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THE EPISTLE TO THE PHILIPPIANS:

An Expanded Paraphrase

I. INTRODUCTION (Ch. 1: 1-11)

(a) *Salutation* (Ch. 1: 1-2)

To all the people of God at Philippi, united in Christ Jesus, with their chief pastors and other ministers, this letter comes from Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus. Grace and peace be yours, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

(b) *Thanksgiving and prayer* (Ch. 1: 3-11)

Every time I call you to mind I give thanks to God. Every time I pray I always pray for you all, and rejoice at your fellowship with me in the gospel from the first day until this very hour. Of this I am fully confident, that He who has begun to do such a good work in you will go on bringing it to completion until the day of Christ Jesus dawns. It is but right that I should have this care for you all, because I know I have a secure place in your hearts. While I am in prison, engaged in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, you are all joint-partners in my ministry of grace. God knows how earnestly I long for you all with Christ Jesus' own affection.

This is my prayer, that your love may increase more and more, in divine knowledge and all spiritual perception, so that you can learn by experience to approve what is the better course. I want you to be genuine through and through, free from everything that would be a spiritual hindrance, in view of the day of Christ. I want you to yield to the full that harvest of righteousness which is produced through Jesus Christ; thus God will get glory and praise among you.

II. PAUL'S PRESENT SITUATION (Ch. 1: 12-26)

Now I want you to know, my brothers and sisters, that my present situation has turned out for the advancement of the gospel rather than otherwise. The upshot of it all has been this: the whole praetorium,¹ and everyone else, knows that it is for the cause of Christ that I am in prison; and the majority of my brethren, thanks to my imprisonment, have plucked up courage to proclaim the message of God all the more fearlessly.

¹"Government House" or, quite generally, "headquarters."

Some indeed are preaching Christ in a spirit of envy and contention, but others out of good will. The latter do it for love's sake, knowing that it is for the defence of the gospel that I am posted here. The former preach Christ from motives of personal ambition, rather than from pure motives; their idea is to irritate me still more, imprisoned as I am. But what of it? This is all that matters: one way or another, whether by way of pretence or from pure motives, it is Christ who is being proclaimed. This fills me with joy, and I will go on rejoicing. "This will turn out for my deliverance"² through your supplication and the gracious supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. My eager expectation, my hope is this: that I shall not be put to shame. No; now as at all other times, Christ will be magnified in my body, whether I live or die.

To me, you see, life means Christ; and as for death, that would be sheer gain. If my bodily life is to continue, that means more fruit from my work. I really do not know which I am to choose. I am in a dilemma between two alternatives: my great desire is to set out and be with Christ, which would be by far the better way for me. On the other hand, for your sakes it is more necessary that I remain here in mortal body. And with the confidence I have I know I shall remain, and stay with you all, for your progress and joy in faith. Thus your exultation will abound on my account in Christ Jesus, because I shall visit you again.

III. EXHORTATION TO ENDURANCE, UNITY AND WITNESS (Chs. 1: 27-2: 18)

(a) *Endurance in face of opposition* (Ch. 1: 27-30)

Only, see to it that you live lives worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you, or get news of you when I am away from you, I shall know that you are standing firm in one spirit, contending together with one accord for the faith of the gospel, in no way intimidated by your opponents. Their opposition is a token of perdition for them, but of deliverance for you—deliverance, I mean, at the hand of God. For to you He has granted the privilege not only of believing in Christ but also of suffering for Him; you are now engaged in the same conflict as you once saw me engaged in—the conflict which (as you hear) I am engaged in again.

(b) *Appeal for unity* (Ch. 2: 1-5)

So then, is there in Christ any encouragement, any loving comfort, any spiritual fellowship, and affection or compassion? If there is,

²Job 13: 16, LXX.

then fill my cup of joy to the brim. You can do this by sharing the same purpose, enjoying the same love, and being knit together in soul. Be united in purpose, I say; do not be moved by selfish ambition or empty lust for prestige; be so humble that each of you thinks every other member of your fellowship to be better than himself. Do not always look after your own interests; each of you should have some concern for the interests of others. Let your purpose and attitude of heart be that which is becoming in those who are one in Christ Jesus.

