, given the theme of human participation in activities of *God’s* agency and power, it would be less appropriate to read into this verse any sense of *Paul* meriting righteousness or the resurrection and more accurate to see it rather as his joining (by his self-emptying, Christ-honoring actions) in the fellowship that is formed because of *Christ’s* kenotic actions. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. This term is not used as a participle anywhere else in the New Testament. However, Paul uses it in noun form (συμμόρφος) twice. In Rom 8:29, after having just briefly discussed “the redemption of our bodies” (8:23) and just before noting the death, resurrection and exaltation of Christ (8:32-34), Paul writes of the resurrection and of being “conformed to the image of [God’s] Son in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family.” In Phil 3:21, Paul also speaks of “being conformed to the body of [Christ’s] glory” when the reigning Christ returns. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Paul’s term of choice here for “death,” θάνατος, is the commonplace Greek word for a physical death, but its very utterance in the context of Philippians would cause the audience to recall other examples of those who were willing to confront and be conformed to death for the sake of others—not only Christ (2:6-8), but Epaphroditus (2:27-30) and Paul himself (1:20). Additionally, this might possibly also a reference to baptism, as in Rom 6:4. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Renn, *Expository Dictionary*, 78. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. BDAG 345. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. As in Rom 8:10 and Eph 2:1, 5-6. Renn, *Expository Dictionary*, 244. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. By using the verb λαμβάνω, which can refer to the obtaining of wages, Paul may have been indirectly tying this verse in with the discussion of gain and loss from vss.7-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Paul also used καταλαμβάνω in Rom 9:30-32 to speak of obtaining righteousness by faith, an idea that closely parallels this verse and v.9. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Paul seems to mix his metaphors a little, though both terms could possibly refer to a race, something that would have been familiar to the people of Philippi, who had access to both an athletic school and an exercise field. Hartog, *Polycarp, 54.* [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Though I did not have time to peruse it myself, BDAG 931 mentions a dissertation that might be helpful here. See Denise Marie Lasky, “An Examination of the Metaphorical Use of ‘Skopos’ or Target in the Philosophical Works of Plato and Aristotle through a Study of Archery Imagery in the Greek Literary Tradition” (University of Chicago, 1994). [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. BDAG 183. See also 1 Cor 9:24 for another Pauline use of this term in athletic imagery. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. I am thankful to Perriman, “Pattern of Christ’s Sufferings,” 77, for this insight. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. The use of φρονέω here strongly echoes 2:5, where Paul makes his transition between exhortative and illustrative climaxes with the imperative φρονεῖτε: “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.” For that reason if no other, it serves as a particularly powerful exhortation here. Not only should the Philippians have the same mind as Christ, but they should have the same mind as one another in these matters! [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Again, I will mention for the final time that *God’s* agency (rather than the Philippians’) is at work to reveal to them what they need to know, helping them achieve the consensus that Paul has just designated as being so important. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Word Biblical Commentary: Philippians*, vol. 43 (ed. Ralph P. Martin, Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 1994), 213. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)