(c) *The Humiliation and Enthronement of Christ* (Ch. 2: 6-11)

Though He existed in the form of God,
He did not use equality with God for His own advantage,
But emptied Himself and took the form of a slave,
Appearing in the likeness of man.

And thus appearing in human shape,
He humbled Himself and became obedient—
Obedient to the hour of death,
Even death upon a cross.

Therefore God exalted Him on high,
And gave Him the name above all names,
That in Jesus' name each knee should bend,
In heaven and earth and underworld;

And each tongue confess Jesus Christ as LORD,
To the glory of God the Father.¹

(d) *A call to Christian witness* (Ch. 2: 12-18)

Now, my dear friends, you have always obeyed me, not only when I was present with you, but now still more when I am away from you. I urge you therefore to live out this salvation of yours "with fear and trembling;"² it is God who is at work in your midst enabling you both to will and to act as He pleases.

Whatever you have to do, do it without complaining or arguing. Then you will be the blameless children of God among a crooked and perverse race of people, shining in their midst like luminaries in the world, displaying the message of life. I shall thus be able to boast about you on the day of Christ, for it will be clear that my running and toiling were not in vain.

Yes, even if now my life is about to be poured out, like a libation over your sacrifice and priestly service—that is, your faith—I am glad, I rejoice with you all. In the same way, then, I want you to be glad and rejoice with me.

¹ Perhaps a primitive Christian hymn, based mainly on Isa. 52: 13-53: 12 and partly on Isa. 45: 23.

²Ps. 2: 11.

IV. TIMOTHY AND EPAPHRODITUS (Ch. 2: 19-30)

(a) *Timothy and his devoted service* (Ch. 2: 19-24)

I hope, subject to the will of the Lord Jesus, to send Timothy to you soon, so that I may be cheered by learning how you are getting on. I have no one so likeminded as he is; he will have a genuine concern for your wellbeing. All the others are pursuing their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus. But you know the evidence that he has given of his quality; you know how he has served along with me in the gospel like a son alongside his father. I hope to send him, then, as soon as I see how it is going to fare with me. And my confidence in the Lord is that I myself will come and see you soon.

(b) *Epaphroditus and his illness* (Ch. 2: 25-30)

I think also I must send Epaphroditus back to you. I count him my brother, my fellow-worker, my fellow-soldier; he has been ministering to my needs as your messenger. He has been longing to see you all, and was very distressed because you heard that he had been ill. He was indeed ill, and at the very point of death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me too, for had he died I should have had sorrow piled on sorrow. Well, I am sending him to you, and sending him the more readily so that you may rejoice at seeing him again and I myself may grieve the less. Give him a hearty and joyful welcome in the Lord. It is people like him that you should hold in high honour; it was for the sake of the work of Christ that he came so near death. He risked his life in his eagerness to discharge fully that service which you would all have liked to render, but could not because you were not with me.

V. WARNING AND EXAMPLE (Chs. 3: 1-4: 1)

(a) *Repetition can be useful* (Ch. 3: 1)

For the rest, my brothers and sisters, be joyful in the Lord. It is not tedious for me to write the same things to you, and it makes for your security.

(b) *Warning against Judaizers* (Ch. 3: 2-3)

Beware of the dogs, beware of the workers of iniquity, beware of the mutilation party. I call them the mutilation party because it is we who are the truly circumcised people—we who offer God spiritual worship, who make our boast in Christ Jesus, and put no trust in outward points of religion.

(c) *The old and the new Paul* (Ch. 3: 4-16)

Yet I myself have no lack of such outward things to put my trust in. Yes, if anyone thinks fit to put his trust in outward things, I

could outdo him. Look at this record! I was circumcised when I was eight days old. I was born into the nation of Israel, into the tribe of Benjamin, a "Hebrew" son of "Hebrew" parents. As regards legal observance I was a Pharisee; as regards zeal, I was a persecutor of the church; as regard legal righteousness I was faultless. Yet those things which I formerly reckoned to my credit I have come to count as loss for Christ's sake. Yes indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have incurred the loss of everything, and I reckon it all as refuse, if only Christ may be my gain. I desire to be found in Him, vested not in a righteousness of my own, based upon keeping the law, but in the righteousness which comes by faith in Christ, the righteous status which God bestows on the ground of faith. I desire to know Christ, to know the power which raised Him from dead, to know true partnership in His sufferings, to be conformed to His death, if only I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

I do not mean that I have already attained this and already achieved perfection. No! I still press on so as to apprehend the purpose for which Christ Jesus one day apprehended me. I do not imagine, my brothers and sisters, that I have apprehended that purpose yet. But this is my one aim in life: I forget the things that lie behind me, and strain forward to what lies in front of me; I press on to the goal that I may win the prize, God's upward call to me in Christ Jesus.

Let all of us who have come to spiritual maturity have this outlook; if in some way your outlook differs from this, God will reveal this to you too. Only, let us hold to that stage of spiritual experience which we have attained thus far.

(d) *Warning against libertines* (Ch. 3: 17-19)

Join in following my example, please, my brothers and sisters, and pay heed to those who conduct themselves according to the example which you have in us. I say this because, as I have often told you before and tell you now with tears, there are many who conduct themselves otherwise. They are enemies of the cross of Christ; their end is perdition; their god is material satisfaction; they make their boast of things of which they ought rather to be ashamed; their minds are set on earthly things.

(e) *Citizens of heaven* (Chs. 3: 20-4: 1)

We, on the other hand, are citizens of a heavenly homeland. It is from that homeland that we expect the Lord Jesus Christ to come as our deliverer; when He comes, He will transform these present lowly bodies of ours and fashion them like His own glorious body,

effectively exercising that power which He has to make everything subject to Himself.

So then, my dear brothers and sisters, whom I long for greatly, my joy and crown, stand fast thus in the Lord, my dear friends.

VI. PRACTICAL COUNSEL (Ch. 4: 2-9)

(a) *A personal plea for unity* (Ch. 4: 2-3)

I beg Euodia and I beg Syntyche to agree as fellow-Christians should. And I ask you too, my trusty yokefellow, to help these ladies, for they shared my contests as I proclaimed the gospel, together with Clement and my other fellow-workers, whose names are inscribed in the book of life.

(b) *Joy and peace* (Ch. 4: 3-7)

Rejoice in the Lord at all times; I will say it again—rejoice! Let everyone know your forbearing spirit. The Lord is close at hand. Have no anxiety; in every situation make your requests known to God with prayer, entreaty and thanksgiving. Then the peace of God, which exceeds the grasp of any mind, will stand guard over your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

(c) *Food for thought* (Ch. 4: 8-9)

For the rest, my brothers and sisters, let your thoughts dwell on all that is true, all that is honourable, all that is righteous, all that is pure, all that is lovely, all that is reputable, whatever is virtuous, whatever is praiseworthy. Practise those things which you have learned and received from me, which you have heard and seen in me. So shall the God of peace be with you.

VII. THANKS FOR A GIFT (Ch. 4: 10-20)

It gives me great joy in the Lord that your care for me has flourished anew. I know that the kind thought was there all the time; it was the opportunity that was lacking. I do not mean that I am in straitened circumstances; I have learned to be content in whatever condition I find myself. I know what it is to scrape the bottom of the barrel; I know what it is to overflow. I have passed through all the stages of initiation—fulness and hunger, abundance and scarcity. I am able to meet them all, thanks to my Enabler.

But I do thank you very much indeed for your fellowship in my tribulation. You know that early in my gospel ministry, when I left Macedonia, you were the only church that had fellowship with me in the matter of giving and receiving, my dear friends at Philippi. Why, even when I was still in Macedonia, you sent gifts to supply my needs not only once but twice. It is not that I

desire the gift for its own sake; what I do desire is the fruit that accrues to your account. Now I have everything; I am full to overflowing, for I have received your gift from Epaphroditus, a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, bringing pleasure to God. And my God will fully meet every need of yours from His glorious wealth which is available for His people in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

VIII. FINAL GREETINGS AND BENEDICTION (Ch. 4: 21-23)

Give my greetings to all the people of God, linked with us in Christ Jesus. The brethren who are here send you their greetings, especially those of them who belong to the imperial household.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.